

The Nostalgic Detective: Identity Formation in Detective Fiction of Pakistan

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Various authors have pointed to the importance of popular literature within the social discourses of identity formation because of it being less “manageable” than the official literature (Joshi 2004; Ghosh 2006). There is, therefore, larger room for multiplicity of views within popular literature which makes it an ideal avenue to search for dissenting voices in social discourse.

Detective fiction represents an important facet of popular literature. Ever since its inception in late 18th century, it has been extremely popular in the West and has been an important carrier of modernity (Joshi 2004). Daeshal and Orsini have shown the wide reception of this genre in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. Their work also contains a discussion of the impact of modernity and colonialism on the detective novels in India (Daeshal 2003; Orsini 2006).

However, there have been very few studies done on post-colonial detective fiction in sub-continent, especially of Pakistan. Recently, Oesheld has discussed the work of one of the most influential post-colonial detective novelists of subcontinent, Ibn-e-Safi (Oesterheld 2009). Her discussion has, however, remained limited to a broad discussion of various themes in his work instead of their importance within the discourses of post-colonial South Asia.

We intend to discuss Ibn-e-Safi’s work as an example of detective fiction which operated within a social milieu and thus, effected and was affected by the discourses around it. More specifically, We will be analyzing the relationship of the major themes in his work with issues of nationalism, religiosity and identity formation in post-colonial Pakistan.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym differentiates between two kinds of nostalgia: restorative and reflective (Boyn 2007). According to her,

“Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory...[it] is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and

*memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming
itself..[it] cherishes shattered fragment of
memory..Restorative nostalgia takes itself dead
seriously. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand,
can be ironic and humorous¹”*

Through our analysis of the detective fiction of Ibn-e-Safi, We intend to show that his work indicates the existence of a reflective nostalgia in the popular culture of post-colonial Pakistan. It is important to mention that this nostalgia was not a craving for the return of Colonialism or a negation of partition. Instead, it should be viewed as an attempt at creating cultural continuity and incorporating the cultural memory of the past into the present.

This reflective nostalgia, in our opinion, operates at three levels; firstly, it represents an approach in post-colonial Pakistan that strives to view partition of sub-continent not as a complete break i.e., the geographical separation does not need to stand for a complete socio-cultural break where the entire heritage of India has to be disowned in order to become an “authentic” Pakistani.

Secondly, this nostalgia represents a yearning for a return of an inclusive religiosity which is aware of its religious identity but by being not judgmental, it does not “silence” the dissenting voices which exist in any society because of the inherent multiplicity of thought in human social condition.

Thirdly, this reflective nostalgia stands for a cultural approach towards Colonialism which although deeply affected by modernity, rationality and capitalist ethic represents an approach which is cognizant of its own cultural history. Thus, it actively appropriates certain elements of its colonial past while retaining some critical elements of indigenous culture like family values.

Finally, we examine how the feminist critique and debates of sexuality are involved in post-colonial notions of nationalism and elements of nostalgia. Thus it depicts a movement from a more patriarchal past to post-modern ideals of feminine liberalism.

¹ For more details on the two types of nostalgia see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic, 2001)

Personality: Personal history as a glimpse of nostalgia:

Asrar Ahmed² (known mostly by his pen name Ibn-e-Safi) was born in 1928 near Allahabad. By the age of eight, he had read *Talism-e-Hoshurba*, which was to have a lasting effect on him (Safi 1972). His first article was published when he was in the seventh grade. He was amongst the progressives during the independence movement and his poetry, which was his main literary interest at that time, contained social themes (Oesterheld 2009). He also remained a devoted communist for a brief period during his educational life (Safi 1972).

In 1947, when he was studying at Aligarh University, the riots started and his education had to come to a halt because of disturbance at the University. One can feel the gloom and helplessness in Safi's tone when he writes about this time³. He had to teach for two years in a secondary school in Allahabad, so he could get a private degree of B.A from Agra University.

Barbaram has argued that the inability of post-Soviet union Russian fiction characters to change the society around themselves is a manifestation of post-Soviet nostalgia. According to her, "Kamenskaia (a Russian detective) perceives the injustice and instability in Russia as failings that she cannot change by herself. She therefore yearns for a world in which there are no such failings or in which the failings are manageable" (Barbran 2005). Ibn-e-Safi also wrote that he was deeply affected by the massacre after independence in 1947⁴ and argues that the character of Fareedi was born out of a concern for justice in the world (Safi 1972). This fact is of crucial importance for understanding the phenomenon of post-colonial nostalgia in Safi's writings.

He started writing detective stories in 1952 while still in India. So, the character of Fareedi (details below) was created before Safi migrated to Pakistan later in 1952 along with his mother. His father had already migrated to Karachi. In

²This section is not meant to as a detailed biography. It is meant to show how Safi's personal history affected some of the central themes in his writings. Most of the biographical details are obtained from Ibn-e-Safi's own article "*Baqalam Khud*" in *Alif Laila Digest* 1972 and Oesterheld, "*The neglected realm of popular writings; Ibn-e-Safi's novels*", Revised version of a paper presented at the Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, in March 2007

³See "*Baqalam Khud*" by Ibn-e-Safi in *Alif Laila Digest* of 1972 for details

⁴It's interesting to note that at no place in his work Safi blames only the Indians as being responsible for the massacre of 1947. He is meaningfully silent about the onus of the crime. It is in marked contrast to other Pakistani authors and textbooks, which put the entire blame on the Hindus and Sikhs for 1947 massacres.

Karachi, he established Asrar Publications, through which he published his novels in Pakistan. The character of Ali Imran (the other hero in Safi's writings) was created in 1955 when the first novel of Imran series came out. Apart from a break of three years in early 1960s, he continued to write till his death in 1980. Safi's oeuvre consists of about 280 novels.

Although Safi has been accused by some critics⁵ of copying Western themes and characters, most of the critics agree that most of Safi's characters and themes were original (e.g., Oesterheld 2009; Abbas 1980). In his writings we can see a creative synthesis of Western and Eastern themes, which is also, determined by his simultaneous childhood inspiration from Talism-e-Hoshurba and Sir Henry Rider Haggard's famous novel "She" (Iqbal 1972).

It is interesting to see that Safi's personal life is a manifestation of all the three aspects of reflective nostalgia We mentioned above. We see his helplessness during 1947 riots and his life experience in pre-partition India, influencing his attitude towards the cultural heritage of India. We also observe his communist and progressive ideological interests coupled with the social milieu of Aligarh, as an indication of the inclusive religiosity that once characterized India. Finally, we also see a creative synthesis of Eastern and Western literature as a glimpse of his attitude towards Colonialism and modernity.

