

## JIHADI LITERATURE? SOME NOVELS OF NASIM HIJAZI

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تمہید مقالہ:

اس مقالے میں تاریخی ناول نگار نسیم حجازی کے سوانحی کوائف، ذہنی افتاد طبع کے ساتھ ساتھ اس کی مقبولیت کا جائزہ لیا گیا ہے اور بتایا گیا ہے کہ ان کے بیشتر ناول نیٹ پر دستیاب ہیں، ان کے تاریخی ناولوں پر بہاؤ پور یونیورسٹی، علامہ اقبال اوپن یونیورسٹی، اسلام آباد اور کراچی یونیورسٹی میں تحقیقی مقالات بھی لکھے جا چکے ہیں، اس کے باوجود کہ اُردو ناول کی سنجیدہ تنقید ان کو خاطر میں نہیں لاتی۔ جہاد اور اشاعتِ اسلام کے حوالے سے ابوالکلام آزاد کی بجائے، مولانا مودودی سے وہ متاثر ہیں اور وہ خود کو تحریکِ پاکستان کا بھی ایک پر جوش کارکن خیال کرتے ہیں۔ اس مقالے میں نسیم حجازی کے چار نمایندہ ناول اور ان کی تین تھیم (جہاد، اخلاق، ثقافت و روحانیت) بھی زیر بحث لائی گئی ہیں اور اس نکتے کو اجاگر کیا گیا ہے کہ ناول نگار کے مخاطب عام طور پر مرد قارئین ہیں کہ یہ ماضی کے حوالے سے ان کے رومان کو زرخیز بناتے ہیں اور انہیں اپنے عصری مسائل کے حل کے لئے عسکری قوت کے حصول پر آمادہ کرتے ہیں، اس طرح وہ ناول نگار ہونے سے زیادہ ایک نظریے کے پر جوش مبلغ بن جانے کو زیادہ اہمیت دیتے ہیں۔

In the wake of the Muslim political and social reform movements of the nineteenth century, evoking the Golden Age of Islam turned into one of the favourite topoi of Urdu writers who aspired to mobilize and consolidate the Muslim community. Starting with the novels of Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926) and the poetry of Altaf Husain Hali (1837-1914) and continued by Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the glorious past was used as counter-image to the desolate present. Images of vigour, bravery, self-sacrifice and the glorification of martyrdom are stock features of these literary works. Many of the texts deal with the conquest of Andalusia, the age of the Crusades or the early years of Islam. These settings were later adopted by several writers,

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This article is being published with the approval of CraCow Indological Studies where it appeared in 2009.

among them the novelist Nasim Hijazi who was to become one of the most popular authors of Urdu. His works are available with several online booksellers and in regular bookstores. The Jahangir Book Depot in Lahore alone carries 21 titles by the author, some of which have seen up to 40 print runs. In Pakistan several of his novels were turned into successful films and TV serials. A film based on the novel *Xak aur xun* (Dust and blood, 1974) dealing with a village in eastern Punjab during the partition period was produced in 1979. In this story Hijazi incorporated experiences of his own family which had migrated to Pakistan in 1947. The serial based on *Axri cat?an* which was produced by Pakistan TV in the mid-1980s became very popular and is among the most frequently visited sites on [video.google.com](http://video.google.com).

Several of Hijazi's most famous novels are available online free of charge. Thus, for instance, until June 2008 *Dastan-I mujahid* which was published digitally on 26 January 2006 had been viewed by 8.409 readers and downloaded by 5.505, and *Axri cat?an* which had been published on 12 September 2006 had been viewed by 5.377 readers.<sup>[1]</sup> An MA thesis was written on two of Hijazi's novels<sup>[2]</sup> and an MPhil thesis on Iqbal's influences on him<sup>[3]</sup> and a PhD thesis on his novels was submitted to the University of Karachi in November 2007.<sup>[4]</sup> Several audio books are based on his stories. One English translation is available online.<sup>[5]</sup>

Notwithstanding all this, he is not part of the literary canon of Urdu literature, a fact that can be attributed to his popular appeal as much as to the ideological underpinnings of his works. When he is mentioned at all in histories of the Urdu novel, he is often - and rightly so - ac-cused of catering to the popular taste with his mix of adventure and romance, of too much

1. *Figures as given by Irsad cAlam in "Urdu naval, int?arnait ? aur mutavvaqac qari", in Urdu dunya, Na'i Dihli, 10:6 (Jun 2008), p. 31. The digitalised novels can be read and downloaded at <http://www.kitaabghar.com> and others.*
2. *Busra Yusuf, "'Xak aur xun' aur ,Axri cat?an' ka tahqiqi ja'iza", University of Bahawalpur, 1983.*
3. *Tahira Naz, Allama Iqbal Open University, 2001.*
4. *Mumtaz cUmar, "Nasim Hijazi ki tarixi navalnigari ka tahqiqi aur tanqidi ja'iza".*
5. *Qafila-i Hijaz, transl. by Mohammad A. Qayyum, [www.qayyum.com/maq/kafla.doc](http://www.qayyum.com/maq/kafla.doc).*

proselytizing<sup>[6]</sup> and of idealizing his characters.<sup>[7]</sup> The most enthusiastic reviews of his works are to be found in popular Urdu digests, particularly in *Siyara Da'ijast*. Literary histories of Urdu in English usually do not mention authors of his kind, and if at all he is referred to, then as an example of a literature which constructs a past that entirely belongs to conquerors and invaders.<sup>[8]</sup> Why then should one bother to deal with this author? Are the sheer amount, distribution and popularity of his works reason enough to consider him worthy of attention? I think so. Popular culture has come into the purview of academic research on a wide scale since the 1960s, and recently the realm of the popular has also attracted the interest of some historiographers.

Nasim Hijazi (Nasim 'Hijazi') was born as Muhammad Sarif in Sujanpur/Distr. Gurdaspur (India) in 1914. His family traced its ancestry to the Arab Peninsula (Hijaz) which enabled him later to attach the nisba Hijazi to his pen name Nasim ('pleasant breeze'). In 1938 he did his BA in History from Islamia College, Lahore.

