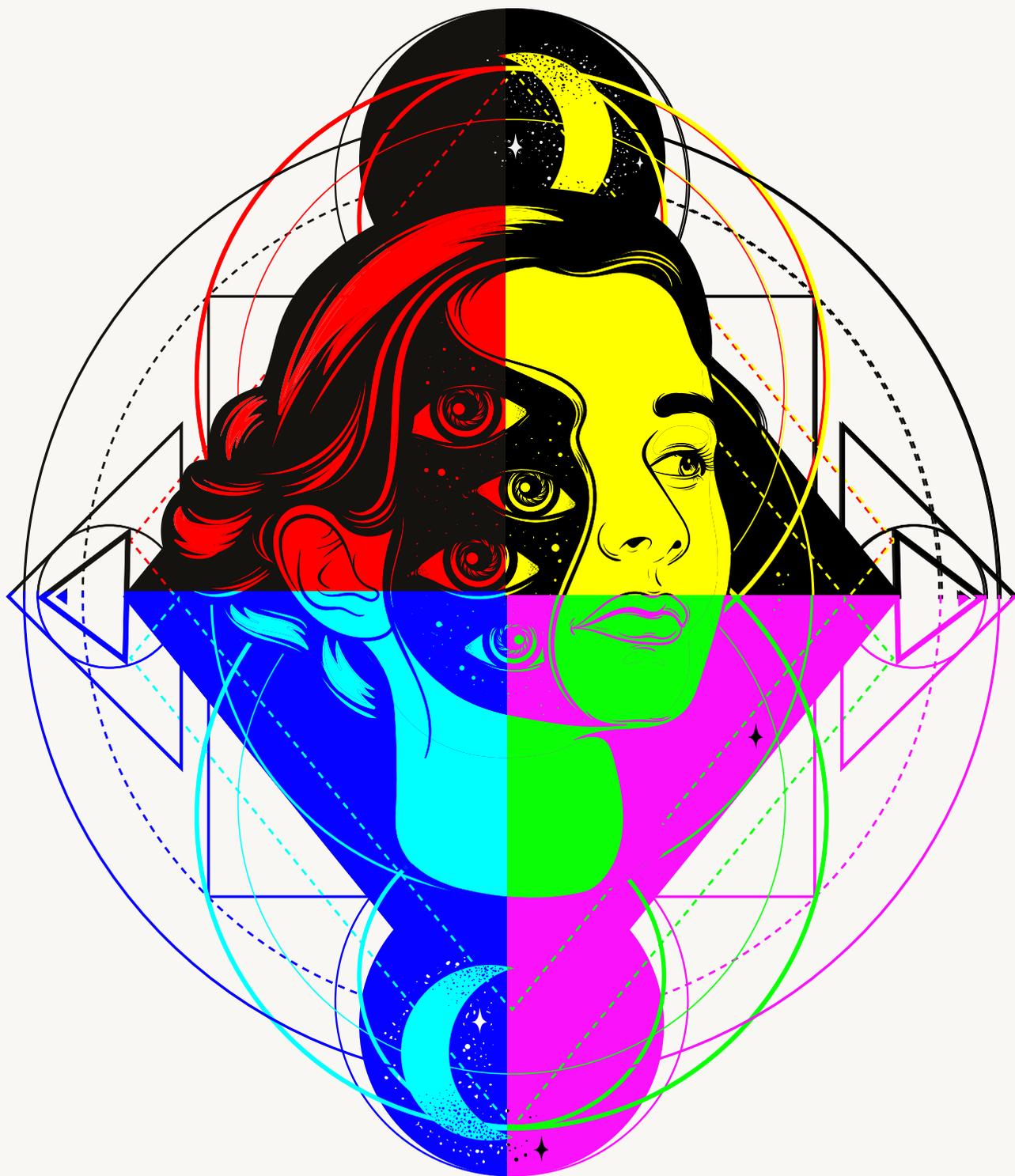


ENGLISH LITERARY ASSOCIATION

# MAGAZINE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH | JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The Department of English has walked alongside the institution of Jamia Millia Islamia, being from the onset one of the core academic spheres. Just as the institution entered into its new century, the department followed suit; a change in approach, application and systems of engagement. The celebrations of crossing into the horizon of the centurium became antecedent to the darkness and the density of its silent collective despair that was to succeed. We have come to realise not only the evidence of the institutions' perseverance but of its colliding into the fragility of humans that sustained within it, allowing a revising of the human as basic.

English Literary Association (ELA) continued to be one of the rays that broke through the heavy clouds that hovered over all for the past couple of years. Going on to contain and expand the hope of the collective, breathing into the shared mechanisms of creative expression, novelty and ideals, the same illumination. The ELA Magazine 2022 serves as a testimony to the sublime that was taken grant of by the students of the Department of English and professed onto verses, prose and other expressions. The compositions are personal and political musings, critiques and contrasts of the parity; outburst of what was constraint within the bounds of desperate laws in times of malady eruptions.

This collection would not have been possible, without the guidance of the department; ELA Advisor Dr. Shuby Abidi, Head of the Department Prof. Simi Malhotra, their attention and undivided commitment to bring forth the talent of their students. ELA Magazine 2022 acts not as a singular pillar of experience and labour, but as an anthology of varying degrees of thoughts, effort and sheer output of diverse minds, solidified in collaboration and symphony.

*Raafat Gilani*

Editor-in-Chief



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# DECLARATION IN RAGE, OF A PERPETUAL RAGE!

*By Quratulain Qureshi*

We cast away the songs and the odes endowed upon us, wrapped in a cloth of false generosity.

We discard those deceptive melodies and the cinema, the meticulously formulated images of “Paradise.”

We declare the passer-by's idea of us as “hospitable” a sham. Our children abhor the sympathies lent to them, followed by narratives declaring them brainwashed. Denying to let powerlessness be their identity, they flood streets and alleys – rage is what they know, rage is what they sing of!

We accurse the solidarities shrewdly handed-over to us in envelopes made of dictations, taming tactics, proposals of “development.” Mothers here chant to us the lullabies whose lyrics are made of pearls of dignity, held together by the thread of resistance.

We have shielded our history from lies, mendacious tales.

We have long replaced our scrap-books, our fancy magazine-cuts, now our collection comprises pictures with no notes, just dates. Piling up year after year, they find home next to the old books, in our old-fashioned trunks. They also reside in the raging folders of our computers, screaming out loud their truth, they defy all the narrators.