MULTIPLE AUDIENCES: CLASS, GENDER AND NATIONALITIES:

"For the generations that grew up in the decades between 1950s and the 1980s, Ibn-e Safi was such stuff as dreams were made of. Competing with the ever-growing popularity of radio and cinema until the late seventies (and that of television somewhere in between those years), the wonderful penman kept on churning out ten or twelve novels every year and selling over several thousand copies of them every month"⁶.

This quote from Shafique gives us an indication to the popularity Safi's work enjoyed in Pakistan and India in the decades after independence. Joshi, in her

⁵See for example, Asar, Azhar (2000), Beesween Sadi ka Jasoosi Adab, *Aajkul*, New Delhi, 2000

⁶Shafique, Khurram, "Literature for thrill seekers literati", *Dawn/Weekly Review* (Online edition), 10 July, 1997: 6-8.

study of British novels in India, has shown the importance of readers in understanding the cultural importance of fiction; it is the readers who made something popular (Joshi 2004). Therefore, a study of the readers of Safi's novels is important to get an idea of the appeal his novels had in post-colonial subcontinent.

First editions of all novels by Ibne-e-Safi were published simultaneously from Karachi (Pakistan) and Allahbad (India). The second editions were published from Lahore in Pakistan. At least three editions of all his novels were published which is an indication of their popularity (Abbas 1980). Some even call him the most read author in subcontinent during 1960s (Allahabadi 1972).

First few novels were published in small numbers. So the huge demand led to many incidents of plagiarism and copy right infringements⁷. Later according to one of the sources, around 50,000-60,000 of each first edition were published in 1970s and were quickly sold out (Abbas 1980). When he started writing a serial novel in Daily Huriat on the demand of its editor, there was so much demand that copies of newspapers were sold at exorbitant prices (Khan 1972).

Similarly, when he was taking a three years break from writing in early 1960s, many authors started writing using his characters⁸. Some, like Kaleem, simply used his characters while others, like Akram Allahbadi in India, fashioned their characters as almost exact replicas of Safi's characters but with different names (Allahabadi 1975; Asar 2000). All these facts point to the existence of huge market demand of these novels.

Although it is difficult to access from sources the social strata to which most of his audiences belonged, we can safely argue that he had a wide audience that included many social classes, ethnicities and religions. For example, the covers of his novels published from Lahore were designed by Hanif Ramay who later became Chief Minister of Punjab in Pakistan. Similarly, on the occasion of the release of Safi's novel *Derh Matwalay* in 1964, the then Law Minister of India Mr. Ali Zaheer and later Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri were

⁷Safi discusses these infringements briefly in the preface of his novel *Larkyon ka Jazeera* and *Derh Matwalay*. He also mentions a legal suite against one Khalid Mir who was engaged in copy right violations. Abbas also discusses incidents of copy right infringements. For details see his article "Ibn-e-Safi" in *Akhbar-e-Jahan* 1980.

⁸Some of the authors who have written Imran series include Mazhar Kaleem, Safdar Shaheen, Azhar Kaleem, Ibn-e-Kaleem, MA Rahat, MA Sajid, Ayn-e-Safi and Ibne Rahat

amongst the guests. Similarly, Safi is also reported to have given informal lessons to officers of Inter-services Intelligence (ISI) in Pakistan (Nisar 2000).

Safi was most popular amongst the college students who found his non-polemical writings refreshing and entertaining. According to one of his readers, "Ibn-e-Safi was very popular amongst the students. Many times only one student could grab a copy of his novel. So, he would narrate the novel to his friends⁹".

Similarly, another reader remarks, "Unlike Naseem Hijazi who was mostly read by the youth of religious minded families, Ibn-e-Safi was read by everyone even the religious families¹⁰". Small local libraries called "*Ana Libraries*" sprang up everywhere because of limited supply of his novels which were a clear mismatch to huge demand. Ibn-e-Safi in one of his articles remarked that he was responsible for the creation of most of these libraries¹¹.

He was one of the few authors who were "acceptable" to almost all sections of society. Thus, even religious families allowed their children to read his novels. For example, children from a religious family of Faisalabad who had established a local library vividly remind, "While we had established the library for fiscal reasons, we used to read Ibn-e-Safi's novels ourselves instead of lending them much to the dismay of our father¹²". One of these children went on to become a member of the central executive committee of Jamat-e-Islami in Pakistan.

⁹Interview conducted by author from Mr. N.A Atta who was a college student in 1970s in Govt. College, Lahore. Khurram Shafiq also mentions this point in his article cited above

¹⁰Interview conducted by author from Mr. A.D. Raza who was a college student in University of Engineering and Technology, during early 1970s in Lahore

¹¹For details see Ibn-e-Safi, *Baqalam Khud*, in Alif Laila Digest 1972

¹²Interview conducted by author with Ms. Abida Masood from Faisalabad



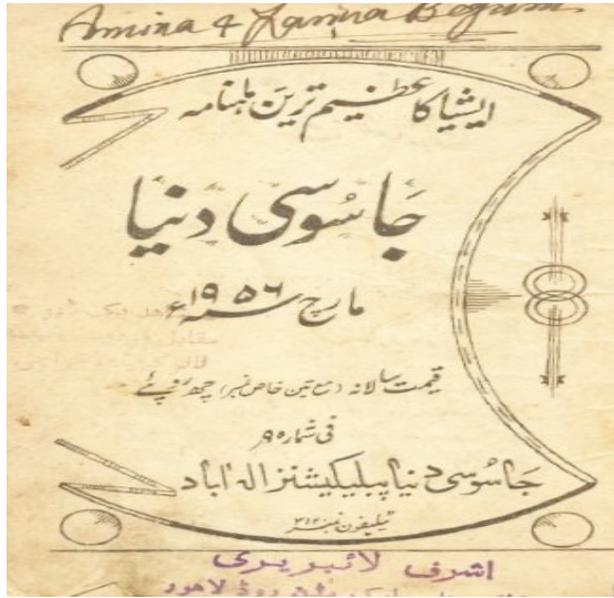
Picture showing audiences belonging to various social strata (Ibn-e-Safi standing in the picture on right at a book store)

Although one would expect that his audience was limited to the Urdu speaking population, sources indicate that it was not the case. Many columnists of his time indicate that many of his readers in Bengal, Sind and other areas of subcontinent, who could not speak Urdu, used to ask their Urdu speaking friends to narrate his novels (Abbas 1980). Ibn-e-Safi himself writes, "The biggest tribute for me is when I hear that some of my fans learn Urdu just to read my novels because they do not get the full flavor of it only by listening to it" (Safi 1972).

