ABSTRACT

Title of Document: WOMEN, LANGUAGE, AND WOMEN AS LANGUAGE: THE PARADOXICAL DOMESTICITY AND SEXUALITY OF MUSLIM WOMEN AND URDU IN POST-1857 INDIAN LITERATURE AND NATIONAL DISCOURSE

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Although, since the late 1980s, much attention has been paid to the woman/mother as nation trope in multicultural colonial and post-colonial scholarship, what remains largely unexplored is the concept of woman as language functioning as scaffold for a gendered, cultural-linguistic nationalism deployed by Hindu Indians in colonial India. These "language woman," a term political scientist Asha Sarangi coined in 2009, are diametrically opposed: the feminine anthropomorphic dutiful, mother Hindi, fit to represent India, and the unruly, courtesan Urdu who has no place in the incipient nation. In the last decade, scholarly engagement with Begum Urdu has been limited to structuring this characterization as demeaning, with Indian Muslims failing to subvert the marginalized linguistic representation in the fundamentally Hindi-speaking, Hindu project of the Indian nation state. Such a gender essentialist reading of anthropomorphic Urdu perpetuates the very androcentric society-approved gender roles it seeks to denounce, aligning with colonial Indian nationalists' and British imperialists' myopic ideology of one appropriate type of woman. Why must the courtesan lack agency or respectability and require reformation? This project offers an alternative view of Begum Urdu, recasting the language courtesan as empowered through the application of, among others, Foucault's theory on authorized forms of sexuality eventually rupturing societal norms combined with sociolinguist Robin Lakoff's interpretations of authoritative woman's language viewed from both inside and outside the socio-political frame encompassing it. Drawing on

feminist, linguistic, and colonial studies and bridging them with the concept of metonymy through contiguity in prose realism, this work offer a new metaphorical reading of Muslim female characters as representing both the Indian Muslim woman and Urdu in seven Urdu prose realist works: Ratan Nath Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*; Abdul Halim Sharar's *Flora Florinda*; Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's *Mirat-ul Uroos*, *Banaat-ul Naash*, *Taubat-un Nasuh*, and *Fasana-e-Mubtala*; and finally, Muhammad Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* and *Junoon-e-Intezaar* in which the metaphorical language woman is transformed into a real, round character and woman in the real world who functions with authority and agency as not only a character but an author. The Muslim and Urdu-language woman who emerges from these texts in the latter half of the 19th century gradually mesh the spheres of acceptable domestic sexuality and disreputable public sexuality to conceive a woman, who despite being untethered from societal norms, is a compelling representation of Muslim women and Urdu. In restructuring courtesan Urdu as reputable, this dissertation corrects scholarships' sustainment of the linguistic hierarchy of Hindi over Urdu and the colonial symbolic Indian Hindu woman over her Muslim counterpart. Dismantling the British imperial and Indian colonial construction of a debased Urdu is imperative to redress the continued global devaluation of Urdu and even its speakers, including in Pakistan, where Urdu is the sole national and one of the two official languages. This dissertation answers Gyatri Spivak's question of if the subaltern woman can speak with a resounding "yes, she can" and explores the various ways in which the marginalized and repressed can use language as a tool in an attempt to dismantle colonialism and subvert the authority of colonial oppressors while creating a singular identity, much in the way Aamir Mufti approaches the power of language.

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Introduction

"Agar-che mein kamsin thee magar phir bhi aurat zaat burree hoshiyaar hoti hain."
"Granted, I was young, but even still, the female race is quite clever."
~*Umrao Jan Ada* (1899) (transliteration and translation from Urdu mine)[1]

The impetus for this dissertation occurred on a trip to Pakistan in 2011 while I was completing my master's dissertation on letters and villains in Victorian literature. As much as I loved the English and French of Jane Austen, I craved characters with experiences similar to mine, my mother's, and my grandmother's. I was searching for a shared history, and for me that could be found in our shared language, Urdu. In middle school, I had stumbled across a box of letters my mother had written to my father when they were engaged. Written in her flowy script, the Urdu felt like a treasure, and I shared with her my surprise that she wrote epistles just like my favorite heroines, Elizabeth Bennet and Anne Elliot. I should not have been surprised, but in an immigrant household, even a well-educated one, English reigned supreme. I found this lack of Urdu writing and literature more frustrating during my trip to Pakistan, when standing in a three-story bookstore, I discovered only one dusty shelf of books written in Urdu, and which included Urdu translations of *Dracula* and *Pride and Prejudice*. I could not understand why in a country where Urdu was the national language, English took such precedent. In her 2022 book, *Vernacular English: Reading the Anglophone in Postcolonial India*, Akshya Saxena discusses how English moves beyond its colonial and global power roots and becomes a tool of fighting the caste system in India and becoming unifier as a visual language (Roman script) even for the majority of the Indian population that cannot read it. She states that "vernacular has offered a way to access histories outside institutional frameworks of the colonial and postcolonial state" (10). I wanted to apply this idea to Urdu, a language that in its formal (nineteenth-century court documents) and vernacular state existed in many ways outside colonial reach since its conception. I was curious to see if it could function as a tool not struggling to

assimilate with or bow down to colonial authority but a means to create an identity in the margins, an identity that could still be a player on a global scale.

My research led me to discover the origins of Urdu and the the forced creation of the language through Fort Williams college in the early 1800s India. As I uncovered more, I learned of the debasement of Urdu, its disconnection from the nation, and how it is still struggling to overcome the marginalization to which it was subjected in the 1800s. Instead of lamenting its status, I sought to discover and highlight its moments of authority as well as where and how it had made a lasting impact on its speakers and readers. This dissertation is the result.

Although, since the late 1980s, the woman/mother as nation trope has informed multicultural colonial and post-colonial scholarship's understanding of gendered nation construction, the parallel concept of woman as language, which simultaneously functioned as a scaffolding for the gendered, cultural-linguistic nationalism Hindu Indians deployed in colonial India remains largely unexplored. These "language women," a term political scientist Asha Sarangi coined in 2009, are diametrically opposed feminine: the anthropomorphic dutiful, mother Hindi, fit to represent India, and the unruly, courtesan Urdu. In the last decade, scholarly engagement with Begum Urdu has been limited to structuring this characterization as demeaning, with Indian Muslims failing to subvert the marginalized linguistic representation in the fundamentally Hindi-speaking, Hindu project of the Indian nation state. Such a gender essentialist reading of anthropomorphic Urdu perpetuates the very androcentric society-approved gender roles it seeks to denounce, aligning with colonial Indian nationalists' and British imperialists' myopic ideology of one appropriate type of woman. Why must the courtesan lack agency or respectability and require reformation? This project offers an alternative view of Begum Urdu, recasting the language courtesan as empowered through the application of Foucault's theory on authorized forms of sexuality eventually rupturing societal norms combined with sociolinguist Robin Lakoff's

interpretations of authoritative woman's language viewed from both inside and outside the socio-political frame encompassing it. Drawing on feminist, linguistic, and colonial studies and bridging them with the concept of metonymy through contiguity in prose realism, this work offer a new metaphorical reading of Muslim female characters as representing both the Indian Muslim woman and Urdu in seven Urdu prose realist works: Ratan Nath Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*; Abdul Halim Sharar's *Flora Florinda*; Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's *Mirat-ul Uroos*, *Banaat-ul Naash*, *Taubat-un Nasuh*, and *Fasana-e-Mubtala*; and finally, Muhammad Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* and *Junoon-e-Intezaar* in which the metaphorical language woman is transformed into a real, round character and woman in the real world who functions with authority and agency as not only a character but an author. The Muslim and Urdu-language woman who emerges from these texts in the latter half of the 19th century gradually mesh the spheres of acceptable domestic sexuality and disreputable public sexuality to conceive a woman, who despite being untethered from societal norms, is a compelling representation of Muslim women and Urdu. In restructuring courtesan Urdu as reputable, this dissertation corrects scholarships' sustainment of the linguistic hierarchy of Hindi over Urdu and the colonial symbolic Indian Hindu woman over her Muslim counterpart. Dismantling the British imperial and Indian colonial construction of a debased Urdu is imperative to redress the continued global devaluation of Urdu and even its speakers, including in Pakistan, where Urdu is the sole national and one of the two official languages. This dissertation answers Gyatri Spivak's question of if the subaltern woman can speak with a resounding "yes, she can" and explores the various ways in which the marginalized and repressed can use language as a tool in an attempt to dismantle colonialism and subvert the authority of colonial oppressors while creating a singular identity, much in the way Aamir Mufti approaches the power of language.

Background:

The Division of Language and its Impact on Indian Women

Sangeeta Ray's *En-Gendering India* unpacks how Indian society historically and problematically focuses a heterogeneous India's nationality onto a particular type of "native" Indian female body: "The woman who became synonymous with country in the second half of the nineteenth century was specifically an upper-caste Hindu woman" (9).[2] For nineteenth-century Hindu Indian social reformists, this performative woman became a site through which the Indian nation could be restructured and reimagined. As Barbara Metclaf claims, "[t]he 'New Hindu woman' was at once different from the unreformed, poor, and uneducated women; from English women, who were both a model and a threat; and from non-Hindu, above all Muslim women" (*Islamic Contentions* 100). Representing only a minority of Indians, this woman creates an exclusionary effect, detaching Indians of other castes and religions from their country.[3] For Ray and many scholars, this alienation is deeply rooted in the events and aftereffects of 1857's failed Sepoy Rebellion against British presence in India.[4] Krupa Shandilya proposes that this pivotal historical moment incited Muslims and Hindus to turn towards religion to position and affirm their place in the Indian nation (*Intimate Relations* 5). During this time, the identity and community behavior of Muslims, in particular, was also redefined through the woman subject when she "became symbolic, not only of all that was wrong with cultural and religious life, but also of all that was worth preserving" (*Learning* pp. 65).[5] For nationalists of both faiths, the female form became a consolidated symbol of piety and tradition, one that could be used to represent visually and metaphorically a culturally empowered Hindu or Muslim India striding towards modernity. For Indians, infusing modern ideals into traditional values was a method of combating British presence and notions. They were attempting to create a new identity that rivalled the ones the British were formulating for both Hindus and Muslims.

Meanwhile, British imperialists clashed with Indian nationalists as they used the repressed "native" woman to validate their presence and eventually rule in India. If a woman can symbolize the Indian nation. then she can also become the locus for rethinking nation and nationality.[6] The

Urdu-speaking, often Muslim, nineteenth-century Indian woman in Urdu literature had a role, both as a symbol and as a person in her own right. She dismantled prevailing gender norms while upsetting the established hierarchical Indian language order that set Urdu and its speakers on the lowest rungs.[7] In nineteenth-century British and Indian society, the most invisible of all "native" women was not any woman but rather the Urdu-speaking Indian woman, though education may have helped her mitigate her position on the periphery of Indian society.[8]

During this time period, Muslim men and women existed in India's peripheries. Scholars often cite 1857's unsuccessful Sepoy Rebellion as the leading cause of Indian Muslim, Urdu speakers becoming outsiders in their country. Many argue that religious spheres were not so divisive before the mutiny. Jennifer Dubrow cites the readership of the popular nineteenth-century Northern Indian newspaper *Avadh Akhbar* to illustrate "the *lack* of importance of religious identity," as both Hindus and Muslims wrote to the paper; this semi-disregard of religion altered drastically as "a process of linguistic separation began in the 1860s, in which Urdu was presented as the language of Muslims, whereas Hindi…was portrayed as the language of Hindus" (*Cosmopolitan Dreams* 2). Such linguistic partitions occurred in an earlier historical moment: Fort William College's establishment in 1800 and its scholars' subsequent bifurcation of the Hindustani language into Urdu and Hindi.[9] Aamir Mufti reinforces Vasudha Dalmia's argument in 1997's *The Nationalization of Hindu Tradition* that nineteenth-century British officials considered Indian Muslims and Hindus to be radically different people; they searched for the "correct" Hindu language under the belief that Muslims and Urdu speakers had degraded and corrupted the actual Indian spoken languages (117).[10] Under the influence of Fort William's numerous publications, India's general public learned to associate Urdu with Islam and Hindi with Hinduism, with the former held in far lower esteem.[11] A perception that the mutiny did not incite but exacerbated.

In the past decade or so, several linguistic and literary scholars have attempted to eradicate the chasm between the two languages. In their introduction, editors Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield state that they "intentionally use the term Hindavi…in order to avoid the split history of Hindi and Urdu that has dominated modern scholarship and language consciousness" (*Telling and Texts* 9).[12] In the same vein, Urdu historian Shamsur Faruqi presents Urdu and Hindi as possessing the same literary roots in order to reconcile their differences: "no discussion can now afford to ignore the fact that there are two claimants to a single linguistic and literary tradition, and the whole issue is more political than academic" (45).[13] This meshing of two very separate languages and literary cultures is inherently problematic. Such critical discourse either disregards or glosses over Urdu and its users' dubious position in nineteenth-century India, particularly in the wake of the mutiny.

Hindi speakers enjoyed a stronger connection to nation, though that too was not without issues. Orsini explains that although "Hindi's claim to be a national language was an ideological construct, Hindi became a nationalized identity as 'pure,' elusive, and elitist – in a subordinate way as highest levels of society used English."[14] Hindi's somewhat spurious status as a national language nevertheless lent growing credence to the symbolic Hindu woman representing the Indian nation. This phenomenon further tarnished the image of the Urdu speaking, Muslim woman. In nineteenth-century India, Urdu was not tethered to the nation. As Orsini states, even Hindi had to compete continuously against English's more prominent position in Indian educated elite society. Although somewhat outdated, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's suggestion that "[l]anguage doesn't merely describe identity but actually produces moral and perhaps even physical identity" underscores the unique feminine representations attached to Hindi versus Urdu in the 19th century and the present (33).[15] Furthermore, if "language is isomorphic with cultural formation" as Gayatri Spivak claims,

then Urdu's Islamic infusion led to its speakers developing a unique cultural identity that clashed with dominant Hindu and British ideologies of what it meant to be Indian.[16]

This shift in ideology placed nineteenth-century Indian Urdu speakers and writers in a precarious position.[17] Aamir Mufti notes that "the distinct situation of Urdu since the middle of the nineteenth century as a set of linguistic, literary, and social practices [was] at odds with the emerging practices of the nation," in which Urdu was often feminized (called Bibi or Begum Urdu) and anthropomorphized as a courtesan or other sort of female unsuitable to Indian nationalism (117-118).[18] Barbara D. Metcalf compares the problematic feminized depiction of the two languages: "Hindi…was a respectable cow-and-Brahmin-nurturing matron, while Urdu…was nothing less than a heartless aristocratic strumpet. Queen Devanagri was…the image of the new middle class Hindu housewife…Begum Urdu was the unreformed and uncontrolled woman."[19] Such gendered representations marked both Urdu and its speakers outside normative Indian society.[20]

This dissertation contends that nineteenth-century Urdu literary works fracture and refashion the existing portrayals of "Begum" Urdu and Muslim, Urdu speaking women. Muhammad Hadi Rusva's 1899 *Umrao Jan Ada*, for instance, revolves around an intelligent and resilient Muslim prostitute, who continuously disturbs Urdu's linguistic, gendered rules, while subtly wielding more power than Indian men; she is also listed as the author of Rusva's second novel, *Junoon-e-Intezaar*. Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's 1885 *Fasana-e-Mubtala* positions a prostitute, who later becomes the second wife, against a housewife; her educated stature and worldly knowledge become a foil to the bumbling, illiterate, and traditional first wife. That work also deals with the tensions between veiled and unveiled women. This applies to Muslim women in which being veiled meant not only dressing modestly but remaining mostly at home; such women were called purdah-nashin (those of the veil). Yet, Dehlvi takes some pain in the introduction to his books like *Taubat-un Nasuh* and *Fasana-e-Mubtala* to state that the story is applicable to all Indians. In fact, Hindu women often struggled

against the same domestic restraints as Muslim women, including purdah. Regarding education, Indian women encountered many of the same obstacles when trying to become as literate as their men.

Urdu writers like Dehlvi, Rusva, and others advocated for women's education, particularly Muslim women. Although Dehlvi's *Fasana-e-Mubtala* mocks the housewife's lack of skill (hunar, which is also mentioned as one of Asghari's virtues in *Mirat-ul Uroos*, his first published work) in comparison to the courtesan's astuteness, it also makes clear that this ignorance originates from a lack of education. Krupa Shandilya argues that "the courtesan becomes the model for the wife's reform, even though the courtesan cannot be incorporated within the respectable household."[21] While this theory applies to Indian colonial literature in general, Urdu works such as *Umrao Jan Ada* and *Fasana-e-Mubtala* create moments in which the courtesan is not only incorporated into but also thrives in a respectable household. In both works, readers are meant to reevaluate their viewpoints on sex workers and traditional wives and, to a great extent, side with the former. In short, the readers are urged to embrace modern ideals, which involves rethinking women's roles. Nineteenth-century Urdu literature provided a liminal space in which an Urdu speaking—often Muslim—woman could embrace new modes of function in India, regardless of her background. The courtesan, for instance, became someone to emulate to some extent rather than revile.[22] Scholars such as Meenakshi Mukherjee state that Indian writers utilized widows and courtesans to circumnavigate Indian society's cultural and traditional restrictions on women.[23] However, the use of such "outsider" women in Urdu writings was not a necessity but a calculated decision. This choice assisted writers in reshaping Indian society's views on gender roles and Urdu's representation as a brazen, useless courtesan, an argument more closely aligned with those of Devapriya Roy and Esha Sil, who suggest that such women were not "other" but simply "another" (42).

Urdu literary scholars' prevailing critical arguments that fictional Indian women had to exist outside structured society in order to possess agency is also flawed. Some of Dehlvi's works and the majority of Rashid ul. Khairi's pieces center on married women. These wives inhabit domestic spheres while still disassembling traditional gender roles. However, critics like Ruby Lal find such women highly problematic: "Fundamental to these female figures were clearly defined tracks of respectable domesticity…therefore, what has had to be negotiated in historical writings is the problem of a 'static' woman, confined to the space of the household, duty bound with familial obligations, even as the drive to make her literate [grew] even more insistent" (32).[24] Anindita Ghosh raises a similar issue in stating that these "women emerge as unresisting, inert, and passive objects of defining discourses, as people without any control over their lives," and when they are assertive, they are seen as "either participants in larger mass struggles under the tutelage of their male peers…or unusual eruptions within a conventional social fabric" (*Behind the Veil* 2).[25]

Yet, Urdu literature assisted in altering these exceptions (unusual eruptions) into the norm, particularly as India entered the twentieth century. Even if one is to accept that these female characters remain within certain social and religiously approved tracks then those reading these books can learn to deviate from those tracks.[26] Furthermore, although prevailing Islamic ideologies did often have a restrictive influence on Urdu writers, their penned female characters move beyond these religious and cultural limitations. A majority of nineteenth century Urdu novels' women are neither inert not static. Asghari of Dehlvi's 1868 *Mirat-ul Uroos* constantly leaves her domestic sphere to fix issues her incompetent husband or in-laws cannot manage. While she writes letters to her father and brother for advice, the responses often arrive after she has already successfully carried out a plan that she solely formulated. In contrast, the domestic sphere does severely constrain Rashid ul. Khairi's female characters. Yet, even within those delineated boundaries of "acceptable femininity," these women constantly question and push against traditional social norms, including marriage

without consent and polygamy. Like Asghari, these female characters are realistic women; they are variable and consistently adapt themselves and their domestic sphere to encapsulate modern ideals. As in reality, men have a limited influence on their daily lives and thoughts.

Patriarchal society may constrain these women, but they continuously struggle against such bonds. Helen Thomspon argues that we as readers want a woman "to violate the norms that constrain her" (*Ingenuous Subjection* 2). One of the most prominent violations in many nineteenth-century Urdu novels is female characters denouncing polygamy. Referencing William Muir's 1861 publication *The Life of Mahomet and the History of Islam to the Era of the Hegira*, Asiya Alam shows that "a perusal of colonial missionary records reveals that polygyny was often identified as a specific feature of Muslim societies" (632). According to Alam, the polygamy debate during this time "emphasized the infertility and reproductive incapacity of the first wife, and…presented an idealization of domestic ideology where the second wife made the 'perfect' home," though "there were also strong critiques of polygyny by women writers who underscored the misery of the first wife" (631). Despite this ongoing debate, the accepted and often normalized Islamic practice of polygamy was yet another reason for non-Muslim Indians and the British to demarcate Urdu users as other. However, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, even many Muslims found this practice distasteful. Within their religious community and general Indian public, Muslim elites often argued vehemently against it. British Indian jurist Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928) insisted that "polygamy was 'an unedurable evil'…in Islam there was effectively monogamy because of the requirement that a husband only take one wife unless he could show impartiality, a patent impossibility" (*Islamic Contestations* 111).

Urdu literature worked to disseminate the condemnation of polygamy among a wider audience. Nineteenth-century Indian Urdu literary works then deploy both displaced and culturally traditional female characters as microcosmic textual sites of subversion. Such women encapsulate a

rejection of the marginalized social and cultural standing of Urdu and its mostly Muslim users in colonial India. Yes, polygyny existed and was accepted in nineteenth-century Indian Muslim communities. However, female protagonists not only denounced it but the works in which they appeared impressed upon readers the problematic and detrimental nature of this practice.

Fictional Women and the Stuttered Development of the Urdu Novel

The focus of Urdu writing, poetry, and fiction on women was not a new phenomenon that is tied to the nascent novel form that emerged in the latter half of the 19th century. The first movements towards Islamic and gender social reform began in rekhti, a poetic form that started in the 1700s.[27] Although a woman was always the main speaker of these poems, these pieces were neither read by nor produced for women. As such, various scholars' stance is that "they consider rekhti voyeuristic, written by men to titillate men and mock women."[28] Yet, nawab's wives, women of high court stature, educated Indian or British women, and courtesans not only read rekhti but also wrote or repeated it, using certain pieces as agents for urging social change. As Gouri Srivastava has so admirably shown in *The Legend Makers: Some Eminent Muslim Women in India* and later works, Indian lower- and middle-class traditional housewives impacted and shaped nineteenth-century social reform. When Indian men attended mushairas (poetic gatherings) where rekhti was recited, they shared these poems and themes with their housewives, who then wrote poems and pieces developing those ideas. Although these musings were not officially published, they were shared amongst other women, family members, and close friends. Rekhti provided women with agency beyond the domestic sphere as it allowed women to portray love for both sexes (male and female) as well as move through marketplaces and important social gatherings.[29] As Vanita Ruth powerfully illustrates with myriad examples, through rekhti, "the domestication of the figure of woman is thus partially undone" (9).

Urdu literature is intricately linked with poetry and the language's oral tradition. While poets were prolific, much of their work was transmitted orally, as were many Urdu stories and folklore (dastaans). The dominance of Urdu's oral culture significantly shaped prose publications that began appearing in India towards the middle of the century. Critics such as Sheldon Pollock, Orsini and Schofield state that "the cultural premium on memorized knowledge 'left indelible traces on secular written culture;'" they further claim that, as writing overtook auditory transmissions, Indian writers sought to form a bridge between the two.[30] To reconcile the gap between oral and written, many Urdu writers turned to newspaper serials, the most prominent example of which is Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's popular *Fasana-e-Azad*. Published in serial form from 1878 to 1879 and in novel form in 1880, *Fasana-e-Azad* is particularly unique as each new installment included readers' letters. Author Sarshar often integrated reader suggestions and requests into new "episodes." Equally important, the reading audience included women as well as men of all classes, for "[t]he serial turned out to be something of a communal experience, with families, groups of friends and even fellow travelers in a railway compartment getting together to read or listen to and discuss each episode in the hero's adventures."[31] This communal experience challenged the readership status quo at a time when only the elite and educated could afford novels or book-length works, while the subaltern Indian readers shared stories orally or purchased the much cheaper songbooks or short narratives Indian presses printed.[32]

Works like *Fasana-e-Azad* illustrate how serials facilitated Urdu writers' abilities to adapt to shifting ideologies. This particular serial began as a satire of rigid Islamic rules and the threat of British influences. Later, the story shifted towards nationalist and prescriptive discourses, including women's roles. As Dubrow meticulously charts in her work, although Urdu works in serial and novel form often overlapped, the open nature in serializations led to an open nature in novels; yet, scholars have not extensively explored how serialization, which allowed for experimentation, helped

develop the novel form in Urdu (*Cosmopolitan Dreams* 405-407). The serial form also provided an opportunity for Urdu writers to explore realism, which prevailed in nineteenth-century British novels entering India during this time: "Indeed it would seem that realism—or as Sarshar put it, 'Nechar [nature]-nechar- nechar'—was the principal new pleasure on offer in these narratives. And…'neither prose nor verse, neither story nor masnavi' could offer nechar in similar measure" (184).[33] Sarshar like other Urdu, Indian writers of the time was not creating realism pieces, but rather dastaans and qissas with realistic or natural (nechar) elements, so that a woman was reading a newspaper or a man was travelling in a train instead of battling beasts or having out-of-body, Sufi-like experiences; the first true novel and work of realism with the first Urdu round character does not appear until 1899 with *Umrao Jan Ada* and its titular character. This desire to emulate British literary aesthetics possibly results from "Indians consent[ing] to being ruled, those of the higher classes who constantly came in contact with the British felt they should adopt something of British culture and values—which also played out in literature."[34] Partha Chatterjee, however, is wary of Indians still praising the "virtues of the British empire," as the values the British introduced to colonial India aligned with "the desires and prejudices of India's professional middle classes" (*The Black Hole of Empire* 161).[35]

Urdu writers often searched to find the proper balance. Some readers and fellow writers criticized Dehlvi for siding too much with the British and their ideas. In his writings, Rusva's distaste for Dehlvi's works is two-fold; he found the writings boring in their didactic nature and thought the author was molding himself and his work to cater to British preferences. In general, Rusva had some contempt for those who fashioned their ideas to align with the British: "Ruswa sees those who emulate the English as losing sight of their own identity because they slip into any new 'mould' available to them. However, at the same time he suggests that it is pointless to resist the influence of the English literary tradition."[36] British novels were indeed a temptation that Urdu writers did not

attempt to resist. In fact, the plot of Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* is nearly identical to George W. M. Reynold's 1854 *Rosa Lambert*. Dehlvi's *Taubut-un Nasuh* bears a striking resemblance to part one of Daniel Defoes' 1715 *The Family Instructor*. Despite those two examples, for Indian writers, integrating British ideals and novel themes was difficult. As Meenakshi Mukherjee writes, "the early novels in India were all written in urban areas by English-educated people," but "in the rigidly hierarchical familial and social structure of nineteenth century India, individualism was not an easy quality to render in literature" (*Realism and Reality* 7).

This dissertation more closely parallels Muhammad Assaddudin's argument that while Urdu "writers were faced with the challenge of reconciling the Western form with Indian sensibility… realism became a virtue, and a notion of individualism developed…leading to a consolidation of the genre…The British encouraged and facilitated writings of 'approved design and style' in the Indian languages and the most privileged genre in this regard was fiction" ("First Urdu Novel" 84). The novel form opened up new avenues for Urdu writers and readers. The decreasing cost of the novel towards the end of the 19th century and its existence as a tangible object meant that it was not as exclusive as Urdu poetry, which often circulated only amongst Urdu male speakers.[37] When Urdu poets, such as the acclaimed Ghalib, shifted away from mythological and mystical content to preach nationalism and patriotism, "their voices were stilled in death or defeat."[38] The novel form had a more universal appeal and audience, allowing ideas to reach more Indians and the British.

While Indian writers struggled to reconcile British form and ideals with Indian culture, the British harbored a fear of their colonial subjects. Máire ní Fhlathúin's *British India and Victorian Literary Culture* analyzes the British fear of India's metaphorical and literal consumption of the British body and ideals. The colonizers feared this consumption would lead to a dissolution of the marked difference between native Indians and the British who merely resided in India. In reference to Indian Muslims, this British anxiety took a different route in the aftermath of 1857's Indian

Rebellion. William Wilson Hunter's 1871 influential text *The Indian Musalmans* details how Islam made its followers violently rebellious against the British and their queen.[39] The inherent distrust and fear of native Indians impacted Indian publications. Partha Chatterjee outlines the strict control the British exercised on English and Indian-language newspapers. Although Governor Metcalfe's passing of the 1835 Press Act allowed free circulation of opinion in print, "this meant that the rule of colonial difference would only be applied elsewhere by using different criterion" (*The Black Hole of Empire* 119-120).[40] As Simon Gikandi establishes, "as a colonial subject you must speak to exist, but you can only speak that which is allowed" (*Maps of Englishness* 142). Indian writers could only pen that which was permitted both in British and Indian society.[41]

To overcome this dissonance, many Indian writers in the early to mid-nineteenth century turned to what Ruby Lal labels as playfulness, where serious themes and subjects occurred in a state of absurdity.[42] For instance, Azad (of Sarshar's serial) flippantly claims at one point he will simply eat and drink in the dark when other Muslim passengers comment on non-Islamic eating of pork and drinking of wine. Sudipta Kaviraj situates such writing in what he titles self-ironical tradition, where satire and laughter are used as a means of dissent: "When people are saying something on a subject as dear to ourselves as ourselves, it is easy to slip into pleasantly delusive things. In nonsense writing, deeper structures of self-referring beliefs, the signature of an objective mind as it were, may find expression, precisely because the invigilation of reason is loose at the time" (219-230).[43] Indian writers, especially Muslim, Urdu ones, continuously navigated the borders between Indian and British culture, while also discovering their Indian identity:

> [A] network of institutions (such as publishing houses, literary societies…newspapers…and universities)...emerged in each language region of India to create, sustain, and police the new standardized vernaculars…to order internal cultural hierarchies…and in the process produce a new sense of 'the people.' In every region, it was this newly construed notion of a people that contributed imaginatively to the sense of nation, with complex cultural negotiations between the language community and the imagined entity called India.[44]

The novel form allowed for a solidifying of these language and cultural communities, of 'a people.' The Indian government and East India Company presented works like Rusva's 1899 *Umrao Jan Ada* and Dehlvi's 1868 *Mirat-ul Uroos* to the public as specifically Urdu texts. This allowed and encouraged readers to draw religious, traditional, and cultural parallels between their experiences and those of the characters. The reading audience was not limited to Muslims either. Although the general Indian public may have devalued Urdu, many would have known how to read and comprehend it. Scholars such as Abdul Qadir, Ralph Russel, and G.E. Ward observe that the majority of official Indian government documents used Urdu.[45] Yet, Urdu retained its status as an overly poetic, weak language. The publication of *Mirat-ul Uroos*, the first instance of Urdu appearing in a familiar novel-like form [though Dehlvi called his works books or qissas (tales) not novels] challenged Indian and British perceptions of the language.

However, even as writers moved towards this new literary form, the oral tradition remained ever-present in much of Urdu prose writing, particularly through the depictions of mushairas and characters sharing poems:

> The novel was a principal form through which the bilingual elite…fashioned a new narrative prose…And yet, as the practice of the form gained greater popularity, it was remarkable how frequently in the course of their narrative…novelists shifted from the disciplined forms of authorial prose to the direct recording of living speech…the literati, in its search for artistic truthfulness, apparently found it necessary to escape as often as possible the rigidities of that prose.[46]

In this manner, Urdu writers limited the slippage occurring between the written and oral. As such, poorer but literate Urdu speakers could find as much enjoyment and sense of community in these works as the educated elite. Many Urdu writers claimed their works were novels. Yet, Asaduddin contends that "although we apply the term 'novel' loosely to a number of works, it is only Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* that can be called a novel in every sense."[47]

Due to its nonlinear progression, the development of the Urdu novel and its study is fraught with complications. A majority of critical discourse on nineteenth-century Urdu literature is solely concerned with questions of genre and form identification. This is partially due to what Priya Joshi calls the "anxiety that somehow Indian novelists were unable to weave their social world and its concerns into the imported form" of the novel (146).[48] As such, academic interests focus on establishing whether an Urdu work is indeed a novel and whether the writers have succeeded in molding the form to suit their needs. This dominant mode of inquiry means that most scholarship of nineteenth-century Urdu literature solely references *Mirat-ul Uroos*'s Asghari and *Umrao Jan Ada*'s Umrao Jan. Scholars and critics often only scrutinize these characters to define which work is the first Urdu novel.[49] In 2016, Sharon Pillai urged readers to move away from a traditionally realist reading of *Umrao Jan Ada* to consider Rusva's aesthetic experimentation.[50] In the past few years, a new line of criticism has emerged in which scholars examine the idea of sharafat, a new approach to earlier conversations regarding sati and naqaab.[51] Critical discourse on sharafat investigates the ways in which male Urdu writers balance modernity with traditional and cultural restrictions on Urdu speaking, Muslim women. Again, the focus seems to be on the works as a whole or the intentions of the male writers. An excavation of Urdu speaking female characters as individuals apart from male influence once again falls by the wayside. Female characters are symbols, language women (representation of anthropomorphized Urdu) *and*, despite being mostly flat characters, individuals with agency and influence separate from their male creators.

Yet, one cannot merely ignore the presence of these male writers. Basing prose works on women allowed these writers to create their version of a novel and present social reform to a mass audience. They spoke for the women who could not, did not wish to, or simply did not know how. This new form of prose writing took their ideas for women's reform to not only other Indian men but also women. Historians and scholars have noted that women read most of Dehlvi's novels, and

families often gave young women *Mirat-ul Uroos* as a wedding gift; Dehlvi gave a copy to his daughter as part of her dowry. Like many Urdu male writers, Dehlvi was fairly successful in his endeavor to bend a form similar to the novel form to his needs. Alternatively, Joshi proposes that Indian writers often resignedly gave up realism to return to the marvelous, for they believed "what they wrote was neither sinful nor exciting enough to titillate audiences the way that British novels entering the market and being consumed by readers were" (*In Another Country* 147). This dissertation draws on Krupa Shandilya's suggestion that Urdu "novels grapple with questions of literary form, often introducing innovations and breaking from narrative conventions to accommodate new conceptions of women's roles in South Asian society" (273).[52] In the female character then, Urdu writers discovered a method of both emulating British gynocentric novels while also titillating readers as the nation rethought gender spheres. Even in the midst of this rethinking, Indian writers, including Urdu authors, were anxious about protecting women from colonialism while also wishing to push their women and society towards modernity. Chatterjee discusses that "it is striking how much of the literature on women in the 19th century was concerned with the theme of the threatened westernization of women" even as various Indian communities and writers desired more education for women; yet, this education's purpose was to make women more skilled housewives (*Empire and Nation* 123-125). Urdu authors such as Dehlvi and poets like Hadi make similar claims in prefaces or the main body of their works: educate women, but to a certain point. However, in spite of authorial intentions, Urdu speaking fictional women often move beyond such patriarchal restrictions, displaying and utilizing their knowledge outside the domestic sphere. Rusva's Umrao Jan, for instance, has no intention or hope of ever becoming a housewife. Yet, those like Asghari, actually write letters, move freely about marketplaces, and have a sense of authority society usually relegates to men.

More so than the courtesan Umrao Jan, female figures like Asghari were relatable to male and female readers. Such characters could move outside the domestic sphere successfully while upholding cultural and religious traditions. They also offered readers new possibilities. In *Mirat-ul Uroos*, Asghari's father, who often feels like an extension of the author Dehlvi, seems almost desperate to limit female agency. The novel ends with his letter to Asghari, in which he outlines how she should act and what she should learn to become a beloved housewife who helps her family. Yet, the letter feels hollow as well as somewhat silly and petulant, as Asghari has shown throughout the work to be far more successful in navigating the world than the men in her life. Her character moves beyond the limitations that the piece attempts to place on her, specifically, and Urdu speaking, Muslim women in general.

Margrit Pernau argues that to propagate bourgeois values, new cultural habits had to be formed such that an internal cohesion could grow between men and women as the latter's influence over families and "the role they had in the life-cycle rituals made it imperative to at least gain control over the female sphere, better even to ensure their active collaboration" ("Female Voices" 39). Rusva's Umrao Jan is the physical embodiment of this idea as she and Rusva appear to write the entire novel *Umrao Jan Ada* as a collaboration in which Umrao often wields more power, knowledge, and agency than the male narrator and author. The archive for this dissertation consists of published fictional nineteenth-century Urdu works in which an Urdu speaking woman plays a significant role and struggles to find a foothold in society—and how that women can also be read as anthropomorphized Urdu

Translations as Mirrors

In 1947, Pakistan gained independence from India, which impacted the Urdu language in two ways: 1) for the first time in history, Urdu became a national language and 2) as the national language of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, its link to Islam solidified. Some of the openness and

freedom to discuss a variety of topics, including sexuality, that nineteenth-century Urdu literature and writers experienced became restricted. The concluding chapter of the dissertation highlights the mobility and agency Urdu speaking women experienced in nineteenth-century Indian Urdu works through comparing those works and fictional women with modern 21st century Urdu translations of nineteenth-century British texts, specifically Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*[53]. Translated by Pakistani Urdu speaking Muslim men, these three works suppress the feminist moments in the original texts. They downplay female characters' independence and agency, especially when it contradicts nineteenth-century British and current Pakistani social gender norms and expectations.[54] This suppression, intentional or not, highlights the agency and independence afforded to the female characters in nineteenth-century Urdu works.

This dissertation focuses on nineteenth-century British works instead of 20th century Urdu, Pakistani texts because it argues that British works significantly influenced nineteenth-century Urdu texts; both Dehlvi and Rusva have works based on British novels. With the establishment of Queen Victoria's rule and an elevation of English in Indian education, British literature significantly influenced Indian writing. In prefaces and forwards, many of these writers reference at least one British novel or author grappling with social issues. Nineteenth century Urdu writers took these British themes and applied them to Urdu, Islamic society in order to embrace modernity. They further created powerful female figures that could represent the colonized Indian nation while remaining rooted in tradition and culture.

Twenty-first century Pakistani Urdu translators took those same British themes and eradicated them from Urdu translations. This act of censorship is problematic as it works in opposition to translations introducing foreign ideas and modes of thinking into a society. Lesa Scholl claims, "By exploring the continental philosophies that were emerging and being rediscovered, especially from Germany and France, women (in nineteenth century England) who

could translate were empowered to imagine a different discourse and ideological space."[55] The French question of "le femme à l'alcôve" (the woman at the alcove) became the English question of the angel at the hearth, which then influenced the Urdu question of the woman in the veil. In each instance and reiteration of this question, the female characters in fictional works redraw or erase the societal restrictions delineating their roles and restricting them to the domestic sphere. This influence was not linear but rather semi-cyclical. Aamir Mufti makes the claim that oriental translations brought Indian ideas to European intellectual and aesthetic debates, while they also fixed Indian thoughts in India (12). An English translation of *Umrao Jan Ada*, for instance, helped to clarify for Indians as well as the British what Urdu, Muslim identity was and what it could be.

Yet, these Pakistani Urdu twentieth century translations warp that identity as well as the agency of both British and Urdu speaking nineteenth-century Indian women. These translations then become displaced texts to use Kenneth Goldsmith's term: "The displaced text is a mirror, taking on the hue of whatever it is placed near. Displaced authorship solely consists of determining what the text will reflect" (*Against Translations* 18). The shifting gender roles and social reform present in many nineteenth-century British novels dissipate in the translations, which reflect current Pakistani normative gender roles. Sarah Maitland argues that meaning will always remain other than what the author (dead or alive) intended, so that a translator must read at some distance and 1) cognitively engage with the text and 2) think about the needs, knowledge, and expectation of audience" (10).[56] Through comprehending the needs of readers' consuming these 21st century Urdu translations, a better understanding of the needs of nineteenth-century Urdu readers and writers can occur. Therefore, the nineteenth-century Urdu speaking female character illustrates Urdu writers' and readers' desire for a more mobile, influential women. Such a women could match and surpass the image of the Hindu Indian women who came to represent the Indian nation in the latter half of the 19th century.

Exigence and Application:

Aamir Mufti resituated Indian literature as a derivative of nationalist discourse when he claimed, "[T]he idea that India is a unique *national* civilization in possession of a 'classical' culture was first postulated on the terrain of literature, that is, in the very invention of the idea of Indian literature in the course of the philological revolution" (109). While nineteenth-century Urdu literature is tethered to nationalist discourse, it also functions as a vehicle for empowering Urdu speaking, Muslim women through literacy as seen through an application of a modified version of third wave feminist criticism. Reconciling modern feminism, which is in constant flux, with the concerns of 19th century and, at times, contemporary Urdu speaking Muslim communities, this dissertation views these works as providing a new form of Urdu, one that assimilated Western ideals and sexuality even as she fought against tradition and played second fiddle first to Hindi in India then English in Pakistan. As Gail Minault states,

> One should not project current feminist consciousness back too far in seeking to understand the origins of women's political participation in India. Women themselves were slow to seek public roles, and then only did so as extensions of their familial roles, both in deference to male opinion and because they felt more comfortable defining their public ventures in such terms. (*Gender, Language, and Learning* 26-27)

Similarly, Ghosh discusses Indian women's culpability: "the *active* complicity of the subordinated within the structures of their own domination" (*Veil* 6). For many Indian women, complying with patriarchy equated to complying with religion, tradition, and even patriotism. Despite being authored by men, the texts in this dissertation create fissures in established women's roles and tradition.[57] These 19th century Urdu texts and their female characters reveal moments of female empowerment in *this* particular time period, religion, language, and setting. The contemporary translations in the conclusion are of 19th century British works and thus are confined to similar rules.

These steps forward in female empowerment and education during that time can lend insight into what Urdu speaking Muslim women have accomplished thus far and how much work still

remains to be accomplished. Furthermore, taking into account more recent gender studies that seek to blur or even eradicate the masculine/feminine gender binary is not feasible. Due to the time frame, this dissertation is instead obliged to further cement this dichotomy. Nineteenth-century British and Indian literature and scholarship definitively divided masculine/feminine spheres. As such, attempts to ignore or merge them will be disingenuous and be a disservice to the feminist struggles in both nations. The exception to this is hijras, a recognized third gender in South Asian nations and communities. However, as none of the nineteenth-century Urdu book-length prose works of this dissertation mention hijras, they are not included in the investigations or archive, which mainly revolves around female protagonists and, by extension, Indian women.

Nineteenth-century British and Indian society marginalized this group during colonial struggles, particularly after the 1857 revolt: both sides often pared women down to a nationalistic and/or cultural symbol. Analyzing Urdu prose works written and published after the mutiny provides a different outlook on women's status during this time period.[58] Charting the progressive increase of these fictional female characters' literacy in these works mean delving into how these women first work towards obtaining gender equality and agency (chapter one) then stand as equals (chapter two) and finally gain a form of individuality independent of men (chapter three). As these characters' level of education rises in each novel, so too does their authority over men and society. The main purpose of this work is to establish how a woman's ability to effectively read and write afforded her a notable position not only within her household but also outside those four domestic walls—and that Urdu's sexualized representations could be as powerful as it was condemning in the 19th century.

This literary female advancement mirrors 19th century Indian women's struggles for rights and status. After the 1857 revolt, the question of women's education came to the forefront. Indian men of all religions and the British began debating the lack of Indian women's education. The

British pointed to illiterate Indian women as Indian men's way of keeping their wives and daughters oppressed. Meanwhile, Hindu and Muslim men struggled to find a balance in which they could provide women with an education without obliterating religious, traditional, and cultural values. After visiting Britain, Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan, a Muslim and leader of the Aligarh movement, argued in his essay "Hindustan ki aurton ki halat" (Hindustani women's condition) that women, unlike men, had not yet experienced ilm ki roshni (literarily: the light of knowledge).[59] Deputy Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi, the novelist of this dissertation's chapter two, staunchly supported Khan, the Aligarh movement, and the necessity of women's education.[60]

Dehlvi was not alone in this fight. Khwaja Altaf Husain, known as Hali, achieved extensive fame through his Urdu prose works and poetry. Like Dehlvi, he penned pieces arguing that without an education, women would be unable to uphold the Muslim family. He believed education would anchor women in their culture and "[t]his would not cause further dislocation, but would rather supply the cultural self-confidence which the community needed in order to advance" (*Learning* 144).[61] Others like Abdul Halim Sharar desired to elevate Muslims above all others. In either instance, this battle played across the field of a women's body and mind.

These ambiguous feelings regarding British versus Indian culture help define this dissertation's archive, specifically chosen prose works published after the 1857 revolt when Queen Victoria became the sovereign ruler of the British Raj.[62] As the British influenced Indians' thoughts on women, they also impacted literary form. Ralph Russell states, "After the revolt of 1857-59 a tremendous change took place, and in the second half of the nineteenth century the impact of British rule and of British Victorian values was so great that the whole character of Urdu literature was changed by it" (77). Muslims, in general, and the elite, specifically, did not fare well in the aftermath. During the last Mughal emperor's (Bahadur Shah) trial, an English prosecutor stated: "to Mussulman intrigue and Mahommedan conspiracy we may mainly attribute the dreadful calamities

of the year 1857" (*The Madness of Waiting* 7). Urdu male writers employed the novel form as a way of gaining a foothold in a British and Indian society that increasingly condemned Muslims and their language. With British rule firmly in place, this particular form was fast becoming popular and permitted a wider reading audience. Poetry was an oral affair and usually limited to Urdu speaking Muslim men. Other prose fiction works like dastaans or masnavis were also oral and still included extensive swaths of poetry. This Urdu focus on poetry results from Urdu speaking men's dependence on Persian tradition. In contrast, Krupa Shandilya suggests that in the 19th century, "the Urdu novel was also mobilized as a form of celebrating a glorious Muslim past and reviving a Muslim identity in response to Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan's call to reform Muslim society from within" (*Waiting* 13). More generally, the novel form allowed for an assimilation of British ideals while formulating a new Urdu cultural tradition.

Many of the authors in this dissertation, such as Khairi and Sharar, self-labelled their works navel. This word needs further explanation. Most importantly, when it appears, this word is only in Urdu - never Roman - script: ناول. Therefore, the use of the word navel instead of novel is simply that the Urdu language does not have a letter equivalent for the o sound in English. The noon alif vow and lam are the only possible combinations a writer may use to approximate the English word novel in Urdu. This leads to the navel instead of novel pronunciation and translation from Urdu back into English. Moving beyond this elementary explanation, this modification of the English word aligned with Urdu writers' modification of the English literary form to suit their needs. The majority of these writers taught and were taught in English and had read various works in the language. In many articles and essays, Rusva references English poetry. Dehlvi also often cited English idioms such as "charity begins at home" in his books' introductions.[63] These examples illustrate these authors' command of English. Moreover, Urdu publishers had the ability to print Roman script as one can see on numerous Urdu works' title pages. *Fasana-e-Azad*'s text, in fact,

includes entire sentences and sections where English appears in Roman script. The word ناول then works as a statement, a visual representation of Urdu writers searching for and creating identity in post-mutiny Indian society.

In the 19th and following centuries, numerous literary and historical scholars have debated whether the many Urdu works referenced in this dissertation are novels or not.[64] This dissertation intentionally eschews the contentious term of novel in terms of its archive. Instead of approaching these works through the analysis dominating critical discourse since the late 1800s (questions of form and genre), it repositions nineteenth-century Urdu speaking female characters as subjects and individuals demanding critical attention. Male Indian Urdu writers transform fictional women into stratified sites of subversion and struggle. These female characters' possess five main functions: 1) a symbol representing male Urdu speakers' and writers' rebellion against British and Indian perceptions of Urdu and its users 2) a character allowing for the complication of the Urdu language 3) a metaphor for the Urdu language and the language itself, Bibi Urdu and its struggles to gain a foothold in nineteenth-century India 4) as individuals and agents of change in their own right and 5) progressive, mobile counterpoints to British fictional women in original nineteenth century works and their 21st century Urdu translations.

The existence of such women in these 19th century Urdu works is a direct result of British views on women's education. Indian men may have vacillated in regards to how much and what kind of knowledge women should obtain. However, some of them are also responsible for creating platforms showcasing and encouraging female writing. Women's magazines, particularly those in Urdu, are a prominent example of this phenomenon.[65] Urdu magazines, specifically, for Muslim Urdu-speaking women had additional obstacles to overcome, including but not limited to their purdah.[66] This is the main reason families pulled Muslim girls out of madrasas before or as soon as they hit puberty. Many of them barely knew how to read the Arabic Quran, let alone read and write

in Urdu. While Delhvi wrote prose fiction championing women's education, others produced outlets for educated women. Rashid ul. Khairi, a prolific and popular 19th century Urdu prose writer, started several magazines, such as *Ismat* (1908). For his women's journals and magazines, he would often write pieces then credit them to women. Scholars and historians have stated that he hoped to encourage women to write and show that anyone could accomplish the task.[67]

A pioneer in Urdu journalism, Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and his wife, Muhammadi Begum, founded *Tahzib-un-Niswan* (Feminine Etiquette) in 1898.[68] Muhammadi Begum remained the editor during her life; after her death, a female editor always remained at the helm of the magazine.[69] Maintaining that they adhered to true Islamic practice, Ali and his wife used their newspaper to study and open discussion regarding several imperative feminine issues: polygamy, marriage age, women's choice in marriage, wives' roles, and education (Metcalf 108). They also significantly expanded the boundaries of education, giving women access to texts and subjects the Muslim ulama restricted.[70] As women read more, they were able to formulate new ideas and perspectives on current and past Indian society. The articles and pieces they wrote for Ali and other magazines became bolder and more varied. The publication of female writing towards the latter half of the century shows a monumental leap forward not only in women's education but their ability to engage with and become more active participants of Indian society.[71]

The existence and content of such journals and magazines provide a basis and precedent for posit that these writers' works eased female Urdu writers' difficult emergence from marginalized spaces into more prominent literary arenas. This dissertation's research does not focus on nineteenth-century women's Urdu fiction writing simply because it does not exist, at least not in a published state. Whether in prose or verse, novel-length Urdu works penned by women did not appear in the market until the twentieth century. Writing from New Delhi, Muslim scholar Nishat Zaidi pinpoints the inherent problem of male writing: "[W]omen's roles as citizens, as members of

the nation, are either relegated to symbolic status or embedded in the narratives inscribed by men" (Arora vi). Acknowledging this issue, this dissertation still contends that male writing provided a window into women's lives and struggles thereby eventually affording women opportunities to write their stories in their words. Fictional women advanced their knowledge and education; they literally took up the pen that men grasped. Eventually, at the beginning of the twentieth century, these fictional women stepped from the pages as real Urdu speaking, often Muslim women, who penned and published their works. The translations mentioned above, however, show a step backward. Through illustrating how progressive Muslim Urdu speaking nineteenth-century men and women were, the hope is that current Muslim Urdu speaking communities, specifically those in Pakistan, will continue progressing forward instead of citing religion and language as a barrier to advancement and female agency and education, as is often the case.