Our rosaries here scream out loud the forbidden word that haunts Nations. We are the bearers of our own songs, our miseries and our courage, our lament to God, our rhymes of despair, and our hopeful pleas, our requiems, and our hymns, our anger-ridden assertions and our far-sighted declarations!

# BOOK OF EUPHORIA

*By Ashna Arif*

Read me a book,  
Where the blanket of sky unfolds magic,  
And the shower of rain pours angelic songs,  
Where the rainbows are drawn with shades  
of glee,  
And the crows create a sweet melody,  
Where the rustling leaves build rhythms of  
pleasure,  
And the hearts overflow with empathetic  
treasure.

Read me a book,  
Where the night is bright,  
And the streets are paved with fairy lights,  
Where the winds of warmth blow free and  
clean,  
And not a single mortal is to be seen,  
Where the weeds smell of passion and  
union,  
You and I, holding each other,  
Swirling in the air, falling into oblivion.

Read me a book,  
Where the cosmic souls are bound to unite,  
And the lifelong yearnings meet an end,  
Where the hostile chains are fated for  
divergence,  
And the universe conspires  
journeys of convergence,  
Where the Capulets and Montagues are

families with composure,  
And the love of *Qais* and *Layla* is destined for  
closure.

Read me a book,  
Where the voids ultimately meet their  
destiny,  
And words of longings fall into a symphony,  
Where the silent cries receive a tender  
response,  
And the lost flocks find the nest where they  
belong,  
Where the love of her stepmother lets  
Cinderella flourish,

And the Little Mermaid lives a life long  
enough to cherish!

Read me a book,  
Where kindness irrigates the fields of unity,  
And the leaves of hope swish in serenity,  
Where life survives beyond the clutches of  
morality,  
And mankind is free from the hopes of  
disparity,  
Where the tiger and the lamb are sincere  
lovers,  
And the flowers of tranquillity conjoin into  
lovely bowers.

# PASSING THE PAST

*By Sarah Mahajan*

When unto memory's lane, I wander  
The senses farther in despair do fall,  
And my steps thus tyrannised, surrender,  
But for a moment do fate's choler stall.  
Furnished to spilling with sound despondence  
No fare it demands though longer the stay.  
Come penalties which need no pretence,  
To frame my perceptions when thoughts betray.  
It behoves not me to venture again  
These gates which lead to the crown of memory,  
That first forbids with such proud disdain,  
Only to ravage the one who dares to flee.  
Such be the trade in the kingdom of time,  
Where each day ends in a melancholy rhyme.

# HOME

*By Khushboo Malik*

If you lived by the borders, they'd  
tell you their secret.

It's not the war that tires them.  
It's the collapsing and recollapsing,  
every day, to contain all the grief  
which still finds ways to seep out  
like pus in between damaged  
fingers.

Tell me now,

What do you call home?

The blood runs shamelessly with  
the water sometimes, but it's all the  
water we have. I'm sorry.

I will spell your home as h.o.m.e.  
I can't spell mine without g.r.i.e.f.

# DUST(IN') THE CAGE

*By Apoorva Phutela*

I grab the key dangling on my neck  
And wonder when did I become a cage.

My heartbeat echoes in the silence inside me.  
It's too loud for me to hear anything else.

I drop the key as I try to run  
Away from myself – far, far.

What is it like forgetting everything  
Have you ever known?

What is it like being unable to recall  
The letters of your Name?

I unlock the ashtray and look for my skin and bones.  
It is dust everywhere: around, inside.

My hands are full of incomplete words and half-spoken ideas.  
How long could I possibly carry them?

How long have I come?  
How far must I run to meet myself again?

# THE KNIGHTS

*By Md Saemul Haque Noori*

Strutting about the streets, a group of ten  
here they come, the saviour, the Knights.  
Hear oh hear! The crowd rejoiced.  
“Fearsome warriors, a group of ten  
once again they killed a child.”  
They unsheathe their swords, brandish it with pride,  
who else but them killed the ones who didn’t abide?  
Covered in crimson hue their hands,  
still shaking I wonder why,  
hurt a little, so the swords came down.  
It seems that the child put up a great fight.

# BOW-DOWN AND LEAVE

*By Syed Taqui Haider*

[Shakespeare claimed- All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players. If this was an act, why do the exits come as a surprise for the co-players?]

Bow-down and leave.  
The body which you wore along  
With time became weak,  
It's time you face away-bow down  
Leave the stage- it'll creak.

Your leather belts, your shirts and pants  
Along with your chits of poetry.  
Your muslin scarfs, Your cosy hats  
Along with your precious jewellery,  
All sit the same in your wood dresser.  
They carry your perfume,  
Some smell of tobacco or honey.  
Some smell of you and me.

Your pictures sitting on the walls  
Are still dusted the same,  
You left the stage, who'll take the props?  
The stage is not yet free!

Your act was long, you saw it all  
You missed the act of – me.  
They say that you have gone for long  
Then how you manage thee?  
You left behind all dust and prop.  
You left behind a family.

Come back to stage, bow down for long.  
The audience has to leap,  
Smile along, clap and shout, then  
Bow down and leave.

# REVIEWING THE BOOKSTAGRAM: A GLIMPSE INTO SOCIAL MEDIA'S PERSONAL LIBRARY

*By Zainab Wahab*

As someone who considers books an inseparable part of her life, I understand people who use their social media as a personal library. The act of carefully curating an online profile is almost as fulfilling as that of neatly organising a bookshelf. Instagram, which has become a popular platform for book lovers to express their opinions and write reviews, has a separate name tag for profiles that function as a substitute for the traditional bookshelf: the Bookstagram.

Originally meant for posting and sharing pictures, Instagram acts as a window into our private life today. For people who harbour a keen interest in books and derive pleasure from articulating their opinions about them, Instagram has come to be the ideal platform. Wolfgang Iser, a celebrated exponent of the reader-response theory, believed that there are certain gaps inherent in all texts that the reader's imagination fills; rendering the text complete. Through the act of posting book reviews on a public platform, Bookstagrammers present the content of the book alongside their understanding of it and fulfil their role as what Iser has called the 'co-creator' of the text.