Although few sources are available to verify it but it appears that females also formed a sizeable portion of Safi's audience from the beginning. Thus we have the record of first novel of Imran series from 1956 owned by Amina and Zarina Begum (see picture below). In addition, as mentioned above, even women from religious societies used to read his novels. Hence, we can safely assume that his writings were popular across gender lines.

Safi's writings were, thus, an example of popular literature that was unique in its time. His readership indicates that this reflective nostalgia was not limited to a

fictional world created by Safi but that it was given a definite meaning and “reality” through his audience by being equally popular among the different binaries that came to characterize post-colonial subcontinent later on i.e. Male and Female; Pakistani and Indian: Rich and the Poor and Religious and Secular.



Cover of first novel of Imran series showing the names of its female owners

NATION, INDENTITY AND THE BINARIES OF POST-COLONIALISM:

The clearest manifestation of the post-colonial reflective nostalgia appears in Safi’s attitude towards the questions of nationalism, identity and the binaries of post-partition subcontinent.

The most significant indication of this nostalgia in Safi's writing is his refusal to name the country of origin of his heroes, Imran and Fareedi. Indeed, he has gone to extremes in order not to name their country. For example, in *Thnda Suraj* when Imran refuses to answer when asked about his country by a foreigner. When pressed, he eventually replies, “I am from a country in South East Asia”¹³.

¹³ “May janoob mushriqui Asia kay aik mulk say taluq rukhta hoo” *Thunda Suraj*, Safi p136-137

Oesterheld has rightly recognized that this country appears to be a Muslim country and the action "appears" to take place in a port capital which is similar to Karachi (Oesterheld 2009). While this observation is true, when combined with the overall milieu of this post-colonial fictional world, it provides significant insights about the nostalgia which is inherent in Ibn-e-Safi. In this world, creation of an Islamic country does not mean an implicit refusal of the broad socio-cultural heritage of India.

One is reminded here of Mufti's argument about nostalgia in post-colonial minority authors like Faiz (Mufti 2004). Mufti writes;

It is not accidental that neither the criticism nor the poetry itself is unequivocal about what the term country (watan) signifies. It might even be said that to speak of watan and qaum (nation/people) in the context of Faiz is to remain meaningfully silent about the objects toward which they point: does the hubb-ul-watani (love of country or nation, patriotism) of Faiz's poetry attach itself to any one of the postcolonial states of South Asia? Does it represent a hope for dissolution of these states? What is its stance on partition, their moment of coming into being? Does it imply a "civilizational" referent? If so, which civilization—Indic, Indo-Persian, or Islamic? Where exactly, in other words, is the poet's home?¹⁴

He concludes by saying that, "it is an enactment of the relationship of "Muslim" culture and identity to the emergence of a wider "Indian" modernity" (Mufti 2004). In our opinion, Safi's treatment of nation and country should be studied in a similar manner.

Thus, in his last novel *Baybakon ki Talash* written shortly before his death in 1980, this nostalgia is still apparent when a foreign agent asks Safdar (a comrade of Imran), "Are you a ruler of a princely state? ... I do wish to become a secretary for the prince of one of these state¹⁵" and he replies, "No, I am only secretary of

¹⁴For a detailed discussion of this see Aamir Mufti, *Towards a lyric history of India*, in *Boundary 2*, Duke University Press, 2004, p 245-274

¹⁵"Kia tum kisi desi riyasat say taluq rukhtay ho ... Mujhay kisi desi riyasat kay shahzaday ki secretary bunanay ka bohot shoq hay" *Baybakon ki talash*, Safi p296-7

the ruler of one such state". The reference to princely states in this conversation clearly indicates pre-independence Indian society and represents not only the fact that for an "external" viewer the society across borders was still the same but also that Safi wants to remind his readers (from both Pakistan and India) of a society which represents neither of the post-colonial states in South Asia but a past with which a continuity and not a break is warranted.

Reich has shown how the rhetoric of "mob at the gates" is one of the fundamental stories of society in United States which are used to unify the people (Reich 2000). Similarly, Walter and Kubink have shown that, the "foreign criminal" has functioned in a period of economic instability to consolidate German society (Walter & Kubink in Teraoka 1999). The choice of this "other" and how this "other" is defined, therefore, becomes very important for any society. The choice of foreign criminals in detective novels is, therefore, of significant symbolic value.

In case of Pakistan, most of the authors, intellectuals and politicians have made use of the foreign criminal for various purposes. Almost always, this criminal "other" has been India, which is shown to be responsible for all the ills of Pakistani society¹⁶.

Ibn-e-Safi's choice of this criminal "other" is unique in the sense that it never includes India or Hindus in this category whether explicitly or implicitly. The criminal "other" is mostly a world power conniving against third world countries¹⁷. In this fictional world, one does not need to blame Hindus (or Indians) for being the criminal "other". Rather they are included in the "I" by the refusal to accept the geographic separation as socio-cultural separation.

The uniqueness of Safi's treatment of nation becomes more apparent when compared with other detective novels authors in Pakistan. Among the authors who started writing Imran series by using Ibn-e-Safi's characters, only Mazhar Kaleem was successful in the long run. He started writing while Ibn-e-Safi was still alive in late 1960s.

¹⁶See for example, *May nay Dhaka doobtay dekha*, *Shahbaz* and *Huma yaraan Dozakh* by various Pakistani authors

¹⁷See for example *Thunda Suraj* and *Aag ka Darya*

Interestingly, Kaleem from the very beginning named the country of Imran as Pakeshia (a clear reference to Pakistan) with its major enemy being Kafristan¹⁸. It was apparent to all readers that Kafristan was an allusion to India. In another strange twist, Fareedi and Hamid who were the other major characters of Ibn-e-Safi were shown to be residents of Kafristan instead of Pakeshia. This choice was significant at many levels. Firstly, it shows that Fareedi and Hamid, who were created by Ibn-e-Safi in his novels before he migrated to Pakistan in 1952 and were shown to work quite clearly in a united India in the beginning, could not be imagined as Pakistanis by the new generation of authors. It is also interesting to note that while many authors started writing Imran series, almost no one wrote about Fareedi after Safi; again, a clear preference to the “Pakistani” Imran over “Indian” Fareedi. It was a symbolic gesture which indicates that popular culture now disowned the socio-cultural heritage of pre-partition India.

Secondly, it shows that the generation which grew up in a society after independence could not conceive of a society where the boundaries of nationalism did not exist. The national identities were entrenched deep even in popular culture after the 1970s. Finally, by naming India as Kafristan and labeling it as the main enemy of Pakeshia, popular literature was colonized by the rhetoric of "mob at the gates" and “negative nationalism”¹⁹ which could only define itself against some evil "other". The exclusion of the "other" was now complete.