In the same year he started his work as a journalist and editor of several newspapers and journals which he continued until old age. He was actively involved in the Pakistan movement and especially in the struggle for Balochistan's accession to Pakistan. In an interview he declared that he had been a Pakistani by birth, even before the idea of Pakistan was developed, because already as a child he experienced the discriminative behaviour of Hindus toward the 'impure' and had come to detest any notion of untouchability.<sup>[9]</sup>

His biographer Tasadduq Husain Raja describes him as motivated by two missions - to gain Pakistan and, after 1947, to work for the stability of Pakistan and the introduction of an Islamic order in the country.<sup>[10]</sup>

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6. Cf. *Vaqar cAz'im, Dastan se afsane tak*, Karachi: Urdu Akademi Sindh, 1966: 168.

7. Cf. *Suhail Buxari, Urdu navalnigari*, Lahaur: Maktaba Meri La'ibreri, 1966: 128.

8. Cf. *Mubarak Ali, "How many Qasims, Ghaznavis, and Ghoris do we need?"*, [http://www.insaf.net/pipermail/sacw\\_insaf.net/2000/000508.html](http://www.insaf.net/pipermail/sacw_insaf.net/2000/000508.html)

9. *Mumtaz Umar, op. cit.*: 72.

10. *Tasadduq Husain Raja, Nasim hijazi. ek mut?alaca*. Lahaur: Qaumi kutubxana, 1987: 8.

In the preface to *Axri cat?an* he declared: "As tragic as what happened in East Punjab may be, as instructive it also is. We are entering a decisive phase in the history of India. At this stage a right step can take us to the highest peak and a wrong step can take us to the deepest abyss. If we like, we can wash away the blood of the martyrs of Eastern Punjab with tears of helplessness, or we can write the brightest chapter of Pakistan's history with their blood's ink."<sup>[11]</sup> He made it very clear at the outset that the his-torical events were closely linked to later developments and that they were meant to teach his contemporaries a lesson: "Axri cat?an is a mirror of our past, and seeing the contours of our present in this mirror we will be able to mend our future. Otherwise history demonstrates that nature (creation; divine power? Urdu: qudrat) will never forgive a nation's political mistakes. In *Axri cat?an* I have presented those young men to you which shouldered the burden of the great edifice of Pakistan."<sup>[12]</sup>

Nasim Hijazi published his first short story in 1936 and completed his first novel, *Dastan-i mujahid* (The story of a warrior for Islam),<sup>[13]</sup> in 1938, but it could be published in 1943 only. The second novel *Muhammad bin Qasim*<sup>[14]</sup> was written and published in 1945 after the author had received many enthusiastic letters from readers of the first novel, urging him to write a follow-up.<sup>[15]</sup> In 1947 he completed *Axri cat?an* (The last pillar/bastion). The present analysis will be based on these three novels as well as on his most ambitious and voluminous work *Qaisar-o-Kisra* (The Emperors of Rome and Persia)<sup>[16]</sup> which was published in 1964. He com-pleted this project after five years of writing, studying historical sources and travelling to the sites of the action. In an interview for Radio Pakistan he remarked: "The best moments of

11. "masriqi panjab ke vaqicat jis qadar alammak hai?, isi qadar sabaqamuz bhi hai?. ham hindustan me? apni tarix ke ek faisla kun marhale me? daxil ho cuke hai?. is marhale par ek sahih qadam hame? auj-i suraiya tak aur ek galat qadam tahatu- 'ssara tak pahu?ca sakta hai. agar ham cahe? to masriqi panjab ke sahido? ka xun bebasi ke a?su'o? se dho le? aur cahe? to is xun ki rosna'i se pakistan ka rosantarin bab likh d?ale?." *Axri cat?an* (AC), online edition, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/7391590/Aakhri-Chataan-Part1-by-Nasim-Hijazi>, p. 3.
12. *axri catan hamari mazi ka ek a'ina hai aur is a'ine me? ham apne hal ke xad-o-xal dekh kar apne mustaqbil ko sa?var sakte hai?, varna tarix sahid hai ki qudrat kisi qaum ki siyasi galatiya? mucaf nahi karti. axri cat?an me? qaum ke un nau javano? ko pes karta hu? jinho? ne apne kandho? par pakistan ki caz?imu-'s-san tacmir ka boj ut?haya hai.*" AC: 4.
13. *DM, Lahaur: Jahangir Buk D?ipo, 2005.*
14. *MbQ, Lahaur: Jahangir Buk D?ipo, 2005.*
15. *Preface to MbQ: 8.*
16. *QK, Lahaur: Hijazi Sanz, 1964.*

my life where those which I spent writing *Qaisar-o-Kisra*."<sup>[17]</sup> He produced several more novels, often triggered off by contemporary events such as the secession of East Pakistan or the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. His last novel which contained some autobiographical references appeared in 1991 under the title *Gumsuda qafila* (Lost caravans) and *Spain*, he finally kills his arch enemy Ibn-i Sadiq and returns fatally wounded to his village where he dies after instructing his son, nephew and grandson to continue the holy war. This fictional story is embedded in the historical setting of the Muslim campaigns under Valid bin cAbdu'l Malik (86-96 AH, 705-715 CE) and Sulaiman (96-99 AH, 715-717 CE). The eminent Muslim conquerors Muhammad bin Qasim and Qutaiba bin Muslim appear in some decisive battle scenes, but do not occupy the centre stage of the action.

Muhammad bin Qasim in a way is a sequence to the first novel, but, as the title suggests, here the focus is on the famous conqueror of Sindh who was recalled from India by Sulaiman and cruelly put to death in an act of revenge. The alleged cause of the campaign against King Da-har of Sindh (92/93-96 AH, 711-715 CE), the abduction of Arab ships by Sindhi pirates, is dealt with in great detail and provides the backdrop to the ensuing action. These passages are used to introduce a range of fictional characters who actually occupy more space than the hero of the novel. Special attention is given to the treachery and injustice with which the Sindhi rulers treat not only their Arab and Sri Lankan captives, but also their Sindhi subjects.