To enhance my understanding of the impact of Bookstagram on the reading world, I talked to Aysha Kulsum (@stealbooksnotmoney), a third-year student of English literature and a fellow Bookstagrammer who spends her days reading translations and procrastinating on writing reviews. "Reading reviews written by people from different cultures opens your eyes to new insights and critical perspectives that you might have overlooked during your reading", Aysha says, commending the Bookstagram for allowing the opinions of an eclectic readership to surface. Through Bookstagram, reviewers have encouraged critical thinking and initiated necessary discourse on a gamut of topics that would've otherwise remained ignored.

The role played by the Bookstagram in introducing readers to the works of writers who do not constitute the mainstream and providing representation to marginalised voices has been remarkable. Through social media, it has become easier for writers from the lower echelons of society to advertise and draw attention to their works. Further, with the help of the features provided by Instagram, readers can easily locate the books belonging to the genre of their preference from a diverse range and access recommendations that complement their reading taste.

Despite the plethora of benefits that are up for reaping for the readers on Bookstagram, the space is not without some equally significant downsides. Instagram promotes your account based on how active you remain on it. When this demand for consistency meets the Bookstagram, the pressure to post and simultaneously read more increases. The capitalist drive to be an active producer of content on social media dissuades people from taking the time to process and meditate on what they've read. Moreover, it perpetuates conformity by compelling readers to align their opinions with that of popular reviewers to avoid the risk of seeming contentious or overreacting.

While talking about the Bookstagram, Aysha says, "The accounts that make a display of reading a large number of books regularly garner the most support online. This is a matter of privilege since not everyone has limitless time to invest in reading or the lack of other commitments and responsibilities". Further, she asserts that the focus on an "aesthetic" has overshadowed almost all other aspects of Bookstagram. The pictures that feature the hard copies of books with elegant background settings and are captured through expensive cameras receive the most attention due to their visual appeal.

Talking about this proclivity towards an aesthetic, Aysha explains, "Through the carefully orchestrated creation of a picture, the aim is to sell an experience. You look at a picture of an open book with a cup of coffee resting next to it with the view from a window overlooking the sea in the background, and at that moment, what you desire is to be there, not the book or the cup of coffee, but the whole experience of being the person who's living the picture." In the pursuit of promoting their accounts, Bookstagrammers have begun to align the visuals of their posts to the popular aspirations of the masses to acquire more likes and followers. Further, the Bookstagram directs the attention of people towards popular books written predominantly by white writers, and on themes that are of common interest to everyone. This limits people from cultivating interests specific to themselves and going beyond the most widely picked up genres.

At present, the Bookstagram is the online niche for readers worldwide. With the promise of experiencing enhanced interaction and connectivity, social media has penetrated the reading world and become a key component in generating interest in books. While its impact has certainly benefited reading enthusiasts and budding academics in multiple ways, its role in creating a materialist and elitist environment surrounding books is unmistakable. As compared to social media sites like Instagram, Goodreads is a much better platform for readers who wish to engage with book reviews online and evade the unhealthy influence of Instagram's conformist and validation-seeking culture.

Photographed by Quratulain Qureshi



# RUMINATIONS ON DECOLONISATION, LANGUAGE, AND IDENTITY

By Poulomi Chandra

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, the renowned Kenyan intellectual and postcolonial theorist, in his book *Decolonizing the Mind* establishes language as a medium of perception and identity-formation. He asserts that the construction of one's identity is significantly impacted by the relationship a person has to one's own culture and primary language. Thiong'o attempts to explain how the English language has been utilised as a means of further oppression for the colonised people. Using several anecdotal evidence, the writer explains how colonialism still prevails and affects the lives of the colonised people, albeit, in different forms than before. Several critics including Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, etc, have written extensively along similar lines, about the 'othering' and the aftermath of colonialism in the minds of the colonised people.

Thiong'o argues that for the colonised people of Africa, the derogation of indigenous languages in imperial education systems led to the further alienation of the native people from an enormously crucial component of their respective cultures. The imposition of European languages and British literature as canon in the educational structure of African colonial schools not only reinforced the idea of British superiority over the African tradition and languages but also further contributed to the cultural erasure of African people. Teaching European literature as a part of the mainstream education in the colonised countries superseded the traditional native culture of folk tales, folk songs, and drastically reduced their significance in a system that labelled anything from the East as 'savage', which additionally helped propagate the agenda of the colonial powers.

Colonialism certainly drained the economy and exploited the wealth and labour of several African nations as well as South-Asian countries like India, however, writers like Fanon and Thiong'o bring forth the fact that it is much more complex than

just that. The European colonisers methodically indoctrinated entire populations into believing that they were not 'civilised' enough, perpetuating the infamous myth of Western supremacy and sophistication that unfortunately is so internalised that it is popular even to this day. Furthermore, the idea that formerly colonised nations in Africa and Asia lived in a primitive 'barbaric' fashion before the onset of British imperialism lends an illusion of benevolence to the horrific violence and cruelty of colonialism when there was actually none.

I remember our class teacher in my middle school who threatened to charge us a fine every time we would be caught speaking in any language other than English during school hours, and that she entrusted two representatives to report any disobedience regarding the same. This anecdote came to my mind while reading Thiong'o's essay and it is intriguing to me how closely my story resonates with his, despite being worlds and generations apart. The internalised inferiority complex and aspiring to become more 'white', both literally and metaphorically, results in a complete alienation of the colonised natives from their own cultural heritage, language, and identity.

Frantz Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* that these feeble attempts at seeking validation from the West by constant comparison are a gigantic issue. Fanon asserts through various studies in the postcolonial context that abandoning one's native languages and culture to replace it with the colonial culture just to fit into the Western aesthetics ultimately leads to a loss of identity of the colonised individual. Whether it is the idealised lens through which English is viewed in places like India and Africa or blindly allowing the Eurocentric standards of beauty to rule the mainstream media, theorists like Fanon and Thiong'o urge the native people to

become aware of their personal cognitive biases and reclaim their identity by rejecting the coloniser's rules of language. This inevitably should bring our attention to E.K. Braithwaite, who despite writing in English, did not follow the conventions of the standard English language in his poems like "Negus" and "Ananse".