The concept of nation in post-colonial subcontinent is also problematized by the popularity Safi's novels enjoyed in India. Safi was not thought of as an "Urdu writer from Pakistan". His work was labeled as "worthy output in two of Hindustan's major languages" (See picture below).

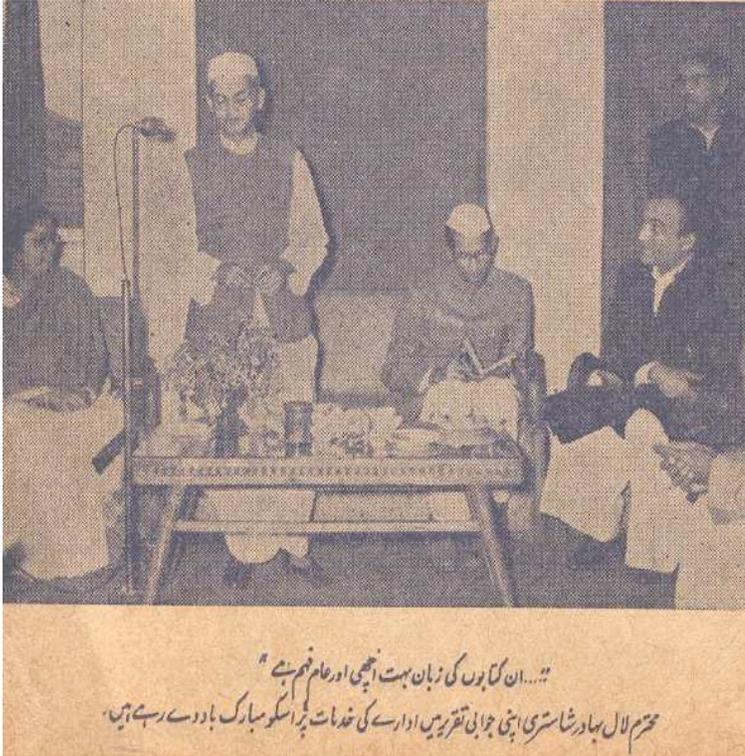
¹⁸Labelling India as Kafristan is also significant since the word “Kafir” in popular Muslim imagery stands for the infidels

¹⁹See Dorschner and Sherlock, “*The role of history textbooks in Shaping Collective Identities in India and Pakistan*” in *Teaching the violent Past; history education and reconciliation*, 2007 for a discussion of the concept of negative nationalism in Pakistan and its use in history textbooks



An Indian speaker at the inauguration ceremony of Safi's novel *Derh Matwalay* in 1963

Furthermore, from the record it is clear that his popularity did not decline in India decades after 1947. For example, in 1963-4 when he came back from his break from writing, this come back was celebrated in India as well and the future Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri, who was the chief guest at one such meeting, praised his work (see picture below). It shows that Safi was not only popular in India but this inclusive nostalgia was part of a larger discourse centered on the questions of nationalism and identity formation in South Asia.



Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri at the inauguration ceremony of *Derh Matwalay*

Thus, in Safi's writing we see a clear manifestation of the "reflective nostalgia" by which he wanted to establish a creative continuity and not a violent break with colonial India.

INCLUSIVE RELIGIOSITY WITHIN A SECULAR MILEU:

One of the most significant aspects of Ibn-e-Safi's novels is the treatment of religion in Post colonial subcontinent. As mentioned above, he never explicitly treats discloses the nationality of his major characters. Similarly, Imran and Fareedi's country is never shown to be a theocratic Islamic state. However, religion does come up in a variety of indirect ways in his novels which gives us an insight to the imagination of religion as a determinant of national and personal identity in popular culture.

As shown by Aitzaz Ahsan in his book *Indus Saga and the making of Pakistan*, Indian subcontinent is one of the few places where the local converts to Islam changed their pre-Islamic names to "Islamic" ones (Ahsan 1996). Sharma has also pointed out the uniqueness of Islamic names in subcontinent (Sharma 1998).

Names of various characters, therefore, gives a reader fair idea of their religious affiliations in such an environment. In Ibn-e-Safi's novels we find that all the major position holders in the government are Muslims e.g., Sir Sultan is the Secretary of State and Mr. Rahman is the Director General of CID. Similarly, most of the detectives are also Muslims. It is a society, therefore, in which Muslims enjoy social prestige and power.

It is important to remember, however, that religion alone is not the guarantee towards social prestige in this post-colonial world. Thus, many of the major characters of the series Juliana Fitzwater, Joseph and Roshee never convert to Islam; all that matters is their devotion to the nation which is never under question. Their religious ideology is their personal matter which is not a concern for the state.

What sets Safi apart from other novelists of his time, therefore, is the absence of any religious rhetoric for a "governmentalized Islam". By governmentalized Islam, We mean such a state where power relations related to Islam are all mediated through the state. Even where he engages in political rhetoric, we find a third world developing country fighting for its survival amidst a scheming developed world encroaching on its freedom²⁰. For example, in the novel *Ashtray House*, the organization responsible for all the chaos is named "Aath Baray" (The Big Eight); a clear reference to the G-8, which represents the developed countries of the world. We never find a Muslim country, which is being contrived against just because of its theocratic status²¹.

In some novels, other Muslim countries are directly or indirectly shown to have been engaged in actions against Imran's country. For example, in what is clearly a reference to separatist political movement in Baluchistan in late 1970s the novel *Shahbaz ka Basera* depicts a Muslim neighboring country using a separatist leader from Imran's country to spread regionalism and a separatist movement within Pakistan.

²⁰For more examples *Thanda Suraj*, *Aag ka Darya* and *Talash-e-Gumshuda* where there are frequent references to the cold war rhetoric and Imran's country is shown to be a victim of a tussle that is not their own but a spillover of the developed world rivalries which are fought out in the developing world

²¹Even in the novel *Ashtray House*, a Jewish organization is shown to be plotting for world domination by various activities in Middle East and other countries, at no place Muslims are shown to be the exclusive focus of domination. It is in marked contrast to traditional writings on Jews by Pakistani authors who generally show them to be against all Muslims. See for example, Ishtiaq Ahmed's *Begaal Mission*

In this post-colonial world, nationalism, and not religion, is the focus of human devotion. Thus, we never find either Fareedi or Ali Imran fighting for the cause of religion. For them and for everyone else in this fictional world, nation state becomes the dominant ideology. It is a significant historical break in Urdu detective novels genre because even till 1930s, we do not find nationalism as the ultimate motivator of human actions in this genre. Thus, detective novels from 1930s Punjab like *Zalim Daku* while admitting rationalist thought and other facets of modernity are silent on nationalism (Daeshal 2003). Hameed²² or Faredoun²³, are not fighting for the survival of a nation state; theirs are more mundane ideals.

