2 The Ambivalences of Nostalgia in Late-Nineteenth Century Urdu Literary Sphere

> *Five invading armies have fallen upon this city one after another: the first was that of the rebel soldiers, which robbed the city of its good name. The second was that of the British, when life and property and honour and dwellings and those who dwelt in them and heaven and earth and all the visible signs of existence were stripped from it. The third was that of famine when thousands of people died of hunger. The fourth was that of cholera, in which many whose bellies were full lost their lives. The fifth was the fever, which took general plunder of men's strength and powers of resistance.*
> Ghalib[86]

In a letter to his friend, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869) describes the various calamities that destroyed Delhi in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first is ushered in by the "rebel soldiers", who fought India's first war of Independence to overthrow British rule.[87] The failed uprising led to further consolidation of British power, now transferred from the East India Company to the Crown. The unrest caused by the Rebellion had remarkable consequences on the socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of much of northern India, especially the Urdu-speaking population in and around Delhi, the erstwhile seat of Mughal power.[88] Although the Mughals had already relinquished actual political power some time ago, the titular throne in Delhi reminded North Indian Muslims of their former glory, and the reality of an alien rule receded in the background. The failure of the uprising demolished these remnants and altered, among other things (that Ghalib enlists as "life and property and honour and

86 *Ghalib: Life and Letters*. Trans. Russell & Islam (1994), 243. Addressed to Anvar-ud Daula Shafaq.

87 This uprising of 1857 has been described officially and historically by many names. I use 'Rebellion' to refer to this tumultuous event for clarification and constancy.

88 Historian Margrit Pernau suggests that the importance of the Rebellion was blown out of proportion by "British representation" of it rather than its real impact or that its historical reception was designed by an asymmetric power nexus in narratives and perspectives of the victorious, the British (2015 a), 75.

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dwellings"), literary taste and trends. These changes also greatly transformed the perception of time for this community of Urdu-speaking readers and writers, as Victorian perceptions of morality and utilitarianism replaced the earlier loose notion of time. These ideas of morality and utilitarianism, reinforced by the teachings of reformist Islam, became central to the literary discourses following the rupture of 1857.

Literature and literary aesthetics are deeply enmeshed in everyday life in Delhi before 1857. The king, Bahadur Shah II (1775–1862), was also a poet, writing under the ironical *nom de plume* '*Ẓafar*', the victorious. The figure of Bahadur Shah Zafar has been seen, as William Dalrymple (2008) puts it, in "nostalgic sympathy" as a symbol of "romantic longing" for a past that is lost (2008: 414). A patron to several poets, including the illustrious Ghalib, the king famously sponsored and participated in many *muśāʿirah*s (poetic symposiums) at the Red Fort of Delhi. While he has been hailed as a poet and a patron, several historical accounts see his role as king in conflicting light in the context, some accusing him and others sympathising with him for his equivocal response to the Rebellion. The king was arrested, declared guilty of treason, and sent off to exile in Burma, where he died a painful, solitary death, thus bringing to a tragic end the glory of the long-standing Mughal dynasty.

The ways in which lifestyle, time, and literature have been perceived before and after 1857 point to a rupture, a significant alteration in thought, emotion, and action. The period before the Rebellion has been recalled by many historians as one of peace, calm, and cultural exuberance – even termed the 'short-lived Delhi Renaissance' by Percival Spear, Frances Pritchett, and others. For many Urdu writers of the time, this exuberance is reflected in several historical accounts, written immediately in the aftermath of the Rebellion, where the phrase last/"*ākhrī*" recurs, declaring an end, or a rupture.[89] Several texts written after 1857 look back nostalgically at a past that embodied a cultural richness, political or diplomatic peace, leisurely pace, and aesthetics. This glorified image of the past is further enhanced through nostalgic recalling of those times – "*voh zamānah*" – with grief and sorrow.[90] Remembrance/"*yād*" itself emerges as a significant discourse in the late-nineteenth century, moti-

89 See, for example, some of the Urdu titles referring to the end of Delhi's courtly culture of the time, like Munśī Faiz-ud Dīn Dihlavī's *Bazm-i Ākhir* (1885)/*The Last Gathering*; Rāśid-ul Khairī's *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Bahār* (1937)/The Last Spring of Delhi; Mirza Farḥat-ullah Baig's *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Śamʿah* (1928)/The Last Glow of Delhi. Here, *śamʿah* (candle or flame) poetically describes the glow of a *muśāʿirah*.

90 Several Urdu writers, including Hali, use this phrase to recall their world before 1857 (see Chapter 2.3.1).

vating several recent historians to explore this feeling of nostalgia.[91] However, nostalgia was felt and expressed in different, often conflicting, and contradictory ways by writers of the time, and as we shall see, in different genres. While for some writers, it was expressed in longing for the bygone era, for many others, it was an emotion that provoked urgent severance from their immediate past, regarded by many as too leisurely, too decadent, and much too otiose. Nostalgia has to be read as conflicted in its nature, as conceptualised in this context. Several writers expressed severe critiques of the past that they also mourned.

This chapter explores the deep relation between the concept of otium and nostalgia in this context. Nostalgia is explored as an emotional manifestation of otium, where the imagery of a 'leisurely past' is reconstructed retrospectively in expressions of loss. Arguing against a universal understanding of nostalgia or that nostalgia feels the same for everyone, the chapter draws out the ambivalences in the emotion through contextual histories and textual analyses. After introducing the literary and emotional conflicts that several influential Urdu writers like Ghalib, Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98) and Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914) have negotiated and expressed in the aftermath of 1857, the chapter focuses on the rise of the Urdu genre of the novel. The novel evolved out of attempts to allay the influence of the *ġazal* (or lyrical poetry) on Urdu literature of the time and focus on more 'useful' and 'instructive' literary genres *via* a reformation and renewal of literary ethos in the face of loss and defeat. After exploring this reforming spirit in the critical poetry of Altaf Husain Hali in his long poem, *Musaddas* (1879, revised in 1886), the chapter focuses on two significant Urdu novelists, Nazir Ahmad and Hadi Rusva. While offering an understanding of their literary attitudes with regard to depictions of the leisurely past and nostalgia, it focuses on one novel by each novelist – *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and *Umrā'o J̌ān Adā* (1899), respectively. In these novels, the emotional conflicts regarding the leisurely past signified through representations of idleness and indulgence in poetry, are played out in the context of an emergent literary ethos. As a final claim, the chapter establishes that this rise of utilitarian ethos in Urdu literature is simultaneously profoundly entrenched with the theme of nostalgia for a leisurely past while the emotion attains a unique trajectory in the journeys of Urdu henceforth.

91 See Margrit Pernau's article "Nostalgia. Tears of Blood for a Lost World" (2015a). See Eve Tignol's article "Nostalgia and the City: Urdu shahr āshob poetry in the aftermath of 1857" (2017).

2.1 "*Seized by the Incurable Disquiet of the Times*": The Ambivalences of Nostalgia

In the aftermath of 1857, aristocratic Muslims in Delhi were subjected to growing suspicion from British officials for participating in the Rebellion. Muslim families from the elite classes (*aśrāf*) looked towards a precarious future after the loss of a world they had inherited from the Mughal court culture. Before the Rebellion, there was a reportedly increasing fondness between the Muslim aristocracy and the British officials, based on the latter's "latent" admiration of the culture of pleasure and the luxurious, leisurely life of the former.[92] Literature was an integral part of this culture of leisure; an interest in Urdu (and Persianate) language and literature came to be considered "a hallmark of the city itself"; and "poetry was discussed in every house".[93] Literary histories of this period repeatedly refer to a sense of irretrievable loss.[94] The representation of this loss is seen as something irredeemable and with everlasting impact on the written present and the imagined future. It is important to grasp the significance of these repeated metaphors of loss, mostly drawn on metaphors of Persianate-Urdu lyrical poetry of the time, for instance, ruined garden, caged nightingale, flickering lamp, and recurrent mentions of finality – *ākẖrī* (last). The constant emphasis on the finality of this loss contributes to a construction of the past by reiterating and reproducing the same. The emotion of nostalgia is almost always intertwined with despair (*ġam*), expressed astutely in genres of poetry like the *śahr āśob* (lament for a ruined city), but also in prose accounts of the time.

The abrupt demise of the so-called 'Delhi Renaissance' and the inevitable destruction of the way of life during Delhi's courtly days were chronicled by Ghalib in his *Dastanbū* (1994 [1858]), an anthology of diary entries (in Persian). He recorded, with much anguish and agony, the painful loss he suffered. He

92 In *Orientalism* [1978], Edward Said expounds the notion of *latent* orientalism to distinguish between the positive and/or negative categorisation of colonial stereotypes regarding the 'natives'. In the context of colonial idleness, Monika Fludernik uses the distinction to explore racial discriminations of idleness. See Fludernik, "The Performativity of Idleness" (2014), 131–35.

93 Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (1994), 10.

94 See, for example, titles of critical pieces on the Rebellion and literary history: Pritchett's chapter titled "The Lost World", the first part of the book "A Garden now Destroyed"; Pernau's article on Nostalgia and the Rebellion; William Dalrymple's best-selling dramatic historical novel, *The Last Mughal*. These English translations of 'loss' and finality as emotional and historical signifiers are, in turn, inspired by Urdu titles of the declining literary culture of the time.

wrote of this period in the country as one utterly devoid of possibilities of otium, peace, or repose – "*ārām va āsā'iś se kẖālī"* (Ghalib 1994: 24). He documented it as a time of *"Hindustān kī vīrānī"* (India's desolation, 25), and of his predicament in the situation as dramatically pitiful: "My face remains devoid of colour and glow until I have washed it a thousand times in tears of blood. Grief and distress have taken the shape of my life and heart; and my bed is woven with thorns" (Ghalib 1994: 82). Controversially, in *Dastanbū*, Ghalib holds the Indian rebel soldiers as responsible for the widespread suffering and misery. At the same time, the British officials are sympathised with, and their torments at the hands of the rebels are seen as outrageous treachery. He makes his loyalties unabashedly clear, defending the British as just and wise rulers (1994: 19, 21–24) while painting the rebels as men of "blackened hearts" (1994: 23, 37). His loyalty is expressed in an ultimate gesture, the *qaṣīdah* (panegyric) he had penned for Queen Victoria (1994: 47–49), perhaps in foresight, before the outbreak of the Rebellion. Scholars read Ghalib's dubious loyalty to the British as his desperate attempt at survival, where his sustenance depended on royal patronage. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi, an authority on the *Dastanbū* and one of its first Urdu translators, writes that "he [Ghalib] had to protect himself during those stormy days" but "there is no doubt that Ghalib sided with the Mughal emperor" (Faruqi 1970: 10). Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, translators and editors of Ghalib's letters and records, show through various correspondences that the poet may have "omitted or toned down passages which could give serious offence to the British" and "may have added emphasis to his horror at the acts of the rebel sepoys"; particularly since it became clear that in 1858, Ghalib had conceived of presenting *Dastanbū* to British authorities "as a means of winning their favour and patronage" (Russell and Islam 1994: 132–33). Ghalib suffered profoundly, the loss of his world, his beloved city and the creative life it cultivated, as he shifted allegiance depending upon the patronage he sought for survival in the twilight of his illustrious life.

The loss was felt on different levels by Urdu writers of the time and was not always adequately or unanimously expressed. Specifying the exceptionality of Ghalib's *Dastanbū,* Pernau writes of how this loss and the emotion of nostalgia is strikingly missing from the works of many Urdu writers of the time; they were possibly, she emphasises, "too busy surviving", "demonstrating their loyalty to the British" (2015 a: 80–81). Pernau unpacks the emotion as complex, ambivalent, and encompassing "a variety of different phenomena" (Pernau 2015 a: 101–3). Following this reading, this chapter demonstrates that nostalgia acquires an ambivalence in this context, closely entangled with claims to a time, place, and memory of peaceful, leisurely existence. In this historical context, nostalgia embodies yearning for the loss of otium for leisurely days of the past. However, it is also an experience of otium in its being felt, allowing one to

dwell in the past while time in the present fades away. I therefore read nostalgia as a manifestation of otium, as it mourns the loss of a leisurely past. It is an emotion that South Asian writers often revisit in the following century to express the mourning of and simultaneous yearning for a leisurely past before the grip of colonial rule had strengthened. Nostalgia then attains a narratorial agency towards the reconstruction of the past, further developed by later writers who already inherited a sorrowful image of the past to build upon.[95] As a historical emotion, it is further highlighted as the past becomes distant.

Arguing against the idea that emotions are felt universally and expressed in the same way, the chapter draws out the ambivalences of nostalgia and the conflicting shades in this emotion expressed differently by different writers like Nazir Ahmad and Hadi Rusva. Here, the emotion is read not only in mourning the passing of a certain time or era (*zamānah*) but also in the attempts made by the writers to distance themselves from this past, associated with the court, with indolence, idleness, and decadence; in fact, they criticised the very leisurely past they mourned since it is this very leisurely past that was often held responsible for the decline of Muslim civilisation in India. Strategically negotiated by writers of various genres, nostalgia in this context evolves as an emotion that allows for criticism of the extravagances of the past, as it simultaneously mourns the loss of the same elements that it criticises. Nostalgia then shapes the future as much as the past, in what Svetlana Boym refers to as "side effects of the teleology of progress" (2001: 10). Many writers in this context who took recourse to remembrances of the past also looked forward to the future and advocated reforms to retain certain semblances of the past. As Pernau puts it, for many such writers, "aiming at colonial modernity did not prevent them from being nostalgic, quite the contrary" (2015a: 103).

Nostalgia is most emphatically invoked during this time in texts of *śahr āśob* – a genre of poetry that laments the ruin of a city. However, the emotional investment here has brought in certain long-lasting changes to the genre and, in many ways, giving shape to the evolution of the genre itself. Hans Harder suggests that the focus of the style had likely transformed from the pre-existing classical genre of "*śahr āśob*, 'what brings the city into uproar'" to the "*śahr-i āśob*, 'city of decay/terror/uproar'" (2016: 439). Eve Tignol has shown that in the immediate aftermath of 1857, the genre reflected various innovations like collective memory and materiality of the city to construct an emotional representation of the past and the memory of 1857 as "cultural

95 Fludernik draws out nostalgia as a representation through which recent Indian novels in English are read to "lay claims" to an "Indian tradition of leisure". See Fludernik, (2020), 14–34.

trauma" (2017: 566–67). In this, she sees a stark difference in the genre (despite a sense of claimed continuity) before and after 1857 that thrived beyond the Rebellion and the publication of the commemorative *śahr āśob* collection, *Fuġān-i-Dihlī* (The Lament of Delhi, 1863). Literary genres and trends witness transformations through emotional contextualisation, while the evolution of these genres and styles then reflects how these emotions are expressed, represented, and negotiated. While certain genres and texts evoked nostalgia for a glorious (construction of the) past, many others, in particular, the emerging genre of the Urdu novel, as this chapter explicates, directed their emotional engagements towards a criticism and, at times, negotiations of the same, as they manoeuvred their vulnerable position, in Ghalib's phrasing, "seized by the incurable disquiet of the times".[96] The emergent genre of the novel allowed for narrative innovations where the leisurely past is also mourned in the conflicted nature of characters who are afflicted by nostalgia.

Historically identified in the seventeenth century as an affliction amongst migrant Swiss soldiers, manifested in the feeling of homesickness for one's native land, nostalgia was thought to be curable with the aid of "[l]eeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, opium and a return to the Alps"; progressively it emerged as a modern epidemic among Europeans at the time – significantly except amongst the British (Boym 2001: 4–6).[97] Gradually, it came to be seen as a "shameful disease that revealed a lack of manliness and unprogressive attitudes" (ibid.). Nauman Naqvi argues that nostalgia has long been "discursively constituted as a pathological category in Western epistemic regimes, and the nostalgic represented as a disorderly subject to be subjected to a variety of disciplinary knowledges and institutional practices of discipline and control" (2007: 7). Manliness and progress are two central aspects of the emotion, especially within the "classic Foucauldian disciplinary-institutional paradigm: military, criminological/penal, educational" (ibid.). Much of how nostalgia is perceived in modern times is drawn on experiences and memories of wars and consequential catastrophes, displacements, and sufferings, often expressed in terms of pathology and disease. Beyond this severely psychosomatic notion, through the processes of modernisation on a global scale, its associated conflicts and widespread expressions in cultural memory, modernity can be said to usher in nostalgia as a commonly recognised and felt emotion outside the historical-cultural borders of Europe. Simultaneously, nostalgia itself – in its feeling profile – was transformed from the sense of homesickness or longing for a

96 "*zamāne ke hāthoṇ nā-qābil-i ʿilāj muṣībatoṇ meṇ giriftār*", *Dastanbū* (1994), 18.

97 For British history, nostalgia attained significant relevance in the aftermath of the loss of the Empire.

lost home (place) into a yearning for bygone days (time) as the upheavals of the last century ushered in shared experiences of loss on a global scale. Universally, nostalgia almost always renders the past as peaceful and leisurely compared to the disillusionment of the present, thereby evoking the feeling of 'longing'.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the South Asian subcontinent underwent several political upheavals and bloody wars. The firm consolidation of British colonial power in the mid-nineteenth century, following the failed Rebellion of 1857, engendered a commonly identifiable emotion of loss. This feeling was shared by many communities in various parts of the subcontinent and emphatically expressed by the Urdu-speaking *aśrāf* (elites), reflecting the image of a destroyed Mughal city and a way of life that it used to boast. While the Urdu writers did not use a word that was directly equivalent to the (linguistically-culturally) European 'nostalgia', prevailing Urdu poetics of loss, expressed in the vocabulary of despair and sorrow (*ġam*), decline (*zavāl/tanazzul*) and remembrance (*yād*) emerged in the aftermath of 1857 as entangled, creating a discourse of grief that constituted for them a nostalgic mourning for the past. Physiological expressions of this emotion, in attributes like tears, sorrowful facial expressions, sometimes even on a pathological level, were directed towards grieving for a time that was once signified by ease/tranquillity/calm – "*ārām va āsāyaś*" – in the words of Ghalib. Simultaneously, the past is also expressed as a time of "*farāġat*" or leisure, steeped in "*sustī*" (sloth, indolence, laziness) and "*ġaflat*" (heedlessness, carefree abandon) by the influential poet and critic, Hali, amongst other writers. Representations of the past, in both terms, heavily coincided with painting the past as *more leisurely* – either in sorrowful longing or in stern criticism. In the aftermath of 1857, the value and utility of time attain great significance; this is starkly visible in repeated phrases that stress the preciousness of time and its limitations – "*vaqt kī qadr va qīmat*", in terms of penance and reward. While texts that claimed the past to be too luxurious and decadent urged for reformation and renewal of the Muslim civilisation in India, they also, as we shall see, succumbed to nostalgia on different levels.

