



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Classical Exponency And Thematic Diversification Of Mir Tariq Mir – A Wizard Of Urdu Poetry

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ABSTRACT

The language known as Urdu is intimately bound up with the history of the Indian subcontinent — its courts, its cultures, its social transformations, and its upheavals. Correspondingly, the literary tradition in Urdu has a rich and complex history in India. From its beginnings as a colloquial speech in the Muslim-ruled courts of the Deccan and North India to its rise as a major literary medium of poetry and prose, and from the 19th- and 20th-century modern developments to its present day status, Urdu literature in India reflects the social, cultural and political currents of its times. Using this as a backdrop, this essay traces the development of Urdu literature in India, its major periods, genres, figures and issues. To understand Urdu literature, one must begin with the language itself. The evolution of what we call Urdu (and before that Hindavi, Zaban-e-Dehli, Rekhta, Dakhani) occurred over many centuries in the Indian subcontinent. According to the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language, Urdu developed in the post-12th-century period as a “linguistic modus vivendi” under the influence of incoming Muslim rule — Persian, Arabic and Turkic contacts merged with local Apabhramśa dialects and emerging northern Indo-Aryan speech forms. For instance, the earliest extant work in the Dakhani variety (southern Urdu) is the verse narrative Kadam Rao Padam Rao (c. 15th century) by Nizami. The label “Urdu” itself, meaning “camp” (from Turkish) or “army-camp language”, came to be used later; but the literary tradition grew through various regional varieties (Dakhani in the Deccan, Rekhta in the north, etc.). Thus, the foundation was laid: by the 14th-15th centuries there were religious prose treatises and poetic works in the new speech; but secular literary writing in Urdu proper would flourish later.. Mir’s poetry primarily revolves around the theme of love—both earthly and spiritual. His ghazals capture the emotional depth of unfulfilled love, longing, and separation, expressed in a language that is delicate yet powerful. Unlike many poets who adorned their verses with complex imagery, Mir’s style is marked by simplicity and sincerity. He focused on the inner emotional world of the lover, portraying the heart’s pain with remarkable precision. His couplets often evoke universal human emotions, transcending time and culture.

Key terms: Classical Poetry, Diversified themes, Literary genres, Challenge, Scope, Optimism, Universalism, Immortality.

The Deccani

One of the first major centres of Urdu (or proto-Urdu) literature was the Deccan region under sultanates such as the Qutb Shahi and Adil Shahi. Poets writing in the Dakkhani variant included Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (d.1626) and others such as Wajhi, Gawwasi, Nusrati and Ibn e Nishati. For example, Wali Aurangabadi (d.1707) is often credited with bringing the north-Indian court's attention to Urdu poetry.

In this period, the Dakkhani literature was patterned on Persian models (qasida, ghazal, masnavi) but infused with local idiom and imagery. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, poetry in Urdu flourished from the 16th century onward, but real prose literature developed only by the 19th century.

This Deccan phase is important because it demonstrates that Urdu literature did not emerge solely in Delhi or Lucknow, but in multiple regional strands; the southern courtly environment gave space to creative experimentation, often in a mixed speech that combined Persian, Arabic and vernacular elements.

The Delhi-Lucknow Classical Period (18th-19th centuries)

The 18th and 19th centuries are often regarded as the classical period of Urdu poetry — in north India, especially around Delhi and Lucknow (Awadh). According to the National Council, “the 18th and 19th centuries are considered to be the golden period of classical Urdu poetry when the language reached its highest degree of sophistication and excellence.” Some of the major poets of this period include: Mir Taqi Mir, Sauda, Khwaja Mir Dard, Ghalib

Themes of poetry: The dominant poetic forms were the ghazal (lyric couplets), the qasida (ode), the masnavi (narrative poem) and elegy/marsiya (especially in Lucknow for Shia elegiac tradition) (e.g., Anis and Dabir). The concentration of cultural life in Lucknow under the Nawabs of Awadh, and in Delhi under the later Mughal court, gave space to poets and literary gatherings.

The refinement of the Urdu language: high Persian/Arabic vocabulary combined with local idiom, subtle metaphors, and a high degree of polish and inter-textuality. A stable tradition of poetic patronage and manuscript circulation enabled poets to refine craft and build reputations.

