

SYED AKBAR HYDER

Urdu's Progressive Wit: Sulaiman Khatib, Sarvar "Danda" and The Subaltern Satirists Who Spoke Up*

*navī ik ṣubōn sbām sē
navē Raḥīm-o-Rām sē
ittihād kē gabvāre mēn
qaum jab apnī palēgī
ukhuvvat kē payām sē
insāniyyat jab dhalēgī
badlēgī ye duniyā badlēgī
ik khush-rañg savērā ā'ēgā
bē-rañg andhērā jā'ēgā
har dēs kā rahnevālā ab
āsōn kā jivan pā'ēgā
jab parčam-e 'adl labrā'ēgā
phir āp hī duniyā sañbhlēgī
badlēgī ye duniyā badlēgī*

With a new morning, with a new evening
with a new Raḥīm, with a new Rām
in the cradle of unity,
when our people will be nurtured,
through the message of brotherhood,

* In Hyderabad, I incurred a special debt to Mr. Ḥimāyatu'l-Lāh and Dr. Muṣṭafā Kamāl, two brilliantly witty individuals who shared with me the historical and cultural worlds of Hyderabad humor. I am deeply grateful to Manu Bhagavan and Valerie Turner for their critiques and suggestions regarding many aspects of this paper.

when humanity will be molded,
this world will change—it will surely change
A colorful morning will dawn
a colorless night will be gone
the inhabitant of every country,
will inherit the life of hope
when the flag of justice will fly,
then the world will settle
this world will change—it will surely change
Sarvar “ḌanḌā” (1990, 100)

zindagānī kō apnī kyā bōlūn
jaisē jōrū ḡarīb kī yārō
gāb hañstī hai gāb rōtī hai
naḡ jaisē Khaḡīb kī yārō

What shall I call my life?
like a poor fellow’s wife, my friend
at times she laughs, at times she cries
like Khaḡīb’s poem, my friends!

Sulaimān “Khaḡīb” (2002, 29)

IN THIS PAPER, I explore the manner in which satire, wit, and humor served resistive and reformist discourses springing from Hyderabad, Deccan. I focus on the poetry of Sarvar ḌanḌā (1925–64) and Sulaimān Khaḡīb (1922–78); how their poetry not only engaged issues of class, caste, gender, and religion, but also how these poets coped with the challenges posed by their North Indian counterparts. In order to fully appreciate the poetry of ḌanḌā and Khaḡīb, and their distinguished contributions as poets and satirists, I will first locate their works within the historical context of the Progressive Writers’ Movement, the ideologies of which were intimately bound up with the sentiments that resonated in the poetry of the Deccani poets.

Historical Context of the Deccani Poets

The year was 1932, the place was Lucknow, the publisher was Sajjād Ḍahīr, and the book was *Añḡārē* (Embers). The five writers whose prose con-

stituted this book were all under thirty. The literary milieu of the Subcontinent was filled with words generated by the living pens of ‘Allāma Iqbāl, Munshi Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore, Nazru’l-Islām, and Sarojini Naidu. It had been eighteen years since Naidu had written to her friend Gopal Krishna Gokhale:

Oh, we want a new breed of men before India can be cleansed of her disease. We want deeper sincerity of motive, a greater courage in speech, and earnestness in action. We want men who love this country and are full of yearning to serve and succor their brothers and not to further aid in their degradation by insincerity and self-seeking. O how I hate shams and prejudices: how I hate all sectarian narrowness, all provincial limitations of vision and purpose, all the arrogant sophistries of man-made divisions and differences: how tired I am to death of the reiterated resolutions that have become almost meaningless by lip repetition: uncorroborated by the heart’s conviction and unsustained by practical action ...”

(1914)

The highly community-conscious, community-reflexive verses of Iqbāl were also meant to effect positive changes on the economic front:

u ḥō mirī dunyā ke ḡarībōñ kō jagā dō
kākh-e umarā kē dar-o-dīvār bilā dō
jis khēt se dahqāñ kō muyassar na hō rōzī
us khēt kē har khōsha’-e gandum kō jalā dō

(Iqbāl 1973, 401–2)

Rise! Wake the poor of my world
 shake the doors and walls of the palaces of the
 rich
 set ablaze every stack of grain
 in the field which gives the farmer no
 sustenance.

Such pain and sincerity, cast in simple yet majestic eloquence, brought about a reaction and illuminated the spirit of twenty-something-year-old idealists Sajjād Z̤ahir, Rashīd Jahāñ, Aḥmad ‘Alī, and Maḥmūdū’z̤-Z̤afar. The result was *Añḡārē*—ten short stories, deprived of critical acclaim on their aesthetic merits by the existing and future canon guardians, but haughty enough for an Urdu paper to declare: “To buy or quote from this book is a great sin” (Mahmud 1988, 82). The book was promptly banned

under section 295A of the Indian penal code. When Shabana Mahmud published the postcolonial hardback critical edition of the book, the first page was adorned with the calligraphy of *Bismillāh ar-Raḥmān ar-Raḥīm* (In the name of Allāh, Most Gracious and Most Merciful). Can great sins begin with the name of Allāh? Such are the aporias we still ponder and those that *Aṅgārē* exploited with disdain. How could anybody who has read these notorious stories not remember Maulānā Dāʿūd of the short story “Jannat kī Bashārat” (The Glad Tidings of Heaven) who endeavors to gratify the houri of Islamic paradise in a stream-of-consciousness mode while his wife, two decades younger, revolts as a co-wife to the sacred. It is relatively easy to fantasize about sexual intercourse on a prayer mat, even with the scriptures as welcomed voyeurs, but it is much more difficult to give women what they want. *Aṅgārē* boldly lit a fire under issues such as these that had been smoldering for many centuries.