After 1857, many influential Urdu writers blamed the *navābī* (aristocratic) culture of a leisurely life immersed in idle pastimes and wasteful leisure, including poetic contemplation, as the reason for the decay and destruction of the Muslim/Mughal civilisation in India.[98] Literary and cultural societies in post-1857 Delhi attempted to structure themselves around concepts of utilitarianism; while one

98 Hali, for example, has a string of verses in his *Musaddas* that demeans contemporary Urdu poetry in vitriolic satire: "the filthy archive of poetry and odes, more foul than a cesspool in it putridity/by which the earth is convulsed as if by an earthquake, and which makes the angels blush in heaven/such is the place among other branches of learning of

group attempted to follow the English, others strived to bring older sensibilities in some compatibility with the new ethos.[99] In his brief critical history of Urdu literature from 1850 to 1975, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi points out the nature of the conflict the Urdu writers faced after 1857.[100] The challenge thrown by British supremacy in the aftermath of 1857 was voiced towards the immorality and uselessness of the extant literary culture in Urdu. Urdu literary tradition and its followers had, according to Faruqi, never been concerned with the question of the *usefulness* of literature; thus, this sudden and "alien" question (and criticism) gave rise to unprecedented conflict regarding how literature was perceived and its role in society (Faruqi 2005: 169–71). It "introduced disruptive elements" in the extant literary philosophy (ibid.). Having faced defeat and humiliation at the hands of the very same alien power, littérateurs underwent immense pressure to either change the (allegedly) otiose nature of literature or tried (and failed miserably) to prove its usefulness. Urdu literary ethos had been secular in nature, being fashioned by various literary, linguistic, and cultural influences ranging from Arabian, Persian, and the Indic/Hindvi. This prevalent plurality began to be suppressed, to some considerable extent, as reformist Islam took precedence to 'rectify' the allegations put forth by colonialist critique.

Against the utilitarian values championed by the industrious British and their thus prejudiced understanding of culture, knowledge and education, Urdu literature or *adab*, as a concept, underwent massive transformations and reorientations. At the same time, it also functioned as the media for this transformation. Literature then became the vehicle that best represented this split in perceptions of time and the literary itself became the object of this change, acquiring an "alien" utilitarian ethos under colonial administration. Several writers, now influenced by shifting loyalties or coercion of colonial authorities, looked towards colonial modernity, progress, and functional values of literature. Influential writers like Hali, Muhammad Husain Azad, and Nazir Ahmad followed such quests for reformation and renewal, embodied by the Aligarh Movement, spearheaded by Syed Ahmad Khan. Nevertheless, as scholars like

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our literature, by which learning and faith are quite devastated". In *Hali's Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam*. Trans. Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (1997), 18. The verse is discussed in detail later in the chapter.

99 See Shamim Hanafi, "Unīsvīṇ Ṣadī: Sar Sayyid aur Munśī Naval Kiśor". https://www.rekhta.org/articles/unniswin-sadee-sir-syed-aur-munshi-nawal-kishor-shamim-hanafi-articles?lang=ur accessed on 28th December 2020.
See also Faruqi (2005). He reads the founding of the Deoband Dār-ul 'Ulūm (1867) as a Muslim response against the westernising responses of Ahmad Khan and his followers, p. 170.

100 See Faruqi, "Conflict, Transition, and Hesitant Resolution" (2005), 168–87.

Frances Pritchett (1994), Margrit Pernau (2015a), and Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (2006) have shown remarkably, emotions of sorrow for the lost past and anxiety/discomfort towards the impending future continued to trouble these writers as they sought to break ties with their 'peaceful' and 'leisurely', alternately 'wasteful' and 'decadent' past and their erstwhile non-utilitarian, pluralist literary ethos in such times of "incurable disquiet".

2.2 Cultural Encounters, Literary Reorientations, and Feelings of Disequilibrium

Encounters with British colonial authorities were not entirely new to Urdu literature. The Fort William College in Calcutta, set up by the Marquess of Wellesley in 1800, was a place of heightened literary activities under the guidance of the orientalist scholar John Gilchrist.[101] Literary texts from Persian and Sanskrit were translated into simpler, more facile expressions. As an institute of what was understood as 'oriental learning', the activities at the College led to a revival of Urdu prose. Simultaneously, the Delhi College served as another framework of enhanced knowledge, translation, and encounters. Admittedly, there was a marked difference between these encounters and those that followed 1857. Earlier attempts were mostly meant to train fresh British recruits of the Company to help them acclimatise to the languages, literatures, and cultures of 'Hindoostan'. It has been adequately argued that much of the motivation among British officials and orientalists towards 'oriental learning' emerged from feelings of admiration and appreciation "before they were slowly replaced by self-righteous utilitarian and evangelical newcomers. This development took off in the 1830s and was sealed with the brutal repression of the revolt of 1857, never to be revived" (Pernau 2006: 11).

The literary encounters between the British and the Indians in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were often bi-directional, motivated by the need to acquire knowledge and understand the other. Gradually, the colonisers were also concerned with educating Indians in the sciences and other aspects of knowledge that they perceived the latter to be ignorant of. The British involvement in educating Indians changed through the nineteenth century. Initially, through the official mandate of 1813, a clause was inserted in the East India Company Act that announced, for the first time, an intention to supply funds towards the development of education and learning of the Indians.[102] In

101 Gilchrist had already compiled his dictionary of "*Hindoostanee*" in 1787.

102 For details, see C. M. Naim's essay "Prize-Winning Adab" (2004a), 120–21.

1823, after a bleak report on the status of formal education in the area of Delhi, Agra and other North Indian cities was drawn up, the government sanctioned resources towards the "instruction of Muhammadan youth in Delhi" (Pernau 2006: 10–12). After 1857, these British concerns about educating Indians transformed into direct involvement in the propagation of utilitarian knowledge and literature, particularly in the context of Delhi and the North-Western Provinces. In 1868, William Muir, the Lieutenant Governor of the NW Provinces, announced prize money for native writers for producing "useful works in the vernacular" languages for the moral instruction of Indians (Naim 2004a: 122–23). In about half a century, the nature of encounters between the British colonial officers and the Urdu-speaking North Indians had transformed dramatically from one of diplomacy to one of discipline.[103]

The years after 1857 saw more of such direct British influence in the literary activities of North Indians, which drastically changed the course of Urdu literature. In 1865, G. W. Leitner, a renowned linguist and orientalist scholar, founded the *Anjuman-i Panjāb* (the 'Punjab Society') in Lahore, directed towards "the revival of ancient oriental learning, the advancement of popular knowledge through vernaculars, the discussion of social, literary, scientific, and political questions of interest, and the association of the learned and influential classes with the officers of the government" (Pritchett 1994: 32). The society organised literary talks, set up libraries and reading spaces, and was instrumental in establishing Lahore's Oriental College. It served as a role model for such organisations to be founded in other towns and cities. Leitner had been instructed in Urdu by Muhammad Husain Azad, who fled to Lahore after the destruction of Delhi and the torments his family had suffered in its aftermath. Closely working with the *Anjuman* and under Leitner's watchful guidance, Azad advanced cautiously towards his literary career. He delivered a speech in 1874 in which he called for "a new Urdu poetry and a new poetics, both based on English models", urging poets to leave the "traditional adornments of poetry" behind (Pritchett 1994: 34). The director of public instruction, Colonel W. R. M. Holroyd spoke on the "usefulness of poetry as a teaching tool" and proposed a new series of *muśā'irah*, which should develop by adhering to a specific predetermined theme or subject instead of the spontaneous flow of verses in a traditional symposium. By now, Altaf Husain Hali was also in Lahore and became closely associated with the *Anjuman*. His involvement in, influenced by his association with British authorities, had a gradual but magnanimous impact on Urdu poetry and criticism, as reflected in his influential works like the *Musaddas* titled *Madd va*

103 See also references to the remarkable difference in British involvement in North India before and after 1857 in Pritchett (1994), 5 and 6.

Ǯazr-i Islām (*The Flow and Ebb of Islam*, 1879, 1886) and the preface to his *Dīvān*, the *Muqaddamah*. These encounters and their negotiations of Urdu poetry, albeit inspired by their mentors and patrons, encouraged both Azad and Hali to develop their philosophy of a new poetics in their works *Āb-i Ḥayāt* (1880) and *Muqaddamah-i Śiʿr va Śāʿirī* (1893), respectively. While Azad's *Āb-i Ḥayāt* was written in the form of a *taẕkirah* (a chronological, biographical commentary), perhaps even the last traditional *taẕkirah*, Hali's *Muqaddamah* ushered in the revolution of poetry criticism. Annemarie Schimmel has claimed Hali to be the "founder of literary criticism in Urdu" (1975: 226). Shamsur Rahman Faruqi describes him as the writer who "broadened the perspective" but "also narrowed it", invoking the emotion of "guilt" in revaluing the past (2005: 176).

The British had convinced Indians of the former's superiority in literature, knowledge systems, and civilisation. Having experienced the rupture of 1857 first-hand, Azad and Hali sought to salvage what was left of the long literary tradition they had inherited and loved. In their opinion, the only way to do this was by reforming or renewing it to meet the demands of the present. Hali found a guide with whom he could work towards the reformation and revival of Urdu literature in the tall-standing figure of Syed Ahmad Khan. The doyen of Muslim education and social reform in India, Khan worked for the East India Company as a judge and remained loyal to the British during the Rebellion, earning him a knighthood in 1888. His trysts with British values and ethics are reflected in the two most influential results of his efforts – the dissemination of his new journal *Tahẕīb-al Aḵẖlāq* (The Cultivation of Morals, published 1871–97) and his brainchild, the modern education system embodied by the Aligarh Movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[104] Khan utilised his influence on Azad and Hali, and through their voices, he called for a "*necarī*" (natural) form of poetry, one that is inclined towards nature or natural emotions, thus marking a break from the older traditions, implying their dealings with 'unnatural' thoughts and feelings expressed in construed metaphors.[105]

104 David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (1996 [1978]), 102–5.

105 In a letter written by Khan to Azad in October 1874. The letter has been quoted by Aslam Farrukhi in his two volume-biography of Azad, *Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād: Ḥayāt aur taṣānīf, ḥiṣṣah-i avval va duvum. Karācī: Anjuman-i Taraqqī-i Urdū, 1965*. The Urdu original line uses the word "*necar*", adopted from the English 'nature': "Apne kalām ko aur ziyādah necar kī ṭaraf māʾil karo" (Turn your poetic writing further towards nature), 280. For a more contextual reading of the letter and several other documents pertaining to this call for a "natural" form of poetry of Syed Ahmad Khan, see his works translated and analysed by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in his essay "From Antiquary to Social Revolutionary: Syed Ahmad Khan and the Colonial Experi-

This form and style of natural poetry, Syed Ahmad claimed, was to be found in abundance in the annals of English literature.[106] Khan's affinity towards the English language, literature, and its progressive culture intensified during his trip to England in 1869–70. His encounters with English education and literature informed Khan's dreams of turning Aligarh and its institutes into the 'Oxford and Cambridge of India'. This first-hand interaction with England had a tremendous emotional impact on Khan, urging him to 'awaken' Indian Muslims. David Lelyveld writes: "[B]y all accounts Sayyid Ahmad's experience of England was a major personal crisis. His writings took on a new passionate intensity or *josh*, which often expressed itself in terms of shocking self-debasement totally at odds with his usual stance of proud self-respect" (1996: 105). Although overwhelmed by the achievements of the British, Khan was not a man easily immobilised – he used his *joś*/*josh* to stimulate his community. The several encounters (briefly charted above) of Urdu-speaking Indian Muslim writers with British officers, English efficiency and advancement, especially after 1857, generated an influx of emotions of inferiority and helplessness. With their backs against the wall, they formulated several revisions to the extant literary culture as they attempted to cut their ties with the past.[107] Within this emotionally charged historical framework, this chapter reads the discussions surrounding otium, leisure, and idleness as the forward-looking Urdu writers tried to suppress nostalgia for the Delhi of a bygone era, which was felt and constructed as more leisurely and peaceful.

While on the one hand, they looked to the future of Urdu literature and the progress of Muslim society in North India, many such writers could not overcome the asynchronicity of emotions as they mourned a beloved time and city. This emotional conflict echoes what Faruqi describes as "disequilibrium" in the literary field, as Urdu writers attempted to modernise literature by borrowing literary ideas and novelties from English: "The ideas that invaded Urdu lit-

ence", 9–10. The essay was developed from a speech delivered by Faruqi at Aligarh Muslim University in 2006, published online by Frances Pritchett. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/srf_sirsayyid.pdf accessed on 29th January 2019.

106 "Ẕarūr hai ki angrezī śāʿiroṉ ke k̲hayālāt le kar urdū zubān meṉ adā kiʾe jāʾeṉ" (ibid.).

107 Several scholars have addressed these attempts at severance of the past from the present: Pritchett's expansive study on the Urdu *ġazal* focuses on the trials of Hali and Azad as they reoriented Urdu poetry towards a critical functionality; Khan's dissociation from his deep interest in the past reflected in his two-volume book, *Āṣār-us Sanādīd* (1847, 1854) has been analysed by Faruqi (2006) and Pernau (2019) to arrive at the reformer's emotional dilemmas and his reorientation towards the future.

erature from the West were not only modern and novel: they were culturally alien. Furthermore, they introduced disruptive elements into our literary thought" (2005: 171). Many such novelties were responses to the need of the hour, oriented towards uplifting the defeated emotional state of the literary community/*qaum*. While poetry was altered in functionality and form, prose became a more desired genre during this period. The contemporaneous enterprises of the printing press in the middle of the nineteenth century saw great success in the next two decades as printed books became easier and more affordable vehicles for the dissemination of literature. Earlier prose traditions in the oral form, like the *dāstān* and the *qiṣṣa*, were replaced by the call of the genre of the hour, the modern Urdu novel. The printing press also gave rise to other popular prose forms – like periodicals, literary journalism, and popular literature. These possibilities allowed for necessary and exciting literary innovations in Urdu literature, even if they ushered in a disequilibrium in high literary thought. The early Urdu novel provides for a fascinating study of how literature embodied a space where the tussle of tradition and innovation played out, juxtaposing with the 'nostalgic subject' who must be disciplined, and the modern subject who must adapt. In the overall analysis, the focus is on the apparently contradictory prejudices of the nostalgic subject and the modern subject in their attitudes towards forms of otium – leisure, idleness, and indolence, embodied in the leisurely bygone era – and towards nostalgia for that lost past. Before we read the novels as case studies, let us look at the conceptual construction of idleness in the emerging Urdu literary discourses formulated by the most remarkable poem of the time, Hali's *Musaddas* – a poem in critique of the extant tradition of poetry.

2.3 Hali's *Musaddas*: The Construction of Counterconcepts and the Critique of Indolence and Poetry

> *In those days, before its destruction, Delhi had recovered itself for the last time. Although the possibility of illuminating the discourses of the pastwas null, the city felt full of life and colour, teeming with enduring men of letters. .... This last brilliant glow of Delhi, the thought of which makes the heart break with grief, I have seen it with my own eyes, and one by one, I bade farewell to the lagging caravans of that time.*
> Hali[108]

As Ghalib's Delhi and its former cultural and poetic brilliance declined, Khwaja Altaf Husain 'Ḥālī', along with his contemporary senior, Muhammad Husain Azad, tried to gather the remains and progress towards journeys of regeneration. In this quest for a strain of literature significantly different from the previous, allegedly decadent ethos, Hali was highly influenced by Syed Ahmad Khan. However, before Hali came to be acquainted with Khan, he was mentored by two doyens of the old world – Ghalib and Navab Mustafa Khan Sheftah. Hali writes of his time with Ghalib and Shefta (along with other masters he had known) in a nostalgic verse (taken from the same text as that of the epigraph) in which he bids himself to look ahead at the future and let go of these painful memories of the past:

> *Neither Ghalib remains, nor Shefta, not even Naiyar, neither Vahshat remains, nor Salik, not Anvar;*
> *Hali, now take this to be the gathering of friends; the wounds of friends remain etched on the heart.* [109]

Here, I explore the emotional conflicts of an influential writer like Hali, who inhabited both worlds – before and after 1857 – and had an irrefutable impact on the future of Urdu poetry and literary ethos. This reading enables contextualising the literary upheavals from within the emotional framework of the poets and writers' experiences and puts emotions at the centre of these debates. The objective of reading a writer like Hali in a chapter on nostalgia is to rethink the perceptions of writers as isolated, unidirectional influences on literary debates. Instead, the impetus is towards reading the contradictoriness within literary debates, vis-à-vis a flow of emotions not only within the writer or the

108 '*Dīvān-i Anvar*', *Maqālāt-i- Ḥālī, ḥiṣṣah-i duvum* (1936), 173.

109 "*Ġālib hai nah Śeftah nah Naiyyar bāqī, Vaḥśat hai nah Sālik hai nah Anvar bāqī, Ḥālī ab isī ko bazm-i yārāṇ samjho, yāroṇ ke jo kuch dāġ haiṇ dil par bāqī*" (ibid.). I thank Saif Mahmood for his help with this verse.

actor but also within contexts and communities – the writer, the text, and the literary sphere.

