

## The neglected realm of popular writing: Ibne Safi's novels

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You may wonder why of all writers I have chosen to deal with Ibne Safi, an author who is not discussed in any book on Urdu fiction - apart from a short mention in Salīm Akhtar's *Urdū adab kī mukhtaṣartarīn tārikh*, (Lāhaur, 1993) – a book which in itself is not taken seriously among historians of Urdu literature: “Although the established critics refused to call Ibne Safi a writer, it is difficult to ignore the author of about 250 popular novels. His special blend of thriller and fantasy proved very successful in creating suspense, and this made him extremely popular among readers of all ages and all tastes.” (p. 267)<sup>1</sup> The sheer amount of publications which I found reflected in booklists made me curious to find out more about this writer. Fortunately now, thanks to the internet, I was able to locate some sites which provide a good deal of information on his life and works and even some readers' responses. Cheers to the truly democratic character of the internet which created a space for those who would otherwise not be considered worth mentioning!

This situation is not peculiar to Urdu literature, however. In the West, too, popular literature started to become the subject of academic research as late as the end of the 1950s - beginning of the 1960s. As far as India is concerned, recent studies reveal that right from the start popular fiction constituted the bulk of literature issued from public libraries – as was to be expected after all! Among the favourites of Indian readers of English were the novels by W.M. Reynolds (an author who is almost forgotten and hardly ever mentioned in histories of English literature), Marie Corelli and F. Marion Crawford. Reynolds was the most widely translated author. With twelve novels (*Mysteries of London* etc.) he tops the list of those English works by a single author translated into at least three Indian languages, and he stands out for the fact that all his works were translated into at least four Indian languages. (Joshi: 310) Joshi explains the popularity of his books with the appeal of melodrama (use the English word!) to Indian readers. In addition to this, one may also account for his success by the special mixture of thriller/crime fiction and the fantastic or grotesque, but on the other hand the triumph of a sharp mind and logic reasoning which was at the heart of many Indian and Perso-Arabic stories about crimes and the detection of criminals. Francesca Orsini has hinted at such “indigenous genealogies” in her study of early detective novels in Hindi (Orsini: 436). In such traditional stories we find the same ingredients which make modern thrillers so attractive and which are described by Joshi for English melodrama of the nineteenth century:

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<sup>1</sup> All English translations from Urdu sources are mine.

In its cleaner-than-life modalities, the economy of persecution and justice resonated even among the most unsophisticated Indian readers. (...) The melodramatic mode provided the pleasure and satisfaction of experiencing wholeness, victory, and retribution for all the wrongs that were, in reality or in imagination, visited upon the community of readers. Melodrama enabled its readers to conceive of and give shape to the 'enemy'. It articulated action and projected results, however fictional. (Joshi: 316-317)

We may maintain here that these features continue to hold attraction for readerships all over the world. The success of crime fiction is ample proof of this fact.

It cannot surprise us, then, that crime stories were prominent among the first publications in various Indian languages when commercial publishing started on a big scale in the 1880s. Many of them were adaptations of English novels, often through the medium of Bengali. Monthly fiction magazines, which started in Urdu and Hindi in the 1890s, were a viable vehicle for the publication of popular reading matter (see Orsini: 443-444). Around the turn of the century, the writing and publishing of detective stories and novels in Hindi and Urdu had really taken off and in many cases was a great commercial success. Any student of the history of Urdu literature knows that Mirzā Hādī Rusvā of *Umrā' o Jān* Adā fame also wrote a remarkable number of thrillers to earn his living.

Reading habits have not changed so much over time. Love stories, thrillers and historical or pseudo-historical novels in cheap paperback editions are bestsellers everywhere. In Urdu we have the corresponding genres of *mu'āṣarātī* or *rūmānī nāval* (novel of manners or romance), *jāsūsī nāval* (thriller) and *islāmī/tārīkhī nāval* (Islamic/historical novel) which were established in the late nineteenth century and continue to this day. Let us now turn to one of the most prominent writers of the *jāsūsī nāval* in Urdu, Ibne Safī.

There is a long gap of about fifty years between Rusvā and Ibne Safī. I have not done any study on that period, therefore I won't be able to comment on changes in the genre within that time span, but will immediately jump to the time after the Second World War. I must also add that this short essay is based on the study of a few selected stories which were available to me and that I can in no way attempt to present a comprehensive analysis of Ibne Safī's writing.