Braithwaite rejects the English rhymes and metres and instead adopts the African traditions. Even while writing in English, Braithwaite continues to reclaim his own language, culture, and heritage. He, too, talks about the systematic destruction of the native culture by the colonialists, but opines that they can rebuild their dormant culture and traditions. Laying emphasis on the African traditions of oral literature and drawing vibrant imageries from African mythology and culture, Braithwaite does not shy away from reconstructing the identity of the colonised people of Africa. His poems also zoom in on the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised by emphasising that the material comforts as products of European capitalism "is not enough" (Braithwaite) and that he is ready to bring back his rich culture lost to colonialism by reclaiming his real identity. Postcolonial critics like Thiong'o and Fanon endorsed cultural reclamation where African culture is acknowledged for what it inherently is, rather than being pushed to the peripheries.

Thiong'o suggests that one must eradicate the influence of the imperialist culture as much as possible to revive their authentic African identities. In an attempt to legitimise and bring

back a form of dignified acceptance of his native tongue against the mainstream English language in the colonial schools, Thiong'o decided to abandon writing in English and almost entirely write in Gikuyu. Whether it is in a far-off East African country like Kenya or a remote corner in India, it is a widely experienced fact that colonisation has its systemic way of diminishing the legitimacy of indigenous languages. A Button Poetry poet from India Diksha Bijlani writes in her poem "Translated Disney" that speaking fluent English in India is not just about knowledge, it is a symbol of higher status and economic privilege, or more aptly like owning a "verbal Mercedes".

The very fact that I am not nearly as fluent in reading or writing in my mother tongue *Bangla* as much as I am in English is a testament to the fact that the regional languages were not considered important enough or 'global' enough to be included seriously in my academic curriculum. Sometimes, it is inevitable to wonder what the saddest aspect of being able to speak the coloniser's tongue fluently is: that one can never be fluent enough or that the older generations will always feel inferior even if they are very well-read in their regional languages. To even be able to spend time thinking about it might be considered a privilege. However, lately, whenever I want to read a book, I have been consciously picking up the original writings of Rabindranath Tagore or Ashapurna Devi from my mother's shelf, and even though it is far from what Fanon and Thiong'o envisioned, I consider it a step closer to the reclamation of my own cultural identity.



Artwork by Anam Fatima

# REFLECTIONS ON AN ORIENTAL NATION

*By Raafat Gilani*

When we think of Orientalism, the European conquest comes to mind, the Britishers in India and elsewhere, or the French. However, by detaching from the terminology, one can look at the patterns of not just the West in the East, but of anyone anywhere. Thus, the framework becomes elaborate on the patterns of actions that are mostly considered reprehensible, academically, or popularly, allowing for a broader and much more encompassing understanding of similar reprehensible structures around the globe.

In 1853, Karl Marx wrote the piece *The British Rule in India*. In spite of being acutely aware of the British devastation in the Indian subcontinent, Marx still considered the British rule to be a boon in disguise. It is now accepted as an Orientalist text, because Marx believed that although Indian civilization lost its backbone and culture, what was lost primarily were the ancient, "barbaric" and "unregenerate" customs of India. This reminded me of a historical event I personally witnessed; the abrogation of Article 370 and 35a. A lot of events have happened in Kashmir by the post-independent India, but this one particularly resonated a grave Orientalist tendency; force justified through social and moral change. This tendency is broad enough to even categorise the Geneva Conventions as Orientalist; however, it was particularly embodied in the post-abrogation Indian feelings towards Kashmir.

Marx believed that the power which brings a social revolution or change, that which Britishers employed in India, is of a superior civilization. A view underpinned by an assumption that the oppressed were simply *backward*, that they could not have developed on their own and the Occident (the Britishers in this case) had to bestow a favour upon the Orient (India) by developing them through whatever means necessary.

This assumption has some extensions that are prominent in Oriental studies; exoticism. The Britishers viewed the Indian subcontinent as an

exotic place. I had been observing it for a while post-abrogation, although the intricacies had been brewing prior. Kashmir is always viewed as a place to wonder about, a fragile beauty with an exotic aura. This was overtly displayed post-abrogation when we witnessed the Indian lens of viewing Kashmiri women as "exotic" (in the Oriental sense). They openly favoured the "snatching" of Kashmiri women. This barbaric tendency of demanding women for sexual reason has already been in practice by the Indian Army in Kashmir, and other *exoticized* places like North-east India, unlike the non-exoticized places, which are not blatantly subjugated like Delhi, Kerala and else

Exoticism of a place is a self-imposed, almost self-manifesting trait of the Occident that which is accompanied by oppression and compromised knowledge production about the Orient.

Marx's text provides a profound insight into the thinking of an Orientalist; that self-proclaimed superiority of a civilization (including moral, legal, social, and economic) can be imposed by force on another that is viewed as backward and weak. If this is not something that the Indian Union believes in or is willing to collude to; then why the rule in Kashmir, and if not this view, then what justifies the years of atrocities that the government of Indian Union committed and continues to commit in Kashmir; ranging from penetrating the boundaries of Kashmir and celebrating it, to violating the women of the land in mass rape cases such as the one of *Kunan and Poshpora* and later, denying it.

Even when Article 370 was abrogated, people clung onto one reason or the other to justify demolishing the last pipeline of Kashmir's separate essence; that was of law, that Indian law will finally be fully applied in Kashmir. If not Orientalist, believing their law as superior and willing to dominate a region for its expansion, then no clue can be derived of what is more reverberant of a coloniser tendency.

That not a law, but all laws without debate or discussion shall be imposed on the Kashmiris without consent of the people of the land can only happen when the superiority has finally manifested in full form, needing no disguise. It is projected that finally an enlightenment will occur to the Kashmir region in effect of the imposed laws and that development (economic or social) will accompany it. It is mirroring the Britishers who thought of it as a favour upon India – through hiding the disapproval of Indians towards the imposed rule and thus laws – to strike them with their regulations and structure that will save these “backward” people from themselves. This is the exact authoritarian and classically Orientalist trait displayed by the Indian rule. The similarities are uncanny but conspicuous once the terminology is detached from the patterns, to unravel a set of structures that are no different in their illness and imposition of power, than a classic Occident. What justification is there to these actions, but that there is denial, there is no objective legality involved. The legal bounds’ foundation is laid on chaining of the exact region which it claims to free.