Chapter Outlines:

Chapter One: Redefining Tradition: Unmarried Muslim Women and Urdu Prose in Sarshar's 1878-79 *Fasana-e-Azad* and Sharar's 1893 *Flora Florinda*

This chapter begins with Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*, which appeared in installments in the Indian *Avadh-e-Akhbar* newspaper from 1878-79 then in several print editions starting in 1880. Marking Urdu writers' first notable deviation from oral, poetic storytelling to emulate the British-introduced prose form and realist genre, this narrative functions as a dual critical point in the formation of Muslim colonial identity through a new educated middle-class woman and language, both more closely aligned with British ideals. Although colonial, multicultural, and transnational literary critical discourse has recently begin moving away from "colonists writing back to the colonizer" ideology, this chapter charts *Fasana-e-Azad* and Abdul Halim Sharar's 1893 *Flora Florinda*'s sustained circumscription of female sexuality and education within domestic, marriage boundaries as an attempt to counter British imperialists' and Hindu Indian nationalists' degrading representation of the overly-sexualized, oppressed Muslim woman while also appeasing Muslim

moral sensibilities. The flat female characters embody the Foucauldian tension of repressed sexuality warring against present societal norms while defining new social mores. This middle-class Muslim woman may now be sexual and literate so far as she uses both in an effort to obtain an appropriate husband. Connecting this to Jakobson's notion of metonymy through contiguity, these flat characters also represent the Urdu "language woman" as an interpellating figure who detaches Urdu from her poetic lineage and immerses her in the more authoritative, respectable prose form. Woman's speech or 'begamati zuban" in these narratives indicates the first movement away from the unrestrained, earthy language between woman or the suggestive poetry used by courtesans towards a refined, nuanced sexuality in prose form that pushes against the colonial debasement of Urdu and its speakers without wholly rejecting its sexualized anthropomorphic image. In transforming the symbolic Muslim women and the Urdu woman from a mere Indian Hindu nationalist and British imperialist construct to a purposeful colonial Muslim creation, this chapter offers a method to reclaim a previously debauched feminine image.

Chapter Two: The Agency of Urdu Wives: Didactic Realism and Lingual Communities in Dehlvi's Works

This chapter uses Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's prefaces, introductions, and four prose, fiction works to explore the tethering of didactic realism to the creation of a lingual communal identity as a gendered endeavor. In Dehlvi's introduction to *Uroos* and later works, he frames his works as guidebooks for married Muslim women, thus partially eschewing the issue of separating licentious amusement from instruction plaguing many 18th and 19th century realist novels and writers. Dehlvi's works do not suppress but rather celebrate female sexual liberation as long as it remains under the purview of men through marriage. While this may appear to extinguish female Muslim agency, the wives in 1868's *Mirat-ul Uroos*, 1877's *Taubat-un-Nasuh*, and 1885's *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, function as agents of change, with men providing nebulous ideas that their educated wives transform into feasible action. Husbands and wives tend to work as a unit, with some exceptions, which not only

parallels Islamic teachings but also opposes British imperialists' and Hindu Indian nationalists' conception of Muslim men subjugating women to their "savage" natures.

Drawing on Sudipta Kaviraj and Ayesha Jalal's notable contributions to Indian colonial linguistic scholarship that colonial rule marked language as an identifier of community thereby creating marginalized language communities, this chapter contextualizes Dehlvi's work as an attempt to reconstruct as respectable Urdu and its speakers' communal lingual identity through situating married, educated Muslim woman in didactic realist works that utilize the prose form for both dialogues and narration. This chapter layers, among others, the Foucauldian theory of sexuality leading to divergent social norms on the shifting figure of respectable Muslim wife- an obedient, daughter then wife in *Mirat-ul Uroos* to a courtesan turned caring wife in *Fasana-e-Mubtala*. The increased sexuality of the Muslim wife, who represents the Indian Muslim woman as well as the supposedly immoral Urdu woman, is crucial to Muslim Urdu speaker's elevation of the sexualized Muslim woman from disgrace to a more reputable position by embracing rather than rejecting her sexuality.

Chapter Three: Plural Sexuality: The Grammatical and Lexical Masculinization of Urdu through Umrao Jan

Whereas the previous two chapters chart the struggle between acceptable Muslim female domesticity and sexuality, this chapter focuses on Muhammad Hadi Rusva's 1899 works *Umrao Jan Ada* and *Junoon-e-Intezaar*—both centered around a Muslim courtesan—as the culmination of courtesan Urdu and the Muslim Indian woman's colonial-inherited Foucauldian tension, so that repressed sexuality now ruptures societal norms to conceive a new normal. This rupturing occurs across the dual planes of genre and language. Presenting *Umrao Jan Ada* as a biography in his introduction—most contemporary readers and scholars understood Umrao Jan as real but the narrative as fictional—Rusva provides his audience with a text that is the epitome of realism, a British-introduced genre that, as Meenakshi Mukherjee and other historians indicate, colonial Indian

writers struggled to imitate. This permits Rusva's works to recover Urdu's poetic lineage, which previous Urdu works relinquished in their relentless pursuit of producing an authoritative, prose Urdu that could compete with colonial India's veneration of English in government, education, and the workplace. Instead of abandoning Urdu's poetic past, *Ada* and *Inteezar* integrate it with prose to construct an Urdu that is an outgrowth of British influence while embracing its oral, lyrical roots. The narratives celebrate instead of suppressing the sexualized, titular nature of poetic Urdu. This chapter bridges Gail Minault's notions of begamati zuban (Indian woman's language) as counter-intuitively impolitic yet commanding with Robin Lakoff's seminal work; Lakoff unpacks woman's powerful speech patterns first in 1972's *Language and Woman's Place*, which she revised in 2017 to include emotional and political influences on gendered linguistics. Umrao Jan, as a woman, her manner of speaking, and as a representation of anthropomorphic Urdu, is a new model for creating sexual pluralism in language, which encourages a fluidity between previously rigid structures of masculine and feminine grammar and lexicon. This then opens up new avenues for Urdu, where its speakers can redefine its image of overt, unruly sexuality as progressively modern.

With its demoted position in nineteenth century India, Urdu must be viewed as a language unique from Hindi and other Indian vernaculars. Influenced heavily by poetry from Persian and Sufi tradition, the muddled, non-linear development of Urdu literature and its path to embracing the novel form must be taken into account when scrutinizing Urdu works of this time period. Analyzing the female character both as a symbol and as individual women enhances the troubled situation of Urdu and its users in nineteenth-century India and in the world today. Through an understanding of nineteenth century Urdu literary works and male authors' progression towards modernity and perhaps new Urdu speakers and Pakistani woman, in particular, may discover new modes of achieving authority and agency in the current climate.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all transliterations and translations are mine.

[2] Apart from Christianity, Islam and Hinduism were India's two dominant religions at this time. India was and is also home to many languages, including but not limited to Hindi, Urdu, English, Punjabi, Tamil, Bengali, and Malayalam. For the purposes of this dissertation only, I take "native" Indian to mean anyone residing in nineteenth century India with South Asian genetics and/or heritage, someone who did not immigrate to India from another country but was born and raised there.

[3] Upper caste Indian Hindu women were a minority in nineteenth century India as they still are today.

[4] Other names include Indian Rebellion, Sepoy Mutiny, Indian Mutiny, First War of Independence, Revolt of 1857, and Indian Resurrection.

[5] Gail Minault. *Gender, Language, and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History*. Permanent Black, 2009.

[6] The symbolic status of the Indian woman did not always correspond with her lived reality. As Anindita Ghosh suggests, "Indian women have been '*silenced doubly*' in the colonial text, because the colonial state justified its rule using images of weak and vulnerable women oppressed by tradition and late nineteenth century onwards, nationalists constructed women as repositories of Indian culture and tradition on which their identity was based" (*Power in Print* 1). Similarly, Inderpal Grewal contends, "'*[N]ative' women are invisible* but at the same time symbolize the 'savage' customs that mark by contrast the racial superiority of English culture" (*Home and Harem* 71, emphasis mine).

[7] When I use the term gender norms here, I am specifically referring to the general Indian societal expectations levelled at Urdu speaking, often Muslim, men and women.

[8] I choose the word speaking and not using because no Urdu Indian female writers published any works in the nineteenth century. Similar to other Indian women, many of these women were also illiterate. However, some Muslim women were able to read the Quran, which is written in Arabic, a language not commonly spoken or used in nineteenth century or modern day India outside religious purposes.

[9] This term comes from the name that, ironically, the Muslim Persian Mughals gave to the region when it was under their rule: Hindustan.

[10] Aamir R. Mufti. *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*. Harvard University Press, 2016.

[11] Upon its establishment in India, Fort William College's British educators and officers asked educated "native" Indians to write texts in or translate English texts into Urdu or Hindi, among various other languages. However, before Fort William came into existence, Indians did not necessarily consider Urdu and Hindi separate languages but rather one language that was written in two scripts. As G. E. Ward outlines in the editor's preface of his 1899 transliteration of Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's 1868 Urdu novel *Mirat-ul Uroos*, Muslims would write Hindustani in modified Persian/Arabic script while Hindus used Devanagari. The British mistakenly thought two different scripts meant two different languages, thus insisted on having separate texts in Urdu and Hindi. These languages, however, were mere constructs that the British perpetuated on the Indian people as it caused scholars to use Persian to shape Urdu and Sanskrit to shape Hindi in order to demarcate a difference between the two. G. E. Ward laments the splitting of what should have been one national language: "Two book languages were thus *created* for Upper India by Maulavis and Pandits…while the spoken language of the country was still being polished…at the ancient metropolis of Delhi. [T]he prose writers, as well as the poets of the country, have ever since been split into two camps" (xiii). Maulavi and Pandit, in this case, refers to a well-educated (usually) religious leader of Islam or Hinduism, respectively; these men are similar to priests in Christianity.

[12] Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield, editors. Introduction. *Telling and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*. Open Book Publishers, 2015.
Their decision is eerily reminiscent of G. E. Ward's staunch refusal to use the terms Hindi or Urdu in his 1899 transliteration of Nazir Ahmed Delhvi's *Mirat-ul Uroos*. He determinedly labels the book's language Hindavi or Hindustani.

[13] Shamsur Rahman Faruqi. *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

[14] Francesca Orsini. *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*. Oxford University Press, 2009. pg. 126

[15] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979.

[16] Gayatri Spivak. "Rethinking Comparativism." *New Literary History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2009, pp.609-626. pg.613.
Whether these speakers/writers practiced Islam or not, were Muslim or not. I make this distinction because some Urdu users were Muslim but did not actively practice their religion.

[17] Urdu changed drastically from simply existing as a different script of one national language to a language that the public, Indian and British scholars, as well as Urdu speakers often denoted as a specifically Islamic one, significantly different from all other languages Indians spoke at the time.

[18] Aamir R. Mufti. *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*. Harvard University Press, 2016.
When discussing nation, Mufti refers to India here.

[19] Barabra Metclaf. *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press, 2004. pg. 103

[20] At least metaphorically if not physically.

[21] Krupa Shandilya. "The Widow, the Wife, and the Courtesan: A Comparative Study of Social Reform in Premchand's *Sevasadan* and the Late Nineteenth-Century Bengali and Urdu Novel." Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 53, no. 2, 2016, pp. 279

[22] This emulation refers to the amount of power, education, and worldly knowledge the courtesan possessed, not to her sexual knowledge or prowess.

[23] Meenakshi Mukherjee. *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*. Oxford University Press, 1985. pg. 70

[24] Ruby Lal. *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness*. Cambridge, 2013.

[25] Anindita Ghosh, editor. *Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

[26] One can see this movement in the increase of women's magazines and women contributors and editors of those magazine. I provide more details of this in my last chapter/conclusion as well as later in this introduction.

[27] Rekhti is the feminine version of the masculine rekhta, both style of poetry revolving around love or romance. In rekthi, the speakers was specifically female though the love interest could be either male or female.

[28] Ruth Vanita. *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India, 1780-1870*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. pg.5

[29] Before rekthi, many poems had a male speaker professing love for a woman or a man, a tradition stemming from Persian poetry, which greatly influenced Urdu poets. Rekthi allowed women a similar ability to love beyond the opposite gender.

Some poems of Mirza Mohammad Rafi Sauda, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Momin Khan Momin, and Mirza Ghalib not only explored a women's emotional state in love but also encouraged moving beyond spirituality to embrace worldly knowledge. Male Urdu poets constantly competed against one another to create poetry that showcased the increasing attention on women and their role in society; one such example is Mohammed Taqi Mir's defiant two line shehr "Rekthe ke tum hi ustad nahi ho Ghalib" in which Mir sets the prominent and prolific Ghalib as a poet of the past and himself as a poet of the future, a fair claim since many of his poems praised women and the Urdu language.

a) Rekthe ke tum his ustad nahi ho Ghalib: Ghalib, you are not the only shrewd teacher of poetry.

b) In "Guftugu rekhte men ham se ne kar" (do not speak to me in poetic form), Mir defends Urdu and laments those who willfully choose to misunderstand and misuse its beauty.

[30] Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield, editors. Introduction. *Telling and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*. Open Book Publishers, 2015. pg. 5 and 21.

[31] Francesca Orsini. *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*. Permanent Black, 2009. pg. 184

Although few Indian women, especially Urdu speaking ones, were literate, they would often have men write in for them or share ideas with men who then wrote in to the paper publishing *Fasana-e-Azad*.

[32] In 1984's *A History of Urdu Literature*, historian Mohammed Sadiq credits Indian printing presses and British East India Company's road construction for the wider dissemination of Urdu novels across India toward the end of the nineteenth century (294). Similarly, Francesca Orsini's 2009 Print and Pleasure: *Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* and Partha Chatterjee's 2012's *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*, among many other scholarly works, cite the declining costs of printing and purchasing a novel towards the latter half of the nineteenth and beginning of the 20th century for the increase in Indian vernacular publications.

[33] Francesca Orsini. *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*. Permanent Black, 2009. pg. 180

[34] Richard Allen and Harish Trivedi. *Literature and Nation: Britain & India 1800 – 1900*. Routledge, 2000. pg. 10.
Like several other Urdu historians and scholars Muhammad Assuddin's 2001 "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers" makes a similar claim: "In [the] unquestioning acceptance of British values one can see the psycho-pathology of a vanquished people. For many, the British conquest of India implied the inherent superiority of their culture, their sciences and their values, and therefore these ought to be emulated" (85).

[35] Partha Chatterjee. *Empire and Nation*. Columbia University Press, 2010. pg. 161

[36] Shandilya, Krupa with Taimoor Shahid, trans. *The Madness of Waiting*. By Muhammad Hadi Ruswa, Zubaan, 2012, pg.9.

[37] I have noted the exception to this earlier, where particular women may have read, heard, or even penned Urdu poetry. The Urdu novel, however, was available to Indians of all religions, languages, etc.

[38] Ahmed Ali. *The Golden Tradition: An Anthology of Urdu Poetry*. Columbia University Press, 1973. pg. 56

[39] Hunter's most notable achievements are perhaps for his work *The Imperial Gazetter of India*, published in 1881, and as an statistician working for the Indian Civil Service. He fully supported the British Raj and often spoke of creating a greater empire than the Muslims and French did previously.

[40] Partha Chatterjee. *Empire and Nation*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

[41] Although Gikandi refers only to the colonizer's (British in this case) oppression, my work also considers non-Urdu speaking Indians showing condescension towards Urdu and its speakers/writers.

[42] Ruby Lal. *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness*. Cambridge, 2013.

[43] Kaviraj, Sudipta. *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*. Columbia University Press, 2015.

[44] Partha Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Bodhisattva Kar, editors. Introduction. *New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices*. Oxford University Press, 2014. pg. 17.

[45] Abdul Qadir. *Urdu Literature of the Nineteenth Century: A Critical Study of Halo, Azad, Nazir Ahmad, Rattan Nath Sarshar, and Abdul Halim Sharar*. Quami Kutub Khana, 1941.
Ralph Russell. *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature: A Select History*. Zed Books, 1992.
G. E. Ward, translator/transliteration. *Mirat-ul Uroos*. By Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi, Henry Frowde, 1899.

[46] Partha Chatterjee. *Empire and Nation*. Columbia University Press, 2010, pg 100.

[47] Mohammad Asaduddin. "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers." *Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 16, 2001. pg. 96

[48] Priya Joshi. *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*. Columbia University Press, 2002. pg. 146

[49] Scholars tend to consider only these two texts when debating which one was the first true Urdu novel.

[50] Sharon Pillai. "'Tell…the Truht, but Tell It Slant': Form and Fiction in Rusva's Umrao Jan Ada." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2016, pp. 110 – 126.

[51] Sati references the Hindu practice of widow burning, which very few Hindus actually followed, even in nineteenth century India. Naqaab references the Muslim practice of veiled women, which could mean anything from covering the face, to the hair, to the entire body, or simply remaining indoors. Sharafat translates to humble, noble, or virtuous.

[52] Krupa Shandilya. "The Widow, the Wife, and the Courtesan: A Comparative Study of Social Reform in Premchand's *Sevasadan* and the Late Nineteenth-Century Bengali and Urdu Novel." Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 53, no. 2, 2016, pp. 272-288.

[53] I choose these three because they are the only translations I believe are suitable for the academic inquiry, as they are published by reputable presses. Other translations, I have found have been written by bloggers or published online in chat rooms, often by high school students or those simply interested in both languages. These pieces are often written by Urdu speakers residing in America and created as hobby, thus not subject to editing and publishing standards. While I believe a scrutiny of such works is important, it is beyond the scope of my paper.

[54] Despite my extensive research, I could not locate any existence of women translating nineteenth century British works into Urdu.

[55] Lesa Scholl. *Translation, Authorship and the Victorian Professional Woman: Charlotte Brontë, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot*. Ashgate, 2011. pg. 2

[56] Sarah Maitland. *What is Cultural Translation?* Bloomsbury, 2017.

[57] One should also note that many of these men considered themselves what, in modern day, society would label feminist. They often collaborated with their wives, daughters, and daughter-in-laws. Through the introductions to their works and the works as well, they show they were fighting, to some extent, for women's rights.

[58] The only exception to this rule is Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*, which he began writing and publishing in an Urdu newspaper in 1846. I include it because he continued writing past 1857 and new editions appeared until 1902.

[59] The Aligarh movement, which spawned many newspapers and even a college, functioned off the idea that British ideals and values should be incorporated into Muslim thought, literature, and life. Many Urdu and Muslim writers and poets such as Mirza Ghalib were strongly opposed to this idea.

[60] Delhvi seemed to be a bit conflicted about this. In his introduction to *Mirat-ul Uroos* discusses how women do not need to receive too much education, just enough to run the household along with helping their husbands, in-laws, and other family members (8-9).

[61] Hali's stance is basically the popular 'women as cultural repositories' argument that many scholars such as Sangeeta Ray have thoroughly analyzed and which I have covered towards the beginning of this chapter.
[62] Until this point, India was not a colony. The East India Company was present, but Indians still retained some measure of rule and power.
[63] In the introduction to *Taubut-un Nasuh*, Dehlvi introduces this very idiom with a mention that it is an English proverb, which fits his novel's theme.
[64] In my research, I have not come across any scholars who do not label Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* a novel.
[65] Although I am quite certain that Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, and other Indian language women's magazines may have provided similar platforms, I have only mentioned Urdu here as that language is my research's focus.
[66] Purdah does not only refer to dressing modestly and covering one's hair and often face as well. It also kept women tied to their homes as a respectable purdah-nashin (one who follows purdah) would not leave her house to enter into a public area of any sort.
[67] As Gail Minault outlines, however, many of his "women-written" pieces were quite bland, usually describing household tasks such as sewing in a simplistic and dry manner (*Learning* 160).
[68] Several author women's magazines, including those in Urdu, appeared on the scene during this time. I cite *Tahzib-un-Nuswan*, specifically, as it was revolutionary with its content and educated female editors.
[69] These female editors, as Gail Minault mentions in *Gender, Language, and Learning*, were always Western-educated, with a thorough knowledge of Islamic sciences like Muhammadi Begum.
[70] "Like the ulama, he was keen to see girls educated, but he favoured a more cosmopolitan approach to education, allowing them, for example, to read the old Persianate tales and epics (that the ulama judged decadent), as well as history, geography, and science" (Metcalf 108).
[71] This brings up a question about my research. Why not focus on these female writings rather than male writer's prose works. The issue is that much of these female writings were simplistic, focusing on household chores or religious and cultural superstitions. While these certainly lead to strong Urdu writing towards the end of the century and beyond, they are not the focus on my research, mostly due to their content.

Chapter One:

Redefining Tradition: Unmarried Muslim Women and the Urdu Prose Language Woman in Sarshar's 1878-79 *Fasana-e-Azad* and Sharar's 1893 *Flora Florinda*

Siphar Ara: "Haya kahnum nah churah az-ruq niqab hunooz/
Mera hijab nadeedast bey-hijab hunooz."
"Do not attempt to steal the covering of my soul/
My modesty (scarf) is craving its removal."

Husn Ara: "Yehan chashme haya parwar ahdeb ahmwaaz nigah hai."
"Here the spring of modesty resides in respectful gazes."

~ P. Ratan N. Sarshar, *Fasana-e-Azad*, 1878-1899. (transliteration and translation from Urdu mine)

Converted Muslim Helen to her Muslim husband: "Zaid, tum iss, iss mey dhakal na doh"
"Zaid, don't you interfere in this, *this*."

~Abdul H. Sharar, *Flora Florinda*, 1893. (transliteration and translation from Urdu mine)[72]

Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's Urdu *Fasana-e-Azad*, which appeared in installments in the Indian *Avadh-e-Akhbar* newspaper from 1878-79 then in several print editions starting in 1880, marked Urdu writers' first notable deviation from oral, poetic storytelling to emulate the prose form and realism genre the British introduced to colonial India in the early 19th century. Sarshar's narrative functions as a dual critical point in the formation of Muslim colonial identity in fiction through a new educated middle-class woman and an elevated form of the Urdu language (prose instead poetry), both more closely aligned with British ideals. Moreover, Sarshar's identity as a Hindu, unlike his contemporary Muslim male Urdu writer Abdul Halim Sharar and others, is negligible for the purposes of my analysis as his works, specifically *Fasana-e-Azad,* are in Urdu with Muslim main characters and are indistinguishable—for the purposes of this chapter—from other Urdu Muslim writers' works that supported women's education and the shift of Urdu from poesy to prose.[73] Although global colonial, multicultural, and transnational literary critical discourse has begun moving away from the "colonists writing back to the colonizer" ideology and Saidian contrapuntal readings, Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* and Abdul Halim Sharar's 1893 Urdu *Flora Florinda*'s sustained

circumscription of female sexuality and education within domestic, marriage boundaries is an attempt to counter British imperialists' and Hindu Indian nationalists' degrading representation of the overly-sexualized, oppressed Muslim woman and, by extension, the anthropomorphic Urdu woman. [74]

Building on Jakobson's notion of metonymy through contiguity, these flat characters are a representation of the Urdu "language woman," a term coined by Asha Sarangi in her 2009 article "Language as Women: The Feminisation of Linguistic Discourses in Colonial North India." Sarshar and Sharar's works and their fictional women support a reading of this Urdu language woman as an interpellating figure who detaches Urdu from her poetic lineage and immerses her in the more authoritative and respectable—as viewed by the British and many non-Muslim Indians—prose form.[75] The names of the characters encourage such an allegorical reading. For instance, *Fasana-e-Azad*'s characters do not possess proper names; the titular character's name Azad means *free*. His first love interest's name, Bi Allah Rakhi, translates roughly to *may God keep her*. The name of his second love interest and eventual wife, Husn Ara, simply means *beauty*. With the exception of one of the villains, Abu Muslim, the characters in Sharar's *Flora Florinda* possess more realistic and common names like Zahra, Zayid, Helen and Florinda; unlike Husn Ara and Azad who are unchanging flat characters, Flora Florinda's do develop and change, learning different ways to connect with the world and understand their faith with Helen, in fact, converting.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims, "language is isomorphic with cultural formation" (New Literary History, 613). The cultural formation of India was a diverse project, even before the British arrived and created a simple dichotomy of Hindu versus Muslim. As Papia Sengupta writes, "It was unthinkable for the English to comprehend Indian nationalism…could ever develop given the absence of one religion, one culture, and one language…[W]hat emerged, therefore, was the concept of plural selves" (*Language as Identity in Colonial India* 81). So, Hindi and its speakers became

connected with India and Indian nationalism, while Urdu and its speakers were detached from the nation. As covered in my introduction, Muslim-linked Urdu was often feminized as the unruly Bibi or Begum Urdu, while the Hindu-linked Devanagari (Hindi) became the metaphorical representation of the educated, reformed Indian woman who could represent Indian nationalism.

Sarshar and Sharar's narratives provide a different language woman who cannot yet represent the nation but can at least better represent Indian Muslims. In their works, woman's speech or "begamati zuban," for instance, begins moving away from the unrestrained, earthy language between women and the sexually suggestive poetry used by courtesans towards a refined, nuanced sexuality in prose form. This refinement pushes against the colonial debasement of Urdu and its speakers without wholly rejecting Urdu's sexualized anthropomorphic image. Even within the last decade or so, critical discourse on the anthropomorphization of Hindi and Urdu has lamented the demeaning representation of the latter but offered no alternate readings or recourse, not even by Sarangi.[76] In reading the Urdu language woman, representing the symbolic Muslim woman, not as a mere Indian Hindu nationalist and British imperialist construct but rather as a woman that colonial Muslims attempted to transform and refashion through Urdu prose, this chapter offers a method to reclaim a previously debauched feminine image of Urdu; the reclamation runs along the lines of the image remaining sexual while still being elevated to a more respectable status, at least in fiction.[77]

The men versus women dialogue is exceptionally apparent in India after the failed 1857 mutiny; a year later, the British usurped the country and retitled it the British Raj. Although the British imperialists navigated racial tensions between the colonizers and the colonized along gender lines, "colonial criticisms of the low status of Indian women, which the British used as a justification for empire" (Shandilya 4) existed well before the unsuccessful rebellion exacerbated this pre-existing issue. Anindita Ghosh unpacks how the British alongside Muslim and non-Muslim Indian men

struggled for control over the symbolic Indian women, which this chapter extends to include the anthropomorphic language women Hindi and Urdu, to further their nationalist agendas:

> [D]uring the colonial period…we see woman as a silent shadow…unquestioningly accepting a discourse that endorses her subordination. As has been pointed out, for the colonial state, this was part of a strategy to perpetuate domination: helpless and weak Indian women in need of protection provided one moral justification for colonial rule. Later…the Indian woman became the site for nationalist constructions of tradition and cultural authenticity in the quest for self-identity from the late nineteenth century onwards. *Faced with defeat and humiliation in the political and material world, Indian men constructed their women as the repositories of all that was pure and worthy in their own culture.* (*Power in Print* 1-2)

The British argued that Indian men had misguided and miseducated Indian women to keep them silent and subordinate. To combat this oppressive rhetoric, Muslim and Hindu Indian men refashioned women into a mere figurehead of pure tradition. This new representational Indian woman then became a foil to the values and ideals the British injected into colonized India. She was also an attempt to counteract derogatory English interpretations of Indian male/female dynamics, for Indian men explained her absence from the public sphere as their method of protecting, not oppressing, her. Consequently, in the mutiny's aftermath, a more defined hierarchy emerged with Muslim women at its nadir.[78] In this colonial battle, Indian women's, specifically Urdu Muslim women's, voices became lost.

Gail Minault and Ghosh add another dimension to this invisibility; they posit that Indian women were complicit, partly due to the time period and partly due to cultural mores, in first the British imperial then Indian male suppression of their voices.[79] Additionally, social historian Mahua Sarkar highlights Indian women's deprecation of each other to raise their status in society. For instance, middle-class Brahmin Indian Hindu women often wrote well-read and well-circulated nineteenth-century articles in which they discuss Muslims in a purely male sense, thereby reducing Muslim women to mere objects that Muslim men sexually control. This dismissal of Muslim women's humanity, Sarkar argues, was an extension of nationalist (Hindu) ideology, introduced by the British and supported by Hindu Indian nationalists: "[h]egemonic nationalist discourse also

produces 'Mussalman' as a violent, and *almost exclusively male category* by making Muslim women invisible," for the British and Hindus perceive "the category 'Muslim' as *predominantly male*, violent, dissolute and 'medieval'" (229 and 228, emphasis mine). Non-Muslims also pointed to the Islamic practice of *purdah* (veil) to bolster their defamation of Muslim men.[80] In contradiction, Margrit Pernau argues that *purdah* was not as restrictive as Hindus and the British supposed, with Muslim women not being locked in female-only rooms or always hidden behind a curtain but rather leaving the house with men or even shopping for groceries in the streets. She further credits Indian bureaucrats and professionals migrating to Hyderabad, India for the 1880s start and propagation of reformist Islam, which advocated for Muslim women's education. This education reformation, she asserts, allowed these female voices, especially those behind the *purdah*, to no longer be invisible (36).[81] Yet, religion was not the only ammunition the British imperialists and Hindu nationalists wielded, for language, which was deeply connected to religion in nineteenth-century India, also played a major role in lowering Indian Muslims' status, which is my main focus of interest in this chapter, particularly language in male-written nineteenth-century Urdu prose.

In 2018, four female Pakistani scholars reiterated American feminist Kate Millet's claims: "[i]n sociolinguistics, this term [patriarchy] was firstly used by feminists who want[ed] to show the inequality in relationships on the daily basis…[s]o it is one kind of politics. This patriarchal power is maintained by [the] practice of socialization. It is promoted by religion, education and literature."[82] The four scholars also conducted interviews with both Urdu-speaking men and women and concluded that although their "data analysis shows that the set standards of stereotypical roles are changing now…Gender Based Variations [in the Urdu language] are bringing a drastic suppression of the rights of females. Their voice is not being given a vent…*[b]ut the most dangerous thing is that they are accepting their suppression hegemonically*."[83] Their overall argument is that Urdu needs to become a non-sexist language in order to provide Pakistani women with a psychological *individual* identity.

In nineteenth-century India, the political milieu did not allow for individual Muslim identity, let alone individual Indian Muslim women's identity. Urdu prose had no space for individual female characters in the sense of fully rounded personalities, as it was fighting against the representations of language—and, by extension, the entire group of its speakers—as depraved, sexual, uneducated, and unreformed. Sarshar and Sharar's works are not a dismissal of feminism or even an elevation of a Muslim woman, per se, but rather pieces that transform the Urdu language woman into a semi-respectable representation of Muslims. This evolving Urdu language woman then functions as scaffolding for later feminist and more rounded characters to emerge in Urdu writing, such as Umrao Jan Ada, explored in chapter three.

In the 19th century, Urdu was not the only language undergoing a transformation along gender lines. In Britain, as women and men began exploring new gender roles, language began changing drastically. With the rise of the new British woman during the 1880s and 1890s, male and female spheres began to overlap, with women leaving the domestic sphere to work as men did though as nannies, tutors, and missionaires. Nancy Armstrong claims that these shifting roles induced nineteenth-century British authors to create a new vocabulary: "Language…was dismantled to form the masculine and feminine spheres that characterize modern culture" in Britain (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 469). This same dismantling did not occur in Urdu even though most Urdu writers of the time read and were influenced by British novels, so much so that Sarshar stated that *Don Quixote* had influenced his *Fasana-e-Azad* and its hero, Azad, along with other characters. Such a dismantling would have been counterproductive which is why the fictional women, except the female protagonists in earlier Urdu literary works, such as *Fasana-e-Azad* and *Flora Florinda*, do not use the raunchy, joyful begamati zuban (women's tongue) that Gail Minault presents in her 2009 *Gender, Language, and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History*. Instead, they often speak like men,

spouting theories in an eloquent and almost formal speech-like format even when speaking among themselves.

Whereas the new British fictional woman in England was based upon and even written by actual women, missionaries or authors like Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, the new Indian woman, specifically the new Indian Muslim woman was appearing in fiction in response to the Hindu and British perception of the Muslim woman and specifically of the Urdu language; she did not yet exist except on the literary page. British women's real lives influenced the change of the English novel; it was the opposite for Urdu prose. In fact, not only could many Muslim women not read but Muslim communities forbade women to do so. Urdu prose then suggested and created the foundation not for what the Indian Muslim woman *was* but what she *could* be. Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* contains a pivotal moment where the main female character, Husn Ara, saves her sister Siphar Ara, from a marriage that could bring disgrace on the entire family; she does so simply by reading the newspaper. Upon reading the newspaper as is her daily habit, she comes across what amounts to a mug shot and details of Siphar Ara's fiancé—and the two sisters immediately cancel the wedding. This is a perfect example the types of the advantages women gain from becoming educated, something Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi proclaims in every one of his books.[84]

English could dismantle and reform because it was not necessarily representing the entire Christian religion nor was it in competition with any other language. Urdu had to contend against Hindi and English. The British and, to a greater extent, Indian Hindu nationalists, seeking to further cement Hindi's position as a national language, represented Urdu as an uneducated, tawdry, and prostitute-like Muslim woman. As Aamir Mufti states, Urdu then "could not replicate that *strong* claim to possession, came to see itself, and of course was seen by others, as not quite Indian in the emergent sense" (20). So, Hindi was national, and Urdu disconnected from nation; this also applied to speakers of each language. To clarify, Urdu-speaking Muslims could not easily help women

develop their individual psychological identities when the entire community's identity was so nebulous and degraded. As Sarkar states, "[T]he representations of Muslim women as 'backward/victimi[z]ed' were intimately related to the productions of the category of modern 'ideal Indian woman' as Hindu, upper caste/middle class," which also led to the Hindu, specifically Bengali, male becoming effeminate (227-228). While in *En-Gendering India*, Sangeeta Ray discusses the demeaning nature of the effeminate Bengali male rhetoric, Sarkar offers an intriguing alternative. She states that effeminate also equated to sophisticated, civilized, and liberal in British eyes (228). In short, effeminate was a much better descriptor than violent and oppressive, a label with which non-Muslim Indians and the British had branded Muslim men. Urdu literature then afforded an opportunity to rethink this disparagement. Urdu prose literature is the terrain on which the new Indian Muslim woman emerged and on which the Indian Muslim male identity was reinvented. In advocating for women's education and writing texts that proposed a new Indian Muslim woman, Muslim male writers and their allies like the Hindu Sarshar could begin to redefine the entire Muslim community.

The new Indian woman, who began developing in the aftermath of the 1857 mutiny and whose creation was later influenced by the new British woman, varied widely across different Indian communities and religions, which is apparent in nineteenth-century Indian literature. Bagchi, for instance, establishes the new Indian Bengali woman in Tagore's works as someone who gained the ability to move between public and private spheres through performance, specifically of song and dance, an act that previously occurred only within households, and even then, in women-only spaces.[85] Ray, in her chapter on Bengali author Bankimchandra Chatterjee, depicts his novels as creating a new woman who combatted the colonial depiction of the effeminate Bengali man; she existed within a world that could "simultaneously valorize man's essential martial nature…even as [it] intimate[d] that 'woman' is the eternal warrior" (*En-Gendering India* 24). Even within the Bengali

community, the new woman was quite heterogenous. In works such as those of Sarshar and Sharar, the new, albeit still fictional, Indian Muslim woman was either still trapped or prevented from moving freely outside of the home. Instead, she was indirectly connected to the public sphere through literacy. She obtained knowledge of the outside world, ranging from market prices of clothes and food to news items about politics or local thieves, and reading newspapers or even certain texts or novels. She also gleaned knowledge through conversations with women, sometimes with servants, or on rare occasions, male vendors. This allowed her to better engage with men, who were constantly in the public sphere, and, theoretically, make more sensible decisions about her life in the domestic sphere, including finding an appropriate husband.

This may seem somewhat limiting, especially in comparison to the new British woman or even the Indian Hindu woman, but as Bagchi states, "When postmodernists talk about the emergence of modernity in the lives of colonial women, as the white men saving the brown women from the brown men, they seem to be oblivious of the spaces of selfhood which were opened by new forms of self-expression, well beyond the ken of white masters" (4).[86] Modernity and the term *new woman* functioned differently for nineteenth-century British women than it did for their Indian and especially Muslim counterparts. English women embraced modernity through becoming more educated, so they could often act as purveyors of imperialism or gain financial independence. For Indian women, with most being illiterate, movement into the workforce usually meant turning to prostitution, so modernization and even self-expression for them meant learning to read and write. Urdu prose presented a new Muslim woman that was educated and marked a shift away from traditional restrictive and prohibitive Islam, which often became ammunition for those debasing Muslims and Urdu; her transformation in literature ran parallel to the transformation of Urdu as it shifted from the more supposedly crass poetry to the more sophisticated prose.

This concept prevails in Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* and Sharar's *Flora Florinda*, as illustrated in the two quotes from these works that begin the chapter. In the first set, two young, unmarried Muslim women converse with Azad and his male companion on how *purdah* is the responsibility of men controlling their gazes rather than women remaining locked within households or donning modest attire, a progressive viewpoint for that time and yet another conversation that is ongoing in the 21st century.[87] The latter quote is from a married Muslim woman deciding to adopt a child born out of wedlock while dismissing her husband's outright rejection of the newborn. These female characters symbolizing a new future of Islam pushed against a present, restrictive Islam that was more a result of tradition and culture rather than the actual religion.[88] Texts like *Fasana-e-Azad* depicted a new possibility, that of a new Muslim woman respectfully but logically entering into dialogue with men who dominated the Muslim community. This portended a new dynamic between Muslim women and men of mutual respect if not mutual authority.

Notes of Form and Genre:

Even uneducated women could have an impact on the changing literary Muslim and anthropomorphic Urdu woman. Their influence, though limited, was possible because of the oral tradition of Indian storytelling. While many scholars like Meenakshi Mukherjee weigh the value of Indian literary works of this time on how well Indian writers assimilated and utilized the novel form, this chapter establishes value in the movement of Urdu away from mostly oral storytelling and poetry.[89] Urdu's mere existence in a written, tangible form that somewhat resembled a novel was a first step in lending it and its users credence and respectability. The Urdu literary landscape struggles with this balance as even the last Urdu novel of the century, 1899's *Umrao Jan Ada*, still depicts how much of Urdu storytelling happened on a poetic oral landscape where stories and poems are shared during gatherings and little if anything is written. This tension is the very facet of evolving Urdu that helps redefine the Urdu language woman, as it shows a movement towards respectability without a

complete uprooting or rejection of tradition. Urdu published works, Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* in particular, forged a link between the past and present of Indian storytelling, becoming amalgams of the still prevailing oral tradition and the literary novel form that the British introduced. This integrated instead of completely banishing the oral poetic tradition of Urdu, though orality was one of the reasons non-Muslim Indian and the British derogatorily called it Begum Urdu; a begum could be someone running a brothel and many prostitutes and courtesans would use Urdu poetry to entice and entertain their clients.

Unlike oral tales, published works allowed for constant and sustained reader feedback. As such, the new Indian Muslim woman forming on the pages could be dynamic, shifting and morphing instead of taking shape in a vacuum. Furthermore, because it still had its roots in tradition, it could also theoretically still appeal to Muslim readers while showing the British and non-Muslim Indian that the Muslim community were not the male savages society painted them. Sarshar and Sharar used the popular oral format of the quest narrative, which was the nascent beginning of the Indian novel and entered the nineteenth-century market in book format or, more commonly, as serials in newspapers, magazines, or journals, not much different from *Vanity Fair* and other similar works in Britain. Historians Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield chart the powerful impact of oral storytelling to widely spread themes and ideas among various Indian groups.[90] *Fasana-e-Azad*, printed as serial then book, continually adapted to male and female reader feedback, which can be seen in the several editions as well as the newspaper reprints that include adjustments and changes. Not quite to the same extent, *Flora Florinda* also followed a similar path with the author releasing a handful of revised editions.

As historian Jennifer Dubrow emphasizes, Indian women of all religions and languages were a major aspect of this conversation between creator and reader.[91] This did not require them to be literate. Rather, the practice of community reading, such as men reading stories out loud on trains or

even within homes allowed women a window into these new Urdu works.[92] In newspaper form, readers devoured Sarshar's installments and once the volumes became affordable to purchase at railways, they became a popular form of entertainment. A.R. Venkatachalapathy attributes the increased reading on trains to a rise in book sales at train stations. He insists that reading is a solitary activity; referencing a train passenger's Indian newspaper article, he writes "another observer found some passengers glancing through books lost in thought, unmindful of the gossip of fellow travelers" (230). Conversely, Francesca Orsini presents reading Urdu publications on trains as a communal activity: "while *Fasana-e-Azad* was read both aloud and silently, just like qissas, it nevertheless surprised its readers with the characterization of its protagonists and the situations it placed them in" (*Print and Pleasure* 163).[93] Scholar Swati Moitra "engages with alternate frameworks of considering the practice of reading aloud, drawing upon diverse feminist scholarships on practices of reading to argue in favor of considering the practice of 'communitarian' reading as a form of female sociality for Bengali women in the nineteenth-century, at a time when public spaces remained largely inaccessible to women" (627). If public spaces were mostly off-limits to Bengali Hindu women, then Muslim women had even more difficulty breaching the barrier between private and public. Yet, as can be seen in Dubrow's discussion of women writing into the *Avadh Akhbar* (1858-1896) newspaper in response to the latest installment of *Fasana-e-Azad*, communitarian reading opened up many avenues for Indian women of all religions.[94] Moitra further contends that the act of women 'reading together,' had the ability to change a private, domestic space into a public one, as this was a "form of female sociality that open[ed] up different possibilities for women's participation in the public sphere" and that "the seeming absence of active resistance to patriarchal norms that confined [Indian women] to the domestic sphere need not imply that there was no attempt on the part of women to negotiate such stipulations, that this very sociality, often clandestine in nature, enables us to consider women's negotiation with the boundaries of acceptable behavior" (629). In

essence then Urdu literature not only provided Muslim women with a window into the public sphere but also permitted them to interact with it and have an impact on Urdu literature.

Indian feminist critic and activist Jasodhara Bagchi's analysis of 19th and 20th century Bengali Rabindranath Tagore's songs and novels is fitting here: "The end product is the release of women's voices, women's subjectivity, women's emotions and women's passions that helped, with great effectiveness, to bend the wall-the inner and outer-into a bridge between the two" ("Tagore and Woman" 4). This bridging is even more surprising and imperative in Urdu texts for the wall, constructed on the basis of *purdah*, was seemingly insurmountable in Muslim communities. Yet, texts like Sharar and Sarshar's helped Muslim men and women see the problems of *purdah*. Female characters such as Flora in *Flora Florinda* and Siphar Ara in *Fasana-e-Azad* illustrated to Muslims the dangers of barring women from education. Such works shifted how the Muslim woman functioned in Urdu literature.

While this chapter will not focus on the impact of these works on Muslim communities, fear of reader reaction played a significant role in developing these Urdu stories. As texts moved from serialization to book print, reader feedback was less instantaneous, and a published book was more permanent thus far more open to scrutiny than newspaper print. Authors writing in Urdu about Muslim characters continually struggled to find a balance between tradition and modernity, represented most obviously in every newly released edition of Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*. Dubrow charts how each new edition noticeably diluted the female characters' outspokenness or movement away from domestication, so that eventually the flirtatious, independent innkeeper Bi Allah Rakhi is tempered into the loving wife of a nawab/aristocrat at the work's conclusion; "[y]et this transformation of Bi Allah Rakhi felt heavy-handed and artificial to readers, and the question of her respectability prompted protest from them" (*Cosmopolitan Dreams* 60). Dubrow suggests that certain reader feedback influenced Sarshar's to alter the most dissenting, rebellious woman, Bi Allah Rakhi,

in the serial into a woman yoked in marriage and turned respectable in the book edition. However, the root of the problem lies in the work's theme. Since it refuses to deviate from presenting educated women as making better wives, Bi Allah Rakhi must submit to this theme as well, regardless of reader preference. Furthermore, since she is financially independent, leaving her single provides her with far too much authority and agency. As Sarkar notes, for most Hindu and Muslim Indian men and women, the goal was to create a modern woman who represented traditions and culture in a new way, not a woman independent of men (229). Bi Allah Rakhi, when representing the Urdu language woman retained some of her sexuality, such as poetry being included within the respectable format of a novel-like publication.

The Muslim public opinion, generally, was that only courtesans, not even widows, could possess the liberty of moving in the public sphere independent of a family man.[95] *Flora Florinda* also encounters a similar issue. After being raped and giving birth to a boy, Flora can no longer exist within society, despite having gained a great deal of knowledge and experience. She must perish at the story's conclusion because she cannot become a wife and thus fulfill her proper role in Muslim society. Permitting respectable women to exist freely outside a man's guidance or control would make the man superfluous. Yet, this anxiety seems less apparent in other nineteenth-century Urdu prose works. If married, they either work in conjunction with their husbands and fathers or as completely separate entities. This freedom allows them to utilize their education in varying ways. Sarshar's and Sharar's female characters, however, are important literary figures because they become the basis for more outspoken, more mobile women in other Urdu works.

Ruby Lal, however, finds this stagnation in female growth particularly troubling and labels such women as "static" characters, whose growth is limited to their coming-of-age. Ghosh disagrees. This form of female resistance, though frustrating in its limitations, is significant. Although these fictional women overcame only "everyday struggles," these moments of subdued rebellion give

voice to the subaltern experience (*Behind the Veil* 4).[96] These texts are the start of women gaining a foothold at least in literature, specifically through education. Both Sharar and Sarshar were strong proponents of the Aligarh movement. The movement and its leader Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan rallied for assimilating British values and ideals into Muslim traditions and culture, which included educating Muslim women. As historian Mushirul Hasan declares, "[M]any believed that equal access to educational and public roles were unwelcome and would have nightmarish consequences" with "an insistent 'commonsense' belief that men and women had different qualities and roles, and that this was only 'natural'" (158). The specter of patriarchy is constricting and ever-present in these two works, with men elevated above women in regard to public roles and mobility outside the domestic sphere, but this does not invalidate the changing women within these texts. While their behavior still needed to be approved by Muslim male characters, Husn Ara of *Fasana-e-Azad* along with Flora and Helen of *Flora Florinda* upset traditional values of *purdah* and the restriction of women's education. These fictional women illustrate that even minimal education and agency provides them with a new status in Indian society. Their limited literacy permits them to choose their name, their religion, their form of dress, and their marriage partner. Even though a man must approve their decisions, without education, none of these choices would be possible. Although their identities are still problematically defined through their relationship with men, they are the forerunners of characters like Fahmida and Umrao Jan, women who use their education to redistribute power between men and women.

To reiterate, the link between the evolving Muslim woman ran parallel to the evolving Urdu language woman. Understanding the genre of these texts is as imperative as understanding the movement into a novel-like format. Although scholars classify *Flora Florinda* as a historical romance, this chapter engages with it as a quest narrative similar to *Fasana-e-Azad*.[97] The latter functions as a true quest narrative with a very loose plot line and the main character Azad meandering through time and across India without a particular goal in mind. Unlike Azad, the character of Zaid has an

overarching goal: to bring his sister Flora back home. Yet, Zain and Flora behave much like characters of a quest narrative, as they move from place to place, reacting to events rather than acting. Much of scholarship has focused on these two works for one of two reasons: how they align with the novel genre that spread from England to the colonies or how the authors, especially men, present female characters. Scholars and historians tend to understandably avoid character analysis of these two literary pieces, for the loose plot and overall theme often take precedence over the individual characters, who are mostly two dimensional and often change abruptly based on plot. Azad, for instance, is very outspoken against the British and ridiculous community practices in the incorrect name of Islam, such as leaving women uneducated or not riding in trains that serve alcohol. Yet, he becomes more tempered as the serial gained popularity and more readers wrote into the publishing newspaper. Although *Flora Florinda* has a tighter plot with a beginning, middle, and end of sorts, it too focuses more on didactic themes than the development of character. The characters and their inconsistency do not take away from the transition of Urdu and its anthropomorphic version into a more respectable sphere away from oral storytelling, which was often meandering and a collection of events without a plot, and poetry. Sarshar's tempering of Bi Allah Rakhi and Azad shows a navigation between British and Indian Hindu versus Muslim ideals, while still enacting change and an evolution of the Muslim woman and Urdu woman.

In fact, Gilbert Phelps notes, "With its emergence – as so often in the initial stages of the establishment of a fictional tradition, especially among subject peoples – came the first experiments in historical fiction as a means of *asserting national or racial identity* and of exploring the heroic exploits of the past" (328, emphasis mine). This applies to *Fasana-e-Azad* and to a greater extent, *Flora Florinda*. These works then are not simply a foray into a creating new Muslim Indian woman or a new Urdu language woman but also, by connecting with the past, link the Muslim characters to India and thereby also link Urdu to India. Sharar's works negotiate the past to fortify religious and

racial identity, specifically Muslim superiority. While in Sarshar's lengthy tale, Azad moves from quest to quest without any discernible plotline apart from his marriage to Husn Ara, *Flora Florinda* provides somewhat more of a plotline, though the narrative revolves mostly around the representation of Islam versus Christianity than a real story. Jennifer Dubrow still titles him the "inaugurator of the historical novel genre in Urdu" (*Serial Fictions* 15).[98] Ralph Russell labels him "the pioneer of the historical romance in Urdu" (123). Russell reasons that Sharar's support for the Aligarh movement colored his works, the movement's "argument being that the civilization of Islam had once been far in advance of the Christian world, and that the Muslims therefore had it in them to emulate, and even overtake, the advanced notions of the West" (131).[99] Both works change with new editions in the way oral storytelling and dastaans did.

While Urdu scholars and historians continue to debate which text deserves the title of the first Urdu novel, Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* and Sharar's *Flora Florinda* are never considered as possibilities. Both were published as serials first, *Flora Florinda* in London starting in 1893 and *Fasana-e-Azad* in an Indian newspaper from 1878-79. Although they are fiction prose works, their form is closer to that of a dastaan than a novel. Urdu writers and poets carried this form over from Persian storytelling and poetry. The word dastaan literally translates into *a story*, though dastaans tend to be lengthy and winding. Traditionally, dastaans were oral tales so that with each new telling they expanded further and allowed for the storyteller to display his/her creativity. They are not dissimilar to quest and hero narratives in Western English literary history.