Aṅgārē was not only an irreverent and provocative text, it was the first real manifesto of the Taraqqī-Pasand Taḥrīk (All India Progressive Writers’ Movement). Two years after inflaming the passions and prejudices of men and women of various stripes, Sajjād Zāhīr, with the help of Mulk Raj Anand of *Untouchable* fame, founded the Progressive Writers’ Association.¹ The history of Third World literature, especially its resistive manifestation, can simply not be written without a mention of the Progressive Writers’ Movement. The Progressive Movement, in spite of its many shortcomings that glare at us in retrospect, designated the under-represented, the marginalized, and the silenced as the dialogical equals of men, feudal lords, politicians, religious bigots, and élites in general. It was an affront to patriarchy, feudalism, and religion. Rashīd Jahān, through her short story “Dillī kī Sair,” rent asunder the curtains that veiled women’s alienation in society; Faiz bemoaned the Palestinians butchered by American money, Israeli soldiers, and Arab complacency; Sardār Jaʿfrī created bridges between his world and the worlds of Paul Robeson and Pablo Neruda; Sāhīr made a clarion call for disarmament; Kaifi Aʿzamī versified an explosive elegy in admiration of Charu Majumdar, the architect of Naxalism; and ʿIṣmat Čuġtāʿī, refusing to cast her eyes downward, isolated an inestimable amount of prudishness from the Subcontinental prose through such stories as “Liḥāf” (The Quilt).

In spite of its initial forays into the realm of economics, religion, sexuality, and beyond the boundaries of discretion, the Progressive

¹For a thorough and lucid study of this movement, see Coppola (1975).

Movement began to stumble over the very issues that had invigorated it. The reckless youth of the colonial 1930s and 1940s matured into unwitting citizens of India and Pakistan, nation-states scarred by the traumas of Partition, born out of idealism but still sweltering in inequality, poverty, and communal and sectarian tensions. A cadre within the Progressive Movement moved from bold literary experimentation to discrete, at times derivative and contrived modes of discourse. The Progressives pined for justice in the fashion of the ghazal poet-lovers' masochistic longing for the unattainable beloved, and began to fence their gardens of hope with censorship and expulsion, with idioms of ambiguity that seem so antithetical to the spirit of those who sang in the courts of Neruda, Robeson, and Majumdar. Man ō's olfactory sensibilities were no longer appreciated after he wrote "Bū" (Odor) and " ḥanḍā Gōsht" (Cold Meat); his friend 'Iṣmat Čuġtā'ī also wrote on the hair-thin bridge dividing the progressively permissible from the forbidden; Mirājī's sensitively original, at times profoundly opaque poetry was just not allowed to become a part of the canon. Nūn Mīm Rāshid and Qurratu'l-'Ain Ḥaidar also suffered insofar as they constantly bore the blame of spreading élitist values at the expense of progressive declaratives. Many of the literary works by these authors were singled out for criticism on the grounds that they did not sustain strong enough calls for the demise of capitalism.²

As though alienating Urdu writers coming from the upper echelons of the Urdu literary and aesthetic establishment was not enough, the Progressives heeded little the cries that came from the lower region of the Deccan. Ironically, it was in the 1945 meeting of the All India Urdu Conference held in Hyderabad that Dr. 'Abdu'l-'Alīm and Sajjād Ṣahīr, under pressure from the Communist Party of India, embarked on a censorship campaign (Coppola 1975, 256). After 1947, campaigns such as these only became more acute, and through them particular writers were labeled obscene and a curse to progress. It was during this process of interpellation that members of the Progressive Writers' Movement congealed into a group in which not only did particular themes become unacceptable, but variations within the Urdu language (often tied to particular regions) were

²When speaking of Progressive censorship, we must remember that several writers who identified with the Progressive Movement, like Qazī 'Abdu'l-Ġaffār and Ḥasrat Mōhānī, were opposed to the censorship campaigns that were led by people like 'Abdu'l-'Alīm. See A'ẓmī (2002, 84–5).

papered over to make Urdu appear standard and univocal. The effort of North Indians to suppress Deccani Urdu was consequently also an effort to silence a region, a region that claimed it had a legitimate right over Urdu.

This silencing of Deccani Urdu had begun even before the birth of the Progressive Movement. North Indian immigrants to the Deccan, many of whom worked for the Nizam of Hyderabad, coded the Urdu of this region as rustic and provincial. For writers like Jōsh Malīḥābādī and Hōsh Bilgrāmī, Hyderabad's Urdu served only as a gloss for humor. As Ḥimā-yatu'l-Lāh points out, even as they made fun of this language, many North Indian writers could not produce it as it was spoken by the people of the Deccan (2003). It was usually gibberish that they laid as paving stones for their Hyderabad memoirs, calling it Dakhni. Such approaches to the language and culture rankled with many Deccanis and raised questions about the image and standing of the region—it had become more than simply an issue of language. After all, Hyderabad had particular significance in the context of Urdu. It was a city founded by Urdu's first *ṣāḥib-e divān* poet, Muḥammad Qulī Quṭb Shāh (r. 1580–1611); it was the site of the first vernacular (Urdu-medium) university in South Asia, the Osmania; and it offered financial assistance to many North Indian Urdu writers and reformers.³

This paper seeks redress by reflecting upon Urdu's Deccani voices that used their wit to challenge the hegemonic Progressive Writers' Movement. I focus on the manner in which Sarvar Ḍanḍā and Sulaimān Khaṭīb, two Deccani poets, disrupted the Progressive canon by turning the exclusionary semantic etiquette of the literary elite on its head.

Ġulām Sarvar Khān adopted the pen name “Ḍanḍā” (bludgeon) very early on in his writing career. An employee of Hyderabad's Public Works Department (which, among other things, oversees the maintenance of public roads), Ḍanḍā saw firsthand how the oppressed workers willingly braved the elements of hardship and labored daily under the weight of the demands imposed by the nation-state, in addition to the demands of their immediate families. His poetry is heavily laden with the language of the masses, the uneducated, the poor, and the downtrodden. He called his poetry collection *Imliban* (Tamarind Forest), a title that captures at once the favorite flavoring of Deccani foods, the evergreen idioms of a rich region and the tartness of considerable diversity.