Deciding on the oppressor-oppressed relation, for instance in context of India-Kashmir relationship, one might encounter that the idea of oppression is one that is fallible with no clear knowledge of it available. If there is subjugation, where are the reports, the mainstream coverage of mass rape and genocide, or fake encounters and illegal detentions (even according to Indian law) – here, the knowledge structure of the Occident comes to play. As when the British Philosopher James Mill wrote about the history of India whilst enjoying the Anglo-Indian subjugation-driven soft beds in the British lands, claiming that “sufficient stocks of information were now collected” for him to write about the ones his land was subjugating. India, too, claims the same; an all-knowing knowledge structure by itself that does not need the voice of the victims of its “development” to be heard or have any fruitful representation. India’s information banks, at least the ones that are made public, are consciously Orientalist. The entirety of the history of Kashmir and its voice is drawn from Indian institutionalised power pieces.

One might make the contention that given there are no “proofs” of oppression in Kashmir, no “proof” of mass rapes and genocide, no “proof” of fake encounters, that the only sympathizing news is propaganda, it is concluded that the rule of the Indian Union is fair, and accompanied by much needed “development” and “protection.” To unpack this contention Michel Foucault’s works are of importance, upon whom Edward Said rests his concept of Orientalism. Foucault notes that the discourse which is circulated, generated, and solidified by the institutions of the powerful (in this case India) is the discourse which gains acceptance as the truth. Thus, the discourse of Kashmir by the Indian Union, with all its prejudices, ideologues and problematic understanding of the people of the region gained validation as being the truth, hence becoming the mass understanding of the issue of Kashmir.

The discourse on Kashmir is validated through the institutions of the Indian Union which represent, what I am going to refer as neo-Occident – a power and or region reflecting similar tendencies as the traditional Occident whilst not being from it. To reiterate, Foucault pointed out that the knowledge generated by the powerful is validated through the very trait of being powerful. Said extends it by propounding that Orientalism is a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient. The neo-Occident’s institutions, including legislation, judiciary, educational institutions, seminar halls, newsroom debates and authoritatively favourable allies, work in nexus to connect the power with the knowledge it produces. It solidifies the spoken, written, and propagated information of the neo-Orient (having the counter definition of neo-Occident, aside from the directional region, in this case Kashmir) by the neo-Occident as the truth about the former on one hand, while on the other it enables the neo-Occident to justify its rule and domination by using the extracts of the traditional Orient.

Thence, proposing the neo-Occident as the rightful power and the high civilization while projecting the neo-Orient as backward, and in need of protection by the neo-Occident. Concluding that, which was also preached by the European colonisers, that rule is justified

not because of legalities as much or even economics but because the rule is the morally right thing to impose by force. What is happening in the discourse on Kashmir are these Orientalist tendencies that the Indian Union displays overtly but is always looked over because of the terminology restricting the traits of bias, prejudice, oppressive nature, among others to the West disallowing the recognition of such patterns in other countries, such as India in this case.

Recognition of Orientalism is not the only step that Edward Said prescribed. He formulated a concept to disrupt such ways of thinking and their power (and thus knowledge) structures called "contrapuntal reading." This, in the case of India-Kashmir relationship would be not to view the texts solely because the texts themselves are all reframed and enabled through the power structure of the former, but to read the voices of the Kashmiris, that which have been fruitfully (for the Indian Union) been shot at. The assumptions of neo-Occident must be thrown out for there to be room for any reading whatsoever.

Artwork by Amber



# THE TRIAL OF FAN FICTION IN THE LITTERATEUR'S COURT

By Nuzhat Khan

Fan fiction, literary purists would argue, is an unimaginative, anti-original, imitative, substandard writing only meant to be masticated by the aimless youth of the consumerist culture. It is, according to them, the lowest point of art and literature, an apocalypse – the doom, the end. But fan fiction is not new. There is no clear evidence on when it started, but a big Homer fan – Virgil – wrote *The Aeneid* based on one of the minor characters in the *The Iliad*. *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri – one of the greatest works of world literature – is a nexus of biblical, Virgil and Homer fanfic.

The central objective of fan fiction has always been to engage with the original work beyond or within the author's telling. It is derivative, but also transformative. Contrary to what is widely believed, fan fiction is not just sex. It is a reflection that encourages speculative questions and broadens imagination outside "normal" – what if Harry Potter was Indian? What if Elizabeth Bennett was queer?

*Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys is a postcolonialist and feminist prequel to Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*. It is a critical re-imagining, a masterpiece in its own right. But it still has been inspired by Bronte's novel, so why should it be shy of being a Jane Eyre fanfic?

## WHAT IS FAN FICTION?

Before the arrival of pop-culture juggernauts such as Star Trek, Sherlock Holmes, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, there was a Jane Austen fandom. Shannon Chamberlain in an article for *The Atlantic* wrote that in the Anglophone world, contemporary fan fiction writing began in the 18th century. With the advent of modern novels, limitations on storytelling ended. Readers began to prod into the lives of their favourite characters, retold them as per their imagination and shared it among those with similar interests; the fandom. However, the beginning of modern fan fiction is believed to be the Star Trek fanzines of the '70 and the '80s. It popularised a lot of neo-age fan fiction genres.

Fan fiction blurs the boundaries between consumption and expression. It is interest-driven, a manifestation of unattended desires. It has

expanded the scope of storytelling beyond the mainstream by including dialogue and conversation. It has a participatory (e)quality to it. Fan fiction, thus, becomes a space for questions, a playground for imagination.

Among its various sub-genres, there is recontextualization, expansion or more stylistically, an alternate universe (AU), shifting the focus to supporting characters, changing moral alignment or dislocating by omitting their presence from the original scene (fix-it-fic). In some fan fiction, primary romance is reimagined. For example; Sir Walter Scott's novel *Ivanhoe* disgruntled W.M. Thackeray so much that in 1850 he wrote a satirical novel *Rebecca and Rowena* where he finally paired Ivanhoe with Rebecca. Little did Thackeray know that he was a 'shipper' – a term coined by the fan fiction community which means supporting two characters – or two real-life people – to be together romantically. Shipping could be as simple as *The Vampire Diaries'* fans wanting a Klaroline (Klaus + Caroline) endgame, or as complex as navigating the homoerotic subtext in *Moby Dick*. Fan writers often eroticize the original text. There is fan fiction with homosexual pairings known as 'slash', such as Harry Potter/Draco Malfoy and RPF or real-person-fiction, which is a fan fiction based on a real person – a genre dominated by the One Direction fandom.