Time is the poem's central theme, caught in a struggle between history (how time is seen to have progressed) and nostalgia (how time's passing is felt). Spending time in leisurely and idle pursuits is constructed by Hali as the reason for the degradation of Indian Muslims of his time. Interestingly, this squandering of precious time is repeatedly depicted in the composition of useless poetry by the leisurely elite aristocrats. In this emotionally negotiated conceptual manoeuvre, Hali fuses the concepts of leisurely decadence, idleness, and indolence with the state of poetry and literature, declaring the composition of elaborate Urdu poetry and this tradition as wasteful and decadent. In this entanglement, he states poetry and indolence as the inseparable counterconcept to the progress of his community.[110] As the poem advances, the dichotomy is restructured towards progress and idleness, severely criticising the contemporary poets (*śuʿarā*), aristocratic men and their children (*śarīfoṇ kī aulād*) who are busy passing their time in idle activities and the carefree slumber of heedlessness (*ġaflat, fārig̱-ul-bāl*). The cure to this decaying process, Hali asserts, is the reverse of wasting time in elaborate and useless poetry, i.e., the utilisation of precious time through effort and hard work (*kośiś va miḥnat*) and the utilisation of literature towards the inculcation of morality.

Hailing from Panipat, Hali first moved to Delhi in 1854 with dreams of a literary career but travelled to Hisar for practical employment. During this short stint in the capital, he witnessed the 'last brilliant glow of Delhi'. He returned in 1861 and became associated with Shefta and Ghalib, both of whom encouraged him (Shackle & Majeed 1997: 2; Pritchett 1994: 15). These joyous times ended with the consecutive deaths of Ghalib and Shefta in 1969. In 1971, Hali moved to Lahore, but the pinnacle of his career was destined in Delhi. In 1874, he returned to Delhi and became closely associated with his new mentor, Syed Ahmad Khan. Hali was seriously committed to the regeneration of Urdu poetry, which he expressed in the preface/introduction to his collection of poems, the *Dīvān* of 1890. The long preface, titled *Muqaddamah-i Śiʿr-va Śāʿirī* (Preamble to verse and poetry), became a successful book in its own right and was published separately in 1893. In it, he laid down what he believed to be the proper role of poetry. He elaborates on the effects of poetry on the audience's emotions (*śiʿr kī tāṣīr*), on the relationship between poetry and morality (*śāʿirī kā taʿalluq akẖlāq ke sāth*) and its dependency on society (*śāʿirī sosāʾiṭī kī ṭābiʿ hai*) among many such func-

110 Koselleck, "The Historical-political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts" (2004 a), 155–58.

tionalities of poetry.[111] He offers several examples from European literary history to demonstrate the "political", "social" and "moral" benefits the people of Europe have reaped through a functional relationship of poetry and literature with social reality.[112] These proclamations in the *Muqaddamah* foreshadow the *Musaddas* of 1879, written largely under Khan's mentorship.

Titled *Madd va J̌aẕr-i Islām* or *The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Trans & Eds. Shackle & Majeed), the *Musaddas* is arguably one of the most important and influential works of poetry in the last half of the century. Disrupting the tradition of poetics and setting a new literary trend, it provoked a series of imitations and reactions that stirred up a small literary storm in the world of Urdu poetry (Shackle & Majeed 1997: 36–48). Unlike previously accepted norms of a poem, Hali's *Musaddas* approached the innovation of literary polemics in its many aspects. Distinctly departing from extant themes in Indo-Persian poetic traditions like love, separation, and longing, it addressed the contemporary socio-political situation in its analysis of the rise and fall of Islamic civilisation in world history. Not only does it accomplish a shift in theme but also in style. The *Musaddas* made a distinct mark in moving away from the dominant form of poetry, the *ġazal*. The *Musaddas*, on the other hand, retained its unity of theme(s) and, in itself, became a critical investigation of the social (dis)order, hoping to awaken Indian Muslims through emotions of shame, disgrace, and hope. It is written in the poetic form of the '*musaddas* stanza' – units of six half-verses, composed of 297 such verses, later reduced to 294 in its second edition (1886).[113] The second edition came with a supplement (*ẓamīmah*) as well as a glossary (*farḥang*) and was clear proof of its momentous success (Shackle & Majeed 1997: 11, 26). The first introduction argued, in the form of a polemic, for an urgent need to severe from the past tradition of poetics; the second criticised the vices of the lazy, immoral, and indolent Muslims. The printed copy of the *Musaddas* was also alien to extant traditions of Urdu poetry. Shackle and Majeed describe it as "Victorian" – "unassuming, disciplined, and prosy" (1997: 9).

The poem is a struggling investigation of the depressing state of Muslims in India, hoisted on the dichotomy of the two concepts, *taraqqī* (progress) and

111 *Muqaddamah-i Ś'ir-va Śā'irī* (1928), 3, 15 & 17.

112 Ibid. 8–9. Note that Hali writes 'political', 'social' and 'moral' as English words in his Urdu text.

113 As Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (1997) elaborate in their critical translation of the poem, the fact that the poem underwent many revisions, culminating in a second edition published seven years later, can be seen as something that 'differentiates' it from the rest of Urdu poetry of the time.

tanazzul (decay).[114] Hali makes the central claim that the present degradation of Indian Muslims is because, over time, they lost their faith in the simple, moral, and rational teachings of Islam and have become indolent and arrogant. He employs two poetic devices: firstly, he sets up strong, rigid dichotomies between East and West (*maśriq va maġrib*), between progress and decay (*taraqqī va tanazzul*); and then he introduces a cyclical movement of time between the two opposites, destabilising the seemingly fixed positions of these dichotomies, subverting their positions with the passing of time, as if in a cycle of nature. He begins with the age of darkness – the period of '*jāhilīyāt*' or the barbaric times in pre-Islamic Arabia. After descriptions of this dark period, he introduces the birth of the prophet (Muhammad) and the spread of Islam, with which a social revolution is brought about as the early Muslims of Arabia attain "progress" in every aspect of life (*musalmānoṉ kī taraqqiyāt*, 1997: 126–41).[115] After a long list of progress of Arab Muslims, suddenly he depicts the "decay of Islam" (*tanazzul-i ahl-i Islām*, 143), soon followed by the "efficiency of the Europeans" (*ahl-i Yūrap kā ẓabt-i auqāt*, 151) and the fall of Muslim civilisation in India, signalled by "the wind of autumn" (*caman meṉ havā ā cukī hai <u>kh</u>izāṉ kī*).

> *The wind of autumn has already come into the garden, the direction of the gardener's gaze has shifted.*
> *The warbling nightingale's cry has altered. Now, the garden is due to depart at any moment.*
> *All the visions which are seen are of destruction. Now, the dawn of catastrophe is about to break.* (1997: 153)

The rest of the long poem is a moralistic critique of the unending reasons responsible for the degradation of contemporary Muslim society in India. The poem then summarises the fortunes and blessings of the British rule in India (*barkat-i ḥukūmat*, 202) before it concludes with the theme of impermanence (*raftanī*, 205–7).

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114 Several scholars have identified progress and decay as central themes in Hali's *Musaddas*. See Christopher Shackle and Javed Majeed (1997), 6, 49. See also, Arian Hopf (2017), 147, 155.

115 See original text and translation in Shackle & Majeed. In this section of the chapter, for quotations and translations of Hali's *Musaddas*, I have used their critical and authoritative translation, unless mentioned otherwise. They have translated the *musaddas* stanza of six half-verses as stanzas of three full verses, presumably for coherence. I have inserted page numbers as in-text citations while using their translation following the year of publication, 1997. This translation also includes the Urdu original on the opposite page of each translation. For references to a separate Urdu original, when required, I use the following version: *Musaddas-i Ḥālī yānī Madd va J̌aẓr-i Islām*. Kānpur: Munśī Naval Kiśor, 1895. Citations from this text will be referred to as 1895.

Through the dichotomy of progress and decay, the poem pivots around change or the impermanence of time, already suggested in the title, *the flow and ebb of Islam*. However, this changing perception of time as natural is contrasted with human action, leading to civilisation's progress. This contrast then transforms time from its natural, cyclical flow into time as a fleeting opportunity, as linear and irretrievable, as valuable and utilitarian. There is a constant tension in the poem regarding the perception of time – and its inevitable turning – which, according to Hali, is then not so natural if it is not invested with human toil and morality (the first instance of this is seen to be achieved through the struggle of the prophet in spreading the message of "original" Islam). This tension and suspicion regarding the nature of time and the fortunes it may (not) bring if (no) human toil is invested is best described in the *rubāʿī* (quatrain) at the beginning:

> *If anyone sees the way our downfall passes all bounds, the way that Islam, once fallen, does not rise again,*
> *He will never believe that the tide flows after every ebb once he sees the way our sea has gone out.* (1997: 102–3).[116]

2.3.1 Process or Product? The Contradictions of Time in the *Musaddas*

In his article, "Kyā Musalmān Taraqqī kar Sakte Haiṇ?" (Can Muslims make progress?), Hali compares Europeans and Indian Muslims via the description of two caravans advancing on the same route. He advises the lagging caravan (the one that sets out later, i.e., Indian Muslims) not to lose hope, as the destination of both is the same. This destination, which Arian Hopf identifies and questions as Hali's understanding of historical *telos* (2017: 156–65), is then analysed to be originating in Europe and its advancements, although at the beginning of the poem, it seems that the *telos* was 'original' Islam. The primary question relating time and progress is the contradiction in the construction of the *telos*, a final destination that is required to understand progress (towards a goal), and the simultaneous destabilising of the *telos* with the cyclical movement of time albeit in a linear direction, in troughs and crests, ebb and flow. This nature of time as a variable is grasped with its possibilities of time as valuable in what Shackle and Majeed identify as the "economics of time" (1997: 55). This is further strengthened by the perception of time as limited in its opportunity (*thoṛī hai muhlat*) in the following verse, wherein Hali presumably quotes the philosophy of the prophet (Muhammad):

116 "*Pastī kā koʾī ḥadd se guzarnā dekhe, Islām kā gir kar na ubharnā dekhe, māne nah kabhī ki madd hai har jazr ke baʿd, daryā kā hamāre jo utarnā dekhe*".

> *'You have your opportunity in health before sickness, in leisure before abundant occupations,*
> *'In youth before the affliction of old age, in halting before the traveller goes on.*
> *'You have your opportunity in wealth before poverty. Do what you ought, for there is little time to spare!'* (1997: 116–17)[117]

With the constructive and moral use of time, its value can be transformed into knowledge (*taʿlīm*) and wealth (*daulat*).

Time is also the resource through which the future can be constructed, by recalling the past, the time that has gone by. Hali's source of progress and a possibly hopeful future for Indian Muslims seems to be knowledge of the past glory of Muslims in Arabia after the advent of Islam. Looking back at the peak of Islam's advancements, his gaze is nostalgic as he depicts its glory. This nostalgia is re-enacted in the epigraph where Hali reminisces the final, short-lived "recovery" of Delhi and its "last glow", the diminishing of which left wounds etched on his broken heart. Hali's emotions for the past are reflective of what is termed by Svetlana Boym as "restorative nostalgia", which "manifests itself in total reconstructions" of signs of the past by investing in the process of "myth-making of history" and "invented traditions" (2001: 41–42). Boym explicates the invention of traditions borrowing from Eric Hobsbawm, drawing on the chasms, ruptures, and discontinuities of the nineteenth century: invented tradition "builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing" (2001: 42). Hali utilises this longing for a glorious Islamic past as the source through which the future can be constructed (Hopf 2017: 162–65). In this (dis)continuum of progressive time, Hali's view of history and modernity echoes the gap between what Reinhart Koselleck terms the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'[118]:

> *'Who were you yesterday, and what have you become today! Just now you were awake, and now you have gone to sleep!'* (1997: 102–3)[119]

The difference between past and present is shrunk with a sense of disbelief, to 'just now' or *abhī* and yet, separated with real-time centuries between 'yesterday' and 'today'. The gap between this yesterday and today, the past and the

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117 "'*Ġanīmat hai ṣeḥat ʿalālat se pahle, farāġat maśāġal kī kaṣrat se pahle, javānī buṛhāpe kī zaḥmat se pahle, iqāmat musāfir kī riḥlat se pahle, faqīrī se pahle ġanīmat hai daulat, jo karnā hai kar lo ki thoṛī hai mohlat.*'" Shackle and Majeed refer this to a Hadith/*Hadīṣ* (sayings of the Prophet).

118 Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories." (2004 b).

119 "*Ki kal kaun the āj kyā ho gaʾe tum, abhī jāgte the abhī so gaʾe tum*".

present is deemed irreconcilable in Koselleck's separation between the two historical categories, the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. When the previous experiences can no longer aid us in gauging the possibilities in the future, the stranded present then becomes the irreconcilable gap, denoting 'modernity' (Koselleck 2004b: xvii, 257, 260–61). But for Hali, although he recognises such a gap, the distance between today and yesterday, *āj* and *kal*, is apparently reconcilable with hard work and toil (following the Europeans), which would lead to haste so that the lagging caravan can catch up with the advancing one. Interestingly, Koselleck himself sees progress as a singular destination, almost echoing Hali's metaphor of *telos*, as an end to the journey of the now, the worldly understanding of mortal time, one that combined as well as defied the logic of 'experience' and 'expectation':

> Progress thus combined experiences and expectations, both endowed with a temporal coefficient of change. As part of a group, a country, or finally, a class, one was conscious of being advanced in comparison with the others, or one sought to catch up with or overtake the others. […] progress was directed toward an active transformation of this world, not the Hereafter […] What was new was that the expectations that reached out for the future became detached from all that previous experience had to offer. (Koselleck 2004b: 266–67)

This detachment that Koselleck sees as inevitably modern or new (*neu* in the *Neuzeit*) is seen by Hali as something that can be bridged again by reconciling with the simple tenets of original Islam, but also of European progress, of 'hard work and toil' (*kośiś va miḥnat*). The way to achieve this is by diagnosing and rectifying (*iṣlāḥ*) the present ignorance over the power of time amidst the Indian Muslims. For this purpose, Hali finds it extremely important to sever oneself from the immediate past to rectify one's 'space of experience' to influence one's 'horizon of expectation'. Shackle and Majeed draw our attention to the verse the first Introduction of the *Musaddas* begins with, which severs Hali, the 'contemporary' poet's past, from his presence:

> *I sing no longer with the nightingale*
> *From the poets and recitals, now I quail.*
> *For ever since you left me, living heart,*
> *No more do I recount your endless tale!* (1997: 89)[120]

120 "*Bulbul kī caman meṉ ham-zabānī chorī, bazm-i śuʿarā meṉ śiʿr khvānī choṛī, jab se dil–i zindāh tū ne ham ko choṛā, ham ne bhī terī rām kahānī choṛī*".

This determination is reminiscent of the last line in the epigraph to this section, where Hali pacifies his broken heart at the thought of 'the last glow' of Delhi and bids farewell to its lagging caravans, one by one. He then calls for a 'new' time or era, not one that looks back at the immediate past, but one that must look ahead to the linearity of time, the logic of the cycles of nature. Because the immediate past is a trough, an ebb (*jaẕr*) and a distant past is seen as a crest, the flow (*madd*), as it once flowed, it may flow again. Hali emotionally harnesses this possibility of progress in the restorative nostalgia of the distant past. His relationship with nostalgia is manoeuvred in a restorative form that calls for a revival, a renewal. In the *Musaddas*, he (re)invents traditions, as if in a continuum from those of the original teachings of Islam, embodied in notions of simplicity and morality of religion ("*Ad-dīn yusr*" Religion is easy).[121] This is also the central claim of the Islamic reformation led by Hali's mentor, Syed Ahmad Khan. In the poem, Hali constructs this simple, moral, and easy understanding of religion in strong opposition to three targets – first, the complex poetry traditions in Urdu that he describes as filthy (1997: 192–93); second, the young aristocrats and their debauchery (194–201); and the third, indolence, idleness, and a heedless attitude towards time (203).

2.3.2 The Pathology of Indolence and Poetry: Degeneracy and Sickness

In the prologue to the *Musaddas*, an unnamed person (*kisī ne*), in a manner of anecdote, is reported to have approached Hippocrates to enquire which diseases (*marẕ*) are fatal in his opinion. The Greek physician responds that there is no disease for which God has not created a cure; "[E]xcept for that disease which people think trifling (*āsān*), and about which whatever the physician says is (understood to be) nonsense (*ḥizyān*)" (Hali 1997: 103). This unnamed disease, the cause (*sabab*), and the symptoms (*ʿalāmat*), which are not taken seriously by the afflicted is gradually developed into the central problem of the poem. It is seen as having led to the degradation of the Muslim community, which is now at the edge of a dangerous situation, depicted in the immediate verse through the metaphor of a storm and whirlpool. While the ship, signifying the community, is about to sink, the "people in the boat do not even turn over, as they lie asleep (*paṛhe sote*) and unconscious (*be-k̲habar*)" (1997: 102–3). In the next stanza, he attempts to awaken the community by reminding them of their mighty position in the distant past and their pitiful degeneracy in the present (verse discussed in the previous section, on the distance between yesterday and today).

121 For an elaboration of Hali's notion of ease in religion, see Hopf (2017), 151.

This disease, the fatality of which is depicted as about to annihilate the community, is shown to be a potent intoxication, a spell, invoking a pathological seriousness that should induce fear and trepidation in the audience.

This overarching theme of sickness in society and bodily illness of the poet is in continuum with the first Introduction of the *Musaddas* of 1789, "the inner turmoil he underwent as he was torn between the poetry of the past and the demands of the present", which Hali describes as fevers raging within (*bukhārāt daraunī*).[122] The severity of the sickness is contrasted with the arrogance and obliviousness of the afflicted: "But the obliviousness of that heedless community is still the same. Their contentment with their decline is still the same. […] Morning has come, and their comfortable sleep is still the same" (1997: 104–5).[123] The rest of the poem, particularly in its latter half, explicates the symptoms followed by the causes of this illness. Although the degeneracy of the Indian Muslims is intricately tied to the degeneracy of poetics, the mysterious illness itself is almost never spelt out or identified directly. A thorough reading of the poem makes it quite clear that the sickness in society that brings in periods of decay (like in pre-Islamic Arabia's dark period of barbarism and the present situation of Muslim society in India) is essentially that of indolence. Shackle and Majeed identify indolence as a partial referent with which the decline of Muslims in India is measured (1997: 56). But indolence and disregard towards the value of time, in fact, are interwoven to constitute the illness itself that Hippocrates describes as the 'fatal' (*mohlik*) and 'trifling' (*āsān*) disease, ignored by those who are afflicted. This is made clear by the single mention of the affliction in verse 122 (1997: 146–47), where Hali elaborates on everything that is wrong with the present state of society, including "sloth in our hearts" or a leisurely/idle temperament ("*mizājoṇ meṇ sustī*"). It is this disease against which Hali strives to awaken his community into recognition (diagnosis), and then action towards its rectification (cure), which he continues until the end of the poem.