The point is not how well these works emulated the novel form but that they attempted it at all—without foregoing Urdu's tradition of poetic storytelling. Bibi Urdu was receiving an education and becoming more sophisticated without forgetting her roots. For example, in *Flora Florinda*, Sharar pens the phrase "Ghareeb Flora!" (436), which literally translates to "Poor Flora!" a common English phrase. However, common Urdu would use the word bechari (a feminine synonym of

hapless) in such an instance. Even in the 21st century, the Urdu word ghareeb refers only to a lack of wealth, while bechari refers to troubling circumstances of all sorts. Despite his penchant toward British concepts, similar to his contemporary and fellow editor for *Avadh Akhbar*, Rathan Nath Sarshar, Sharar struggled to fit his content into novel form. For instance, if a reader peruses a Jane Austen novel, the marriage plot is clearly defined. Each scene builds upon the previous one and introduces the next. They cannot be read as singular events. However, if one looks at a work like *Don Quixote*, one can read any event without requiring knowledge of the previous or next occurrences.

While Sarshar often vacillated between the terms novel and dastaan when referring to *Fasana-e-Azad*, Sharar had no qualms assigning the word "novel" to his works. On *Flora Florinda*'s title page, directly above the bolded title, are the words "ek dilchasp tahreekhee navel" (*A heart-enthralling historical novel*) (1).[100] A version of this becomes the first line of the work: "humari dilchasp navel AH 230 ke khareeb shuree hoti hai" (*our heart-enthralling novel starts around AH 230,* with AH referring to the Islamic calendar and meaning Anno Hegirae or the year of Hijra) (1). The word *dilchasp* serves a dual purpose. Urdu poets used similar words to promote their ghazals, shers, and other forms of poetry. Similarly, Sharar's use of the word assists the transformation of anthropomorphic Urdu from dastaans or poems to what he titles a novel. Secondly, many Indian writers (of all languages) struggled to compete with English novels entering India, as educated Indian men were not only reading these novels as part of their education but also purchasing them to read for pleasure. Scholars such as Mukherjee and Priya Joshi also describe the Indian audience as finding English novels more thrilling than their Indian counterparts.[101] With the word *dilchasp* appearing twice at the start of *Flora Florinda*, the text works to dislodge readers' preconceived notions that Indian Urdu Muslim prose works are mundane and the format and depiction of it as a novel works against preconceived notions of it being tawdry.

The British's demotion of Urdu as a proper Indian language from the start of the 19th century and as only the language of Muslims enhanced this rift. After the 1857 rebellion, Lucknow presses exaggerated the problem. Many Indians saw Lucknow as the center for the development of Urdu. Yet, a Hindu owned one of the most popular Urdu newspapers, *Avadh Akhbar*, of which both Sharar (Muslim) and Sarshar (Hindu) were editors. A Hindu also owned one of the most prolific presses: Munshi Naval Kishore press. Muslim Urdu writers sought to fortify the protective enclosure around Urdu; they attempted to regain their footing in a colonial India that continually suppressed their voice. Prior to the mutiny, Muslim language publications were ubiquitous in the city, despite the strict censorship the British placed on Indian vernacular publications from 1849 to 1856.[102] Urdu newspapers entered the market after 1856 only to succumb to the rebellion's deleterious impacts: "In the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of free press would exist in India only to the extent that the language of opinion was English. Everything else was subject to the rule of colonial difference and liable to be declared as exceptions to the universal principle of liberty" (*The Black Hole of Empire* 120). Urdu Muslim writers like Sharar contended against British suppression of the Indian voice. Under the shadow of the rebellion, "the British started to grant licenses to indigenous printers again, the first license was given not to a local printer but to a young outsider who, significantly, was at once of Hindu origin and a newcomer to the city."[103] Munshi Naval Kishore's press not only revolutionized the Lucknow book trade, but also made several Urdu writers, including Sarshar, and their works affordable thus accessible to the general Indian public; yet, his religion and status as outsider did nothing to ameliorate Urdu-speaking Muslim's fear of erasure. This fear also provides a reason for most of Sharar's works, including *Flora Florinda*, releasing through the Muslim, Urdu-centric publishers Qawami Press.

While Sarshar's religious identity will not play a significant role in this chapter, it must be acknowledged, since most Urdu scholars limit their analysis of *Fasana-e-Azad* to the question of

whether it is a novel. They tend to circumvent the issue of Sarshar's identity as a Hindu man writing Urdu works in Lucknow; not only was he not *ahl-e zaban* (a native speaker/master of Urdu) but also practiced a religion different from most Urdu-speakers. Post-1857, Urdu became a protective enclosure in which Muslims could venerate their language. Sarshar's entrance into this enclosure fed resentful sentiments, especially in the literary world. As Shamsur Rahman Faruqi argues, "New Urdu writers continued to rise from among the Hindus, but the Muslims, perhaps unconsciously responding to the pressure of official British opinion, tended towards excluding Hindu writers from the Urdu canon" (47). The newspaper *Avadh Punch* continually criticized first *Fasana-e-Azad* then Sarshar directly for attempting to appropriate Islam and Muslim culture. A particularly vehement review appeared in *Avadh Punch* on July 20, 1880; a writer berated Sarshar, stating that the author needed to spend more time learning about the people about whom he was writing and their language; "Otherwise writing a novel, and that too about Muslims and in the language of Muslims is a hefty task indeed" (239). This review inaccurately denounces Sarshar's identity, for he grew up in the elite Muslim city of Lucknow thus was well aware of Muslim customs. The issue was rather Muslim Urdu-speakers viewing him as usurping their culture, language, and religion. Much like poets at mushairas, evening gatherings at which Urdu poetry is recited, Sharar (author of *Flora Florinda*) was also overly protective of Urdu. In *Avadh Punch*, "Abdul Halim Sharar viciously attacked *Gulzar-e Nasim*, an Urdu poem by Daya Shankar 'Nasim,' because the poet was Hindu and Kashmiri, thus not *ahl-e zaban*" (*Cosmopolitan Dreams* 104).

This perhaps led to Rathan Nath Sarshar, unlike Sharar, dubiousness about what literary form (novel or dastaan) best suited *Fasana-e-Azad*. Whereas Sharar wrote for Muslims and Dehlvi boasted that he wrote to educate Muslim wives and daughter, "works such as *Fasana-e-Azad* had to please the greatest number of potential readers-listeners."[104] Yet, because *Fasana-e-Azad* appeared in a Muslim newspaper, the text works as a guide for the Muslim community and works to elevate

Urdu in particular still holds true, especially given Sarshar's tempering of the main Muslims characters in the work. A Hindu or British reader could not have reasonably cared enough about Bi Allah Rakhi's impertinence enough for Sarshar to make changes; the logical assumption must be that Muslim readers influenced this decision. His vacillation on form also provides room for exploration of political issues, like the low value of Muslims and Urdu. The characters in the work function as mere vessels for Sharar to explore India's political issues, on which many articles appeared in *Avadh Akhbar*. *Fasana-e-Azad* then began as a conversation with politics and the upheaval caused by the 1857 mutiny. Furthermore, Sharar wrote at a decided advantage. As editor of *Avadh Akhbar* in which his serial appeared, he had firsthand access to reader feedback. He often shifted Azad's stance depending on how readers reacted to a particular installment. At first, Azad stood as the mouthpiece for dominant ideology debates occurring within the nineteenth-century Indian community. As the serial progressed and Sharar contemplated compiling the somewhat discordant pieces together in a book, Azad gains some individuality through distinct ideas. His sidekick, Khoji, enters the story towards the latter half of the first volume. He becomes a foil to Azad so they may converse about societal matters as more realistic individuals rather than caricatures of bipartisan ideals (modern vs traditional).

Jennifer Dubrow writes that "the open nature of serialization in South Asia, in which novels were not planned in advance but could rather develop and change while in progress, meant that serialized versions of novels were often more experimental than book editions" (*Serial Fictions* 51). Sarshar, however, experimented with the book form as well, releasing several editions in response to reader reception. This allowed him to morph his characters to better fit public approval: "Sarshar toned down some of the very liberal ideas contained in the newspaper version. He also sanitized his hero, Azad, by attributing some of his earlier misadventures to other characters, or by removing from book editions non-respectable behaviors, such as drinking alcohol and fighting with lower-

class characters such as a washerwoman" (Dubrow 51). In essence, Sarshar transplanted the flexibility of the serial and oral storytelling to books, which meant that he could shift the Urdu work as needed to gain the most traction amongst the readers and continue the evolution of Urdu works.

As for the issue of whether *Fasana-e-Azad* is novel or not, Mukherjee claims that Sarshar and Urdu solved the problem of the novel quite simply: in the preface to *Fasana-e-Azad*'s book format, published in 1883, Sarshar labelled it a novel, claiming that it was unprecedented in Urdu fiction and a new form of writing (*Realism and Reality* 12). Many nineteenth-century Urdu writers did stamp novel (navil – ناول) on their works despite creating content that Indian readers may recognize as closer to a lengthy poem or dastaan. Rather than conform to a British definition of novel as being a literary piece with a clear beginning, middle, and end and often utilizing realism, which captured day-to-day life through fictional but believable, round characters. Sarshar approaches novel as a more fluid term, as a form that is simply different from poetry or oral storytelling. In a thank you letter to his *Avadh Akhbar* readers for their praise of his writing, he rapidly shifts his work from one literary form to another: "I've written the novel of all novels, the dastaan of all dastaans, the best humor and the best ethics."[105] In *Print and Pleasure*, Francesca Orsini applies Michael McKeon's term "generic instability" to *Fasana-e-Azad* (5). This instability shows Urdu shifting and changing instead of simply jumping into a new format.

It also shows a desire to not alienate Urdu readers, which is important as the new Muslim woman developing in fiction was an attempt to create the new Muslim woman in reality. Scholars studying the emergence and development of the novel form in India often cite readers' lack of trust in print versus oral dissemination of ideas and stories. A.R. Venkatachalapathy considers an actual event in which Indians ridiculed a man for depending only on the printed version of a religious story; the printed account altered many aspects of the oral version, which is why "[t]he authority of print was therefore never taken for granted and in fact its initial penetration into society was

considerably contested" (217). The shifting nature of *Flora Florinda* and *Fasana-e-Azad* even after their author released them in book format harkened back to oral storytelling traditions, which helped readers trust the text more because the work could evolve. Sharar also mentions in some of his *Avadh Akhbar* articles that his various pieces of writing are often printed with errors still present. Yet, *Fasana-e-Azad* or, rather its readers, intertwined oral and print culture. Dubrow and other Urdu scholars indicate that readers often compared older editions with newer ones or the newspaper versus the novelized version; readers often carried out line-by-line comparisons that were "not only consistent with preprint Urdu literary culture's attention to fine details, but also allowed readers to…for[m] a critical community of interpretation, united by the act of simultaneous analytical reading" (*Cosmopolitan Dreams* 104). As such, Sharar and Sarshar's work allow for a space in which, even as the Urdu language woman and the Muslim woman evolve in literature, the Muslim community plays a role.

Choice of Name and Religion in *Flora Florinda*

Abdul Halim Sharar and an Insular Muslim Community

Priya Joshi writes that, after 1857, Indian activists either "regarded the Indian woman as belonging to a sacrosanct sphere untouched by empire" or were among "those who insisted that the anticolonial struggle required the modernization of Indian society in which addressing the Woman's Question and pursuing social reform were critical" (173). While Joshi mostly eschews religious influences, Islam did impact how Urdu Muslim writers engaged with the Woman Question. While advocating women's education, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan continually had to reassure the followers of his Aligarh movement that aligning with the British and their values did not equate to abandoning Islam but rather reinterpreting it along modern lines.[106] As previously indicated, author of 1893's *Flora Florinda*, Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar was a strong proponent of this movement and women's reform. His writings became a political platform to engage with new ideas while educating Muslim

men, specifically, and the wider Indian public, generally. This is apparent in his 1890 journal *Muhazzab* and 1904's *Ittihad*, which were meant to improve Hindu-Muslim relations (*Serial Fictions* 19-20). His 1897 book *Badr un Nisa ki Musibat* (Badr un Nisa's Predicament) highlights the destructive consequences of *purdah* (separation of the sexes) in a similar manner to *Clarissa*'s (1748) denouncement of forced/arranged marriages.[107] Sharar's *Flora Florinda* similarly grapples with patriarchal society problematically forcing young women to yield to men's decisions. Unlike in *Badr un Nisa ki Musibat*, this work shows the consequences of forcing religion on a young woman without educating her. Published in serial form in 1893 in London and then as a book in India in 1899, *Flora Florinda* is set in AH 230 Spain (approximately AD 845), when Muslim power was at its zenith. Most scholars attribute the choice of this historical moment as Sharar's way of bolstering Islam's dominance in the text and, consequently, his readers' eyes.

Here is a summary of the work. A Muslim man marries a Spanish, Christian woman. They have a son, Ziad, and a daughter, Flora. The husband attempts to convert his wife to Islam but fails. Although he gives his daughter the Muslim name Zahra, she never claims it. The wife brings up Flora as a Christian in secret. Once the parents die, Ziad, who has grown up Muslim, learns of Flora's Christianity and connections with Christians. He bars any non-Muslims and strangers from the household while struggling to convert her sister to Islam. He takes the advice of several Muslim maulvis.[108] Most counsel him to use logic in convincing her sister that remaining Christian would mean her death. Meanwhile, several Christians, including priests and nuns, devise a plot to sneak Flora out of her house, away from her brother and other Muslims, and to a church. The nun Florinda infiltrates the home as a Muslim widow and eventually manages the task of escaping with Flora. The Christian patriarch Lewal, Flora, and Florinda go into hiding. The Christian Duke of San Sebastian's daughter Helen joins them while Ziad, disguised as a Christian monk, searches for his sister.

Soon, the Patriarch becomes attracted to Flora and makes inappropriate advances towards her. To escape his attentions, Flora decides to join a convent believing she will be safe there. Helen, who has become fond of her, argues for her to stay. Florinda also urges Flora not to go to the convent because she has taken a liking to her. The nun knows that Flora will have to submit to Lewal's desires as part of her religious duties, but Florinda's obligations force her to keep silent on convent realities. In distress, she reveals the truth to a furious, contemptuous Helen after Flora leaves. Flora has already joined the convent, where Lewal has repeatedly raped her. In the meantime, Ziad has finally located Helen and Florinda's residence. He and Helen fall in love and marry, though he does not make any attempts to convert her. When he reveals his true identity, Helen requests to join him in his search for Flora to which he agrees.

While Helen and Ziad search for her, a pregnant Flora submits to Lewal one last time before stabbing him. She escapes him and the city. She eventually ends up in a cave where she finds the clothes and sword Ziad discarded before donning his Christian monk disguise. Thinking the Christians have killed her brother, a seven to eight months pregnant Flora dons his clothing and decides to avenge his death. Disguised as a young Muslim man, she reenters the city where she soon disguises herself as a Christian once more. Learning that Lewal is still alive, she becomes determined to kill him and any other Christians who may have contributed to her brother's death. Giving birth and then tricking a Christian man to guide her to the patriarch, she enters a church where she shows Lewal his child before stabbing him with Ziad's sword. As he lays dying, Helen and Ziad appear on the scene. Ziad ends up stabbing the Christian man Flora tricked whom the text reveals is Helen's father. Another priest mortally wounds Flora, who accepts Islam with her dying breaths. As Flora dies, Helen, despite Ziad's initial objections, decides to raise her friend and Lewal's boy as hers. Ziad acquiesces, apologies to his wife for slaying her father, and calls Flora by her chosen name instead of Zahra. Lewal also bleeds out as this conversation is occurring. Helen forgives Ziad for killing her

father as he was only protecting her and Flora from his blade. She then accepts Islam though Ziad states he does not require her to convert. The book concludes with Ziad arranging a proper funeral for both Flora and Helen's father.

The main theme of this work is the victory of Islam over Christianity. The characters and even the story are secondary to establishing Islam as the superior religion. Apart from the tensions resulting from the 1857 mutiny, Sharar's background provides some explanation for this enthusiastic championing of Islam. Having lived in London for a period of time and an avid reader of British novels, he often encountered the British degradation of Muslims in India and England. Works such as *Flora Florinda* were his retaliation to such condescension. Furthermore, as an editor and writer for the daily newspaper *Avadh Akhbar*, Sharar lived and worked in the cosmopolitan city of Lucknow.[109] Here, he had easy, affordable access to British literature, which he often lauded.[110] However, Sir Walter Scott's *Talisman* and its offensive portrayal of Muslims ignited Sharar's desire to correct this denigration "in deep sympathy with the Aligarh movement, Sharar took upon himself the task of *reminding Muslims* of *their* glorious past and often got carried away by his enthusiasm" ("First Urdu Novel" 77, emphasis mine). This correction of the Muslim image became highly imperative after the 1857 rebellion, but as historian Mohammad Asadudin mentions, it often only reached the Muslim community.

In attempting elevate Muslims' status in his works, Sharar problematically filters his historical fiction through an absolute black and white lens. Sharar's reduction of the complicated colonial relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims to a prosaic binary attracted Muslim readers to his works. His contemporaries, however, did not hold his writings in high regard. Scholars of Urdu literature often cite Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva's introduction to *Umrao Jan Ada* to highlight the irrationality and implausibility of the events occurring in Sharar's works. Rusva sarcastically condemns Sharar in stating that he (Rusva) has not the time, imagination, or inclination to truthfully

write about history, which is usually presented in a detrimental manner in (Sharar's) fiction because it neither properly reflects the present nor the past.[111] Mushirul Hasan is one of the very few scholars who presents these historical romances in a more positive light: "Sharar…detailed the historical relations between the Muslim and Christian communities in the light of age-old barriers of ignorance, misunderstanding, and prejudices gradually disappearing" (105). This reading of Sharar's books is exceedingly optimistic. While his journals and newspaper articles did make strides in this direction, his novel-length pieces seemingly failed to resolve prejudices. Sharar consistently penned narrative fiction in which Muslims rose, often through bloody violence, to conquer other cultures and religions instead of working alongside them. In short, his works like *Flora Florinda* are an overcorrection. Bibi Urdu has turned into Warrior Urdu quote dramatically, and while the shift was not altogether successful, Indian Muslims did love the works, which, at least, attempted to show Urdu in a novel-like format and the many advantages of educating women of all religions particularly Muslim women.

In an article about Sharar, Faiz Ahmad Faiz explains the popularity of his fiction in nineteenth century India:

> Muslims had just awoken to a consciousness of their decline. These romantic tales…helped them forget the bitterness of everyday life. Secondly, the recital of past conquests partly inspired them with self-respect and partly with emotional solace… And thirdly…with a way of taking mental revenge for their present subjection. (229)

This notion also appears in current scholarship. Asaduddin states, "Sharar gained popularity because through his great flights of imagination he reminded Muslims of their glorious past, *a potion they sorely needed in their fallen state*" (135, emphasis mine). A balm to nineteenth-century Indian Muslims of all classes, these works, while creating a new Urdu language women and new Muslim woman, had content that was insular and isolating. Instead of the collaboration with the British that the Aligarh movement and Sharar encouraged, his historical romances accentuated the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. This created an "us versus them" mentality that Sir Syed

Ahmed Khan specifically wished to avoid. Yet, insularity may have allowed Muslim readers a comfortable way to reevaluate and modernize their nineteenth-century community. With the text setting up Muslims as in control, it supplies a new way of thinking: "how may we increase our power?" rather than "we have lost all control," the unfortunate reality for Indian Muslims in the 19th century. The text provides an answer to that question in Flora and Helen. Although Sharar's approach reduces the fictional women to an angel versus prostitute dichotomy, leaving little room for individuality, a reader can find elements of the new Muslim Indian woman in Flora and Helen as they become educated through their experiences, which imbues them with some authority to overcome oppressive Christian and Muslim cultures. The work claims that if women are educated and allowed to make their decisions, they will not fall into the path of disrepute but rather provide their Muslim family men with more authority as well as make them better Muslims.

Regardless of Sharar's intention or his works' readership, *Flora Florinda*'s target audience is undoubtedly the Indian Muslim. The cover page adds the honorific Maulana in front of Sharar's name, which is the Islamic equivalent of priest. The first page of the work begins with "bismillah hir rahman nir rahim" (*in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful*), an Arabic phrase that Muslims recite before reading or reciting any verse of the Holy Quran. This encases an otherwise bawdy work under a didactic protective layer with the overall lesson being that Muslims are capable of regaining the control they once possessed. While the text does not help create a broader readership, the heavy-handed Islamic infusion at the start of the narrative is a diluted reflection of Urdu tradition. Instead, the works' innovative aspect lies in its engagement with women. Pedestrian in its moral themes and character developments, *Flora Florinda* is, nevertheless, an innovative, progressive Urdu work. While Flora, Florinda, and Helen may not be Urdu's first female titular characters, they are the first non-Muslim Urdu speaking main characters in an overtly Muslim text.[112]

What's in a Name?

Flora Florinda's main female characters negotiate learning in a unique way; their education comes from real-world experiences rather than from a printed text. Flora, for instance, learns that holy men can defile her after Lewal takes advantage of her. In order to illustrate how gaining knowledge allows her to acquire some authority, this chapter explores how men and women restrict her intellectual growth. Men's delineation of what is appropriate for Flora to learn and the restrictions Indian Muslim society imposes on women within the text show how detrimental such control can be—and why a more empower new Muslim needs to emerge from Indian Muslim society. Perhaps if Flora had been permitted to learn about Islam and Christianity on her own, she would not have been so easily swayed by the opinions of others, men and women.

Once Flora's brother learns of her attachments to Christianity, he restricts her to the home. Ziad speaks to her not as an equal but rather as someone who should submit, not necessarily to a man, but rather to Islam. One of Ziad's earliest lines is discussing how he and his father were unable to convert his mother to Islam, despite their many efforts. This occurs in the second chapter after the first chapter follows Christians discussing how to bring Flora to their side. The second chapter revolves around Ziad and a Muslim man trying to correct the error of Ziad's late mother remaining a Christian by ensuring that Zahra remains Muslim. At the start of the novel, Zahra is merely an object to be controlled. Even her name is a great source of contention. While most children do not get to choose their name, Flora's case is unique. As Ziad states in reference to his youngest sister, "jiss ka naam walid Zahra kaha tha laykin waldah hamaesha Flora kaha karti thi" (*whose name father said was Zahra but my mother always used to say Flora*) (Sharar 27). Ziad tells the Muslim man that this confusion over her name is why Flora is "gumrah" (*lost, on the wrong path*) (Sharar 27). From the start of the narrative, Flora's identity is not hers. In fact, she is such a non-entity that she does not even speak until well into the fourth chapter.

The book functions as an instruction manual for Muslim men, one which links the serious consequences, including death, of keeping women uneducated or simply forcing Islam upon them. When Flora finally speaks, her conversation with her brother is troubling in that it furthers the prevailing nineteenth-century societal viewpoint of men oppressing women. It highlights the problems with *purdah*, where women often converse only with other women and men wield far too much power. The first words the reader "hears" from Flora are those of submissiveness: "bhaiya mein hamaesha aap ka adab kharti hoon aura ap kay kissee hokum ka nah bholney mein azadi nahin" (*brother I always respect you and I do not have the freedom to say no to any of your commands*) (Sharar 48). Modern readers are likely to read this response as sarcastic and rebellious. However, many Muslim men and women would have read this as an appropriate response from a young woman to her older brother; she also uses the formal Urdu you (aap) instead of the more casual tu or tum. Yet, Ziad notices the notes of resentment in Flora's voice and gives an overdramatic, emotionally blackmailing answer: "Flora, mera kalayja phuth gaya, aur mein raat din dil hi dil mein roya karta hoon" (*Flora, my liver has exploded and I, night and day, in my heart, cry constantly*)(Sharar 48).[113] Her name is weaponized, a tangible representation of her failure to be a good Muslim like her brother desires.

Flora tries to explain that she does not have as much taussab (*pride*) in religion and her stance in the Islamic community as he does (Sharar 47). This further highlights the disadvantages of no education. Ziad learned about Islam from his father and is able to discuss it freely with other members of society. One reason that he is firm in his support of Islam is precisely because he is fairly well versed in the religion, albeit a rather orthodox, conservative version of it. Flora, meanwhile, learned Christianity in secret from her mother. She has no proper understanding of either religion and no one with whom to converse and thus expand her knowledge base. Ziad makes no attempt to rectify this other than berating her, which leads to her stating that she is a Muslim.

After she utters these words the back and forth between the two siblings with the "stage notes" reveals the problematic hierarchy between Muslim men and women:

> Ziad (bahrum ho kar): 'Dil se yah fahqet meray dekhaney kay leeyay?"
> [*Ziad (showing male authority): From your heart or simply to show me.*]
>
> Flora (kiss khadar sakhti ke lehjay mein): 'Aap jiss leeyay samjhain!'
> [*Flora (in an especially hard tone of voice): Whatever you (formal) would like to think!*] (Sharar 48)

Flora's reply should make clear her frustration with the situation. Her brother then proceeds to talk at her for over two pages, during which he refers to their mother as only her mother and discusses all the ways in which Flora's mother was incorrect in her beliefs. Ziad's heavy-handedness, which culminates in his refusal to accept any response from his sister other than complete submission, leaves the reader in no doubt as to why Flora eagerly leaves the house (and thereby *purdah*) to join the Christian community. When a woman is allowed to choose, unlike Flora or her mother, she turns to Islam on her terms. As discussed in the later section on Helen, the former Christian chooses Islam of her own accord, even after her Muslim husband Ziad clarifies that she does not have to convert. The parallels the text draws between Helen converting in the end and Flora and her mother refusing to convert when their family men coerce in the beginning of the novel highlights the importance of Muslim men relinquishing some control over their family women.

The text, therefore, presents domesticity as trapping Flora in Christianity, while liberation and education bring her to Islam. When her father, her brother, and Spain's Muslim community impose their will on her, they not only constrain her within the home but also hamper her intellectual growth and ability to formulate personal viewpoints. Confined within this coercive environment, Flora draws further away from Islam. In contrast, her exposure to other people, cultures, and religions outside her home reconnects her to her father and brother's faith. Another supporter of women's education, Dehlvi also emphasized the importance of proper education for women so that they may better understand their religion and roles in society.[114] While Dehlvi argues

for a proper structured education through didactic novels and similar schooling for men and women in madrasas (Islamic schools), Sharar's Flora undergoes a different type of education.[115] Her experiences become her knowledge base, so that she comprehends the world and Islam better.

In fact, the text even pinpoints how many supposedly Islamic traditions are steeped in outdated cultural tradition. They need to be modernized, with *purdah* at the forefront. Ziad tells his Muslim friends that he was unable to learn much about his mother or Flora specifically because the household *purdah* rule. Instead of learning from this, Ziad further demarcates the line between public and private, as he permits only Muslims and familiar acquaintances within the home. After their parents' death, Ziad becomes Flora's only source of information, and he bases his arguments and rhetoric on the biased counsel of maulvis' (Muslim holy men, similar to priests). Due to his unbending devotion to "Islamic" rules, Florinda the nun is able to enter the household and speak to Flora. Ziad's detainment of his sister in a form of *purdah* works in opposition to his intentions. When scholars such as Gail Minault, Francesca Orsini, or Margit Pernau point to *purdah*'s porous nature, they are largely referencing women's communications and socialization among others of their sex within non-public arenas, such as the front yards or balconies of their houses. Exploiting these regulations, Florinda, disguised as a Muslim widow, is able to manipulate Flora. Ziad is not privy to the majority of the conversations between the two women specifically because of the *purdah* rules which he instituted.

The text also places blame on women's shoulders. In the nineteenth century, many Indian women kept each other from becoming literate. Nineteenth-century Urdu writer Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's introductions to his works attempted to convince both Indian men *and* women to accept and embrace women's education. In *Flora Florinda*, the nun Florinda epitomizes the destructive consequences that come from constricting women's intellectual endeavors. When Flora decides to go to a convent to escape the Christian patriarch's unwanted attentions, her decision is based solely

on the knowledge her mother and Florinda have thus far provided: Christian churches and convents are safe havens. Florinda knows the truth that Flora will have to submit to Lewal's sexual advances. She effuses hysterics instead of logical reasons why Flora should not go. The text presents religious duties as Florinda's only obstacle to revealing the truth. Yet, a deeper implication exists here, a commentary on how women keeping knowledge from other women leads to injurious consequences.

Despite the dramatic irony that occurs in this scene, the text illustrates Flora's first movements towards making her decisions, incorrect though they may be. In response to her friend Helen's urging her to remain away from the church, Flora resolutely states, "Nahin tum kuch nahin kar sakhthi…sewaiy nun ban jahney kay mujhe aur kissee tarah itminaan nahin ho saktha" [*No, you (casual) cannot do anything…apart from becoming a nun I cannot find peace any other way*] (Sharar 234). For the first time in the text, Flora makes a decision that impacts only herself; the move is one of independence and thus quite powerful, even though, unbeknownst to her, entering the church will put her in further danger. Ghosh suggests that, broadly speaking, Indian women's '"everyday' and 'small' (even failed) rebellions are shown as complementing larger meta-narratives of more successful women's movements, reopening and enriching questions of agency in the process" (*Behind the Veil* 20). Flora's rebellions are neither small nor ordinary. Her abandonment of home and her joining the convent are rebellious acts, but they occur before she is fully educated. She leaves Ziad's residence based on Florinda's cajoling. She leaves the hideout she shares with Florinda and Helen to join the convent based on the patriarch's advances and her mother's teachings about Christianity. When she leaves for the convent, her education is still elementary. Yet, her decision to go despite Florinda and Helen urging the exact opposite illustrates her first steps towards reaching for personal power.

Meanwhile, Ziad remains intractable, unwilling to relinquish tradition. After Flora escapes, Ziad asks an honorable Muslim man in Cordova for advice. His rather obstinate response is "You should make it clear to Flora that if she accepts the Christian religion she will be put to death; the penalty for renouncing Islam is death. This threat should be effective" (Sharar 62, translation mine).[116] This incarceration of Flora's mind and body even after she leaves the domestic sphere as the stimulus to her downfall. Regarding Indian male/female dynamics, specifically in the 19th century, Gail Minault and Robin Lakoff similarly agree that women "are socialized to be more polite and less assertive than their brothers, and this, in turn, handicaps women in playing public roles that require assertiveness" (*Secluded Scholars* 118). In *Flora Florinda*, even Flora's mother teaches her to be submissive towards Christian patriarchs. While Minault and Lakoff discuss a broader societal problem regarding women's advancement in Indian society, the focus here is on Flora's inability to function with any sort of assertiveness or independence even within her household. Her mother then her brother truncate her thinking and opinions, supplanting her thoughts with theirs.

The moment of Flora's education begins when she leaves her brother's home and thereby *purdah*. Her true move towards independence begins not after she enters the church but when she stabs her rapist. However, only after she receives an education does she finally begin to possess authority to commit an act such as getting revenge on her rapist. Her education is complete when Lewal rapes her, shattering previous notions of Christianity. Her act of stabbing him and escaping to live alone in the wild is the first time she makes choices of her free will based on what she has learned. Pregnant with his child, she makes an entire plan and sleeps with him one last time in order to slit his throat. While he sleeps, her movements are calm: "apney kapron mehsey ek choorie nikalee aur jee khatr akr key uss key ghalay per pehrney lagee" (she took a knife out of her clothes and strengthening her will begin to pass it over his neck) (Sharar 365). Her hands don't shake. She doesn't even run when he awakes but rather when he leaps out of bed with fawareh (*fountains*) of

blood pouring from his neck wound (Sharar 365). Flora, through this decisive, courageous action, assuming the role that the male protagonist holds in a dastaan. Despite her situation, she is less the distressed damsel and more the damsel's protector. Assuming Lewal is dead after she stabs him, she escapes the convent on foot. Overcoming her fear, she jumps into a fast-moving river, where she nearly drowns before reaching dry land. The text, in the form of a dastaan or even a melodrama, is vague on details regarding time at this juncture but, for a few weeks at least, Flora lives off the land without encountering any obstacles.

As Flora progresses towards some form of independence, she also upsets literary traditions, creating a Warrior Urdu woman instead of dead Begum Urdu. In Urdu literary history and actual Indian history, the loss of a woman's honor often meant her family disowned her or ended her life in an honor killing.[117] Unlike Thomas Hardy's Tess, a pregnant Flora cannot simply return home and hide, even in Spain. In Indian literature, she has limited options, one of the most popular being a transition to a courtesan or sex worker. In a dastaan, a male hero may avenge her honor, though the woman rarely remains alive, for such a tarnished woman has no place in Indian society. In a ghazal, her honor besmirched, Flora may commit suicide. In *Flora Florinda*, a new option materializes, for Flora avenges both her honor and her brother's "death."[118] Looking at Flora as a representation not just of a possible new Muslim woman but also a new Urdu woman, this new anthropomorphic Urdu is still sexual—the image of Bibi is not shed—but she's empowered as well, appearing in a novel-like text that breaks from Urdu tradition and gives a woman the chance to quite literally wield the sword; even William Thackeray's clever, manipulative, and shrewd Becky Sharpe only ever wielded her mind. Flora acting as a man is her way of restoring or at least reclaiming some of her power. This chapter interprets such a moment occurring in an Urdu work as an attempt to reclaim Urdu's honor and power as well.

As the story progresses and Flora becomes more experienced, and thus more educated, her character refuses to remain marginalized or inactive. *She chooses* to leave the populated Cordova for the wilderness after wounding Lewal, and *she* chooses to return to avenge her and her brother. She retains some semblance of control over her life. Once she has obtained real outside world experience, she begins aggressively fighting for agency in nearly every situation she encounters, including facing Lewal's reprehensible behavior. Before returning to the city to avenge her brother, she cloaks her heavily pregnant female body in Ziad's male clothes. Her appearance physically conceptualizes the intermeshing of masculine and feminine characteristics as well as the very minor blurring of gender and gender roles. She hides her hair inside Ziad's clothes and straps his sword against her back. The text makes no mention of how she hides her advanced pregnancy, but the reader is to assume she does. In this moment, she not only changes from female to male warrior, but she also shifts from Christianity to Islam, another moment where the text shows that free will brings women closer to Islam. As she is changing, she sets aside her outfit from the convent: "Iss per behan ne Musalman rias zaidon ke sey kaprey pahahn-ney aur ek nawjawan aur khoobsurat sharif-zadey ki khatey bhana kay bhaath gayi" [On this the sister wore the clothes of a rich Muslim man (the reader should understand this description refers to her brother Ziad's clothes) and taking on the posture and attitude of a young and beautiful, respectable man, she sat down] (Sharar 438). This pivotal moment is not just one of cross-dressing; rather, she truly embodies what the nineteenth-century Indian society and especially Muslim men would consider as significantly masculine traits. She remains female, for the text reminds us she is a sister (*behan*) and that she is still pregnant. Yet, she is about to wield a sword, a literal and metaphorical image of her wielding male power. She becomes an empowered woman, thinking and acting like a man while remaining very much female.

Her shift in thinking is as imperative as her change of attire. At first, she cries heavily then, gaining control of her emotions, she asks her heart, "Phir ab kya karna chahiyay?" (*Then what should*

now be done?) (Sharar 437). She not only overcomes her overwhelming emotions but logically thinks out a way to avenge her brother. That she believes her brother is dead at all simply because she sees his sword and clothes abandoned in a cave is unreasonable, but that fault lies more in the text than the character. Her determination to seek revenge for her brother is far more analogous to an Urdu dastaan's male hero than a female character. Whereas the male is meant to uphold the family honor, Flora is the one who succeeds in accomplishing this task despite being an unwed mother. While Flora's pregnancy is the result of force, the supposedly strong Muslim man, Ziad, nearly succumbs to the nun Florinda's seduction. The juxtaposition of Flora and Ziad sets the former on higher moral ground. Although Flora is a victim of circumstance, she fights for control and justice. Ziad has trouble simply locating her without almost bedding a nun. This representation of Flora and Ziad is a meaningful attempt in rewriting Indian concepts of dishonor, disgrace, and Muslim men and women's responsibilities. It fails because the story does not create a new space for Flora. She perishes at the end of the narrative, whereas Ziad, the man, receives a happily ever after with his converted wife and a child.

Nevertheless, within the space of approximately three chapters, Flora's intellect outstrips that of a revered Christian as well as an influential Muslim man. Authors like Sharar, Dehlvi, and Rusva encouraged Indian men to support Muslim women instead of hiding them away behind domestic walls. A common argument was that an educated woman would uphold Islamic and cultural values. Flora signifies how an experienced woman can wield her knowledge for Islamic justice. Through her striking down of an immoral man, she defends any woman subject to Lewal's unwanted attentions or any man he attempts to corrupt. When Lewal mortally wounds her in self-defense, she becomes a martyr for the Islamic cause, a role traditionally only men could embody. Throughout the narrative, Flora eschews conventional gender norms, while remaining the story's heroine. She creates a powerfully different perspective on what women can accomplish.

Unlike most women comfortably ensconced in family homes, Flora incites disorder through her mere existence. Yet, her disorderly behavior partially rectifies corruption. She alters some Christians' and Muslims' obdurate ways of thinking. The text shows that blind devotion to a religion or, as this dissertation chapter argues, a woman's illogical deference to a man is destructive. In contrast to Helen and Flora, the nun Florinda unquestioningly follows men's orders, which the book, through Helen, highlights as imbecilic. She is little more than a simpering sycophant. Her silence leads to Flora's pregnancy and eventual death. A Christian priest wielding a Muslim's dagger ends Florinda's life when Ziad refuses to sully his blade with her contemptible blood. The story underlines Flora's death as that of an honorable martyr. Her final words are the shahada, the Arabic, Quranic verse that a person converting to Islam says aloud in front of several witnesses. Florinda does say some final words after Flora converts, but she uses them to explain Flora's actions not hers. Only Flora and Helen retain agency and the moral high ground throughout the narrative. They analyze situations and speak their minds. They are never silent. Flora, however, is only able to accomplish this feat after gaining world experience. In short, education allows her to possess authority and a singular mind. Her assertiveness stems from her obtaining knowledge.

As Flora struggles towards independence, she often takes up the male mantle. However, her true act of individuality and power occurs in her life's final moments. Despite converting to Islam as she dies, she does not own or accept her Muslim name Zahra. In discarding her Islamic name, Flora upsets cultural norms and reader expectations. Her final act is submissive to God rather than tradition or male subjugations. Her choice to embrace Islam comes not from societal, patriarchal, or cultural pressures but is rather the culmination of her experiences. Her conversion is the proper implementation of the knowledge she has acquired since leaving her home. Although her becoming a Muslim occurs in an emotionally wrought moment as she bleeds to death, this is an educated

decision. The text presents her resolution to change her religion as a pure act because she makes the decision as draws her last breaths.

She converts not to fit into an accepted societal role but so that her soul may find peace. This moment is a stripped-down version of faith-based enlightenment, an experience Indian society usually restricted to men. Furthermore, her rejection of the name Zahra is a significant step towards individuality. Names define identity, and Flora earns the right to choose hers. The problem with the narrative, however, is that she must earn this right. Furthermore, a man must approve her choice. After Flora reads the shahada, Ziad tearfully acknowledges that evil men have destroyed his pure sister, Flora, and that he will always remember her.[119] In contrast with how Ziad uses her name in the beginning of the text, this response is imperative; it shows his changing ideology as well as Flora's. With sorrow, he says to her, "Hain meri bholi behan kaun zalimo ney dhokha dey key zaleel wah kharab kiya. Flora toton hogayee magar tabhee yaad karsathe hameasha rohoonga" (Yes my innocent sister whom cruel people defrauded, who made her dishonored and made her bad. Flora is murdered but whenever I can think of her, I will always cry) (Sharar 462). Upon hearing this, Flora sobs uncontrollably and shortly thereafter passes.

She must gain Ziad's approval before drawing her final breath. Despite all she has accomplished, her identity is still irrevocably defined by her brother. Her personal thinking allows her a position in society that moves beyond invisible *purdah-nashin* (veiled) women towards individuality. She is able to dialogue with her brother, as is Helen, and change his perceptions. Although he does still say she was dishonored, he does not say she became disrespectable. He calls her innocent (*bholi*). He holds Lewal and Florinda responsible for Flora's suffering. Unlike in many countries, including Pakistan and India, where honor killings of raped women occur even in the 21st century, Ziad's shifting of blame from his sister to the actual aggressors is rather progressive. That he uses her name, Flora, with kindness and does not attempt to call her Zahra further shows his

acceptance of her wishes instead of coercing her to follow his. The moment is a powerful visualization of how Muslim men and women can avoid tragic outcomes if they can converse as equals with equal access to knowledge and education.

Uncoerced Conversion

Similar to Flora, patriarchal society and male family members heavily influence Helen, who resists converting to Islam because of her oppressive, violent Muslim father. Under the Christian church's directive, Helen meets Florinda and Flora after they escape Ziad and the Spanish Muslim community. Yet, she possesses more mobile agency than Flora. The strongest example is of her marrying Ziad, a Muslim, purely on the basis of love. She neither asks for nor receives permission to join with him. Helen is Flora's foil, both in terms of a woman and also as a representative of English, British society, and English literature.

Her ability to move through society allows her to play a more active role in shaping her life. Her experiences allow her more authority within society. In discussing Indian Muslim reformists' view of women, Barbara D. Metcalf credits them for advancing education but also pinpoints the limits of that reform: "Of course, women were still expected to play their proper role: of deference to their husbands and fulfilment of a range of household obligations. They were to avoid any public life and even avoid undue outings from their home" (105). Although Helen marries and becomes a mother through adoption, she is not restricted to the domestic sphere. Her rank as noble and her former Christian faith permit her to move beyond the domestic boundaries to which Indian women are tied. Her education and experience allow her to establish personal views. For instance, Flora struggles to choose her religion while trying to please both Muslims and Christians. Helen, however, converts to Christianity upon seeing her father's (Abu Muslim) corrupt, malicious behavior towards people of all religions.

Helen's intellect is also more developed than Flora's. She is able to see through the nun Florinda's schemes far more quickly than her more sheltered new friend. When Florinda reveals to Helen the truth about why she does not want Flora to join the convent, she berates the nun: "You gave me the idea the Muslims are cruel and biased… In truth…they respect and honor any man who lives a sincere and honest life, no matter what his religion may be. I am the best example of their acceptance" (Sharar 326-327). This condemnation of Florinda and approval of Islam is a bit too effusive. However, it shows Helen's ability to apply her intellect. A reader will note she comes to this conclusion of an accepting Islam despite her Muslim father's cruelty and before she meets and falls in love with Ziad. Unlike Flora, she does not cling to old ideas that others have implanted in her mind. Like an educated modern Indian, she adapts her ideas to better understand society and her place in it. Although the story is set centuries before the British colonized India, Helen still represents the new Indian, not just the new Indian or new Muslim woman.

If Helen's despotic father is a zealot, then she resides at the opposite end of the spectrum. At the narrative's denouement, she embodies a post-1857 Muslim as she ruptures extremist views through the proper application of experience and modern thought. Meanwhile, Ziad is the figure of the average nineteenth-century Indian Muslim man standing between the two diametrically opposed stances. Ziad's character is not dissimilar to that of Urdu writers like the author of *Flora Florinda*, who also navigated the merging of modernity and tradition but on the landscape of fiction. Helen's conversion to Islam and Ziad's response underscores a new way of thinking about gender power struggles to reshape traditional values.

In the final scene of *Flora Florinda*, Abu Muslim raises his dagger to kill Helen. Instinctively, Ziad uses his sword to strike off Abu's head. Helen declares that with her father's death, she has no reason left to turn from Islam, and she converts on the spot. Ziad attempts neither to force nor to persuade her to abandon her Christian religion. In fact, he tells her that she does not need to convert

for him. Flora still craves her brother's approval and a man's acceptance of her actions. When Ziad offers his wife this same approval, Helen renounces it. Her response to her husband is that she embraces Islam for herself and through her free will:

> Ziad: 'Magar mein nahin kahta kay meray khater sey dean badlo."
> (Ziad: But I don't say change your faith for my benefit.)
>
> Helen: 'Tumharey khater sey nahin. Mein apney rooh sey Muslaman hoti hoon."
> (Helen: Not for your benefit. I, from my soul, become Muslim.) (Sharar 463-464)

Even as a Muslim wife, in this moment, Helen is an individual and an authoritative one. She has used her knowledge and experience to choose Islam, not because a man has urged her to do so or so that she may adhere to societal standards. In writing about nineteenth-century Indian cosmopolitan and local perceptions of women, Metcalf claims that "both posit women as, above all, disorderly and a stimulus to disorder; they are far from being the guardians of Islamic morality and truth" (103). Helen is a two-fold opposition to such views. She brings order back to Ziad's life. Through her, Ziad achieves a typical family consisting of a wife and a son, whom both Hindu and Muslim cultures venerated above baby girls. Even before Helen converts to Islam, she functions in the text as a protector of Islamic morality and truth. She discusses Islam like an educated scholar, weighing facts against actual encounters with Muslims. Her conversion then is the conclusion of her studies. She is neither a religious fanatic nor a woman submitting to her husband, but simply using her knowledge to make the best decision for her life and hereafter.

Where Muslim men like Ziad fear opposing cultural regulations and adhere to divisive traditional ways, modern thinking women like Helen create bridges between old and new. While the Christian and Muslim men of the text accept the status quo, Helen attempts to abolish extremist Islamic and Christian views. She effectively joins Islam and Christianity when she marries Ziad. Although she converts to Islam in the final pages, she is Christian when she marries the Muslim Ziad. She literally and figuratively becomes the new Muslim, staying true to religion yet filtering it

through the lens of modern ideals. Whenever she obtains new relevant information, she shifts her perceptions and belief system to incorporate newly gained knowledge. Her education is ongoing instead of stilted, precisely the type of women's educational reform for which authors like Sharar argued.

Similar to Flora, as Helen becomes more educated through life experiences, she gains more authority. Even after Flora converts to Islam and lays dying, Ziad is reluctant to adopt her child. He does not say it explicitly but strongly implies that his nephew is an abomination against Islamic and cultural mores. He exclaims, "Lewal's boy cannot live in our pure home" (Sharar 422). The identity he creates for the baby is entirely linked to the abominable father. Helen detaches the child from it, firmly responding, "How is any of this related to Lewal? This is my sister Flora's boy. *Ziad do not interfere in this*. I will raise him as my own" (Sharar 423, emphasis mine). She specifically uses the word tauluq (relation) to erase the boy's connection to his father, Lewal. Imperatively, she again denies Ziad's authority while strengthening hers. She does not say, "We will raise him" but instead "I will raise him." The inference a reader may make is that Helen can live comfortably without Ziad or any man. Her position of independent authority in this moment parallels her conversion to Islam. She separates her thoughts and viewpoints from her husband and figuratively stands as an individual. If the British imperialists depicted Indian women as enslaved and British women as pure—each in need of British male protection—then Helen, in my view, surpasses both. Her unequivocal dismissal of Ziad's ostracism represents a new type of woman, one who does not discard tradition, culture, or religion but, through her education, molds the way she applies those three aspects of her life to fit a rapidly changing world.

Helen also symbolizes a new tolerant religion and culture, one that she may pass on to future generations. Her Islam is entirely different from the violent, oppressive religion British imperialist envisioned in the wake of the 1857 mutiny. One may also see Helen as a metaphor for Sharar's

relentless attempts to position Islam as equally or more progressive than Christianity. Her conversion then acceptance of Flora's child are triumphs. At the conclusion of her character's developmental arc, Helen abandons Christianity to become Muslim, for she views it as a more tolerant, progressive religion. Ziad's redemption relies on his abandonment of anathematic principles as he orients his beliefs with Helen's more liberal views. A reader must remember that the plot unfolds in approximately 845 AD. Through Helen, the text shows that Ziad's exclusionary thoughts were already outdated centuries ago and should be eradicated in 19th century India.

Flora and Helen then sit at neither end of the courtesan/wife spectrum. They move from the margins to a new mid-ground mostly absent from nineteenth-century Indian literature and poems, especially Urdu works, revolving around women. Flora's and Helen's agency and intelligence disrupt Indian society's ideals for traditional and appropriate women's roles. They articulate new possibilities for women's accomplishments if they are educated instead of being confined to the home. Furthermore, when women converse with Muslim men, those men understand Islam better. Muslim men and women working together help integrate modernity and traditional values.

Choice in Marriage and Dress in *Fasana-e-Azad*

Although Hindu, Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's works, *Fasana-e-Azad* included, identified him as a supporter of Muslim causes, specifically women's education reform. As seen in many of his writings and very specifically in *Fasana-e-Azad*, he championed the removal of *purdah* alongside proposed the idea of modesty existing within both men's and women's gazes. Moreover, Sarshar was clearly influenced by the work of Urdu Muslim writer Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi. Sarshar mentions several of Dehlvi's works, particularly *Mirat-ul Uroos*, in *Fasana-e-Azad*; he claims that Husn Ara and her sister Siphar are the embodiment of the educated female ideal Dehlvi crafted in his books. Sarshar also revered Urdu; he spends a significant portion of *Fasana-e-Azad*'s preface extolling the beauty of Urdu and its Persian influences. Moreover, many of his chapters begin with a shehr (a

couplet from a ghazal) in a nod to Urdu tradition. His religion may have impacted the purchase and reception of his books, but this may have been an advantage for his Urdu works as he did not necessarily have the pressure of protecting Urdu that Muslim writers like Sharar or Dehlvi faced. Unlike most nineteenth-century Urdu Muslim male authors, Sharar creates a text that allows the intermeshing of languages; this reflects the lingual climate of India at the time where cosmopolitan cities used Urdu, Hindi, and English. *Fasana-e-Azad* includes English in Roman script and Urdu and Hindi words in Arabic script.[120] Most educated Indians knew how to read and speak in English; in fact, English was the preferred language of communication in the middle to upper educated Indian classes. Sarshar mirrors realistic Indian society, for his eleventh chapter starts with a job offer in English. While Sharar's *Flora Florinda* created a clear separation between Christian versus Muslim and constantly venerated Islam and its followers, Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* is more of a fusion of Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. As mentioned in the previous section, Sharar was determined to avenge Muslims through his fiction after reading degrading portrayals in British literature. Sarshar doesn't seem to have had a similar experience and as a Hindu, while he advocated for Islamic reform, didn't necessarily need to defend the religion or the Urdu language, despite loving both.

Sharar as a Muslim was perhaps also more excluded from the nation and overall Indian society. Barbara D. Metcalf argues, "As for Indians, excluded from many aspects of political life, it was only in creating domains of 'religion' and 'community' that they could find permissible arenas of power" (100). For Sharar, this may have meant creating fictional historical worlds in which Islam and Muslims prevailed over Christians (*Flora Florinda*) and, sometimes, Hindus. In Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*, however, a collaboration occurs. The inclusion of several languages and thoughts creates an inclusive text. Instead of appropriating Urdu or Muslim culture, Sarshar weaves it into Hindu and British culture, a significantly important act for counteracting Muslim marginalization. Although the

text can still be read as insular, it shows that Muslims are not as disconnected from the nation as many linguists like Aamir Mufti or Asha Sarangi establish.