³For a catalog of Hyderabad's services to the cause of Urdu, see Ashraf (1990) and Kamāl (1990).

ḌanḌā's friend, Sulaimān Khaṭīb, was born in modern-day Karnataka and worked for the Water Works Division of that state. Hailing from a family of Muslim preachers, he was a devotee of the Sufi saint of Gulbarga, Hazrat Khvāja Bandē Navāz Gēsūdarāz; he tied himself not to any one religious community but to the public at large. He identified with the suffering peasant and the subjugated woman, with a language that forged trans-religious and trans-regional alliances: "Till now, the peasant's causes have been advocated in eloquent and polished language. I have written the peasant's song in the peasant's language. Through satire and wit, I have struck a blow at the shortcomings of society" (Khaṭīb 2002, 10). He was convinced that from the vantage point of the Deccan, those verses that did not capture the language of its masses had limited potential for promoting reform. He saw his world as *Kevrē kā Ban*, (The *Kevrā* Forest), the title of his poetic corpus. The extracts from the scented *kēvrā* (a species of *pandanus odoratissimus*) flower are used in food flavorings and perfumes. But to Khaṭīb, the world was much more than fragrance and flavor; like the *pandanus* forest, it was also characterized by pointed thorns and poisonous snakes.

ḌanḌā and Khaṭīb brought together in their verses the insights they derived from their respective social contexts, including the ill-fated peasant-led Telangana struggle (see Roosa 2001, 57–94), and the Indian nationalist movement. Their presence at the mushairas (poetry gatherings) in and around Hyderabad elicited an incredible popular response, rendering these gatherings circuits of entertainment for the rich and sites of catharsis for the poor. Mushairas in the Urdu public spheres have served powerful cultural functions, thus ḌanḌā and Khaṭīb were pivotal in promoting Dakhni Urdu as a reservoir of inclusionary progress. What tied ḌanḌā and Khaṭīb together was their faith in the power of wit and satire.

Both of them realized that satire can have a reformatory function and has been historically constituted by "voices of protest." The imperatives under which satire and wit operate as political acts can muster a strong rebuttal to conventionality and the status quo. Satire can appeal to reason by splicing the absurd and the tragic to produce an irreverent yet wise potentiality. Through ambiguity, it can constitute a locus of disclosure for the impermissible. From the times of Mīr Ja'far Za allī (d. 1712) and Muḥammad Rafī' Saudā (1713–80) to the present, Urdu satirists have demonstrated their sharp acumen when deploying wit in politically strategic ways.

Yet having said this, we cannot forget that Victorian literary aesthetics, and those South Asians drawn to it, viewed wit-employing genres like

satire as something antagonistic to more pure poetry (see Pritchett 1994, 170–2). Satire was perhaps as threatening as it was tasteless. But in spite of such aversions, the likes of Akbar Allahābādī (1846–1921) challenged and disturbed colonial constructions ranging from Indian sexuality to the religion of Islam. And after Akbar, the literary initiatives of Dilāvar Figār (b. 1929), Muġtabā Ĥusain (b. 1936), Paṭras Bukhārī (1889–1958), Sarvar ḌanḌā, and Sulaimān Khaṭīb, among others, radically politicized the issues of class, gender, nation, and religion, chafing against the large-scale practices of the social order of their time.

Danda and Khatib: Distinct from the Progressive Hegemony

In this paper I argue that the writings of ḌanḌā and Khaṭīb have five main features that distinguish their voices from the hegemonic Progressive establishment: (1) they constitute a dialectic between the so-called standard North Indian Urdu and Hyderabadī (Dakhnī) Urdu; (2) they approach issues of femininity with an aesthetic that absorbs into itself a more liberated, folklike, and resistive female voice; (3) they posit a diglossic discourse between Urdu and Telugu, the way in which North Indians had sprinkled their Urdu with Persian; (4) they begin the task of resistance and reform by emphasizing the transformative power of humor; and (5) they reconstitute the domain of progress either by avoiding the Progressive label, or by playfully jibing at it.

Deccani Manifestations: ḌanḌā and Khaṭīb accorded importance to the polyvocal, multi-dialectical idiom of progress: they penned poetry not only in “standard” North Indian Urdu but also in its Deccani manifestations. Urdu to these people did not necessarily speak in a North Indian accent.

*sōnā nakkō čāndī nakkō
nakkō muṅgā mōtī
jō hōnā sō hōnēdyō
ab jō hotī sō hotī
bhūk lagī jab bhātī na’īn rē kōyal kī bhī kūk
bhūk lagī hai bhūk rē dādā bhūk lagī hai bhūk
sāl navā hai navē bātān
navē jhēl jhamēlē
insānōn kī bastī meñ ab rāj karēngē kavvē*

bhūk lagī jab bhātī na'īn rē kōyal kī bhī kūk
bhūk lagī hai bhūk rē dādā bhūk lagī hai bhūk
mō ē mō ē pē ānvālē
nām hai jin kē sē h
upar upar čāndī kē nād
andar andar sē haiṅ kē h
bhūk lagī jab bhātī na'īn rē kōyal kī bhī kūk
bhūk lagī hai bhūk rē dādā bhūk lagī hai bhūk
 (Dandā 1990, 78)

No to gold, no to silver
 no to jewels and pearls
 whatever happens, let it happen
 be what it may be
 hunger strikes, so *kōyal*'s songs
 lose their sweetening charm
 hunger strikes bro, hunger strikes, hunger,
 hunger hunger
 it's New Year, it's New Talk
 it's a whole new show,
 in the world of humans,
 now crows will rule
 hunger strikes, so *kōyal*'s songs
 lose their sweetening charm
 hunger strikes bro, hunger strikes, hunger,
 hunger hunger
 fat, very fat, the pot-bellied ones
 called the seths
 silver seals their outward forms,
 inner states, wrecks,
 hunger strikes, so *kōyal*'s songs
 lose their sweetening charm
 hunger strikes bro, hunger strikes, hunger,
 hunger hunger