## LET'S TALK BUSINESS!

Canonical literature has been the catalyst for many artistic discoveries. Inspiration in itself is a fan-culture appendage. Fan fiction then becomes a classification based on its context, and distribution system. Internet has encouraged and expanded fan-culture generally, and fan fiction particularly. It has led to greater connectivity among fans and fandoms, and thus greater proliferation of sub-cultures such as fan fiction. It is highly unlikely for a pop-culture phenomenon today, such as Marvel Cinematic Universe, K-pop/K-drama, Anime or even Bollywood without a significant amount of fan-fiction dedicated to them.



Fan fiction is commercial, a money-making business. In its most reductive form, it is free advertising or marketing. Today, the most expensive fanfic could be E.L. James's BDSM extraordinaire *Fifty Shades of Grey* which started out as a Twilight fan-fiction called "Master of the Universe." The book's film adaptation was practically crucified by the critics, and yet the trilogy amassed over half a billion dollars worldwide.

### IT HAS FICTION, SO IS IT LITERARY?

Now the question is: Is fan-fiction good writing by established literary standards? The answer is, could be. [Virgil?] But now there are other questions: Is all literature good literature? What is good literature? If a literature is not good, then is it not literature?

The artistic stigmatisation around fan fiction is based on the perception that it is not serious, it is "cheap" and is largely porn-esque. However, the understanding of literature changes with society and culture. Literariness cannot necessarily be a systematic construct. It is malleable, changing and very fragile at that. Objective parameters of judging art cannot exist, because it is dependent on individual human experiences which are not monolithic.

For the longest time, a white male's experience has been the standardised basis of critiquing art. But the fanfic world is mainly young women. Thus, the preconditions of largely machoistic literary standards cannot be extrapolated on fan fictions. It is connatural to

the digital reality we have entered. The idea of quality is not hinged to the same outdated standard. It is argued that fan fiction is borrowed writing, but storytelling has always been a shared universe. Plots are anchored to each other, to folklores, to myths, to history, to cultural tales, to personal stories until it culminates into something original. As French literary theorist Roland Barthes argued that all narratives are extracted from older ideas or previously existing cultures; nothing is entirely original. Peeking at the canon; Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is arguably a crossover fanfic based on a Norse legend and a mediaeval play called *Ur-Hamlet*.

Fan fiction has essentially changed the language and psychology of fiction. Similar to other forms of writing, it has bad work and brilliant work. It cannot be defined by a one-dimensional "hot-take." Its range expands from being an incubator for "real" work to being a creative outlet which does not seek institutional validation. Fanfic does not need a workshop, a professional writing course degree, an agent, or capital investment. It is free, and mostly anonymous. It stands as an exercise of imaginative engagement with a fictional work that is not limited to the time of its consumption. It is underpinned by the idea that readers contribute creative and or imaginative inputs in the stories they consume. Fan fiction is as much a reading culture as a fan culture. Therefore, while it can be ridiculed for being disorderly or problematic, it is still a compelling case to remodel "canons" for more inclusive human experiences.

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# Listening to Literature: Music in Indian Literary Traditions

By Alfisha Sabri

Upon listening to *Uth Shah Hussain* by the musical group SomeWhatSuper (somewhat continuously, I concede) after receiving it from a dear acquaintance, I decided to demystify for myself its Punjabi lyrics. Two hours, and several perusings of Google, the YouTube comment section, and SomeWhatSuper's social media pages yielded this- the lyrics were the poetry of sixteenth century Punjabi Sufi poet Shah Hussain, a pioneer of the *Kafi* form of poetry. Now, this wasn't the first time I was being introduced to classical poetry from the subcontinent through music. *Ghazals* and couplets from the likes of Khusrau and Mir, sung in the dulcet tones of many singers had already taken care of that. However, it was definitely a strange acquaintance to an otherwise familiar form. I find myself reassured in the certainty that I am not alone.

Just like Shah Hussain's *Kafi* poetry, many forms of classical poetry (in different Indian languages) were written to be sung, as they are till date, even some four centuries later. Only the context, the setting has changed, perhaps as a consequence of and response to modern times. Instead of a *mehfil*, we get to hear them through Spotify, YouTube, et al. *Ghazals*, a fitting example of the intersection between music and poetry, find their place in popular Bollywood movies, Pakistani dramas, and ventures like the Coke Studio. Singers from across the subcontinent are seen covering these and sharing with the masses through social media. For example, many of early nineteenth-century Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib's *ghazals* were recorded for the 1988 drama series on the poet's life. Similarly, Ghalib's, Dehlavi's, and such others' *ghazals* were sung by Kavita Seth for the 2020 drama series *A Suitable Boy*. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's *ghazals* and *nazms* have been sung by distinctive singers on both sides of the border. Besides these, there are ghazal renditions by Ali Sethi that are believed to have rekindled the love for nineteenth and twentieth-century Urdu poetry among the youth today. Sufi poetry of the past and the present can be heard in the voice of Abida Parveen, Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ustad Fareed Ayaz, and Ustad Abu Mohammad, among others. They reach a much wider audience than they were written for, in today's times. Hence, such practices can be looked at as a means of introducing classic literary traditions to the masses. Interestingly, however, we hardly come across English poetry from India being adapted as songs although Agha Shahid Ali has already given us ghazals in English as well.

It might seem like the difference between poetry and songs lies in the additional rhythm and beat added to the words but the genre of rap and hip-hop music defies those distinctions. Rap is the performance of verse, not its singing, and yet it is classified as music, not poetry. On the other hand, nowadays, we see spoken word poetry being recited with a guitar playing in the background. The intersections are many with new kinds of additions every day.

The intersection between literature and music, however, is not limited to just poetry. With music becoming not just an auditory but also a visual experience, different forms of literature are enmesh with different kinds of music at so many places. For example, drama merges with music in songs like *Bismil* from Vishal Bhardwaj's movie *Haider*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where Bhardwaj has adopted a scene of Hamlet performing an act displaying his father's murder, to a song doing the same. An avid reader of literature, Bhardwaj is both a director and musician, so we see adaptations of literary classics not just in his movies, but in his music as well. Even where there isn't a direct attempt to adapt something from an existent drama into a play, performance songs like *Dastaan-E-Om Shanti Om*, from *Om Shanti Om*, the famous *Ek Haseena Thi Ek Deewana Tha* from *Karz* employ music for storytelling. Folk songs like *Paar Chana De* are narrations of the tragic tale of *Soni and Mahiwal*, and even without employing the performative aspect, engage with literature through music. In the literary traditions of India, the Indian subcontinent, and most non-European literary traditions, this is also reflective of the age-old oral storytelling practices that form an important part of our literature and history. Unlike European practices, text didn't have to be written or printed for it to be considered literature; narration and performance were important aspects too.

