

# Subcontinent - Punjab partition novel: 'Those, however, were the marginally happier days...'

Review of Abdullah Hussein's "The Weary Generations"

Friday 27 April 2018, by [NAEEM Raza](#) (Date first published: 27 April 2018).

It is rare for a translated work to survive the legacy and celebration of the original work. Yet in the case of the twentieth century Indian subcontinent, such is the case with a celebrated novel, namely Abdullah Hussein's *Udas Naslein*, published in 1963. The novel, perhaps for reasons of enhancing the international reputation of the author, was self-translated into English, in 1999. The English version, translated by the writer himself, thirty-three years later can and should be treated as an independent work of fiction in English; and if indeed this treatment is successful then *The Weary Generations* arguably becomes the most significant Pakistani work in English in the immediate post-partition period since the publication of Zulfikar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan* in 1967.

The novel maybe read on three levels: as an account of events revolving around the partition of India in 1947; as a description of the politics and sociology of undivided Punjab, with its attendant system of feudalism and patriarchy; and a love story which begins, thrives and eventually falls with the fate of British colonialism in India itself.

## Book Presentation

On the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pakistan's independence and Hussein's 86<sup>th</sup> birthday (both incidentally falling on August 14), the talk not only revisits Hussein's iconic translation, which has unjustifiably received far less critical attention than its Urdu variant, but researches the backstory that went into its writing, as well as the poetics and politics of subcontinental history, the Punjabi milieu and the plight of the women protagonists rampant throughout the *The Weary Generations*. It will also be interspersed with readings from the work itself.

3 PM, Friday, 27 April 2017, IVS Gallery

Copies of the novel will be available for sale and signing

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## P.S.

Raza Naeem is a Pakistani social scientist, activist, book critic, and an award-winning translator and dramatic reader currently engaged as Senior Instructor in History and Global Perspectives at the Senior School in the Beaconhouse School Systems in Lahore. He has been trained in Political Economy from the University of Leeds in UK, and in Middle Eastern History and Anthropology from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, USA. He began his journey of breaking stereotypes during his undergraduate studies, when he joined the Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party, and helped to mobilize workers and peasants in Lahore and Karachi over more than a decade. He has engaged with the Middle East since the last sixteen years and widely travelled in and reported from Egypt, Yemen and Turkey over the last decade. He is presently working on translations of the selected work

of Sibte Hasan, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi and Abdullah Hussein and contributes regularly to Newslite, The News on Sunday and The Friday Times. He has curated and moderated a first-ever edition of Banned Books Week in Pakistan in Lahore in September 2014; a second edition in September 2015; a third edition in 2016; and a fourth edition in September 2017 in collaboration with Olomopolo. His translation and dramatic reading work has been showcased internationally at the Lucknow and Delhi Literature Festivals in India (both in 2014), and most recently at the Winnipeg International Writers Festival(Canada, September 2017), one of Canada's largest literary festivals; and locally at many TEDx (most recently at TEDxLUMS, Lahore, April 2018) and Model United Nations (most recently at LUMUN, Lahore, December 2017) events at some of Pakistan's most prestigious universities and schools. He is the recipient of a prestigious2013-2014 Charles Wallace Trust Fellowship in the UK, awarded for his translation and interpretive work on banned Pakistani writer Saadat Hasan Manto's essays, and most recently a runner-up/finalist for the inaugural 2017 Jawad Memorial Prize for Urdu-English Translation (India), awarded for his translation of 'Bahaar' (Spring), a short story written by Abdullah Hussein. He is currently the President of the Progressive Writers Association (Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musannifeen) in Lahore. His most recent work is an introduction to the reissued edition (HarperCollins India, 2016) of Abdullah Hussein's classic partition novel The Weary Generations (Udas Naslein).

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## Footnotes

[1] <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?page=lettres>