Sulaimān Khaṭīb expresses the sentiments of a clerk's widow who is forced to forgo the few rupees of her husband's earnings because he inconveniently dies on the 28th of the month:

*rōz lay lay kō jān khā khā kō
 aččhā jaṅgal mēñ sō ga'ē ā kō
 munḍī kā ī kō pahlē marnā thā
 lē kō mu hī meñ jān bai hī hūñ
 aisā marnā bhī ka'ikā marnā jī
 ghar mēñ be ī javān bai hī hai
 kittē lōgāñ kē pāvāñ paṛ paṛ kō
 ghar sē maiyat kō maiñ u hā'ī hūñ
 jīmā marnā tumbārā qarṛē kā
 āj phūlāñ udhār lā'ī hūñ
 ittā ehsān ham pō karnā thā
 tankhā lēñē kē ba'd marnā thā*

(Khaṭīb 2002, 79)

After fighting with me day in and day out
 consuming my soul day and night,
 Lovely! You fell asleep in a barren land
 I, the wretched one,
 live like a head cut off from the torso,
 Why didn't I go first?
 clutching onto life, in a fist
 I sit,
 This death, what a death!
 A young daughter in the house,
 awaits her nuptial day
 begging from so many souls
 I sent off your corpse
 your life in debt, death in debt,
 a few flowers I brought for you,
 put me more in debt
 why couldn't you do a favor for us,
 and be paid before you died

In the poetry of Ḍanḍā and Khaṭīb dates matter in this world, as do the relationship between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife, the lover and the beloved, all prefigured by economics. It is axiomatic for these writers that economics differentiate the sorrowful sentiments of the rich and the poor. The poor cannot mourn in as extreme a deceased-centered manner as their rich counterparts. The ideals of mourning favoring the human loss over the economic one cannot persist in a situation

wherein the last rites for the dead mean an increase in the ceaseless toil for the living.

Feminist Manifestations: Unlike mainstream North Indian reformist discourse, wherein men tried to reform their women's worlds, in *ḌanḌā* and *Khaḏīb* we see women parlaying with men on different terms. In a song meant to be sung by women accompanied by a *ḏḏōlkī*-drum, *ḌanḌā* explicitly bares the masculine body that can pose sexually but is impotent in the face of persistently invariable poverty. This is the song of a woman who has to run her house (a synecdoche for the world) while her husband (a synecdoche for mankind) is fast asleep. Her contempt for the sleeping man is typified by this song:

u ḥō u ḥō jī saiyyān ṣubōn ḥōnē kō hai
bāsnān aur bhāṇḏōliyān khālī paṛa'in
unḡo čuvvē azān dēnē ākō khara'in
baččē rōra'in tumēn kyā jī sōnē kō hai
u ḥō u ḥō jī saiyyān ṣubōn ḥōnē kō hai
ujli ḡpī kē is rāj kū aṅgār lagō
unkē kamōn kū har kāj kū aṅgār lagō
rāt kā mūn bhī ab kālā ḥōnē kū hai
u ḥō u ḥō jī saiyyān ṣubōn ḥōnē kō hai

(*ḌanḌā* 1990, 107)

Awake, awake my darling,
the morning is on its way
Pots and pans lie barren
save for the mice
solemnly posturing upon them
as if ready for the call to prayer
Children cry,
what's wrong with you,
why sleep this time away
Awake, awake my darling
the morning is on its way
May this topsy-turvy rule of law catch fire
may all his deeds and all his doings catch fire
even the night departs in disgrace
Awake, awake my darling
the morning is on its way

Instead of rising from the bed, the husband is sexually aroused by his wife's agitated plea. Her response represents women's engagement with men when the illusory male superiority and a masculine sense of control thrusts women headlong into a position of being sexual objects:

*un kũ qa'ē das lagō un kũ gōlī lagō
un kũ pīlēg lagō, un kũ jhōlī lagō
unōñ p̄h̄uslā kō minjē masalnē kō hai
u h̄ō u h̄ō jī saiyāñ ṣubōñ hōnē kō hai
ham bhī inkī samajhnē lagē shaikhiyāñ
patt̄harōñ sē ničōṛēñgē ham sakhtiyāñ
sārī bastī kī bastī mačalnē kō hai
u h̄ō u h̄ō jī saiyāñ ṣubōñ hōnē kō hai*

(*ibid.*)

May he vomit and shit and catch the plague
all that sweet talk
then he rubs me the wrong way
Awake, awake my darling
the morning is on its way.
I too have come to terms with all his boastings
I'll squeeze hardships from stones
the community verges on agitation
Awake, awake my darling
the morning is on its way

Daṇḍā and Khaṭīb belie the image of women as passive recipients of a male agenda; they do not perpetuate a patriarchy in which the ideal woman listens to her reformer-poet instead of actively engaging him. The gender struggle is very much inscribed within a gendered language, a gendered narrational point of view, and a (feminine) personal and local history. Such an approach is a far cry from Kaifī A'zamī's "Aurat," a poem that was brandished as the exemplary blueprint for reforming women's worlds. Of crucial importance to Kaifī A'zamī's discussion of gender is the ill-founded idea that men must take the lead in developing the lives and worlds of women.

*tū ke bē-jān khilōnōñ sē bahal jāti hai
taptī sāñsōñ kī ḥarārat sē piḡhal jāti hai*

pā'ōñ jis rāb par rakhtī hai p̄hisal jāti hai
bankē simāb har ik zarf mēñ d̄hal jāti hai
zīst kē ābanī sāñcē mēñ bhī d̄halnā hai tujhē
u h mēri jān merē sāth hī čalnā hai tujhē

(A'zmi 2003, 85)

You who are amused by lifeless toys
 and melt in the heat of burning breath
 You who slip at every step
 and turn into mercury, you fit into every goblet
 and you'll have to fit in life's iron mold
 Rise my darling, you'll have to walk with me.