*Axri cat'an* is based on the failure of the Abbasid Empire in Baghdad to unite forces with Khwarezm Shah to defeat the advancing Mongolian forces under Chengiz Khan and his successors which not only leads to the end of the Khwarezmid Empire but finally also paves the way for the gruesome sacking of Baghdad by Mongolian troops in 1258. In the centre of the novel are the Khwarezmid Sultan Jalalu-'d-Din and two Arabs (Tahir bin Yusuf and cAbdu-'l- Malik) who are dedicated to Muslim unity and try to convince the caliph at Baghdad to come to the rescue of the Khwarezmid Empire because it is the "last bastion" (*axri cat'an*, literally "last rock") of Islam against the Mongolian tide. But despite all their efforts, the caliph prefers to side with the Mongolians instead of supporting his Muslim rival. Sultan Jalalu-'d-Din is not able to save his empire and finally sets out alone from his camp to seek an honourable death. Tahir bin Yusuf and cAbdu-'l- Malik find refuge in India where they serve the Delhi Sultan Iltutmish. Tahir dedicates

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17. *T.H. Raja, op. cit.:* 307

the last years of his life to his ultimate mission: the spreading of Islam.

Qaisar-o-Kisra is a much more complex novel. The action is situated against the backdrop of the war between the Eastern Roman and the Sassanid Empires (602-630 CE). In the beginning the author draws a picture of Arab society which is torn by tribal rivalries, feuds and bloody revenge. The main protagonist cAsim tries in vain to put an end to the enmity between his and a rival tribe. After killing some of his own relatives he becomes an outcast and has to run away. He gets involved into the fights between the East Roman and Persian rulers and witnesses the bloodshed on the battlefield, the atrocities against civilians and the murderous in-trigues of different contenders for power. These experiences make him long for peace and justice. He dreams of a just, merciful and truly humane ruler and a new Messiah. After many adventures and dramatic twists and turns cAsim marries a noble Christian girl and settles down in Constantinople. When he hears of the rule of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula, he embraces Islam, returns home and then joins the Muslim troops which are advancing against Damascus. He is convinced that the triumph of Islam will finally bring peace and a just rule to the whole region.

### The General Structure of the books

Nasim Hijazi wanted to reach out to a broad public, in particular to juvenile (male) readers. Commercial success was not his (primary?) concern. He was driven by a sense of mission which is corroborated by his journalistic writings. But to bring his messages home, he had to capture the readers and to uphold their interest. Hence he adopted some of the narrative strategies of his predecessors, albeit in a more sophisticated form. While his first two novels are still clumsy and tedious at places, his later work reveals somewhat refined literary techniques and highly developed stylistic devices.

The narratives usually progress chronologically with only a few flashbacks. Common to all books is an omniscient, impersonal narrator who occasionally also comments upon the events and provides historical information. The amount of such factual information is much greater in Qaisar-o-Kisra than in the previous books. These passages deal not only with historical facts, but also with different ideologies and religious belief systems which are commented upon from the perspective of the author. With 736 pages, a great number of locations and characters and a good deal of

ideological-philosophical musings, it is Nasim Hijazi's most ambitious novel and simultaneously the only book in which Muslims play only a marginal role in the action. They mostly appear as points of reference, as embodiments of the vision of a better world order.

All books under discussion have brave, courageous and righteous heroes who either are Muslims right from the start or embrace Islam in the course of the action. Most villains are non-Muslims, but there are a few exceptions to this rule, especially in Muhammad bin Qasim and *Axri cat'an*. To create suspense and to save the course of the action from getting too predictable, the author had to construct a number of intrigues, unexpected turns and incredible coincidences. Not less incredible changes of heart are often needed to convey the right message, e.g. the overwhelming attraction of Islam which is exemplified by the conversion to Islam of Christian, Hindu or Buddhist characters.

Moments of great tension and dramatic action alternate with romantic episodes which, however, are brief and very chaste. Familial relations and love stories not only create the necessary amount of human interest and relief from the dramatic scenes. They are an indispensable part of the message in so far as they illustrate the right conduct in all forms of human relationships.

Despite the dramatic titles and the central role of heroic adventures, battle scenes are not depicted in graphic detail. In the first three novels, events on the battlefield are mostly summed up in a few sentences. *Qaisar-o-Kisra* presents the horrors of war in much more detail, but here this was necessary to bring the message home.<sup>[18]</sup>

Short soliloquies are designed to allow insights into the character's feeling and thinking, but overall a third-person-narrative dominates. Dialogues are usually presented in the "modern" style, i.e. with the usual

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18. *The proclaimed decadence of East Rome and Persia is demonstrated by the immoral and cruel conduct of their leadership. This is a common motif in Muslim literature on the period; cf. Jan Peter Hartung, Viele Wege und ein Ziel. Leben und Wirken von Sayyid Abu l-H?asan al-H?asani Nadwi. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004: 132.*

introductory phrases which were mostly absent in the "dramatic" dialogue style of most Urdu and Hindi novels of the late nineteenth century. The "dramatic style" is more evident only in *Axri cat?an*. Indirect speech hardly ever occurs. Most characters are highly idealized or demonized stereotypes, but some of the main protagonists are depicted in more detail, undergo a change in the course of the novel and are less one-dimensional. The best example in this regards is *cAsim*.

The central ideas of the novels are conveyed predominantly through the actions, speeches, sermons and dialogues of the protagonists, to a lesser degree through commentaries of the narrator. Teaching through example and sermonizing thus complement each other. Occasionally we also find counter-arguments voiced by a character which are then refuted by another character (e.g. on the question of jihad), or inner conflicts expressed in inner monologues (e.g. *Nacim's* dilemma concerning his relation with a girl whom he loves and who loves him, but who is to marry his brother). There is a good deal of repetition of the main teachings and the narrative patterns which, however, seems to have been happily tolerated by Hijazi's admirers.

The language of the novels is laconic and matter-of-fact in the summarized reports of action, but highly emotional and metaphorical in those dialogues, speeches and letters which deal with the Islamic mission, Muslim bravery, the role of Muslim women, jihad and martyrdom. Here the author uses a number of conventional metaphors and images of Urdu poetry, albeit in a very stereotyped way throughout all the novels. The appeals for Muslim unity, courage, self-sacrifice which are voiced in speeches, Friday sermons and dialogues in the various novels are very repetitive. *Nasim Hijazi* time and again uses the same limited, but obviously powerful, repertoire of concepts and images.

Unlike most popular novels in Western languages, popular Urdu novels do not necessarily have a happy ending. *Nasim Hijazi's* books often end with the death of the main protagonist(s), but death in jihad is the guarantee of eternal life. Commenting on the smile of a dying Muslim hero,

the narrator therefore remarks: "That smile which is bestowed only on those who are martyred in the way of God."<sup>[19]</sup> And when Tahir condoles the grandmother of a young man on the death of her son, she replies: "He didn't die, he became a martyr/he was martyred."<sup>[20]</sup>

### The Image of Islam and Muslims in the Three Novels

It has to be noted right at the outset that Hijazi does not present any new or original concept of Islam but is very close to the concepts of Maulana Abu'l Acla Maududi (1903-1979).<sup>[21]</sup> What concerns us here is how he transmits these concepts in his novels.