The affliction of sloth is enhanced with arrogance regarding the value of time after a couple verses, where time is described as "that priceless capital which is real wealth" (*voh be-mol pūṇjī ke hai aṣl daulat*), whose value is not recognised (*nahīṇ uskī vuqʿat naẓar meṇ ḥamārī*) and which is dissipated "use-

122 See Shackle and Majeed's analysis of themes of the *Musaddas*, of which 'The economics of time and bodily illness' are read together (1997), 55, 57–58. For reference to the fevers and sickness that Hali elaborates in the first introduction of the *Musaddas*, see Hali (1895), 7. See also (1997), 92.

123 "*Par us qaum-i ġāfil kī ġaflat vohī hai, tanazzul pe apne qanāʿat vahī hai, mile khāk meṇ par raʿūnat vohī hai, huʾī ṣubḥ aur khvāb-i rāḥat vohī hai…*"

lessly and for nothing" (*yūṉhī muft jātī hai barbād sārī*, 1997: 148–49). Immediately after this, the value of time for the advancing Europeans is contrasted in a section titled "The efficiency of Europeans", who "never sleep their fill" and "do not waste an instant uselessly". The contrast is heightened in the following verse where the inactivity, indolence, and uselessness of Indian Muslims are emphasised and compared:

> *But we, who are still exactly where we were, are a burden on the earth, like minerals.*
> *We exist in the world as if we did not. We sit so careless of the world*
> *That it is as if all necessary tasks had already been accomplished, and only death remains.* (1997: 150–51)[124]

While indolence is the sickness, it is depicted as being transmitted by the worst sections of the community, the wealthy elite Muslims, the poets, and especially, the younger generation of the aristocrats. The aristocratic Indian Muslims are admonished for their arrogance, ignorance and lack of skill, but more than that, for living in luxury (*taʿayyuś meṉ jīnā*) and for squandering their wealth on games and sports (*lavh va bāzī*) and infatuations (*ḥaẕrat-i ʿiśq*, 1997: 160–61). The children of the aristocrats are equally accused of wasting their time in vices like flying pigeons and quail-fighting, as well as addiction to opiates. They are described as further diminishing the nobility of their families by wasting their time (1997: 195). They are deemed as useless, unfit for any suitable employment (*nah k̲hidmat-guzārī kā unko salīqah* 1997: 198–99).

The worst of the lot for Hali, are the poets of the times. Shackle and Majeed read the stanza about the degeneracy of Urdu poetry as the poem's most "vitriolic" passage. Indeed, the first stanza describing the poets is graphically exaggerated in such a manner as if to display the worst symptom of the disease, the "hectic fever": "Such is the place among other branches of learning of our literature, by which learning and faith are quite devastated" (1997: 192–93).[125] The degeneracy of poetry and poetics, described in the corruption of the poets, is directly linked to the disease in society as a symptom. Having himself gone through the fevers (as described in the first Introduction), Hali is determined to break this tradition of contemporary poetry as he reminds the readers in the

124 "*Magar ham ki ab tak jahāṉ the vahī hai, jamādāt kī ṭaraḥ bār-i zamīn hai, jāhāṉ meṉ haiṉ aise ki goyā nahīṉ hai, zamāne se kuch aise fāriġ-naśīṉ haiṉ, ki goyā ẕarūrī thā jo kām karna, vo sab kar cuke ek bāqī hai marnā*".

125 "*Vo śiʿr va qaṣāʿid kā nā-pāk daftar, ʿufūnat meṉ saṇḍās se jo hai badtar, zamīn jis se hai zalzale meṉ barābar, malak jis se śarmāte haiṉ āsmāṉ par, huʾā ʿilm va dīn jis se tarāj sārā, vo ʿilmoṉ meṉ ʿilm-i adab hai hamārā*".

subsequent stanzas that the gift of exalted poetry (like religion) had been handed down to his community from those mighty Arabs, and it has now festered in the decaying ailment of indolence in Indian Muslims. Continuing with this pathological image of contagion, his attempts at severing from poets and poetic tradition of this immediate past (whose boundaries with the present are continually blurred) are achieved in his rectifying measures, i.e., the writing of the *Musaddas*. In a symptomatic treatment, Hali identifies the disease, its causes, and its symptoms and, furthermore, foregrounds its cure (*davā*). The cure is in rejecting indolence (*fāriġ-ul bāl*), changing the customs and ways of life (*cāl aur ḍhāl*), and moving ahead/progress (*taraqqī*) (1997: 202–3).

In the final equation, the claim is that the gifts received from the glorious Islamic civilisation of Arabia – 'original' Islam and the art of poetry – have been carelessly squandered by the present generation of Indian Muslims. This indolent nature and attitude are responsible for degeneration in society. The sickness of sloth and its symptoms (the useless and immoral poetry) can now be cured by grabbing the opportunity offered by the advancements of Europe, translated in the "blessings of the British rule" (1997: 203). Hali's original claim for renewal and regeneration (to return to the golden era of Arab civilisation) does not hold in his eventual loyalty towards the British in India, as expressed in the penultimate section of the poem, where progress is now the monopoly of the British:

> *The government has given you all kinds of freedom. It has completely opened up the roads to progress.*
> *From every direction these cries are coming, 'From prince to peasant, all men prosper.'*
> *Peace and security hold sway in all the lands. No caravan has its way blocked.*
> (1997: 202–3)[126]

The path to progress following European advancements and its relationship to his ideas of revival and renewal remains unclear until the end of the poem, especially in the concluding section, where fortune is constantly subject to change. His attitudes towards the past(s) and the possible future following the flow and ebb of fortune also remain ambivalent. The strong dichotomy between progress and decay set out in the poem's first half is gradually seen to transform. The opposite of progress is later deconstructed as the indolence of aristocratic Indian Muslims and the degeneracy of contemporary Urdu poetics. The

126 "*Ḥukūmat ne āzādiyāṉ tum ko dī haiṉ, taraqqī kī rāheṉ sarāsar kholī haiṉ ṣadāʾeṉ ye har simt se ā rahī haiṉ, ki rājā se parjā talak sab sukhī haiṉ, tasalluṭ hai mulkoṉ meṉ aman va amān nahīṉ band rastah kisī kārvāṉ kā*".

strong binaries, painted in "black and white" (Hopf 2017: 148) are enhanced with the semantics of counterconcepts, linguistic dualities, and techniques of negation.

Hali's construction of water-tight binaries is accomplished through the singular perception of the self and the other and how the other perceives the self. The protagonists of Hali's two stories (Hopf 2017: 159), the Muslims of past Arab civilisation and the decaying Muslim community in India, are united and identified through the legacy of Islam. He then deploys binary concepts in constructing social and political agency for the groups he refers to as 'they' – the others, i.e., the Arabs of the past and the present Europeans, and 'we' – the self, the present Muslims of India, which form the basis of these identities. Some of the central concepts are *taḥzīb* (civilisation), *jāḥīliyāt* (barbarism), *taraqqī* (progress) and *tanazzul* (decay), *miḥnat* (toil) and *sustī* (sloth/indolence). Koselleck sees the employment of such concepts as a strategy in defining community identities based on naming oneself by means of excluding another: "[a] political or social agency is first constituted through concepts by means of which it circumscribes itself and hence excludes others, and therefore, by means of which it defines itself" (2004 a: 155–56). Koselleck analyses these conceptualisations as an attempt to establish 'singularity' by writers of history, who often regard such general concepts as particularly inherent to the historical agencies. He explicates these binary conceptualisations as "asymmetrical" and "unequally antithetical" (Koselleck 2004 a: 157). History is seen to be operating through designed value judgements based on particular unequal footings with an estranged sense of reciprocity regarding the identity of oneself and the other. Only after naming the other does one group of people ascribe a name (in contradiction) to themselves. Hali uses the singularity of concepts to exclude communities he earlier united. He also then targets traditions (poetry) he had previously belonged to.

Hali's loyalty to the British government, his renouncement of the poetic traditions he once belonged to, and his critique of the way of life that was lost are all harnessed, although asymmetrically and ambivalently, towards the reformation of his community. He constructs this semantics of duality in the *Musaddas* to provoke emotions of shame (*śarm*) and disgrace (*ẓillat*), hoping to shake his community into wakefulness.[127] Shackle and Majeed identify the writing of the *Musaddas* as a cathartic process for Hali, "to heal and rejuvenate

127 Osterheld, "Campaigning for a community" (2017), 45–49. She notes that passages from the *Musaddas* would later be "quoted by preachers in their sermons and by leaders of the community in their public addresses, always arousing strong emotional responses and floods of tears".

the worn-out body of both the poet and the Muslim community in India" (1997: 58). This metaphor of pathology that Hali uses falls in with his severance from the erupting nostalgia for the 'last glow of Delhi', the Delhi of Ghalib and Shefta. Disciplining himself as a 'nostalgic subject', Hali looks ahead, at the end of his poem, following the footsteps of the British. Hali's travels from one world to the other (painted by him as binaries) attempt to catch up with the *telos* of European advancement, reflected later in the mentions of European, especially English poets and writers in his *Muqaddamah* (1893), including the English utilitarian, T B Macaulay. The utilitarian impetus in Urdu literature is interwoven with the protestantisation of Islamic teachings in the works of Hali towards the reformation of Muslims in the aftermath of 1857 and its rupture. The days of leisurely past and their memory are regarded as emotional contagions, and their treatment is continued, as we shall see, by other writers of the time, through the semantics of pathology and the impetus for rectification or *iṣlāh*.

2.4 Conceptual Transformation in Urdu Prose: The Novel in the Making

While some scholars tend to argue that the novel was borrowed from or influenced by the English presence in India, such perceptions regarding its 'origins' have been adequately challenged.[128] However, the novel genre in Indian languages is seen to have flourished only by the middle of the nineteenth century. This may have been affected by Western influences. However, recent scholars have shown that the most significant influence on the burgeoning of the genre was the dissemination of print in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *Mirʾāt-ul-ʿUrūs* (The Bride's Mirror, 1869) is often considered the first Urdu novel, although these claims have been heavily contested.[129]

128 The influence of English as the most significant on the Urdu novel is an idea shared among earlier scholars like Muhammad Sadiq and Shaista Suhrawardy among the literary histories in English. See Sadiq's *A History of Urdu Literature* (1964), 245–46, Suhrawardy's *A Critical Survey of the Development of the Urdu Novel and Short Story* (1945), 12–22. In Urdu, the same is suggested in ʿAlī ʿAbbās Ḥusainī's *Urdū Nāval kī Tārīḫ aur Tanqīd* (1944) and Aḥsan Fāruqī's *Urdū Nāval kī Tanqīdī Tārīḫ* (1951).

129 There are critical contentions regarding Ahmad's novels. For discussions on *Mirʾāt-ul-ʿUrūs* (not) as the first Urdu novel, see M. Asaduddin, "First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers" (2001), particularly, 91. Suhrawardy (1945) reads Ahmad's books as the "first real novel" in Urdu, 41. On the other hand, Ralph Russell identifies Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrāv J̌ān Adā* (1899) as the "first true novel" in Urdu. See Russell's essay "The Development of the Modern Novel in Urdu" (1970), 132.

Ahmad referred to his books as *qiṣṣa*s and did not consider his works as novels *per se*. On the other hand, his contemporary Ratan Nath Sarshar, the author of the famous *Fasānah-i Āzād* (Tales of Azad), claimed his long prose narrative (in four volumes) written and published in instalments from 1878 to 1883 to be a "*nāval*", albeit dressed in conventional and polite humour.[130] Several Urdu novels or narrative prose like Hali's *Majālis-un-Nisʿā* (An assembly of women, 1864) and Lala Gumani Lal's *Riyāẕ-i Dilrubā* (circa 1950) predate Ahmad's books. Furthermore, Hasan Shah's *hindustānī-fārsī* (Urdu-Persian) prose narrative/novel *Qiṣṣah-i Rangīn* (A colourful tale), originally written in the late-eighteenth century (c. 1790) and later translated in Urdu by Sajjad Hasan Kasmandavi under the title *Naśtar* (Lancet, Urd. pub. 1893) dismantles these claims and contestations, allowing us to reconsider the concept and meaning of the novel in Urdu.[131]

Several writers contend that based on generic qualifications, more than often, these examples do not approximate the novel, which usually leads to counterarguments regarding whether these texts necessarily need to confer with the 'English' examples of the novel. However, the novel has proven to be the most flexible of literary genres, and the fact that these texts continue to haunt discussions on the early Indian novels shows that they are not non-novels. They can be seen to inhabit processes of transition that bridged prevalent prose forms and the novel 'proper', as read by scholars following theories of the novel ranging from Ian Watt to Mikhail Bakhtin. Some of the uncertainty and ambiguity in these processes stem from what Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests as the influence of socio-political factors on literary expressions and innovations (1985: 3). The long nineteenth century being a period that witnessed social and administrative upheavals, the prose genres in Indian languages of this period have undergone processes of colourful, sometimes inchoate, often ingeniously innovative transitions before the novel is seen to 'come to its own'. These processes developed in conflicts and overlaps, rendering the early Urdu (like other modern Indian languages-) novel as a concept of change, as well as the vehicle that effected the change. Mukherjee discusses the re-invention of certain words to label the new

130 Cover page of *Fasānah-i-Āzād, jild avval* (vol 1). 1949 [1880]. The cover announces, "is Urdu nāvil se nāẓirīn ko muhaẓẓab ẓarāfat ke perāyah meṉ ʿumdah ʿumdah akhlāqī natīje ḥāṣil ḥote haiṉ" (in this Urdu novel, viewers/readers can gain meaningful lessons on morality in the form (dress) of polite/civilised wit and humour). See also Jennifer Dubrow, *Cosmopolitan Dreams* (2018), 35.

131 See Śamīm Ḥanafī's essay, "Pahla Hindustānī Nāval" (2008). Shah's novel was rediscovered by Qurratulʿain Hyder and translated under the title *The Nautch Girl*, published in 1992. Hyder claimed it to be the first Indian novel, generating a series of literary debates.

genre in the various Indian languages in the mid-nineteenth century – *upanyās* in Bengali and Hindi, *kādambarī* in Marathi, and *nāval* or *nāvil* in Urdu – to demonstrate the extent and diversity of various influences in these literary fields (1985: 11–13). She writes that the challenge of taxonomy in Urdu came to be resolved by rendering it as '*nāval*' due to the "approximation of sound as well as sense" with the English – the word *naval* meaning new/young or unique in Urdu/Hindi. The process of translating the concept, in this case, is far more interesting to consider it a mere semantic borrowing. It entailed a transfer of ideas and concepts, leading to different understandings of the word along the lines of what Jonathan Zwicker terms "terminological confusion" in the context of the development of new genres.[132] As Christina Oesterheld has shown, the name '*nāval*' was used by Urdu writers and publishers in myriad ways for various purposes, particularly aiming at commercial success, effecting not only a boom in the production of the novel but also an ambiguous understanding of the genre (2004: 189–91).

This section presents a brief discussion on the development of the Urdu novel as a process influenced by a variety of factors. Drawing from existing literary histories and debates on the early Urdu novel, the aim is to arrive at an understanding of the Urdu novel/*nāvil* as a concept, viewed from the perspective of emotional conflicts and responses of writers (and their audiences). Through such a reading, the idea is to understand the processes of the novel's development in Urdu beyond the two strands: Western, colonial supremacy and indigenous inventions. This is not to say that the Western and the indigenous influences did not shape the novel, but instead, to understand these influences through a focus on the conceptual shifts in the novel and the emotional atmosphere in which these shifts occurred. The argument is that in its attempts at novelty (*naval*), the early Urdu novel/*nāvil*, as a genre in transition between the old and the new, becomes a space for mediating emotions and temporalities. Several innovative factors in the development of the Urdu novel, as a prose genre based on expressions of reality, rendered it a mouthpiece for writers and their different agendas – in negotiating the past, the present and the future. As the novel became consolidated and standardised, it became a literary space in which remembrance and reflection upon the past became a significant theme, while the genre also grappled with the struggles of the present.

In standard histories of the Urdu novel, only a few early novels and novelists usually receive attention. Oesterheld has refuted such restricted historiography in her study of the several prose genres in print at the time and their

132 Jonathan Zwicker, "The Long Nineteenth Century of the Japanese Novel", *The Novel* (2006), 573.

multiple influences on the novel. Asif Farrukhi's essay on the Urdu novel (2004) shares a similar view, stating that the novel has to be understood beyond mere plot and structure and invest in analysis through the lens of polyglossia and discourse as conceptualised by Bakhtin.[133] Oesterheld suggests that the late-nineteenth century was when Urdu novels had a flourishing phase and that the large chunk of "popular novels which were produced mainly for commercial reasons" have been ignored by literary historians (2004: 169). Some literary histories written in Urdu explicate this, while most reiterate the few chosen novelists.[134] Farrukhi refers to several significant novels of the time that have been overlooked, for example, *Fasānah-i Khurśīdī* (1886), *Afsānah Nādir Ǯahān* (c. 1894), and *Navābī Darbār* (1901). In her recent work on Urdu print culture in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Jennifer Dubrow has shown that the thriving print culture of the late-nineteenth century saw an explosion in prose narratives, especially the novel, often via periodicals, published in instalments (2018: 37–38). She suggests, like Oesterheld, that the short prose conventions of prevalent genres like *laṭāʾif* (humorous anecdotes), *ẓarīfānah maẓāmīn* (witty compositions) and *naqliyāt* (fables, anecdotes) – expressions of reality unlike the fantastic *dāstān* – were often used by serious and reformist writers in the development of the novel (Oesterheld 2004: 169–70; Dubrow 2018: 38; Farrukhi 2004: 173). The long prose of the *dāstān* (fantastical tales of adventure) and the *qiṣṣa*[135] obviously served as the narrative models in the minds of writers when they approached writing in the new prose genre.[136] Another influence on the Urdu novel was translation and/or transcreation of Persian and Sanskrit classics at the Fort William College in Calcutta.