ḌanḌā and Khaḏīb neither surrender women's causes to man's goodwill nor do they submit to a manly language—rather they proudly make full use of women's folk traditions of the Deccan. Moreover, they playfully draw from the styles and idioms of the saint of Gulbarga, Khvāja Bandē Navāz Gēsūdarāz, and Golconda's ruler, Muḏammad Qulī Quḏb Shāh. The female voice, usually mediated by the man's pen, permeates much of premodern Deccani poetry, just as it does *rēkbtī* and bhakti poetry (see Ja'far 1985, 542; Petievich 2001). Although tonal proximity exists between ḌanḌā, Khaḏīb, and the Deccani poets who came before them, according to one of the foremost Progressive Urdu critics from Hyderabad, Rāj Bahādur Gaur, the aforementioned poem of ḌanḌā is much more than an example of intertextuality between ḌanḌā and his Deccani forerunners. It is a poem that echoes the memorable sermon of the Prophet Muḏammad's granddaughter Zainab in the court of the Umayyad ruler Yazīd. This is not just the song of a disgruntled wife; it is the rallying hymn of “Zainab's daughter,” inciting Yazīd's subjects to rebel against injustices (ḌanḌā 1990, 12). ḌanḌā's woman has dovetailed her concerns not with those that became female subjects of other Progressive writers but with those of Fāḏīma's daughter. Zainab is remembered every year as fighting the battle of Karbala in the Umayyad courts and palaces of Kufah and Damascus. Her sermons, for many devotees, are wake-up calls not just for the men of Yazīd's time but for all the oppressors who would be born in subsequent centuries. Like many of their reformist and Progressive counterparts elsewhere, ḌanḌā and Khaḏīb are interested in producing an immanent critique of society by reading society's struggles on a religious scale.

In a touching *geet* meant to be sung with a *d̄hōlkī*, Khaḏīb exposes the

tension between Islamic ideals and the realities of Muslim lives. It is a *geet* that confronts the relationship of dowry to women's subjugation. Khaṭīb heightens his anti-dowry discourse by conceiving this issue through a complex dialectic of power in which women are not simply victimized by men but also suffer at the hands of their sisters, neighbors, and mothers-in-law. In this poem, within a week of her wedding, a newlywed bride hears her mother-in-law's friend express her views on the gender divide:

Girls are banana peels,
Guys are crazy, they slip on them.

(Khaṭīb 2002, 96)

The mother-in-law then produces a list of all the amenities that she had asked for but not received from her daughter-in-law:

gōrē pāshā kō kār pūchī thī
khālī paččīs hazār pūchī thī
dil kī mēri du'ā'ēn lēnā thā
ēk baṅgla zurūr dēnā thā
aisī 'chōri kō chōr dālēngē
aisē rishtē kō tōr dālēngē
shādī hōnē kō čār hōti hai
pauñ mēñ jūti hazār hōti hai

(*ibid.*, 100)

I asked Gōrē Pāshā [the bride's father] for a car
I asked for a mere twenty-five thousand rupees
If only he could receive the blessings of my heart
If only he could have given his girl a house
such a girl as this one—we'll let go of her
such a relationship—we'll end it
what's the big deal with marriage?
not just one, we can have four
like shoes for our feet, we can buy a thousand
more

An aged man who had been on a pilgrimage to Mecca provides the rejoinder to these women:

hīrā hōtā hai dhūl mēñ khāla
kēsē čhū ēgā dhūl sē rishta
kyā khabar thī ḥasīn phūlōñ kō
unkā hōgā babūl sē rishta
shākh-e gul mēñ hazār kāñ ē hōñ
phīr bhī hōtā hai phūl sē rishta
kyā diyā thā nabī nē bē ī kō
kučh tō hōgā Batūl sē rishta
ēk čakkī thī aur mishkīza
šīrf lafz-e “qubūl” sē rishta
ghar nabī kā, nabī kī bē ī hai
aur ‘Alī kē uṣūl sē rishta
ēk čādar hai bāp kā tuḥfa
jēsē hōtā hai phūl sē rishta
isī naqsh-e qadam pe čalnā hai
tā abad hai rasūl sē rishta

(*ibid.*, 101)

Dear aunt, diamonds are fated to be in dust,
 how could they get away from dust,
 little did the blooming flowers know,
 they'd be fated to live with thorns
 Even if a rose branch has a thousand thorns,
 it is still tied to the rose
 [In a heavy voice]
 What did the Prophet give his daughter?
 You must have some links with Batūl [Fāṭīma, the
 Prophet's daughter]
 a millstone and a water bag, she got
 her only tie was with the word *accept*
 she was in the Prophet's house
 she was the Prophet's daughter
 she was married to 'Alī's principles
 a mantle was the Father's gift
 Like a flower, she cherished it
 in these footsteps we must walk
 for eternity we are linked to the Messenger

Khaṭīb adapts the traditions of the Prophet to argue that the prevail-
 ing practices of dowry and daughter-in-law abuse underscore the dis-

crepancy between the ideologically-rich but poverty-stricken world of Fāṭima and the world of her unfaithful devotees. These poets imply confidence in religious ideals in spite of losing hope in those who claim to follow particular religions.

Urdu and Telugu: The language in which these poets launch into a tirade against the economic and social degeneracy of India also carries in it idioms of Telugu, a language spoken by the majority of the population that lives in and around Hyderabad. Perso-Arabic expressions or interpolations have limited utility in the poetic enterprise of these writers, who constantly traverse the aesthetic criteria that privilege Persian-sounding words over Hindi-sounding words or, for that matter, Telugu-sounding words. As the postcolonial state wound further into despair, ḌanḌā wondered in Telugu, “Is this our country, Is this our country?”