#### 1. The concept of jihad

The dominant feature of the first three novels is the call for jihad (holy war).<sup>[22]</sup> The very titles of the books point to this central theme. jihad here means armed fight for the supremacy of Islam. In *Dastan-i mujahid* a small boy who plays with a wooden sword tells his mother: "I need a sword of steel. Get me one! I will go for jihad." Only those mothers can understand the joy of another on hearing these words of her little son who used to sing their sweethearts into sleep with the following lullaby: 'O Lord of the Kaaba, let my dear son grow into a mujahid and let his youthful blood water the tree planted by your beloved (Prophet)!"<sup>[23]</sup>

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19. "vah muskurahat? jo sirf xuda ki rah me? sahid honevalo? ko nasib ho sakti hai." AC: 28.

20. "vah mara nahi?, sahid hua hai." AC: 260.

21. *When asked about influences on him, Hijazi once replied: "If I may compare my literature to a stream of clear water, then I will have to admit that cAllama Iqbal and Maulana Maududi were the shores who kept me free from pollution and provided direction to my flow, and Maulana Sibli Nucmani showed me the fascinating glimpses of Islamic history which lent colour to my stories." Raja, op. cit.: 339. Hijazi maintained close family relations with Maududi who is reported to have suggested the names of his two grandsons. Cf. Mumtaz cUmar, op. cit.: 96.*

22. *For the use of the concept of jihad on the Subcontinent in the nineteenth century, cf. Annemarie Schimmel, Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, Leiden: Brill, 1980: 181-182, 209.*

23. "'...mujhe lohe ki talvar cahiye. Le do na. mai? jihad par ja'u?ga!' Kamsin bet?e ke mu?h se jihad ka lafz? sunne ki xusi vahi ma'e? jan sakti ha?I jo apne jigar ke t?kr?o? ko lori dete waqt yah gaya karti ha?:i: Ai, rab-i kacba! mera yah lal mujahid bane aur tere mahbub ke laga'e hu'e daraxt ko javani ke xun se serab kare." DM: 9-10

The mujahids set out to invade foreign territories in the name of Islam. But, as the narrator stresses, their aim is not to conquer or oppress other people.<sup>[24]</sup> They come as "liberators" from unjust rule, oppression, discrimination and social inequality. jihad is thus inseparably linked to the pro-claimed ideals of Islam: equality (musavat), the rule of God as against the despotism of hu-man rulers, a new morality, and peace.<sup>[25]</sup>

These novels were written at the height of the struggle for Pakistan as a separate homeland for South Asian Muslims. There was considerable resistance to this concept in the territories on the Western fringes of British India (NWFP, Balochistan). Nasim Hijazi intended his books as a contribution to mobilize the Muslim youth to take part in the struggle. To this end, he on the one hand celebrated the spirit of sacrifice and the heroism of the mujahidin while at the same time stressing the noble aims of the struggle and suggesting a bright future in the envisaged Islamic state. Hence the promise of justice, egalitarianism, exemplary moral standards and "good governance" in an Islamic order. Thus, while agitating for jihad Nacim reminds his fellow Muslims; "It is our obligation to take the message of our beloved Prophet to every country of the world and to enact the law he brought with him among all people because this is the law that can establish equality between weak and strong nations and reinstall the op-pressed and destitute people in their

24. *Thus, when a Sindhi queen compares Muhammad bin Qasim with Alexander, he replies, that Alexander came as an emperor who wanted to subjugate people, whereas he (MbQ) does not believe in the rule of human emper-ors on God's earth. (mai? xuda ki zamin par insan ki badsahat se munkir hu?.) MbQ: 352.*

25. *Addressing his troops, MbQ says: "The people of Sindh, who for years have been burning in the fire of cru-elty and oppression, are waiting for those clouds of mercy from the western horizon which several years ago cooled down the fire temple of Iran. From their wounded breasts emanates the cry: 'Oh let the warriors who with their blood watered the plant/sapling of equality, justice and peace in the garden of Adam snatch the sword of tyranny from the hands of the Sindhi ruler and let their horses trample down the thornbushes in which the sail of humanity and freedom is entangled." (... sindh ke cavam jo barso? se z?ulm-o-istibdad ki ag me? jal rahe hai?, ufaq -i magrib se rahmat ki un ghat?a'o? ke muntaz?ir hai, jo aj se ka'i baras pahle atiskada-i iran ko t?hand?a kar cuki hai?. un ke majruh sino? se yah avaz nikal rahi hai ki e kas! vah mujahidin jinho? ne apne xun se bag-i adam me? musavat, cadal aur insaf aur aman ke paude ki abyari ki hai, sindh ke hukmran ke hatho? se z?ulm ki talvar chin le? aur un ke ghor?e un xardar jhar?iyo? ko masal d?ale?, jin ke sath insaniyat aur azadi ka daman uljha hua hai.) MbQ: 252*

rights."<sup>[26]</sup> To further highlight this progressive mission, Nijazi went to considerable length to paint the despotic rule of King Dahar and his allies in Sindh in the cruellest possible manner. This narrative can be interpreted as a warning about the future prospects of Indian Muslims under the rule of a Hindu majority. Social inequality, the discrimination of lower castes and "untouchables" and the concept of "impurity" are depicted as central features of Hindu society. Moreover, there is no adequate sense of shame and modesty which is amply demonstrated by the way in which Hindu women dress. Similarly, the atrocities committed by the Mongolian invaders of Muslim territories which are depicted in *Axri catan* in a way mirror the horrors of the partition period in Eastern Punjab and are professedly used as a warning for contemporary Muslims.