When Spotify can introduce us to Shah Hussain, *Bismil* to *Hamlet*, Coke Studio to *Soni and Mahiwal*, and literary theories are used for reading, understanding, and even analysing lyrics, distinctions between oral and written, performed and read, rhyme and music, seem to exist as a matter of words only. Today, as real and virtual spaces transcend each other, categories of art and expression do too, and in the context of the subcontinent, we witness an interesting continuation of the relationship that music and literature have always had.



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# The Glamorous Crossroads of Cinematic Literary Adaptations

By Ashima Grover

Isn't it every movie buff's ultimate dream to rewatch the entire *Harry Potter* series some years down the lane? "But where are Peeves and Charlie Weasley? (Ron's other older brother, the third Weasley son)", calls out a bewildered *Harry Potter* fanatic. Well, of course, they're missing in the movies. That's the tragedy one has to come to terms with when highly acclaimed books receive their movie adaptations. A two and a half-hour long movie cannot possibly assimilate the entirety of a 317-page long novel.

Literary pieces, be it Children's literature, the classic epics, dystopian fiction, or coming-of-age sagas, narrativize characters on pages while it is the readers' imagination that runs amok to breathe life into them. Their cinematic translation on the other hand makes these larger-than-life individuals come alive on the screen, initiating an identity crisis, with the whole world replacing the actor with the character. This translation from a one-dimensional existence to a more vivid and natural picturization of characters and their story leads to the elimination of certain factors and elements. All of it is done at the discretion of the director's vision, following the filmmaking diplomacy.

"Cinema's" etymology marks its derivation from the Greek word "kinematographos", where 'kinema' means movement. Therefore, cinema is a record of movement rather than thoughts. This sheds light on why internal monologues aren't explored in-depth in movies. Even animated films end up receiving live- "action" adaptations, thereby always focusing on the visual aspect of Action. A movie as highly grossing as *The Hunger Games* is able to put out a pompous blast of action sequences but not dive into its protagonist, Katniss Everdeen's subconscious struggle and conflict. This is further proved by how the sequel to this trilogy - *Catching Fire* - was credited with the highest IMDb rating out of all the other installments of the franchise. It fared well with the critics just as much as it did with the fans due to its compelling grip on the visual imagery of violence i.e., the action being situated outside and not within the character's mind.

Moving on, a repetitive trope that has been employed throughout the course of bringing these movies, especially ones targeting the young adult demographic, is the act of joining forces with an appealing cast ensemble. Bringing in a talented panel of actors to push the success of an adaptation seems to be a logical stunt falling in line with capitalist standards of society where "art has seldom or never flourished in absolute independence of commodity" (Eric Bentley). Nevertheless, this calculated move on the part of casting directors isn't enough to save the ship from sinking.

Another Young-adult fantasy adventure that went down this road was the *Percy Jackson* series, and yet it failed miserably to revive those complex characters in flesh. Let alone the audience, the author of the series himself — Rick Riordan — denounced the adaptation as his "life's work going through a meat grinder" and so, he's preparing for its upcoming TV adaptation to justify his vision and give these characters their due.

The "*deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts*" would be for film adaptations to bring about the exact representation of the words on the pages of our beloved works, as would also be reflected in the *Mirror of Erised* if book readers stood in front of it with their copies in hand. However, the sad crushing reality of the film business is that it is not merely an imaginative expression of the creator's thoughts, but a machine churning out profitable investments. To promote this purpose, filmmakers envisage lofty A-list actors to make the cut and don the costumes of characters that may have been left behind in time.

The storytelling of Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* hinged on the backdrop of a society existing prior to the Great Depression which speaks just as much of class differences as does its 2013 movie spectacle. However, the latter is supported by grand experimentations and fireworks to showcase the hollowed-out and frivolous lives of the wealthy. The plot so chosen for the screen adaptation definitely resonated with the audience but it was also overshadowed by the moguls starring therein. At the end of the day, the 'Great' Gatsby isn't as 'great' as Leonardo Di Caprio's race to the Oscars, which ends up becoming the prime matter of discussion.

More often than not, the general public tends to discover a new literary work of art through movies. Let's be real and accept this because almost every other movie is nothing but a derivation of its literary analogue. Even all "supermen" fall into this construct as graphic novels find their representative platforms in the Marvel Cinematic Universe or DC Extended Universe generally. This dynamic has been reduced to a cat-and-mouse game where readers compete against movie makers to catch a new book title before they do, so as to prevent any chances of them ruining the mentally fabricated versions of their cherished personas.

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# The Infused Melody in Literature

By Saniya Roomi

As someone who has at this point in her Literature degree read more books on Kim Namjoon's recommendation than ones prescribed in her syllabus, I live for the moments where my favorite songs meet literature. If gatekeeping did not exist, I believe musicians would rule the literary world. People who objected to Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 — I'm looking at you.

Writing is innate to songwriting. From being inspired by their favorite authors to directly quoting iconic literary lines — lyrics are a playground for literary references. Allusions to prominent literary texts are not just small easter eggs for keen listeners, but also add context and layered meanings to the song.

In her song *Happiness*, Taylor Swift uses phrases like “*green light*” and “*beautiful fool*”. Rings a bell? This is a direct reference to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* of whom Swift is a huge fan. Referencing *Gatsby* in a song about an unfulfilled love story — talk about genius songwriting! Similarly, Hozier quotes lines from W. B. Yeats's *Second Coming* in his song *NFWMB*, equating the end-of-the-world quality of Yeats's poem with his love song.

Greek mythology and Biblical references are found profusely reworked in literature. Once, mid-way through a lecture, my then poetry professor said “Do not remain ignorant of Greek mythology as a literature student”. Then I came across Gang of Youths' *Achilles Come Down*. Invoking the struggles of a great literary protagonist who is suicidal, this song acknowledges the universal burden of existence. Biblical references in songs are not only limited to hymns. In *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a song about sin, the eternal damnation of soul, and punishment, Queen refers to Beelzebub. Similarly, Hozier's song *From Eden* is written from the point of the serpent (devil) who tempted Eve to sin according to the Bible.