idēnāmādēsham
sadā mērē gāñvāñ pō gurbat kā mōsam
na fāqōñ sē furṣat na dam maič hai dam
yāñ dhōṭi bhī gat naiñ vāñ un kū hai rēsham
idēnāmādēsham idēnāmādēsham
barā pāp hai yāñ pō hañsnā hañsānā
sadā rīt hai yāñ kī rōnā rulānā
čupīč laṛ kō marra'iñ gharaṭ venka ēsham
idēnāmādēsham idēnāmādēsham
jāñ jīnē pō aiksāñ jāñ marnē pō aiksāñ
jāñ janvar sē badtar haiñ bēčārē insāñ
jāñ milnā bhī mushkil hai beṛi kē dō dām
idēnāmādēsham idēnāmādēsham
jabāñ dō dil āpas mēñ milnē tarasta'iñ
zarā gāñčūñ karta'ič ḌanḌē barasta'iñ
jāñ admīyāñ kē bhēsāñ mēñ rahtē haiñ dayyam
idēnāmādēsham idēnāmādēsham

(ḌanḌā 1990, 77)

Ever-hovering over my village,
 the cloud of poverty
 no respite from starving, no break from fear
 here not even a decent dhoti, there they have silk
 Is this our country? Is this our country?
 To laugh and make laugh is a grave sin here,

to cry and raise cries is the old tale here,
 Gharo Venkatesham fight and die without reason
 Is this our country? Is this our country?
 Where life is taxed, where death is taxed
 where human fare is worse than jungle lair
 where even shackles don't come cheap
 Is this our country? Is this our country?
 Where two hearts long to meet
 the slightest muttering from them and bludgeons
 rain
 where demons live in manly form
 Is this our country? Is this our country?

Through the voice-over Telugu refrain, a dialogic element is added to the poet's complaint: It is not just one linguistic entity that wonders about the postcolonial direction that the state has taken, but two languages speak in unison. Within this macaronic poem, two religious communities are also subsumed within the signifiers *Ghārō* (a common Muslim name in Deccani villages) and *Venkatēsham* (a Hindu name), and the plight of the communities these men represent is not much different.

Ḍanḍā and *Khaḍīb* also complicate their indictments against the post-colonial state by raising issues of religious and caste hierarchies. A visceral dimension to the politics of caste is given by *Ḍanḍā*'s "Blood Bank." In this poem, a farmer's wife receives a blood transfusion. The farmer grows concerned about the source of this new blood in his wife's body: whether it is noble or ignoble, male or female. When he finds out that it is from an untouchable man, he feels that his wife's body now houses this *other* man and that she will always be attached to this man. The doctor responsible for the transfusion responds:

mēñ nē sōñčā hai barsōñ sōñčā hai
ye jō bā al mēñ khūñ rakkbā hai
bōlō kis kā ye khūñ hai pyārē
kō'ī mazhab hai dharm hai khūñ kā
kō'ī uskī zabān hōtī hai
kō'ī uskā maqām hōtā hai
kabīñ khūñ kā bhī nām hōtā hai
khūñ-e Hindū ke khūñ-e Muslim hai
khūñ gōrā ke khūñ kālā hai
khūñ Brahman hai yā harijan hai

khūn adnā ke khūn a'īlā hai
ye jō bā al mēñ khūn rakḥā hai
bōlō kis kā ye khūn hai pyārē

(Khaṭīb 2002, 139–40)

I have thought about this—thought this for many
years
this blood which is stored in bottles
tell me dear, whose blood is it?
Is there a religion or faith of blood?
Does it have language?
Does it have status?
Is blood named anywhere?
Is it Hindu or Muslim
Is it white or black
Is it Brahman or Harijan
Is it lowborn or highborn
This blood stored in a bottle
Tell me dear, whose blood is it?

Through the discourse of the oneness of blood, Khaṭīb proceeds to connect categories as diffuse as gender, economics, religion, language and caste. All these other categories are subsidiary to blood, for it is blood that binds them all. It is blood through which appeals to reason must be made.

The Power of Humor: The fourth tendency in the writings of Ḍanḍā and Khaṭīb focuses on introducing lightheartedness and humor when speaking about the most serious topics. In spite of all the sufferings that afflict the dispossessed ones, they try to convey that the spirits of those less fortunate are buoyed by a sense of humor that gives them a broader perspective on life.

Pishkōlā
(*apnā pēshāb āp pinē vālōñ kē nām*)

bḥā'ī hōtā hai ēk mūñbōlā
kōkā kōlā kā bḥā'ī pishkōlā
is sē nāsūr kyūr hōtā hai
tāza ānik hai piyūr hōtā hai

vaisē ghā yā bhī lōg hōtē haiñ
 aur ga hyā bhī dūr hōtā hai
 jō bhī ḥākim ḥuzūr hōtā hai
 kučḥ na kučḥ tō fatūr hōtā hai
 jis kā bhēja kharāb hōtā hai
 vo bhī ačḥā zārūr hōtā hai
 tum bhī dēkhō na čīz ačḥī hai
 ye tō āb-e ḥayāt jaisī hai
 tan badan mēñ kashīd hotī hai
 pīnē vālē kī ‘īd hōtī hai
 vāñ pe urdū zabāñ bhī ā’ī thī
 aur shikāyat thī ibn-e ādam sē
 sar čarḥāyā hai mūt ko tum nē
 maiñ tō mar jā’ūñgī isī ḡam sē
 ye to pēshāb kī taraqqī hai
 ye na pūčḥā ke urdū kaisī hai
 ye na pūčḥā ke kyā girāñī hai
 ye na pūčḥā ke kyā masā’il haiñ
 ro ī ro ī kō lōg martē haiñ
 ye na pūčḥā ke kyā dalā’il haiñ
 yāñ tō bhāshan hai aur mēla hai
 šīrf pēshāb kā qašīda hai
 shīrī pēshāb čīkh kar bōlē
 hāth dhō kar paṛī hai kyūñ pīčḥē
 tū tō rēñgī na kāñ kē ūpar
 maiñ tō pabuñča ḥalaq sē bhī nīčē
 ye taraqqī kā daur hai urdū
 ye to qīssa hī aur hai urdū

(*ibid.*, 153–4)

PISSCOLA

(For those who drink their own urine)

There are bros
 and those as close as bros
 like coca cola’s bro piss cola
 it *cures* ulcers
 it’s fresh, so *pure*

some people happen to be worthless
 it even cures [their] arthritis.
 Now, whoever is leader
 has something or other up his sleeve
 his brain is rotten,
 even though he might certainly be good.
 Why don't you give it a try?
 it's a good thing
 it's like the water of life
 it comforts the soul
 it causes joy in its consumer.
 In a protest, Urdu language interjects:
 O Sons of Adam!
 You put piss on the pedestal of your head
 I shall die in this sorrow
 this is urine's progress
 who cares how Urdu fares
 who cares what wages are and
 who cares about issues
 for a morsel's sake, people die
 who cares what are the proofs
 we have sermons and fairs,
 and plenty of praise for piss!
 Sir Piss retorted:
 why the hell do you piss me off?
 You don't even fall upon people's ears
 And I? I go down their throat
 this is the age of Progress Urdu
 this is a tale of something else Urdu!