Fasana-e-Azad's narrative is lengthy and meandering. A brief summary is as follows: Azad is a young Muslim man in India. In the first few chapters, Azad often spouts British ideals of how men should behave in appropriately masculine ways and protect pure Indian women. Characters such as Khoji and Chammi Jan, who value tradition, often refute his exaggeratedly obstinate views. In one particular argument, Chammi Jan effeminately dresses as a nawab. Azad berates him, saying that he should act like a man, an educated European whose knowledge is changing the world.[121] Azad often fights with Khoji on various matters where he takes the modern approach and Khoji the traditional and Islamic one. One example is eating. Khoji claims that a Muslim should not eat in public restaurants as they may use alcohol or pork, both forbidden to Muslims, and meat not prepared through proper Islamic methods. When Khoji continues pushing, saying society will judge Azad, he retorts that he will just eat in the dark in the future. They discuss other matters like *purdah*, where Azad is against the practice and Khoji for it. Azad has similar conversations with an irreverent female innkeeper name Bi Allah Rakhi. A financially independent and business savvy woman, she challenges and expands Azad's thoughts. She also becomes his first love interest.

Nearly halfway through the narrative, Azad meets Husn Ara, whom he eventually marries. She espouses ideas that reflect the late 19th century's Aligarh movement's take on women's education and *purdah*, in support of the former and rejection of the latter. Azad falls in love with her intellect and quick wit. She asks him to accomplish six things before she will marry him. In the meantime, she saves her sister, Siphar Ara, from a bad marriage when a newspaper prints her fiancé's criminal dealings. Azad accomplishes the tasks and weds Husn Ara. Later, he goes to fight in the Crimean War and makes a name for himself. The narrative ends with a happily ever after sort of conclusion.

Sarshar's peculiar position as a Hindu Urdu writer permitted him to bring a new perspective to a woman's role in Indian society. In *Fasana-e-Azad*, he does not separate the struggles of Hindu and Indian women. Instead, he combines them to fight against British colonial perceptions of the weak Indian woman. An entire chapter revolves around Husn Ara preparing a speech in which she justifies the needs for Indian women's education. She references Dehlvi's didactic works as well as prominent Hindu women. This intermeshing of the Hindu and Muslim women's plights allows Sarshar some freedom with his female characters. They are not as bound to traditional values as Flora and even Helen at times. Sangeeta Ray's analysis of Tagore's novel, *The Home and The World*, is applicable to Sharar's *Flora Florinda* as well: "the narrative underscores the tragic outcome for the 'new' woman who crosses the domestic threshold too hastily" (89). Although this chapter has attempted to show that Flora breaks accepted norms for what constitutes shame and dishonor, Flora still dies tragically. Where Sharar barely manages to create room for the new woman through Helen, Sarshar succeeds to an extent, "for Sarshar in the 1870s the challenge was to create a respectable and modern Muslim heroine at a time when debates on women's education and about women appearing in public raged in the public sphere."[122]

Husn Ara's literacy is what provides her with agency and authority, even though she remains reliant on traditional values. She is the embodiment of the Urdu language woman and the new Muslim woman with her sophistication, education, and desire to educate other Muslim women, and even men. She wishes for Indian women—Hindi and especially Muslim—to become more educated, even though much of her arguments are geared towards presenting literate women as better wives and support systems for their in-laws. Much of her agency also depends on Azad's support. Although Husn Ara is a symbol for the advantages of women's education, she reflects real nineteenth-century Indian women. As Metcalf contends, "men remained the actors: it was they who granted women education; they who were called upon to be generous to women" (108). Srivastava

writes that even the social reformist Sir Syed Ahmed Khan "was a strong supporter of western education for men but as far as women were concerned he was reluctant," for his mother was uneducated and he feared upsetting orthodox Muslims (4). Even Sarshar, the creator of Husn Ara, adds a sentence to *Fasana-e-Azad* that states a far too independent woman is inappropriate.

In the narrative, Husn Ara becomes an advocate for women's education while spending a considerable amount of time assuaging Indian society, specifically Muslim men's, anxieties regarding female literacy. Like *Flora Florinda*, *Fasana-e-Azad*'s purpose seems to be, above all, the education Muslim men through presenting the possibility of a new Muslim woman who can be learned, be literate, have her own values all of which would make her a stronger partner and Muslim. For instance, before presenting her speech advocating women's education, Husn contemplates Indian society's reluctance on educating woman. She says that society and particularly men believe that education will lead to women losing their morals and innocence. If they are able to write, they will begin penning love letters and establish improper relationships with men.

Husn Ara responds to this objection in stating that education will not lead to love letters but will help women make respectable decisions: education will make them wary of risky and dangerous steps and better companions for their husbands (Sarshar 450). The work adds further weight to her words through her use of Persian instead of colloquial Urdu. In scrutinizing nineteenth-century male and female speech patterns, Minault claims that only men use Persian, for "women were not highly educated, and thus the flowery and polite phrases of Persianized Urdu did not enter their vocabulary" (119). Although one can argue that Husn Ara only speaks Persian because the educated Sarshar pens her speech, this fact does not lessen the impact of her words or the elevation of both her and Urdu overall. The use of Persian, especially in common speech, sets Husn Ara on a level with educated Muslim middle-class, elite men. Her logic and reasoning are of some worth because of her educated status and her ability to speak fluently in Persian. Yet, as the text positions her in

society, her arguments have little weight unless men approve of them. Nevertheless, in her choosing her husband and her clothing, Husn Ara uses her education to not necessarily weaken men's power and position in society but strengthen women's. Her ability to speak as a man, in essence, allows for her to not only speak to women but convince men to consider her ideas, as Azad, in fact, does and changes his perspectives based on her arguments.

Matrimony through Literacy

Linguist Scott F. Kiesling, in discussing gendered language resulting in gendered activities and behaviors, asserts, "There is a sense in which things that are not recognized as masculine are deemed feminine (although this may not be true in the other direction)" (79). In nineteenth-century Indian society, a modified version of this argument was true in the other direction. Indian society, specifically in the earlier half of the 19th century, deemed literacy and education specifically out of the women's realm; they were thus considered masculine activities. Indian society did not specifically ascribe writing and reading to men so much as it barred women from engaging in either act. *Fasana-e-Azad*'s Husn Ara is only able to make female literacy palatable to both Indian men and women because she applies it to distinctly feminine enterprises, specifically marriage. The issue with such restrictive application is that women like Husn Ara do not obtain education to improve themselves for their sakes. However, one must consider that in the fight to advance women's education, a shrewd strategy was to not entirely supplant traditions and cultural values with modernity but to gradually introduce new ideals and assimilate them. Husn Ara is the perfect example of this gradual assimilation.[123]

One of the earliest instances of Husn Ara's use of literacy in a decidedly domestic arena is her saving her sister, Siphar, from a bad marriage. Their mother is uneducated. The text condemns this lack of worldly and academic knowledge as dangerous and detrimental to Indian society and the nuclear family. With her husband dead, the matriarch sets up an engagement between Siphar and a

supposedly respectable Indian gentleman. Reading the newspaper as is Husn's daily practice, she and eventually Siphar discover an article outlining the "gentleman's" robberies. They utilize their literacy not to pen love letters or engage in other salacious behavior. Instead, their ability to read helps Siphar avoid a disadvantageous, perhaps harmful marriage. As no father would want his daughter to enter into a detrimental marriage that would shame her family, female literacy here becomes couched in terms of preserving the family and specifically male honor: "[t]hus Husn Ara's ability to read the newspaper is clearly unconnected from potentially dangerous interests and justified as a means of upholding the family honour, besides making her the agent of her own deliverance from danger."[124] She has authority but men restrict it by deeming what is appropriate. However, actions such as Ara's helped alter prevailing male attitudes, especially in regard to women's education. As Gouri Srivastava writes, among nineteenth-century Indian men "[t]here was a strong realization…that only education would instill confidence in women, enable them to have a questioning attitude and in the long run prevent them from submitting to irrational customs and traditions" (4). Education became a form of saving a Muslim family's reputation rather than destroying it.

Furthermore, the text aligns Husn Ara with British values while remaining true to Indian desires, specifically for young women to leave their father's household and enter their husband's. Husn Ara compares educated women looking after their homes to the British tending their estates (Sarshar 514). Her connection to the British does not end here. Although Sarshar clearly wants the readers to draw connections between her and Dehlvi's heroines, Husn Ara bares many similarities to British fictional women as well. Although Husn does not enjoy the freedom of Brontë's Lucy Snowe or Jane Eyre, both who are tutors and teachers, she does lecture on the importance of women's education, imparting her knowledge onto others. In the Indian Muslim setting, Husn Ara redefines how to achieve domestic bliss. Her character parallels Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet as both

women challenge outdated traditions through words and actions. Yet, both women find suitable husbands. In their path to marriage resides their ability to counter gender norms. Elizabeth marries Darcy only once she is certain of his character and morals. Husn Ara acts in a similar manner with regards to Azad. She sets for him a list of six things he must accomplish before she will agree to marry him. Azad must make a name for himself through fighting in the Crimean War. He must also go to Friday prayers, own a respectable home, visit her mother, etc.

In presenting these stipulations, she sets herself as equal to him. While men usually made demands for women to act a certain way before they agreed to marriage, here Husn Ara refuses marriage until Azad meets her requirements. She further ends her request with the explanation that he must be an educated man, as she has spoken to him in the words of an educated woman (Sarshar 508). Dubrow asserts that "[i]n stressing her own agency in choosing a marriage partner, Husn Ara enacts the model of the 'new women' imagined by Hindu and Muslim reformers in the late nineteenth century. Yet, in her emphasis on the bride's consent, Husn Ara pushes the role of the new wife further than suggested by reformers" (57). Husn Ara then is an entirely new woman who is able to exist within Indian society unlike poor Flora. She rejects outdated cultural regulations without disposing of her morality or tradition. Francesca Orsini's praise of Husn Ara illustrates the importance of such a heroine at this time in India: "Unlike the equally fictional heroines of didactic and reformist models, however, the main heroine of *Fasana-e-Azad*, while subscribing to the same ideals of modesty, chastity, and respectability, is also outspoken, flirtatious and speaks to Azad from a position of equality. Sharar was…not representing some already-existing kind of woman but rather imagining a desirable ideal" (182). This desirable woman could still function as "a repository for tradition" to use Chatterjee's phrase, while embracing modern ideals. Husn Ara then is also the embodiment of a new Urdu, who keeps the tradition of poetry (Husn's use of Persian usually used by Urdu male poets) while embracing the modern novel book format with a plot line.

Furthermore, his scene of marriage discussing between Husn Ara and Azad illustrates that far from making a woman disreputable, her literacy makes her desirable to potential husbands. Her reasonable requirements also indicate that she will make Azad a better Muslim, husband, and person. Therefore, this moment highlights the text's illustration of how the new, educated Indian Muslim woman can potentially not only improves women but also the men with whom they come into contact. This contact with strangers, however, was extremely limited due to *purdah* restrictions. The next section outlines how *Fasana-a-Azad* and Husn Ara present a novel, modern outlook to *purdah*.

Modesty is in the Eye of the Beholder

In 1975, Christopher Lakoff claimed that women are forced to be more polite than men in order to appear more ladylike. Twenty years later, Janet Holmes studied New Zealand speakers and found that women tended to apologize about the same amount to the opposite sex but exponentially more to each other.[125] Overlaying these ideas on both Sharar's and Sarshar's texts illustrates how they alternatively present women. The female characters of *Flora Florinda* are submissive and apologetic to men and other women for the majority of the work's first half. In *Fasana-e-Azad*, women use speech that is direct and includes far fewer apologies. This unrestricted speech is because they believe they are acting appropriately and not outside the boundaries of decency. Indian society often linked decency and modesty with the practice of *purdah*. In *Fasana-e-Azad*, Husn Ara politely but firmly reassigns *purdah* as male responsibility and not female. The burden shifts in the story from the women to protect her modesty to men who should protect it through veiling their gaze. As shown in the quote that begins this chapter, Husn Ara is the one who proposes that modesty lies in respectful gazes.

Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's Hindu background meant he was semi-detached from Muslim culture and tradition. This seemingly impacted his confidence in his work, specifically his views on modernizing gender roles. One of the main issues of *Fasana-e-Azad*'s first volume is the discussion

of *purdah*. Arguing with Khoji, Azad states that the *purdah* has become a sickness in North India. Although Hindu and Muslim women in Kashmir may use their hands to cover their face, they do not participate in the "illness where women don't step foot out their houses" (Sarshar 525). In the serial, Azad wins the debate, concluding that in countries without *purdah*, virtue flourishes alongside independence; *purdah* is in the heart and thoughts (Sarshar 525). Perhaps anticipating backlash to Azad's unbending proposition for the eradication of *purdah*, Sarshar has Khoji respond that Azad is part of the New Light and that his fiancée, Husn Ara's, thoughts are even more progressive than his (Sarshar 525). This marginally insulates the story and the main character, for Sarshar aligns Azad with the Aligarh movement (New Light) and positions the manageable woman as the instigator of modern thoughts. Yet, Dubrow notes that "the position was contentious enough that Sarshar revised the ending of this scene for the first book edition" (53) with an additional sentence: "But giving too much independence to women is not appropriate" (526). Sarshar's position as once removed from Islam and its issues perhaps diluted the effectiveness of his proposals but within the text, and in spite of Sarshar's edits in later versions, Husn Ara remains a woman who values tradition yet finds way to ethically assimilate modernity and education.

His additional sentence, however, remains extremely problematic. One reason for the anxiety apparent in this statement, which circumscribes the extent of women's liberation, is that it places the burden on men. This means that it resituates a women's responsibility, that of her protecting her modesty through appropriate dress, onto men's shoulders. The arguments that Husn Ara makes to other women and Azad for society allowing women in the public sphere and in their choice of clothing are educated proposals based on facts. She discusses how women acting modestly with pure hearts should not fear dishonor or disrepute. As quoted above, Azad takes up this argument in his heated conversation with Khoji on *purdah*. Husn's well-reasoned argument then takes power away from men. Clothing and domestic confinement were a way from men to control

women's physical bodies and thoughts. Fittingly, her logic colors Azad's thoughts, for he champions modernity and irritates Khoji who staunchly remains attached to traditional values.

Non-fictional Indian men eventually took up arguments similar to Husn Ara's. Sayyid Mumtaz Ali wrote *Huquq un-Niswan* (A Guide for Women to Islamic Law) in the late 1890s. Out of respect to his mentor who became infuriated upon reading the contents, Ali waited until 1898 to publish the text. In it, Mumtaz Ali vehemently argues against *purdah*: if feminine clothing style were only made more modest then "they (women) would not be obliged to spend their lives within their four walls.... Secondly, if a women dresses and acts modestly...and a man still looks at her lustfully, the sin is in the eye of the beholder. Why punish half the population because of a few lecherous characters?...If a thief wishes to steal sweets, must the *halvai* [dessert maker] close his shop, or the thief be reprimanded? The cure to lust lies not in locking up the women, but rather self-discipline. The shari'a [Islamic law] exempts neither men nor women from the responsibility for moral behavior, which is the true meaning of purdah" (quoted in *Gender, Language, and Learning* 59). In his work, Ali clearly states what Sarshar only alludes to through Husn Ara. In short, if a man behaves badly, why should society punish a woman for his actions? This question is a logical one and it forced Indian society, specifically men, to confront their idiocy in terms of imprisoning women within the household. Sarshar seems reluctant, however, to cede male control to women, educated though they may be. The declaration that providing women with too much independence is inappropriate truncates Husn's progression towards female empowerment in domestic and public spheres. Yet, despite the limitations the text, its readers, and Sarshar impose on Husn Ara, she shows how uneducated women cannot survive even when confirming to traditional and cultural values.

Weakening Patriarchy's Chokehold

Anindita Ghosh argues that nineteenth-century radical feminist movements, female political figures, housewives, and female convicts in India "offer[ed] a backdrop of 'invisible' but consistent gendered resistance" (4). Her reasoning is that subaltern studies have focused on analyzing and presenting exploited South Asian groups' more violent and spectacular forms of resistance, meaning that women usually don't figure into such discussions (3). This chapter extends this definition to female characters of Urdu literary texts. In them, the word 'invisible' functions differently. In many ways, Urdu texts were and still are invisible, those that focused on women, marginalized members of nineteenth century Indian society, even more so. In a country where people belittled Urdu and English was used by the middle class and elite and primarily in education, Urdu struggled for recognition. Even in contemporary literature, very few novels exist in the Urdu language, though myriad published, award-winning collections of poetry and even short stories exist. The oral tradition of Urdu is stronger than ever and even making a global, especially through the amazing works of artists like Arooj Aftab, a Grammy award-winning Pakistani-American Urdu singer, composer, and producer, who often uses the form of the Urdu ghazal and is as influenced by Billie Eilish as nineteenth-century Urdu Indian poet Mirza Ghalib. In contrast, texts like Sharar's *Flora Florinda* appeal to a small group of readers, even in the time of its publication: Muslims who wanted to relive the glorious Muslim past and enjoy a prose work in Urdu.

In critical discourse, *Flora Florinda* and Sharar's texts do not receive the same attention as *Mirat-ul Uroos* or *Umrao Jan Ada*. In the 20th century and earlier, this dismissal occurred because scholars of Urdu works narrowed their focus on literary forms. Sharar's prose does not easily slot into a defined literary category. More recent discourse has taken up the idea of sharafat (*modesty*), which is absent from *Flora Florinda*, as the idea of modesty in this text is amorphous. Yet, the amorphous nature of the main female characters' modesty is precisely what makes this text worthy of analysis. Flora and Helen's push against traditional and cultural binds demarcating women's

appropriate roles in society opens new avenues for Indian women of all religions. The text is not couched in terms of sharafat but rather the beginning of redefining women's position in Indian society. *Fasana-e-Azad* appears in critical discourse more than *Flora Florinda*. However, scholars use it mostly to explore the emergence of print culture and the expansion of readership through journals/newspapers/magazines. Only Jennifer Dubrow has really scrutinized the importance of the female characters and how this work and Husn Ara advanced women's rights. Sarshar's and Sharar's texts begin a movement away from the dichotomy of sharafat versus lack thereof. Instead, the prose ignites a discussion of a woman, just like a man, having moments of both. So, the question that then begins to take over Urdu literature is not one of women's respectability but rather one woman's individual outlook on life and society. As the Urdu texts allow for dialogue between fictional men and women, the communal reading of these texts created bridges for Muslim men and women to converse on the same topics and for women to engage with the public sphere.

If the British feared the Indian man's violation of their women, then the thought of vulgar British concepts marring their pure woman also haunted Indian men. Their movement towards women's reform was fraught with an ambivalence of how much independence a woman should enjoy. Sharar's *Flora Florinda* and Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* construct a new woman, who weakens the protective enclosures Urdu speakers began building around their communities after the 1857 rebellion. Although fictional, these women provide templates for what the Indian woman may accomplish if men allow her to receive proper education and experience the world outside domestic boundaries. Yet, Indian men clearly feared that such women may transgress the limits of propriety and this anxiety manifests itself in both works. Flora is controlled through her death, Husn Ara through her marriage and then motherhood. A man consistently remains in power, managing these female characters.

The next chapter turns to Deputy Maulvi Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's fictional Urdu prose works, such as *Mirat-ul Uroos*. Some were published before *Fasana-e-Azad* and *Flora Florinda* and some after. Yet, while the women in Sarshar and Sharar's text struggle for recognition and authority within Indian society and even their homes, Dehlvi's female characters reach an equal status with men. They accomplish this not only through becoming educated and literate but utilizing that literacy to break through into male dominated spheres. While the man always remains in control in the two works analyzed in this chapter, Dehlvi's fictional women work in conjunction with men or surpass their intellect. Their acts of writing and reading imbue them with authority usually reserved for men in Indian society. The anxiety of them usurping men's power is less apparent in Dehlvi's text because he specifically sets them as equals to men in his introductions and often calls men idiots for clinging to outdated gender perceptions. So, women's movement towards individuality and independence through education advances further in his works.

[72] This and all subsequent transliterations and translations mine, unless otherwise noted.
[73] For a Hindu author to write in Urdu and create a piece consisting mostly of Muslims characters is an anomaly for the time period. I explain this further in my "Notes on Form" section of this chapter. Notably, Sarshar was proficient in written and spoke English, Hindi, and Urdu, a somewhat unique linguistic background for the time period. Most Urdu authors and teachers were also skilled in English, Persian, and, occasionally, some Arabic. Most Hindi authors and teachers were skilled in English, Sanskrit, and, occasionally, some of the multitudes of other Indian languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, etc.
[74] Please see "Introduction" for further detailed information regarding this the British separation of Hindavi into Urdu and Hindi and attaching each to a religion.
[75] Please see introduction for a more detailed analysis and background of the Urdu language woman.
[76] I am referencing works such as those by Kavita Dalta in 2013, Walter Hakala in 2016, Gail Minault in 2009, Papai Sengupta in 2018, and Sarah Waheed in 2014.
[77] I must also briefly address the matter of a dichotomous gender construct that is the basis for my arguments but opposes the changing fabric of academic and societal discourse across the globe. Although the world, including Pakistan, is moving towards recognizing, amplifying, and becoming more inclusive of LGBTQI+ voices, colonial discourse must often submit to the male/female gender binary. Some contemporary as well as colonial scholars take into account those whom scholarship has often labelled India's third sex, hijras, though current work may more appropriately identify this portion of the Indian population as trans. I have not included hijras in my work as they, regretfully, do not make significant appearances in the literary, fictional texts of the time period (British Raj) or the debate I am endeavoring to enter through my work.

I will not expound on the difference between sex and gender either. I will present the definition that appears in Amjad, Anjum, Yousaf, and Manzoor's article: "Gender and Sex are two different words having different meanings…[s]ex is a biological trait whereas gender is a social attribute…Gender is not related to what a person possess[es], but related to what a person does. Gender is something that is impossible to avoid…an integral part of identity. Men and women exhibit different ranges of verbal skills." (233)
[78] In my introduction, I have discussed this hierarchy and the role of British as well as Indian, both Hindu and Muslim, women in developing nation and nationalistic pride. However, a brief, simplistic diagram can visually depict this shifting power in post-1857 India: British men > British women > Indian Hindu men > Indian Hindu women > Indian Muslim men (usually Urdu speaking) > Indian Muslim women (usually Urdu speaking)
[79] Please see "Exigence and Application" section of the introductory chapter for further details and references.
Minault, Gail. *Gender, Language, and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History*. Permanent Black, 2009.
[80] *Purdah*, roughly translated, is veil. In Islamic tradition, for a woman to do *purdah* not only meant dressing modestly, which may include covering her hair and face, but also that she would stay within the walls of her husband or father's home, protected/blocked off from society and, specifically, men.
[81] Pernau situates this reformation quite late in the century. As I have argued in my introduction and which will become more apparent in my discussion of Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi in chapter two, I believe this education reformation began around the 1860s, shortly after the 1857 mutiny.

Furthermore, my introduction provides examples of magazines and journals that not only sought to teach women their rights in Islam and to help them move in a progressive direction but also printed their writings and analyses of these "hot button" topics.
[82] Amjad, Fakhra, Rehana Yasmin Anjum, Saira Yousaf, and Faiza Manzoor. "Gender Based Linguistic Variations in Urdu Language and Their Role in Suppression of Females." *Journal of Business* and Social Review in Emerging Economics, vol. 4, no.2, 2018, pp. 232.
[83] Amjad, Fakhra, Rehana Yasmin Anjum, Saira Yousaf, and Faiza Manzoor. "Gender Based Linguistic Variations in Urdu Language and Their Role in Suppression of Females." *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economics*, vol. 4, no.2, 2018, pp. 244, emphasis mine.

Their work consists of interviewing Urdu-speaking men and women separately and together. They data they gathered and analyze is fascinating. For instance, they found that both males and females said that females understand matters better, but females are the ones to compromise and males are the ones to make final decisions, especially on important matters, while women only lend support.
[84] He is the focus of chapter two, and he spends the entire introduction of his prose work, *Mirat-ul Uroos* prevailing upon the Muslim community to understand the importance of teaching women, especially soon-to-be-married or those of marriage age, how to read and suggests his work as an instruction manual for becoming a respectable, successful, and pious Muslim woman, daughter, and wife.

[85] I have somewhat oversimplified but not misrepresented Bagchi's complex arguments in reference to Tagore's various works. My description is sufficient in presenting her viewpoint for the contrast I set up in this paragraph.
Bagchi, Jasodhara. "Tagore and Women: Some Thoughts." *Tagore's Ideas of the New Woman: The Making and Unmaking of Female Subjectivity*, edited by Chandrava Chakravarty and Sneha Kar
Chaudhuri, Sage Publications India, 2017, pp. 3-6
[86] Here, she is specifically referring to author Tagore's songs with a nod towards his later novels.
[87] Victim blaming, among other similar issues, is, unfortunately, only one example. The August 2020 uproar over the W.A.P music video in which two female Black artists perform is a vivid example of patriarchal societies, in this case the United States of America, and their citizens policing women's bodies and claiming the right to choose what is appropriate for women to wear.
[88] I will discuss this in further detail in the next chapter (chapter two) with Nazir Ahmed, including his forewords and literary works.
[89] Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
[90] Orsini, Francesca and Katherine Butler Schofield, editors. Introduction. *Telling and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India*. Open Book Publishers, 2015.
[91] Dubrow, Jennifer. *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2018.
[92] As mentioned in some detail in my introduction, the printing of stories such as *Fasana-e-Azad* in newspapers and the communal reading it incited on trains and other areas allowed for women to engage with and speak about the themes and characters of such works, sometimes even through having men write in their questions directly to the author or newspaper in which the serial was printed.
[93] Qissas are a type of fable, the tradition coming from Persian and Arabic forms of oral storytelling.
[94] Dubrow, Jennifer. *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2018.
[95] Muslim widows were not permitted to remarry, though Islamic law stated nothing against second marriages. Nineteenth century Urdu Muslim writer Rashid ul. Khairi was a strong proponent of widow marriage. Hindu widows had to deal with the practice of sati or widow-burning.
[96] Ghosh takes the term "everyday struggles" from editors Haynes and Prakash's *Contesting Power*.
[97] I have not personally come across any scholar who places Flora Florinda in any category outside that of historical romance. Some of these scholars include Jennifer Dubrow, Francesca Orsini, Mohammed Asaduddin, and Shamsur Faroqi.
[98] As mentioned in my introduction, I eschew the problematic label of novel even though some historians and Urdu scholars do apply it to Sharar's works. I see Dubrow's label of novel is a misnomer, as these works shared more similarities with the Urdu dastaan form, as I have mentioned previously. If Ian Watt's definition of a novel is applied to Sharar's works, it would fail on the account that the collective experience is given greater weight than individuality and the background is general rather than specific. Scholars such as Ralph Russell, Fiaz Ahmad Fiaz, and Muhammad Asaduddin give specific reasons why *Flora Florinda* is more of a dastaan than a novel; they cite dichotomies of virtue versus vice and the "spicing" of events to the point that Fiaz states that "his (Sharar's) writing borders on the pornographic" (229).
[99] Russell notes that this strategy sometimes backfired, for people then took up the idea that if Muslims were so advanced, they had nothing left to learn from the British (131), whereas the Aligarh movement wanted to work in conjunction with the British to a certain extent.
[100] I offer different readings of this term and Urdu writers' usage of navil in my introduction.
[101] Joshi, Priya. *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*. Columbia University Press, 2002.
Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
[102] Muslim languages here refers to Persian and Urdu. These publications included translations of the Quran into Urdu; these translations changed the way Indians and Indian Muslim men and women approached, understood, and learned about Islam.
[103] Stark, Ulrike. "The Coming of the Book in Hindi and Urdu." *An Empire of Books*. Permanent Black, 2007, pp. 59.
[104] Dubrow, Jennifer. *Cosmopolitan Dreams: The Making of Modern Urdu Literary Culture in Colonial South Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. pp. 38.
[105] *Avadh Akhbar*, September 15, 1879. pp. 2899
[106] Ralph Russell outlines how Sir Syed Ahmed Khan believed that revolting would be detrimental, and the Muslim community punished. Instead, Khan felt that Muslims needed to align with British rulers and customs in order to succeed. He wished to "implant the values of Victorian England in the minds of educated, articulate sections of the Muslim community" (77-80).

[107] Translation of title, mine.

Richardson, Samuel. *Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady*. London, 1784.

The title page line of *Clarissa*, "The most important concerns of private life. And particularly showing, the distresses that may attend the misconduct both of parents and children in relation to marriage," could easily be transplanted on to the cover page of Sharar's *Badr un Nisa ki Musibat* and work just as well.

[108] Maulvis are in many ways the Muslim equivalent of Christian priests.

[109] His first journal, Dilgudaz (1887), focused on Lucknow culture and history.

[110] In direct letters to readers of *Avadh Akhbar* and in other pieces of writing for his journals and newspapers, Sharar often lauded British- specifically male- novelists and their works. Nineteenth century and modern historians, specifically Jennifer Dubrow, have noted this in discussions of early Urdu novels and Sharar.

[111] Tauraf (introduction) portion of *Umrao Jan Ada*.

[112] Both Flora and Helen convert to Islam at the narrative's conclusion.

[113] In Urdu poetry, songs, and other forms of writing, even today, liver is considered the place of love and pain, much as the heart in Western ideology.

[114] Delhvi, Nazir Ahmed. *Mirat-ul Uroos (The Bride's Mirror)*. Munshi Nawal Kishor, 1868. pp.1 -17.

[115] A madrasa is an Islamic school that was usually only open to men or men and women were taught vastly different aspects of Islam and the world. Authors like Dehlvi and the Aligarh movement encouraged similar education for men and women.

[116] For the sake of clarity and space, I have not transcribed transliterations of the text's Urdu. For the remainder of the chapter, all translations from the original Urdu are mine.

[117] Unfortunately, even in modern times, women who are victims of rape in the South Asian countries of Pakistan and India often become victims of honor killings. Regardless of religion, these families feel that the woman has brought shame upon the entire family and that, through killing her, honor may be regained. A recent highly publicized case in Pakistan deals with such an issue. On September 27, 2019, Qandeel Baloch's brother received a sentence for life in prison after he was found guilty of killing her. In an interview, he stated that he felt that he needed to murder her to save his family's honor. Baloch was not a victim of rape. Instead, she was a model and social media presence. The 2012 Bollywood movie *Ishaqzaade* also deals with the continuing problem of familial honor killings.

[118] As a reminder, Ziad is not dead, but upon finding his clothes in a cave, she believes the Christians have killed him to retain control over her.

[119] Shahada is the first kalma. When someone is converting to Islam, they recite this line as a declaration of their intention and their faith.

[120] To clarify, Hindi does not appear in Devanagari script.

[121] As Jennifer Dubrow writes, "featured in this debate is the theme of masculine behavior (identified by colonist discourse with British colonialism) versus feminine behavior (posed by colonial discourse as a symbol of native effeminacy and thus native inability to rule)… yet, as is typical with these early *Fasana-e-Azad* scenes, no position is supported" (*Serial Fictions* 49). Dubrow refers specifically to *Mrinalina Sinha's Colonial Masculinity: The "Many Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century*. However, Barbara D. Metcalf, like other colonial scholars, engages with this problematic British feminization of the Indian man; this allows them to "establis[h], at least to themselves, British moral authority on gender roles…issues related to gender cannot be understood apart from the colonial context" (100). Sarshar's position on the outer edges of Islam allows him an outsider's perspective. Azad and Chammi Jan can metaphorically stand for the two branches of Muslim thought that emerged post-1857. Although Dubrow views Sharar's reluctance to support one position over another as a flaw, I suggest this lack of stance creates room for debate and discussion. Since readers often experienced *Fasana-e-Azad* in groups, whether reading together or one person reading out loud, Sarshar's decision to not take sides assists readers in discussing these issues from different perspectives. Furthermore, unlike Sharar, who was a Muslim and supporter of the Aligarh movement, Sarshar had no such ties. By comparison, Sarshar is not as biased as other Muslim writers.

[122] Orsini, Francesca. *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*. Permanent Black, 2009. pp. 177-178.

[123] Yet, Husn Ara is not a clear-cut character. Sarshar often had to defend her actions. After a particular installment in which Husn Ara and Azad flirt, Sarshar writes in the August 2, 1879 edition of *Avadh Akhbar* that her education is responsible for keeping her within morally acceptable boundaries (2418). Firoze Mookerjee provides an explanation for why readers and the author had to constantly support Husn Ara; in their flirtations and movement outside the public sphere, Husn and Siphar Ara act similar to masnavi and dastaan heroines, whom authors penned as mirrors of Indian courtesans (106). Where Sharar created fictional women who resided somewhere in the middle of the angel/whore spectrum, Sarshar produced women who possessed characteristics of both: "the two models of femininity, of the sharifzadi (innocent woman) and the courtesan, overlap in order to create a new type of attractive but respectable

romantic heroine."[123] This mixture was quite innovative for the time. Focusing on Lucknow, Sanjay Joshi states that middle-class reformers purported that a proper Indian woman was neither like a courtesan nor a low-class woman (61). Bi Allah Rakhi then becomes Husn Ara's foil. Despite admitting that Rakhi is one of the most beautiful women he has ever seen, Azad rejects her as a potential spouse because she is low-born and works in an inn. *Fasana-e-Azad* presents education as a trapping of respectable, middle class families, so that Husn's knowledge verifies her higher status in society.

[124] Orsini, Francesca. *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*. Permanent Black, 2009. pp. 178.

[125] Kiesling references both these studies in his work.

Kiesling, Scott F. *Language, Gender, and Sexuality*. Routledge, 2019.

Chapter Two:

The Agency of Urdu Wives: Didactic Realism and Lingual Communities in Dehlvi's Works

"Aurat ka muqqam hai."
"Women have a position (of status and respect)."

~*Fasana-e-Mubtala* (1885) (transliteration and translation from Urdu mine)[126]

In the wake of the failed 1857 Indian rebellion against British company rule leading to 1858's establishment of the British Raj, the feminine anthropomorphization of the languages Urdu and Hindi became the scaffolding for Indian nationalism in the latter half of the 19th century. In his 2016 work, colonial scholar Aamir Mufti writes, "It is therefore meaningful…of the emergent Hindi nationalist polemics…that one of its distinct features was the feminization of Urdu, often anthropomorphized as an aristocratic and indolent 'bibi' or 'Begum Urdu' or even a louche or garishly made up courtesan, figures of the precolonial upper-class social milieu in the towns of North India that are inassimilable to notions of 'national' productiveness and rectitude."[127] Barbara Metclaf, a historian similarly specializing in colonial South Asia, notes, "Hindi…was a respectable cow-and-Brahmin-nurturing matron, while Urdu…was nothing less than a heartless aristocratic strumpet. Queen Devanagri (Hindi script) was…the image of the new middle class Hindu housewife…Begum Urdu was the unreformed and uncontrolled woman."[128] Indian Hindu and British nationalists conflated language, religion, and women, so that these "language women," a term coined by Asha Sarangi in her 2009 article "Languages as Women: The Feminisation of Linguistic Discourses in Colonial North India," functioned in a way that allowed Hindi, as a respectable Hindu woman, to represent India while Urdu was fashioned into the unruly, disreputable Muslim woman sullying the nation. These language women gave birth to two disparate lingual communities, one inexorably linked to the nation and one struggling for survival.[129]

The Urdu-speaking Muslim Deputy Maulvi Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi was a member of the latter, despite his post in the British Government and his fluency in not only Urdu but also English, Hindi,

Arabic, and Farsi. The study of language ecology as mapped out by theorists such as Haugen (1975), Fill and Mühläusler (2001), Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (2008), and specifically Hornberger (2003) state that language is dependent on the area in which it is spoken and that "languages also evolve, grow, change, live and die in relation to other languages, and in relation to their environment. Consequently, *some languages, like some species, may be endangered*" (Manan and David, 204, emphasis mine). The endangerment of Urdu also led to the endangerment of the entire Muslim, Urdu-speaking population; while some ashrafi, middle-to-high class Muslim families maintained their lifestyles, that status became precarious after the failed 1857 mutiny. In her 2018 work *Language as Identity in Colonial India*, Papia Sengupta asserts that language is critical to identity formation, one's wellbeing, belongingness, and upward mobility, while also being crucial in accessing social justice and rights. Citing social philosopher Axel Honneth's assertion that the way in which an individual or society views themselves is dependent on others, she writes about using language to form a sense of self and community: "Constructing, identifying and understanding the self is a highly complex phenomenon—reflective, responsive and reactionary…[and h]ow one is defined and (un)recognized by 'others' often leads to a particular response."[130] Delhvi's fiction works were one such response.

This chapter tracks the evolution of the Urdu language woman within the didactic realist framework of his first four fiction, prose works: the trilogy, consisting of 1868's *Mirat-ul Uroos*, 1872's *Banaat-ul Naash*, and 1877's *Taubat-un Nasuh*, followed by 1885's stand-alone *Fasana-e-Mubtala*. The women in each book demonstrate a different phase of Urdu in the latter half of the 19th century. For instance, Asghari, in *Mirat-ul Uroos* then *Banaat-ul Naash*, represents a modern yet simple, vernacular Urdu, harkening back to Persian and Nawab control in India when it was used in court documents and official speeches that had to be understood by masses; she is a more masculine Urdu and one that is emulated in the realist novel when depicting home life and conversations. Fahmida, the wife in *Taubat-un Nasuh*, represents the changing status of Urdu within the Muslim, Urdu-

speaking community; she portrays the struggle of the community finding the balance between the seemingly respectable aspects of Urdu (literature and prose) and the supposedly licentious, inferior aspects (poetry as rektha, poetry by men from a male point of view, and rekthi, poetry also written by men with a female point of view that often covered topics like spiritual and physical love). The courtesan-turned-housewife Haryali in *Fasana-e-Mubtala* becomes the final stage of Urdu, one in which acceptance of sexuality merges with tradition, modernism, and certain Western ideals. This chapter establishes the flat, female main characters—notably all wives—as anthropomorphized Urdu and the emblematization of sexuality not being so much repressed as emerging and being discussed in various "authorized" ways, especially during the Victorian era. In the chronological line of Dehlvi's works, Urdu begins as the demure, pure, respectful, and literate yet still ensconced Asghari of *Mirat-ul Uroos*, who goes from her father's home to her husband and in-law's and ends, by the fourth publication, as an Urdu transformed into the educated, literate, and world-wise courtesan-turned-second-wife. Moreover, the first wife in *Fasana-e-Mubtala* can be read as the reputable Hindi that the Indian nation, the husband Mubtala, incorrectly chose, thinking she'd be a suitable partner or, at the very least, a more suitable wife than a courtesan. Instead of shedding the sullied garb of disrepute, Urdu eventually refashions it and begins donning it like a sophisticated woman wearing an expensive, imported shawl. In simpler terms, this chapter offers a reading of Dehlvi's works and the female main characters as an Urdu language woman who, at first, attempts to distance herself from her sexualized representation, even femininity to some extent, only to embrace both as an advantage and a benefit to the Urdu lingual community and its Muslim speakers—and potentially to the Indian nation as a whole.

Through this reading, this chapter presents Dehlvi's works as celebrating female sexual liberation even though it remains under the purview of men. On the surface, this seemingly extinguishes female agency even when reading these women as anthropomorphized Urdu and

raising the specter of the oppressive Muslim man locking women behind purdah within homes. However, these fictional wives function as agents of change, including Asghari, the first character Dehlvi penned. Asghari writes to the army to obtain a post for her husband and speaks with her in-law's debtors to clear the family's outstanding accounts. The evolution of the Urdu language woman, this chapter reveals how a reputable Muslim woman can be sexual, empowered, and educated, someone who can handle accounting as well as domestic responsibilities; someone who can read Urdu and even English fiction and non-fiction for enjoyment as much as for the advancement of knowledge—not just someone who reads the Islamic holy book, the Quran, in Arabic and its translation in Urdu.

By his fourth work, Dehlvi's writing illustrated how supposedly demure, naïve, and illiterate women may not necessarily equate to either a happy, comfortable life or marriage or even a good Muslim woman and that a courtesan, in certain circumstance, may, in fact, be not only a better wife but a better mother and Muslim. While nineteenth-century and modern readers alike may balk at women's agency being so yoked to men's control and purview, this chapter suggests that these fictional women and works become the precursor and foundations of a more advanced, multi-layered Urdu language and create space for a new Muslim Urdu-speaking woman, as depicted with Dehlvi's contemporary, Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva's 1899's *Umrao Jan Ada*, the first Urdu novel with a titular character who is Muslim, a courtesan, well-educated, financially independent, and, in general, well respected by other educated, high-class Muslim men and women.

In stating that anthropomorphized Urdu as represented through Dehlvi's fictional wives both encourages and reflects a transition in the Muslim, Urdu-lingual community towards empowerment, acceptance, and assimilation of female sexuality and agency alongside the community's fight for standing and status within the Indian nation, this chapter's argument offers a different view to the prevailing academic discourse surrounding Dehlvi's works. Most approaches

lament Urdu's sexualized status whereas this argument establishes it as advantageous, illustrating how the language woman becomes nuanced in integrating rather than wholly rejecting her sexuality and sets up the foundation for works like *Umrao Jan Ada* and the many female-written Urdu books, magazines, and other literary pieces published in 20th century India and then, after the 1947 partition, in Muslim country Pakistan as well. Such Urdu publications did decrease significantly by the start of the 21st century, though many women, both Muslim and not, are currently making a global impact with oral and written Urdu: Pakistani-American Arooj Aftab and her use of rekthi in composing her songs; poet, activist, and Pakistani-Urdu writer Fahmida Riaz, who passed away in 2018; Urdu romance novelist Farhat Ishtiaq and cotemporary literary Urdu writer and television, drama-series writer Umera Ahmed. Historians and critics in the field of South Asia, Islam and Urdu praise Dehlvi's efforts in advancing Muslim social reform, particularly in terms of women's education. Minault writes that he was "pivotal in responding to the changed conditions of British rule…realiz[ing] that the older, home-based system was no longer vital, and he sought a way revitalize it…[h]is syllabus combined a basic vernacular education, similar to that given to boys, and training in the domestic arts necessary for girls' future lives" (*Secluded Scholars* 11). His first novel-length Urdu prose work, 1868's *Mirat-ul Uroos*, is one such text; his other eight fiction publications are also works of didactic realism providing guidelines for, in particular, women's education and agency and, more generally, how to live as modern Muslims, regardless of gender.

However, feminist and colonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak, Kamala Visweswaran, Lucy Carroll, Tanika Sarkar, Rajeshwari Rajan, and Sangeeta Ray remain wary of how women function in such reformist actions put forth by men. Ray's 2000 work, *En-gendering India*, mentions some of the problematic ways that nineteenth-century Indian men used women as repositories for culture, tradition, and nationalism. Her introduction mentions how, in 1996, an Indian ambassador pointed to women wearing saris or shalwar khameez at a semiofficial gathering as the "daughters of

India….affim[ing] the continuity of tradition" and in doings so "reproduced a gendered separation of spheres…allow[ing] men to function as citizens of the world…while Indian women were part of the ambassador's global visions *only* as uncontaminated purveyors of an inherent national culture" (1-2). In a more extreme case, Lati Mani's work analyzes the disturbing Indian androcentric traditions and societies propagating the horrific act of sati, widow-burning. In "Gender and *sharafat*: re-reading Nazir Ahmad," Ruby Lal expresses her concerns: "[T]he point has been made that women were all too often (in Lata Mani's words) 'neither subjects, nor objects but rather, the ground of the discourse…women themselves are marginal to the debate.' Much the same kind of point might be made about Nazir Ahmad and his Age of Reform" (17). Similarly, in her 2020 *Writing Gender, Writing Nation: Women's Fiction in Post-Independence India*, Bharti Arora argues that such cultural preservation "fell severely short of proposing a critical paradigm wherein women could be perceived as equal stakeholders in the nationalist movement" (10). This chapter presents Dehlvi's works as not resolving these issues but attempting do so, working as scaffolding for Urdu-speaking Muslim women to become critical stakeholders in the advancement of feminism, female agency, and the lingual community's connection to nation as well as the creation of diverse, complex Urdu literature and art. It also intimates that through this reading of fiction women gradually elevating Bibi Urdu, the language could reach a point that paved the way for Indian Urdu female writers like the Mumbai-based writer, filmmaker, and essayist Ismat Chughtai, who graduated from India's Aligarh Muslim University in the mid-20th century. Prolific and popular though slightly controversial at the time, she, in fact, often wrote in the realist style and covered topics ranging from class conflict and femininity to female sexuality.

Dehlvi was a staunch supporter of the Aligarh Movement, led by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who, in 1875, established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College that became Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. The movement attempted to align Muslim values with Western ideals, pushing

for scientific education for Muslim men and women bolstered by a transformation of Urdu writing. Until that point, Urdu had appeared mostly as laws, Urdu poetry, or in other academic endeavors, such as textbooks for male British and Indian university students; the Urdu stories in newspaper, like the previous chapters *Fasana-e-Azad* didn't start releasing until 1878. Other stories, tales, and folklores were all part of Urdu's oral tradition, shared at weddings or mushairas as historians have shown. Dehlvi, the son of a teacher and graduate of Delhi College, became the deputy inspector of schools in 1856 for the Department of Public Instruction and, at the behest of the British government, translated the Indian Penal Code to Urdu, an effort that earned him more notice and praise from British officers. All the while, he remained interested in Khan's efforts. By 1863, Khan had founded the Translation Society, later the Scientific Society, which released two journals from Aligarh city, "The Aligarh Institute Gazette" and "Cultures and Morals." These journals used simplified, conversational Urdu to present original and translated major works in the fields of sciences and modern arts, making them more accessible to Urdu speakers, including women with a basic education and the ability to read elementary Urdu.

Dehlvi took this initiative one step further, becoming the first to publish a fiction, novel-length prose work in Urdu, the 1868 *Mirat-ul Uroos*, written in vernacular Urdu. In fact, the success of the work is such that, as of 2023, Pakistani education still includes it in school syllabi.[131] The short two sentences that begin the piece clearly state the work's purpose and audience in straightforward words, "tumheed kay taur per aurtohn kay likhnay pernay key zaroorat aur un kay haalat kay munasib kuch naseeyataan" (by way of preface, some advice corresponding to women's circumstances and their writing and reading needs) (5). Such simple language would have made the book easier to read and understand, especially for Urdu-speaking Muslim women. He also mentions in his introduction that, before the book was officially published as a result of him winning a competition, he had written the story down as something that would be enjoyable and instructive for

his daughters when he noticed nothing appropriate existed to read and engage their minds; it would also teach them useful ways to manage a household, from tackling bills to maids. According to him and historians like Ruby Lal, Gail Minault, and G.E. Ward who translated *Mirat-ul Uroos* into English in 1899, other women and households became interested in this book until "oonchi oonchi gharoan mein kitab mangwayeegayee…yeh kitab aurtohn key liyay neehiyat mufeed hai aur bohat dil laga kar par thee hain aur sun thee hai" (upper class households began requesting the book…this book was exceedingly advantageous for women, who wholeheartedly read or listened to it) (*Mirat-ul Uroos* 3). His introductions, particularly the ones to *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Taubut-un Nasuh*, bookending his trilogy, were also calls to action for the Muslim community to change their outmoded viewpoints and infuse some Western ideals into their daily lives, specifically the education of women—not just to fight against British perceptions of enslaved, oppressed Muslim women but also to advance the Muslim community within the world at large.

While proponents of the Aligarh Movement firmly advocated for women's education, others, like the Muslim ulama, felt that women should be taught just enough to be able to read the Quran.[132] Finding a balance between modern British ideals and Indian traditions, Dehlvi's fiction evokes Islamic hadiths (accounts of the prophet) and even Quranic verses to support literacy for women and a movement towards gender equality. In the introduction to *Mirat-ul Uroos*, he writes: "So that, if you look into the matter carefully, the world is like a cart which cannot move without two wheels – man on one side, and woman on the other" (Ward 7).[133] Dehlvi was not singular in this outlook. Referencing Sayyed Mumtaz Ali, a writer and supporter of Sir Sayyed Ahmed Khan and the Aligarh movement, Minault writes:

> In [Ali's] discussion of women's education, he starts from the tradition of the Prophet that both Muslim men and women should seek knowledge. This clearly indicates that in God's eyes, men and women have equal intellectual powers that should be developed.

> Men make the mistake of considering themselves superior to women, and then they make the second mistake of considering women incapable of intellectual attainments, and thus deprive them of the education that could prove otherwise. Social custom is thus to blame for the fact that women are uneducated and locked up like prisoners – this is not what God intended. (*Learning* 45)

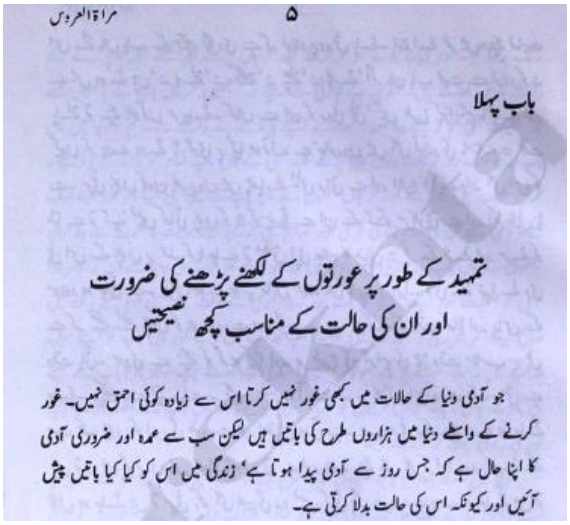
Dehlvi's works visualize Ali's argument in depicting how an educated Muslim woman may conduct her behavior. He presents fictional Muslim women carrying out daily nineteenth-century domestic tasks, such as cleaning and cooking, while also moving into the public realm. In this manner, these female characters embody modern ideals (education and engagement with public affairs) even as they remain ensconced in a respectable domestic space. In this way, they also stand for Urdu. If Asghari represents Urdu, she is then the first to be written in prose work in Dehlvi's attempt at a novel; this Urdu has become educated in that she is published and not oral poetry passed among Urdu speakers, and, within the framework of didactic realism, is teaching her readers how to act and live happily married, Muslim lives. Yet, despite assimilating some Western ideals, she is still protected, for Dehlvi starts the book with bismillah-hir-rahman-nir-rahim, an Islamic prayer Muslims recite to praise Allah before reading the Quran or praying.

