



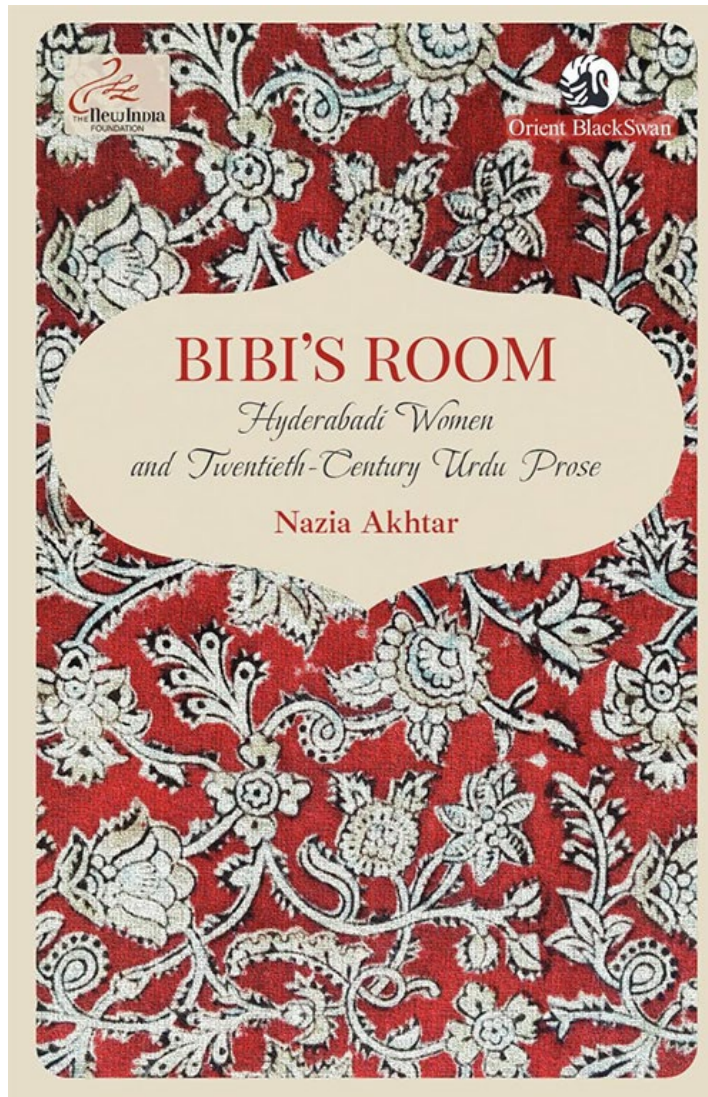
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Urdu writer Nazia Akhtar's 'Bibi's Room' book records all that one needs to know about Urdu literature

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Urdu writer Nazia Akhtar's 'Bibi's Room' book.

By Shreya Veronica

Express News Service

HYDERABAD: Urdu has been the heart of Hyderabad since time immemorial. While the number of writers, readers and enthusiasts has slowly come down, the city has a golden few of them doing their every bit to conserve and cherish Urdu literature. Of them, Urdu writer Nazia Akhtar recently penned a book *Bibi's Room* in which she put together all that one needs to know about Urdu literature.

Nazia spent years researching about the vast topic and its people to remember all the contributions of women Urdu writers. Sharing what got her to work on such a book, she says, "There is a distinct gap when it comes to Urdu writing from Hyderabad in general, and also in particular, in the case of women writers. So, my argument in the book is that there is a triple marginalisation happening — including gender neglect and neglect of South Indian Urdu literature. Most of the research scholarship, translation, publishing and teaching of this work is concentrated on North India and North Indian writers.

This is ironic because it is in the Deccan, that the Urdu literature blossomed, it was in the Deccan that the ordinary, as well as the kings and sultans, saw Urdu as a potent vehicle for ideas and expression. Urdu as a literary language developed here but you do not see that reflected in Urdu literary historiography which has, to a great extent, ignored Hyderabad and any other South Indian states. The history of the society and culture of Princely State (Hyderabad) has been neglected.

These things prompted me to write this book." Nazia did a fair share of research about Hyderabad earlier too, including topics like transfer of power. It was while working on that she began to hear about Hyderabad woman writers who wrote in Urdu. "People kept giving me texts and I kept buying texts to realise that there is a 150-year-old tradition that no one discussed about. The book itself profiles three women writers who wrote short stories, novels, and literary essays.

The book has one representative story of each writer and these have been translated along with a detailed biography," she tells CE. Putting this book together was full of challenges. "In their times these women were celebrities — they reward work on radio or travelled across India. Very few people know about it — I went to book stores and asked shopkeepers about some of these writers and nobody had a clue. For example, Sajida was a towering personality of her time but her work was poorly preserved in archives. That was a challenge, plus, no one has done a full-scale study of this so for a while, I did not know what I was looking for.

I had to look and meet people asking for more information —it was more like a jigsaw puzzle. My job was made a lot easier by the willingness of Hyderabadis to speak about what they know. It got easier as time went on and I had to teach myself Urdu in this process, which took me a couple of years to get a hang of," she says of the book that she focussed on from 2017 to 2020. Currently, Nazia is working on more translations which she hopes will be complete by next year, while also researching the context of women writers and the transfer of power.