The Vitality of Mirza Ghalib

Ghalib stands as a transitional figure: he is often described as “the last of the classical” and also “the first of the moderns” in Urdu poetry. His work reflects the turbulence of his time (decline of Mughal power, British ascendancy) and the richness of Urdu poetic tradition.

The Period of Transition:

While poetry had flourished, prose in Urdu developed later. As the Britannica article notes, “poetry written in Urdu flourished from the 16th century, but no real prose literature developed until the 19th century.”

The Growth of Essay:

The 19th century, especially under British colonial influence, saw the growth of new genres: the novel, short story, drama, journalistic writing, essays and translations. The language expanded beyond the elite poetic

salons to a wider readership. Works like *Fasana-e-Azad* (serialized in the newspaper *Avadh Akhbar*) by Ratan Nath Sarshar are regarded as landmark Urdu novels/fiction.

Societal Influences:

The colonial encounter: English education, printing press, newspapers, periodicals, and modern publishing brought new audiences and new demands.

The rise of Urdu as a language of wider communication: In North India, Urdu assumed importance as a lingua franca among educated, urban populations and began to be used in courts, civil service and print culture.

Social change: new themes of identity, reform, nationalism, colonial critique began to appear in Urdu literature.

Unity in Diversity:

While Delhi-Lucknow retained primacy, other regions such as Punjab, Bombay, Hyderabad, Bengal also began to produce Urdu writers, leading to a broader canvas for the language. According to Britannica, in the 20th century “writers from the Punjab began to contribute more than those from the traditional Urdu areas of Delhi and Lucknow.”

Nationalistic movements and Reformation:

The early 20th century saw a flowering of Urdu literature in India with new themes, genres and voices reflecting the changing times — nationalism, social reform, modernism, gender issues, communalism, etc. Urdu proved to be a major literary language in the freedom struggle and in articulating Muslim identity in British India. Poets used the ghazal, the nazm (modern poem) and prose to express sentiment for the homeland, freedom, social justice. For example, poets such as Altaf Hussain Hali raised voices for freedom and motherland. “Urdu, the language born in the streets of Delhi, became the language of love in the 19th century and the language of rebellion in the 20th and 21st centuries.” Literary magazines, periodicals, and the print culture expanded, enabling writers to reach wider readerships beyond courtly salons.

Modernistic experimentation:

Modern Urdu writers began to question classical forms, experiment with free verse (nazm), prose fiction, short stories, drama, and engage with urban life, social issues, and psychology. This marked the move from the classical to the modern.

Feministic Expressions:

The early 20th century also saw women writing in Urdu and experimenting with various genres. One early figure is Mah Laqa Bai (1768-1824) in the Deccan, the first female poet to have a published diwan of Urdu ghazals. Later in the 20th century, more women writers would gain prominence and bring new themes of gender, identity, diaspora.

Lingua Franca of varied regions:

The Urdu literary world was no longer confined to Delhi-Lucknow; cities such as Hyderabad, Lucknow, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Lahore (then part of undivided India) all had vibrant Urdu cultures. The variety of dialects, registers (Rekhta, Khariboli, Dakkhani) and regional idioms enriched the literature.

The politics of Language:

With the creation of Pakistan, many Urdu writers migrated to Pakistan, while in India those who stayed faced changing circumstances: Urdu lost some of its former elite patronage, had to adapt to new socio-political realities and competed with Hindi in North India. Nevertheless, India remained a significant centre of Urdu literature. According to Britannica: “Urdu literature... is the work of Muslim writers who take their themes from the life of the Indian subcontinent.”

Genre Diversification:

The late 20th century in India saw prolific output in Urdu fiction: short stories, novels, theatre, film scripts and criticism. Urdu writers addressed themes of partition, identity crisis, modern urban life, communal violence, migration, memory, diaspora. The language matured beyond poetic salons into mass reading.

Reaching the public and academicians:

Urdu literary journals flourished (though under financial stress) and significant literary festivals and institutions emerged. For example, the annual literary festival Jashn-e-Rekhta (held in Delhi) celebrates Urdu language and literature, with poetry recitations, discussions, calligraphy, and more.