One of the most pressing issues of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in the Hyderabad region was the status accorded to Urdu. Urdu, which did not get its own state in post-independence linguistically subdivided India, was rapidly disappearing from schools and colleges. It had become tied to the Muslim community, and by extension to Pakistan, and groups like Jana Sangh were actively trying to root it out from various regions of India, including Hyderabad—a region that had housed the first Urdu-medium university on the Subcontinent. As though the struggle to delink Urdu from Muslims was not difficult enough, Ḍanḍā, Khaḍīb, and their comrades were offered the additional challenge of proving their credibil-

ity as voices of authentic Urdu. So Urdu, for these Deccani poets, becomes subjugated at two levels: one at the local level, where issues of community were tied to the legitimacy of a language; and the other at the national level, where Urdu was being defined narrowly and presented as a monolith of the North Indian variant. It was during this contest over Urdu that Indians were told that Prime Minister Morarji Desai imbibed his own urine and advocated urine therapy. In the poem above, Sulaimān Khaṭīb taunts both the political establishment signified by the urine-consuming prime minister and the much talked about notion of progress in Urdu circles.

A New Domain for Progress: The fifth feature of Ḍanḍā and Khaṭīb's writing is the way in which they implicitly offset the hegemonic notion of progress by invoking the terms *progressive* or *progress* in an irreverent manner. Since progress to these people came to mean exclusion and élitism, they were happier with the designation *‘avāmī*, or that which belongs to the people or the masses. They realize that the cause of Urdu as well as that of real progress was impeded by the very term progressive. Progressivism was trafficking in exclusion, censorship, and most of all rigid definitions:

*taraqqī pō taraqqī kar kē dunyā
sazā apnē ki'ē kī pā rabī hai*

(Ḍanḍā 1990, 35)

Achieving progress after progress, this world
Now reaps what it has sown

Although the denotation of progress had its redeeming value, what disturbed Ḍanḍā and Khaṭīb were the obfuscations marring the discourse of progress—obfuscations flowing from the pens of North Indian progressives, politicians, and scientists. For example, after the successful Apollo 12 landing on the moon, the astronauts went on a world show-and-tell tour that marketed itself as an exhibition of human progress. The United Nations had that very year reported that hunger was on a rise all over the world. Out of the juxtaposition of these two events, Khaṭīb gets a good deal of satirical mileage. Here is his tribute to the Apollo 12 astronauts:

*lō mubāarak hō čāñd kē rābī
apnī manzil kō čhū kē ā'ē haiñ*

bhūki duniyā kō ro ī lā dētē
ye tō mi ī u hā kē lā'ē baiñ
ibn-e ādam banā hai mi ī sē
is kī qismat meñ širf mi ī hai

(Khaṭīb 2002, 161)

Bravo, congrats, you who reached the moon
 you who returned triumphantly
 would that you had brought back bread
 for the starving people of the world, instead
 what did you bring back?
 Mud!
 [After all] The son of Adam is made of mud
 fated to earn only mud

Ḍanḍā and Khaṭīb also used parody to snap at their progressive brethren. They did not even spare Makhdūm Muḥīu'd-Dīn, the only canonical Progressive from Hyderabad, and a personal friend of both Ḍanḍā and Khaṭīb. Makhdūm is most known for his poem, “Ēk Čaṅbēli kē Mandvē Talē” (Under a Jasmine Arbor):

ik čaṅbēli kē mandvē talē
maikadē sē zārā dūr us mōṛ par
dō badan
pyār kī āg mēñ jal ga'ē
pyār ḥarf-e vafā
pyār unkā khudā
pyār unkī čitā
dō badan
ōs mēñ bhīgtē čāndnī mēñ nabātē huvē
jēsē dō tārza-rū tāza-dam pḥūl pičḥlē pahar
ḥanḍī ḥanḍī subuk-rau čaman kī havā
šarf-e mātām hū'ī
kālī kālī la oñ sē līpa garm rukhsār par
ēk pal ke liyē ruk ga'ī
ham nē dekhā unhēñ
din mēñ aur rāt mēñ
nūr-o-zulmāt mēñ
mašjidōñ kē minārōñ nē dekhā unhēñ
mandirōñ kē kivārōñ nē dekhā unhēñ

maikadōn kī darārōn nē dekhā unḥēn
az azal tā abad
ye batā čāragar
tērī zañbīl mēn
nuskbaʿ-e kīmyāʿ-e muḥabbat bhī hai
kučḥ ʿilāj-e madāvāʿ-ē ulfat bhī hai
ik čañbēlī kē mañḍvē talē
maikadē sē zarā dūr us mōr par
dō badan
čāragar!

(Muḥīuʿd-Dīn 1986, 121–2)

A bit away from the tavern, at that turn
two bodies
in the fire of love, burned up
Love, their word of fidelity
Love, their god
Love, their funeral pyre
two bodies
drenched in dew, bathed in moonlight
like two new-sprung, youthful flowers at noon
The cool, swift garden breeze
mourned forthwith
at once embracing her dark tresses
for a moment, halted on her warm cheeks
We saw them
in the day, at night
in light, in the dark
the mosque minarets saw them
the temple doors saw them
the tavern apertures saw them
from beginning to end, for all eternity
Tell me, O remedy-provider:
Is there a prescription for love's alchemy
Is there a cure, a remedy for love?
Under a jasmine arbor
a bit away from the tavern, at that turn
two bodies
O remedy provider!