Even within Ibn-e-Safi's novels, we find a gradual development of this concern with nation state. In his earlier novels, the concerns of characters are more local in nature and the conniving "external" world is only in the background. But towards the 1960s, the exclusive focus of his characters becomes saving their nation from the scheming "other"; in this case the developed world mostly²⁴.

This break is also significant because the other major popular genre of Urdu novels i.e. historical romances, also saw a surge in its popularity in this time period owing to Naseem Hijazi who wrote numerous novels glorifying the history of Islam and its accomplishments²⁵. Similarly, most other authors of literature like Asfhaq Ahmed, Banu Qudsia and Mumtaz Mufti remained more concerned with religion as compared to nation state. In such an environment, the nationalism of Ali Imran and Fareedi with its huge popularity becomes much more significant as an indicator of sentiments towards religion in popular culture.

It is important to remember, however, that a total negation of the presence of any religious undertones in this post-colonial fictional world would be missing the point completely. Religion does matter; clearly much more as compared to the detective novels of the colonial era. Thus, we do find references (mostly indirect)

²²Detective of *Zalim Daku*

²³Hero of *Bahri Tufan*

²⁴A comparison of his earlier novels like *Khofnaak Imarat* and *Larkioon ka Jazeera* with his later novels like *Bebakoon ki talaash* reveals a clear difference in this regard. In earlier novels, even if there is some external country involved, it is only referred to at the end as being responsible for the plan while in the later novels the action takes place explicitly within a scheming world where balance of power is in question

²⁵See *Dastaan-e-Mujahid*, *Muhammad bin Qasim* and *Shaheen* by Naseem Hijazi; *Mun Chulay ka Soda*, *Talim-e-Hosh-Afza* by Asfhaq Ahmed; *Raja Gidh* by Banu Qudsia; *Lubbaik* and *Alakh Nagri* by Mumtaz Mufti

to the virtues of being a good Muslim for the individual and sometimes for the nation²⁶.

However, this religion is inclusive and cognizant of its secular surroundings. No one is there to impose or judge one's religiosity. One is free to choose; and one may choose to follow religion as one understands. Thus, in *Shahbazoon ka Basera* during a conversation with another Muslim colleague, Imran first praises the virtues of being a Muslim and then asks his colleague to feel free to drink (alcohol) his heart out²⁷. Thus, in this society, being a Muslim does not mean that one gets a license to criticize others for their religiosity. The question of a governmentalized religion is, therefore, an anathema.

Various authors like Oesterheld have remarked at the significance of the fact that none of the heroes i.e., Fareedi or Imran drink alcohol, womanize or use drugs (Oesterheld 2009). It has been proposed that this concern with religious morality is an important element in post-colonial identity creation because heroes are supposed to act as role models for the readers, especially the youth.

We, however, do not agree with this point of view. While it is clear that Ibn-e-Safi is intentionally building his characters (specially his heroes) to be role models of sorts for the youth, his model is not one of religious morality but a socially conscientious morality²⁸. Imran, for example, is often shown to be unconcerned with religion. For example, in *Paharoon kay Peechay* he says, "I only talk about religion, I don't practice it". Womanizing, drinking and drug addiction have always been frowned upon in South Asia; not just among Muslims but in the society in general. Keeping in view the overall milieu of Ibn-e-Safi's fictional world and his own political interests, it is hard to label this morality as being religiously rather than being socially determined.

The position of religion and popular literature in Pakistan becomes clearer when one places the work of Ibn-e-Safi between pre-independence and post-independence detective novelists. Ibn-e-Safi's treatment of religion is similar to the authors of detective novels in the earlier 20th century i.e., religion is irrelevant to the major plot and the social milieu is one of religious toleration.

²⁶For example, in *Shahbazoon ka Basera* Imran says, "at the moment we are only 20% religious, if we were even 50% religious, no one in the world would dare to stare us in the eye"

²⁷"if you want to have drink, go ahead. I don't have any problems with that", *Tum ager peena chaho to pee suktay ho, mujhay koi aitraz na ho ga*, Safi, 31-32

²⁸"*Mazhab kay baray may may sirf bukwaas kerta hoo amal nahee kerta*", *Paharoon kay peechay*, Safi, 12

We see glimpses of the nostalgia about which I talked above in Safi's treatment of non-Muslim characters. For example, Juliana Fitzwater who is a major character of Imran series is shown to be a part of a complex love triangle (constituted by Juliana, Imran and Tanveer) but her religiosity or ethnicity is never shown to be a cause of concern for any character or their families²⁹. Similarly, Imran's servant Joseph is shown to have love interests independent of religion. One is therefore, reminded of a religiously flexible milieu of pre-independence mystery novels like *Mysteries of Amritsar* (Boyk 2009).

This nostalgia becomes clearer when Ibn-e-Safi's work is compared with detective novelists after him. Among them, Mazhar Kaleem and Ishtiaq Ahmed have clearly been the most successful. Both were clearly influenced by Safi and Kaleem actually continued writing Imran series by slightly modifying Ibn-e-Safi's characters and themes. In both these novelists, one can find the popular discourse becoming colonized by religion gradually but surely. Thus, in Kaleem's novels, Ali Imran who could see a semi-naked married woman in her bedroom in Ibn-e-Safi's novels³⁰ now turns on his heels even at the sight of such a woman³¹. Similarly, while new characters like Captain Shakeel are introduced, none of the authors writing after Ibn-e-Safi introduce a single character who is not Muslim as their "heroes".

In the same vein, in Ibn-e-Safi's novels Muslims (men and women) are commonly shown drinking alcohol publically. Importantly, alcohol is the norm and not the exception for higher social classes in this fictional world. This drinking while being frowned upon by certain characters is equally enjoyed by Muslims and non-Muslims. Similarly, in various novels Imran acknowledges that he provides six bottles of alcohol daily to his servant Joseph³².

Drinking alcohol is "silenced" in detective novels after Safi. According to Foucault, "silence and secrecy are a shelter of power, anchoring its prohibitions; but [also] ... provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance" (Foucault, 1978). Therefore, in Kaleem's novels scenes showing Muslims having alcohol are significantly minimized and limited to "bad" Muslims. This discourse reaches its culmination in Ishtiaq Ahmed where alcohol becomes an anathema for all Muslim

²⁹In *Talash-e-Gumshuda*, for example, it is shown that Imran's family (which is quite traditional) recognizes Juliana as his girl friend since a long time.

³⁰"Imran was staring at Lady Jahangri with his eyes wide open, who was not wearing anything but her sleeping suite" in *Khofnak Imarat*, Safi p27

³¹"Imran and Tanveer immediately turned their eyes away as the door opened; the lady was in a skimpy dress" *Mazhar Kaleem* 1996

³²See for example, *Thanda Suraj* and *Beybakoon ki talash*

characters (good or bad). This silence over alcohol in popular literature after Safi is, therefore, significant because it refuses to give alcohol a voice or a visibility in popular discourse and points to the gradual encroachment by religion.