Challenges:

The decline of Urdu's official status in many Indian states, and competition from Hindi and English. Reduced patronage and readership. Reduced circulation of Urdu print in comparison to previous decades. A generational gap: younger readers often prefer English or Hindi media; Urdu print culture suffers accordingly. Institutional and policy constraints: In many Indian states, Urdu has lost ground in education and official domains, reducing the flow of new readers and sustaining of literary culture. Language politics: Urdu's association with Muslim identity in India sometimes leads to politicized perceptions; this can affect institutional support and public perception. Preservation of manuscripts and print heritage: Many older Urdu manuscripts, periodicals and print archives are vulnerable; their preservation and digitisation are urgent. Script and digital issues: Urdu uses the Perso-Arabic script (Nastaliq); digitising and publishing Urdu in appropriately formatted forms remains a challenge. (See digitalisation efforts noting difficulties with OCR and online platforms).

Poetic genres:

Poetry remains the heart of Urdu literature. The ghazal (with its couplets, themes of love, mysticism) dominated classical poetry. Nazm (a more flexible poetic form) became prominent in modern times. The marsiya (elegy) particularly thrived in Lucknow among the Shia community (Anis, Dabir). Rekhti — a form of Urdu poetry that uses a female voice, often by male poets, to address women or women's world. Modern scholarship has revived attention to it.

Prose: Novel, Short Story, Drama, Essays

As noted earlier, significant prose works began in the 19th century. The novel as genre matured in the early 20th century. Short stories (afsana) became a particularly powerful medium in Urdu in India, exploring social realism, internal psychology, partition, communalism, modern life. Plays and scripts for radio and film also utilized Urdu literary sensibilities.

Though much of Urdu's literary history centres on Delhi and Lucknow, it is important to note the regional diversity. Hyderabad / Deccan: The Dakkhani tradition, as mentioned, produced early Urdu works; Hyderabad later remained a major Urdu cultural centre. Bombay / Mumbai: The city attracted Urdu writers, film script-writers, journalists; the Bombay Urdu literary culture is noteworthy. Punjab, Bengal, Bihar, Assam: Writers from these regions contributed in Urdu; different dialects, registers, readerships emerged. As Britannica notes, in the 20th century, writers from Punjab began to play a bigger role. South India: Urdu in the south (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra) also had publishing and literary activity, though often smaller than northern centres. Thus, the literary field of Urdu in India is not monolithic but richly plural.

Opportunities and revival

Digital archiving and online platforms: Projects to digitise Urdu manuscripts and books are underway, making classic works accessible globally. Literary festivals and cultural events: The Jashn-e-Rekhta festival in Delhi, for instance, brings Urdu poetry, prose, music, calligraphy and culture into the public square. Cross-lingual and translation efforts: Urdu literature is increasingly being translated into Hindi, English and other languages, expanding readership beyond native Urdu speakers. Younger writers, women writers, regional writers, diaspora writers are contributing fresh perspectives and diversifying the literary field. Cultural syncretism: Urdu in India is the product of Persian-Arabic, Turkic and local Indo-Aryan linguistic and cultural streams; its literature reflects this syncretism and the plural heritage of the subcontinent. Literary richness: The sheer poetic tradition — ghazal, nazm, marsiya — and the prose tradition — novel, short story, drama — in Urdu is vast and significant.

Historical witness: Urdu literature has documented and responded to major historical changes — decline of empires, colonialism, nationalism, partition, modernity, migration — thus serving as a window into India's social history.

Cross-linguistic influence: Urdu has influenced and been influenced by other regional literatures (Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Bengali) and has helped shape the 'Hindustani' literary domain; in turn, its aesthetics have influenced film, music, popular culture.

Contemporary relevance: In a multilingual India, Urdu literature offers a medium for minority voices, for urban and minority literatures, for global-diaspora literatures.

The Scope:

The history of Urdu literature in India is a long, rich, multi-layered story: from its early beginnings in the courts of the Deccan and the camps of Delhi, to its classical flourishing in the 18th-19th centuries in Lucknow and Delhi, through its transition into modernity with prose, short stories and novels, and into the challenges and opportunities of the postcolonial and contemporary eras.