This poem celebrates the audacity of two lovers, oblivious of the larger world around them, locked in an exhibitionist embrace in broad daylight and under cover of night, unconcerned with what the mosques and the temples think of them. It is a love that calls for witnesses not remedy providers or consolers (*čāragar*). But who can afford such love, asks Khaṭīb in a line-by-line parody titled “Bēčārgī” (Helplessness). Khaṭīb’s parody not only follows the structure of Makhdūm’s poem but is also indentured to Makhdūm’s language. The setting of Khaṭīb’s poem, however, is not under a jasmine arbor but rather in a queue of hungry people at the foot of a grain silo:

*maikadē se zarā dūr
us mōr par
ēk ḡallē kī ūnči dukān kē talē
čand bhūkē kharē thē
barī dēr sē
čilčilātī hu’ī čil sī dhūp mēn
bad naṣībī kē thūkē hū’ē rūp mēn
sab badan jal ga’ē
bhūk kī āg mēn
ḡalla un kā khudā
ḡalla un kī du’ā
ḡalla mushkil-kushā
ḡalla ḡarf-e čita
sab badan jal ga’ē
bhūk kī āg mēn
phīr sunō dōstō!
ik laṭīfa hūā
ik tamāshā hūā
ik shagūfa khulā
ēk mā’ī kō ki’yū meñ bačča hūā
ṣaf meñ bhūkōn kī phīr sē izāfa hūā
maṣjidōn kē minārōn nē dēkhā usē
mandirōn kē kivārōn nē dēkhā usē
maikadōn kī darārōn nē dēkhā usē
ham nē dēkhā usē
dīn meñ aur rāt meñ
nūr-o-zulmāt meñ
sab badan jal ga’ē
bhūk kī āg mēn*

ye fazā'ōñ mēñ ur̄tā hūā ādmī
jis kī mu hī mēñ shams-o-qamar band haiñ
ēk čāval kī mu hī kā muḥtāj hai
ye batā čāragar! tēri zañbīl mēñ
kučḥ 'ilāj-o-madāvā'ē fāqa bhī hai?
galla imsāl ṭhōṛā jō arzāñ hūā
ham bhī gātē phirēñgē merē dōstō
ik čañbēlī kē manḍvē talē
dō badan jal ga'ē pyār kī āg mēñ

(Khaṭīb 2002, 216–8)

A bit away from the tavern,
 at that turn,
 at the foot of a high silo, filled with grain
 a few starving ones stood for a long time
 in scorching sunlight, appearing like a devouring
 vulture
 they stood—as though spat out by misfortune
 all bodies burned up
 in the fire of hunger
 Grain, their god
 Grain, their prayer
 Grain, their helper
 Grain, the litany meant for their pyre
 all bodies burned up
 in the fire of hunger
 then, Listen friends!
 Something funny happened, a spectacle—
 one that opened a can of worms
 a mother delivered her child in the queue
 an addition to the hungry queue
 the mosque minarets saw this
 the temple doors saw this
 the tavern apertures saw this
 We saw this
 during days and during nights
 in light and in darkness
 all bodies burned up
 in the fire of hunger
 This man who can glide through space

in whose fist the sun and the moon are locked
 deprived of a fistful of rice
 O remedy-provider! In your medicine bag
 is there some remedy for starvation?
 if grain becomes a bit cheaper this year
 we too, my friends, will go about singing:
 under a jasmine arbor,
 two bodies consumed by the fire of love

Khaṭīb's poem is not only a rejoinder to Makhdūm's celebration but it labors under the weight of the insidious lure generated by the traditional ghazal universe. Khaṭīb morphs the two carefree bodies of Makhdūm's poem into several hungry people. The hungry must first fulfill their basic dietary needs before they have the strength to stand up to the world around them. Their god is not love; it is grain. The society and its institutions which bear witness to them in the form of mosques and temples, are not amused spectators; they are pathetic ineffectual voyeurs consumed in the poetry of love. Such love can be celebrated by those well-fed but these self-centered well-fed ones are the *raison d'être* of the hungry queue. Each moment that Makhdūm's lovers seize for themselves the exploitative gaze, another deprived soul comes into being. Khaṭīb assigns an out-of-balance economy of value to Makhdūm's carefree unions: the poor cannot afford to love like the rich and economics inhere in all relationships. For Makhdūm, love is a welcome restorative. But this is not how it works for Khaṭīb. The only way to appreciate the union of the two thirsty lovers is by averting one's eyes from the day-to-day toil of the poor. Khaṭīb's queue is economically very distant from Makhdūm's lovers and Khaṭīb's verses push the Progressive romanticism of the likes of Makhdūm and Faiz into the periphery of existence.

Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrate that the history of Urdu Progressivism, and by extension that of the Subcontinent's leftist writings, should not be read as homogenized in any way. The Progressive ideology, especially that which served the dictates of the Communist Party of India, in spite of constituting a resistive discourse to the colonial and postcolonial states, was inflected by the exclusionary considerations that it was resisting at one level. Sarvar Ḍandā and Sulaimān Khaṭīb, through witty rusticity, not only

reclaimed progressive space for those who had been excluded from it, but their words also fracture the orthodoxy that is more determined to create categories than it is to act out its own script. Through their poetry, they began to carve out a distinctively Dakhni sphere in the 1960s and the 1970s—a sphere that was much more inclusionary than the one created under the hegemony of the Progressive Writers' Movement. The verses of Sarvar ḌanḌā and Sulaimān Khaḏīb can be of fundamental importance in redirecting our attention to issues of representation and categories and to the region-based snobbery that still haunts Urdu, as well as in providing focus for issues of poverty, war, and injustice that resonate in our world more than ever. The stakes of their words were not only literary, but also political. □

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