Nasim Hijazi was by no means the first to call for jihad in the Indian independence movement. Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), the most prominent "nationalist" Muslim who opposed the Two-Nation-Theory, refashioned the theory of jihad in view of the aggressive expansion of European power to legitimize modern anti-colonial struggles.<sup>[27]</sup> He "grasped the wider ethical meanings of jihad to make a forceful case for fighting colonial injustices."<sup>[28]</sup> "Following earlier scholars of Islam, Azad identified three kinds of jihad: 1) verbal proclamations commanding good and prohibiting wrong, 2) giving property and goods for the cause and 3) the actual waging of war and fighting (qital)."<sup>[29]</sup> He propagated the concept of jihad in his Urdu weekly *Al-Hilal* (The Crescent) which was read by Muslims in Bengal, the United Provinces and Punjab until it was closed down by the British in November 1914. "Article

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26. "Hamara yah farz hai ki ham apne aqa aur maula ka paigam dunya ke har mulk me? pahu?ca de? aur jo qanun vah apne sath la'e the, dunya ke tamam insano? par nafiz? kar de?, kyo?ki yahi vah qanun hai jis ki badaulat dunya ki kamzor aur t?aqtoar aqvam musavat ke ek vasic da'ira me? la'i ja sakti ha?I jis ki badaulat maz'lum-o-bekas insan apne kho'e hu'e huquq vapas le sakte ha?i." DM: 67.

27. Cf. Ayesha Jala, "Striking a Just Balance: Maulana Azad as a Theorist of Trans-National Jihad", in *Modern Intellectual History*, 4:1 (2007): 95-107.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

after article extolled the gallant Muslims resisting European aggression in the charred and bloodied battle-fields of Tripoli and the Balkans."<sup>[30]</sup>

He dreamt of a united Muslim front under the Ottoman xalifa. Azad believed that "non-peaceful actions are needed for the sake of peace".<sup>[31]</sup> Azad also reminded Muslims that "while others were masters of their own lives, the lives of Mus-lims were the property of God"<sup>[32]</sup> hence it was only natural to sacrifice these lives in the name of God.

Azad explained the difference between temporary warfare/political war (harb) and jihad: While the first were waged to subjugate and slaughter people, or fought against people who broke treaties etc. (political wars of the Prophet), jihad was the direct opposite, fought with the purpose of establishing peace, tranquillity, and freedom.<sup>[33]</sup> Hence, "the true jihadi is mod-erate in his treatment of the vanquished and thinks only of winning God's favour".<sup>[34]</sup> The same arguments are again and again repeated in Nasim Hijazi's books. With Azad he shared the strong belief in the ethical superiority of Islam. The rule of Islam is to be established to eradicate all causes for war and to attain a stable peace. However, like Azad he, too, does not endorse the indiscriminate killing of non-Muslims, which is not sanctioned by Islam. The ba-sic difference in their application of the concept of jihad is the attitude towards Hindus. Azad in his presidential address to the Khilafat conference at Agra in 1921 stated that Muslims should fight for the removal of the illegitimate British government in India by uniting with their Hindu countrymen.<sup>[35]</sup> This stance was also advocated by the Ali brothers.

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

33. *Ibid.*; In Hijazi's words: "We want safety and peace for ourselves and for all mankind, and the only way to peace in this world is Islam. This is the faith which extinguishes the differences between master and slave, black and white, Ara and Persian." (*ham apni salamati aur apne sath dunya ke tamam insano? ki salamati cahate ha?I aur xuda ki zamin par salamati ka rasta sirf islam hai. yah vah din hai, jo dunya se aqa aur gulam, gore aur kale, carabi aur cajmi ki tamiz mit?ata hai.*) MbQ: 332.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

"Referring to the Prophet's constitution at Medina in which Muslims and non-Muslims were described as one nation, Azad asked Muslims to perform their religious duty by uniting with the Hindus."<sup>[36]</sup>

In contrast to this stance, Abu'l Acla Maududi in his book *Jihad fi'l Islam* (*Jihad in Islam*, 1927) identified the Hindus as the main enemies of Islam. When Nasim Hijazi started to write his novels, the Khilafat movement had long ended, and in 1940 the Two-Nation-Theory had become the basis for the Pakistan resolution of the Muslim League which demanded autonomy for areas with a Muslim majority. It seems that Hijazi, who was a staunch supporter of Maududi, took the end of colonial rule more or less for granted and concentrated his efforts on the struggle for a separate statehood for Indian Muslims.

But although Hijazi repeatedly stresses jihad as a duty for every (male) Muslim and mentions the reward for sacrificing one's life in the name of God in his novels,<sup>[37]</sup> it would be wrong to conclude that he wanted to call his fellow Muslims to arms against the Hindus. His purpose was political - to obtain a separate state for Indian Muslims where they would be able to establish a polity in accordance with the injunctions of Quran and Hadith. This view is in line with Maududi's "governance-oriented" concept<sup>[38]</sup> according to which the extrovert juridical aspect of religion is more important than the introvert spiritual dimension - although it has to be kept in mind that Maududi originally opposed the idea of separate statehood for South Asian Muslims. But Hijazi fully agrees with Maududi as far as the question of an Islamic state as the basis for a truly Islamic way of life is concerned. Many statements by characters or the narrators of his novels confirm this stance. Thus the narrator comments on the situation of Baghdad under the late Abbasids in the 13th century where religious matters are left to the disputing, hair-splitting factions of the culama: "This divide between politics and religion was the greatest cause of fitna (revolt, unrest) in Islam."<sup>[39]</sup>

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36. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

37. E.g., in *MbQ*, p. 337: "The blood of martyrs washes away all their sins." (*sahido? ka xun un ke tamam gunah dho deta hai.*), or: "For a Muslim it is the greatest fortune/the most auspicious moment to die as a martyr for God." (*musalman ke liye zindagi ki sab se bar?i sacadat yah hai ki vah xuda ki rah me? sahid ho ja'e.*) QK: 731.

38. Cf. Maududi, *Al jihad fi'l islam*, Dihli: Markazi maktaba-i islami: 1995 [1927]: 92-104.

39. "siyasat aur maz?hab ki yah taqsim Islam ke liye sab se bar?a fitna tha." AC: 42.

reigns to lead them to the field of jihad!"<sup>[40]</sup> and where the heroine tells the hero: "Nobody can bring down the banner of a nation (qaum) which has warriors like you!"<sup>[41]</sup> Moreover, the uni-fying effect of military campaigns is stressed: "History is a witness that whenever Muslims left their homes to go for conquests, they never engaged in unnecessary mind-boggling about religious persuasions."<sup>[42]</sup>

Despite all the jihad rhetoric, there is not a single case of forced conversion in any of the nov-els. Outside military combat, not a single "infidel" is killed. The supremacy of Islam is consti-tuted to create conditions for an implementation of Islamic ideals, but all conversions are in-spired by the good example of the Muslim characters or by peaceful proselytizing, as done in India by Tahir in Axri catan. Usually, these voluntary conversions are preceded by living with Muslims over a certain stretch of time, observing their daily lives and getting instructions from them about the basic tenets and injunctions of Islam. Thus the Muslim protagonists con-vince non-Muslims of the social and ethical superiority of the new faith by their own example and by religious instruction. Their words and deeds are in full accord.