The Classical Exponent of Urdu Poetry : Mir Tariq Mir

Mir Taqi Mir (1723–1810) is popularly known as Khuda-e –Sukhan, the God of Poetry. His works are the representative milestones in the history of Urdu classical period. His Ghazals often show deep philosophical and cultural scenario of his contemporary society. Various themes like, love, pain of bereavement, impermanence of human life and changing times are quietly occupied his fabric of poetry. His identity is the identity of the collective consciousness of the entire society of his times. He was born in Agra and well educated in Persian and Arabic languages. He moved to Delhi to find a shelter in the court of Mughals but at that there was going political turmoil in Delhi and his works reflects the burden of

uncertainty in life. Existentialism is the philosophy of life which reiterates that existence precedes essence, and poet too is not immune to this paradox of life. Mir's poetry primarily revolves around the theme of love—both earthly and spiritual. His ghazals capture the emotional depth of unfulfilled love, longing, and separation, expressed in a language that is delicate yet powerful. Unlike many poets who adorned their verses with complex imagery, Mir's style is marked by simplicity and sincerity. He focused on the inner emotional world of the lover, portraying the heart's pain with remarkable precision. His couplets often evoke universal human emotions, transcending time and culture.

His poetry is the poetry of universal love universal religion, he opposes those who want construct walls across the religions.

"Mir ke deen-o-mazhab ko ab poochhte kya ho un ne to,

kashka khaincha dair mein baitha kab ka tark Islam kiya."

(Why ask about Mir's faith and religion now?

He has long drawn the sacred mark on his forehead and renounced Islam by sitting in the temple.)

*"Patta patta, boota boota, haal hamaara jaane hai,
Jaane na jaane gul hi na jaane, baagh to saara jaane hai."*

The sorrow and pain of separation is evident in above stanza, the true love is always forgiving, there is no sense of punishing for transgression, if change has to happen it happens through love and care.

*"Ishq ek Mir bhaari pathar hai,
Kab yeh tujh se utha jaayega."*

The true essence of love is bearing the brunt of life. It is heavy but we should lift it. Through love only the door of immortality opens but not through the door of revenge, it only opens the door of death.

*"Dard minnat-kash-e-davaa na hua,
Main na achha hua, bura na hua."*

Pain is liberating force, it comes with a wonderful sight of optimism, bearing pain leads to the development of patience. Pain shows us what we are actually, it strengthens soul. Author says that pain brings us near to the reality of existence.

*"Aah ko chahiye ik umr asar hone tak,
Kaun jeeta hai teri zulf ke sar hone tak."*

Patience is the way for perfection and to enjoy the beauty with in one has to turn inside with great patience, it redirects us think about the meditation. Meditation leads us to explore the inner voice which reverberating within us.

“Ab to ghabra ke kehte hain ke mar jaayenge,
Mar ke bhi chain na paaya to kidhar jaayenge.”

Death is not the end of everything. Life is present beyond death, it is a cycle of birth and death which is the procedure of entire creation. Poet says that many think that death brings peace and end of everything but that is not possible, at every moment of life, there is a presence of death, death itself is present in life, every out going breath is death and incoming breath is life.

“Woh jo hum mein tum mein qarar tha,
Tumhe yaad ho ke na yaad ho.”

Every creature of this existence craves of peace and happy life, we human in search of peace and happiness we destroy our lives and destroy other's too. We have become conquerors and invaders destroying what we don't know. We think that whatever we know is the only truth but never try to know the reality of nature. Books and ideologies can't give real socution can't give real peace.

“Har ek baat pe kehte ho tum ke tu kya hai,
Tumhi kaho ke yeh andaaz-e-guftagu kya hai”.

The truth can't be realized in foolish questions, but in understanding. We humans have questions but never try to find the answers. We think our religion, our culture, our elders or religious heads know everything, but it is utter foolishness to think so.

“Mir ka deen-o-mazhab hai ishq,
Aur kuchh bhi nahin, yeh hi sab kuchh hai”.

Mire says that whatever is our of the sight of 'love' that is nothing but utter darkness and ignorance. If we don't have love in heart we are not human beings but worse than animals.

CONCLUSION

Mir Taqi Mir stands as a towering figure in Urdu literature whose poetry remains timeless. His ghazals not only capture the pain and beauty of human emotion but also serve as a mirror reflecting the social and cultural turbulence of his age. Through his profound expression and emotional depth, Mir gave Urdu poetry its soul, laying the foundation for generations of poets to come, including Ghalib. His legacy endures as the truest voice of classical Urdu poetry.

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