As C.M. Naim states, "[i]n giving such importance to women, in allowing them the inherent capacity to be coequal with men in almost all matters, and in laying emphasis on women's education, Nadhir Ahmad (Nazir Ahmed) was going against prevalent views" (127). Taking this further, Dehlvi's works also challenge what Urdu could do and its perceptions both in the Urdu-speaking community and beyond. Furthermore, as Sarangi states, "The making of Hindi as the national language was part of the larger project of nationalizing the Hindu cultural identity of India" (287). Building off his experience in Indian colleges as well as with the British government and the Aligarh movement, Dehlvi's works offer a different Urdu, a different Muslim woman, and a different way of

living for Indian Muslims. Yet, some scholars, like Ayesha Jalal, find his construction of a new Muslim community on the site of a demure, complacent woman as only furthering patriarchal control. In fact, in her 2002 book, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, she writes that "Novels like *Mirat-ul-Arus*…set the standard for ideal Muslim womanhood in the character of Asghari…what has made her character memorable…is the almost insufferable capacity to be the perfect domesticated heavenly ornaments…the model of womanhood cherished by middle-to-upper-class Muslim men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that of the literate but domesticated, wise but chaste, intelligent but submissive wife" (60-62). Jalal argues that these women in Dehlvi's work are another form of male fantasy and mere objects, no different from the nawabs (royals) of prior years who collected and praised courtesans.

She is not wrong, and this chapter does not seek to argue that such representations of Muslim fictional wives are perfect but rather that, in spite of themselves, they represent a shifting Urdu and lingual community that was integrating education and sexuality. Even in *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, when the courtesan becomes a second wife and remains a male fantasy in many ways, she represents how Urdu and women can be the site of a merging of chastity and the obverse. She breaks from the bounds within which even the book tries to restrain her, as no matter how well she takes care of the children or the household, she will never be chaste, much like Urdu; she cannot be contained even though she mostly remains within her husband's house. Similarly, Urdu maintains her past, often harkening back to her oral spirit of songs and poetry, even in short stories in popular Urdu newspapers in the latter half of the century. Even Dehlvi, who notably concludes his introduction not with a mention about women's education but rather the form, couldn't shed traditions entirely: "Nazreen se tohqeh hai kay mazoor rahein; kyun kay iss tarz mein yeh pehli tasneef hai," (The audience is requested to be open minded and notice the (writer's) handicap as this work is the first

such in this form.) (4). The beginning of every chapter is written like a couplet, two sentences, not poetic but visually formatted just like poetry as seen here on page five of *Mirat-ul Uroos*:


مراۃ العروس ۵

باب پہلا

تمہید کے طور پر عورتوں کے لکھنے پڑھنے کی ضرورت
اور ان کی حالت کے مناسب کچھ نصیحتیں

جو آدمی دنیا کے حالات میں کبھی غور نہیں کرتا اس سے زیادہ کوئی احمق نہیں۔ غور کرنے کے واسطے دنیا میں ہزاروں طرح کی باتیں ہیں لیکن سب سے عمدہ اور ضروری آدمی کا اپنا حال ہے کہ جس روز سے آدمی پیدا ہوتا ہے' زندگی میں اس کو کیا کیا باتیں پیش آئیں اور کیونکہ اس کی حالت بدلا کرتی ہے۔

His contemporary, Rusva, more openly embraced the past and oral traditions, starting each chapter with a clear, poetic couplet, rather than an explanation of the upcoming chapter as Dehlvi does. So, perhaps these fictional women of Dehlvi's do cater to the male fantasies of the ashrafi, but this chapter argues that as the Urdu woman, they also show a shifting, transitioning Urdu.

While these women may have reflected the time period's Muslim male fantasy, they also created the first opportunities for women to read alone and start formulating their opinions, again not complete agency but a nascent form of it. Anindita Ghosh parses the importance of this shift to singular reading: "Significantly, for the first time, women were also reading on their own. As private reading practices gradually replaced communal reading sessions that homogenized meanings and imposed conformity on its audience, women were free to interpret the books they read in the seclusion of their own room" (*Power and Print* 228). Undoubtedly, men providing a male written book to women to instruct their actions is a form of censorship and the continuation of patriarchal suppression of women's growth.[134] However, in a time period when many Muslim women, even those of ashrafi households, could not even read the Arabic of the Quran let alone the Urdu which

they used in daily speech, reading prose fiction was unprecedent. Solitary reading permitted women to discover new intellectual spaces to explore even while remaining within physical domestic boundaries. As Ghosh writes in regards to nineteenth-century Indian women, "What has been systematically excluded from accounts of women's struggles is the everyday realm of social relations in which power is constantly and relentlessly negotiated" (*Behind the Veil* 6).[135] Men may have controlled the sources of information and content but, for perhaps the first time, middle-class Muslim, Urdu-speaking women could draw their conclusions in a private space, relatively unimpeded by family men and their viewpoints. Dehlvi's fiction framed these spaces of negotiation as less threatening for Muslim men in the framework of didactic realism, as Islam and men remained in control. Revolutions start with sparks not explosions.

Additionally, the realist aspect of Dehlvi's works most likely made the book more relatable and enjoyable to women, especially those who had never ventured outside the courtyards of their and their neighbor's homes. The lieutenant governor M. Kempson, when proposing the award for *Mirat-ul Uroos*, stated, "The sketches are those of real life, the language is simple and artless, and the inner history of the Indian home is portrayed true to nature."[136] Decades after its publication, Uttar Pradesh's lieutenant governor stated, "It brings to light the vast influence exercised by the women of India, and the manner in which that influence may be crowned with the highest results when education is added to intelligence and virtue" (Naim 159-160)[137] while the director of public instruction, Dehlvi's patron, said the novel had "the singular virtue of being admirably adaptable for the perusal of the females of India" and would "interest their imagination as well as instruct their minds" (Naim 159-160). Further grounding readers in reality, the introduction of Dehlvi's first novel-length prose work (*Mirat-ul Uroos*) specifically cites women "who have become famous and celebrated in the world in the same way as men. Such women were Nur Jehan begam, and Zebunnissa begam; and in these days the nawab Sikandar begam, or the English Princess, Queen

Victoria.[138] They are women who have administered the affairs of nations-of the whole world, not of a little home and family" (Ward 8).[139] The listing of Queen Victoria alongside Indian Begams is a shrewd move. As Minault mentions in *Secluded Scholars*, "[a]doring subjects and British officials alike were prone to draw parallels between the (Bhopali) Begams and Queen Victoria. The comparison was apt, though of course Bhopal was an infinitely smaller realm, and the Begams were possibly better educated" (26). The presentation of the Queen and the Begams as analogous allows British readers an entry into an Urdu book, expanding its readership, while simultaneously easing Muslim readers into altering their conceptions of what is and is not acceptable for Muslim women.[140] Dehlvi's possible successful in broadening his audience can be found in the 1899 English translation of *Murat-ul Uroos*. Translator G. E. Ward mentions in his preface that "[t] he main object of this edition of it [*Mirat-ul Uroos*] is to furnish a suitable textbook in Hindustani for English ladies…It is a work which is peculiarly fitted for such a purpose, since it deals with subjects in which ladies are naturally interested, and is written in the unpretentious but refined language of home life" (xi). In essence, the realism of Dehlvi's works and their characters becomes authentic and naturalized because he grounds it in his readers' reality and simultaneously expands the reach of Urdu, which only Urdu newspapers had been able to manage at that point as seen through the circulation and readership of *Avadh-e-Punch* and *Avadh-e-Akhbar*, discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

The didactic realist framework is most likely what made Dehlvi's works so popular amongst men and women. While Lal laments that nineteenth-century Indian society restricted women to "clearly defined tracks of respectable domesticity" (32), these defined tracks made Dehlvi's prose more palatable, especially to the Muslim community resisting change and the influence of Western ideals. In 1875, seven years prior to the publication of *Mirat-Ul Uroos*, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi published the revolutionary *Insha-i-Hadi un-Nissa*, which instructed women in matters of letter writing. Myriad scholars and historians, including Jennifer Dubrow and Gail Minault, have noted

that in early to mid-1800s India, Islamic society considered the teaching of writing to Muslim girls, in particular, dangerous: "Reading (the Quran in Arabic) and arithmetic were acceptable, but if a women in purdah learned how to write letters (Urdu, Hindi, or English), the fear was she might communicate with men beyond the permissible circle of kin" (*Gender, Language, and Learning* 146). Historian Geraldine Forbes extends this patriarchal fear of literate women engaging in intrigues and affairs to Hindu women. She references Hindu superstitions that literate women would become widows soon after marriage; since women were dependent on men for their livelihood, pursuing education was akin to committing suicide (59). Such similar superstitions also made the rounds among Muslim women. In the previous chapter, *Fasana-e-Azad*'s Husn Ara addresses these superstitions when she tells Muslims that letter writing will not lead to salacious correspondence among those who are unmarried but help women find more suitable husbands.

As Partha Chatterjee notes, "[W]omen themselves seemed unwilling to shift their position within and without the family/household and that even men's efforts at liberating women seemed to be based merely on personal necessity and survival" through a 'limited and controlled emancipation of wives' as they were often Western-educated males" (*Empire and Nation* 119). Dehlvi specifically addresses and admonishes women's lackadaisical and sardonic attitude towards education in his introduction to *Mirat-ul Uroos*:

> Some ignorant women reason after this fashion. They say: 'However much we read, shall we become *maulavis* like men?[141] Well, then, what is the use of our bothering ourselves?' But even if a woman has learnt more than she requires, there is not the least doubt she will reap a proportionate advantage. I do not deny that too much learning is unnecessary for a woman, but how many women are there who acquire even so much as is absolutely necessary? It is of the greatest importance to them, at the very least, to be able to read and write the vernacular. (Ward 8)

The line "too much learning is unnecessary for a woman" certainly supports Chatterjee's argument regarding male control.[142] To obtain education, Muslim women in particular had to struggle against many odds. Based on narratives of nineteenth-century Indian women, Forbes offers an unsettling insight into the obstacles Indian women faced: "Women interacted primarily through women, and it was women who enforced the prohibition against female education. Many of the women who learned to read before 1870s have reported hiding their accomplishments from other women. Those women and girls who were eager to learn had no recourse but to look to men who controlled their lives" (59). An argument that Dehlvi is trying to maintain control of how much and what women learn is thus not unreasonable.[143] His use of the *maulvi* honorific before his name further cements his authoritative male position. However, despite these factors, his works are one of many such nineteenth-century efforts that facilitate women's movement beyond Indian men's control and upset the patriarchal chokehold alongside Urdu. In fact, in his introduction to 1877's *Taubut-un Nasuh*, he alludes to his previous publications, such as *Mirat-ul Uroos*, and mentions the pride he takes in the way they have elevated the status of Urdu in India.

The lasting impact of efforts from Urdu writers, such as Dehlvi, are still apparent today. In 2013, Syed Abdul Manan and Maya Khemlani David conducted a research experiment in which they investigated 162 undergraduate students in Pakistan and found that "[t]he respondents tend to attach greater value to academic literacy in Urdu and English over their mother tongues for they believe *Urdu and English to hold significant pragmatic and economistic value as languages of power and wealth*. Local mother tongues [such as Sindhi, Balochi, Siraiki, and Pashto] are perceived to be good as identity carriers in a multilingual and multiethnic country, and their use…in intra-ethnic interaction and family chitchat" (203, emphasis mine).[144] While both researchers contend that Urdu and English hold a higher status in Pakistan than other local, mother-tongues, they also state that while "[b]oth these languages are used in the domains of power such as government…[t]he language hierarchy is

based on power in which *English stands as the most powerful*; Urdu occupies the second position, while the rest…stand at the lowest rung in the language hierarchy ladder" (206, emphasis mine). The failing of this research is that it positions English and Urdu as flanking each other closely, but the gap between the rungs is quite more pronounced than they indicate.

The issues that Urdu faced during Dehlvi's time are similar to the ones it faces today in Pakistan, where it is the national language and shares the title of official language with English. Despite Urdu being both a national and official language of a country, the aftereffects of the colonial debasement of the language are still prevalent today. In nineteenth-century India and twenty-first century Pakistan and India, people position Urdu as quite a bit lower than English, which was and is used by the middle-class elite in education and the workplace.[145] Even in contemporary literature, very few novels exist in the Urdu language. In *Forget English*, Mufti argues in terms of global scale where the vernacular disappears into the margins. On the local scale (Pakistan and even India), however, Urdu also encounters difficulty competing with English. In 2017, a Pakistani food company, Kashmir Cooking Oil, released an advertisement and launched a Twitter campaign with #urdupoeatry in which they recreated the Urdu poetic words of 13th-14th century Indian Sufi poet Aamir Khusro in *jalebi* (a fried, sweet dessert somewhat similar to funnel cakes) form. The visual ad begins with various booksellers stating that no one prefers reading in Urdu and the majority of their stock consists of English books.[146] A random Pakistani civilian woman then explains, "Urdu mein baat karangey tho shahid, you know, people will think ke hum paray-likha nahin hain" [If we speak in Urdu then maybe, you know, people will think that we are not educated (literal translation of paray-likha: read-written)].[147] In 2019, Fauzia Shamim and Uzma Rashid offer an explanation for this devaluation of Urdu:

> In education; however, a linguistic divide is evident in the two-stream system of education – mainly referred to as Urdu medium and English medium – according to the

> dominant language of instruction…Urdu medium schools are normally the state schools providing free education to the poorer communities while the English medium schools are private fee-paying schools for the economic well-off sections of [Pakistani] society. This disparity in the educational system…signal[s] linguistic capital, particularly in terms of proficiency in English" (43).

Kashmir Cooking Oil also posted three tweets with #UrduChallenge on August 1, 2, and 4 with attached videos. In these videos, various Pakistani citizens, most of whom appear to be well educated and working for large companies are asked to converse in Urdu (August 1, 2017), count to 100 in Urdu (August 2, 2017), and recite the Urdu alphabet (August 4, 2017).[148] None are successful, and as in the earlier advertisement quote, most engage in code-switching, where they fall back on English. These mark the lasting effects of the imperial management of language in British India. In 1878, *Fasana-e-Azad*, which is written in mostly Urdu, transcribes a job posting, which appears in English, reinforcing the idea that English was and is the language of the professional class. These two examples from different historical periods illustrate how Urdu continues to struggle in finding a foothold, even in its own nation, as a respectable language of the middle-to-upper classes. This chapter encourages an embracing of the disreputable side, for *Umrao Jan Ada*, the Urdu novel about a courtesan is still popular enough to have remixed songs about it and the 1981 Bollywood film with one of India's most well-known actresses, Rekha, is still considered a cult classic with songs and scenes using words directly from Rusva's novel.

Rewriting Perceptions: Women's Epistles and Urdu's Masculinization in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash*

Asghari is the main character in Dehlvi's first two fiction, prose, Urdu publications 1868's *Mirat-ul Uroos* and 1872's *Banaat-ul Naash*. In the former, *The Bride's Mirror*, two sisters, Asghari and Akbari, live in a middle-class Indian Muslim family home in Lahore.[149] The eldest daughter Akbari

dislikes reading and learning. When she is married, she consorts with women who bring shame to her in-laws.[150] She cannot manage the household and saddens both her husband and in-laws when she asks to live alone with her husband.[151] When her husband reluctantly grants her request, she screams, shouts, and is generally disrespectful to her husband, her in-laws, and other family members. From the very beginning, the younger daughter, Asghari, appears as a foil to her sister. Her parents, brother-in-law, and neighbors often sing her praises. Respectful, knowledgeable, and religious, she is often seen reading moral, didactic stories and the Quran. Once married, she runs across several obstacles. First, she discovers that one of the servants, Mama Azmat, is stealing. When she tries to fix this issue, Mama Azmat attempts to sour relations between Asghari and her husband, Muhammad Kamil, and his mother. Writing letters to her brother and father, Asghari formulates a plan in which she is able to pay off all the debt Mama Azmat has piled on the household and dismiss her from her position. Later, her husband begins to become wayward without a steady income or daily responsibilities. She travels alone and brings him back home. After this, she writes several letters to people in a position to help, has her husband write to British officers, and generally guides him in obtaining a position among the officers. With her husband respectably settled, she then starts up a small but successful school to educate other women and their daughters. The book ends with a letter from her father extolling her virtues, congratulating her on how cleverly and generously she has acted in all matters, and how other women should emulate her.

The story and characters are simple enough, with the language being of particular note. The first chapter reads like a continuation of the introduction and, in fact, when G.E. Ward translated the book into English, he retitled that section as part of the introduction and the two-page introduction in the original book as an author's preface. This lengthy introduction section-first chapter consumes nearly a full twenty pages in the original 1868 publication and is the likely culprit

for many literary scholars labelling the work a proto-novel. This section also reflects Urdu oral tradition and Dehlvi's understanding that, as mentioned in his preface, many women would be listening to this read aloud rather than reading it. It creates a conversation between the book and the reader, regardless of gender. The introduction ends with a direct appeal to readers: "Nazreen say tohqay hai kay mazoor rakhein; kyun kay iss tarz mein yeh pehli tasneef hai" (Viewers are requested to have some patience because this is the first written work in this style) (Dehlvi 4). It also fashions a space and reality in which Urdu can be reputable in prose, published form while still being simple and written in the vernacular, conversational tone of daily life. The second line of the first chapter—or extended introduction—reads "gaur karnay kay wastay dunya mein hazaroan taray kee bahtein hain leykin sub say ahmda aur zaroori admi kah apna haal hai" [worthy of note are thousands of ideas in the world but the most important and necessary is for a human to understand their state (of living and being)] (Dehlvi 5). While the idea is rather philosophical and reflects the deeper theories of life and existentialism that poets and philosophers like Ghalib explored in their works, it is written in clear, plain, and artless language, something an elementary schooler could easily understand—except for the word ahmda (important), which may be why its then immediately followed by the much more common and simpler zaroori (necessary).

Such writing is also far more accessible than Urdu poetry that also used simple words. For instance, Dagh Dehlvi, a popular poet in the latter half of the 19th century and a contemporary of Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi, wrote a couplet reading "tumhara dil mire dil ke barabar ho nahin sakta / vo shisha ho nahin sakta ye patthar ho nahin sakta" (your heart cannot become equal to my heart / that (one) cannot become a mirror and this (one) cannot become a stone). The words are quite simple, unlike the sort found in Ghalib's poems, but the structure and message require a skilled reader or listener of poetry. For instance, it does make its pronouns clear so vo and ye can be referring to either person's heart, rendering it unclear if the speaker's heart is the one that cannot become a

mirror or the stone. Even serial works printed in newspapers like *Fasana-e-Azad*, mentioned in the previous chapter, often depended on communal reading to broaden the audience. *Mirat-ul Uroos* was arguably the first Urdu text that allowed for solo reading by those who were simply literate and not necessarily educated or even world-wise, specifically women in ashrafi, upper class Muslim households.

In her 2013 *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*, linguist and historian Kavita Saraswathi Datla writes that, during this time, Muslim intellectuals updated Urdu, rendering it into a modern vernacular in hopes of making the language more accessible and representative and thus stake a claim for it as a national language of India; Urdu scholars and speakers refused to be "*minoritized*, to be considered anything less than truly national" even as they sought to bring recognition to Urdu as a secular language, one that was nevertheless still connected to Islamic history and culture (15). Dehlvi's preface and first chapter reflect this reading; while the first page of the book, right above the preface, bears the words bismillah-hir-rahman-nir-rahim, he doesn't refer to religion at all in the two-page preface.

The use of the vernacular and conversational tone is evident not only in those two pages but in the first sentence of the first chapter (not the couplet-like two sentences mentioned earlier that open the book): "Joh admi dunya kay halat mein kabhi ghaur nahin karta uss say zaida ahmaq nahin" (That person who doesn't pay attention to the state of the world, no one is more idiotic than them) (5).[152] Ahmaq is particularly idiomatic and is similar to someone calling another person a bone-head. Apart from the style of writing, this opening sentence also hints that this book will do just that, reflect the state of world, albeit on a smaller scale, specifically that of women in households. Although Dehlvi does mention religion in certain parts throughout this introduction-first chapter, he refrains from attaching mentions of language or religion to his larger, more significant claims about how men and women should act, their responsibilities, as well as his perception of the world and

education. Again, all of this is written in flowing, simple language. One paragraph in that section is of particular note, as it seems to be specifically addressing men and women of the Muslim community who believe women, in particular, do not need to read, write, or increase their knowledge as they don't need to work like men:

> Baaz nadaan aurtein khayal karti hain kay kya likh par kay hum ko mardon ki taray nohkree karnee hain laykin agar kisee aurat nay likh parh liya hai aur uss nay nohkree nahin kee to uss kah likhna parnah ahkaarat bhi nahi gaya. Usko aur behatereen faydein ponchay jin kay muqablay mein nohkari khi kuch bhi haqeeqat nahi. Jo log ilm sirf nohkari kah wastah samajh teh hain un ko ilm ki qadar nahin. (Some ignorant women believe that to read and write means we (women) will have to work like men but if any woman has learned to read and write and has not obtained a job then her reading and writing has not gone to waste. She has gained much better advantages which are incomparable and far beyond those that would be gained in a job. Those people who think knowledge is only for jobs do not properly appreciate knowledge.) (8)

So, if not for earning an income, what is the purpose of knowledge? Dehlvi writes his answer clearly a couple pages later: "Khana dauri badoon aurat kay ek din nahin chal sakthi. Mard kitnay bhi hohshyaar kyun nah hon mumkin nahin kay aurat kay madad kay badoon ghar chal saktha" (Cooking and chores without women cannot be managed even for a day. No matter how clever men may be, it is not possible without the help of a woman to run a household) (11). So, the argument presented in Dehlvi's first chapter is that knowing the state of the world is important for all people and that women can utilize knowledge to help ease the burden of responsibilities on men, through running the household, for instance. These sort of restrictions to women obtaining and using knowledge is what makes scholars, particularly feminist scholars like Jalal, paint Asghari as an object of male desire and fantasy, the perfect woman. However, these are the nascent steps of women

reading in Urdu, the general population of even middle- and upper-class Muslim women reading at all, and a palatable argument for Muslim traditionalist to accept that educating women has its advantages.

Another interesting analysis of this preface and introduction can be found in the theory of reading put forth by Karin Kukkonen in her 2019 book, *Probability Designs: Literature and Predictive Processing*. She outlines how "novels provide readers with a designed sensory flow in their plots, style, and relation to other books…and how this designed sensory flow revises readers' expectations and leads them to engage in exploratory thinking" (1). Since *Mirat-ul Uroos* had no other comparable Urdu books at the time it was published, the didactic realism framework harkens back to other similar novel-like works like John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World* or even 1863's Charles Kingsley *The Water-Babies*, which is a children's novel that is part satire and provides readers with a moral education, religious redemption, as well as commentary on England's treatment of the poor and its continued use of child labor. In fact, he mentions in the preface to the third and last installment of the trilogy that *Taubut-un Nasuh* was inspired by Daniel Defoe's *The Family Instructor*. Furthermore, *Mirat-ul Uroos* also relates, as mentioned previously, to the Urdu tradition of sharing information through oral communication, particularly popular amongst women, who often shared recipes or hurled insults from at each other from the balconies of their houses. The novel then unfolds not in opposition to Kukkonen's claim about readers' expectations but rather in reverse. Instead of allowing the story of Asghari to revise reader expectations, the introduction-first chapter revises expectations that Urdu can only be used for poetry, legal and official matters, and for oral sharing of tradition, folklore, and even knowledge about faith. The book tells readers exactly what to expect and the purpose of the work, so the exploratory thinking is not about what will happen to Asghari—even someone who hasn't read the work can most likely guess that from the two-sentence heading starting the book—but rather a call to action for exploring how Urdu can function as an

official language not just within the Urdu, Muslim lingual community but throughout India. In prose form, it can have a larger audience and larger reach—and perhaps show that Bibi Urdu can be more respectable.

Even after the two-sentence heading of the second chapter conspicuously states the story is now beginning, the following sentence still doesn't start the story but introduces it in a method akin to oral storytelling. In fact, the colloquial tone resembles some of the popular and well-respects poet Ghalib's Persian prose and Urdu letters; Ghalib also wrote treatises, and his poetry often dealt with philosophical matters, thus helping him avoid the disrepute attached to poets who wrote rekthi and about worldly love and passions. The first line of the second chapter reads, "Ab tum ko ek mazey ka qissa sunatey hai, jiss say maloom ho jayaga kay halaat aur bayhunari say kya kya taqleefein paunch thee hain" [Now, (I) will tell you an entertaining story through which (you) will learn how circumstances and lack of education/talent can illicit painful troubles] (21). For modern readers, this phrasing may evoke the common phrase "Once upon a time;" it's a similar call to the audience to sit down and prepare for a tale. It would not be much different from someone seeing a friend and saying, "hey, let me tell you about what happened today" or an Urdu travelling storyteller saying something like, "Let me tell you the tale of…;" that Dehlvi's fourth novel and Sarshar's serialized story on Azad both have fasana (tale) in the title is not coincidental. Moreover, the use of the term qissa, which means story in vernacular, may also be a subtle reference to the traditional Persian genre of stories that falls under the category of romance—and that term, romance, can also mean new vernacular languages as it did in the early Middle Ages. Christine Oesterheld claims in "Nazir Ahmad and the Early Urdu Novel: Some Observations" that he "called his stories qissas, and…introduced new content into forms which were current at his time…develop[ing] something entirely new within the existing indigenous forms" though "the content of his work—viz., the

bundle of contradictions which engulfed his time, his society, and his own life—le[d] him unavoidably toward the development of new forms" (27-28).

If one reads Asghari as Urdu, her name conveys an interesting complexity. Her elder sister is Akbari, meaning the great one, while Asghari stands for the small one: "The two names are a brilliant device in Nazir Ahmad's building of his central characters. Akbari never lives up to her name, is never 'great'. Asghari becomes great in her 'small', wise acts" ("Gender and Sharafat" 18). Akbari also invokes religious connotations, as a common refrain in Islam is Allah-hu-Akbar or Allah is the greatest. So, reading Asghari as Urdu means a connection to Islam without being immersed in it, which allows for a more secular and national anthropomorphized presentation of Urdu. Furthermore, throughout the book, Akbari is referred to as the mizajdar bahu (temperamental daughter-in-law) and Asghari as the tahmeezdar bahu (respectful, well-behaved daughter-in-law). Almost every Urdu literary scholar from Ralph Russel to Minault and Minakshi Mukherjee who has analyzed *Mirat-ul Uroos* has referred to this dichotomy that sets Asghari up as the perfect foil to the wayward, uneducated Akbari. This chapter takes this critical discourse one step further, marking Akbari as the old form of Urdu and Asghari as the new, evolving modern version in the post-mutiny era.

One particular plotline is critical in support of this reading. Towards the end of the book, an ashrafi (an upper middle class Muslim family) asks Asghari to tutor their daughter Husnara, a name meaning beauty and exactly the same as the female character of *Fasana-e-Azad*. Asghari refuses on two accounts: she will not leave her household to teach at theirs, and she will not accept payment. She makes a point of stating that other thunkvadaar ustaani (salaried teachers) are available in the city (Dehvli 102). Eventually, Husnara's parents agree to send her to Asghari, whose skill as a teacher attracts other families' interests. She then takes several other young girls under her wing, teaching them not just to read and write but manage household duties from handling accounts to

sewing, cooking, dying cloth, and even valuing jewelry. In this act alone, Asghari become a physical representation of the book, *Mirat-ul Uroos*, which is trying to teach its readers, particularly female ones, these same skills.

Notably, although many young girls in the area want to learn from Asghari, she carefully chooses those from ashrafi households and tactfully turns away those from the lower middle class. This is not a strange or incongruous decision in the world of the book as, at the start of the story before Asghari is married, Akbari is admonished by her husband for socializing with those below her class: daughters and wives of tradesmen like watchmakers. Furthermore, despite Dehlvi's mention of women and nohkhree (job) in the introduction-first chapter, he also underscores his belief that women have much better uses for the knowledge they gain. Asghari's refusal to accept payment and become a worker (naukrani, a word that also means servant) is a deliberate choice to maintain her status as an ashrafi bahu. Reading her as a language woman meants the book is presenting a refined Urdu that appears in a published, tangible book instead of being orally passed through communities. Urdu itself becomes reputably ensconced in a household like Asghari, as the book *Mirat-ul Uroos* was most likely not read in train stations and railway cars in the manner of *Fasana-e-Azad* and other stories, dastaans, qissas that were printed in Urdu newspapers. Urdu, through *Mirat-ul Uroos* is not stripped of her sexuality, but rather that sexuality is hidden and protected behind the closed doors of a middle-class family home. One must also take into account that 8 annas would be equivalent to around 1,600 India rupees or $20 in 2023; while that cost would not have been extravagant by any means for such higher-class families, it would be well outside the budget of lower classes. Urdu has become circumscribed, her waywardly oral behavior, brought under the reins of educated men, not necessarily a praiseworthy act but one that could help it regain a more venerated status in India.

The Urdu language woman Asghari assimilates Western ideals of literacy and education without moving freely in the public sphere. Any public performance of women, even Asghari's

teaching in another household, especially for payment carries with it the sexual undertones of courtesans and prostitutes. The prevailing perception of Urdu did not help matters. Sarangi points to a poem written by the prolific nineteenth-century Hindi nationalist writer Chandrabali Pandey:

> Pandey's feminine narrative of [the] Urdu woman is unambiguously sexual and political. [H]e characterises her decline in terms of the loss of feminine beauty and sexual power in a woman…Now she is more like a courtesan without a client…She loses her lover/husband (India) to her more powerful and competitively rising rival, Hindi woman. Eventually, the loss of love and beauty is equivalent to the loss of her language too. (290-291)

This portrayal expands on the already detrimental view of Urdu as a courtesan; she is now also not appropriately sexual, i.e. in pleasing her husband (the nation). *Mirat-ul Uroos* further distances Urdu and Asghari from these feminine, sexually charged representations through the masculinization of both. In the same way that Ray argues Bankimchandra Chatterjee infuses his warrior female characters and the Bengali language with masculinity in order to cure the effeminacy plaguing colonial Bengali men, *Mirat-ul Uroos* attaches masculine characteristics to Asghari in order to cure the effeminacy and derision plaguing the Urdu language.

The book overlays this masculinity on Asghari from the beginning. Durendesh, her father, addresses as if she is and has been the head of the household, not her older brother Khairandesh Khan. His first letter to her upon her impending marriage is addressed to his *beta* (son) Asghari instead of using the more fitting term *beti* (daughter). His second and final letter to his daughter opens with the salutation "Burkhurdaar Asghari Khanam" (281).[153] The adjective burkhurdaar literally translates to son, the term connoting a young man with spirit and courage. Even in the twentieth-first century, Urdu speakers rarely apply this term to women.[154] As linguist Scott Kiesling argues, "We can see then, that as address terms are used in actual interaction, they can challenge

dominant gender ideologies" (101). Kiesling is referring specifically to gender roles, which Durendesh is challenging. He writes to his daughter as one may expect a father to write to his son. Minault's work underscores the uniqueness of his address: "Blessing a woman…or honoring a girl or woman with a male title, are special characteristics of *women's discourse*. This is not self-deprecation…but rather indicates that one's own life is important only in relation to others: the male on whom the woman is dependent" (*Learning* 121, emphasis mine). A father would not ordinarily speak in this manner, and the term's appearance in a published work is quite radical.

An excerpt of the letter reads:

> It can hardly have escaped your notice that out of all my children I have been particularly drawn towards you; and I do not write this claiming any gratitude for myself; on the contrary, *it is you*, who by your own helpfulness and cheerful obedience, have secured a place-not in my heart only, but in that of everyone. Since you were eight years old, you have taken the whole burden of my family upon your head…And whenever I have happened to go home on leave within these years, it has rejoiced my heart to notice your excellent management of the house. (Ward 57, emphasis mine)

In this challenging of gender roles, Asghari starts to obtain power usually relegated to men.

One of the ways Asghari is further masculinized and empowered is through her letter-writing. The book introduces the letter as a masculine endeavor with Durendesh writing one to his daughter towards the beginning of *Mirat-ul Uroos* as a guide and present for her on her marriage; he is absent throughout the novel due to some work with the British government. Instead of asking for a reply, he simply requests that she read it every day while she navigates married life. She writes anyways, and these letters provide her with agency and access to the public sphere while remaining at home. To settle the family's debts, she writes to her brother to bring home her father-in-law. When the father-in-law reads her words, they have the intended effect of inducing him to return:

"When the Maulavi [father-in-law] read it he was overjoyed" (Ward 90).[155] The book makes no note of her brother and father-in-law speaking, So Asghari's words retain the power of action. If Asghari represents Urdu, then as she gains efficacy so does the language.

In 2013, Asim Karim and Safina Kanwal utilized a questionnaire to discover how less educated Pakistanis relied on code-switching to compensate. Basing their study on Foucault's theory that "language is used to exert power (1998)," they concluded that speakers prefer whichever language holds a higher status in their speech community, so that they often code-switch from a low-status enjoying language to a high-status enjoying language; they add that of 30 participants, women used more powerful, assertive language, thus they code-switched more in comparison to men (1-16). In writing letters, Asghari is not code-switching but, in a similar manner to the Karim-Kanwal experiment, she is utilizing a form of communication that holds a higher status in the way less educated Pakistani speakers shift from their mother tongue of Punjabi, for instance, to Urdu, which they view as existing on a higher rung on the nation's linguistic hierarchy. Similarly, Asghari often switches from verbal communication (feminine) to written communication (masculine), the latter being more influential.

Similar to other colonial-Indian scholars, Vanita Ruth describes how nineteenth-century Indian female communication was typically oral.[156] Minault, across several works, also discusses how *begamati zuban* (female speech) usually occurred across balconies and other female-dominated spaces, such as house courtyards. However, as *Uroos*' narrative consistently illustrates, Asghari's written words are far more instrumental in resolving issues than her spoken ones, perhaps specifically because they, in their very existence, reflect the power men held during this century. Her letters recall her father-in-law to the home when it is laden under the debt Mama Azmat has accumulated through her treachery. They also assist her husband in finally procuring a job; before that, when she and other family members try to verbally convince him to alter his prodigal ways, he remains

adamant in ignoring their pleas. In short, Asghari uses a masculine form of communication to help resolve domestic affairs. Furthermore, because she writes these letters within her in-law's home, she remains in a safe, respectable place even as her words enter a more public domain. Minault writes, "Women exercised power, both as individuals and as members of the group, to the degree that decisions made in the private sphere-the women's realm-influenced the fortunes of the family in the public sphere, dominated by men" (*Learning* 21-22). Yet, in Asghari's case, her decisions are often not made in the private sphere. Although she may not move in the public sphere, her letters work as proxies, constantly mobile and impacting the public/political sphere.

One particular scene of letter writing works to correct skewed perceptions of women partaking in this activity.[157] Asghari regularly corresponds via letters with her father and brother. The act is so incongruous with Indian society's—not just Muslim and Urdu-speaking communities—predominant ideas of Indian women's literacy that Mama Azmat, a servant, and Asghari's mother-in-law both become suspicious: "Letter after letter is despatched [sic] to her father's address. What other business is there between them of such importance unless it be her going away?" (Ward 72). This suspicion is characteristic in general but here, since it is aimed at the act of writing, it draws attention to the fear of women behaving licentiously if allowed to be literate. The speed with which the mother-in-law and even her son, Asghari's husband, believe the letters to be conspiratorial mirrors societal biased, patriarchal views on literacy. The scene and dialogue read as satire, harkening back to the humorous yet slightly condescending, judgmental, and firm tone Dehlvi utilizes in the preface and the introduction-first chapter of such outdated and outmoded ideals held by Muslim, Urdu-speakers of all genders.

Mirat-ul Uroos pushes back against the disparaging, unruly feminization of Urdu through masculinization, thus creating a new language woman and recasting Urdu as the literary language for the middle- and upper-classes. This Urdu, like Asghari, is not frivolous: "She never appears

irresponsible, or casual, not to say unthinking or carefree" ("Gender and Sharafat" 19). This idea that this form of Urdu can be both entertaining and educational—not just one (oral stories or poetry) or the other (official court documents or speeches)—is enhanced and further strengthened in Dehlvi's next book, *Banaat-ul Naash*.

The title refers to the constellation, the daughters of the bier or the mourning maidens, the three stars in the handle of the Big Dipper. References to this particular constellation are not new in Urdu or Farsi, as one of Ghalib's couplets also mentions these stars. This collection of stars has an Islamic history as well with the Arabic Ka'id Banaat-ul Naash referring to the very last star in the handle of Ursa Major and the second brightest, indicating it is the chief or principal mourner. The book is not a lament of any sort, however; rather, the title refers to scientific studies and knowledge. Although this is the second part of a trilogy, Dehlvi published it with the words, "*Mirat-ul Uroos* ka doosra hissah" (The second half of *Mirat-ul Uroos*) directly underneath the title. The preface-introduction is brief; the three pages mostly rehash the story of the previous work, its characters, and Dehlvi's continued support for women's education and why it is imperative for the Muslim community and its households. The book begins with the singular phrase: "Husnara kee badmizajgi aur shararat" (Husnara's bad temperament and mischievousness) (5). Shrewd readers will recall that Husnara was the daughter of an upper-class ashrafi Muhammaden Muslim household in the same neighborhood as Asghari, who took on the tutelage of the young girl.

For the purpose of this chapter, the book is not conducive to extensive analysis. Although Asghari is the main character, the book follows Husnara as she expands her knowledge, talking not only with Asghari but also others. In one particular scene, she asks her grandmother (nani) about diseases and not only how they can be contagious but how the first men and women dealt with contagious diseases in terms of spread, preventions, and the cures; Delhvi's next book, *Taubat-un Nasuh*, gives an added weight to this conversation as it set during the cholera pandemic in Delhi. No

plot really exists in *Banaat-ul Naash*, and it functions more like an entertaining version of a textbook, where knowledge is shared on topics from math to science and is presented to the reader through conversations between Husnara and the women in her life, particularly Asghari, her ustaani (teacher). Husnara is a fascinating character only in that she is woman who is from a high-class ashrafi household but is allowed by her parents not only to leave her home before marriage—even if it's just to the home of Aghari's in-laws in the same neighborhood where Husnara lives—but to do so in order to become educated. In this, she gains an independence that even her teacher Asghari does not possess. Husnara then represents a shifting in the thoughts of some of the ashrafi Muslim community and certainly those of Dehlvi and the Aligarh movement who consistently advocated for women's education and how it could be obtained outside the home, without women attending schools and colleges like men. If Husnara, like Asghari, represents the evolving Urdu woman, then here is one who can, prior to marriage, perform publicly—albeit in a very restricted manner—without a connection to prostitution. Here then is a spark, an answer of how to embrace sexuality while retaining respectability.

The last two pages are also of note when Asghari gives Husnara advice in a gathering of women a few days before her former pupil is to be married. Asghari's words quickly turn into a plea to all to think carefully about their lives and actions and are punctuated with exclamations points, uncommon in Urdu writing of the time where questions marks, periods, and exclamation points were rare and dashes marked the ends of sentences or completed thoughts. The tone and word choice mirrors Dehlvi's introduction to *Mirat-ul Uroos*, where he firmly encourages Muslim men to educate their wives and daughters while also insisting that they make an attempt to better understand why expanding knowledge is important and how it can make it easier for them to raise their children and run their households. The fourth last paragraph of the book is a perfect example of this didactic appeal to readers and what makes it all the more intriguing is that Dehlvi allows a

woman to speak these words, whereas Mirat-ul Uroos ends with the words of Asghari's father, Durendesh Khan, who is a narrative representation of Dehlvi in the story. In this particular paragraph, Asghari conveys the ideas Dehlvi's introductions and his books have been espousing:

> Tumharay dil mein jab ajeeb taree kay khayalaat ghuzar tay hongay kay yah kya horaha hai aur kya hoga! Magar apnay khyalat koh zara oonchi nazar ko tahrah aur agay barwah. Soncho and samjho kee baat toh yeh hai kay dunya kya cheez hai. Kiss liyay hum yahan aayein hai. Kya hum kar rahain hai aur anjaam kaar kya hona hai. Jiss taraha tumharay maikay rehnay key din pooray ho chukay, har chaks kay wastay ek din who bhi hoga kay uss kay mudat hayaat tamam hojayange [Strange thoughts must be passing through your heart about what is happening and what will happen! But you should set your thoughts and sights at a higher level, and you should advance and develop them. Think and understand what the world really is. Why we are here. How our actions will have consequences. In the same way that your days with your parents are now over (your single life), every person will experience a day when their worldly actions are complete] (158).

As in *Mirat-ul Uroos*, in this book, *Banaat-ul Naash*, Asghari remains the calm, refined, married woman spreading knowledge to women and throughout the Muslim community and not just to women.

Some debate exists among scholars, Dehlvi's contemporaries, friends, and colleagues, such as G.E. Ward and Mirza Baig—and even the author's account in conversations and the preface to *Mirat-ul Uroos*—on why he wrote *Mirat-ul Uroos*: for entry into the 1868 Government of North-West Provinces competition, calling for books in Urdu or Hindi suited for educational or simply for his daughters to have something engaging, entertaining, and yet appropriate and instructional to read. The truth is probably a bit of both. His promise in the afterword of *Banaat-ul Naash*, the follow up to *Mirat-ul Uroos*, that he will write another book as soon as time and responsibilities allow gives some indication of the increasing popularity of his fiction, even outside the Muslim Urdu lingual

community. The first two of Dehlvi's fiction publications gave Bibi Urdu a new purpose and light, a language meant to help others and one that could be worthy of the nation; she becomes Ustaani Urdu, a teacher, not a courtesan or madam.

The Battle and Balance between Tradition and Modernization in *Taubut-un Nasuh*

Reading *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash*'s Asghari and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Husnara as a developing, shifting language woman converts Bibi Urdu to Ustaaani Urdu. She teaches and, perhaps in spite of the novel's efforts, still carries with her the undertones of sexuality, especially with Husnara travelling to a person's household to whom she is not related to become educated and Asghari handling a variety of difficult domestic situations and often acting independently, even when she asks the men in her life for advice. When Asghari discovers Mama Azmat's treachery (the head servant who has been stealing from the household and putting it in severe debt), her mother-in-law bemoans that no woman can deal with this issue properly. Asghari, however, mobilizes a retaliation with her cousin, Tamasha Khanam's help. When Asghari's mother-in-law laments that Tamasha is only a woman, Asghari responds, "No doubt Tamasha Khanam is a girl, but I made it all thoroughly certain, and I have every confidence" (Ward 85). Asghari and Tamasha, with minimal help from Tamasha's husband are successfully able to remove the threat of a lawsuit from those who are owed money. As a woman, Asghari resolves a serious, legal issue without depending on a man. As Urdu, Asghari represents a language gradually transforming and learning her strengths.

This evolution of anthropomorphized Urdu is abruptly truncated in Dehlvi's next publication, 1877's *Taubut-un Nasuh*, which was published five years after 1872's *Banaat-ul Naash*, released after a gap of just a few years from *Mirat-ul Uroos*. The first two books of the trilogy, within the story and Dehlvi's prefaces, encourage women to take charge of their education and present instances of women reading on their own and using that knowledge to protect and advance

themselves and their families. The entirety of *Banaat-ul Naash* is about one woman teaching another a variety of topics, not just reading, writing, or managing a household. *Taubut-un Nasuh* is a noticeable and dramatic shift from this empowerment of Urdu and the Urdu language woman.

The titular character is a man, Nasuh, the patriarch of an ashrafi family household; he shares two daughters and two sons with his wife. Where the previous two books encouraged women's reading and even writing, even admonishing those who saw women writing letters as a means to commit adultery or engage in other non-Islamic, immoral actions and temptations, here, women's reading is brought under the strict control of men. The book revolves around an ashrafi (aristocrat) Muslim Indian man and his family who live in Delhi during the cholera epidemic. They have avoided the disease raging through India until Nasuh falls ill at the narrative's start. Feverish and fearing his death, he dreams that he is in God's court, in which the Quran is law. He is found wanting, for as a comfortable, well-off man, he is not quite a practicing Muslim anymore, apart from reluctantly performing the obligatory five daily prayers. His detachment from religion has also led his family astray. When he wakes after the fever breaks, he is determined to begin life anew as a pious man. A devout Muslim before her marriage, his wife Fahmida quickly agrees to this change in lifestyle. Together, the couple educate their children to become followers of Islam. The youngest daughter, Hameeda, is quick to change, covering her hair and praying on time. The elder children are more obstinate. The adult son, Kaleem, constantly clashes with his parents, particularly his father, in matters of reading materials and religious commitments. The married daughter, Naeemah, mother to a baby boy, is even worse. While Kaleem presents logical arguments against his parents' requests for an alteration in habits and mindset, Naeemah throws tantrums like a spoiled child. In the end, both children turn towards Islam. Naeemah returns to her married home and continues her life as a religious Muslim wife and daughter-in-law. Kaleem also changes his mind as he returns home from battle on his deathbed. The narrative concludes with his death.

Urdu has changed in subtle ways as well. The tone of *Mirat-ul Uroos*, in the preface, the first chapter-introduction, and the chapter that introduces the story are injected with a playful tone even when Dehlvi reprimands ashrafi men who don't properly educate the women of their household and the women who don't ask to be educated and expand their knowledge the way his daughters did. However, the first words of *Taubat-un Nasuh* read:

> Ek bars Delhi mein hayza kee baree saqt wabah aayi. Nasuh nay hayzah kiya aur samjha kay mara chahta hai. Yaas ki ilm mein uss ko mohqazza aqbuth tasuvvar banrah. Doctor nay uss kho khwab aur dua dhi thi. So gaya toh wahee tasauvvar usko mohish ban kar nazaar aaya [One year in Delhi the cholera came and took severe hold. Nasuh fell to the cholera and thought he would die. With this knowledge came desperation and thoughts of the afterlife. The doctor gave him dreams (presumably through medication) and prayers. When he slept thoughts manifested as fear and hopelessness in his dreams] (8).

This opening to Nasuh's story differs from the ones to Asghari and Husnara because it is grounded in a historical event. The year 1817 marked the first Indian cholera epidemic of the 19th century. Linked to British soldiers, it impacted them and civilians with increasing outbreaks during periods of unrest, specifically the 1857 mutiny. Furthermore, the narrator is third-person omniscient and distanced from the reader while the one in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash* directly addressed the audience at the start of each story and also listed the purpose of the story. Here, the introductory paragraph simply sets up the story.

Scholars and historians such as Sheikh Abdul Qadir as well as Dehlvi's friends and colleagues like Mirza Baig and G.E. Ward have stated that Daniel Defoe's 1715 *The Family Instructor* was the inspiration for this book. Parallels between the first part of Defoe's novel, "Relating to fathers and children" and that of *Taubat-un Nasuh* are immediately apparent, such as repetition of bismillah-hir-rahman-nir-rahmin that already opens the preface; in the other two books, this Islamic

phrase is not repeated as a heading and only appear before the prefaces. This subtly grounds the book in Islam just as Defoe's overtly discusses the duty of parents to teach children Christian principles and ideals. The rest of *Taubut-un Nasuh*'s themes has some significant similarities to Defoe's, especially in the patriarch making mistakes while mostly teaching but also occasionally learning from his children. From the title to the tone, this book is much graver than his previous works with *Taubut-un Nasuh* translating literally as "The Repentance of Nasuh." The more formal tone also eradicates the threads of Urdu's oral tradition and history that were enjoyably interwoven into the other two books. It is perhaps an overcorrection, a presentation of an Urdu that isn't assimilating certain Western ideals but more significantly emulating Western texts, writing, and philosophies, while simultaneously struggling to alleviate fears of the Muslim community by further circumscribing Muslim women's literacy within the male purview and even appealing to Hindus. In short, it appears to be an attempt to fashion Urdu into a language of everyone's liking and preference. It is in many ways a manifestation of Robin Lakoff's claim in the afterword for the 2017 collection of her career's work, *Context Counts: Papers on Language, Gender, & Power*: "*Language creates and is created by the self* and at the same time creates and is created by community" (381, emphasis mine).

The preface of *Taubut-un Nasuh* clearly engages an audience beyond the Muslim community, something that was evident but subtle in the introduction of *Mirat-ul Uroos* and mostly lost in Dehlvi's exposition on women's education and his beliefs on the responsibilities of the Muslim community to support that endeavor. In *Taubut-un Nasuh*'s preface, besides quoting verses from the Quran, Dehlvi also includes an English idiom to summarize the main theme: "It is, therefore, as the English proverb 'Charity begins at home' puts it, an individual's first duty…to educate and improve his family…After these relatively smaller responsibilities come…the responsibilities of educating and improving his neighbours [sic], his co-citizens, his compatriots, and then all of humanity"

(Naeemuddin 5).[158] Although the book revolves around characters reaffirming and discovering their Islamic faith, Dehlvi explicitly addresses all possible readers. In the preface, he further elaborates how similar Hindus and Muslims are as he compares *namaz* (Muslim form of prayer) to *puja-paat* (Hindu form of prayer) and *roza* to *barat* (Muslim versus Hindu form of fasting). He ends these comparisons with an assurance that all readers may learn from and enjoy *Taubut-un Nasuh*. He states that although he has modelled the characters after a contemporary middle-class Muslim family, their experiences can be those of *any* middle-class Indian family (Naeemuddin 8).

Urdu literary scholars from Meenakshi Mukherjee and Ralph Russel to Ruby Lal, Ayesha Jalal, and even C.M. Naim and Aamir Mufti discuss the dichotomies and character foils present in Delhvi's works, such as Akbari versus Asghari in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and Nasuh versus Kaleem. The general consensus in academic discourse is that Nasuh represents more traditional teachings; he advances a more conservative Islam, which is also why he prefers Urdu texts that are educational versus those Urdu publications—in the form of qissas, dastaans, or poetry and prose—that may mention or even allude to same-sex love, physical love, or even reference the poetry of the famous Ghalib. The poet was quite controversial at time and once responded to a British officer's question of "Are you Muslim" when he was caught gambling that he was only Muslim by half and the other half was kafir. Kaleem, in contrast, represents the ashrafi youth who like to read but need guidance on choosing appropriate reading material. The story seems to side with Nasuh as Kaleem comes to agree with his father's viewpoints on his deathbed even though his books were burned by Nasuh. Unlike *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash*, traditional ways seem to win out—and this battle, the chapter argues, plays out on the field of Fahmida, the wife of Nasuh, the Urdu language women struggling to find a space between the traditional (Nasuh) and the modern (Kaleem).