## 2. Ethics

In the Quran, Muslims are expected to eradicate instability and injustice and to establish a just and virtuous society. This is a vision which the heroes of Nasim Hijazi's novels try to imple-ment wherever they have their way. The best illustration of these principles is the conduct of Muhammad bin Qasim after his victory in Sindh. He is depicted as a paragon of magnanimity, tolerance, benevolence, human sympathy, and justice. Thus, he personally looks after wounded soldiers of the enemy, dresses their wounds and releases them into freedom once they are cured. He strongly prohibits any killing, plundering or molesting of women in the areas under his control. His

40. "xus baxt hai vah qaum jis ke afrac javani me? talvaro? se khelte hai? aur bur?hape me? apne bacco? ke ghor?o? ki bag pakar? kar unhe? jihad ka rasta dikhate hai?." AC: 13.

41. "jis qaum ko ap jaise sipahi nasib ho?, us ka jhand? a ko' i t? aqat sar nigu? nahi? kar sakta." AC: 241.

42. "tarix gavah hai ki jis zamane me? bhi musalman futuhat ka sauq le kar gharo? se nikle, un me? ictiqadat ke bare me? kabhi sar phat? uval na hu' i." AC: 59.

behaviour stands in stark contrast to that of the Sindhi ruler whom he has displaced. Despite his glorious victories, his youth and his popularity, he remains utterly selfless and modest. And as a true, obedient soldier he obeys the order of Sulaiman though he knows that this will be his death sentence. He would have had all opportunity and means to escape, but he readily accepts his fate and refuses to rebel against the order of the caliph who, howsoever evil he may be, to him represents the sacred institution of xilafat which he will serve to his last breath. Moreover, he hopes that this painful experience will teach Muslims a lesson and will lead to the election of a better caliph in the future.<sup>[43]</sup>

Nasim Hijazi, no doubt, added fictional details to the story, but as a whole he remained truth-ful to the historical character. With the stunning record of his conquests at a very young age, the reports of his exemplary conduct and his popularity among his own troops as well as the ordinary people of Sindh, Muhammad bin Qasim already had everything a legendary hero needed. A light touch here and there and some amount of exaggeration were sufficient to turn him into an exemplary leader. His tragic, premature end only adds to the fascination for this character.

Here we come across an important contradiction: Sulaiman is obviously wrong in his treatment of Muhammad bin Qasim, is unjust and acts against the wider interests of the Muslim community/polity, but Muhammad bin Qasim obeys his orders for the sake of the unity of the empire and (temporary) political stability, thus holding the sanctity of the office of the xalifa more important than the principles of right and wrong, just and unjust. This can be regarded as primacy of the political over the ethical principle. In this context it is important to note that Hijazi strongly advocated a democratic process in the election of the xalifa and denounced hereditary kingship as un-Islamic.<sup>[44]</sup> In the same vein, and following Maududi, he

43. *MbQ*: 385.

44. *His view of democracy obviously corresponded to that of Maududi's "theo-democracy" (ilahi jumhuri huku-mat); cf. JanPeter Hartung, "Gottesstaat versus Kemalismus. Eine islamische Reaktion auf Mušarrafs Putsch in Pakistan", in Religion-Staat-Gesellschaft 1:1 (2000): 84-90.*

supported Fatima Jinnah in her candidacy against General Ayub in 1956 and condemned the military takeover by Ayub in 1958.

The conspicuous moral deficiencies of some Muslim leaders who appear in his works, most prominent among them the tyrannical Hajjaj bin Yusuf, point to a lack of individual spiritual and moral perfection which Maududi's adversary Abu'l Hasan Ali al-Hasani Nadvi (1914-1999) deemed necessary for the mission of Islam. Nadvi saw "Islam as guidance for the whole humanity (and not just a social system for Muslims) and the individual (not the political domain) as the main target of the prophet's task."<sup>[45]</sup> This aspect is to some degree implemented in Hijazi's exemplary "good guys", but it is inadvertently linked with the political supremacy of Muslims which is time and again stressed as the precondition for moral perfection and social harmony.

Another important topic is the interaction between women and men. All Muslim protagonists are shown to be without greed and lust. They never look at girls and women, but always lower the eyes when they encounter a female. Thus, the inhabitants of Debal (the then capital of Sindh) are astonished to see that the Muslim troops which have conquered the town cross the bazaars with their eyes cast down.<sup>[46]</sup> Girls and women are instructed to stay away from men as far as possible, to cover their bodies and faces and to stick to "female/feminine" occupations. Modesty is taught in all walks of life. The protagonists dress modestly, enjoy simple food, and denounce pomp and show. They prefer simple marriage ceremonies. Extravagant wedding parties, dowries and gifts are strongly discouraged - well in line with the teachings of reform Islam. Another quality which is time and again mentioned with regard to the Muslims - men and women alike - is dignity or acute sense of honour.<sup>[47]</sup> For the sake of adventure and romance,

45. Ahmed Mukarram, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Islamic Thought. Guidance and Governance in the Work of Mawlana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and Mawlana Abul Aala Mawdudi". PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1992: 210.

46. MbQ: 310.

47. In Urdu the adjective *gayyur* (high minded, very jealous in point of honour) is used.

however, under the extraordinary circumstances of war Muslim girls are shown to come out of the confines of their houses and to meet male Muslim strangers. Otherwise there could be no love stories in the novels! But even on the battlefield, in hiding or under other untoward conditions, the Muslim heroes and heroines never trespass the boundaries of de-cency and morality. Their relationships have always to be sanctioned by marriage before they can become united.<sup>[48]</sup>

### **3. Culture and spirituality**

Hijazi's Islam is extremely austere. Singing, music and dance are strictly prohibited. These rules are established in an episode of Dastan-i mujahid where the Muslim protagonist Nacim is saved and nursed back to health by Tartar tribesmen after he had been wounded on the battlefield. He is shocked to notice that men and women of the tribe mix freely and even sing and dance together. He starts to instruct the young girl who has nursed him (and fallen in love with him in the process) in the basic tenets of Islam and teaches her to behave bashfully and modestly, that is, he installs in her a sense of shame which she had been lacking. Similar patterns are followed in many other cases throughout the novels.