Love, mythology, and religion are not the sole universal literary themes explored by music. Remember the book recommendations by Nam Joon I mentioned earlier? I will credit most of my exposure to philosophical discourses as referenced in different songs. BTS' album *WINGS* directly references Herman Hesse's novel *Demian* and by extension explores Nietzsche's dissolution of traditional religion and metaphysics. Their album *Map of the Soul* with songs named *Ego*, *Shadow*, *Persona* further dives into Jung's *Map of Soul* by author Murray Stein.

Sometimes, the literary references are not as direct in lyrics, rather they pick up literary tropes. Messages from some works of literature have transcended through centuries. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* found new voices in Emilie Autumn's *Gothic Lolita* and Lana del Rey's *Off to the Races*, both calling out the loss of innocence at the perverseness of individuals. *The Madwoman in Attic* trope led by Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* remains a champion of feminist discourse. It was recently revisited by Taylor Swift in her song *Madwoman*.

Literature is heavy on motifs and symbols. Music videos with restrictive time frames borrow visual imagery from literature for effective story-telling.

Who left a shoe at the palace ball signifying an end to a wonderful dream? Ali Sethi in his music video for *Chan Kithan*. In the music video, the protagonist engages in wistful dreaming about attending a high society soiree with her beloved. She breaks from her trance by leaving behind her slipper at the stairs. Using the slipper as a prop, Ali Sethi conjectures this famous scene from Grimm Brothers' *Cinderella*, to depict the protagonist's transition from a dream to reality.

Speaking of props, it would be an injustice to not speak about one band that has brought forth the most visually descriptive storyboard — BTS. Their *Blood, Sweat and Tears* music video explores the moral dilemma and eternal conflict between good vs. evil. Throughout the music video, there is a strategic placement of paintings and sculptures ranging from the painting *Fall of Rebel Angels* and *Lament for Icarus* to the sculpture of *Fallen Angel* to aid their story-telling. All these props allude to various mythological and fictional characters giving additional insight into the conflict of characters.

From reference to literary works in lyrics to weaving strong visual storytelling by use of literary devices, *I Can't Get No Satisfaction* without multiple listens and extensive analysis.

For a few short minutes, you are transported by the music industry to a world where music meets literature. With such superior qualities of representing life in a few short snippets, you must be wondering too — shouldn't songs be considered a part of literature already?

*The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind.*

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# Pyasa and the Poetics of Sahir Ludhianvi

By Vinay Rajoria

*"Khushiyou ki manzil dhundi to gham ki gard mili  
Chahat ke naghme chahen to aahen sard mili"*

I have encountered Sahir, the poet, innumerable times in my life. Sometimes advertently and often inadvertently, but fortunately from a very young age. He is indeed a person whose work precedes his reputation. With me, the attachment with his poetry began as a child when I memorised numerous songs of his, as they were often played over a cassette in my house, to be able to win the *antakshri* competition my family played every other night. Of course, at that time, I was oblivious to the fact — what a great poet Sahir was, or that his popular lyrics that I used to hum over and over, were, in truth, heart-rendering literary verses, imbued with meaning and written in perfect rhyme and metre.

Coincidentally, years later, my mother, who was pursuing her Post-Graduation in Animation and Film Design, made me watch the cult classic of Guru Dutt — *Pyasa*, along with her. Evidently, the movie reinvigorated those enchanting lyrics which faded from my mind over the years, and I found myself fascinated with Sahir once again and with the movie as well. This time, however, the allure was different. Rather than being oblivious to his genius again, I observed with intrigue, an exceptional characteristic in his poetry — the innate quality to speak the political and the personal in the same verse. The ability to move from one's own afflictions to the sorrows of the lowly and the downtrodden within a single poem. He best catalysed this trait of his in the lyrics of *Pyasa*, where we listen to the dilemma cry of an artist, represented by the character of an unsuccessful but perceptive poet Vijay (played by Guru Dutt), who is experiencing life in a labyrinth of socio-political disillusionment and deep personal tragedy. He is a poet searching for meaning amid the tribulations of the world and the trials of the heart. His search, as we realise over the course of the film is a lost cause which he admits in the end, and says:

*"Ye mehlon, ye takh ton, ye tajon ki duniya  
Ye duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya hat..."*

This quest of Vijay, which is one of political and personal freedom, is reflected in the poetry of Sahir time and again in his literary oeuvre.

Moreover, Vijay, much like Sahir in his poems, is not just a heart-broken poet who sees nothing but love in every facet of life. He was neither a revolutionary whose sense of transformation makes him consider the upturning of the status quo as the only thing that makes life worthwhile. On the other hand, he is a person who sees both the personal and the political in one aspect of life, i.e., bitterness, since he has been betrayed by both. As he finds no security in the outer world and discovers the same desolation in his heart, Vijay resentfully decides to forsake them both in pain. He writes,

*'Gram is qadar badhe ki mai ghabra ke pee gaya, Is dil ki bebasi pe taras kha ke pee gaya.  
Thukra raha tha mujh ko badri der se jahan, Mai aaj sab jahan ko thukra ke pee gaya.'*

This struggle between reacting to the materialistic exterior and the emotional inner world is introduced in the second scene itself, where we see a publisher mocking Vijay for not being much of a poet. The reason is his rejection of intimate themes like love, beauty, and tavern for writing about poverty and unemployment. The publisher humiliates Vijay by questioning his awareness of the classics of Meer and Momim. He wittily replies that he has not only read Meer and Momin, but also Josh and Faiz. Thus, intending to highlight the former poets as the champions of love, and the latter as representatives of progressive poetry. Vijay abandons exclusivity, reacting to both and assimilating them in his work. Sahir comprehends this quality of assimilation in his poetry, most beautifully in the haunting lyrics of the song — *'ye duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya hai'* from *Pyasa*. Here, we notice that in the same song he expresses the pain of the individual upon realising the hollowness of human relations as,

*'Ye duniya jahan aadmi kuch nhi hat Wafa kuch nhi, dosti kuch nhi hat,  
Yahan pyaar ki qadr hi kuch nhi hat, Ye duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya hat.'*

In the second last stanza of the song, he sums up the disenchantment with the moral and political order of the world in the cathartic exclamation,

*Jala do ise phoonk dalo ye duniya, Tumhari hat turn hi sambhalo ye duniya  
Mere saamne se hata lo ye duniya, Ye duniya agar mil bhi jae to kya hat.'*

Thus, Vijay in the story and Sahir in his poetry made a truce of detached involvement with the world and the heart; with the political and the personal.

# DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA

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