MARKS OF COLONIALISM AND MODERNITY:

Cawelti remarked about the popular culture that "one cannot write a successful adventure story about a social character type that the culture cannot conceive in heroic terms; this is why we have so few adventure stories about plumbers, janitors, or street sweepers" (Cawelti 1976). This remark signifies the importance of the choice and appearance of heroes in detective novels because it gives an insight into the prototypes, which are thought of as "heroic" in a society.

Critics have also remarked that detective novels as a genre is white, and masculinist in nature (Munt 1994). Thus, even the early black detectives depicted white values and tastes (Teraoka 1999). British colonization had a huge influence on the collective psyche of Indians. Various scholars have remarked at the changes colonization brought in the popular imagination of the colonized (Said 1978; Chatterjee 1996; Vishwanathan 1989). This impact can also be felt in the novels of Ibn-e-Safi where the heroes depict predominantly Western ideals.

The impact of colonial ideals is felt in the "legitimization" of hero in Ibn-e-Safi's novels. By legitimization, we imply the skill set that is put forth as being responsible for the intellect of the hero. Both his heroes are shown to have a Western education. Both are also shown to be primarily interested in scientific education. For example, Fareedi is shown to have a private laboratory where he conducts his experiments. Similarly, Imran has a Masters and a PhD in Chemistry³³. Furthermore, his characters are often shown quoting philosophers and scholars from West like Freud and Carl Jung³⁴.

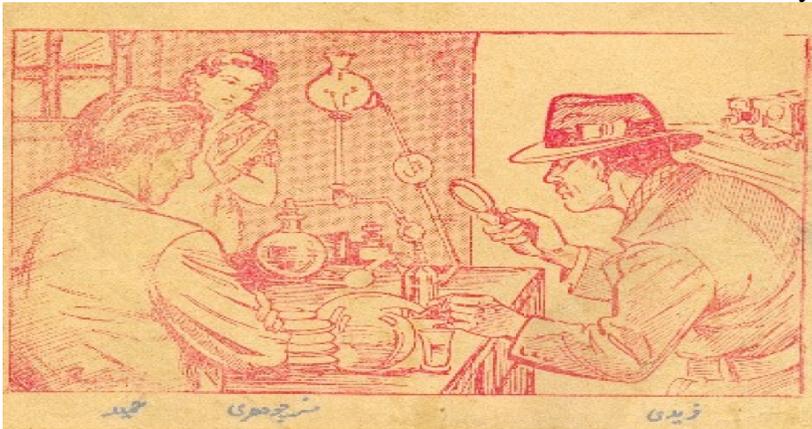
This focus on Western education is clearly a manifestation of the influences of colonialism. Western education is deemed more "authentic" for the hero. In addition, this literary background is significant because all these characters operate in a modern world. It has been shown by various authors that detective novels have been influenced heavily by modernity (Deashal 2003; Boyk 2009; Joshi 2002). Thus, there is always a simple rational explanation for everything.

³³See *Khofnak Imarat* and *Talash-e-Gumshuda* where Imran continues to refer to his Western education

³⁴See for example *Khofnak Imarat* by Ibn-e-Safi

There is a demystification of the external world in these novels. Modernity and the belief in a rational world are powered by the supremacy of the scientific discourse. That is why, it is important for the authors in a modern world to show their heroes as being equipped with the repertoire of scientific knowledge (Daeshal 2003).

The impact of colonial ideals of an intellectual are also felt when it comes to the attire of characters in post-colonial detective novels. Fareedi, Hamid and Imran all are always shown to be dressed in Western dress³⁵ and not just any Western dress but a dress "suitable" for an intellectual. Thus, the heroes are shown dressed up in a necktie, felt hat and a coat. This depiction of the hero as a Westernized individual becomes complete when we combine it with sketches from Safi's initial novels³⁶. Although, after the first few novels, the later novels do not have any sketches in them but the ones that do have the sketches are very informative.

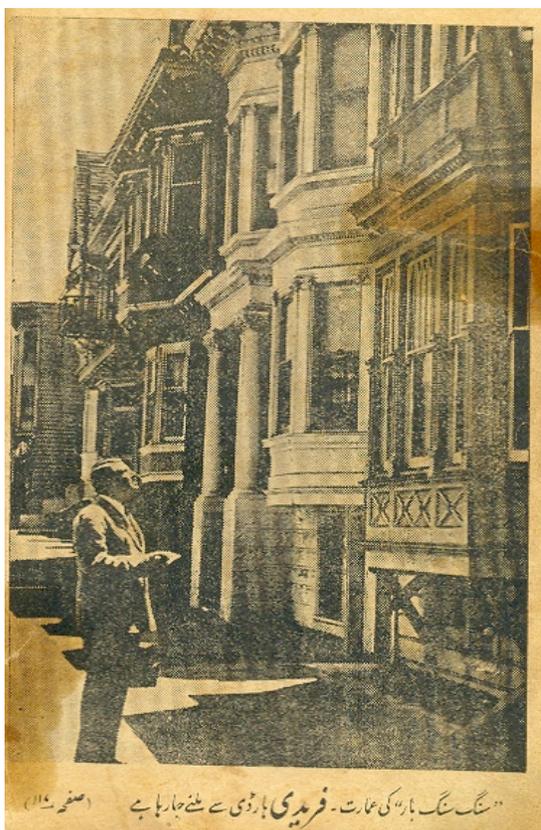


A sketch from *Khofnaak Hangaama* showing Fareedi and Hamid

These sketches show Fareedi and Imran as replicas of Western detectives like Sherlock Holmes (see picture above). The sketches are also mixed up with a few real photographs which are almost always of copies from some Western magazine showing a White male dressed immaculately who is shown to be Fareedi, Hamid or Imran (See picture below). Thus, the appearance of heroes in Safi's fictional world conforms to the ideal detective of Western fiction.

³⁵See for example, *Khofnaak Hungama* for Fareedi's description and *Khofnak Imarat* for Imran's dress

³⁶Some of the novels which have sketches of various scenes are *Khofnaak Hungama*, *Shouloon ka naach* and *Zameen kay Badal*



Pictures from *Sholoon ka Nach* and *Zameen kay Badal* showing Imran and Fareedi

Another area where the influence of colonial society is clearly visible is in the language of various characters. The hero is always multi-lingual who mostly speaks English with his colleagues. For example, in Imran series, Juliana Fitzwater and Joseph do not speak Urdu until much later. Therefore, all the discussions are supposed to take place in English. This point is so important that Ibn-e-Safi explains it in the preface of his novel *Paharoon kay Peechay* by explaining that Joseph speaks with Imran only in English and Arabic. Naturally, Joseph speaks English with other characters in the novel also.