The most famous examples are Mir Amman's *Bāġ va Bahār* (1801) and Sher Ali Afsos's *Ārāʾīś-i Maḥfil* (1808). These books were especially written for Englishmen to educate themselves in the literature of 'Hindoostan' in a language that they could access, i.e., 'Hindoostanee', or Urdu. Nonetheless, they did eventually interest and influence the reading habits of the locals, although,

133 See Farrukhī, "Ḥairatī hai ye Āʿīnah" (2004), 189–97. Farrukhi strongly critiques the marginalisation of several novelists of the time as "minor" by literary historians.

134 See, for example, the long list/*fahrist* of Urdu novelists of the time in ʿAżīm-as Śān Ṣiddīqī's *Urdū Nāvil: Āġāz va Irtiqā: 1857 tā 1914* (2008), 506–13. Many literary histories ignore this boom.

135 Meaning a story or a tale and earlier used interchangeably for short and long narratives, but now understood as referring to a short narrative.

136 This has also been suggested by Mukherjee (1985), 9. However, she emphasises the "conscious" influence of English writers like Scott and Thackeray on early Indian novelists.

in the initial period, the language in these books was reported to be ridiculed for the simplistic style by sections of Urdu readers (Russell 1970: 105; Asaduddin 2001: 80; Suhrawardy 1945: 15). The influence of English on the Urdu novel was not limited to these transcreations and standardisations. Access to the Victorian novel had opened the sensibilities of Indian readers and writers to different world views, which often provoked inspiration and imitations. Such ambitions also led to creative conflicts as the formula of the Victorian novel did not correspond to the social conventions of nineteenth-century India. Oesterheld argues that the practice of reading English novels among Urdu readers was far less common than among readers in other sections of Indian society (2004: 190). While this may be true for the lay reader, Urdu writers often had a more familiar relationship with the English novel, as is seen, for instance, in the influence of Walter Scott on the historical novels of Abdul Halim Sharar written in the last decades of the century.

A more direct influence that the British had on the trajectory of the Urdu novel, as has been signalled before, is the government's encouragement towards producing and disseminating *'useful' books in the vernaculars*, announced in the Gazette notification number 791 A in 1868.[137] C. M. Naim explicates that the Lieutenant Governor of the North-Western Provinces, William Muir, had announced in the notification that each year, the government would award the sum of one hundred Rupees each to authors of new books in the vernaculars, which would serve "some useful purpose, either of instruction, entertainment, or mental discipline" (Naim 2004 a: 123). In addition, the government would help publish and widely circulate these books. As Naim's essay elaborates, quite a few of these awards went to Nazir Ahmad's instructive tales, which were retrospectively seen as early examples of the Urdu novel. The influences on the development of the Urdu novel in the late-nineteenth century were thus numerous; they ranged from socio-political circumstances to interactions with Western literature, from direct influence of the government to inspirations from prevalent prose styles and genres, all made possible due to the flourishing print industry and the affordability of printed material like books and periodicals.[138] Many of these influences were in conflict and often overlapped. As Oesterheld asserts, tracing the boundaries between different types of prose narratives of this time is challenging. While the novel remains difficult to define through these transformative processes, it triumphed over all other prose genres (Oesterheld 2004: 205).

137 See Naim's essay "Prize-Winning *Adab*" (2004 a) for a detailed discussion.

138 On the development of the book as a commodity, see Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books* (2007).

The four significant names repeatedly associated with the Urdu novel at this time are Nazir Ahmad (1830–1912), Ratan Nath Sarshar (1847–1903), Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926) and Mirza Hadi Rusva (1857–1931). While in agreement with Farrukhi that literary histories of the novel must refrain from repeating these four novelists' achievements, the aim here is to understand the emotional atmosphere in which the Urdu novel developed. For this purpose, a quick glance at the careers and works of these novelists is adequate, considering the scope of the chapter. Sarshar's *Fasānah-i Āzād* marks the most visible transition from the earlier narrative form of the *dāstān* to the novel, although it consists of more than three thousand pages. The plot (or the lack thereof) follows the hero's (Azad's) adventures, like in a *dāstān*. Its major difference from the traditional *dāstān* is the realistic depiction of urban and quotidian life. Transporting the formulaic battle of the *dāstān* (between good and evil) to contemporary times, Sarshar's picaresque hero is sent off by his beloved to fight in the Crimean War alongside the British in a gesture of post-Rebellion assertions of loyalty to the Crown. While Sarshar's "*nāval*" emerged out of serialised witty vignettes (*ẓarāfat* or *ẓarīfānah maẓāmīn*) in the periodical *Avadh Akhbār*, Nazir Ahmad was merely writing tales or *qiṣṣa*s for the instruction of his daughters. These tales became hugely popular in his family circles, and he is reported to have included one in his daughter's dowry. They were later submitted to the competition announced in the Gazette notification. Several of these books, especially his quasi-trilogy on the instruction of young boys and girls – *Mirʾāt-ul-ʿUrūs* (*The Bride's Mirror*, 1869), *Banāt-un-Naʿś (Daughters of the Bier*, 1872) and *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (*The Repentance of Nussooh*, 1874) – won the award. These books were seen to fit the bill so perfectly that they were translated by Englishmen like Matthew Kempson and G. E. Ward and published in London. The books were praised for having handled the instruction of children and adolescents so skilfully that eventually, they were incorporated into school and college syllabi for Urdu students.

Abdul Halim Sharar was by far the most 'popular' novelist for his historical novels. Similar to Hali's *Musaddas*, although in an entirely different tone, Sharar takes recourse to the glories of past Muslim civilisations and their victories over Europeans. His books have more defined plots compared to Sarshar's lengthy tale, but the setting of the distant past and his painting of societies in black and white render them with a flavour of the *dāstān*.[139] Sharar's novels were published in periodicals, and he used his journal to inform his readers

139 Major examples are *Malak Azīz Varjinā* (1889), *Ḥasan Anjalīnā* (1889), and *Florā Florinḍā* (1899).

that these books (once serialisation was complete) were, indeed, novels.[140] Almost all of Sharar's historical novels have the subtitle "ek dilcasp aur natījahkhez tārīkhī nāval" (a fascinating and meaningful historical novel).[141] Faiz Ahmad Faiz is repeatedly quoted for his description of Sharar's almost pornographic painting of Catholics as lustful, but his reading of Sharar's popularity at the time is significant. He describes the time as an age when the Muslims suffered from the realisation of their decline, and these "romantic tales helped them forget the bitterness of everyday life", as recollection of past victories "inspired them with self-respect" and "emotional solace".[142] Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899) is regarded as the best example of the modern Urdu novel. A massive transformation is seen from Sarshar to Rusva, albeit several novels influenced the evolution. Rusva's novel is convincingly situated within the social context of nineteenth-century India. It deals with contemporary upheavals and skilfully develops an unlikely protagonist in the figure of the eponymous courtesan. Rusva's other novels also present social transformation, especially *Śarīfzādah* (1900), in which one sees the growth of a young man of aristocratic birth, reorienting himself to modern times.[143] What made Rusva's novels significant was their engagement with protagonists whose lives were being shaped by the upheavals of the time.

Several emotional influences and conflicts played central roles in the genre's development. While Nazir Ahmad's novels responded to colonialist critique regarding the education of young men and women, reading the novels themselves can direct us towards an emotional ambivalence in the author regarding the cultural past he criticised and the admiration for English values that his fellow reformers provoked. Ratan Nath Sarshar, based in Lucknow, responded to the turmoils of the time in a different manner. As Delhi's slow decline had begun in the former part of the nineteenth century, Lucknow saw its rise. By 1857, the city's language, culture and etiquette had become highly refined and distinctively famous. It had also become the locus of the emerging print capital,

140 In 1887, he inaugurated his own periodical, *Dilgudāz*, where he serialised the historical novels.

141 See cover pages of his novel *Alfānso* (1926), published by Dilgudaz Press, Lucknow. See the front cover of *Florā Florinḍā*, published by Qaumi Press, Delhi. In his introduction to *Malak Azīz Varjinā* (1889), Sharar writes "hamārā jadīd nāval" (my new novel).

142 Faiz, quoted in Russell (1970), 132. Russell quotes an article in *Mīzān*, published in Lahore in 1862.

143 See Oesterheld (2018). She reads the novel as a significant text of the time concerned with the education and reform of Muslim men and finds the descriptions of labour and physical work in it as strikingly rare, 125–27, 130–31.

providing an entrepreneur like Sarshar with new ideas and impetus to refashion his literary career. Mindful of the need for reform and education at the time, he worked towards merging morality (*a<u>kh</u>lāq*) with fun and taste (*maẓāq*) and wit and humour (*ẓarāfat*), thus catering to "please the greatest number of potential readers-listeners" (Dubrow 2018: 38). This significance of the taste for novels among readers-listeners (*nāẓirīn*) is something that is also drawn attention to by Farrukhi, in the readers' taste (*bā-ẓauq*) and perception for the usefulness (*ifādiyat*) of the novel (Farrukhi 2004: 159). Sarshar enlarges his audience, catering to their various emotional needs in response to loss and defeat: *a<u>kh</u>lāq* or a sense of morality to refute the colonial critique of decadence, and *ẓarāfat* or humour and wit, drawn from extant literary and cultural traditions that restored the colourful associations of the past, now rendered in a tasteful (*muhaẓẓab*) manner. Dubrow reads Sarshar's novelistic ambitions as running parallel to the reform novels produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Dubrow 2018: 38). Sharar becomes difficult to categorise in this equation: he was a staunch supporter of Syed Ahmad Khan and the latter's attempts at reforming Muslim society, but Sharar's works defy this reformist tendency. They hark back, instead, to glorious images of several pasts – ranging from the Crusades to Arab rule in Spain. Like Hali, for Sharar too, the image of the magnificence of distant pasts is a source to deal with the loss of the recent past. For Rusva, the present and the future are realities, and he claims to write from this vantage point. Nevertheless, the severed past and its depiction in his sober novel continue to be streaked with nostalgia and longing for the grandeur of *navābī Lakhna'ū* (aristocratic Lucknow), its culture of leisure, etiquette, and finery.

The early Urdu novel has been largely seen as a genre that channelled ideas of reform, morality, and education. Reorienting the reading of the novel as a process in transition under emotional conflicts, I argue that the early Urdu novel is also a genre of remembrance. It is invested in looking back as much as it is oriented towards looking ahead. In remembering and looking back, it attempts to express mourning and yearning for the past as it locates itself into the quickly transforming present. While memories of the past are presented as passionate and violent, rendered in pathological descriptions in the immediate aftermath of the loss defined by the events of 1857, in depictions after a couple of decades, these memories attain a more sober tone in conceptualising the past and in expressing emotions for it. The following two sections of the chapter focus on one exemplary novel by the two writers who seemed to write for the present and the future – Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi's *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrā'o Jān Adā* (1899). For both writers, entrepreneurship, modernity, and the future held high values and their characters have often been read as mouthpieces for the authors' views. Furthermore, these novels allow us

to observe the treatment of the two intertextual socially interdependent figures, the young aristocrat and the courtesan, both stripped of their stations in life and hurled into a new world where they must adapt to survive. Their relationships with the past, in remembrance and severance, like those of their creators, remain ambivalent, and this ambivalence is echoed in their developments within the plots.

2.5 Nazir Ahmad's Novels: Reform and Remembrance

Born in Bijnor, Nazir Ahmad Dehlavi joined the Delhi College as a student and eventually became a Deputy Inspector of schools and rose to the rank of Deputy Collector in the province. Employment in the colonial administration brought him in close contact with government officials of the education department and broadened his knowledge of English. Influenced by his encounters with English utilitarian values and his Islamic education, Ahmad wrote short tales, or *qiṣṣa*s, with the purpose of instructing and educating his children. This sense of 'purpose' is the keyword in unpacking Ahmad's perception of modernity, reflected in the shift in conceptualising Urdu prose-fiction. Keeping the *qiṣṣa* as a narrative form in mind, Ahmad introduced new content to his tales, which "transformed the structure of his tales" (Oesterheld 2001: 27–28). The content consisted of reformative education and instruction but styled in a fashion that would appeal to young readers – his original audience. Besides his children, the novels appealed immensely to colonial authorities for their puritanism. In the Preface to the translation of *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, William Muir writes that it is "only in a country under Christian influences" that "the idea of such a book would present itself to the Moslem mind".[144] The reformist zeal in it (and his other books) had a flavour of English Puritanism, which Ahmad synthesised with reformist Islam along the lines of Syed Ahmad Khan.

Nazir Ahmad was heartily encouraged by Muir, who believed there to be a lack of "useful and amusing" books in the vernacular languages of India. He saw Ahmad's books as an efficient means of propagating English and Christian values. "The tale", he writes of *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, "is not the mere imitation of an English work, though it be the genuine product of English ideas" (ibid.). With this direct involvement of the colonial authorities in Urdu literary ethos, a split in the tradition of knowledge and education into the realms of *ʿilm* (science) and *adab* (literature) is witnessed (Naim 2004a: 121–22). This literary-

144 Preface by Sir William Muir, *The Repentance of Nussooh (Taubat-al-Nasûh. The Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago.* Ed. C. M. Naim (2004) [1884], xi–xiv.

educational split, reflective of the demarcation in temporality (a cut from the decadent, undisciplined past), was a social, administrative, and cultural force in the reformist poetry fashioned by Hali. Like his fellow reformists, Nazir Ahmad was torn between the two worlds. He wrote many novels following the government awards he won. Regarded as a British loyalist and reformist writer who majorly penned moralist books for the instruction of girls, Ahmad also engages with the trajectories of young men in this transitional period. One finds the writer caught in his cultural, temporal, and emotional dilemmas in such books as *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* (1874) and *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (1888). While in *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, the conflict is between the past and the present, in *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* (literally, Man of his times), Ahmad is severely critical of blind followers and imitators of the British. Focusing on *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*, this chapter analyses the quandary between the past world of carefree, leisurely existence and the present world of discipline and control, reflective of a writer torn between inescapable nostalgia and the urgency of rushing modernity.

2.5.1 *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*: Repentance, Poetry, and Prison

Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ, literally, the repentance of Nasuh, is the story of an upper-class Muslim man named Nasuh (meaning preacher) and the moral-religious transformations he and his family undergo. It elaborates on children's 'right' upbringing, shown as lacking in *śarīf* Muslim societies. Beyond mere didacticism, the central drive in the story is the conflict between Nasuh, once a man of leisure, typical of his class, and his eldest son, Kalim, who is unable to deal with his father's sudden turn to religious zeal and disdain for their leisurely lifestyle. The treatment of emotional conflicts in the main characters gets the better of Ahmad's didactic intentions. If the novel starts as a reformist tale, it turns into a tragic failure in bridging the gap between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. The story opens at the scene of devastation in Delhi, in the clutches of an epidemic of Cholera. Nasuh loses members of his family, including his father. As the epidemic subdues, Nasuh falls severely ill. Afflicted by fever, Nasuh reflects upon his wasteful life as he comes to terms with the possibility of death: so far, he has led a life of carefree self-containment (*āzād zindagī*). He falls into a prolonged slumber and dreams a dream that changes his remaining days.

He dreams of an impressive building that looks like a court of justice, making him feel stifled. Upon entering, he sees his late father waiting for the hearing on the impending judgement day to tally men's deeds on earth. Nasuh is shocked to find his pious father among others in the "House of Detention"

(2004: 5) (*ḥavālāt,* 1995: 35).[145] His father shows him his charge sheet and recounts his many sins: neglect of religious duties, lack of faith in the powers of god almighty, indulgence in a life of carefreeness, and false pride (1995: 35); he advises his son to be pious and dutiful in this life so as to not suffer in the afterlife. On awakening, Nasuh feels profound regret and wishes to repent for his otiose, wasted life, full of pleasure and idle leisure. He realises his sins exceed those of his fathers, for he has altogether disregarded religion. Nazir Ahmad's rather colourful description of Nasuh's hitherto idle, leisurely days spent in the urban hustle and bustle of the old city, painted in the local language of Delhi, albeit in a mocking, sarcastic tone, almost takes away from his reformist purpose.

> As to Friday prayers, Nasuh did occasionally venture to the Jamiʿ Masjid if his clothes were clean and the day was not too warm, or the sky not too cloudy, or if he wanted to meet his friends and acquaintance; and anyhow, the observance of Friday prayer was a matter about which opinions differed. He had never really taken to the five-times-a-day prayer ritual. Never in his life had he bothered with *ṣubḥ* (morning) or *ẓuhr* (noon) or *ʿiśā* (late evening) prayers, for these were simply times for rest and sleep. And as to the *ʿa_sr* (late afternoon) prayers, it was the opportune time to take the air (*ḥavākẖorī*), wander in the bazaar (*sair bāzār*), meet friends and acquaintances and engage in all the other significant tasks in the world. Evening (*maġrib*) prayer was possible, but there was hardly any time for it. By the time he would return from his rambles (*phir phirā kar*), the rosy shades of twilight would have waned away. (Ahmad 1995: 35–36)

Ashamed of his indolence, Nasuh recollects his dream and fears to his wife, Fahmida, and they agree on the urgency with which they must try and rectify their children's ways and habits. She fears that it might be easier said than done, that it might be too late to set right the ways of their eldest daughter, Naimah, and the worst of the lot, their poetry and pleasure-loving eldest son, Kalim. As Nasuh discusses his sons with bitterness, he paints a picture of their idle lives, an image that echoes Hali's views on the "younger generation of the aristocracy".

> Observe that useless (*nā-bakār*) eldest son of ours! He obsesses over his appearance, strutting like a pigeon. His clothes are so tight that they appear to be stitched onto his body. […] The younger one, ill-mannered and wicked

145 All quotations referring to *Taubat-un-Naṣūh* are from the edition by Al Faiṣal Nāśirān, Lahore, 1995 [1874]. Translations are mine. Quotations from the English version are from Matthew Kempson's translation, *The Repentance of Nussooh (Taubat-al-Nasûh). The Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago.* Ed. C. M. Naim (2004) [1884].