Ibne Safī was born as Asrār Aḥmad in Nara near Allahabad on July 26, 1928. It is reported that he started to read the *Ṭilism-i hośrubā* at the age of eight. His first story was published in a weekly when he was in the seventh grade, and one year later he also started to write poetry. He received his secondary education in Allahabad. During the independence movement he was close to the progressive writers and wrote poetry against social evils. In 1947 he enrolled in Allahabad University, but due to the partition riots he did not continue his studies there. He

later obtained a BA degree from Agra University. Together with two other writers he founded a publishing house (Nakhat Publications) in 1948. In this period, he began to experiment with different literary genres, including short story, humour and satire.

In 1949 Ibne Safi started to teach at secondary schools in Allahabad and continued to study part time to finish his education. His first detective story *Diler mujrim* (The brave criminal) was published in 1952 as the first part of the newly started series *Jāsūsī duniyā* (The world of crime). In 1952 he also migrated to Pakistan with his mother and sister. They joined his father in Karachi who had migrated there in 1947. In Karachi Ibne Safi founded Asrār Publications and started to publish *Jāsūsī duniyā* simultaneously from India and Pakistan. In 1953 he married the daughter of a Deputy Superintendent of Police (!). In 1955 he added the new °Imrān series to his *Jāsūsī duniyā*. After a lapse of three years during which he suffered from schizophrenia he staged a comeback with his bestseller *Derh matvāle* in 1963. He continued writing until his death on 26 July, 1980.

Ibne Safi's books are available both in India and Pakistan. Apart from the earlier single issues in small format at cheap prices, we now have modern editions, usually of two to three stories, with colourful covers on reasonably good paper and in state-of-the art computer-composed type-setting. Publication dates are not given in the Pakistani editions from Lahore, Asrār Publications, neither in the old nore in the new imprints, but some of the author's short prefaces at least give the date of completion of the stories. The recent Indian editions from Delhi give only the year of the new imprint. In some sources, the total number of his stories/novels is given as about 250.

Of late, voices have been raised to give more attention to an author of such outstanding, lasting popularity. Khalid Javed published a detailed study of the author and especially of the main characters of his stories in *Urdū adab* (Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqī Urdū, 2006). Earlier, Khurram Shafique had remarked in an article in *Dawn*:

For the generations that grew up in the decades between 1950s and the 1980s, Ibne 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. No matter how we rate his literary merit, he surely deserves some credit in a country where people who read are virtually negligible in number. For such was the magic of his words that some who could not read themselves would get others to read the novels aloud. And it is also on record that many non-Urdu readers (including east Pakistanis) learnt Urdu just in order to be able to read Ibne Safi. (Shafique: 7)

Shafique then goes on to praise the high quality of Ibne Safi's Urdu prose, the diversity of his settings, characters and themes, and the moral dimension of his writing. He explains the neglect toward his works which has been exhibited by Urdu literary criticism and in histories of Urdu literature by the fact that his writing is directly connected to another popular narrative form of Urdu – the *dāstān*. In his opinion Urdu critics failed to appreciate Ibne Safi because they were guided by western standards. “Ibne Safi became virtually inconceivable for the modern Urdu critics because the two belonged to different traditions. Ibne Safi was in a way reconstructing the genre of dastan for modern times.” (Shafique: 8) We have many reasons to doubt the veracity of this statement, but there certainly is some truth in it as the further discussion will show. Detective stories were not taken seriously by many literary critics in the West as well. This was part of the general contempt for all forms of popular culture – despite Gramsci and his followers. On the other hand, Shafique is very right to demand to judge Urdu works in their own right, without always trying to compare them to some western model. Attesting Ibne Safi a healthy self-confidence in this matter Shafique reports him as countering the question why he didn't write like Erle Stanley Gardner: “Do you have the gal to go and ask Stanley Gardner why he doesn't write the way Ibne Safi does?” (Shafique: 8) In view of his overwhelming success Ibne Safi was fully entitled to such a reaction. His self-assuredness was based not only of the sale of his books but also on the numerous enthusiastic letters he received from his readers. Nevertheless one may question Shafique's assumption that there were no foreign influences on him at all. After all, influences from foreign writers are nothing to be ashamed of and are a common feature in literatures the world over. In the mid-twentieth century Reynolds had become obsolete, but other, more modern models had appeared, foremost that of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Ibne Safi himself admitted to his admiration for Sherlock Holmes and for the books of E.S. Gardner and Rider Haggard (Ahmed: 1-2). We find tongue-in-cheek references to Sherlock Holmes in the narratives, for instance in *Laraztī āg*, where °Imrān poses as a harmless simpleton who has read all Sherlock Holmes novels, or when Farīdī says to Ḥamīd in *Jāpān ka fatna*: “Now you will probably make fun of me again by comparing me with Sherlock Holmes!” (*Ab tum gāliban Śarlāk Homz vālī phabtī duhrā'oge.*”, 54) In one scene, Farīdī is also shown to play the violin. There are references to Gardner and to Haggard's novel *She* as well.