It is also interesting to note that the higher strata of the society are shown to speak only English in their social gatherings. Thus, in one of the novels *Raat ka Shahzada* when a rich industrialist speaks to his wife in Urdu, this fact is explicitly mentioned to show that other visitors could not understand what was being discussed between the two. This discussion also alludes to the distinction of language roles in public and private spheres in the post-colonial world. Even the

heroes and the rich speak Urdu at home or when they talk to their wives but English is the norm when it comes to social gatherings³⁷. Lower strata of society are, however, shown to speak only Urdu. Thus, the linguistic milieu is deeply influenced by colonial society and its linguistic norms.

Along with representations of enlightenment rationality, we also see the influence of colonial capitalist thought in Safi's fictional world. In capitalist thought, wealth is seen as a manifestation of social realities and its inherent inequalities (Baraban 2005). It is not, therefore, morally condemned and, in itself, is not linked to evil. For example, Fareedi is shown to be an heir of a huge estate and his wealth is shown to be of enormous proportions. Indeed, the style in which his wealth is described is celebratory instead of being neutral³⁸. Wealth is, therefore, a virtue and not a vice in Safi's world.

Thus, we see that the hero of Safi's novels is similar (though not identical) to the prototypical hero of detective fiction in West where "he is a celebration of Western individualism and self-reliance, of a rugged and incorruptible masculinity, of a private and puritanical moral code of male friendship, justice, honor, and sacrifice" (Teraoka 1999).

It would be unfair to remark, however, that this world is a mere replica of the colonial ideals and thus a bland depiction of Orientalism as proposed by Said³⁹. Oesterheld has also rejected claims by some authors that Safi's heroes were copied from Western prototypes (Oesterheld 2009). Instead, we clearly see an active appropriation of colonial ideals and their combination with indigenous histories to create a new product. While the personalities of Imran and Fareedi are clearly influenced by Western ideals, it is not the complete picture. There are also quite clear imprints of local historical characters. Thus, Imran can be compared to Umro Ayyar of *Talim-e-Hoshurba* and Fareedi with Ameer Hamza of *Dastaan-e-Ameer Hamza*. Safi himself admitted of being influenced deeply by *Talim-e-*

³⁷See for example, *Raat ka Shahzada*

³⁸See for example, *Zehreela Admi*, *Jungle ki Aag* and *Bechara* for the description of Fareedi's wealth

³⁹Edward Said and many other scholars are of the view that Orientalism was a system of knowledge which was "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient" and by which "Western Power over the Oriental was given the status of scientific truth" (Said 1976). According to these scholars not only did the British "conquer" India but because of Orientalism, this conquest was never over because even the nationalism project was thought out within this knowledge called Orientalism.

Hoshurba and gave it as one of the reasons because of which he started writing (Safi 1972).

Similarly, the family structure and its power relations with the heroes are traditional. Thus, Imran happily sits at the feet of his mother and receives blows by her shoes when he spends one night outside home without informing her⁴⁰. We, thus have an interesting mixture of colonial and local ideals in the personalities of Safi's characters.

Thus, one can argue that Safi's heroes and novels while being hugely influenced by colonization and modernity are not carbon copies of Western ideals but aim at a creative continuity with their colonial past by actively appropriating selective ideas from West and East.

Nostalgia in Gendered Nationalism

Mufti and Shohat have theorized the inscription of debates of feminism and sexuality within notion of race, nationalism and post-colonial thought (Mufti 2004). The treatment of gender in Safi's work is a much more complex and nuanced issue which needs a more detailed discussion elsewhere. However, the element of nostalgia mentioned above is also apparent from the depiction of gender in his work and is discussed here briefly.

Anne McClintock has shown that ideals of nationalism have sprung from the masculinized memory and hope. Excluded from direct action, women are subsumed in the body politic as its symbolic boundary: they are represented as symbols of nation yet denied any direct relation to national agency (McClintock 2004). In Safi's work, women depict a similar pattern. They represent a nostalgia for traditions of "homeland" e.g. while male characters frequently don western attire, women are always shown in local "native" clothing⁴¹. They are idealized in very traditional roles e.g. as a mother, sister, a widow taking care of relatives of his husband. At the same time their lack of agency is obvious by their absence from any commanding position in society. This point becomes even more important when the choice of race by author for powerful women is considered: they are almost always foreigner, for example Julia, Roshi, Shahida, Kelly Graham, Adele de Savant, Reena Williams and Theresa⁴². They abrogate the

⁴⁰See *Khofnak Imarat* for details

⁴¹ For details see *Khofnak imarat*, *Oratfarosh ka Qatil* and *Tijori ka Raz*

⁴²Julia is Swiss, Roshi Anglo-burmese, Shahida Spanish, Adele de Savant French, Theresa Bohemian, and Kelly Graham and Reena William are of unspecifie European origin. For details of

native gender hierarchy because they are not part of the society. . This compounding of race with gender further problematizes the issue as the undercutting of their roles carries a double entendre: firstly it is resonant of defeat of colonized power and in this way becomes of part of the third world rhetoric that is prevalent throughout Safi's oeuvre and is characteristic of post-colonial literature. Secondly it acknowledges the (relative) freedom available to women in western civilization and by invoking nationalist ideals and memories, re-asserts and epitomizes traditional gender role definitions for "native" women.

Shohat has asserted the patriarchal basis of colonial regime and the male dominant nature of native and ethnic movements (Shohat 2004). That is why, female characters, although present in Safi's initial novels, always conformed to the conservative masculine nature⁴³ of society and detective fiction genre⁴⁴. However a significant change took place in mid 1950's and 1960's when Safi introduced his array of powerful female characters. For example, the Swiss-born secret services agent, Juliana Fitzwater⁴⁵ and the famous queens of Zero land (Theresa⁴⁶, Nanota; and Reema⁴⁷)

The reflective nostalgia as it relates to gender is apparent in the treatment of these new female characters. This nostalgia is cognizant of the patriarchal past but wishes to come to terms with the post-modern ideals of female liberalism and the changing social milieu. It represents a society where the unease and anxiety with a powerful feminine figure although reduced is still apparent.

This anxiety manifests itself through two ways: Firstly, by undercutting the role of feminine through romance. This is a different kind of subversion to the authority of gender. On one side this echoes the intellect/emotion binary, in which the femme fatale blinded by her love for hero is lead to destruction while hero uses his supreme intellect to keep his emotions in check thus reasserting the

these characters see *Alfansay, Bhayanak Admi, Ashtray House, Heeray ki Kan, Bhayanak Jazeera* and *Doosra Pathar*.