> (*nāḥanjār*), is up on the terrace flying pigeons as soon as he awakens. […] In the afternoons, he is on the rooftop terrace again, flying kites. And in the evenings, the board of chess is set in all splendour. On Sundays, when he finally has the leisure, he amuses himself with quail-fighting! The youngest is a positive nuisance to the neighbourhood, beating and teasing others. They all behave like foundlings, with no home, no family, no manners – vagabonds (*āvārah*), ill-mannered (*be-adab*, *be-tamīz*) and foul-mouthed (*bad-zubān*). (Ahmad 1995: 57–58)

The story unfolds in the form of dialogues between characters – in retrospect as well as ongoing – a technique that Nazir Ahmad uses to advance the plot and unpack characters. Reflective speech presents emotional transformations within characters. Each dialogue forms a chapter, and chapter titles provide single-line summaries. The conversations between Nasuh and his younger sons, Alim and Salim, come as pleasant surprises to him. He learns that his sons, whom he believed to be idle, useless, and ill-mannered, have indeed turned new leaves behind his back. The youngest, Salim, has turned wise in the company of a well-mannered school fellow and the guidance of his grandmother. The second son, Alim, encountered a Christian missionary who lent him a useful book. After reading it, Alim got rid of the useless literature they were being taught at school as well as the immoral Persian classics like *Bahār-i Dāniś* that his older brother had recommended. Throughout the story, we read about Kalim's notoriety in these dialogues; he is described as a spoilt brat, a bully, and a problem child with a penchant for decadence. The list of his misdeeds seems never-ending. In the seventh chapter, we eventually encounter the character through the conversation between the three brothers and their mother.

At first, Kalim comes across as an arrogant, spoilt brat. However, as the dialogue progresses, Kalim's sound arguments begin to make sense. Kalim's characterisation is perhaps the most 'real' in this novel as we see not a decidedly good or bad persona, typical of reformist and didactic narratives, but someone who grows out of their destined position in the story to find affinity with the reader. Kalim is, perhaps, Ahmad's most 'modern' innovation. We see a chasm between the portrayal of his character as perceived by others and his character unfolding in his own words. Although it is commonly agreed upon that Ahmad's books are primarily 'improving tales', he is one of the first writers of simple prose in Urdu, who allows for the novelty of conflicting points of view in fictional characters. As his name suggests, Kalim is an elegant interlocutor of life's intellectual and aesthetic aspects – the foremost of these being poetry, the arts, and other leisurely indulgences. He is also the only voice with common sense to question Nasuh's sudden change of heart, solely based on a dream.

Frustrated with his father's sudden religious zeal, his mother's, and his younger brothers' blind adherence to the new 'rules', Kalim leaves home. In

anger at his son's rebellion, Nasuh barges into Kalim's quarters. He is stunned at his son's impeccable taste. However, in his uncontrollable rage, he burns down Kalim's most cherished library, stacked with expensive and beautiful copies of Persian and Urdu classics. This scene has been identified as one of the most heart-wrenching and mind-boggling episodes in Urdu prose of the time. It holds the key to untangling the tirade against the triad of idleness, sickness, and poetry, which reappears as central themes in literature of this time. This scene and its significance are discussed in the following section. After his reckless departure from home, Kalim wanders around and falls in with bad company, first that of his friend, Mirza Zahirdar Beg, and then of his ill-wishing cousin, Fitrat. Both misadventures lead him to prison, and eventually, his father comes to his rescue. In a brief stint in Daulatabad, he suffers a fatal shot, at last repentant and seeking forgiveness. This final supplication of Kalim contradicts his obstinate character, but then this was meant to be an instructive and improving *qiṣṣa*.

The conflict between Nasuh and Kalim is explored in the novel through their respective literary tastes and their passion for religion and poetry, respectively, in a tussle between the old and the new, the past and the present. This dichotomy has been elaborated as the conflict between "social usefulness" and "literary excellence" and between "realism" and "metaphor" (Naim 2004 b: 120). The novel's temporal setting can provide some nuances within these binaries. Ahmad's opening line starts with the phrase "*ab se dūr*" (a long time before now) that distances the temporal setting of the novel from its readership's present (Ahmad 1995: 25). While Ahmad's original "*ab se dūr*" floats in a temporal vagueness, the English translation categorises it numerically with the subtitle "The Tale of a Muslim Family a Hundred Years Ago". The setting is reflective of the gradual social and administrative transformations in society. Kalim's eloquence and poetry do not land him desirable employment in this setting because the small princely states, like Daulatabad, are declared unfit for sovereign rule. They are usurped by the colonial authorities, demonstrating in likeness the start of the consolidation of the East India Company's landholdings, acquired through the usurpation of petty princely states. This process was fulfilled with the events of 1857. In these socio-political circumstances, the literary qualities that an eloquent poet like Kalim has to offer are anachronistic, deemed unnecessary and redundant by the newly appointed president/*ṣadr-i ʿaẕīm*, as he confirms: "in the current circumstances, we have no requirement for poetry in our state administration" (Ahmad 1995: 221). Shaista Suhrawardy points out that in most of Ahmad's works, the society he described is no longer one of decadence and opulence. Men of the elite classes cannot live on their properties and are searching for jobs. And yet, "a certain degeneracy among the younger gener-

ation was apparent"; she identifies Kalim as "typical of those indolent, lazy and pleasure-loving but suave and polished young men" of the past (Suhrawardy 1945: 42). Oesterheld also interprets Kalim's portrayal as reminiscent of "the leisurely ways of the old feudal class" (2001: 40).

The similarities between Hali's poem and Ahmad's prose are striking. The same vocabulary of sickness is used in Ahmad's tale to diagnose degeneracy in society, particularly in the protagonist. Nasuh's sickness is depicted as mysterious and inexplicable; it is only cured after he realises his sins during a feverish nightmare. Kalim's alleged decadence is once again symbolised by a conflation of idle and leisurely activities with a penchant for poetry. In Nasuh's contempt for Kalim's love of poetry, however, the author falls into his own trap. Nazir Ahmad was nourished on Persian poetry and earned a reputation as an orator. His love for classical poetry is uncontainable as it slips into the dialogues of his characters, even Nasuh, who rants against his son's love of immoral poetry. In Nasuh's reflective and repentant thoughts, he ends up quoting rhyming stanzas. Kalim is shown to be so skilful in formulating verses and so ardent in his knowledge of Urdu and Persian masters that he has a couplet on his lips for every occasion. As Kalim rightly explicates in the highly dramatised seventh chapter, it was his father who inculcated the love for memorising and composing poetry in him. Ahmad's prose, even in reformist content, continues to flow with the rhythm of poetry. Oesterheld lists the literary merits of his descriptive and reflective prose as "long sequences of similes and poetic images; the juxtaposition of synonyms or near-synonyms or antonyms; rhythm; sometimes also rhymes and quotations from the Qur'ān and from Persian classics" (2001: 29).

If Nasuh is the protagonist of a reformist improving tale, he is unconvincing in his emotional excesses. He had quickly judged all his children as equally vicious and ill-mannered, whereas his dialogues with his younger sons surprise him, revealing how little he knows his children. While Nasuh is repentant for his religious ignorance, he is hardly shown to rectify his misconceptions. If religious reform and the inculcation of Islamic and moral education of children is the agenda of this novel, Ahmad's mouthpiece for reform, Nasuh, is far too passionate and quick-tempered in contrast to the rather resolute antagonist, Kalim. Kalim undergoes several misadventures, imprisonment, and impoverishment. However, it is not until the last paragraph that he is forced to repent as his creator kills him, one may even claim, for he did not know what to do with such a strong antagonist. Nasuh's sinful past – that is, his idle and leisurely life – succumbs to the disciplining of the Benthamian prison of control and utility, depicted in the prisons (*ḥavālāt*) synthesised with the panopticon of the Islamic representation of doomsday/Court of Judgement in his nightmare. For Kalim, a signifier and reminder of Nasuh's leisurely past, such

discipline and punishment, even in the lived experience of imprisonment, does not seem to function; every time he is imprisoned, he manages to bail himself out. Within the logic of discipline, he is subjected to the violent burning of his priceless library, as his father's memories of sinful and pleasurable past must be purged.

2.5.2 Burning Books, Purging the Past: Disciplining the Nostalgic Subject

Persian poetry thrived in India long before the Mughals came to power. A significant process in rendering Persian as the court language was taken up during the reign of Akbar (1542–1605?). The emperor invited many Persian poets to his court and gave refuge to poets seeking a nurturing environment to cultivate their art. Akbar was the first Indian emperor to create the formal position of *malik-uś-śuʿarā* or poet laureate. Persian had become the language to be taught at schools and seminaries to children of the upper and middle sections of the society, with books like *Gulistān* (Persian, *Golestān*, Rose Garden) and *Bostān* (Orchard) of Saʿadi Shirazi as essential parts of the syllabus. Although Urdu/Hindustani/Rekhti was arguably the spoken language in the area, Persian had its supremacy as the language of high literature, poetry, and the court. Like Kalim, those interested in literary pursuits would require fluency in and possess the works of notable Persian poets to converse eloquently. Apart from poetry, Kalim also pursued the leisurely activities typical of his social class – playing chess, pigeon-flying, kite-flying, and acquiring beautiful objects, clothes, and books. Kalim spent much of his short-lived life in the pursuit of such books, of poetry and prose, volumes of *dāstān*, *qiṣṣa*, *dīvān* and *rubāʿī*. His library is shown to be a treasure trove of such books – beautiful in their subjects as well as bindings. His father's sudden charge of immorality and indecency in these literary works echoes S. R. Faruqi's elaboration on the colonial charges of Indian literature being immoral and the violent emotional responses to these charges.

As a lover of literature (at this time, signified by poetry), Kalim often advised his younger brothers on which poets to read and what books to acquire. From his quick retort to his mother when she asks him not to speak in riddles (*pahelī*, referring to his verses), it is revealed that Naimah, the household's elder daughter, would understand such 'riddles' (1995: 127). Perhaps Kalim even loaned some of his precious books to her. The magnificence of his library is depicted as glorious when Nasuh visits it for the first time. Kalim occupied two rooms – a luxurious drawing room for leisurely activities and gatherings that he called *takalluf <u>kh</u>ānah* (room of lavishness) and a library filled with his choicest books, which he referred to as *<u>kh</u>ilvat <u>kh</u>ānah* (room of

solitude).[146] Although he charges these books with indecency (*be-hūdā*), Nasuh spends a quarter of the day hesitating to destroy them, for he, too, would have grown up reading these books, the epitomes of high Persian literature. These are the very books William Muir found to be questionable and unfit for the reading of decent children. Nazir Ahmad seems to agree with Kempson and Muir and allows his protagonist to burn down an entire library of such books. But Ahmad's emotions – reflected in Nasuh's emotions – towards these books and their burning is highly ambivalent. Mirza Farhatullah Baig, one of Ahmad's students and later Urdu writer, recalls Ahmad's love for classical poetry in a memoir of his master.[147] Nasuh, too, recalls a past when he and Fahmida would spend time reading *Gulistān* (1995: 184). He also reminds Fahmida that he would cover up phrases and sentences that were indecent before she would read them. *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ* is, therefore, also a book about books. It looks at certain books as exemplary and others as questionable. This book, which attained popularity as one of the first Urdu novels, directs inflammatory hatred against some of the most-loved books of the preceding generations.

Saʿadi's *Gulistān* and Inayatullah Kamboh's *Baḥār-i Dāniś* (The Garden of Knowledge) are some of the most highly regarded titles that *Taubah* attacks. Books that are praised are random, unnamed books on moral values and depicting the lives of religious men, projected as valuable and instructive, in the tradition of Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*.[148] In some ways, Ahmad makes a case for his own books, showing how new and useful books can change the lives of the youth. Alim turns a new leaf through the guidance he receives from a book given to him by the preaching missionary, and this is contrasted to the entire collection of verses that Kalim could produce anytime, etched in his mind and memory from the classics in his library. Asif Farrukhi criticises this episode of Nasuh's book burning in scathing terms, questioning the mixing and mimicking of books mentioned – from *Gulistān* to *Dīvān-i Śarar* – conflating real books and imaginary books, and that the books are claimed to have pejorative contents are also well-regarded books on ethical and moral values (Farrukhi 2013: 232). The anger inflicted on these books in the text is incoherent and unfathomable. This emotional turmoil, expressed violently in shades of sorrow, grief, and anger, is shared by both the character (Nasuh) and

146 Kempson translates these as "Palace of Delight" and "Palace of Retirement", respectively.

147 In *Ḍākṭar Naẓīr Aḥmad kī kahānī, kuch merī aur kuch unkī zabānī* (1992), 49–50.

148 Smiles's book was hugely popular amongst reformed Urdu readers, following its translation by Syed Ahmad Khan and publication in his journal *Tahẓib-ul-Akhlāq*, under the title "*Apnī Madad Āp*".

author (Ahmad) at the rupture and decline of Muslim civilisation and society under colonial rule.

The collection of prized books as a possession, the cultivation of knowledge and wisdom in the form of Persian classics, and the maintenance of an elaborate and beautiful library have been nostalgically associated by scholars of Urdu literature with metaphors of *gardening*, harking back to the paradisiacal vocabulary of the *ġazal*. The titles of Persian classics mentioned here allude to knowledge as fruit and wisdom as rose. The metaphor of 'the Rose and the Nightingale'/*ġul va bulbul* is a staple to Persian and Urdu. As the garden metaphor projects, the business with literature was presumed to require patience, skill, and nourishment apart from leisurely time and space, thus rendering the investment in poetry an expression of otium. The time for such elaborate gardens was gone. As Hali already warned, the nightingales (poets) had no places to sing in, as time itself is split into dichotomies of progress and sloth/*taraqqī* and *sustī*, followed by the split in the understanding of literature in this milieu. Kalim's library is an image of that past, of the rose garden, with which Nasuh and his creator must cut their ties. When Nasuh visits Kalim's library, he is overwhelmed by its riches. His rage swallows his awe as he broods over these remnants of his erstwhile sinful life:

> There were so many volumes in the collection that an entire day would fall short if one sat down to list them. But whether Urdu or Persian, they were all the same kind: false tales, indecent content, perverse meanings, all equally shameless and irreligious. If Nasuh valued the beauty of the binding, the excellence of lithography, the fine quality of paper, the elegance of style, and the decorum of diction, Kalim's library would be priceless. But their contents were so degrading that they deserved to be burnt. He was caught in these quandaries until the afternoon had passed. At times he felt pangs of hunger, but he had no leisure for food. Frantically, he turned this book, flipped through that book, and eventually resolved that it would be best to burn them all. (Ahmad 1995: 179)

The books Nasuh throws into the fire are listed as Rajab Ali Beg Suroor's *Fasānah-i ʿAjāʾib*, Sheikh Aziz Ullah Bangali's *Gul Bakāʾolī*, Sher Ali Afsos's *Arāʿiś-i Maḥfil*, Mir Hasan's *Maṣnavī*, humorous witticisms of Niamat Khan Ali, Chirkin's odes, and the satires of Sauda among others.[149] As Pritchett puts it, this is "a selection generally meant to suggest frivolousness, immorality, and obscenity" (1994: 223). This range of literary gems, the list of books put together, ironically fits the garden metaphor of Persian literature. Also, significantly, several

149 Sheikh Baqar Ali Chirkin is (in)famous for his notorious erotic and often scatological verses in Urdu.

of these classics were, in fact, chosen for translation at Fort William College, particularly for the education of Englishmen. The burning of these books in a work of fiction, published and circulated with the colonial government's support, reveals the magnanimous transformation in the emotional landscape entangled with the literary in India.

Nazir Ahmad's portrayal of this horrific book burning, with the phrase '*bismillāh*' (in the name of God), is a signifier of a specific war of binaries that had begun and was about to hold North India in its clutches – the war between literary and cultural ethos and morality and reform, was a war of necessity. While Nasuh burns the classics of Persian literature, Nazir Ahmad produces books that win awards, contributing to the radical (arguably inevitable) changes occurring in the literary scene in North India in the late-nineteenth century. From now on, according to reformist writers, books are not to be gardens of knowledge – metaphors for pleasure, delights in obscurity and long-drawn rhymes, leisurely digressions, adorned with gilded bindings, possessions of pride. They are to become guidelines for self-help in instructive and educative prose, published and distributed by the British Government of India. From otiose objects of aesthetics, beauty, pleasure and leisure, the book is now to be transformed into an object of utilitarian purposes that can help its readers towards an industrious life. However, this dichotomy is questioned, as has been shown earlier in the chapter, by the alternate conception of the book as it becomes democratic and affordable with the explosion in print culture, finding its place in people's drawing rooms and libraries, in the form of chapbooks and periodicals, texts of entertainment[150], beyond the disciplining of reformists and the government. In the case of *Taubah*, the burning of Kalim's books is more efficiently expressed in what Farrukhi terms as "cleansing" through the epidemic of Cholera. The burning of these books is symbolic of the purging of sins, referring to the eternal fires of hell that threaten the Garden of Eden, from which the believer can only deliver himself on earth by means of *taubah* or penitence, as is ordained in the Qur'ān.[151]

After the bloodshed of 1857, the garden has been lost, 'now destroyed'. Frances Pritchett aptly replaces the garden metaphor of Urdu literature with the metaphor of reconstruction of the manor that still stands, with the support of poets and writers like Hali and Ahmad. From books to gardens, from philosophy to religion, the shift is clearly manoeuvred towards utilitarian values of

150 See Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure*: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India (2009), 1–5.

151 See Naim's reference to *Sūrah Taḥrīm*, verse 8, translation by Ahmed Ali. "Afterword" (2004 b), 139.

English puritanism that Spear claims is the reason why the English misunderstood the life and times of Muslims in Delhi in the mid-nineteenth century (1951: 50). This shift is upheld by several important writers of the time, through a synthesis of the Victorian sensibilities and reformist Islamic attitudes to life. Hali, Azad, Khan, and Ahmad accepted and embraced this change to sustain and preserve literary traditions even as they turned reluctant masons from enthusiastic gardeners. Nevertheless, they could not ignore the overwhelming emotions felt for the past, expressed at times in grief and at times in anger.