It is perhaps not a step back in the evolution of the Muslim women but certainly a moment of reflection, a course-correction, where Urdu is stripped of her originality and sexuality as Fahmida

is. Although the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is problematic as it fails to account for female sexual experiences and induvial agency while elevating the male sexual experience above all others, it provides an answer as to why Fahmida as Urdu is so desexualized and powerless in this work. He argues against the "repressive hypothesis" in stating that the Victorian age did not repress sexuality but rather allowed it to manifest in authorized manners, such as through the use of specific vocabulary, and that sexuality is a construct, built on the foundations of power and pleasure. In explaining that power in relation to sex and sexuality, he states "We must at the same time conceive of sex without the law, and the power without the king…power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (77, 92-93). That is the potential issue with Asghari and Husnara; they suddenly have unbridled access to power first with their literacy then their independency in financial term and, in the case, of Husnara even physical mobility, as Foucault argues, "where there is power, there is resistance" (93). So, as Asghari and Husnara increase their power, they increase their sexuality, and it must be controlled and, once again, brought under institutions, which in this case are Muslim men even liberal ones like Dehlvi. Meanwhile, in the 1990s, American philosopher Judith Butler critiqued Foucault's work when she argued that power in modern societies is not a creative force leading to emancipation of gender and sexuality but rather a repressive one. In *Taubut-un Nasuh*, it is repressive, and Foucault's arguments provide no escape from this power that he says is always present. Butler provided an escape hatch, redefining gender not as a passive and natural state of being but rather an action, a choice, a redistribution of power that takes into account individual and female agency, which Foucault mostly ignored. Merging these two theories with Robin Lakoff's work on language, gender, and power provides an avenue to read Fahmida/Bibi Urdu as maintaining some power and sexuality even in such an oppressive state and rupturing the control of men.

Through these lenses then, this section scrutinizes a scene of reading and censorship in *Taubut-un Nasuh*, one that overtly contradicts the independent way in which Asghari and Husnara gained and shared knowledge. As Anindita Ghosh claims, "[F]or the male reformers, allowing the women to navigate the world of knowledge, unchaperoned, was tantamount to losing control over their beings. Women had to exist as surrogates, in need of continuous supervision" (*Power in Print* 225). This scene offers male guidance (tradition) as the answer to controlling female education (modernity) and retaining the power Foucault mentions; the heavy-handed supervision is so severe that it reasonably provides support for the British view of oppressed Indian women. When Nasuh and Fahmida discuss the real Persian book *Gulistan*, he reminds her of its contents: "Remember…how I used to blacken with ink several lines in the book ahead of your lesson? There were even some whole pages, which I was forced to hide by pasting plain paper over them" (Naeemuddin 138). Scholars such as Chatterjee, Lal, and Ghosh anxieties and concern about Western-educated Indian men retaining control over women's education is clear in scenes like this. Fahmida attributes her husband's censorship to a benign cause: as a beginning reader, she assumed she would be unable to read those blacked-out portions. She never considers that if she could not read them, the redaction would be entirely unnecessary. Her lack of curiosity illustrates a deference to male/husband's decisions that is unsettling. It highlights the extent to which Fahmida depends on her husband to navigate her thinking. When she remembers him censoring almost a quarter of *Gulistan*, he proclaims that, for another woman or girl reader, he would have blacked out more than half of the contents. He is not only regulating his wife's access to materials but manipulating her into believing that she is receiving an honor in being allowed to read more than other woman.

It's entirely possible this scene was written to appease ashrafi families, particularly men, and the maulvis (Muslim priests) who may have balked at the independence and level of literacy women enjoyed in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash*, for as Partha Chatterjee argues, Indian nationalists'

answer to the women's question was not "a total rejection of the West…[i]t was not a dismissal of modernity; the attempt was rather to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project" (*Nation* 122). So, *Taubut-un Nasuh* is perhaps an endeavor to create an Urdu woman that can stand for the nation, appeal to all leaders, and yet not upset the Muslim male sensibilities of ashrafi families, a herculean task.

In 2017, Lakoff wrote "language is the symbolic representation of the human need to express ideas and emotions, to persuade and to achieve intimacy and distance, power, and equality," and she further sees "language as a revealer of human motives" so that "[t]o ignore context was to drive meaning out of linguistic description…to view language as a string of phonemes produced without reference to speakers' needs of proclivities" (375-376). The proclivity here to raise Urdu's status while simultaneously controlling it and women through language is clear. Apart from the above example, the Urdu is not as easy and straightforward as that in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and even *Banaat-ul Naash*, which discussed complex academic topics in mostly simple-to-understand language for those from ashrafi households. Instead, the first three lengthy chapters of *Taubut-un-Nasuh* discuss the history of cholera and diseases before setting Nasuh in his dream, which takes place in a court. The setting is interesting, but the language is dense, most likely geared towards those who already have some knowledge of history, law, and literature. Even simple words are rife with implications.

For instance, after awakening, Nasuh concludes he'll need help changing his family and their wayward behavior. The heading that starts that chapter includes these two concluding sentences: "Bibi say mahqaraiee khwab bayaan kiya aur aslahi khanadaan kay liya uss ko apna madadgar banaya" (To his wife, he narrated the troubling dream and for the conversion of the family he made her his helper) (27). Madadgar as a word choice to describe Fahmida's role indicates her as someone he respects and cherishes but not a partner or equal, someone who is someone slightly below him, who can follow orders and commands but not act on her own. In fact, although the chapter is

headed with this mention, sort of as a chapter summary, he doesn't think of his wife as someone who can help but rather someone he needs to reform like the rest of the family:

> Aqir yeh dil mein khayal aya key salah kay liya bibi say bahter koi zada nahin aur khuda ko kuch iss khandan kee falah hee manzoor thi kay Nasuh nay bibi ko parah likha bhi liya tha. Jab Nasuh kah naya naya biya hua…[n]ayi nayi kitabein jo aurton kay wastey jari huwee thi, Nasuh nay sab ko bahut shauq se dekh tha aur uss ka dil iss baat ko maan gaya tha kay aurton ko likhnay parnay mein….muzmar hai. Chunachay usnay baaz kitabon mein sey baaz muqamaat dilchasp bibi ko parah kay sunaya…bibi nay bhi iss ko tasleem kiya kay aurton kay liya parnah bohat mufeed hai…meeyain sey parnah shuri kiya tho chaar, paanch mahheenon mein Urdu likhnay parnay lagi
>
> (Finally, the thought came in his heart that for reformation no one will be better than his wife, and god must have known and accepted this family that Nasuh had made his wife literature. When Nasuh had recently married…he would with much interest look at new books released for women and his heart finally accepted that teaching women to read and write was to give life to a hidden talent of theirs. As such he would read out certain excerpts of certain books to his wife…she also agreed that reading and writing is beneficial for women…starting to read with her husband, within four to five months she was reading and writing Urdu on her own) (33-34).

One of the sentences uses vague language, making the struggle between patriarchal control and women's agency murky. "Nayi nayi kitabein jo aurton kay wastay jaree huwee thi" translates to "New, new books that for woman were created" and can mean either that these books were for women to read or that they were simply on the topic of educating women. This is the first instance of censorship though not as severe and as blatant as the one mentioned earlier. Nasuh not only chooses which parts of which books he shares with her, his conviction that education for women is

necessary seems to be what motivated Fahmida rather than it being her own decision. Still, Fahmida does start reading and writing on her own, but it is a very limited agency, restricting her in a way Dehlvi's other female characters thus far in his books were not. Apart from reading only those texts that her husband approves and gives to her, she is also oddly constricted within her home. Whereas Asghari moved freely in her home, including up to roof to bring her father-in-law or husband tea or sweets, Fahmida usually remains in female-spaces, such as rooms with her daughter. She only enters her son, Kaleem's room, when Nasuh says she may have better luck at convincing their eldest son.

Muslim Indian writer Sayyed Mumtaz Ali, who derided Indian Muslim men's behavior in regards to women, wrote, "Men make the mistake of considering themselves superior to women, and then they make the second mistake of considering women incapable of intellectual attainments, and thus deprive them of the education that could prove otherwise."[159] Where Durendesh and the maulvi yield to Asghari's intellect and act on her suggestions, Fahmida only parrots her husband's beliefs; in this manner, the Urdu used in the book is not a new Urdu but a language that parrots received ideas from other works including Defoe. "The anxiety," historian Walter N. Hakala writes, "if it may be termed that, is more a matter of establishing which among the many spoken forms of the language would become the standard for Urdu literary prose" (93).

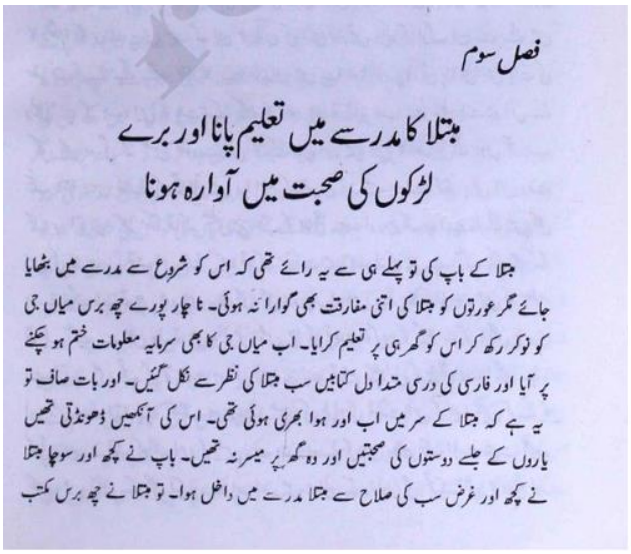
Strumpets and Nurturers Part One: Penning Domesticity in Fasana-e-Mubtala[160]

If *Taubut-un Nasuh* was an overcorrection, a move away from sexuality, then Dehlvi's 1885 *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, released nearly a decade later, is on the opposite end of the spectrum, a defense of sexuality. The plot of the stand-alone book distinctly deviates from the storylines of the trilogy though it still advocates for the education of women and how that can lead to a happier household and married life. However, the educated, literate, main female character is not a housewife but a courtesan who enters the male protagonist's home as a second wife. Although polygyny exists in the work, the book condemns its practice and the male protagonist for engaging in it. In his

introduction, Dehlvi shows he is aware of the impact and fame of his previous, fiction publications. He mentions how they have been translated into seven tongues (English, Bangla, Gujrati, Bhaaka, Marathi, Punjabi and Kashmiri) and nearly 50,000 copies have been printed. Although his intention may be to encourage the sales and positive public reception of this latest book, he frames his success in terms of obligation: he must continue to educate readers. In the preface, Dehlvi presents a clear reason for writing Mubtala's story, though he presents a stronger reproach of the Urdu, Muslim community than the three prior pieces: "During these days, the thought struck me that within the Muslim community idiocy regarding women…and the freedom awarded to men are two major problematic points…since I have done something to help solve one issue (regarding women and education) so I find that providing a solution for the other issue is also imperative" (5).

This chapter further sees Haryali, the courtesan-turned-second-wife, as the third iteration in the evolution of Urdu. The feminine anthropomorphized language has gone from a strumpet in the eyes of the nation to Ustaani Urdu in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash* then a mostly meek, obedient housewife in *Taubut-un Nasuh*, and finally back to a courtesan but one that holds a position of respect. She is the mid-ground, the answer to the anxiety inscribed on Fahmida in *Taubut-un Nasuh* in trying to create a woman and Urdu that is acceptable to all. Haryali will not be universally liked, but her name alone, meaning greenery or abundance, is a return to a more exciting, entertaining Urdu. Her foil is the first wife, Ghairat begum, a woman from a respectable household with familial connections to Mubtala. The word Ghairat can mean honor, self-respect, and modesty. Yet, her lack of education and literacy leads to an unhappy, uneven household, where Mubtala is constantly struggling with her lack of knowledge and outdated ideals, such as folk medicine for the children when they are sick as compared to the courtesan, second wife Haryali who simply calls a doctor when she notices her stepchild has a fever.

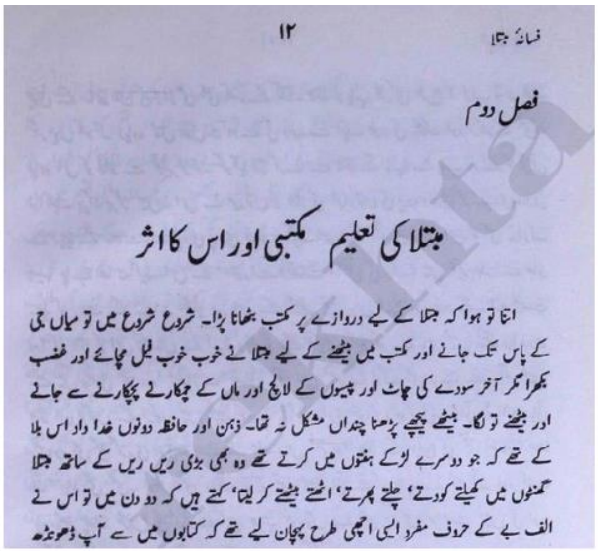
The Urdu here has also changed to a combination of the previous works. Each chapter has a heading, combining the straightforward sentences of *Banaat-un Naash* with the couplet formatting used in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and strictly avoided in *Tabut-un Nasuh*:



فصل سوم

مبتلا کا مدرسے میں تعلیم پانا اور برے
لڑکوں کی صحبت میں آوارہ ہونا

مبتلا کے باپ کی تو پہلے ہی سے یہ رائے تھی کہ اس کو شروع سے مدرسے میں بٹھایا جائے مگر عورتوں کو مبتلا کی اتنی مفارقت بھی گوارا نہ ہوئی۔ نا چار پورے چھ برس میاں جی کو نوکر رکھ کر اس کو گھر ہی پر تعلیم کرایا۔ اب میاں جی کا بھی سرمایہ معلومات ختم ہو چکنے پر آیا اور فارسی کی درسی متداول کتابیں سب مبتلا کی نظر سے نکل گئیں۔ اور بات صاف تو یہ ہے کہ مبتلا کے سر میں اب اور ہوا بھری ہوئی تھی۔ اس کی آنکھیں ڈھونڈتی تھیں یاروں کے جلسے دوستوں کی صحبتیں اور وہ گھر پر میسر نہ تھیں۔ باپ نے کچھ اور سوچا مبتلا نے کچھ اور غرض سب کی صلاح سے مبتلا مدرسے میں داخل ہوا۔ تو مبتلا نے چھ برس مکتب



۱۲ فسانۂ مبتلا

فصل دوم

مبتلا کی تعلیم مکتبی اور اس کا اثر

اتنا تو ہوا کہ مبتلا کے لیے دروازے پر مکتب بٹھانا پڑا۔ شروع شروع میں تو میاں جی کے پاس تک جانے اور مکتب میں بیٹھنے کے لیے مبتلا نے خوب خوب غیل مچائے اور غضب بکھرا مگر آخر سودے کی چاٹ اور پیسوں کے لالچ اور ماں کے چمکارنے پچکارنے سے جانے اور بیٹھنے تو لگا۔ بیٹھے پیچھے پڑھنا چنداں مشکل نہ تھا۔ ذہن اور حافظہ دونوں خدا داد اس بلا کے تھے کہ جو دوسرے لڑکے ہفتوں میں کرتے تھے وہ بھی بڑی ریں ریں کے ساتھ مبتلا گھنٹوں میں کھیلتے کودتے، چلتے پھرتے، اٹھتے بیٹھتے کر لیتا، کہتے ہیں کہ دو دن میں تو اس نے الف بے کے حروف مفرد ایسی اچھی طرح پہچان لیے تھے کہ کتابوں میں سے آپ ڈھونڈھ

Like *Taubat-un Nasuh*, Dehlvi situates this book in a specific time period but not necessarily the story. While Nasuh falls ill to cholera that was impacting many Indians and British, Mubtala is simply a man that happens to be living in the 19th century; the date of the plot, unlike *Taubut-un Nasuh* but similar to *Mirat-ul Uroos* and *Banaat-ul Naash* can be changed without much difficulty. The preface also speaks of British officers, one who is specifically Sir William Muir, handling education across India. The second sentence of the text after bismillah-hir-rahman-nir-rahim (not repeated at the start of the story unlike in the tale of Nasuh) and the heading of Deybachey (Preface) laments the spread of English, followed by the next sentence: "Hindustan ki mulki zabaan toh bin bathnay sey rahi qaum…jabhi bhi tarqee karay gee apni hi zabaan parnay likhnay say" [Hindustan's national language has stayed alive in its people…whenever the nation (and its people) succeed, it will be through writing and reading their mother tongue] (4). He goes on to say this was the philosophy of Sir William Muir, who was the lieutenant governor of the North-West provinces of India and the writer of *The Life of Mahoment*, a book on the pre-Islamite history of Arabia. He further writes that

Muir, who passed away in 1819, when Dehlvi was still in school, had a love for the nation's mother tongues and was always dutifully attempting to preserve it—and that his works were so important that they were translated published in seven languages: English, Bengali, Bhola, Ghujrati, Marathi, Punjabi, and Kashmiri. While thinking on this book and its import, he realized many women even from upper class households could not read it: "Inhi dinnon mujhey yeh khayal aya huwa tha kay Muslimanon kay masharat mein aurton kee jahalat aur nakah kay baray mein mardon kee azadee dobara naqs hai" [(In these days the thought occurred to me that in Muslim communities, women's idiocy and repression while men are free is once again a blemish (on our society)] (3). This book then is meant to continue addressing women's education but also shine a light—he uses the word roshnas, meaning to illuminate—on problematic men.

Although Haryali's elevation from a *bazari aurat* (prostitute or, on occasion, escort, in simple terms) to a housewife is not the main plot point, which is the problem resulting from men keeping women uneducated and of entering into a polygamous marriage, it plays a significant role in the narrative. A spoiled boy named Mubtala is not educated in a madrasa until he is almost in his teens. The women of his family coddle him and try to keep him at home for as long as possible. His father finally forces him to receive an education. Mubtala does not excel at school, partially because he keeps the company of rebellious boys. Once he becomes a man, his parents marry him to Ghairat Begam.[161] The parents and other family members arrange the marriage, inducing Mubtala to agree only because he has reached the age that he should have a wife. Neither the family nor Mubtala take any other facts into consideration. The upshot of this is that although Ghairat is quite beautiful, their personalities do not match. After they have children, he remains unhappy and discontented. One day he comes across a prostitute who fascinates him. Through compliments, Haryali wins him over, and he marries her in secret before bringing her home as a servant.[162] Eventually, Ghairat finds out the truth. Moving to a home above Ghairat's, Haryali runs a cleaner, more efficient household, while

also taking better care of the children and Mubtala. However, the discord between the two wives reaches a point where Mubtala leaves both homes. Eventually, he dies alone, without his wives or children. The narrator concludes the book with the words that the readers should pray for Mubtala but that, in essence, he deserved God's punishment for his misdeeds.

In *Mirat-ul Uroos*, letter-writing allowed a housewife to respectably enter the public domain. The opposite occurs in *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, where a letter from Haryali to Mubtala precipitates her movement from a public sphere into a domestic one. Unlike the previous three Dehlvi prose works, *Fasana-e-Mubtala* is the first to propel an economically lower-class Muslim women into the middle-class strata. The true power of a literate woman manifests in one act of Haryali writing. After meeting her a few times, a married Mubtala decides that he must stop seeing her to avoid temptation. Left with no other recourse, Haryali writes to him, denouncing him as *bewafa* (traitor) and asking if she has made some mistake. She concludes, "Come to me for a few moments and explain your truth. I'm no curse that I will attach myself to you. You are not some fallen [man] that you will slip. And if you are not agreeable on meeting me here then I can without too much time or trouble come to you" (100). Haryali relies on logic. If she appeared at Mubtala's door, either he, another family member, his wife, or even servants would refuse her entrance. Threatening her appearance is enough to convince Mubtala to meet without putting herself at risk, a shrewd move on her part.

The direct language here is critical. In Lakoff's 1977 essay, "You Say What You Are: Acceptability and Gender-Related," a rethinking in some ways of her seminal work *Language and Women's Place*, she characterizes the idiosyncratic women's language in America as 1) non direct, 2) containing emotional expression and 3) being conservative; this is different from the neutral or standard language men use (*Context Counts* 92-93). Although she is referring to English spoken by women in American in the 1970s, her approach to gendered language is applicable here as well, in

particular her assertion that "linguistic deviation from the norm is but one form of social deviation from the norm…[w]e expect women to talk a certain way, which is only partially damaging; but we also expect of women that they will behave a certain way…acceptability in language is directly related to social and psychological perceptions" (*Context Counts* 94, 98). The conclusion of Haryali's letter does not perhaps upset social norms; a courtesan, used to entertaining men not just with sexual favors, but the reading of poetry and conversation, would be more direct than other women and deploy veiled threats to earn a place within the household. That is what makes her writing so powerful; she is who she says. That *Fasana-e-Mubtala* makes no attempt to hide this from the reader or to make her demure but lets her shine as a courtesan is effective. If Haryali is Urdu than she shows how tradition, the poems and other more feminine language she shares with Mubtala, seamlessly intermeshes with the more modern, masculine parts of Urdu like speaking of education or writing letters. Ghairat, the first wife, then is an outmoded Urdu, one stifled with tradition and outmoded ideologies. However, even as the narrator admonishes Mubtala, the first wife, Ghairat, is generalized to represent traditional Muslim wives:

> It is true that the reason Ghairat Begam and Mubtala's hearts did not match was Mubtala's beauty worshipping and vagrancy. But some fault is Ghairat Begam's too that she did not make any attempt to win Mubtala's heart. Her thoughts were similar to those thoughts housewives often have that when her mother and father have given her hand into her husband's hands then that's it, I have to do nothing more on my part. Now the husband has the duty to earn and bring money home, feed me, clothe me. He should take care of me. His job is to do all these things but her job is to allure and entice him. Because every man has a unique personality and specific enticements. But if a wife so desires how difficult is it to find out what he appreciates? (118)

The argument here opposes the intelligent domestic woman in *Mirat-ul Uroos* and even *Taubut-un Nasuh*. This representation of a housewife feels wholly unrealistic. Even the discourteous, insolent Akbari (Asghari's sister and foil) never expected her husband and in-laws to do everything. *Fasana-e-Mubtala* sets up a logical fallacy where Ghairat is a caricature of outmoded traditions and Haryali is the modern woman who can run a household.

Yet this satirical representation is perhaps necessary to usher in a new Urdu the way those suspecting Asghari's letter writing in *Mirat-ul Uroos* had nefarious, sexually deviant purposes were shown as foolish. Similarly, *Fasana-e-Mubtala* rejects *purdah* and polygamy. As Minault states, "the ideal purdah society was hermetically sealed respectability (father's home to husband's house in a palanquin and from the husband's home to the grave on a bier)…[b]ut the realities of purdah existence were considerably more porous," such as when women spent time on rooftops talking to each other, visiting neighbors, sharing food, etc. (*Learning* 120). Delhvi's fourth book castigates both forms of purdah, sealed and porous. In narrative, secluded women only learn what their parents teach them and, sometimes, as in the case of Ghairat, this education may be lacking. The subtle implication to readers is that if Ghairat was allowed to read books like *Mirat-ul Uroos*, she would know how to effectively manage a household, much like Haryali does later in the book. This is a retort against Indian Muslim men, who often married prostitutes as their second wives while denying their first wives access to education. They claimed that the worldly knowledge and limited literacy a courtesan possessed made her not only better at domestic tasks but an intellectually enticing companion.[163]

If Asghari is the masculinization of Urdu and Fahmida the remainder after poetic aspects are eradicated, then Haryali fully embraces Urdu as a courtesan's language in order to rehabilitate it. Haryali as Urdu behaves in accordance with Indian and British expectations; she is a manipulative courtesan past her prime. She never changes her personality, simply her title from courtesan to

housewife. While Indian society painted Urdu as a fallen woman, the Hindi language took on the stature of a maternal, symbolic entity. Haryali, both wife and prostitute, is exceptionally maternal towards her husband and his children. Despite her background, she is suited to step into a maternal role within the domestic sphere. Carrying this logic forward then, Urdu possesses maternal qualities, through its use in courts, legal documents, and prose literary works, that render it suitable for national discourse even though it has carried the stigma of courtesan.

Bharti Arora claims that "the emergent nationalist consciousness was suitably garbed in the revivalist/traditional folds of the maternal in order to contest both the onslaught of colonial modernity as well as the recasting of indigenous patriarchy" (9). Dehlvi's books illustrate the weakening of patriarchy's grip on Indian women. In the case of Haryali, she is nothing if not a modern woman, though marriage and domesticity casts her into a maternal role.

Equality?

Oesterheld writes, "Nazir Ahmad himself never thought of his books as novels. It was only much later that Urdu literary critics started to discuss the questions of how to classify his writings…But Nazir Ahmad was well aware of the fact that he wanted to create a completely new type of book…that…presented everyday characters and was shaped according to a particular didactic intention" (29). She believes he succeeded in this endeavor of creating something new. While his fiction women advocate for domestic bliss in the Muslim, Urdu-speaking household through obtaining knowledge and becoming literate, their evolution as the anthropomorphized Urdu through four of Deputy Maulvi Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's first publications show a gradual acceptance of self and sexuality, the very thing that purportedly was keeping Urdu from becoming a national language. Dehlvi's books show that being both is possible.

Dehlvi, however, was not the only Urdu writer who penned fiction prose pieces supporting women and subverting prevalent Indian gender ideologies. His contemporary Rashid ul-Khairi

wrote and published myriad works. His fiction expounded upon the advantages of society educating women and the irreparable harm resulting from Muslim men upholding and participating in polygyny.[164] Dehlvi's publications were perhaps more successful in engaging a wider audience as they tended to conclude happily and he made some effort to engage a wider audience, not just Muslim men. Whereas his female characters used their wits to resolve problematic situations and lead peaceful, successful marriages, Khairi's female characters often wallowed in grief and drank themselves to death.

Similar to Dehlvi, Khairi published pieces that offered readers, particularly men, an insight into women's language. Both writers' publications contained entire scenes of women speaking to each other. Although some of this language was earthy as is fitting when dealing with begamati zuban (women's language), these discussions also highlighted women's ability to think logically and use language to share important ideas among one another. Such publications were also another blow against British perceptions of Indian women. Nineteenth century writers and scholars of Bengali literature, Reverend James Long and William Carey presented women as vulgar and using rustic, filthy, idiomatic speech. Anindita Ghosh provides a rebuttal: "In reality, however, 'women's language' or meyeli bhasha was nothing but an integral part of a shared domestic speech system, till it was sought out, segregated, and marginalized for want of refinement by the educated male in the early nineteenth century" (*Power in Print* 226). While the British scholars and Ghosh are referring specifically to Bengali women and literature, meyeli bhasha (women's speech) is not exceptionally different from the begamati zuban (women's tongue) of Urdu speaking women in Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, etc.[165] In making the main characters female and then having them engage in dialogue with men and other women, writers like Dehlvi and Khairi partially desegregated women and their linguistic choices. In 1945, the Muslim Pakistani Bengali politician, diplomat, author, ambassador, and United Nations delegate Begam Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah wrote in her critical analysis of

Dehlvi's books: "To say that the 'characters' are living is an understatement. Though they speak the choice and idiomatic Urdu of old Delhi, *they also speak the universal language of humanity*. They are products of the time, yet the belong to eternity; types like Asghari and Akbari…of Mahmuda and Husn Ara…of Fahmida and Nasuh, of Mubtala…can be found in every country and in every age" (43, emphasis mine).[166] Ikramullah taps into the universal appeal of these books, something that Dehlvi also mentioned as an end goal in his introductions: to educate and appeal to all readers, regardless of gender, language, and religion.

While Ikramullah and other scholars' praise of Dehlvi's work is well deserved, one cannot deny that the narratives contain numerous instances of misogyny and patriarchal authority. Furthermore, while these narratives permit men like Mubtala and Nasuh to read about or engage in sexual desires, women must remain pure. As Barbara Metclaf claims, "[T]wo different streams of tradition, one cosmopolitan, the other local, both posit women as, above all, disorderly and a stimulus to disorder…the Shariat tradition…focused not so much on women's own moral and intellectual life as much as on control of their sexuality" (*Islamic Contestations* 103). Writers like Khairi and Dehlvi often use Islamic teachings to bolster their arguments for improving women's position in society. In Dehlvi's works, women's sexual natures seem to refuse to remain suppressed, regardless of the author's or readers' intentions.

Such writings are important steps forward in the fight for pushing against Indian women's oppression and male imposed mental and physical restrictions. Fiction prose works with authoritative, intelligent characters like Asghari and Haryali encourage women to deploy their reasoning in all matters and have opinions that are disparate from their husbands', fathers', and the outdated traditions predominant in nineteenth century Indian society. In 1987, Nancy Armstrong theorized that the rise of the domestic woman in novels created a new vocabulary, so that "[l]anguage…was dismantled to form the masculine and feminine spheres that characterize modern

culture" (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 469). Dehlvi's works blur the lines between these dominant spheres and how language works in each. Still, no matter how like men these women become, they do not step over the domestic threshold. They achieve equality with men only on a cerebral level. In all other ways, they remain dependent on men either through feminine ideas of propriety or the need for money.

The next chapter, with *Umrao Jan Ada*, will establish how women become completely autonomous. Umrao Jan is the first female character who is both sexual and cerebral, penning an entire published work, *Junun-e-Intezar*.[167] Krupa Shandilya mentions that "[f]eminist historians have suggested that the historical archive for women is located in the construct of home, as women write their narratives through and to the home" (*Madness of Waiting* 28). This theory holds true for Dehlvi's female characters who are inherently linked to home. However, Umrao Jan, as a courtesan, has no stable domestic sphere. The respectable *zenana* (women's quarters) of Asghari, Fahmida, and Haryali's homes are different places from a kotha (brothel): "This liminal space [kotha] is both a physical structure – the not-quite respectable 'home'- and an abstract construct of femininity" (*Waiting* 30). Roy and Sila hold similar views: "[I]n the conbook of a nineteenth century Indian novel in Urdu, like *Umrao Jan Ada*, Muslim maledom tends to reinscribe the space of its private self outside the conjugal veil. Herein emerges the kotha, as radical female site" (42). Umrao Jan exists somewhere between zenana and kotha. When she settles down, her home is located in the midst of a sharif (respectable) locality. Aware that society will not accept her profession, she does not make her presence known. The next chapter explores how her liminal status and literacy afford her independence and respectability society usually denied Indian women, especially courtesans.

[126] Unless otherwise noted, all transliterations and translations are mine.

[127] Mufti, Aamir R. Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures. Harvard Press, 2016. pg. 117.

[128] Barabra Metclaf. *Islamic Contestations: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press, 2004. pg. 103
Note that the title Begum is a politer way of saying Madame (of a brothel) or prostitute.

[129] A struggle that continues today. Take note of the jalebi marketing campaign mentioned later in the introduction of this chapter.

[130] Sengupta, Papia. *Language as Identity in Colonial India*. Duke University Press Palgrave Pivot, 2018. pgs. viii, 54.

[131] A quick perusal of the website Goodreads will show a researcher that many Urdu students, specifically in Pakistan, still read many of Dehlvi's works, such as *Mirat-ul Uroos*, *Taubut-un Nasuh*, and *Fasana-e-Mubtala*, as part of their education. Many of the copies I was able to obtain during my research were actually published as textbooks with publisher recommendations of at what levels school should use them, such as A or O levels. A quick discussion with my parents and some relatives who grew up and received their education in Pakistan informed me that they had read Dehlvi's works in school. The staying power of his books through the centuries, particularly in school systems, is impressive, comparable to that of Jane Austen or William Thackeray, at least in Urdu education.

[132] I have mentioned the Aligarh movement in the introduction to some extent. This movement aligned itself with the British as well as their ideals and morals. Many followers harbored different ideas of how much of English sensibilities should be incorporated into Indian ones. However, most seem to have a consensus on women's education and how women needed to receive better, more extensive education.

Ulama are a body of Islamic scholars well versed in Quran and hadiths, thus in Islamic law.

[133] Unless otherwise noted, I use G.E. Ward's 1899 translation of *Mirat-ul Uroos* for the English translations I present in this chapter. I find his translation to excel in capturing both the tone and meaning of the original Urdu in Dehlvi's 1868 publication of *Mirat-ul Uroos*.

[134] The modern term "mansplaining" is particularly applicable here.

[135] Jennifer Dubrow and Gail Minault's numerous works have made great strides in bringing such struggles to the forefront of academic discussions regarding women's movements in nineteenth-century India and beyond.

[136] Numerous scholars cite this quote. My reference is the following: Hasan, Mushirul. *A Moral Reckoning: Muslims Intellectuals in Nineteenth-century Delhi*. Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 159.

In 1869, the first year of the awards, *Uroos* won the 1000 rupee prize and Dehlvi received a watch as a personal token of appreciation from the lieutenant-governor; the government purchased 2000 copies for institutions and made recommendations for it to be included in school syllabi (Naim 126).

The other two books of this trilogy (1872's *Banut-un Na'sh* and 1874's *Taubut-un Nasuh*) also received prizes, though the one for *Na'sh* was significantly lower than the ones Dehlvi received for *Uroos* and *Nasuh*.

[137] This northern Indian state began under British rule on April 1, 1937 as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh before becoming Uttar Pradesh in 1950 after Indian independence in 1947.

[138] Nawab Sikander Begam is one of the educated, Muslim Begams of Bhopal who held a political position from 1860 until her death in 1868. These Begams were royalty and the title nawab stands for native governor. The word Begam stands for a high-ranking woman, often one in a position of political authority. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, Bhopal State was a princely state in India. After the 1737 Battle of Bhopal in which Marathas regained control of the land from the Nizams, it became a British princely state in 1818 until India and Pakistan gained independence from Britain in 1947. After that, the Indian government considered it an unrecognized state.

[139] Within the nineteenth-century Indian community, most people respected and honored these women. Queen Victoria, perhaps, is the only exception as mostly proponents of the Aligarh movement- such as Dehlvi- were the ones to praise her to this extent.

Ward, G. E., translator/transliteration. *Mirat-ul Uroos*. By Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi, Henry Frowde, 1899.

[140] The Begams rode horses, travelled on trains, made speeches, and attended British government durbars. They educated their daughters and granddaughters while also maintaining lives as wives, mothers, and pious Muslims. Reigning from 1868 to 1901, Sultan Jahan Begam of Bhopal is perhaps the most prominent example of such women. While conducting affairs of state, she also maintained strict purdah for most of her life pointing to her case as evidence that women in purdah could be well educated" (Minault, 25).[140] While Dehlvi's works focus on women having authority within the household, he cleverly has readers imagine a link to famous, real educated Muslim women who respectably wielded power in the public and political sphere Indian society usually reserved for men.

[141] Maulvis (various spellings of this word) are educated Muslim men who are doctors in or teach Islamic law. As of 2020, this profession is still male dominated, so the sarcasm of 19th century women as shown in this quote is, unfortunately, still applicable to some extent in the 21st century.

[142] As in the introduction of *Mirat-ul Uroos* so too in other introductions to novels such as *Taubut-un Nasuh*, Dehlvi addresses the Muslim community but makes a point to structure his arguments to be applicable to all Indians and often tries not to mention specific languages either. As one may see in the block quote, he does not specifically state whether he is referring to Muslim or Hindu women. He also uses the term vernacular without listing a specific Indian language. In the introduction to *Taubut-un Nasuh*, he very specifically states that although the family in the story is Muslim, the story could just as easily be that of any middle-class Indian family. Dehlvi seemed to harbor a desire to promote women's education and modern ideals past gender, religious, and linguistic boundaries.

[143] Geraldine Forbes, Gail Minault, Ruby Lal, Mohammad Asaduddin, Shamsur Rahman Faroqi and numerous other scholars make a similar argument.

[144] Manan and David cite T. Rahman who, in 2005, studied the 6 major and over 59 small languages present in Pakistan (206).

[145] Pakistan was gained its independence from the British on August 14, 1947, at which point it split off from the India.

[146] I witnessed this phenomenon first-hand when I visited the Pakistani cities of Islamabad and Karachi in 2017 and then again in 2019 searching for Urdu books for my research. Most booksellers not only had extremely limited Urdu stock but also did not even know where or how to procure Urdu books. The Urdu translation of Harry Potter, for instance, was nowhere to be found in either street stalls or larger, established booksellers in Pakistan's elite and local malls as well as the airport. Some of these Urdu translations and Urdu books are available through online sellers such as Amazon but for exorbitant prices. I was able to procure the Urdu translation of *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* only because a Canadian University had it in their library.

[147] "#UrduPoeatry." *YouTube*, uploaded by Kashmir Cooking Oil, 12 August 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8bhDtd_7Bg

[148] @UILKashmir. "We threw a few people an #UrduChallenge and asked them to simply have a conversation with us in Urdu. Did they succeed? Let's find out!" with video. *Twitter*, 1 Aug. 2017, https://twitter.com/UILKashmir/status/892370662379147264

@UILKashmir. "We came up with #UrduChallenge and asked people to count till 100 in Urdu. Did they succeed? Let's see!" with video. *Twitter*, 2 Aug. 2017, https://twitter.com/UILKashmir/status/892646562505121792

@UILKashmir. "We came up with an #UrduChallenge and asked people to recite the Urdu Alphabet. Did they complete the challenge? Let's find out." with video. *Twitter*, 4 Aug. 2017, https://twitter.com/UILKashmir/status/893423101236719616

[149] During the nineteenth century, the British made Lahore the capital of Punjab, an Indian region.

[150] The implication is that these women, who are of a lower working class and disrespectful in their speech and manner of dress, may also be prostitutes or connected to them in some fashion.

[151] Even in the 21st century, joint family households are quite common among South Asians residing in India, Pakistan, and even Western countries, such as America. While Akbari's request for a private home is rude for the nineteenth century, the greater issue is the way in which she makes the request, in a manner more suitable to a child throwing a despicable temper tantrum than an adult.

[152] While the direct translation of "admi" is man, I see translate it to person, following the stylistic and linguistic approach in English where man can and does often stand for humanity.

[153] I write second and final because the readers are only permitted access to the contents of two of Durendesh's letters to his daughter Asghari. The narrator mentions several other letters, but the readers are not privy to these.

[154] I make this declaration on the basis of having spoken Urdu with a wide variety of people in America, Europe, Pakistan, and India over the past thirty or so years of my life. I also use as a reference numerous Pakistani dramas and Bollywood movies that have entered the market over this time period.

[155] This requires some explanation. Asghari's letter begins with how happy and content she is in her new home. The assumption is that her father-in-law is not overjoyed by the household problems related to Mama Azmat but Asghari's praise of the home and her married life in all other aspects.

[156] Vanita, Ruth. *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India, 1780-1870*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, introduction.

[157] My introduction covered many ways in which Indian society viewed women writing letters as salacious and problematic. Please also see the Fasana-e-Azad section of my first chapter for information on how another female character deals with this detrimental Indian societal view.

[158] Unless otherwise noted, I use Wajid Naeemuddin's 2008 translation of *Taubut-un Nasuh* for the English translations I present in this chapter. I find his translation to sufficiently capture the tone and meaning of the original.

Dehlvi, Nazir Ahmed. *The Penitence of Nasooh*, translated by Wajid Naeemuddin, Oxford University Press, 2008

[159] Minault, Gail. *Gender, Language, and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History*. Permanent Black, 2009, pg. 45.

[160] Part two appears in chapter three: "Individuality Usurps Equality."

[161] This Begam is not the same as the begam honorific attached to the Begams of Bhopal. Although the word is the same, in Ghairat's case, it means simply woman.
[162] Although the book does not mention this overtly, Mubtala has not acted in accordance with proper Islamic law. His friends and family praise him for, at least, marrying Haryali before engaging in any physical contact with her. However, Islamic law states that a man must ask and receive permission from his current wife before he can enter into a nikkah (marriage ceremony) with another wife.
[163] In "The Widow, the Wife, and the Courtesan: A Comparative Study of Social Reform in Premchand's *Sevasadan* and the Late Nineteenth-Century Bengali and Urdu Novel," Krupa Shandilya explains this phenomenon, while also referencing Umrao Jan Ada, the character and prose work.
[164] His works, like the trilogy *Subh-e-Zindagi* (Day of Life), *Sham-e-Zindagi* (Evening of Life), and *Shab-e-Zindagi* (Twilight of Life), did have plots, but they were more or less the same. The characters were also more flat than round, acting in similar manners, and having little distinction that made them individuals rather than metaphors for other Indian women. Still, his publications were not only prolific, but the public received them well. Most works were closer to the length of novellas than novels, which is perhaps another reason for their popularity as they were cheaply priced and a quick read.
[165] For reference, Bengali is language spoken by Indians residing in the country of Bangladesh (founded in 1971), the East Indian state of Bengal, and many other regions across the globe. To speak or be Bengali does not denote a certain religious affiliation.
[166] Mahmuda is Asghari's sister-in-law. The Husn Ara mentioned here is not the same as *Fasana-e-Azad*'s main female character. This Husn Ara is a young girl whom Asghari teaches towards the end of *Mirat-ul Uroos*.
[167] The author is actually Rusva, who also wrote *Umrao Jan Ada*. However, he published the novella *Junun-e-Intezar* under Umrao Jan's name. I will discuss the implications of this further in the next chapter.

Chapter Three:

Plural Sexuality: *Umrao Jan Ada*'s Infusion of Grammatical and Lexical Masculinity in Urdu

"Har chand ghaur kiya shab vah roz
Dunya ka talismaat samajh mein nahin ah-tah"
"Ponder with each moon, each day
The world's wonders remain incomprehensible"

~*Umrao Jan Ada* (1899) (transliteration and translation from Urdu mine)[168]

In 1899, when Muhammad Hadi Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* entered into India's literary market as arguably the first Urdu novel, Urdu—and its majority Muslim speakers—had already spent a century being detached from the nation. This was the result of a series of etymological and colonial vicissitudes, beginning with the British, especially East India Officers, assuming in the early 1800s that Urdu was an adulterated Muslim version of the proper national Hindu language of Hindi, also titled Hindustani and Hindavi.[169] The only major noticeable difference, at that time, was that the two groups wrote the same language using separate scripts, but the British bifurcation altered both so that Hindi became an amalgamation of Sanskrit and Hindustani while Urdu became a version of Hindustani with an influx of Persian poetic roots. The 1857 Indian Mutiny that led to the formulization of India as a British colony enhanced the distancing of Urdu from its nation. As colonial scholars and historians such as Aamir Mufti note, the failed uprising and the sociopolitical struggle to claim the nation led to non-Muslim Indians, especially Hindi-speakers, inscribing feminine characteristics on Hindi and Urdu, with the former exalted as a virtuous, nurturing woman fit to represent the nation and the latter a wanton, rebellious one barely fit to exist within India's borders.[170]

Literary efforts to reclaim the Urdu "language woman" as not hypersexualized or savage—a representation that the British, especially nineteenth-century British women, often extended to all Indian men and women, with the Urdu-speaking Muslim woman residing at the lowest rung of this

post-mutiny hierarchy—began most notably in 1868.[171] As noted in the previous chapter, that year, Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi published the first Urdu prose work: *Mirat-ul Uroos*. Dehlvi and other Muslim and non-Muslim Urdu writers' works in the latter half of the century thus attempt to regain a foothold of respectability for Urdu and they achieve this by using 1. female characters, who function as allegories for the language 2. emulating the novel form to align Urdu works with British literature, admired by British and Indians alike and 3. a denunciation of poetry, since non-Urdu speaking Indians often associated Urdu with what they deemed to be vulgar poetry.

All three approaches rely on an erasure of the image of anthropomorphized Urdu as debauched and overtly sexual. Urdu prose works of the second half of the 19th century are an attempt then to show that "she" was suitable for more sophisticated and respectable forms of writing, like novels, particularly in the realist genre that had become quite popular in England and India. Dehlvi's titular character in 1877's *Taubut-un Nasuh*, for instance, denounces then burns Urdu poetry. Abdul Halim Sharar boldly titles his works, like *Flora Florinda*, novels, often placing the word on the title page as if to preclude any skepticism regarding their literary form. Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* advances these Urdu literary efforts as it emulates the genre of realism: the idealism and tenderness prevalent in the British romanticism period are mostly absent; it has a plot with a clear beginning, middle, and end; and is set up as a biography, which, in essence, is the epitome of realism, noting the harsh realities of life. Yet, it simultaneously includes poetry written by male characters as well as the titular female character challenging the idea that only prose could help reestablish Urdu as a respectable language. The work opens with Rusva and Ada taking great pleasure in reciting and extolling the virtues of poetry and poetry-writing. From the first page, *Umrao Jan Ada* unapologetically cements Urdu in its poetic lineage. In fact, the text almost revels in it, as the readers are initially introduced to the main characters through one resounding personality trait: their love, respect for, and appreciation of Urdu poetry.

Ada is educated and entirely independent, relying neither on men nor other women; yet, as a prostitute devoid of any desire to enter into a married state, she cannot truly function as a parallel to either the new Muslim woman in nineteenth century Urdu literature or the literary British new woman. The previous two chapters discussed how most Urdu female characters are either married or seeking to become married; the one exception is the outspoken and financially independent Muslim inn owner Bibi Allah Rakhi in Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad*—until she too becomes married to a respectable nawab in later editions, ensconcing her within domestic respectability. In discussing the new literate Indian women who came into existence towards the end of the nineteenth century, Partha Chatterjee states, "The 'new' woman…was subject to a *new* patriarchy...[which] bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination" which was different from Western patriarchy but also from traditional Indian culture, so that she was required to be educated and not coarse or vulgar, specifically middle-class women (*Empire and Nation* 127 &132). Urdu works' female characters like Husn Ara, Asghari, Fahmida, and even Haryali use their education to push against and weaken patriarchal control. Yet, even within these fictional worlds, patriarchy and men still delineate the boundaries of their freedom. Moreover, as if setting restriction upon themselves, these women limit their acumen to running a better household without truly entering the public sphere, with the exception of their written letters.[172] In many aspects, they remain subordinate to men and in Indian society, as religion and domesticity suppress the reach of their mental and physical mobility. In contrast, Umrao Jan Ada's profession permits her to move more freely. She is neither beholden to a husband or family nor the idea of marriage, despite falling in love repeatedly.

As for British female characters who were no longer tied to the hearth and worked for their livelihoods, as teachers, nannies, or missionaries, they still sought husbands and domestic bliss even as they competed against men for a place in the workforce and other public realms of society.

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre may turn down marriage with clergyman St John Eyre Rivers and support herself through her work as a nanny, but she still marries and has a baby with Rochester by the end of the novel; *Villette's* fiercely independent Lucy Snowe, who eventually establishes a school on her own much like Dehlvi's Asghari does in *Mirat-ul Uroos*, hesitatingly agrees to marry the irascible Paul Emanuel someday. As for Jane Austen's characters, the headstrong Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* doesn't reject husbands altogether, but ones obtained for convenience rather than love; *Persuasion*'s smart, self-sufficient Anne Elliot, who can manage finances and household affairs much better than her foppish father, desires to become the beloved wife of Captain Wentworth, a feat she manages by the novel's conclusion. Conversely, Ada tries married life almost flippantly before denouncing marriage altogether, saying that she much prefers to remain entirely unattached. In fact, she's so disconnected from domestic bliss that she doesn't have a permanent home, simply purchasing a new abode and establishing her home wherever life, politics, and her whim carry her.

If Ada is an allegorical representation of the Urdu "language woman," as this chapter argues, then, on the surface, she appears as marginalized as the language and its speakers, without roots or respectability. However, this chapter offers an alternate reading: Ada functions as a celebration and complete acceptance of Urdu's seemingly corrupted past and present in 19th century Indian society despite Urdu beginning as a national language often used for court and other official documentation.

Umrao Jan Ada begins her life in a respectable home. However, later on she is kidnapped by her father's enemy and thrown into a debasing profession. By the end of the novel, Umrao Jan Ada's arc is completed as she returns to her home as a performer, who does not hide her past and doesn't even try to stop her brother from trying to kill her. She accepts herself and her life for what it is and after her brother tells her to simply relocate, she settles comfortably in a home of her own purchased through her life savings. The plot of the novel can be read as not just making the best of

poor circumstances but thriving just as Urdu does since *Umrao Jan Ada* is still read and made into movies today. Reading Ada as the femininized Urdu, she is not a disruptor or outlier but rather the culmination in the progression of Indian Urdu works to assimilate and normalize a new type of sexuality and a new Indian, Muslim woman. The Urdu language woman is an interpellating figure, who, through prose writings, allows for a pressure release of repressed sexuality butting against societal norms, leading to a redefinition of social mores. Ada then presents a possibility of a new social convention for Urdu, one that embraces its sexual poetic roots while branching out to actively engage with more modern, education-based literary prose introduced to India through the British. *Umrao Jan Ada* and its titular character create this new standard on the dual planes of genre and language.

Decoding Ada and her language as embodying an empowered Urdu aligns with Gail Minault's notions of begamati zuban (Indian woman's language) as counter-intuitively impolitic yet commanding. It also reflects Robin Lakoff's seminal work on woman's powerful speech patterns in 1972's "Language and Woman's Place." Bothe Ada and her particular use of Urdu represents a new model for creating sexual pluralism in language, which encourages a fluidity between previously rigid structures of masculine and feminine grammar and lexicon. This opens up new avenues for Urdu, in which its image of overt, unruly sexuality is not immoral but progressively modern. Linguist Scott F. Kiesling describes language quite simply: "Language is not a collection of words, but rather there are rules…if a human is using it, the language has a system" (*Language, Gender, and Sexuality* 9). He further states that "[g]ender is a system of categories and language is a system for categorization" with "[t]he social gender system actually originat[ing] in language" (58). He expands, "In both vocabulary and grammar, then, languages do lots to encode gender binaries. Once created, they tend to end up asymmetrical, reflecting and helping to perpetuate the power imbalances in the gender

ideology of a society…categories are used frequently by speakers in interaction and it is here that they have their greatest power" (65).

The previous chapters stipulate that Urdu texts and their male characters often seek to balance and somewhat correct this asymmetry through the attachment of masculine titles and honorifics to female characters or through women speaking in direct, factual discourse often attributed to men in the 19th century and now.[173] While this may undermine Urdu's established gender binaries like verb conjugations dependent on the subject's gender, they have a limited chance of making a significant influence even within the Muslim communities and Indian society given their circulation only in the private sphere. For instance, Durendesh writes his daughter a letter in *Mirat-ul Uroos* in which he praises her and not the eldest child, her brother, for supporting the family and managing the house. In *Fasana-e-Azad*, Husn Ara gives a speech in support of women writing letters and factually discredits Indian male, especially Muslim fathers and husbands', fears that letter writing will lead to sinful, extramarital affairs. Yet, the speech is given to a room full of women. Conversely, after being stolen from her parents' home and sold to a brothel in Lucknow, Umrao Jan Ada spends the majority of her life in the public sphere. Current events such as the 1857 mutiny directly affect her; the revolt, for instance, causes her to flee from Lucknow back to her childhood city of Faizabad. In comparison, other Urdu female characters remain on the margins of society and within the household, with little of outside politics and events directly impacting their daily lives. In *Fasana-e-Azad*, Husn Ara merely waits for Azad to return from fighting in the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War; *Mirat-ul Uroos*' Asghari extent of involvement in the public realm is helping her husband get a position in the army. The nineteenth-century Indian cholera epidemic beginning in 1817 sets the story of *Taubut-un Nasuh* in motion only because Nasuh, the male head of the house, contracts a fever and, upon recovering, sets about reforming his family to become better Muslims. On the other hand, Ada is in the thick of things like an Indian or British man, in literature

or, arguably, daily life of that time. Not only does she have a wider range of experiences influencing her thoughts and speech, but her words can also have an impact on a wider range of people.