Despite these allusions to western writers and novels one never feels that the author has adopted a foreign template. He rather playfully alludes to different literary inspirations and openly exhibits such references. Thus, he also refers to the *dāstān* tradition in some of his prefaces

and in the stories themselves. Ḥamīd once compares himself to the Khojī of *Fasāna-i Āzād* fame, and when he takes over the role of the narrator in *Ṭhandī āg*, he complains about the exaggerated description of his follies in the stories and then comments, that after all some embellishment (*zeb-i dāstān*) is necessary to make a story interesting. Hence, while we may take the master detective Farīdī and his sometimes hapless and reckless, often inapt assistant Ḥamīd to be an Urdu incarnation of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, we may as well relate them to Amīr Hamza and ʿAmrū ʿAyyār or Āzād and Khojī. I think there are elements of all these and many more characters in the main protagonists of *Jāsūsī duniyā*, but the end result is something unique and different from all literary predecessors. Ibne Safī's stories may have replaced traditional *dāstāns* as far as popularity is concerned, but they represent a new genre – the modern detective story/novel which had started to take roots in Urdu by the end of the nineteenth century. Let us now look how this indigenous version of the detective story works.

The first stories of *Jāsūsī duniyā* were quite short and simple in structure, focussed on a straightforward crime such as murder or robbery. There were two, three twist and turns, and the case was solved. In the course of time, the stories became longer and more elaborate, several additional characters started to appear around the central pair of Farīdī and Ḥamīd. The action moved from small places in North India to a Muslim country - sometimes akin to the northern part of Pakistan, sometimes resembling Karachi, but without the mention of exact geographical names. While the crimes in the first stories had private backgrounds (jealousy, greed, a fight over an inheritance etc.), in the later parts we enter the field of politics, both internal and international, drug trafficking, military espionage, super power rivalries, third world struggles against super power domination etc. Together with this expansion in the field of action and in themes, the range of technical devices and installations also widens. From the rather simple trappings of dead wells, subterranean chambers, double walls and secret doors we are transported to a world of submarines, miraculous aircrafts, flying robots, chemical warfare, artificial rains and thunderstorms. Foreign secret services, rings of smugglers, international criminal gangs and terrorist organisations enter the stage. The gadgets and installations depicted in some stories remind us of science fiction literature and films and of James Bond films - which doesn't mean that Ibne Safī borrowed them from such sources. His early stories were published simultaneously with the first James Bond stories (1952), well before the first James Bond film was released in 1962. But we can be sure that Ibne Safī took notice of what went on in international crime fiction, fantasy and science fiction, and he probably was inspired by such material, as is every author who reads what others write. Moreover his

texts prove that he also very closely followed international political developments. Thus, we find in his writing an interesting web of intertextuality with references to foreign writers as well as Urdu literature and between his own stories which are often interrelated, even when they are labelled as “complete (*mukammal*) novels”. Khurram Shafique’s statement that western detective fiction was not a source of inspiration for Ibne Safi (Shafique: 8) misses the point. Ibne Safi absorbed information and took inspiration from wherever it suited him, and this in no way belittles his achievement. Shafique himself admitted:

... for a very large number of his readers, Ibne Safi’s novels were windows into such concepts of human thought as Freudian psychology, Jung; Confucius, Nietzsche, anthropology, art, Picasso, debate against racism, political economy, international affairs, modern technology.. in fact, the novels were handbooks of “all you need to know but nobody taught you at school”. (Shafique: 7)

That may be a bit exaggerated, but indeed Ibne Safi’s stories were abreast of current affairs and state of the art technology. For their readers they thus opened windows into modernity and into a world beyond their own circumstances. We will return to this point later.