The mourning of the past in the nostalgic subject is also expressed in rage and anger, not only in sorrow and grief. Most of all, the self-diagnosis of the nostalgic subject in several attempts – through imageries of sickness, anxieties of imprisonment, purging of sins, and burning of books – is itself a sign of the immense emotional impact the past continues to have on the present. Naim's argument then that Ahmad was not nostalgic like the later generations of writers is to be reconsidered in the light of this discussion.[152] Referring to his rather beautiful and poetic prose, Ralph Russell wonders what Ahmad would do if he set out to write novels instead of improving tales (2013: 42–43). One may not need to wonder as even in his improving tales, Ahmad could not but give in to the 'temptation' of creating one of Urdu's most modern characters, Kalim, in remembrance of the old, leisurely ways. In Kalim's forced death and repentance, one can claim that the present is affected by the ever-powerful past with which the writer strives to sever all ties. This forced death of the tenacious character is an inevitable event in such a story. Kalim's death is Nazir Ahmad's necessity; it entails the tragic but essential demise of the leisurely aesthetics he embodies in his love for the poetics of the past.

2.6 Mirza Hadi Rusva: The Novelist of Modernity

As Delhi declined throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Lucknow became an urban cultural centre. In some ways, Delhi's decline contributed to Lucknow's rise, as writers flocked to the emergent cultural hub, seeking a suitable environment for the nourishment of their craft and for its thriving print network.[153] They also hoped, perhaps, for better chances of patronage in the reign of the renowned artist-poet-king of Avadh, Wajid Ali Shah. But like Delhi's last poet-king, Wajid Ali, too, eventually became a figure signifying loss

152 Naim claims that Ahmad was "not given to nostalgia". See 'Afterword' to his translation (2004b), 129.

153 Many famous poets of Delhi, like Mir, Sauda, and Soz, relocated to Lucknow.

and nostalgia following the events of 1856–57. However, the transformations of the time revealed new, multiple directions for writers. With the thriving print industry, authors now reoriented themselves to become entrepreneurs. Lucknow thus continued to nurture writers, fashioning itself as the city of literary luminaries. One such luminary was Mirza Muhammad Hadi 'Rusva', later celebrated as Urdu's 'first' modern novelist. Mirza Mohammad Hadi (1857–1931) wrote under the *nom de plume, Rusvā* – meaning one of little or no reputation, even ill-reputed. Born and raised in Lucknow, he was a lecturer in Mathematics, Science, Philosophy and Persian at the Christian College while also trying his hand, and rather successfully, at writing Urdu pulp fiction.[154] Gradually, he became a writer of 'serious' novels that embodied the social and literary transformations of the time. These novels deal explicitly with modernity, and they later came to define his literary career. While the novels *Śarīfzādah* (A man from a noble family, 1899/1900) and *Ẕāt-i Śarīf* (The son of a nobleman or noble family, n.d.)[155] are invested in the journeys of young men born to aristocrats in a quickly changing world, Rusva is most famous for his novel on the transformations in the life of a courtesan, *Umrā'o J̌ān Adā* (1899). While all three novels follow the transformation arc for the protagonists during the upheavals of the century, *Umrā'o* deals more seriously with the past, "painting a picture of life under the old conditions of court culture and patronage, celebrating the indulgence in poetry and music and the cultural space shared by the courtesans and their customers" (Oesterheld 2018: 115).

A novel centring the love of poetry, *Umrā'o J̌ān Adā* reflects upon shifting literary trends in Urdu while also presenting the female poet in her own voice, even if several times removed. Set in the middle of the nineteenth century, the story begins around two/three decades before the Rebellion. The events of the loss of Lucknow unfolded at the peak of Umrao's career while she was employed at the royal court.[156] The novel sees the past through two lenses: the past before the Rebellion, in reminiscing the high literary tradition of Lucknow, and the past following 1857, challenging the colonialist critique of the literary

154 Some of his books in the popular vein are *Khūnī ʿĀśiq* (Murderous Lover), *Khūnī J̌orū* (Murderous Wife), *Rūs kā Śahzādah* (The Prince of Russia).

155 Rusva plays with both titles, based on the concept of genteel, noble pedigree – or *śarīf*. The difference is emphasised in the treatment of the two men in the two novels – one hardworking and of sound character, the other lethargic, living off the diminishing riches of his family.

156 While referring to the character, I write the more readable and familiar spelling of the name, Umrao. Diacritics are followed while mentioning the name of the text, in which case it is *Umrā'o*.

scene.[157] Immediately after the publication of *Umrā'o*, Rusva wrote its companion-book, *J̌unūn-i Intiẓār* (*The Madness of Waiting*, 1899). While *Umrā'o* was already radical in recounting the story of a courtesan (*told* to her fictional friend and author, Rusva), Rusva turns the tables in this novella, making Umrao the first narrator, who, furious with Rusva for publishing the private accounts of her life, has written a novella to reveal intimate affairs of the writer's life. With this double-edged performative in the narrative, he brought to life one of the most significant figures of the leisurely past, the courtesan. Nevertheless, Rusva's exploration of the courtesan figure began even before *Umrā'o*, with his first novel, *Afśā-i Rāz* (The revelation of mysteries 1896). Before they were labelled as social outcasts at the hands of reformists and the colonial discourse on the 'nautch girls', the courtesan, or *ṭavā'if*, stood tall as a figure in society, intricately entangled with the arts, cultural, and literary aesthetics (Oldenburg 1990; Sharar 1989: 145–47). Rusva's treatment of this remnant of the past, leading to its several reincarnations from the novel to the screen, can be said to have reinvented emotions for the past. The fictionalised figure of Umrao Jan Ada continues to evoke images of a past, aesthetically set in opulent halls, iridescent with candles and chandeliers, fragrant with the scent of evening, flowers, and perfumes, resounding with poetry, music and rituals of etiquette delivered in impeccable and refined Urdu.

2.6.1 *Umrā'o Jān Adā*: Between Modernity and Nostalgia

Rusva's literary works reveal him to be a man who adapted to the changing times, although in a manner starkly different from the way reformists like Nazir Ahmad or Hali had. He was aware of the various influences on Urdu prose. Instead of imitating or resisting them, he crafted the novel towards a synthesis in which literary tradition could be preserved and thrive. Rusva is reported to have claimed his success in retaining the essence of Urdu in the influences of the English: "I have suffused the English rose with the scent of jasmine" (*Maṣnavī*, trans. Shandilya & Shahid 2012: 10). Unlike Ahmad's didactic reformist narrative or Sarshar's winding and scattered plot, *Umrā'o J̌ān Adā*, its author claims, is a 'true story' of a courtesan in Lucknow, named Umrao Jan. Notwithstanding the veracity of the claim, there is no reason for us to believe it to be a biography; Rusva's book is a skilfully narrated fictional account. Critics have often identified the novel as a work of "verisimilitude", a "faithful copy

157 See Shandilya and Shahid, "Introduction", in Rusva's *The Madness of Waiting* (2012), 11–12.

from life" (Saksena 1927: 342), a realism of the "here and now" (Kumar 2002: 239), a "realistic account of contemporary life" (Asaduddin 2001: 92). Rusva himself elaborates on the art of writing novels in the Preface (*dībācā*) to *Ẓāt-i Śarīf*, wherein he reveals reality as the subject of his novels.[158] Such claims need not be taken at face value, but what makes his novels 'realistic' is the finesse with which he portrays society. His plots are well-constructed, and his characters are credible. Nevertheless, Rusva's novels, or at least the one analysed here, are hardly a simple imitation or portrayal of reality. While inspired by reality, he depicted the life of old Lucknow as he knew and *remembered* it, recreating the tale of the transformation of the city in those of the courtesan's life (Asaduddin 2001: 92; Sharar 1989: 146). In her study on the lifestyle of the courtesans of Lucknow, Veena Oldenburg (1990) reveals the significant position held by courtesans before 1857. As one of the highest tax-paying communities, the courtesans were a social group that the East India Company had much trouble dealing with for their many economic and social subversions. The traditional role of the courtesan in society, in both Hindu and Muslim courts and communities, was to provide not only sensual pleasure but also educate young aristocrats in culture and etiquette, turning them into "an influential female elite" (Oldenburg 1990: 262), at odds with British understanding of societal hierarchies.

Many courtesans of the time were also noticeably influential in giving shape to the evolving classical style of *Hindūstānī* music, particularly in the genres of *ṭhumrī* as song and *kathak* as dance. Firmly positioned in the cultural centres of Lucknow, like the Chowk (*cauk*, square) and the palace in Qaiser Bagh, the courtesans performed and preserved literary-aesthetic culture in many forms. They were also often skilled in the art of composing and reciting poetry, and it was common among aristocrats to send their sons to reputed courtesans for instruction in art and etiquette as well as literature (Oldenburg 1990: 263; Sharar 1989: 142–46). Raziuddin Aquil has shown the perceived disjunct in women's love poetry as leisurely activity, not work; however, the disjunct is complicated in the case of courtesans, for whom, this was an "extension of their work" (Aquil 2023: 247). Rusva takes up the character of this indulgent instructor and keeper of refinement in cultural and literary aesthetics and turns her into the narrator of his novel, thus subverting the understanding of pleasure as an experience beyond the dichotomy of pleasure-provider and sybarite. He also subverts the scope of literary aspirations by endowing his courtesan-

158 "Ham ne apnī taḥrīr kā yahī uṣūl qarār diyā hai ki jo cīzeṇ ḥamārī naẓar se guzar gaʾī haiṇ, aur un se hamārī ṭabiʿat khud mutāṣar huʾī hai, usī ko nāval meṇ likh dete haiṇ", *Ẓāt-i Śarīf* (n.d.) Lakhnaʾū: Aśrafī Buk Ḍipo, 4.

protagonist with exceptional poetic talent so as to shine in the era of masters like Ghalib and Zauq (Shandilya & Shahid 2012: 10–11). He frames the story in retrospect, retelling a story within a story, deftly tying up all ends in a tight plot. The authorial and the narratorial voices merge as the frame narrator, Rusva, recalls being invited to a friend's apartment for a poetry recital. The rooms next door were occupied by a superannuated and reclusive courtesan, who could not help herself but extend gestures of applause as she listened to the recital. Learning that she is the long-famed courtesan of Lucknow, Umrao Jan, Rusva pays her a visit, and a camaraderie ensues between the two as Umrao recognises her old client, the poet Rusva. After several requests, Umrao joins their informal gatherings and recitals, or *muśāʿirah*.

At one such gathering, she begins to recount her life to Rusva and the host, and Rusva secretly writes it down. Umrao's speech is so refined that Rusva claims no authorship in the narrative, but only reportage. However, as he begins the story, Rusva introduces this process and pinpoints his narrative to ten or twelve years ago ("*das-bārah baras*" 1979: 15) – in the immediate past, a past that was still alive in collective memory and one with which readers could identify.[159] Before Umrao's narrative begins, Rusva's novel has a sub-chapter titled "*Muśāʿirāh*", which plays a significant role in the narrative, to which I return in the following sub-section. In fact, poetry and poems are recurring in this novel; the prose narrative is interspersed with couplets that set the mood of the narration or sum up events and their impact on Umrao. It is with one such couplet that Umrao begins her story, much along the same lines as her creator, Mirza Hadi Rusva. Although her claim is along the same lines as his in depicting *reality*, there is a marked difference in her claim with the question of depicting her/a life-story: "*luṭf hai kaun sī kaḥānī meṉ, āp bītī kahūṉ ki jag bītī*?" (Which story would be more enjoyable? Should I tell my own tale or the story of the world? 1997: 38). This consciousness in the protagonist of her place in the world and its story makes the novel a metafictional chronicle of the times, but more importantly, it sits firmly within the conventions of a novel proper (Kumar 2002: 233).

Umrao's story follows a linear progression as she recalls her childhood on the outskirts of Faizabad. The only daughter of a well-off employee in the royal offices, Amiran (her given name) belonged to a financially secure and content family. Struck by misfortune, she was abducted at the age of nine by the infamous robber Dilawar Khan, who sold her to a brothel in Lucknow. The head of

159 All Urdu quotations from the novel are taken from the 1979 edition, published by Maktabah Jāmiʿah Līmīteḍ, Naʾī Dihlī. Translations are mine. Quotations will be referenced with the year 1979.

the establishment, Khanam Jan, changed her name to Umrao. She describes the carefree, enjoyable life in the household of Khanam Jan, spent with her daughter, Bismillah and her domestic assistant, Hussaini. She recounts the stories of other girls she had met in the establishment, their teacher Maulvi Sahib, the music teachers, the instrument players, and the notorious young boy, Gauhar Mirza, who becomes her lover for a time when they grow up. Umrao tells of her training as a courtesan in an environment of adequate learning; the Maulvi Sahib taught them Arabic, Persian, Logic, some Mathematics, Grammar and Poetry. Simultaneously, they were properly trained in classical music, singing and dancing. Khanam's establishment was spacious and grandly furnished, with plenty of servants, which allowed them to enjoy and appreciate the good things in life. She recalls, thus, growing up in luxury, surrounded by wealth and refinery, educated and trained, and living at a leisurely pace.

> We had the most delicious food – such food that I had never tasted before. We were given clothes so beautiful that I could never have imagined them. There were three other girls I could play with – Bismillah Jan, Khurshid Jan and Amir Jan. There was song and dance all through the day and night, musical evenings (*jalse*), concerts and shows (*tamāśe*), fairs to go to (*mele*), outings in gardens (*bāġoṉ kī sair*). What luxury (*ʿaiś*) was there that we did not have! (Rusva 1979: 57)[160]

The narrative advances in episodes of Umrao's initiation ceremony and entry into the profession, followed by several encounters with the men she entertained over the years. The most memorable for Umrao was her affair with the young and handsome Nawab Sultan Sahib, a man of nobility who shared her passion for poetry. This joyous period is short-lived and followed by a quick series of events that uproots Umrao from her establishment and Lucknow, taking her to Unnao, Kanpur, and back to Faizabad, where she is invited to perform. In her hometown, she learns of her father's death and hopes to reconcile with her mother and brother, who reject her to protect the family's reputation. Umrao leaves Faizabad deeply aggrieved. Her fame increases in Lucknow, and she is employed at the royal court. This splendour came to a sudden end in 1857 with the forced abdication of King Wajid Ali. She regains her position in court for a while when the British reinstates the disputed heir, Prince Birjis Qadr, in a political manoeuvre. Umrao attains great fame as the singer of mournful and

160 For elaborations on this culture of leisure and entertainment typical to Lucknow, see Sharar (1989).

melancholic *marṣiyah* – a genre of Urdu poetry that elaborates on loss and lament, foreshadowing the inevitable loss of Lucknow.[161]

The story descends with the usurpation of Avadh, the tremors of which leave their world changed forever. Lucknow's decay is compared to the deterioration in a courtesan's life after she reaches her prime. The novel discusses the difference in how men and women love and the importance of education and hard work. Such contemplative observations take over the story that tells us towards the end that Umrao has finally found comfort in reading and writing. She began reading books like *Gulistān* and moved on to other classics, but soon grew tired of the "false flattery" (*jhūṭī k̲huśāmad*) in them. She then started reading newspapers (*a*k̲*h*b*ār*), keeping herself informed on news of the world (Rusva 1979: 266–67).[162] Gradually, she becomes a respected figure in her surroundings, remaining reclusive, reminiscing the past but keeping herself abreast of the times. Although Umrao repeatedly mentions the sins of her life and profession, she is hardly repentant, and her words of regret are more metaphorical in refined lip-service to modesty. Umrao is now her own mistress and does not intend to fit into a moralist societal or religious view of life. Although she prays regularly, she finds it unnecessary to observe *pardah* after a life of sexual exploits. She has great control over emotions; she displays the ones she chooses. Nostalgia is the mood she invokes while consciously locating herself within modernity. Far from the vocabulary of disease, her nostalgia is reflective and contemplative and displays acceptance, expressed in sighs and reveries. She finds herself in her old room in Khanam's destroyed house, reflecting on her emotions:

> I looked into the mirror and gazed at my reflection. The memories of those days flowed in front of my eyes. The faces of the people from those times emerged in front of me: the mischievous pranks of Gauhar Mirza, the foolishness of Rashid Ali, the love of Faiz Ali, and the handsome face of Navab Sultan. It was as if all those who had been in this room before now passed before my eyes. The room had turned into a kaleidoscope of my mind. The memory of one face would succeed the other, and it would all start over once again. At first, it was a rapid process, but later, it slowed down and gave me the time to reflect upon each of them. Every time I focused on one face, all the incidents connected to their presence in my life started playing one after another. (Rusva 1979: 237–38)

161 Traditionally practiced among the Shiʿa Muslim communities, the *marṣiyah* is a song-poem recited to lament the death of Hussain, the Prophet's grandson, at the tragedy of Karbala.

162 "un se dunyā bhar kā ḥāl maʿlūm hotā rahtā hai" (1979), 267.

Sukrita Paul Kumar suggests "alienation" as an emotional constitution of Umrao in her later years, and her reflections of the past are read as narrated in a "cold indifferent tone" (2002: 238). Such a reading undermines the complexity of nostalgia. The novel glorifies the past through Umrao's emotions for the past; however, it skilfully situates itself between yearning and acceptance, between nostalgia and modernity, not in binaries, but in entanglement. It develops an aesthetic understanding of nostalgia beyond its depiction as disease. Umrao displays frequent recourse to reflecting the past, through Rusva's narrative strategy between biography and novel. She reflects on what was lost and what could not have been; for instance, when she recalls her first interactions with Navab Sultan, she recognises the feeling that, at that point, something was lost to her (*kuch chūṭ gayā*, 238). The loss of the past is painfully felt, but the nostalgic subject is also an adaptive, modern subject. Rusva allows Umrao to enjoy the leisurely ways of her past lifestyle in juxtaposition with her life's work: the treatment of pleasure and passion. The leisure Umrao experiences later in life is emotionally restful. While Umrao's life has changed drastically and sobered in many ways, her one passion remains and continues to make her curious – the passion for poetry. Poetry is retained as an extension of the past, giving her her present identity. Rusva's authoritative voice and Umrao's narrative voice successfully weave her story as a talented composer of poetry. She is known for posterity, not only for her life as a courtesan but also for her *nom de plume*, *Adā*, the poetess. Fascinated by poetry since her initiation at the hands of Maulvi Sahib, she had always tried to polish her art at any opportunity that provided itself – the peak of which was perhaps her relationship with Navab Sultan.[163] To drive the case for poetry, Rusva regularly interrupts the story with either a verse from Umrao or the character-narrator Rusva, often in long duets, pointing at not only Umrao's gradual and visible excellence in the art but also giving his readers a glimpse of the kind of literary camaraderie the fictional author shares with her. This maturity of Umrao as a poetess is witnessed in the verses that comment on the various incidents that took place in the latter part of her life, as the poetry becomes more refined with every loss she incurs. Rusva allows Umrao's love of poetry not simply as an expression but as her modus operandi. Through the performance of poetry and the past as negotiated, and the novel continues to remain one of the most widely appreciated texts in Urdu that invokes nostalgia for a past, depicted as leisurely, lyrical, and grand.