Umrao Jan Ada exists in a liminal space, coming from a sharif (respectable) background and middle-class family and becoming a prostitute due to kidnapping. She is neither the prostitute turned respectable and competent wife Haryali in Dehlvi's 1885 *Fasana-e-Mubtala* nor a woman of complete disrepute like the clever Khanum Jan, madam of the brothel where Ada briefly works and resides. Furthermore, finding a way to leave the brothel, she quickly transforms into an independent self-supporting person. She also defies juxtaposition with other courtesans, for she possesses not only a higher level of literacy and analytical ability but also applies her knowledge to survival outside of merely enticing and titillating an audience.[174] Apart from 1899's *Umrao Jan Ada* and 1899's *Junun-e-Intezaar* (Madness of Waiting), she also appears as a minor character in another work 1896's *Afsha-e-Raaz* (The Revelation of Secrets).[175] Although she appears only briefly in this earlier work, she is still a distinctive character: "Ruswa differentiates Umrao Jan from other singers not only through her beauty and her exceptional talent in music, but also through her intelligence: she does not merely parrot poetry, but is able to relay its nuances to a discerning audience" (*Madness of Waiting* 19).[176]

Other Urdu literary female characters struggle towards gender equality and then achieve some form of it on the basis of their education. Ada is the next step in both Muslim women embracing and not being ashamed of their sexuality as well as breaking and restructuring the rules of Urdu and society to carve out a new liberating space even if that space seems to exist solely within the literary realm. Ada's education, literacy, and staunch refusal to bow to or depend on any other person, regardless of gender, allow her to manipulate Urdu and the gender binaries subsisting within it. This manipulation permits her to make precarious the split between genders that is inherently present in any language. Ada's perspicacity and precise control over words leads to her gaining

authority in a society that raises men above women and both above courtesans. Studying recent theoretical shifts in gender linguistics, Heiko Motschenbacher presents this idea:

> While a structuralist approach would see gendered linguistic structures as a consequence of the social reality of binary gender, poststructuralist approaches go beyond a merely reflective relationship between reality and language and highlight the role of language users as active shapers of discursive structures. The question is then not so much who is represented in language (or not) but how people are constructed via language, for example as male, female, or gender-neutral. (*Genders Across Languages* 28)

Applying a poststructuralist approach then to Umrao Jan Ada's character and actions, her literacy makes it possible for her to control the language as well as how language is applied to her. Gender fluidity occurs not only through her use of Urdu but her behavior and, as such, the term gender appropriation is perhaps more suitable to her. She appropriates male influence and their mobility within Indian society, both in public (politics) and private spaces (poetic gatherings and homes).

The way Ada engages with education and what she hopes to achieve from it aligns more closely with the goals of Indian men than Indian women. While Muslim Urdu authors like Rashid ul. Khairi and Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi and the Hindu Urdu writer Sarshar were strong proponents for female education, they simultaneously proposed in their introductions and through their female characters that education was imperative for a Muslim woman because it made her a better daughter, wife, and Muslim; her education, in short, allows her to better serve others, not necessarily herself. Chatterjee does suggest that even this restricted form of liberation does allow women some freedom from patriarchy: "Indeed, the nationalist construct of the new woman derived its ideological strength from the fact that it was able to make the goal of cultural refinement through education a personal challenge for every woman, thus opening up a domain where woman was an *autonomous* subject...It was a purpose which they set for themselves in their personal lives as the object of their will; *to achieve it was to achieve freedom*;" which contrasted with the idea that the Western woman acquired knowledge only to compete against and with men as well as achieving superiority over the previous generation of women and those of the lower classes (*Empire and Nation* 129-130). Ada's aim,

however, is self-growth and refinement, which continually allows her to become better at her job and move through society with authority. It also helps her survive on more than one occasion.

The desire to attain the sort of freedom Chatterjee mentions does not seem to influence Umrao Jan Ada's efforts as she is, in many ways, no longer subject to patriarchal rules and boundaries; she neither tries to rise above other women or escape male governance. When she begins educating herself, her obtaining literacy is a matter of survival, first to become an accomplished courtesan then to live alone without the protection of a man or brothel. Yet, even when learning simply for survival, she takes a keen interest in poetry and the meaning of dense Persian texts. Dissimilar to a Western woman such as *Villette's* Lucy Snowe, she acquires and develops her knowledge not to compete with men but for personal enjoyment and progress. She conducts a solely individual endeavor of the sort in which educated Indian men engaged. Furthermore, unlike domestic middle-class women, her education runs the gamut from refined to coarse and vulgar. While she is able to speak and recite poetry in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, and Persian, she can also comfortably make lewd remarks and jokes, such as those referencing the aftermaths of contracting an STD.[177]

Imperatively, she also builds up her financial security not once but several times after losing her money and jewelry. Often female characters like Husn Ara or Asghari are dependent on men only because of their sense of propriety and their inability to obtain money without a man or entering into a disreputable profession. Ada has a deep sense of propriety and also prays, probably more often than the respectable, Muslim elite Nasuh or his family at the start of *Taubut-un Nasuh*. Her sense of decorum and unique modesty does not, however, regulate her behavior or ability to earn money. Even when penniless, she manages to become financially secure through hard work and resilience. She constructs herself then not as male per se but more so as possessing the same authority and liberty a man would in Indian society: she is not dependent on anyone, male or

female.[178] Her construction of identity through the Urdu language allows her to move beyond struggles of equality. She is independent and powerful, a person in her own right, not a woman defined through the men or people around her. This chapter proposes that she achieves this independence first through oral endeavors for the majority of *Umrao Jan Ada* then through her writing endeavors at the end of the work and in its sequel *Junun-e-Intezaar*.

First a short summary of *Umrao Jan Ada*. The book is framed as Rusva (author and character) writing down the words of an older courtesan, who is casually conversing with him and others about her life during a mushaira (poetry reading/gathering).[179] The book opens with an introduction from him and how he comes into contact with Umrao Jan Ada. The present-day conversation between Rusva and Ada constantly interrupts the narrative of her past. The young Umrao Jan, named Amiran, is set to marry and excited about her upcoming nuptials. In the past, her father swore on the Quran and acted as a witness to Dilavar Khan's thievery. According to her mother, on mainly his testimony Dilavar Khan is sent to jail. Upon his release, Khan seeks revenge. He kidnaps Amiran from her home and sells her to a brothel's madam, Khanum Jan. There, in Lucknow, she changes her name to Umrao Jan Ada and learns how to become a successful courtesan from the age of around thirteen. She begins to care for one of her teenage acquaintances, Nawab Gauhar Mirza, who then becomes her first client. Taking her life's savings with her, she eventually runs away with another man (Fiaz Ali) who shows her some kindness. As they are travelling, Raja Dhyan Singh's men attack them and arrest Umrao. Through her charming personality and quick wit, she quickly becomes the Raja's guest. She recites a poem of her creation, which, in her words, sends the Raja into states of ecstasy. He does not realize that it is her poem until he asks of the poet's nom-de-plume in the last sher and she informs him that it is hers.[180] When she leaves the Raja's fort, she does so freely as a guest with many gifts from him. As she travels, she

speaks with the people she encounters in Persian and Arabic as well as Urdu. She eventually sets up her place of business in Kanpur where she performs for Begams and other noblewomen.

She is then caught in the middle of the 1857 Indian mutiny and discusses the terror many Indians and especially Muslims felt during this time. She travels to Faizabad, where, after some difficulty and perseverance, she obtains a residence and servants before restarting her profession. She performs for a group of women in her childhood home, which she doesn't recognize as hers until three hours into her performance. Her brother, finding out the truth from their mother, tries to kill her but Ada does not fight back. He leaves her unharmed but tells her to relocate immediately away from the city. Settling her affairs, she returns to Lucknow. She has to fight a case against a nawab who becomes too attached to her and claims she is his wife in court. She finally wins the case but only after several appeals and spending large amounts of money on lawyers. She then lives for a short time in the home of a client (Akbar Ali) as a second wife of sorts. Tired of fights with the women in the home, she leaves again to set her own residence and is successful. She ends up settling in Lucknow once more where she overhears Rusva taking part in a mushaira.[181] In the penultimate chapter, the story comes full circle. The book ends with her reading what Rusva has written of her life. She is angry but decides not to destroy the manuscript. Instead, she edits the work, ties up loose ends in the narrative, and provides advice to the readers.

One of Umrao's unique qualities is that despite her profession she professes that she is a practicing Muslim. This notion of her piety is not discordant with her profession as a courtesan. Different from the idea of Sufism or spirituality in which a person's soul is connected to God/higher being or when a poem's speaker's lust is couched in terms of divinity, language presents an unexpected epistemological connection between courtesan and religion as illustrated in Sarah Waheed's work. She examines the Urdu word tawā'if, as "a word that has now come to mean prostitute in contemporary popular speech [but which]is derived from the Arabic term 'tawāf', the

rite of circumambulating the Ka'aba in Mecca" (2014).[182] Ada deep connection with religion is interestingly portrayed most deeply in her poetry, which non-Urdu speaking Indians often labelled as a vulgar form of writing. In several of Ada's shers and regular discourse, she speaks specifically about being drawn to the Kabah, and its pull on her soul. Her views on God and religion are not blasphemous, either, as she discusses her spirituality and faith in a way that would not be incongruous in the twenty-first century. She believes in God and the path He has laid out for her. She proclaims towards the end of the novel that, as much as life and circumstances have allowed, she has been religious and followed her faith. Now, she leaves the judgement of her soul to God. Her viewpoint may provide some explanation as to why even religiously minded Indian readers, of both genders, found Umrao Jan and her story so intriguing: "As a radical outsider, she becomes the most 'accessible' image of an otherwise veiled Islam" (Roy and Sila 41).[183]

Rusva's novel intrigued Muslim readers. Historian Mohammad Mujeeb mentions his surprise upon coming across a particular review: "But what really roused my curiosity was the praise lavished on it by the reviewer, *a scholar of uncompromising orthodoxy and notorious puritanism*" (161, emphasis mine). The religious background of the reviewer convinces Mujeeb to pick up a copy of Rusva's text. Upon completing it, he states that he now understands why the scholar set aside his beliefs: "Umrao Jan Ada was the kind of person whose company and conversation would make things look entirely different" (161). Many contemporary as well as modern reviews and critiques often mention Ada's enchanting nature first and Rusva's writing abilities in bringing her to life second. She is a captivating amalgam of tradition and modernity. Through the figure of the religiously inclined and respectable courtesan, the text offers Indian and British society a less rigid Islam and an anthropomorphized Urdu language woman who can be both sexual and moral. The text is also populated with Muslim characters who are more amenable to modernity, such as reciting ghazals and conversing on worldly matters with a courtesan instead of merely considering her a bauble at a brothel.

This is perhaps because of Ada's aql. Indian society, particularly the Muslim community, attached the characteristic of nafs (self-indulgence) to women and aql (intelligence/good sense) to men, seeing women as emotional and men as rational and cool-headed. Umrao Jan is in full control of her senses with rarely a slip into self-indulgence. Even when she elopes with Fiaz Ali (Fiazu as she calls him affectionately), her decision is based more on future security than love. Although she is certainly fond of the man, his status and the respect he can provide her through marriage are much stronger enticements for the elopement. In the narrative, she claims that her only inducement is that he treats her respectfully and she cares for him. Yet, her actions bely the logical reasoning behind her decision. In fact, Fiaz the man is the one acting impulsively and self-indulgently, running away from his family and responsibilities to marry a courtesan.

Through such character depictions, the text ruptures the gender paradigms prevalent in nineteenth-century Indian society. As Barbara Metcalf asserts, "Muslims did not only question the old cosmopolitan tradition; they also challenged local traditions where, also far from guarding normative Islam, women came to be seen as engaging in regionally shared life stage ceremonies and 'superstitions'…[s]ome traditions explicitly link women to the impulsive and childlike qualities of *nafs*, so that in women's association with regional traditions these two themes are powerfully joined" (103). Subaltern women, specifically the courtesan or widow, were not trapped at home out fear for the honor and respectability. Moving freely in the public sphere, they had easy access to new ideas whereas the daughters and wives of ashrafi household would hear of news and new ideas from the men in their households, as Fahmida learns about publications on women's education through her husband. "Proper and respectable" Indian wives and daughter gained knowledge through their family men.[184] In the case of Ada, as Roy and Sila state, ". . . this transgressive female agency was exploited by such exponents of the nineteenth century as Lucknawi intelligentsia as Mirza Hadi Ruswa, to reconstruct the legitimacy of a 'most proper' Nawabi Islamism within the overall domain

of a foreign ruler, in this case, the British" (41). Ada's female agency constructs a new Islam and a new Muslim woman.

Ada is a rebuttal to both Indian and British constructions of the Indian Muslim women. At the start of her narrative, she immediately acknowledges and rejects popular societal opinions about prostitutes and courtesans. She states very clearly that she did not 1) grow up in an evil or disreputable place, 2) follow the example of a mother or sister who were in the same profession 3) run away from home and had to turn to prostitution for financial support or 4) possess a mad lust for sex and physical intimacy (Matthews 7-8). Such were the dismissive reasons Indian society provided for women entering the profession. Like the Indians, the British held similar views, though they often referred to courtesans as nautch girls.[185] Anindyo Roy outlines how such women captured nineteenth-century British imagination and appeared in English novels:

> Of particular significance is the 'nautch girl'... although representing that pervasive threat to the established racial and sexual codes, she remains as the tantalizing object of male scrutiny, and as a source of incitement and challenge for men...the objectification of women along gender and racial planes is enabled by the discourse of female 'agency'...prompted by the rising women's movement. It meant situating Englishmen and Englishwomen in particular relationship to Indian women...that helped test the boundaries of male power and female agency...this sense of female agency-and with it the possibility for asserting a sexual and political identity outside the patriarchal order-is often inseparable from the mechanisms of male fantasy around which the narratives operate in these romances. These mechanisms manipulate female agency in order to serve the ends of a colonial patriarchy. (99)

The independent Ada then functions as an answer to English and Indian constructs of the courtesan. She defines her identity separate from Indian and British perceptions of performing women. She is religious, educated, a talented performer, and, for the most part, is respected by both men and women in the novel. Her sexuality, despite her profession, falls within "normal" boundaries (i.e. what nineteenth-century society may find acceptable); her narrative implies that, while not a high priority, she would not dislike being married and having physical intimacy with one person, though her mind does change when she finds that she dislikes the way marriage restricts

women and pits them against one another. She also manages to maintain respectability while being feminine and sexual. Her character thus deviates from literary and Indian nationalist conventions of constructing a woman who is either overtly sexualized or extremely pure and desexualized.

Yet, Roy and Sila's critical argument that Rusva exploits Umrao Jan Ada must be directly addressed. Numerous scholars argue that Ada remains an object, particularly one still under the male gaze. This objectifying gaze accounts for Rusva and his friends hearing her story as well the text's mostly male readers. However, Rusva, character and author, does attempt to make amends for this exploitation, if one is to label his writing as such. Ada's words and literal edits of Rusva's work conclude the novel. She then "writes" the sequel, in the introduction of which she states that *Junun-e-Intezaar* is her rebuttal to *Umrao Jan Ada*.[186] She may incite male imagination and lust, but she functions in both texts as far more than an object of desire for men or a point of contrast for Englishwomen. Her literacy and her mobility among the higher classes afford her a respectability society denies to most courtesans. Her manipulation of language and her writing skills defy readings of her as a mere object. Her unique personality also raises questions of her existence and Rusva's writing talent among scholars. If Umrao Jan is real then Rusva has merely copied her life story. If she is fictional then he has created both an engaging, distinct character and a fascinating plotline. Although many scholarly debates have and still occur on this matter, Krupa Shandilya resolves it neatly: "Through interviews with Ruswa's friends and contemporaries and other archival research, Zaheer Fatehpuri has established that the character of Umrao Jan is based on a courtesan by the same, whom Ruswa was well-acquainted with" (*Waiting* 18).

Ada's status as real or fictional makes little difference to an analysis that underlines her independence. Mujeeb states, "She can exist only as an independent entity…Umrao Jan seems to be well protected, first by her strength, secondly, by her culture" (163). Although accurate, this reading of her is not novel. Meenakshi Mukherjee, when analyzing Indian nineteenth century literature, often

espouses the view that writers penned courtesans and widows to compete against British literature. Such women had a freedom comparable to the female heroines of British novels entering India at this time. The chapter argues that the book takes an inimitable approach to the courtesan character. Her independence and freedom are not imposed on her by society. True, her kidnapping forced her into the profession, but she mostly takes control over her life after that and has several chances to—and once does—enter into a married state.

A Reclamation of Voice: Denying Gender Binaries

The cornerstone of the chapter's argument about Umrao Jan Ada representing Urdu and simultaneously disrupting gender binaries relies on her ability to manipulate language. Gail Minault citing William M. O'Barr and B.K. Watkin's 1980 work "'Women's Language or Powerless Language' Women and Language in Literature and Society," states, "Powerlessness in society is reflected in low self-image and deferential speech, be they women, minorities, or others;" she adds that "[t]he growing awareness of the subtle ways in which language puts women 'in their place' has led to a greater consciousness of discrimination of all sorts" (*Gender, Language, Learning* 118). In terms of Rusva's text, Ada appears acutely aware of this discrimination and how Indian society uses it to oppress women. Although she sometimes speaks in a respectful manner to her audience/listeners, she does not use deferential speech.

However, the parameters of deferential speech in Indian Urdu literature are different from those in British English Literature.[187] In the latter, honorifics are utilized as a sign of deferential respect or to create distance. Jane Eyre, for instance, adds Mister to Rochester's name when he is her employer, then drops it when they began a romantic affair. When Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth Bennett, he begins his speech addressing her quite informally as "you," but in his last words as he is leaving after being rejected, he states, "You have said quite enough, *madam*," (Austen 212, emphasis mine). By contrast, in Urdu literature, honorifics can function as marks of affection

and are also parts of common speech, especially amongst male speakers. As Shazia Kousar, posited in her published research on 76 male and 76 female students, Urdu speakers tend to be non-egalitarian, employing polite speech when apologizing to those of higher *and* lower social status than themselves.[188] This similar dynamic repeatedly shows up in Indian Urdu literature of the 19th century. In Ratan Nath Sarshar's 1878 *Fasana-e-Azad*, for instance, Azad and Khoji are friends, the latter at a slightly lower social rung than that titular character; yet, both affectionally and sometimes teasingly refer to each other as آقا (aaqa), which translates to sire or master. In one instance, this occurs when they are half-joking, half-engaging in a semi-serious philosophical and religious discussion regarding food, with Azad eating the fancier, more expensive British food in a restaurant with utensils, while Khoji eats the Indian naans and kabobs with his hands while sitting on a carpet in the street. As they are speaking, a bearded man who seems quite lower on the social ladder than both greets Azad as Sahib (sir) and, Azad, unironically and without sarcasm responds in kind. In nineteenth-century Urdu literature—and even 21st century gatherings where Urdu is spoken—men, friends and strangers of different or similar classes, may refer to each other as bhai sahib or janaab in informal gatherings, while using that same terminology in a more formal setting to address a superior in an office or even on a battlefield. This particular use of honorifics in this interchangeable way between formal and informal is specific to men in Urdu literature—and Urdu culture—with no equivalent amongst Urdu speaking women.

It is through this lens that the example below, where Ada uses Sahib after Khan can be read as a way of marking herself as equal to any man in the mushaira. In fact, many in the text refer to her as Umrao Sahib, a significant term and the use of which is further analyzed at the end of this section. Her words are often that of a person in full control of her senses, someone who is concerned more with aql than nafs, unlike even perhaps the upstart Khan Sahib. Using her aql, she consistently addresses and disrupts male dominance in her approach to poetry. The book opens with a mushaira

in which Rusva and several other high-ranking men are taking part. When Rusva recites a ghazal that rouses Ada's emotions, she cannot resist exclaiming "Vah! Vah!" from her quarters.[189] At Rusva's urging, she eventually joins the male gathering. After that first night, she continues participating in the mushaira. On one particular occasion, when one of the men, Khan Sahib, irately attempts to diminish she recites a sher which results in Khan's retort:

> Kabah mein jah-kay bhool gaya rah dehr ki
> Iman bach gaya meray maula ne khair ki
>
> In the Kabah, I forgot the temple's pull
> My faith was saved, my lord was merciful (Rusva 19).

To understand the authority that Ada conveys here, one must comprehend the original Urdu. She uses masculine verb conjugations, the nuances of which are impossible to illustrate in English.[190] The Urdu word gaya in the first line of the couplet is masculine. A person identifying as male would say "I went" as "mein gaya." A person identifying as female would say "mein gayi." Notably, Ada is not repeating a poem a man has penned. One cannot explain her masculine verbiage here as a simple recitation of a male-written piece. This sher is also not equivalent to that of a male poet penning a piece of rekhti, in which the speaker is always female. Rekhti was often an exploitation of women and their voices. Umrao is not attempting to exploit or imitate men but to simply structure her poetry in a form she finds suitable. Like men she chooses the best form for her subject.

She begins with speaking another sher from this longer ghazal, which includes the above quoted couplet.[191] The men at the mushaira, specifically Rusva and Munshi, clamor to hear the entire piece. She replies that she cannot oblige them: "But I swear that is all I can remember. I have no idea when *I composed it*. Memory fades, and I've lost the wretched manuscript" (Matthews xiv, emphasis mine). Notably, her response is as masculine as the shehr. Ada notably does not apologize here or use qualifiers but instead uses the direct speech linguistic more often attribute to men: "I swear" and "I've lost."[192] Moreover, the ghazal is her composition, a rarity in itself for courtesans

who often repeated poetry instead of penning original pieces. They may have attempted their hand at writing a sher here and there, but they would normally not present this to an audience. At most, they would share this with other women of the household or brothel.[193] More importantly, since she composed the piece, her use of the masculine conjugation of went (gaya) is a deliberate choice. This choice is what Khan retaliates against.

Here, is a brief explanation of the original Urdu text, necessary for an understanding of the repartee to follow between Khan and Umrao. The original novel is written like a drama or script with name tags. So, instead of "Khan Saab kindly said, 'Please continue,'" readers see "Khan Sahib: 'Please continue'" as one might in a play.[194] As such, the text often provides readers the freedom to color a scene or dialogue with their perception of a character's tone and attitude. This ambiguity allows not only for reader involvement in shaping the text and characters but also leaves the interpretation of the narrative quite open. Khan *irately* retorts to Umrao's sher; he *retaliates*. This estimation of Khan's attitude is based solely on how others respond to his words, and the very brief glimpse the text gives readers into his mental state. Rusva interrupts the tête-à-tête between Khan and Umrao in his defense of the latter. He says to Khan: "So your hamley (attacks) have begun…" and cites an idiom that roughly translates to "to each their own" (Rusva 19). The text tells its readers that with a show of arrogant pride, Khan finally responds "Durast (Well-reasoned)" in response to Rusva's defense of Umrao's sher (Rusva 19).

Returning then to Umrao's sher, Khan, upon hearing it, remarks, "Acha mutala kaha hai magar yeh 'bhool gaya' kyun? [(You) have recited a nice introduction, but why this 'bhool gaya']" (Rusva 19).[195] Bhool gaya literally translates to "I forgot" with the masculine conjugated verb. Here is how the original 1899 Urdu text presents her response: "Umrao Jan: 'Toh kya Khan Sahib mein rekhti kehti hoon?' (So what, Khan Sahib, should I speak in rekhti?)" (Rusva 19). Instead of using rekhti, she has used rekhta.[196] The former always has a female speaker while the latter most often has

a male speaker. The original text provides readers with no hint as to Umrao's mental state or the tone in which she delivers this response to Khan. Writer David Matthews attempts to impart some clues in his translation. He introduces this quote thus: "Umrao teased him: 'Why, Khan Sahib!'" (xx).[197] His translation shades the entire scene with a lighthearted jovial tone. However, it would be more apt to see in her response a sardonic retaliation against Khan's attempt to literally control her tongue.

Her response takes a firm verbal stance against rekhti's status and problematic history; as discussed in detail in the introduction and first chapter, rekhti became synonymous with Urdu and was one of the reasons nineteenth-century Indian society anthropomorphized Urdu as a rebellious, crude woman. Making matters worse was Indian society's understanding that the reputed creator of rekhti was an 18th century Lucknow poet Sa'adat Yar Khan Rangin, who claimed to have developed it based on the colorful language of prostitutes.[198] Consequently, the travelled and knowledgeable Umrao Jan is distancing her status and her poetry from both the vulgarity and the demeaning nature of rekhti as it relates to prostitutes and, in turn, Urdu. From the beginning, the narrative portrays Ada as one who is respectful and polite, regardless of her profession. When she cannot keep her mouth from exclaiming "Vah!" in response to Rusva's ghazal, she tells him that she felt sharminda (embarrassed). When Rusva asks her to join the mushaira, she refuses at first on the grounds that it will have too much informality (betakalufi). For Khan to pigeonhole her into rekhti is both insulting and humiliating to Ada. It demeans her not only as a woman but also as a poet. Carla Petievich has noted how rekhti is still missing from most current syllabi and much of Urdu criticism dismisses it as badnaam (disreputable), for it focuses on social taboos and crudeness: "One of the great ironies in all this is that, though narrated by one 'woman' who usually addresses another in intimate terms, existing records indicate that rekhti was recited by male poets (sometimes in female dress) to a male audience…Not only that, but none of the scholars that have mentioned, let alone analyzed, rekhti in

Urdu critical literature have been women" (Petievich 129-131). While Vanita Ruth asserts that rekhti provided new outlets for women's thoughts and forms of love, such as that between two women, she too has trouble detaching men and male control over this form of poetry, a staple genre in Lucknow. In nineteenth-century India, this city was a cultural marketplace, similar to Delhi, and is also where Rusva and Umrao Jan meet when the story begins.

Neither the story nor the narrative display Ada's thoughts on rekhti other than her formulation of shers in rekhta and her response to Khan. Umrao's use of male conjugations is her way of establishing her status as a skilled poet, regardless of gender, and of reclaiming Urdu's respectable status. As such, the only logical step is for her to utilize the poetic form of respected poets and poetry: rekhta. Furthermore, her use of male terminology combats patriarchal usurpation of the feminine voice through rekhti. She spars against men using their language and their words. Her movement into that very masculine sphere and her success with her rekhta may explain Khan's desire to reassert control over her. In fact, after she dismisses rekhti as being the only appropriate form for her poetic endeavors, Khan tries again to enforce his will upon her. Quoting a portion of her couplet, he cajoles, "Maza to rekhti ka hai 'meray maula ne khair ki' toh aap hi kee zaban sey acha maloom hota hai (The pleasure is rekhti's 'my lord was merciful' only sounds pleasant from your tongue)" (Rusva 19). The nuances of his sentence illustrate how he attempts to eject her from the masculine sphere she enters through her sher. In the first line of the couplet quoted earlier, she uses the masculine conjugation of an Urdu verb. The second line, however, is gender neutral. The words that Khan cites when convincing her that her tongue is better suited to speaking rekhti could be spoken by a man, a woman, or even a group of people. His attaching the female gender to a gender-neutral phrase, specifically the word "meray" displays his level of imposition and intrusion into Umrao's composition.

Yet, Ada retains control within the scene and *Umrao Jan Ada* as a whole. Through poetry, she explores and constructs her identity. In short, her literacy and education allow her to regain control over her body, her name, and her mind. She is born and raised Amiran, which literally translates into rich female. Upon entering the brothel, the madam, Khanum Jan, and Bua Husaini, another courtesan, decide to rename her Umrao, which has royal connotations and literally means queen. Once she obtains clients thus becoming a full-fledged prostitute, the public attaches the suffix Jan to her name, which is an endearment meaning life or soul. When she begins composing ghazals and shers, she affixes Ada to end of her name. The only portion of her name then that is wholly of her choosing is her pen name, Ada. In a very literal sense, her ability to read and write with exceptional skill permits her to if not entirely recreate then at least modulate the names and identity that others have appointed her. On the rare occasion that she refers to herself in her poetry, she consistently uses only the self-ascribed name of Ada.

Through language, Umrao also gains authority over men and male poetry. A reader of the original and Matthews' translations will clearly see how the woman Umrao's shers supplant the man Rusva's couplets. Although Matthews' translation splits the book into chapters for a modern audience, the original reads as one long piece with a sher marking each new section of the plot. The speaker of the first sher that opens the book is ambiguous. A reader may reasonably assume that sher is of Rusva's composition as he is the main speaker of the first "chapter." However, the second sher erases any ambiguity. The couplet's first line ends with Umrao's nom-de-plume, Ada, thus explicitly indicating she is its composer. The majority of the other shers introducing a new chapter/section also tend to express Umrao's thoughts, so that she remains a strong poetic presence and authority throughout the prose work.

Umrao continues upsetting linguistic and poetic norms by imposing her control over Urdu and displaying her dexterity with poetry. While the earlier quoted sher exemplifies how she bends

gender binary distinctions, other shers often use gender neutral pronouns or eschew personal pronouns altogether. In the sher that introduced this chapter, the translations into English reflect the original Urdu, which contains no pronouns. As Petievich declares, "A lot of ghazals have third person pronouns that are not gender-marked like in English, specifically un or voh, which creates problems when translating into English and these words often get translated into the inanimate it" (125). Un or voh are singular gender-neutral pronouns in Urdu. Un is often used as a mark of respect whereas tu or tum are more casual terms of address. In Umrao's shers, *when* she provides a pronoun for poem's speaker, she often turns to the word hum. This Urdu pronoun is quite convoluted and ambiguous. It is gender-neutral and can work in many ways depending on the user's intention. For instance, one may use it as a mark of authority and elevated status. For instance, the phrase "Hum ne yeh faslah leeya hai (We have taken this decision)" is similar to the royal we in English and is singular. An Urdu speaker may also use it to refer to a group. A phrase like "Hum wahan jayengey (We will go there)" positions hum as a casual, plural pronoun. As linguistic Kiesling has noted, most third person pronouns have a male connotation even if only one male exists in a group of women (62). Urdu pronouns such as hum disrupt such linguistic readings of collective pronouns and pronouns in general. Indeed, hum offers a user a sort of gender fluidity or, at the very least, gender vagueness. Umrao capitalizes on this linguistic attribute in her poetry.

A quarter of the way through the narrative, the text presents readers with a particularly notable sher of Umrao Jan Ada's:

> Hum nahin un mey jo parh leythey hain totay kee tara
> Maktahbey isqh o wafa tajruba ahmoze bhi tha
>
> We are not among those who learn like parrots
> School of love and faith has provided experience too (Rusva 24).

This sher reminisces about her education as a young girl of around thirteen. Her anecdote reveals her level of intelligence in comparison to other students of both genders. She admits that Gauhar

Mirza, a young boy who eventually becomes her first client, bullies her constantly because she is the most naïve and plain. However, she is also the favorite of the maulvi teaching the classes.[199] In the section that precedes this sher, she extensively outlines her education under the maulvi's tutelage. Although she does imply that the maulvi pays her attention to the point that it is inappropriate, she reminds Rusva, to whom she is narrating her life, that she was a courtesan in training and the maulvi under the employ of the brothel's madam, Khanum Jan. The circumstances are certainly less than reputable, but the education of eight years under the man's tutelage is, nevertheless, impressive. Apart from simply learning Arabic, Persian, and Urdu letters, she can also read and easily comprehend several texts in these languages. She also describes how important proper writing was for the students as the maulvi corrected not only their penmanship but also their spelling. The maulvi insists that they not only memorize texts, as was common in nineteenth-century Indian education but also learn the meaning and analyze the books.

Although Ada's situation and circumstances are not what Indian society would deem respectable, her education, surprisingly, does not differ much from the type the real Begams of Bhopal received from men. Furthermore, Umrao learns under a maulvi as many respectable men of that time did and, towards the end of the nineteenth century, women did as well. She also mentions reading and enjoying the Persian text *Gulistan*, which helped her better understand other texts and life. The second chapter noted how Nasuh provides *Gulistan* to his wife Fahmida as suitably appropriate and respectable learning material in 1877's *Taubut-un Nasuh*. Therefore, despite the unorthodox mode of tutelage, Ada's education itself is quite respectable. In fact, she tells Rusva how poetry fascinated her during her time with the maulvi. The text implies that proper education not only allowed her to expand her intellect and her skill as a writer, but also elevated her social status and position amongst men and women.

The story of education that bookends this sher further highlights the importance of the first line: "We are not among those who learn like parrots." Many educated Muslim elite, men and women, often merely parroted British views or the Islamic views of those with or against the Aligarh movement.[200] Whether a reader attributes the line to the author Rusva or the character Umrao, the words are a jab at restrictive traditions and educational methods. Ada then is unique, not just as a woman or courtesan, but as a student. Through Khanum Jan's patronage, she receives what is akin to formal education of the time. Yet, she clearly states that she does not learn like a parrot. Furthermore, her education is tempered by experience as the second line indicates. One may also see this as Rusva's criticism of writers like Dehlvi and other Aligarh movement supporters who advocated for women's education but truncated it in male approved texts without advocating for women gaining life experience outside the domestic sphere.

The *combination* of worldly experience and literacy permits Ada to not only develop singular opinions but apply those perceptions to changing societal viewpoints on women, courtesans, and more broadly, education. Therefore, Umrao's manipulation of linguistic gender binaries is also a manipulation of women's and Urdu's status in Indian society. The following sher is the clearest example of her ability to make precarious gender-specific terminology present in the Urdu language:

> Ek shahter chor dil mera chorah kar ley gaya
> Pasbaan kambaqt sab sotay ka sotay rah gaye
>
> A clever thief stole my heart away
> The blasted guards all remained asleep (Rusva 81).

The original Urdu provides no hints as to the gender of the thief, the "victim," or even the guards. The mera (my) attached to dil (heart) is indeed masculine (versus the feminine my: meri). However, this masculine conjugation is not dependent on the gender of the speaker but rather the noun dil. This conjugation is similar to a French speaker using the masculine article le with pen (le stylo) instead of the feminine la with a quill (la plume). The verb ley gaya (took away) is dependent on the

gender of the chor. An Urdu speaker's initial reaction may then be to define the chor as male since gaya is a masculine conjugated verb. After all, Munshi earlier berated Umrao for using the masculine bhool gaya (I forgot) instead of the feminine bhool gayi when reciting a couplet about faith. If one assumes a hetro-normative relationship then, by extension, the speaker is a female.

Yet, nineteenth century Urdu poetry, rekhta and rekhti, often explored and expounded on male-male and female-female love. If a reader/listener does not conflate the poem's speaker and Umrao then the genders become quite vague. The beauty and complexity of this sher is its lack of a clear pronoun for the victim. The verb gaya for the thief also challenges a straightforward assumption of genders. A chart will clarify this for non-Urdu speakers:

	Urdu	**English**
Feminine Singular	Mein ley gayi	I took
Masculine Singular	Mein ley gaya	I took
Gender-neutral Singular	*Woh ley gaya *Uss ne mera dil ley gaya *Kuch mera chand le gaya	*You took *That person took my heart *Something took my peace
Gender-neutral Singular: Formal/Royal	*Hum ley gaya *Aap le gaya *Un no ne mera dil ley gaya	*We (royal) took *You (respectful) took *That person (respectful) took my heart
Plural	*Woh ley gaye *Hum ley gaye *Sab ley gaye *Kuch cheezain mera chand ley gayee	*They took *We took *Everyone took *Some things took my peace

The above chart is by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, the examples should illustrate how imperative a pronoun is understanding gender in Urdu. Umrao's construction of the couplet provides no hints as to the thief's gender thus a listener's/reader's using the verb gaya to define it is folly.

Her use of chor (theif) is as ambiguous as pronouns like app, un, woh, and uss. Applying linguists Marlis Hellinger and Hadumod Bußmann's assesment of English lexicon to Urdu, certain

words like mah, behn, baap, bhai (mother, sister, father, brother) "are lexically specified as carrying the semantic property (female) or (male)...in contrast to nouns such as *citizen*, *patient* or *individual*, which are considered to be 'gender-indefinite' or 'gender-neutral'" (7). Chor (thief) then is no different from gender-neutral and unisex nouns in English such as judge or chef. Such a noun (pasbaan) is translated in the second line of the couplet as guards. It may also mean caretaker. A reader's inclination may be to understand pasbaan as a group of male guards or watchmen, especially given the time period. However, in *Umrao Jan Ada*, women constantly exert control over Ada's life up until she escapes the brothel. Therefore, in her life, the pasbaan are far more likely to be a group of women than men. Separating and lifting out the sher completely from the text offers other possibilities as well. The pasbaan (caretakers) may refer to non-human entities such as common sense and reason—reigniting the aql versus nafs debate—which may guard a lover's heart. The sher may initially seem to contain specified genders; yet, Umrao's poems, in particularly, consistently trouble simplified links between language and gender. Her extensive education and experience allow her to move beyond the rules of both rekhta and rekhti. As the age-old idiom goes, only those who know the rules are able to bend them properly.

Ada as Urdu is transitioning beyond the prostitute-like anthropomorphization. She—Ada and Urdu—can be courtesans but speak like men, have more education and experienced than men as well. Ada manipulates gendered linguistics in her self-identification. While most of her shers have a universal theme, a few couplets encourage a conflation of her and the poem's speaker. One such couplet introduces a section towards the end of the novel:

> Sun chukey hal tabahee ka meree aur suno
> Ab tumhey kuch meree taqreer maza deythee hai
>
> Having heard the story of my destruction, hear more
> Now my speech will give you some pleasure (Rusva 200).

This sher specifically references the narrative and the conversations between the characters of Rusva and Ada. Yet, even here, the couplet plays with gender. The first line contains no pronoun to define the listener. The English translation demonstrates the original Urdu contains an implied you, though whether that you is singular or plural is unclear. One possibility is that Umrao is speaking directly to Rusva. Consequently, the implied you in the first line is You, Rusva. The tumhey in the second line supports such a reading. Tumhey is the respectful form of the pronoun tum (you). However, tumhey is also a term that casually refers to a group. In such a case, the implied tum of the first line and the tumhey of the second may refer to *Umrao Jan Ada*'s readers. As the text makes abundantly clear in its conclusion, Ada has read over Rusva's manuscript, and the last section is one that she writes and constructs. Therefore, her couplet may be addressing the text's readers or Rusva or both at once. Again, her words have made gender definitions shaky.

Further complicating matters, she also destabilizes her gender identity. This couplet is quite tricky in that sense. The use of meree in both lines creates the impression of a female speaker. Meree is the feminine conjugation of my. However, like the mera dil in the previous couplet, the meree in both lines is independent of the speaker's gender. The words tabahee (destruction) and taqreer (speech) require the word meree and not the masculine mera. So, regardless of how a person gender identifies, they would say "meree tabahee" and "meree taqreer." This line contains no verbs or pronouns that give any indication as to the speaker's gender. Even if one understands Umrao to be the composer *and* speaker of this sher, one cannot assign her a gender based on this composition or, indeed, the majority of her compositions.

She does not limit this destabilization of a gendered identity to her poetic endeavors. When Urdu verbs depend on the gender of the speaker, Umrao displays a preference for utilizing the masculine rather than the feminine conjugations. Although Rusva calls her Umrao Sahiba, many others drop the feminine a in favor of the masculine title Sahib, thus Umrao Sahib. As outlined

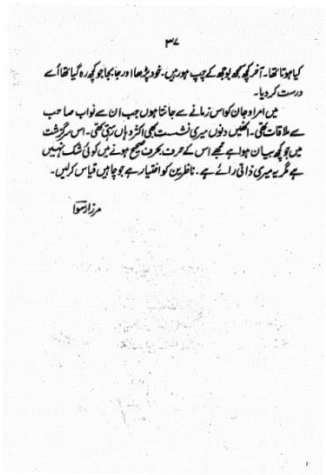
extensively in chapter two, women often used male terms for each other as marks of affection or respect. However, for men to use these terms is outside what Indian society delineates as appropriate and acceptable. Deputy Maulvi Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's Asghari of 1868's *Mirat-ul Uroos* only bears male titles in secret, appearing mostly in her father's letters to her and nowhere else. Umrao Jan flaunts male speech patterns and honorifics. Such words are the visual and verbal representation of her becoming not male per se, but masculine. She takes up the mantle normally reserved for a man, for she is wholly independent. True, some nineteenth-century Indian courtesans did refer to themselves with masculine titles, but this was often only during a performance. Umrao carries this into her life outside of the brothel and further into her poetry and speech patterns.

Indian history sets a precedent for the authority and power Umrao wields and the masculine titles that naturally result from such status in society. Umrao is an exception as courtesan with such favor and respect, but she builds on the foundation of other women who went by male honorifics, gaining them in a more socially approved fashion. Indian Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani (1834-1903) established an English medium school for girls in 1873 called The Faizunnessa Girls' Pilot High School, which catered to purdahnashin (veiled) girls. In 1889, Queen Victoria gave her the title of nawab after Douglas, the Magistrate of Comilla, recommended her to the queen. A Muslim and furthermore, a woman, receiving the title of Nawab disconcerted Indian society, with numerous Indian and, especially Urdu, newspapers reporting on the occurrence.[201] Nawab is a very specifically male title; it translates literally into viceroy. For a woman to bear the honorific nawab would be as odd as a female identifying British royal bearing the title of king or prince. Yet, Faizunnessa was not singular in holding such a masculine title. For instance, the Muslim Begams of Bhopal possessed the prefix nawab. Some like Nawab Sikander Begam also added feminine suffixes to their names such as begam or sahiba. Bhopal State appointed Sikander Begam as Nawab in 1860.

As such, Umrao's use of a masculine honorific, Umrao Sahib in public is not novel, for *Umrao Jan Ada* appeared on the market in 1899. While the text does not refer to any female nawabs or sultans, a parallel exists between Umrao Sahib and the female nawabs. Their education is similar, and both used their intellect, independence, and authority to move beyond finding equality with and among men. They are independent and powerful without having to define their existence through others, male or female.[202]

Wielding the Pen: From Character to Author

Umrao Jan Ada often expresses her subversion of Indian patriarchal society through her command of the Urdu language and thereby also restructures how Urdu is defined and anthropomorphized. Her undermining of male authority is not limited to oral endeavors, however. The general consensus among scholars is that writer Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva penned the prose work. However, authorship is far more complicated. The first two sections of the work are 1) the author and character Rusva's introduction and 2) the mushaira. These two sections conclude with Rusva's note to the readers regarding Umrao Jan and the contents of her narrative. These sections function differently from the introductions of other nineteenth-century and even modern novels. Despite Rusva's appeal directly to external readers (nazreen) in a manner similar to common introductions, the story seems to begin from his first words. The two sections in which he is overtly the writer and character start the plot instead of merely introducing the narrative. Although technically part of the story, these two sections end with the author/character's signature: Mirza Rusva. On the next page in the original 1899 Urdu text, the title appears in large bold letters that indicate the "actual" narrative/plot has begun. Here is a facsimile of both pages in the order that they appear:



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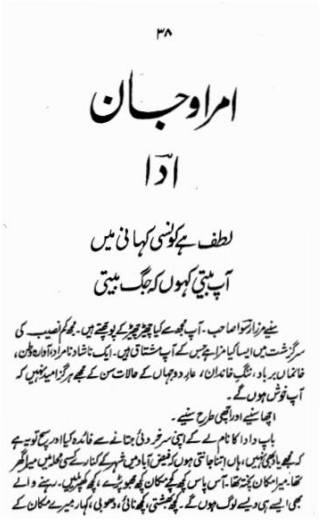
کیا ہوتا تھا۔ آخر کچھ سوچ کے چپ ہو رہیں۔ خود بڑھا اور جانا جو کچھ، وہ کیا تھا اسے درست کر دیا۔

میں امراؤ جان کو اس زمانے سے جانتا ہوں جب ان سے نواب صاحب سے ملاقات تھی۔ انھیں دنوں میری نشست بھی اکثر وہاں ہوتی تھی۔ اس سرگزشت میں جو کچھ بیان ہوا ہے مجھے اس کے حرف بحرف صحیح ہونے میں کوئی شک نہیں ہے مگر یہ میری ذاتی رائے ہے۔ ناظرین کو اختیار ہے جو چاہیں قیاس کر لیں۔

مرزا رسوا



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امراؤ جان

ادا

لطف ہے کونسی کہانی میں
آپ بیتی کہوں کہ جگ بیتی

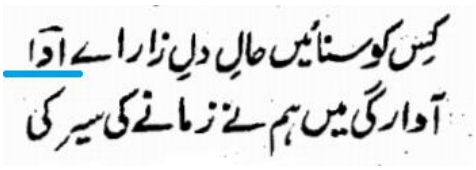
نئیے مرزا رسوا صاحب۔ آپ مجھ سے کیا چیز چیز کے پوچھتے ہیں۔ مجھ کم نصیب کی سرگزشت میں ایسا کیا مزا ہے جس کے آپ مشتاق ہیں۔ ایک ناشاد و نامراد آوارہ دلن، خانماں برباد، شکستہ خاندان، عار دو جہاں کے حالات سن کے مجھ پر گزا میں کہ آپ خوش ہوں گے۔

اچھا سنیے اور اچھی طرح سنیے۔

باپ دادا کا نام لے کے اپنی سرخروئی بتانے سے فائدہ کیا اور سچ تو یہ ہے کہ مجھے یاد بھی نہیں، ہاں اتنا جانتی ہوں کہ فیض آباد میں شہر کے کنارے کسی محلہ میں میرا گھر تھا۔ میرا مکان پختہ تھا۔ آس پاس کچے مکان کچھ جھونپڑے، کچھ کھپریل۔ رہنے والے بھی ایسے ہی ویسے لوگ ہوں گے۔ کچھ خشتی، کچھ نائی، دھوبی، کہار۔ میرے مکان کے

The impression this juxtaposition of Rusva's name immediately followed by Umrao's is one of him setting down his pen and her picking it up. In essence, Umrao is the author of the work, for the nearly two-hundred-page narrative following Rusva's "introductory" sections begins with her sher and ends with it. Furthermore, Rusva signs his signature as a writer would and presents Ada, Umrao's pen name, as an entity separate from the rest of her name Umrao Jan. The Ada bears the same line over it that the word Rusva does, indicating that she is also a writer. Notably, Rusva is both the author and the narrator of this text, but because he, the narrator, says he is transcribing what Ada is orally telling him during their conversations, she becomes part of owner of the work, much in the way an interviewee is part author of a published interview.

Even in his two "chapters," Rusva shares authorship with Umrao. In the second part of his "introduction," The Mushaira (poetic gathering), Umrao's sher headlines the section. A facsimile of the original Urdu script is below:



Kiss ko suna'ey hal-e-dil zara'ey Ada?

Awargi mein Hum ney zamaney kee seher kee

To whom shall life's history be told, Ada?
In debauchery We have traveled through time (Rusva 18)

As with Umrao's other shers, she again rejects linguistic gender dichotomies in her use of the royal/formal Hum (we). More importantly, this sher is the first poem that the readers encounter. It immediately establishes her as a reputable poet through her use of her pen name, Ada.

Although Umrao consistently experiments with her shers and ghazals, she simultaneously adheres to certain Urdu poetic conventions. The majority of Urdu male poets use a nom-de-plume, which they often inserted into the last sher of a ghazal or a standalone couplet.[203] By replicating this practice in her poetry, Ada and the text place her on par with famous male poets. Her above sher is comparable to a well-known one by Mirza Ghalib:[204]

Ishq par zor nahi hai yeh vo atish Ghalib
kay laga'ey na lage aur bujha'ey na bane

Love cannot be controlled such is its flame, Ghalib,
that it refuses to ignite and refuses to be extinguished

As Ghalib died in 1869, one may reasonably conclude that he penned this sher decades before *Umrao Jan Ada* entered the Indian market. In her couplet, Ada mirrors his and myriad other nineteenth-century male poets' preferred construction: her pen name appears at the end of the sher's first line. The Urdu script of that pen name is also notable. The most common way to write Ada or ada (the urdu word for style) is ادا. The line above the daal (د) and in between the two alifs (ا) that appears denotes that the name is a pen name and that of a poet or writer. Rusva often writes his name this way in the text as well, particularly when referring to himself as a writer. As one may note, this occurs in the above facsimile of the last page of his introductory sections. The above sher is not the only instance of Umrao utilizing this convention. After she ends up in the Raja's palace, she recites a ghazal for him, in which she again uses the pen name. When the Raja realizes that the poet

is Umrao, he becomes ecstatic as many people recited other's work, so meeting the poet directly is a rare honor. The practice of using a pen name in a ghazal's final couplet and of drawing a line over that pen name is still common among Urdu poets. So, even before the text begins in earnest with Umrao's narrative, her self-composed sher headlining the Mushaira section then presents her as an individual, skilled writer on par with Rusva, the character and real author. As Rusva and Ghalib are not searching for equality, neither is Umrao.