⁴³For more detailed discussion see Munt, S. (1994). *Murder by the book?: Feminism and the crime novel*. London: Routledge.

⁴⁴For example, Characters of Sarooj, see Safi, Ibn-e-. (1952). *Khofnak jungle*. Karachi: Asrar publications and Shahnaz, Safi, Ibn-e-. (1952). *Orat farorsh ka qatil*. Karachi: Asrar publications.

⁴⁵See Safi, Ibn-e-. (1956). *Dhuain ki Tehreer*. Karachi: Asrar publications.

⁴⁶A former Bohemian spy adept in disguise See Safi, Ibn-e-. (1957). *Alfansay*. Karachi: Asrar publications.

⁴⁷See Safi, Ibn-e-. (1958). *Chandni ka Dhuwan*. Karachi: Israr publications. Another interesting point to note here is that rhetoric of third world country struggling against foreign powers appeared in Ibn-e- Safi with introduction of Zeroland. This happens simultaneously with involvement of Pakistan in CETO and SETO in mid 1950's. This makes clear the popular feeling about Pakistan's involvement in Cold War politics.

supremacy of what would be considered a male-role value. On the other it symbolizes exploitable continuum between, on the one hand, sex and knowledge, and, on the other, knowledge and power (Cooper 1989).

The most important example of this is the character of Theresa, the bumble bee of Bohemia. She is the most powerful of three queens of Zero land and a recurring character in *Imran Series*. She meets Imran and falls in love with him.⁴⁸ In *Piyasa Samundar*, when Imran managed to kill four scientists of Zeroland. Theresa lamented,

Because of you the precious lives of those men, who were the most important capital of my country, were lost in vain, I am powerless before my heart...otherwise...you would see the result of your actions. You are still in the water; you haven't surfaced. I can destroy you within a blink of an eye....Go...I never want to see you again....Go...I see your face and I feel helpless..I cannot raise a hand to (hurt) you (Safi 1957).⁴⁹

Character of Juliana Fitzwater leads a different insight into this matter. She is second in command to X2, the main protagonist of Secret Service. She is shown to be an intelligent, capable, professional woman. Although portrayed as a powerful character, her “power” is made more “acceptable” by either curtailing her feminism⁵⁰ or by showing her school girl romance with X-2. She is, thus, discredited as a professionally reliable detective. In *Char Lakeerain* and *Larkion ka Jazeera* this is a recurring theme and X2 admonishes her several times for her “foolishness” (Safi 1956). This subversion of feminine through romance is used to sanction and re-assert the national hierarchy of gender (McClintock 2004) Interesting point here is that while other *femme fatales* of Ibn-e- Safi, Reema and Nanota were captured and “put in their place” by Faridi⁵¹, Theresa always defied capture. Eventually Imran and Theresa developed a kind of love-hate relationship where Imran tried to tame her but at the same time, helped her eliminate rebellious factors in her organization while in return she often saved his life⁵². This is resonant of reflective nostalgia typical of Safi’s work. It shows a truce of sorts with the new power structure that awards *some* agency to women yet the

⁴⁸Safi, Ibn-e-, *Alfansay*, Lahore: Asrar Publications, 1957.

⁴⁹Safi, Ibn-e-, *Darindo ki Basti*, Lahore: Asrar Publications, 1957.

⁵⁰It is shown that she is not considered a woman by her team members. As Safdar explains to another character □, “We do not consider her a woman. She is just like us”

⁵¹See *Chandni ka dhuwan* and *Teesri Nagan* for Details

⁵² Safi, Ibn-e-, *Sugar Bank*, Lahore: Asrar Publications, 1968.and Safi, Ibn-e-, *Uqabon ka Hamlay*, Lahore: Asrar Publications, 1957.

unease about this change persists through undercutting of feminine and assertion of traditional gender hierarchy and role definitions.

This introduction of these powerful⁵³ feminine characters is coincident with significant changes in the society in which Safi was living. During this era, women started to play an important role in government and politics in Pakistan. The social anxiety surrounding the appearance of powerful women is epitomized by the social discourse about the credentials of Ms. Fatima Jinnah, sister of founder of Pakistan and a respected social activist, to become President of Pakistan⁵⁴.

The essence of the discussion is that partition as an event not only problematizes the binaries of identity formation, colonialism and modernism but also the binaries of gender. Social milieu of society was unsettling for pre-partition patriarchal ideals. Loss of wealth and male members during migration, for some aristocrat families, meant that female members have to fend for themselves by earning. This in turn translated into increase in their agency and their ability to challenge the existing boundaries of sex roles. This upheaval of former power structure of society and its turn from an agrarian based aristocratic one with a prominent elite to a more industrial society with a rising working and middle class and capitalist ethic translates in elements of nostalgia in Ibn-e-Safi: Its society is sharply aware of its male dominant past but at the same time trying to coming to terms with its present social milieu in which women have much more agency and involvement.

Conclusion: Popular discourse and cultural continuity

We have seen how Ibn-e-Safi's writings manifest a reflective nostalgia in which there was a yearning for a creative continuity with the history. This approach towards history questioned and even challenged the popular imaginations of the concepts of nationalism, religion and colonialism in post-colonial subcontinent. Safi's work when placed alongside his contemporary Hijazi, who was writing Islamic historical romances at this time, indicates a popular discourse in Pakistan by which a society is struggling to carve out an identity for itself. We have, however, seen that this popular discourse was gradually colonized by Islamic influences in such a way that the dissenting voices in popular culture were minimized. The exclusive binaries of nationalism and religion eventually triumphed.

⁵³ Here and further in this discussion I use the word "powerful" as a substitute of having agency to act. Note that this can be positive as well as negative.

⁵⁴ The anxiety associated with a woman in position of power was such that the issue of choosing between a beloved social figure that promised democracy and a military dictator that abrogated the constitution became a choice between a man and a woman instead.

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- *Khofnak Jungle*
- *Uqabo kay Hamlay*
- *Khatarnak Dhalaan*
- *Jangle may Mungle*
- *Talash-e-Gumshuda*
- *Thunda Suraj*
- *Raigum Bala*
- *Chandni ka Dhuwan*
- *Alfansay*
- *Larkyon ka Jazeera*
- *Pathar ka Khoon*
- *Beybakon ki Talash*
- *Paharon kay peechay*
- *Ashtray House*
- *Bechara*
- *Char Lakerain*
- *Zehreela Aadmi*
- *Khaufnaak Hangaama*
- *Larkion ka Jazeera*
- *Teesri Nagan*
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7. Pictures courtesy www.ibnesafi.info