The main protagonists Farīdī, Ḥamīd and °Alī °Imrān outwardly in many ways resemble English models. They always wear “suit boot” and felt hats, smoke cigars or pipes, drive luxury cars and move around in posh hotels, clubs and bars. They are not private detectives, but although officially employed by intelligence or investigation agencies, they mostly operate on their own, only if need arises supported by the police or secrete service, but not commanded by anybody. Both are men of independent means, brave, good-looking and physically strong. °Alī °Imrān even holds a MSc and PhD from Oxford. Like Sherlock Holmes, Farīdī maintains a regular laboratory where he conducts secret experiments. But that is as far as the resemblance goes. The main heroes Farīdī and °Alī °Imrān are chaste and virtuous, don’t drink and don’t fool around with women. Farīdī is a rather straightforward character, whereas °Imrān is extremely complex, plays out multiple personalities, is a master of cunning, masquerade and disguise and always succeeds in fooling others by playing the fool<sup>2</sup>. His foolish behaviour provides many comic scenes. In contrast to the infallible Farīdī he sometimes gets trapped in dangerous situations by his own fault, but always manages to escape. In *Jāsūsī dunyā* comic relief is provided by Ḥamīd or other, minor characters, such as the Pathan Qāsim, who take the role of the fool and jester which is a central element of Indian aesthetics – just think of Sanskrit drama, folk theatre and Bollywood films!

Apart from minor details such as household equipment etc., the setting of the stories is not realistic. It is a fairy tale world very much like that of *Ṭilism-i hośrubā*, but with all the ingre-

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of °Imrān, see Javed, pp. 227-229.

dients of a modern lifestyle: big, exquisitely furnished mansions, expensive cars, posh night-clubs, journeys by car, train, plane and helicopter. Instead of beautiful *parīs* we encounter Eurasian and European girls and women of breath-taking beauty. And it goes without saying that all heroes are a combination of Prince Charming, James Bond (minus the affairs with women) and Superman. The charms and miracles of the *dāstān* are replaced by no less wondrous technical accomplishments. It goes without saying that in the eternal battle between good and evil, evil is always overcome in the end, for the time being at least.

With a combination of these ingredients and an outstanding talent as a storyteller, Ibne Safi produced literature which was well suited for entertainment. He often stressed that he never attempted to do more than this. When readers pressed him that he should also try to contribute to “serious literature” (*adab*) he replied:

My friend, let me just serve Urdu! (Although I may also commit mistakes in grammar and syntax)! You can't imagine how happy I am when a Sindhi or Bengali friend writes me a letter saying that he is learning Urdu to be able to read my books, because he can no longer rely on others to read them out to him. You tell me, should I better serve literature or continue to serve Urdu? As far as my own understanding is concerned, I serve both literature and society. (...) Some people start to discuss my place in literature. All I have to say in this context is that in your eyes I certainly have a place otherwise you wouldn't think about that. (Preface to *Tīsrī nāgin*, p. 95)

He then went on to state that he would have to sacrifice the *jāsūs* if he wanted to acquire a place in *adab*, which he would not be ready to do! He would prefer to continue his fight against evil. He wouldn't allow evil and hopelessness to raise their head, hence:

Please don't worry about my place (*maqām vaqām*), let me stay where I am! If you like my stories, and if you feel that I provide quality entertainment to your exhausted mind, then that will be enough for me, and I hope that you will be equally satisfied. (ibid., p. 96)

Ibne Safi wrote prefaces for almost all stories. They provide a lot of information and insight into his attitude toward his writing and his readers. Moreover, they are a mine of information with regard to readers' responses and expectations. I doubt that readers' responses are so well documented for many other authors and books. Even if we take the author's words with a pinch of salt, they are still a valuable source. What can we conclude on the prefaces' evidence?

Readers no doubt turned to Ibne Safi's novels for entertainment, as a pastime, to escape a dull pedestrian existence, to experience thrill and comic relief. In the stories they found their dreams of a life in luxury, of beautiful women (or men), big cars, power and control over others, the triumph of good over evil etc. fulfilled. They could feel the thrill of dangerous situations, experience the forbidden (allusions to excesses in drugs and alcohol, illicit sexual rela-

tions) which, however, was always connected with the bad guys and never depicted in graphic detail. They could identify with the brave and virtuous heroes. But the story obviously didn't end here. As is well researched for popular literature in other languages, even in pulp fiction readers look for more than mere escape. They some way or other relate the stories to their own lives and values. They don't want to be taught a lesson explicitly, but they derive value judgements and ideals from the way the action unfolds and the characters are developed.