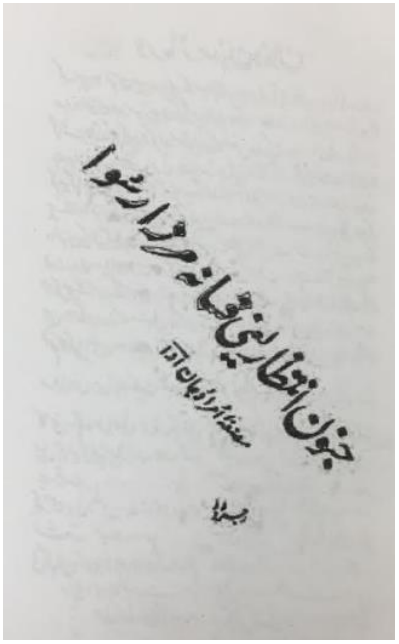
In some rare instances, Rusva, the character, still attempts to elevate his intellect and abilities above Ada. He ends "his" portion with the claim that he secretly wrote down everything she said while she spoke and presented her with the manuscript upon its completion. If one is to believe that Rusva simply copied down Umrao's words, then she is the creator of a text most Urdu scholars point to as the first novel. Even if one believes Umrao to be entirely fictional, a character of Rusva's imagination, the woman is still credited for the story. This idea is revolutionary, particularly regarding Urdu literature and poems. As critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee have studied in great detail, Indian men were still struggling to adapt their writings to the novel form. Urdu writers encountered even more difficulty as the language often appeared only in verse. G.E. Ward, in the introduction to his 1899 English translation of *Mirat-ul Uroos*, discusses how Indian court and other official documents utilized Urdu in verse form during the 19th century. Other Urdu prose fiction writers such as Rashid ul. Khairi and Abdul Halim Sharar opened their works with the term naval (novel).[205] Rusva neither claims the work is a novel nor that he wrote the story without Umrao's help. Rusva is not humble nor did a courtesan named Umrao write this piece. Rather, the text is innovative in that it does not attempt to pigeonhole itself into a certain genre or adhere to Indian societal expectations of genders. *Umrao Jan Ada* succeeds in accomplishing what many Urdu newspapers and journals worked towards in the late 19th century: making physical and amplifying a women's voice, her thoughts, and her opinions. *Umrao Jan Ada* is one important instigator in

women's progression in the Indian literary sphere, for it showed that women could pen titillating, imaginative works. It also is the first instance where an Urdu work does not kowtow to outside forces, in that Ada and Urdu are unapologetically unique, tarnished and modern while retaining traditional and even Muslim ideologies. Umrao Jan Ada, the text and character, is an amalgam of Urdu's past and its possible future at that time.

While the author of *Umrao Jan Ada* may be a man, a woman edits and concludes the work. Rusva states at the end of the introductory sections that she read it carefully and "durest kar diya (fixed/edited it)" (Rusva 37). In this introduction, Rusva retains control over Umrao Jan and her story. When Umrao becomes angry upon seeing his manuscript, he tells the external readers "Magar ab kya hota tha? (But what could be done now?)" (Rusva 37). A subtle hubris is apparent here. Now that he has written the piece, it must be published and presented to the public. However, the text allows Umrao leverage over Rusva. In the final section of the work, she answers the question that Rusva poses at the start: "Jee chahta tha ke parzi parzi kar ke pehnkdoon (My soul desired to shred it into pieces and hurl it)" (Rusva 251). Only through Umrao's sparing of the manuscript does it and her story survive. She writes the entire last section which her shers bookend. In the world of the text, she comments, scrutinizes, and analyzes Rusva's text and his occasional philosophizing as a skilled writer in her own right. She adds to the story, resolving character arcs and plotlines. Her section concludes with her giving advice to society and then directly to other courtesans. Her words, written in her hand, are what bid farewell to the reader. Fictional or not, Umrao Jan *is* a writer, a profession dominated by Indian men at this time. Her writing moves in a public sphere, commanding the attention of Indian and British society.[206]

Umrao's literary prowess does not culminate in the last chapter of this prose work. The earliest extant review of *Umrao Jan Ada*, which appeared in 1899 in a Lucknow monthly newspaper,

mentions a sequel. This sequel was 1899's *Junun-e-Intezaar Yani Fasana-e-Mirza-Rusva* (The Madness of Waiting, Meaning the Tale of Mirza Rusva).[207] The title page lists Umrao Jan Ada as the authoress:



Underneath the bold title appear the words, "Musanifa Umrao Jan Ada (Authoress Umrao Jan Ada)." The term for a male writer is musanif (مصنف). The term used here, musanifa (مسنففہ), is not common in Urdu speech much in the way that authoress is underutilized in English. The Urdu script also presents the pen name Ada exactly as it appears in her shers in the previous text, *Umrao Jan Ada*. This sequel further cements her abilities and status as a skilled writer. The introduction that precedes this shorter story is also from Umrao Jan Ada, with her signature and date at the bottom.[208] That signature bears the same prominent line over Ada, denoting her status as a poet and writer. While Rusva appears in the title of the sequel and also as one of its main characters, he is never evoked as a writer.

The pen is so firmly in Umrao's hand that a contemporary reviewer applauds her for her writing skill and her revenge on Rusva for publishing *Umrao Jan Ada*. On *Junun-e-Intezaar*, the reviewer states, "Bi Umrao Jan, on seeing her own biography being published, has written...the

intimate details of Mirza Ruswa Sahib's own life - in other words, she has vented her fury. But it too is not without its pleasure. It is also an example of Umrao Jan's own talents" (Naim 4).[209] The last line specifically praises Umrao's writing ability, indicating that many nineteenth-century readers would have logically assumed she wrote the text. Unfortunately, Krupa Shandilya provides some reasoning for why Umrao cannot be the authoress. The publication date as shown underneath Umrao's signature at the end of the approximately page long introduction is April 1, 1899 (All Fool's Day or April Fool's Day). Shandilya presents the date as proof that Rusva is enjoying a joke: "This clearly suggests the novella is a prank" (23). She also provides a more factual statement in asserting that the writing style is very similar to other masnavis that Rusva has written (24).[210] The point is negligible in the same way Umrao's fictional or real status is.[211] Whether Rusva is making a joke or not, *Junun-e-Intezaar* is an important piece of work because it presents a nineteenth-century Urdu speaking Muslim woman as a talented writer and a better translator from English to Urdu than Rusva.

Umrao Jan Ada concludes with Umrao at first angry at Rusva for writing down her life story. Appreciating and engrossed by the piece, she then makes the manuscript her own through edits as well as adding her advice, analysis, and shers in the last section. In the introduction to *Junun-e-Intezaar*, she reminds her readers (nazreen) of Rusva's manuscript. She then informs them that she placed this manuscript in his hands the same day he placed a published copy of *Umrao Jan Ada* in hers. In a clever retort, she references Rusva's words in the introduction to his text. As a reminder, he had stated to external readers that she was angry on seeing his written work "[m]agar ab kya hota tha (but what could be done now?)" (Rusva 37). Engaging her readers in her endeavor as Rusva did, she thrusts his words back at him. She tells the readers that when he saw her manuscript, he was not happy "[m]agar kya kar sakthey they ([b]ut what could he have done?)" (Ada 1).[212] Umrao is having a laugh at Rusva's expense the way she claims he gained famed through hers. The line is also impactful

because it concludes her introduction. These are her last words before her signature and the beginning of the story. She has not only stolen Rusva's pen but used it to create a narrative and avenge herself. The authority she wields throughout *Umrao Jan Ada* and, particularly in its conclusion, carries over and intensifies in this work.

Her direct engagement of the readers is also worthy of scrutiny. Indian society praised and read *Umrao Jan Ada*, an Urdu prose work about a woman.[213] *Junun-e-Intezaar* places readers in a position where they are obliged to accept a work written by someone Indian society has relegated to its margins, the subaltern women who is also a courtesan. As Garret Stewart outlines, "The mentioned reader, whether addressed in second person or ascribed in third, marks the site of an implicated response, however minimal, by which the reading subject is gradually taken for granted in the narrative text, granted to it and so assumed by it, assumed and presumed upon...reader becomes an optionally explicit placeholder for that subjectivity constructed by...the execution of narrative not only as mass product but as supposedly private pleasure" (27). The true brilliance of the introduction, however, is the subtle thread of accusation running throughout the work. Readers *should* feel guilty. They found enjoyment and titillation in reading of her ruin, so they must, out of decency, at least allow her to avenge herself.

Here is a brief summary of *Junun-e-Intezaar*'s narrative. Umrao Jan Ada takes several of Rusva's servants into her confidence. She is able to obtain an extended poem he has written about certain life events, "Masnavi Nala-e Rusva (Rusva's Lament)."[214] This text becomes the main basis for the narrative. Ada also surreptitiously takes several letters—and Rusva directly shows her some—that are part of a correspondence between him and the Christian, Urdu-speaking Sofia. She and Rusva are close childhood friends. Once they become adults and her parents pass away, Rusva distances himself from her for propriety's sake. She sends him a letter asking for his help and to rekindle their friendship. Sofia's letters strongly imply they are far more than friends, but the love

seems one-sided. Rusva is undoubtedly madly in love with her, but Sofia seems to want nothing more from him than pleasant conversations. In her penultimate letter to him, she states that she thinks of him as her husband though they are unmarried. However, this declaration feels quite incongruous with her behavior towards him. Possibly, she writes this only to please and cajole him into watching her home and its contents while she is abroad. Asking him to take care of her residence through a letter, she leaves for France after her aunt's death to claim her inheritance and sell some property. Some time passes before she writes him a letter stating that she will return on a ship but never appears. Umrao tells the readers they should make of this what they will. However, she strongly implies that Sofia has not passed away in a ship accident or drowned at sea. Instead, Umrao insinuates that Sofia simply found someone else or a better life outside India. The narrative concludes with Rusva watering Sofia's plants and sitting on her porch waiting for her return, which Umrao states will never happen.

As in *Umrao Jan Ada*, Rusva and Umrao also engage in several conversations. She constantly interrupts him and "[i]n doing so, she overlays Mirza Ruswa's words with her own, subtly undermining his authority as the author of the text" (Shandiliya, 34). The interruptions are a reversal of *Umrao Jan Ada*'s dialogue between Rusva and Umrao. In that text, Rusva's constant interjections into and analysis of Umrao's narrative weaken Umrao's authority as the author of her life story. Here, she acts as Rusva did, committing to paper the story of Rusva's life or, at least, a small portion of it. While Rusva's undermining of Umrao's authority was subtle in *Umrao Jan Ada*, Umrao's subversion of Rusva is quite overt in *Junun-e-Intezaar*. In Rusva's text, readers never see him correcting or criticizing Umrao's speech or poetry. In fact, he is often her most avid supporter. The text also mentions twice, at the start and the conclusion, that Umrao has edited and added to Rusva's original manuscript. In *Junun-e-Intezaar*, while Umrao praises Rusva's translation and poetic abilities she comes across as far more knowledgeable and capable. Furthermore, she takes full credit

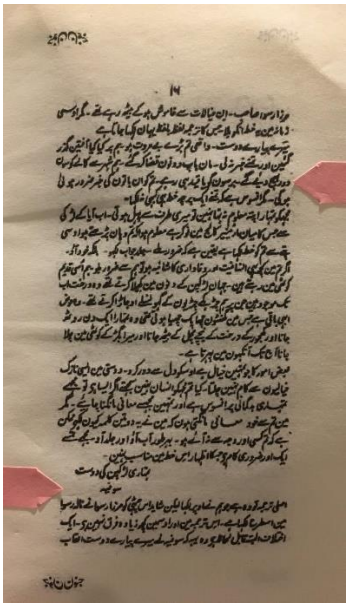
for *Junun-e-Intezaar*, even though it includes several lengthy extracts from Rusva's "Masnavi Nala-e Rusva." For instance, Ada writes down a poem Rusva recites to her when reminiscing fondly of Sofia. She very nonchalantly displays her extensive poetic knowledge and taste. She recognizes that he has merged two shers and altered them slightly. She then proceeds to present the readers with one of the original shers, followed by an educated explanation of why she prefers it to Rusva's creation.

Furthermore, similar to the female characters in Dehlvi's prose works, Umrao is able to illustrate her talent and intellect on the terrain of letters. She moves beyond what the characters of Rusva's contemporaries accomplished. Ada knows and is skilled not only in Urdu but English, Arabic, and Persian. Her knowledge of English is an interesting fact omitted—or simply Rusva had not conceived of it yet—in *Umrao Jan Ada*. A reader cannot assume that she has learned it merely in the time between the first and second book, for her skill in English surpasses Rusva's in some situations within the text. Imperatively, her ability to understand and translate English sets her on par with Muslim elites and most Indian educated men. In the 19th century, most Indian men partaking in higher education studied in English. The elevation of Ada's respectability through her ability to speak English is an elevation of Urdu's respectability. If Ada is Urdu, she (the language) is both embracing her disreputable past but not hiding. Urdu, in text form, is standing amongst other educated elite (Hindi and British novels). In fact, Umrao Jan Ada, the text and the person, are as widely and globally known today as Elizabeth Bennet.

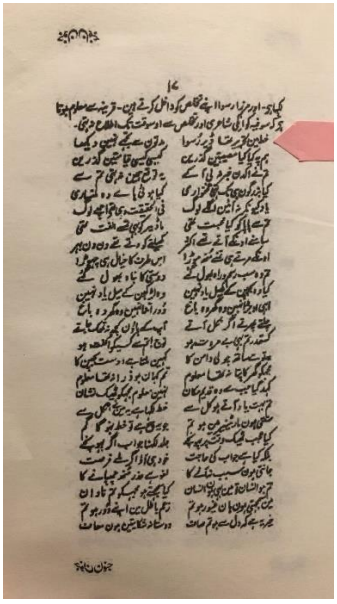
In fact, Ada in the text is at a higher educational level than even her readers. In introducing Sofia's letters to the readers, she informs them, "All of these are in English, but I have translated some of them into Urdu, for your convenience…Each word is suffused with meaning and each sentence is in eloquent English. I wish that I were able to produce such fine prose in Urdu" (Shandilya and Shahid 52).[215] This effusion of praise for Sofia's writing skill also presents Umrao in a

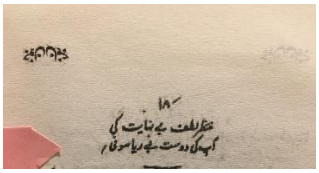
positive light. As she stated in the sher on education in *Umrao Jan Ada*, she does not compare her learning style to that of a parrot that simply repeats things. She can read and understand English at the level of a native speaker like Sofia.

More concrete evidence of Umrao's literacy and writing aptitude is displayed in her translation of the first letter Sofia writes Rusva. The text encourages readers to take particular note of this epistle for it appears twice. Umrao's translation precedes Rusva, so that readers encounter her words first and Rusva's second. While the text may subtly elevate Umrao over Rusva, her words eradicate any uncertainties. Before offering her translation, she makes the following claim: "*The correct translation is the one I have written above*, but I think that Mirza Ruswa has transcribed this letter differently in *Nala-e-Ruswa*. There is not much difference between this translation and that one. However, one difference which is crucial is that Sofia has addressed him as 'my dear friend' while Mirza Ruswa inserts his *nom de plume*. By extrapolation we know that until that moment, Sofia did not know of his poetry or of his pen-name" (Shandilya and Shahid 71, emphasis mine). For the sake of her friendship with Rusva or perhaps her affection for him, Umrao is being modest, though she does so without downplaying her intellect. Although the readers never see the original English letter Sofia penned, her translation gives the clear impression of being superior, partially due to its length and more so because of Sofia's characterization in *Junun-e-Intezaar*. Umrao's translation fits Sofia's character better than Rusva's, which seems to be more a fantasy than a faithful translation of Sofia's original words. This also explains the length of his translation: a page and a half to Ada's barely one page. He has made Sofia effusive and morphed her straightforward epistle into a love letter. A facsimile will better illustrate the difference between Umrao's work and Rusva's (for convenience, the start and end of each letter is indicated; Urdu is read right to left):



Umrao Jan Ada's Translation





Mirza Rusva's Translation

Umrao indicated that the only crucial difference between her translation and Rusva's was the address/salutation. This claim is unequivocally false. Speakers of any language will notice that the poetically inclined Rusva has taken extensive authorial license with Sofia's letter. The majority of the letter he has forced into the verse format of a ghazal, which the two columns make clear. Umrao has translated it into Urdu prose format, a literal example of Urdu's past and present merging together in Ada. Rusva has also taken the liberty of modifying the closing line and Sofia's signature into a sher. Even someone who cannot understand one alphabet of Urdu will recognize the familiar epistolary format, which Umrao retains and Rusva obliterates.

Apart from formatting discrepancies, Rusva's letter heavily embellishes each line with emotion. Rusva's Sofia is far demurer and more in love with him than the Sofia of Ada's translation. For instance, in her translation, the first lines are an admonishment:

> My dear friend -
>
> Truly you are unconcerned about our friendship. I have been overwhelmed with trouble and you seem scarcely to have noticed…Sadly enough, you did not write me a single letter (Shandilya and Shahid 70).

Rusva's lessens his accountability somewhat and creates an emotional familiarity between the two

that was most likely absent from the original:

> Dear Ruswa,
> I haven't seen you for ages. A lot of troubles have befallen me...You didn't come even once to ask after me" (Shandilya and Shahid 72).

Umrao does not omit instances of Sofia's affection through jealousy as some have suggested. The conversations that occur between Rusva and Sofia later in the narrative exhibit Sofia as a frank woman, not prone to passionate words or actions. The text—and, by extension, Umrao Jan—delicately guides the readers almost from the start to see Rusva's utter devotion and infatuation with Sofia as clouding his better judgment and reasoning. Umrao produces a translation that is more befitting of Sofia's character, thus providing readers with a convincing argument that her translation is the correct one. This becomes even more apparent in the epistle's closing. Ada's translated lines are as follows:

> It's possible that you might not have come to see me for some other reason that I am not aware of. Anyway, come now and come soon. I have a favour [sic] to ask you, which would not be appropriate for me to mention in this letter.
>
> Your friend from adolescence,
> Sofia (Shandilya and Shahid 71)

Umrao's version has Sofia maintaining an emotional distance. Her Sofia wastes little time pondering Rusva's detachment and turns to her needs. The way in which Sofia interacts with Rusva supports Umrao's translation. In contrast, Rusva's version morphs Sofia into a woman who is equal parts hysterical and simpering:

> Do you think I'm completely innocent? I understand that you are a man with self-respect, but I think that false pride is keeping you away. I know your heart is pure, so let's forgive our mistakes in friendship.
>
> Waiting expectantly for the boundless joy that will come with your arrival/
> Your candid friend, Sofia (Shandilya and Shahid 73)

Rusva's translation implies a relationship deeper than mere friendship. Yet, none of these words seem appropriate for Sofia. Instead, Rusva's letter reads more like what he wishes she would have

written rather than what she actually penned. Umrao's statement that she has written the correct translation is believable despite the text providing no English original.

Umrao Jan Ada already established her writing acumen in poetry as well as prose. Had she desired to do so, she could have reasonably penned a translation as floral and poetic as Rusva's. She seems to have tried her best to remain true to Sofia's original words, however. So, *Junun-e-Intezaar* and her knowledge of English now raise her education and literacy to a level that surpasses many Indian men's and is comparable to an Englishwoman's and perhaps even an Englishman's. Through her writing and her level of education, Ada establishes her status as someone unique, educated, and in absolutely no need of male protection or guidance.

Strumpets and Nurtures Part Two: Urdu vs. Hindi[216]

In chapter two, *Fasana-e-Mubtala*'s Haryali, despite her status, stood as a metaphor for Urdu. She represented the nation as a mother because she marries and possesses stronger nurturing, maternal qualities than the traditional first wife. Umrao Jan, on the other hand, represents an Urdu that is not domesticated. Umrao Jan as Urdu integrates the language's past supposed debauchery (poetry) into something that can withstand the pressures of Indian and British society. As Umrao's experience and education makes her strong and independent, so too does Urdu's history. It resisted the onslaught of British and Indian condescension. Therefore, the language possesses strength enough to stand for nation.

Linguist and historian Walter Hakala outlines how Urdu did not try to establish its worth by number of speakers or where they existed; "[i]nstead, Urdu was valued for the culture that it signified-an elite Persianate culture for which authority was derived not by popular mandate but rather by the individual influence of exemplary, usually literary, figures. In short, *Urdu derived its authority from charisma*, not currency" (105, emphasis mine). Wakala is specifically discussing the language's status at the end of the century. If Umrao stands in place of Urdu then she becomes not

only a symbol for the new, modern woman but a new, modern Urdu that can represent the Indian nation, specifically against Britain influence and imperialism. In short, Urdu, like Umrao Jan, may bear some stains but its charisma establishes it as both unforgettable and influential.

Krupa Shandilya emphasizes that "Umrao Jan's ability to shine in the era of literary greats such as Ghalib and Zauq suggests that *she is exceptionally talented*…Her depiction functions as a defiant rewriting of post-1857 English narratives that depict tawaifs as 'nautch girls' who are a part of dissolute Lucknawai elite culture" (*Waiting* 11, emphasis mine). Truthfully, she is a rewriting of Indian women in general and of an anthropomorphized Urdu. Ada not only restructures Lucknawi elite culture but also transforms what women can accomplish through literacy while changing perceptions of Urdu as neither pure nor completely aligned with the British or Indians. Furthermore, while many courtesans of this time were highly educated, Umrao is an intellectual. She applies her knowledge not merely parroting it back to increase audience approval. Her learning is also often a private endeavor. She writes down her poetry and prose work for her enjoyment and intellectual advancement. Her manipulation of Urdu also happens in private. Only the final results are available for public perusal. She is the progression of private reading, in which Dehlvi's female characters engage, to private writing and then public writing.

Umrao wields the authority to not only devour the knowledge available in society but to, in turn, impact society. When discussing female characters and Indian women, many scholars refer to their expanding knowledge base through learning how to read and write. Umrao, in contrast, acts as man. After receiving her education, she chooses her learning materials and then plays with conventions. Umrao is a novel woman because of how other men and some women perceive her. Khan Sahib anxiously attempts to circumscribe her speech and fails. Even if Rusva authored both texts, he is not in control of Umrao and he does not seem to have any desire to exert such control. Ada then not only changes female viewpoints but also masculine ones. In her command of language

and society, she refuses to remain marginalized, overcoming and often obliterating the obstacles other women, specifically Urdu-speaking Muslims, face. As Anindita Ghosh claims:

> For a start, as male anxieties testify, women were not extraneous to print. From the mid-century onwards, increasing numbers of women educated in the vernacular gained access to the printed word, and were bound to leave their own impression on it. And secondly, and more importantly, women were reluctant if not unwilling participants of cultural reform in the nineteenth century. They resisted their 'othering' by the educated male, and displayed their defiance by making conscious choices in their readings and writings" (*Power in Print* 229).

While Ghosh refers specifically to Indian Bengali women, his analysis is equally applicable to Muslim women, especially in terms of Urdu nineteenth-century women's magazines and journals. Among the texts presented thus far, only Umrao Jan makes conscious choices in her readings and writings. *Taubut-un Nasuh* indicates that Fahmida continues to learn to read and write without her husband's guidance. However, as readers never see her leave her home, the implication is that she reads on her own the texts that her husband brings home for her. In *Fasana-e-Azad*, Husn Ara reads newspapers, the Quran, and some poetry but rarely alone.

Umrao reads and writes for *her pleasure*; as an adult, she picks up a book or pen for amusement and entertainment. In the final section of *Umrao Jan Ada*, she tells the readers that reading *Gulistan* pleased her immensely. Reading it as an adult is her choice, whereas encountering it as a teenager happened under Khanum Jan and the maulvi's tutelage. Furthermore, the mere fact that she reads it again is something no other nineteenth-century Urdu literary text mentions readers doing. Dehlvi claims that women read *Mirat-ul Uroos* more than once, but that is only if they engage with it as didactic text not a fictional prose work. In essence, they would read it again the way someone may read a book of manners or a cookbook. In all other instances, once a text is read, one discusses it, but no one, male or female, is seen reading a piece twice. Letters are sometimes perused more than once but only when the original reader presents the epistle to someone else. Umrao reads to read, for pleasure. She mentions working her way through Arabic and Urdu works. Her claim is

that her passion for Urdu and Persianate literature opened up many secrets for her and led her to perusing Persian odes. She discusses how she suns her books and reads them in her garden. The image she paints is of a reader devouring written works in all forms and all languages for the sheer pleasure of the experience and for no other purpose.

Umrao is thus the literary culmination of the nineteenth-century Urdu female character's search for identity, individuality, and freedom through education.

The conclusion of this dissertation explores how this forward momentum of Urdu and Muslim women's agency begins going in reverse. Urdu translators have often eradicated moments of feminine authority present in the originals. Juxtaposing these against nineteenth-century Urdu novels supporting women's advancement highlights how such translations are a devolution of women's authority and even sexuality. The British first divided Urdu from Hindi and attached it to Islam. When Pakistan gained independence from Britain in 1947 as an Islamic country, Urdu became irrevocably identified as an Islamic language. Its status as religious language is perhaps the reason modern translators mitigate the female agency present in British texts. Yet, the Urdu texts of each chapter thus presented have furthered women's rights. The next chapter seeks to spotlight how injurious this deterioration of women's strength is and how Urdu can still function as a progressive, innovative literary language if one only examines how it boldly presented powerful women nearly two centuries prior.

[168] This and all subsequent transliterations and translations mine, unless otherwise noted.
[169] For a more detailed history, please see the introduction.
[170] Mufti, Aamir R. *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*. Harvard University Press, 2016
[171] Asha Sarangi coined the term "language women."
Sarangi, Asha "Languages as Women: The Feminisation of Linguistic Discourses in Colonial North India." *Gender & History*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2009, pp. 287-304
[172] Husn Ara appears in my first chapter, the others in my second.
[173] I open my first chapter with a discussion about four female Pakistani scholars, who, in 2018, analyzed how Urdu language and Pakistani Muslim society continues to suppress women's individual identities and agencies. Later in this chapter, I use Robin Lakoff's studies to more minutely scrutinize Umrao Jan Ada's speech patterns.
Amjad, Fakhra, Rehana Yasmin Anjum, Saira Yousaf, and Faiza Manzoor. "Gender Based Linguistic Variations in Urdu Language and Their Role in Suppression of Females." *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economics*, vol. 4, no.2, 2018, pp. 232.
[174] Courtesans, as shown in *Umrao Jan Ada*, performed for audiences consisting solely of men, solely of women, or even gatherings in which the two sexes were somewhat mixed.
[175] I will discuss later in the chapter how the authorship of the sequel, *Junun-e-Intezaar*, is somewhat convoluted, though not truly contested amongst scholars and even Indian audiences of the late 19th century.
[176] Many people choose to transliterate the name from Urdu into English as Ruswa. My preference is for Rusva, thus both spellings appear in this chapter.
[177] During one particular discussion between Rusva and Umrao, Umrao speaks of another prostitute whose youthful flower blossomed. Rusva, the character, understands quickly that she is referring to syphilis in poetic terms. Many other such instances occur throughout the text, though Umrao is often more direct and explicit.
[178] As I mentioned in chapter two, the third gender of hijras is also prominent in South Asian society, particularly in India and, after 1947's independence from Britain, in Pakistan. However, this third gender does not appear in *Umrao Jan Ada.* As such, I have not included it in my analysis.
[179] Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva presents the prose work as a biography/autobiography, thus he is co-writer with Umrao Jan and a character within the story as well.
[180] Shers can be stand-alone or part of a longer poem such as a ghazal. A sher is a poetic couplet.
[181] Poetic gathering. These consisted usually of male Muslim men competing through their poetry. Sometimes courtesans performed at such gatherings. However, Rusva invited Umrao there upon hearing her complimenting his poetry. She is there as an equal, not a performer or hired entertainment. When she refuses to join because she is not properly attired, he responds, "But we do not expect a 'performance.' There is no formality at all. Please come" (Matthews xviii).
[182] The Ka'aba (Kabah) is a religious structure located in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It holds great religious significance for Muslims who walk around it during one of two religious obligations: the Umrah or the Hajj (the difference between these two is time, as Hajj may only take place during certain times of the year, based on a lunar calendar).
[183] Scholars such as Meenakshi Mukherjee would perhaps purpose that their fascination with and appreciation of Umrao Jan is a reflection of their fascination with British women and British literary female characters. These English women, fictional and real, possessed the type of freedom away from home and in society as Umrao does in Rusva's text. In fact, Mukherjee often argues that nineteenth century Indian readers abandoned the novel form because they felt their female characters and stories could not be as titillating as their British counterparts.
[184] In the introduction, I referenced Ruth Vanita's convincing assertations that men often discussed poetry they heard at mushairas with women at home. Women then parsed and developed their viewpoints of such ideas. In fiction texts like *Taubut-un Nasuh*, fictional men reflect the behavior of real Muslim men who brought home texts for their wives and daughter to read and thus expand their knowledge.
[185] Nautch is an English distortion of the word naach, which means dance in Hindi and Urdu. So, nautch girl literally means a dancing girl.
[186] I have placed the word write in quotes, because, as I embellish in the "Wielding the Pen" section, Rusva most likely penned both texts.
[187] To illustrate how Urdu—and its culture—is generally more deferential on the whole versus English, I present this contemporary example. In Pakistan or even England or the U.S., an Urdu male speaker may go to work in an office and call his supervisor sahib, janaab, or sir, who would then not include those deferential honorifics in his reply. Those same two men may meet at a poetry reading and other informal gathering and comfortably call each other sahib, janaab, or sir jee. In comparison, if that same man is speaking English in Pakistan, England, or the U.S., he may use the words sir or mister when speaking to a supervisor, much like in Urdu; however, it is unlikely that if these two then meet at an informal gathering, such as a happy hour, they would both call each other sir or mister.

[188] Kousar, Shazia. "Politeness Orientation in Social Hierarchies in Urdu." *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*,
vol. 3, no. 2, 2015, pp. 85-96
[189] Vah is a word of praise, usually spoken by listeners of a poet. Irshad means repeat or once more. Vah simply means beautiful or bravo. A ghazal is a poetic form.
[190] I do not make this claim to state that my translating abilities are wanting. I am basing my assertion on the dynamics and linguistic qualities of Urdu versus English. An interested reader may also take a look at either David Matthews 1996 translation or Khushwant Sing and M.A. Husaini's 1961 translation of *Umrao Jan Ada* for further confirmation. No other academic, peer-reviewed published English translation of *Umrao Jan Ada* exists as of February 2020.
[191] The quoted sher is from the same ghazal. She remembers and recites it after continued urging from Rusva and Khan. The quote I provide is the introductory or first couplet of Umrao's longer ghazal.
[192] In Robin Lakoff's seminal work 1972 text, *Language and Women's Place*, she discusses how women's speech includes hedging (phrases like "sort of" or "kind of"), apologies, qualifies ("I think that…"), empty adjectives (lovely), and a lack of coarse languages or expletives. Lakoff's is applicable to all women but is a specific analysis of of American women. In her 2018 nonfiction book *That's What She Said* and TEDx Talks, USA Today's editor in chief Joanna Lipman states that women's speech, especially in workplaces, continues to contain hedging and apologizing.
[193] I make this claim dependent of several scholars' and historians' research on nineteenth century Indian women's conversations and poetry writing, including but not limited to Ruth Vanita, Gail Minault, Jennifer Dubrow, and Francesca Orsini.
[194] In very rare cases, the text will provide the mental or physical state of the speaker in parenthesis.
[195] For Urdu speakers, especially modern ones, Khan's choice of "kaha hai" may seem quite odd. For a woman, the correct terminology here would be "kahi hai" (she said versus the he said of kaha hai). However, the implied subject of Khan's sentence is the gender-neutral and respectful aap (you). So, one can very easily rewrite the original Urdu sentence as "Aap ney acha mutala kaha hai" ["You (respectful and gender-neutral) have recited a nice introduction"].
[196] For clarification, rekhta merely means poetry. Although the speaker was often male, no rules exist that the speaker had to be masculine. Rekhti, however, always has a female speaker.
[197] I intentionally disregard Singh and Husaini's 1961 translation of this section. On a personal note, I find both Matthews as well as Singh and Husaini's translation to be rather lacking. Matthews remains truer to the original text but takes a great amount of artistic license, adding his perceptions to the text, which often alters tone and meaning. As such, I have used his English translation only sparingly in this chapter. Singh and Husaini's translation is almost a new text. Whereas Matthews makes some attempt to limit his changes, Singh and Husaini try to restructure the narrative as a more modern novel, which means they summarize many scenes and completely take out many of the shers and poetry present in Rusva's original.
[198] Petievich, Carla. "Rekhti: Impersonating the Feminine in Urdu Poetry." *Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitude: Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia*, edited by Sanjay Srivastava, Sage Publications, 2004, pp. 126.
[199] A maulvi is the title a Muslim man holds. Usually, a maulvi is a Muslim Doctor of Law. The term may also refer to a man well versed in Islamic law and hadiths. A maulvi would also teach in a mosque or in madrasas (Islamic schools).
[200] I have explained the Aligarh movement more extensively in the introduction. They were a group of Muslims who aligned their values with the British and advocated strongly for women's education.
[201] Srivastava, Gouri. *The Legend Makers: Some Eminent Muslim Women of India*. Concept, 2003, pp. 51-52.
[202] Again, hijras would also play a role in real Indian society as a third gender, though the text does not mention them.
[203] For reference, one may view the poetry of many popular nineteenth century Urdu poets such as Mir Taqi Mir, Fiaz Ahmad Fiaz, and so forth. Most of their writings are available to readers for free and with English translations on www.rektha.org.
[204] One of the most prominent and well-known poets in Urdu poetry from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first is Mirza Ghalib, born Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan in 1797. He sometimes also used the pen name Asad, but most know him as Ghalib. His poetry still appears in many Urdu tv serials and movies as well as Bollywood films and songs.
[205] I expand on this in the introduction.
[206] In chapter two, I discussed how Asghari's letters become an extension of her physicality and thus allow her to enter the public sphere. However, her reach and audience are still far more limited than Umrao Jan Ada's.
[207] Although the title is quite lengthy, reviewers and scholars tend to use the main title Junun-e-Intezaar and leave the remainder as a sub-title. I will also follow this convention.
[208] This narrative is more of a novella-length than *Umrao Jan Ada*'s novel length. Krupa Shandilya, in the introduction to her and Taimoor Shahid's translation *The Madness of Waiting*, titles it a novella.
[209] I cite here C.M. Naim's English translation of the original review. I cannot seem to find the name of the original author.

[210] A masnavi or mathnavi is a long poem with an aa/bb/cc rhyme scheme. No rules exist on the number of couplets, but usually the poems are of a considerable length.
[211] Like Shandilya, I believe it nigh on implausible that Umrao Jan wrote this text, not because a woman would not have this skill but because her ability to engage and have a publisher print her manuscript seems unlikely. However, since the text lists her as the authoress, I will refer to her, not Rusva, as the writer of *Junun-e-Intezaar*.
[212] I cite Ada as the author. Although one cannot really formulate an argument here the Rusva is not the author, the text cites her as the author and much of its strength and uniqueness results from that citation. As such, I carry that through here in my chapter and my bibliography.
[213] Not only does Umrao's introduction to *Junun-e-Intezaar* discuss the popularity of Rusva's *Umrao Jan Ada* in Indian society, but the enduring popularity through the years also speaks to its success. India has produced many popular and successful Bollywood films on her character. Songs from these movies are still remixed and covered by a variety of global artists. One of the most popular songs is "In Ankhon ki Masti (The Mischief of These Eyes)." It includes a noteworthy line: "Ek tum hi nahin tanha ulfat meh meree Rusva / iss shehar meh tum jaisey deewanaey hazaron hain (You are not the alone in your adoration of me Rusva / in this city like you exist hundreds of crazy admirers)" (transliteration and translation mine).

A casual search through YouTube showed a plethora of covers and remixes of this popular song. The latest cover I discovered was this one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjKvsV8c2pU, uploaded on February 21, 2020. The latest professional version, a remix, I found was uploaded on March 9, 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldWcKFNJ4zQ. As of February 26, 2020, it has over 4.6 million views. Myriad other covers and remixes appear on a variety of social media sites including Tik Tok.
[214] Although Rusva did publish masnavis very much like this, in the context of *Junun-e-Intezaar*, it appears more like a diary.

Krupa Shandilya makes a claim here that the masnavi protects Umrao: "The layered narrative structure of this text shields her from the direct gaze of the reader…[i]n other words, the narrative veil enables Umrao Jan to 'author' the text while still maintaining the 'home' as the space of the private" (34). I do not disagree with her reasoning. I simply take an alternative approach to the text. I don't see Umrao as needing a veil. I argue instead that her writing and entering the public space through "her" publication of *Junun-e-Intezaar* abolishes the societal need for women to be veiled and linked to the home.
[215] The your in this quote refers directly to the readers.
[216] Part one appears in chapter two: "Equality through Letters."

Conclusion: Displaced texts, women, and Urdu

In 2022, Amina Yaqin published *Gender, Sexuality and Feminism in Pakistani Urdu Writing* in which she explores how the performance of Muslim women in the public sphere will always be a risky endeavor as it will harken back to the courtesan and oral tradition of Urdu. Even popular female singers and poets like Noor Jehan and Zehra Nigah became recipients of the anxiety of sharif men. Similar to Indian men in 19th century India, Pakistani men did not wish for women to perform in the public sphere; even decades—and centuries later—women continue to function as repositories for culture, tradition, and purity. Yaqin also makes particular note of how "Rusva avoids any reference to the *mujra* dance in *Umrao Jan Ada*…the mujra is used as a reminder of a decadent past and one of the causes of the downfall of Muslim rule in India, while in Hindi films it serves as nostalgic reference to the Muslim other" (67).

To this day, the Muslim Urdu-speaking lingual communities in India, Pakistan and even abroad in America or Europe fear the power and agency of a women performing and moving freely in the public domain. The culmination of my chapters and argument of the evolution of Urdu language is Umrao Jan Ada, both as the anthropomorphic Urdu language woman and a new Muslim woman. In refusing to marry and remaining a courtesan at the end of the novel, she creates a new norm of sexuality and agency. Her acceptance and sometimes pride in her sexuality means that she thrives. Representing Urdu, she has been surviving for well over a century. Rusva's shrewd move to lean into Indian society's representation of Urdu as only good for poetry and as an unruly Bibi Urdu has worked out better than Dehlvi's attempts. Although Dehlvi's works are still in print, Umrao Jan Ada has a global notoriety that has lasted for well over a century.

The purpose of this dissertation was to show how embracing sexuality could be advantageous to the Urdu language and Urdu-speaking Muslim women—and not a source of shame as it is often described in scholarly texts. In fact, as mentioned in the introduction, such works led to

the creation of Urdu magazine for women with Rashid ul. Khairi, a prolific and popular 19th century Urdu prose writer, starting several magazines, such as *Ismat* (1908). While women were already writing in the zenana, the home, for each other and sometimes the men of the household, this offered a public setting, where they could share their discourse publicly yet still without performing publicly, much like Ashgari's letters or the women who wrote into *Avadh Akhbar*, for instance, asking for Bi Allah Rakhi to go on a particular adventure or to hear about Azad and Husn Ara's pending nuptials. To encourage women to write and submit their work for publication in his magazines, he would often write pieces and credit them to women. Other magazines and journals like the one started by Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and his wife allowed a space for open discussions regarding several imperative feminine issues: polygamy, marriage age, women's choice in marriage, wives' roles, and education (Metcalf 108). They also significantly expanded the boundaries of education, giving women access to texts and subjects the Muslim ulama restricted.[217]

Through three chapters, this dissertation has endeavored to show how women and Urdu Muslim texts were quite progressive and continued evolving with the times, except perhaps those of Abdul Halim Sharar, whose works seem immersed in the bygone days of Muslim rule. Then as now, not everyone was in favor of educating Muslim, Urdu-speaking women; in many homes in Pakistan or even the United States, there are women who remain in purdah or within the home, leaving only with their husbands or brothers. As historian Mushirul Hasan declares, "[M]any believed that equal access to educational and public roles were unwelcome and would have nightmarish consequences" with "an insistent 'commonsense' belief that men and women had different qualities and roles, and that this was only 'natural'" (158). The specter of patriarchy is constricting and ever-present in the two works scrutinized in the first chapter: Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar's *Flora Florinda* (1893 & 1899) and Pandit Rathan Nath Sarshar's *Fasana-e-Azad* (1878-1880). In these works, the narratives elevate men above women, especially regarding public roles and mobility. *Fasana-e-Azad*'s Husn Ara

and *Flora Florinda*'s Flora and Helen represent the detriments of purdah practice and Indian society's restrictions on women's education. Unlike other Urdu literary works of the time period, these two texts focus on the disadvantages of uneducated women rather than the advantages. Although Husn Ara, Flora, and Helen apply their intellect only within traditional boundaries (i.e. to become married), their educated status allows them to gain a foothold in Indian society. The literary form these two writers used also pushed Urdu outside its boundaries and engaged a much wider audience. It brought a relatable, intriguing Urdu to Indian speakers of all languages and the British residing in India and in England. Unlike other literary forms suffused with the male voice, these texts centered on women. To the educated Indian and British public, this Indian woman would have been familiar as she shared some similarities with nineteenth-century British fictional women. Familiarity may have provided a point of entry for non-Urdu speaking, non-Muslim readers into unfamiliar, unique Urdu narratives.

Scholars and historians Bharti Arora and Partha Chatterjee disagree on whether Indian nationalists resolved the women question and if so, how they accomplished it. Chatterjee states that it was resolved through an injection of modern British ideals into traditional Indian ones. Arora argues against this theory in claiming that women were not equal stakeholders in the nationalist movement. Chapter two outlines how male Urdu writers used language and women's education in literature to imbue women with agency beyond the Indian societal expectations of their gender. Four of Deputy Nazir Ahmed Dehlvi's first published books (1868's *Mirat-ul Uroos*, 1872's *Banaat-ul Naash*, 1877's *Taubut-un Nasuh*, and 1885's *Fasana-e-Mubtala*) include educated women, who, through their literacy, are able to gain almost equal stakeholder status with men, at least within the household. Ruby Lal's argues: "although 'making' a 'woman' was a male project, regularly conceived and promoted in terms of the male universal, the 'becoming' woman was always a product of a greater negotiation" (33). This greater negotiation occurred along the lines of education and

language. *Mirat-ul Uroos*'s main female character's act of letter writing, for instance, imbues her with masculine attributes as Indian society considered this a male activity. When discussing the problematic influence of the female voice being filtered through men, Krupa Shandilya argues, "Even though narrative is by its very nature branded by…the 'dominant consciousness,' articulations of gendered subaltern agency can be recovered by closely examining the ways in which the dominant consciousness-that is, the elite male writers-narrates the subaltern subject" (*Intimate Relations* 11). My dissertation sought to unpack the subaltern subject, i.e. the female character, and how she narrates her story within male-written Urdu works. Other characters' use of male terminology to speak to or about her makes the dominant consciousness precarious as she becomes he.

The Urdu language constructs nouns and verbs according to the gender of the subject and/or direct object. For example, the word for a female child is bachchee and bachcha for a male. Attaching masculine terminology to the female body destabilizes language and societal gendered structures. In *Mirat-ul Uroos*, Asghari's father often refers to her as beta instead of beti.[218] This masculine term is appropriate, since she takes action throughout the novel. She is a foil to her well-meaning but apathetic husband as well as her loving but absent father and brother. She acts and the men in her life are acted upon. This obfuscation of gender roles through language and female literacy permits these texts to explore thematic avenues inaccessible through male characters or traditional Indian females. This chapter also discusses how the female characters represent anthropomorphic Urdu and its evolution from pure and demure to an infusion of overt sexuality. Taking into account Elaine Freedgood's supposition that "cultural knowledge…is always stored at the level of the word" (23), Urdu writers' disruption of language's rules at the level of the word also allows for a disruption in established Indian cultural knowledge and perceptions of Urdu and its

users. Educated women then take on masculine attributes and reach similar levels of authority that men possess within Indian society.

Linguists Scott Kiesling and Heiko Motschenbacher establish how linguistic gender binaries occur less because of language and more so because of the way speakers define and use words, something the third chapter takes into careful consideration. In Muhammad Hadi Rusva's 1899 *Umrao Jan Ada*, the titular character, Umrao, destabilizes these gender dichotomies. When reciting poetry, Umrao Jan speaks with male verb conjugations, refusing to utilize rekhti.[219] Male characters address her using masculine titles: Umrao Sahib instead of the feminine Umrao Sahiba. She composes poetry that often uses gender-neutral and gender-ambiguous terminology and pronouns. Her education and intellect afford her the authority to manipulate Urdu and women's position in Indian society. Through her manipulation of linguistic gender dichotomies, she is able to move beyond searching for equality and stand as a separate entity, a skilled writer regardless of gender. In nineteenth-century Urdu works, the female voice always passed through a male filter. Feminist scholars such as Kate Millet and Elaine Showalter see this filtration as a problematic suppression of the true feminine experience.[220] In fact, scholarship on nineteenth century Urdu literature has focused on what is done with and to female characters rather than her actions as an individual. This chapter situates the physical act of writing as an act of reclaiming individualism and authority. Jennifer Cognard-Black and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls suggest that letter writing aided nineteenth and twentieth century women in articulating and identifying themselves and negotiating the world (2).[221] The act of writing, in the form of a letter or otherwise, allowed freedom to a female character within a male authored narrative to create or discover her identity, to gain agency separate from male pressures. Umrao's skill at writing poetry and her status as a Rusva-proposed writer and author of *Umrao Jan Ada* and the sequel *Junun-e-Intezaar* positions her as an independent woman able to define her identity separate from men.

Having tracked the evolution of the language from Bibi Urdu (prostitute) to Ustaani Urdu (teacher) and finally Respected Courtesan, Independent Urdu, one final iteration is left: Tarjumaihi Urdu (translated Urdu). Not many translated texts of British novels exist because as several book shop owners politely apologized in Islamabad and Karachi bookstores: "Madam, those who read prefer to read in English." Although certainly not as independent as their British counterparts, nineteenth century Urdu novels' women display similar characteristics. Examining the translations of 21st century Urdu allows for insight into translators' influences on the female characters and feminist moments originally present in two nineteenth century British English works. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Dracula* reveal how the translations subdue burgeoning female independence and feminist viewpoints inhabiting the original works, showing a movement back towards encapsulating women in domestic spheres or behind purdahs under the purview of men. In these particular instances, limited though they are in scope, granted, sexuality has once again become something dirty and unfit for proper women. Christopher Larkosh states that "acts of translation, whether in a literal or more figurative cultural sense, continually reshape the understanding of 'our' identities and limits with what is perceived as other, both as embodied in 'our selves' or circulating as part of our lived experience in and across languages and cultures" (*Re-engendering Translations* 5). The difficulty of creating a translation that engaged readers without subverting Islamic and Pakistani cultural mores is nearly transparent in the three translations, which are just a small glimpse into yet another form of anthropomorphic Urdu. These tensions underscore the degree of agency nineteenth-century Indian Muslim female characters possessed.

Furthermore, this semi-erasure of feminist movement in 21st century Urdu translations reveals the translators' anxieties concerning the loss or disruption of traditional female roles. This oddly mirrors nineteenth-century male Urdu speakers and writers' anxieties. Partha Chatterjee discusses how earlier nineteenth-century Indian works often ridiculed western and westernized

women and "what made the ridicule stronger was the constant suggestion that the westernized woman was fond of idle luxury and cared little for the well-being of the home. One can hardly miss in all this a criticism-reproach mixed with envy-of the wealth and luxury of the new social elite" (*The Black Hole of Empire* 124). As in England, in India, some women were staunch supporters of the women remaining within the home, the accepted domestic sphere. Yet, nineteenth-century Urdu novels sought to show female characters embracing modernity, sometimes with the realm of the traditional domestic sphere and sometimes as widows or courtesans. This experimentation and attempt at social reform has all but disappeared in twenty-first century Urdu translations of British novels, which portrayed new societal roles for women with far more openness than nineteenth century Urdu novels. This contrast illustrates the modernity and progressiveness nineteenth century female characters possessed.

In *Takabbur aur Tausab*, Shahid Hamid's 2014 translation of *Pride and Prejudice*, he stays fairly true to the original text. It is, in moments, a surprising contrast to the Urdu writers' lament of the 19th century that realism was not a genre they could emulate as they couldn't compare to the entertaining, exciting novels coming out in Britain. In this, Hamid seems to find Austen not quite enthralling enough and adds bits and pieces of extra emotion to the female characters. The original text, for example, reads "Despite her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man's affection…" (179). The translation reads "Agarche wo uss se saqt nafrat karthi thee aur uss kee nafrat kee jarein kay har baal mein piyosath thi, tahm is qism ka shaqs jiss tarah apni mohabbat kay iqrar kar kay ussay kharaj pehsh raha tha" [However (much) she staunchly hated him and that hatred was imbued in the deepest roots of every one of her hairs, she couldn't ignore this sort of main who had declared his love as if it was a favor] (260). The translation only seems to have heightened emotions in relation to female characters. Meanwhile, Darcy's answer which is thrown vehemently back at Elizabeth in his pain and rejection of his proposal is translated

nearly word-for-word with the original reading "And this is all the reply which I am to have the honour of expecting!" (180), which Hamid translates as "Meray tohqay ka sirf is jawab say ghairat afzai hona thi" (My proposal will receive only the honor of this answer.) A slightly more hysterical Elizabeth, however, is not the most problematic issue of this translation, which is one the best and closest to the original that was found as of June 2023. The larger issue is that this translation has a much clearer class divide than that of the 19th century Urdu fiction works. This form of Urdu is academic and at a level only accessible to those who have had years advanced schooling.

A larger problem appears in the 2014 translation of Bram Stroker's *Dracula*. The first few paragraphs that begin the eighth chapter, for instance, omit some major points made in the original that do not have an impact on the plot but on the overall elevation of women within the original novel. For instance, the translator Mazar Ul-Haq completely eliminates the lines "I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!" and replaces it with mentions of how the owner was an elderly lady (116). Also, on page 116 of the translation, he also simply erases the bolded sentences in the third paragraph below:

> Lucy is asleep and breathing softly. She has more color in her cheeks than usual, and looks, oh so sweet. If Mr. Holmwood fell in love with her seeing her only in the drawing room, I wonder what he would say if he saw her now. **Some of the `New Women' writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the `New Woman' won't condescend in future to accept. She will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too! There's some consolation in that.** I am so happy tonight, because dear Lucy seems better. I really believe she has turned the corner, and that we are over her troubles with dreaming. I should be quite happy if I only knew if Jonathan . . . God bless and keep him (125).

The translation has completed stripped Lucy of even imagined agency. The translation has no mention of Mina imagining her proposing or thinking she'll excel at it.

Such instances harken back to Nasuh censoring the works he provided his wife Fahmida. Such censorship isn't just problematic for women readers but those of all genders. However, these translations are a very small examples and much work is being done by women, Urdu Pakistan

writers and poets to embrace and advance women's sexuality and even queerness. Through illustrating how progressive Muslim Urdu speaking nineteenth-century men and women were, the hope is that current Muslim Urdu speaking communities, specifically those in Pakistan, will continue progressing forward instead of citing religion and language as a barrier to advancement and female agency and education, as is often the case.

[217] "Like the ulama, he was keen to see girls educated, but he favoured a more cosmopolitan approach to education, allowing them, for example, to read the old Persianate tales and epics (that the ulama judged decadent), as well as history, geography, and science" (Metcalf 108).

[218] Beta means son, while beti refers to a daughter.

[219] A form of Urdu poetry in which the speaker is always female.

[220] I am specifically referencing their arguments in 1968's *Sexual Politics* and 1977's *A Literature of Their Own*, respectively.

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