All Muslims in Hijazi's book strictly observe the five daily prayers. They draw all inspiration from the Quran as the word of God. Their unshakable trust in God helps them to endure all hardships and tribulations and takes away the fear of death.<sup>[49]</sup>

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48. *It should be noted that Abdul Halim Sharar was not so particular about pre-marital relations in his historical novels!*

49. *"The first condition for the faith of a Muslim is that he does not fear death..." (ek musalman ke iman ki pahli sart? yah hai ki vah maut se na d?are...) MbQ: 174. The outstanding Muslim commander Qutaiba bin Muslim says when asked about the extraordinary courage of Muslims: "...we don't fear death. Death for us is the message of a higher/elevated life. Once a person has developed the wish to live for Allah and the resolve to die for Allah, his heart will know no fear, not even of the biggest might." (... ham maut se nahi? d?arte. maut hamare liye ek acla zindagi ka payam hai. Allah ke liye zinda rahne ki tamna aur allah keliye marne ka hausla paida karne ke bacd kisi saxs ke dil me? bar?i se bar?i t?aqaat ka xauf nahi? rahta.) DM: 140.*

The trust in God, however, does not relieve man from his individual and collective responsibility. Thus Muhammad bin Qasim exhorts his troops before the attack on Brahmanabad (Sindh): "The rewards of the Almighty are only for those nations who have coloured every page of their history with the blood of their martyrs."<sup>[50]</sup> In contrast to many contemporary Muslim ideologues, the characters and the narrator in the books under discussion do not blame others for the failures of Muslims. All defeats, problems and schisms are created by Muslims - either out of incompetence, ignorance and lack of faith or out of jealousy and greed for power.

Every Muslim is shown to have direct access to the word of God. There is no need for inter-mediaries. Mullahs and Maulawis, the traditional interpreters of the scriptures, come in for a lot of criticism. The main reason for this negative attitude is the divisive nature of their teachings. They are accused of having split the Muslims, thus weakening the Muslim community and playing into the hands of their enemies. Thus, Tahir rebukes the representatives of the five warring factions (firqas) in Baghdad: "Don't tell me the theoretical problems which you have not been able to agree upon for the last five hundred years."<sup>[51]</sup>

Mystic elements in Islam are either not mentioned at all, or appear in a negative light. Thus, the most despicable, mean and inhuman character of Dastan-i mujahid, Ibn-i Sadiq, is introduced as a nam ni had darves (a so-called dervish, i.e. member of a mystic order).<sup>[52]</sup> This may also mean that Ibn-i Sadiq only posed and dressed as a Sufi, but the expression remains ambiguous. Asceticism, escapism and renunciation of the world are strongly condemned, especially in Qaisar-o-Kisra.

The overall impression while reading the novels is that being a Muslim dominates or even obliterates all other aspects of a person's identity. Cultural and social differences, where they are mentioned, are to be overcome. The image of Islam as it is presented here is that of a scriptural,

51. "mere samme vah masa'il bayan na kijiye jin par ap pa'nc sadiyo? me? mutaffiq nahi? ho sake." AC: 60.

52. DM: 66.

unified and universal religious, political and social system.

## Conclusion

In the present age with its obsession about militant Islam and a perceived "clash of cultures", Hijazi's jihadi rhetoric is bound to create irritation among liberal Muslim and non-Muslim readers. Of course it would be naïve to believe that reading his novels would make anybody set out for jihad. Most readers probably turn to his books as a pastime, for the promise of ad-venture and heroism, to take part in a dream world of ideal characters, feel elevated by their gallantry and bravery and revel in the past glories of Islam, or just to escape, for a while at least, their pedestrian existence. But even then they might inadvertently be drawn into the net of the particular worldview which is presented in the novels. They may begin to accept the claims about the superiority of Islam and hence the need to establish an Islamic order, especially when these views correspond with the atmosphere of their upbringing and surroundings and with what they are taught in school textbooks. Hijazi's books are recommended by certain groups, organizations and schools as a tool for indoctrination, and here one may perceive a real danger. When these books become part of a systematic Islamist instruction, with all their celebration of jihad and martyrdom they can perhaps develop a dangerous dimension.<sup>[53]</sup> Their special appeal certainly lies in the simple patterns and solutions the novels seem to offer. Hijazi's novels are very much in line with contemporary terrorist ideologies which dispense "entirely with old-fashioned concerns about the ritual and doctrinal details of Islamic practice".<sup>[54]</sup> With them he also shares the abstract notion of a global Islam/Islamic world in which Muslims have to fight in the defence of Islam wherever needed. Occasionally Hijazi even appears to legitimize an individual call to jihad when the Muslim ruler of the territory in question fails

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53. *For a discussion of the concept of jihad with regard to Pakistan, see Michel Boivin, "Jihad, National Process and Identity Assertion in Pakistan: the Dialectic of Metaphor and Reality." in Saeed Shafiqat (ed.), new perspectives on Pakistan. visions for the future. Karachi: OUP, 2007: 104-121.*

54. *Faisal Devji, Landscapes of the Jihad. Militancy. Morality. Modernity. London: Hurst & Co., 2005: 16.*

to do so. This, too, can have dangerous implications in a situation where the proponents of an international jihad try "to wrest the jihad away from the juridical language of the state and make it a strictly individual duty that is more ethical than political in nature."<sup>[55]</sup> In a way, this runs counter to Hijazi's concern for a very particular geographical space, namely Pakistan whose political stability is seriously eroded by a number of self-styled jihadi groups.