163 Umrao recalls that she and the Navab would write messages to each other in verses and spent much of their time together exchanging couplets, professing their love and admiration for each other.

2.6.2 Poetry, Performance, and the Leisurely Past: From *Muśāʿirah* to Cinema

Locating the amorous in the literary and the literary in the amorous – the complementary comparison of the poet and the lover – has been proposed to be a good way of reading otium in the context of Roman antiquity, particularly in the poetry of Catullus (Segal 1970: 28). Such a juxtaposition of the literary and the amorous can be observed in Rusva's novel, steeped in figurative language and stylistics of poetry and the philosophical treatment of the emotion of love. This juxtaposition and its entanglement with otium are already alluded to early, in the prelude to the novel, through the performative recital or *muśāʿirah*. The *muśāʿirah* emerges as an experience of otium, mediated through performance, poetry, and reflection. Traditionally, a *muśāʿirah* entails a poetic symposium, a contest. In the novel, it gradually attains the flavour of an informal assembly where poets come together to recite their verses amidst a poetry-conscious audience, fellow poets. This dual possibility of the *muśāʿirah* locates it at the boundaries of the formal and the casual, the performative and the literary, the rehearsed and the spontaneous, as it transcends the formal contours of such binaries.

A *muśāʿirah* is an emotional and sensory experience that requires adequate material arrangement to experience poetry in its literary and performative dimensions.[164] It demands a suitable physical space that can host the gathering. Munibur Rahman (1983) derives that perhaps the ritual emerged out of the custom of poets reciting eulogies in the royal courts or the houses of the nobles. Gradually, the *muśāʿirah* became a more democratic (although the essence of 'democracy' or a sense of sharing was already a part of it as is reflected in its etymology) and less exclusive institution, emerging into the literary space of free speech and opinion (Rahman 1983: 75–76; Mahmood 2018: Intr.). Its history unfolded along with the development of Urdu language and literature, as has been seen in the attempts at disciplining the *muśāʿirah* in the efforts of Holroyd, Azad and Hali. The *muśāʿirah* became a subject of longing, grief and nostalgia after 1857, reaching a height best embodied in Mirza Farhatullah Baig's novel *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Śamʿah* (The Last Radiance of Delhi, 1928). A *muśāʿirah* requires a host/patron with the social status and the means; earlier, it was mostly men of nobility and aristocracy who hosted them. Explaining the etiquettes of a *muśāʿirah*, Rahman writes, referring to Baig's book, of the "lav-

164 See Rakhshanda Jalil's essay on the imaginary *muśāʾirah* in *Dihlī kī Ākhrī Śamʿah* (2023), 264–75.

ish and ceremonious" atmosphere. These well-mannered formalities remind one of "an aristocratic culture which has all but disappeared".

A single lit candle is used, which, when placed before a particular poet, signals his turn to recite. There is also a correct order for poets to present their work: the "first to recite are the lesser poets; then come the masters in the ascending order so that the poet considered the most important recites at the end" (Rahman 1983: 76). The *muśā'irah* in Rusva's novel follows such etiquettes and attempts to re-enact the tradition while performing the sensory experience:

> There is no doubt that for today's gathering, Munshi Sahib had seen to every arrangement with careful attention and decorum. It was a summer's day; an hour or two of the day remained. The terrace had been sprinkled with water so that by evening, the floor would cool off. A carpet was spread and covered with a gleaming white sheet. New pitchers filled with water and *kevṛā* were placed on the ridges of walls. These were covered with clay cups. Ice had been arranged. Betel leaves wrapped in red cloth and scented with perfumes had been placed in paper pots; fragrant tobacco was strewn on the lids for chewing. Water was sprayed at the lower parts of half a dozen hookahs, forming wreaths of smoke around them. The evening was moonlit, and we did not need much light. A solitary *kaṇval* had been lit for the round. (Rusva 1979: 18–19)[165]

Although the opulence of aristocracy is absent from the arrangements, the provisions are made following the ceremonial decorum of a *muśā'irah* hosted by the wealthy Munshi *ṣāḥab*. Attention is paid to the enhancement of sensory pleasures in creating an ambience that is conducive to the experience of leisurely sophistication and a sense of respite from the mundane, the urban hustle and bustle of the Chowk below. The atmosphere is rendered favourable to the immersive aspects of a *muśā'irah*, the spontaneous flow of poetry. At the stroke of eight in the evening, all the participants, Mir Sahib, Agha Sahib, Khan Sahib, Sheikh Sahib, Pandit Sahib and the others start filing in, hinting at the necessity of formalities like punctuality to sustain this atmosphere of seclusion (1979: 19). Rusva maintains that this is a close gathering of friends and not a contest. Nevertheless, praising or commenting on each other's verses is what a *muśā'irah* is, and the gathering in the novel is no different. In many senses, the *muśā'irah* is "an antithesis to public life and suggests an elevation of the realm of the private" (Segal 1970: 25). Not only is it one of the "pursuits of privileged class of

165 *Kevṛā* refers to water or oil extracted from pandanus flowers. It is a perfume used widely in northern parts of India. Earthenware cups are placed on top of the pitchers to help diffuse the scent into the air. *Kaṇval*, meaning a lotus, refers to a lotus-shaped glass lampshade that would hold the candle.

young men held together by common interests and tastes, and especially common tastes in literature" (Ibid.), but also "the most common form of intellectual entertainment available in the prevalent urban setting" (Rahman 76). This dual possibility of the gathering is strategically used to frame the story. It is at a *muśāʿirah* that Umrao overhears and applauds Rusva's poetry. The leisurely literary tradition of the *muśāʿirah* introduces Umrao into the story and turns the story into hers. The presence of women in *muśāʿirah* was still a rare event when Rusva was writing, but Umrao's profession, entangling poetry and performance, is an excellent device for the purpose. Having held and performed innumerable *muśāʿirah*s, it is only realistic that Umrao is invited and, after being coaxed, agrees to attend. Her familiarity with the gathering and her erstwhile profession allows the other attendants to accept and praise her in the 'round'.

Performance and the performative are central to the novel; this is reflected in both Umrao being a performer and the performative of the narrative. Her story is recollected orally, claimed to have been secretly jotted down, and performed as a novel by her friend, the poet Rusva, who blurs the lines between character, narrator, and author. Sharon Pillai has argued that it is necessary to move beyond the aesthetics and analysis of "realism" in the novel and reorient the reading towards "a novel poetics of expression, a poetics of indirection" (2016: 112), focusing on the aesthetical aspects of 'play' and 'meta-story' in the novel. Particularly referring to Umrao's "rhapsodical reaction" to Rusva's novelistic narration of her story, Pillai claims that Rusva is engaging in training readers "by teaching them how to emotionally identify with and find pleasure in a new sort of literary experience", bridging a gap between earlier didactic novels and his own modern novels (Pillai 2016: 115). Rusva indeed balances the act between the old and the new. He demonstrates how emotions for the past can be reinvented in narrative and performative expression. Umrao's story is a nostalgic one, as is Rusva's. But the pain of loss, the yearning for a time gone by, are feelings mitigated through textual contrivance and emotional expressions. Umrao emerges as a performer par excellence, coaxed to reveal all, but the text insists that her intimate thoughts remain elusive and untouched as she straddles the past and the present, the public and the private. This unreachable part of her self is symbolised in the dramatic scene when, on returning to Khanam's house after years, she finds the five *aśrafīyāṇ* (gold coins) that she had hidden under her bed ages ago. On her servant's question, if Khanam's house was not looted during the Rebellion, Umrao responds, in character: "It must have been, but perhaps no one thought to look under my bed" (1979: 239).

In the design of the *muśāʿirah*, Umrao is the last poet in front of whom the candle is placed, clarifying that she is the most important of the poets present. Although the utterances of this last poetess transform into prose, it is not far-

fetched to read Umrao's recounting of her life as a *ġazal*.[166] Not only is the narration intercepted with verses and couplets as the prelude to each part of the story, but parts of the text also end in verses that sum up the preceding incidents. More significantly, the story advances in an episodic format reminiscent of the *ġazal*, traditionally composed of couplets in a series expanding upon the same theme. This is further ascertained in Umrao's reply to Khan Sahib's comment that her poetry reflects her own experience: "Whatever my individual experience may be, I have parsed a poetical composition" (1979: 21).[167] Pillai argues for reading the novel in its "poetics of indirection" as a "*mushaira* in narrative form". Her reading focuses on intertwining "*rekhta* and *rekhti*" (2016: 119). *Rekhta* or *re<u>kh</u>ta* is the genre of Urdu poetry with a male speaker; it is also the older name of the language, meaning assorted and scattered. *Rekhti*/*re<u>kh</u>tī*, on the other hand, was poetry composed by men in the voice of women, dealing with women's direct, quotidian and literalist concerns. Umrao's strained, skilled and controlled voice is similar to that of the 'allusive', 'ideal', *re<u>kh</u>ta*, further claiming it to be the *reḫta* of the *ġazal*, attempting at once a dexterity of polishing the craft of sadness as well as reaching the universal abstract 'indirection' of love and loss.[168] The *re<u>kh</u>tī* voice, in turn, is claimed by Rusva in a deft subversion of "tones and tongues" (Pillai 2016: 120). So, to Rusva's repeated nagging questions about her sexual exploits, Umrao is consistent in her literal loftiness and responds with verses of ideal love, loss, and the pleasure of being helpless in love.[169] If we are to agree with Pillai's reading of the narrative as a harmony of *rekhta* and *rekhti*, we can extensively appreciate a harmony in the text, of the strands of bodily, sensual love that Umrao's social identity is enmeshed with, and of the strands of refined, metaphysical love that her literary persona is engaged with. A crafty exchange of the identical strands is embodied by the characters of the novel: the writer (a man of literary taste) desiring textual material on the sensual and the passionate exploits of a courtesan; the courtesan refusing to indulge in explicit descriptions, taking recourse to the art of recounting her experiences in the garb of poetry. Then "this fusion of literary interests and passion" (Segal 1970: 27) becomes central to the meaning of the narrative. At the same time, the meaning is mediated through the

166 Sharon Pillai argues that the novel's "heteroglossia" is that of a *muśāʿirāh* (2016), 116–19.

167 "Ẓātī tajarba jo kuch ho, hamne to ek śāʿirānah maẓmūn kahā hai".

168 See Faruqi on the voice of the *ġazal* in his essay "Conventions of love, love of conventions" (1990).

169 For elaboration on rekhta and rekhti, see Pillai (2016), 119–21. See also Carla Petievich (2003).

performance of these voices, emerging from role-playing between the first and second narrator – textually interdependent characters.

The scope of performance in the text is so suggestive that one could imagine Rusva writing for cinema if it were indeed possible to make such a suggestion. This reading possibly emerges from the playful aspects of the novel. The novel has been extensively explored to coax its performative potential in large-scale cinematic productions like the 1972 film by Pakistani film-maker Hasan Tariq, the more famous 1981 Indian film by Muzaffar Ali, and the most recent production by J P Dutt in 2006. What appeals to today's filmmakers in this classic Urdu text from 1899 is its perception of modernity as precarious, the modern protagonist as adaptive, and her negotiation with nostalgia for a time gone by. Umrao's success is in carefully treading this precarious position she has been hurled into, as it is Rusva's success, too. Rusva weaves a yarn full of disclaimers and pretences, contradictions, and conflicts – for example on the topic of *pardah* (veil), sin, morality, and colonial rule – in the voice of Umrao. This is in keeping with the voice of the performing courtesan and her skill in the art of *nakhra*/*nakhrā* or pretence. Oldenburg draws attention to the extensive training and rehearsals a *tavā'if* undergoes until "no trace of the pretense is discernible" (1990: 274). Umrao herself sums up the courtesan's pretence and manipulation of emotion:

> I am a whore by profession, and love is like a repartee for us. When we want to ensnare a man, we pretend to fall for him. No one can compete with us on how to fall for a man. Heaving deep sighs, weeping, and crying at every little thing, refusing to eat for days, sitting on parapets, dangling our legs, threatening to plunge down, taking poison – these are our tricks. However hard-hearted a man he may be, eventually he will fall into the nets of deception. (Rusva 1997: 125)[170]

Rusva explores Umrao's ability to feign emotions of love and play with narrative conventions and techniques. At the same time, Umrao is shown to capably protect herself through the change in government, lifestyle, and the times. The passing of time for Umrao is doubly dangerous as the passing of not only the tranquil and joyous ways of old Lucknow but the passing of her prime in a profession where youth is currency. Nostalgia for Umrao is a profound emotion, but her ability to channel it in a reflective strand allows her to aestheticise the loss in her skill and love for poetry, aptly signified by her pen name, *Adā* (style or grace). The "new flexibility" of reflective nostalgia, the "sensual delight in the texture of

170 Oldenburg uses the Khushwant Singh and Hussaini's translation. I have used my translation.

time" (Boym 2001: 49), is aptly harnessed by Rusva, a writer of modernity, and projected on the individual and cultural memory of the Urdu intelligentsia through the ingeniously apt figure of the courtesan in her recollection of the past – of both herself (*āpbītī*) and of the changing world she inhabits (*jagbītī*).

Adā is shown to be a poet of great skill when she recites her own couplets, and Rusva, enchanted, enquires about the original composer. Umrao smiles coyly, claiming authorship of these exquisite verses. This is another narrative strategy of Rusva, the wistful poet and writer. The novel allows Rusva, a writer obsessed with poetry, to become, by extension, the poet he wanted to be. *Umrā'o Jān Adā* can be read as his masterstroke, preserving poetry in prose, pitting two friends as rival poets – the courtesan and the writer. In their experiences of love and poetry, they are bridged by experiences of reflection, longing, and *otium*. To return to Segal's remark, "though most men, *otiosi* or not, fall in love, only the *otiosi* ponder and analyse their experience and transmute it into art" (1970: 31). This art is transmuted through nostalgia in transforming the poet's dormant desire for fame, only to be able to do so as a novelist, a writer of the modern genre. *Umrā'o Jān Adā* is a novel of reflective nostalgia, in both its content as well as stylistic innovations, in setting as well as in what it establishes for future readers. It remains a text bearing the essence of Lucknow as a protagonist, its life and times, and the subject of many more nostalgic recounting of the same in literature and performance.

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

Nostalgia for the leisurely past is a significant emotion and theme that recurs in the writings of Urdu poets and novelists in the aftermath of the Rebellion. Effective as a rupture, the severance of the present from the past is envisioned as a transformation in temporal sensibilities. However, emotions for the past are seen to be expressed in different ways, for they are felt differently by different writers. In various expressions, nostalgia is negotiated as contrived and conflicted – sometimes as restorative, sometimes as reflective, but almost always as ambivalent. The socio-political transformations in the aftermath of the Rebellion and the ensuing colonialist critique create an emotional atmosphere of binaries, demanding adherence to reformism in education and literary culture or being left behind by the rushing speed of colonial modernity. Several Urdu writers, particularly in the reformist vein of Syed Ahmad Khan, Azad, and Hali, responded to the call to synthesise Islamic reformism with Victorian morality and utilitarian ethics in poetry and literature. Simultaneously, writers of the new form of the novel reinvented ways in which they felt and expressed the loss of the past. Through their innovative prose narratives, they trained

their readers to feel in new and different ways. The dissemination of print helped several prose writers play with and reinvent new forms of long literary prose, creating new literary platforms to parse emotions for the past. These two processes synthesised towards the conceptualisation of the Urdu novel. The novel genre may have started as a response towards the call for utilitarian literature and estrangement from the dominance of poetry. Nevertheless, it emerged into a modern genre where the past and feelings for the past (before 1857) became a significant theme.

This chapter has shown that nostalgia, in its ambivalence, looms large in the Urdu novel of the nineteenth century, even in so-called didactic and reformist narratives like *Taubat-un-Naṣūḥ*. While contending for a sharp severance from a past perceived as decadent and idle, the pain and longing for the very same past, embodied in poetry, is violently dealt with in the novel. The nostalgic subject is portrayed as trapped, and he must cure himself and his progeny from the sinful leisurely past and towards a progressive future. While Nasuh's repentance from his sinful past turns into religious zeal, Kalim's refusal to repent and give up his idle ways is seen to be so dangerous for the body politic that he must be disciplined, however violently and pathologically. After a few decades, at the turn of the century, emotions for the past are rendered in more sober notes, which allows the nostalgic subject to be critical as well. The Urdu novel comes to its own with Mirza Hadi Rusva's *Umrā'o Jān Adā*, wherein the courtesan, a figure that belongs to a *passé* world of *navābī* courts is reinvented as the voice of modernity. Through a playful narrative performance, Rusva's novel achieves a critical distance from the past while training his readers to remain nostalgic. This nostalgia is expressed reflectively, allowing for new directions in reading, feeling, and looking back at the past.

The chapter reads nostalgia in a new and transformed world by focusing on the intertextual figures in Urdu novels – the young aristocrat and the courtesan – once interdependent characters. At the centre of these readings are the emotions in these texts towards the Urdu poetic tradition and culture. Changing emotions towards poetry (signified as the decadent/leisurely past) runs through the chapter in the close reading of Hali's *Musaddas*, a new and different poem criticising poetry. The new novels, Ahmad's *Taubah* and Rusva's *Umrā'o*, treat poetry as loathed and loved. Rusva's novel is, in many ways, an antithesis, a response to Hali's and Ahmad's restorative nostalgia. A novel written in verses in the tradition of the *ġazal*, it acknowledges the new prose genre and the shift in literary ethos, nonetheless subverting this shift in reflective nostalgia. For the Urdu reader-audience, it reinvents the ways in which nostalgia can be felt, expressed, and performed in various textual and cinematic interpretations it has inspired over more than a century.