But the most negative aspect of the books may be something else. We learn about military campaigns, conquests and victories, but very little about life after the conquest. Most actions in the novels are destructive. We see how evil is destroyed, but we learn very little about how the envisaged life in equality, justice and peace is to be constructed and maintained. Even in the areas which have come under permanent Muslim rule, there is internal strife, power ri-valry, greed, cruelty, injustice. With the exception of a few families, the ideal Muslim society is nowhere to be seen. The exemplary leader Muhammad bin Qasim is not allowed to fulfil his vision of a peaceful, just society which is governed by the ethics of Islam. Hijazi con-ceived his novels also as a warning against the failures of Muslim societies, such as the lack of democracy, and particularly against the divisions among Muslims, but with his own narrow outlook on Islam he can easily be understood to endorse one specific rationalized version of Islam against all others. He expounds what C.M. Naim characterises as "a scriptural Islam that is exclusionary - filled with sectarian self-righteousness - and, far from being inspired by humility, is aggressively focused on having power and holding on to it."<sup>[56]</sup> We should not for-get that sectarian violence in Pakistan (Muslims killing Muslims) is responsible for more deaths than any other form of terrorism in the country. Whatever the social, economic and ethnic reasons for these conflicts may be, the mobilizing ideologies used in them are based on religious concepts (purity

55. *Faisal Devji, Landscapes of the Jihad. Militancy. Morality. Modernity. London: Hurst & Co., 2005: 16.*

56. *C.M Naim, "A 'Hyper-Masculinised' Islam?", in: Outlook India, January 16, 2004.*

of faith, finality of prophethood, a particular interpretation of the sharia etc.).<sup>[57]</sup> On the face of it, however, Hijazi as many reformist writers preceding him stresses Muslim unity and propagates the basic tenets and social norms of Islam without entering into any theological disputes. He strongly condemns disputations between different sects and schools of Muslim jurisprudence as one of the main factors for the decline of Muslim power. He is very critical of the culama who instigate hatred among Muslims and more often than not serve and legitimate unworthy worldly rulers.

In this regard, Hijazi's books can also be read as a utopia of sorts. In his novels he constructs ideal spaces, however limited they may be, in which his notions of a truly Islamic way of living are realised. Thus his later works can also be understood as a critique of Pakistani realities. Although they are set in the past, their concern is the present and the future, and this certainly is part of how the readers relate to the books. In line with different traditionalist movements of the time, Hijazi "sought to harmonise, albeit in different ways, the Muslims' every-day life with the implications of the normative sources of Islam."<sup>[58]</sup> The books may be very attractive for the clear-cut, simple rules and the definite orientation they provide. The Pakistani writer and critic Anvar Sadid called Hijazi's novels "landmarks/signposts" (nisan-i rah) for future generations.<sup>[59]</sup> The very positive evaluation of Hijazi's works in the PhD thesis quoted above may serve as an indication of the ideological importance of this author in present day Pakistan. Mumtaz cUmar reports how a delegation of the Islamic Student Federation (Islami Jamiat-i T?ulaba) came to meet Hijazi. One boy kissed Hijazi's hand and told him that Maulana Maududi had organised them, but only Hijazi's writings turn their spirits on.<sup>[60]</sup>

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57. *A revealing case study of Sunni-Shia militancy is Mariam Abou Zahab's "The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang (Pakistan)." in Imtiaz Ahmad & Helmut Reifeld (eds.), Lived Islam in South Asia. Adaptation, Accommodation & Conflict. Delhi: Social Sciences Press, 2004: 135-148.*

58. *Jan Peter Hartung, "Affection and Aversion: Ambivalences among Muslim Intellectual Élités in Contemporary South Asia", in: South Asia Research, 21:2 (New Delhi et. al.: Sage, 2001): 201.*

59. *"Nasim Hijazi: islami tarix ka saida'i", in Jasarat, 9 March 1996: 5.*

60. *Literally: "hamari rago? me? daur?ne vala xun garm karti hai?", Mumtaz cUmar, op. cit.: 94*

In a special Nasim Hijazi number of the monthly *Siyara* (1989) Nacim Siddiqi wrote: "Most of the young recruits in our army draw inspiring lessons about our glorious past from Nasim Hijazi's novels and go to confront death motivated by the selfless passion of martyrdom. A great number of youngsters in educational institutions highly appreciate his writings, innumerable female students (from middle schools to MA) learn about the message of Islam and its power by reading Nasim Hijazi, and actually the credit for the fact that Islamic jihad, an Islamic system and an Islamic movement are discussed with so much fervour in this country to a great deal goes to Nasim Hijazi."<sup>[61]</sup> What Ralph Russell stated for Maududi could as well be applied to Hijazi: The basis of the great appeal of his message for the urban lower middle class is that his "arguments, such as they are, confirm his supporters in the strong, unthinking prejudices they already hold."<sup>[62]</sup>

A phenomenon such as the huge popularity of Hijazi's writings points to a major difference between popular literature in South Asia and in western languages. While popular reading matter in the west tends to be of an apolitical nature and, at least at the face of it, not to propagate any ideology (which means that the underlying ideology is implied, but not overt), didactic and openly ideological aspects are not so rare in popular Urdu fiction. One has to concede that nowadays Nasim Hijazi's novels are mostly located in the rubric of "juvenile literature" - a field in which normative features and appealing heroic role models are to be found in western languages as well. A clear distinction between good and evil and the preaching of a simple ethics is characteristic of many works of popular culture all over the world. And

61. "fauj ke bestar naujavannasim hijazi ke navalo? se apne sandar mazi zindagi afroz rivayat axz? karte ha?I aur jaz?ba-i sahadat ke liye bexud ho kar maut ke samne khar?e ho jate ha?i. taclingaho? ke kas?iru- 't-tacdad naujavan us qalam ke qadr sinas ha?I, besumar t?alibat (mid?al iskulo? se le kar aim ai tak) Nasim Hijazi ko par?h kar islam ke paigam aur us ki quvvat se asna'i hasil karti ha?I, balki sacci bat to yah hai ki is mulk-o-qaum me? agar islami jihad aur islami niz?am aur islami tahrik ke carce zor par ha?i to is halat ko paida karne me? Nasim Hijazi ka bar?a hissa hai." Quoted in Muntaz cUmar, p. 428.

62. Ralph Russell, "Maududi and Islamic Obscurantism", in: *How not to Write the History of Urdu Literature*. Delhi [et al.]: OUP, 1999, 222.

yet, the amount of direct indoctrination we come across in Hijazi's works is quite ex-traordinary.

Although any "purpose" (maqsadiyat) in literature is strongly condemned by the proponents of the priority of the aesthetic and the autonomy of art, committed literature as well as an overt didacticism are very common features in popular fiction of Urdu. Thus, popular literature deserves much more attention as a vibrant and ideologically loaded site in the system of public discourse in Urdu.