In Ibne Safi's writing, certain ideals take shape in this indirect manner. The society in which the protagonists move is basically secular and rather cosmopolitan. It has to be pointed out, however, that Muslims are always depicted at the top of the hierarchy. Hindus and Sikhs are shown in subordinate positions in the police force and intelligence bureau. The heroes are devout Muslims, but in a completely unobtrusive way. When asked by a reader about his persuasions, Ibne Safi wrote that he would like to see Allah's dictatorship in society, and to arrive there everybody would have to turn inward and reform himself/herself. One should read the Quran and act upon its injunctions, but avoid religious disputations and not even think of using force. (Preface to *Pāgalō kī Anjuman*, pp. 3-4) With his fine sense of humour, he enumerated outer signs of un-Muslim-ness which some people wouldn't like to forsake:

- Some people wouldn't like to grow a beard.
- Some ladies are not ready to return to *purdah*.
- Somebody who has acquired riches, even if by illegitimate means, wouldn't like to give them up.
- Some youngsters are not ready to change their dress.
- Some people who have escaped from the confines of *mahram* and *nā mahram* are not ready to go back to them. (ibid., p. 3)

His comment is that these are superficialities which are not of much importance. First one should mend one's actions, do good deeds, alter one's inner self. So, in a very good-humoured way, he nevertheless makes his point. But such an outspoken agenda can be found only in his prefaces, not in the stories proper. There may be one or two exceptions in his later stories, but then he was duly rebuked by a reader not to start preaching.

Which ideals do the stories project? Many of the later stories deal with plots to undermine the country's sovereignty and to intervene in its internal affairs. 'Imrān and his companions do their best to foil any such attempts and to fight for self reliance and stability. In one of his prefaces Ibne Safi stressed the need for economic self-reliance as the first prerequisite for the country's independence and sovereignty. (*Dahśatnāk*, p. 146) There is quite a lot of Third World rhetoric also in those stories which deal with superpower hegemony.



As far as internal factors are concerned, he also depicted social injustice and feudal high-handedness as a root cause of crime and terrorism. At the end of the novel *Dahśatnāk* when the offender whose entire family had been wiped out by a cruel landlord loses his senses and returns to the mental state of a six-year old child, ʿImrān is deeply moved and says:

My heart cries for this man. If only his thirst for revenge instead of a personal vendetta had taken the form of participating in a movement against the system of repression and despotism! (p. 144)

There also is much talk of corruption in the higher circles of society and a general feeling of distrust toward all authorities. In some episodes the high-ups in business and in the administration are shown to be hand-in-gloves with criminals. Here Ibne Safi seems to reflect a widespread attitude of Pakistani citizens vis-à-vis their rulers which is based on their experiences. All in all, however, we don't find the type of social realism that has become characteristic of contemporary crime fiction in some western languages. The world of Ibne Safi's stories remains a dream world of larger than life characters and fantastic happenings.

However fantastic the settings may be, in the end reason prevails. Ibne Safi does not make any concessions to the supernatural or magic. Every mystery is solved in a rational way, by scientific methods, modern investigative techniques and psychological reasoning. At the end of the day, order is (at least temporarily) restored, evil is defeated, passions are controlled. (That ʿImrān and his network remain shrouded in mysteries only adds to the attraction.)

This is the normative rational outlook of modernity and of reformed Islam from which the adventures and phantasmagoria of the stories allow us to escape but to which we return in the end. On a different terrain, Ibne Safi like Nazir Ahmad in the nineteenth century demonstrates how successful action in the world can be combined with being a good Muslim at heart and in moral conduct. Hence, Ibne Safi's books were safe reading for the family, interesting enough for the youngsters to hold appeal for them but posing no danger to their morality.

The books of course could not have been successful had they not been written in an interesting, lucid, readable style with a lot of humour and irony, very enjoyable dialogues, wordplay, and an apt use of idioms. Ibne Safi's language has often been praised. Khaled Ahmed writes: "His humour and his style are native to him. He wrote a wonderfully elegant but fluid Urdu, somewhat like Manto, totally organic to what he wanted to describe. (Ahmed: 3) And in Afzal Ahmad's opinion his main appeal lay in "a chaste, even classical but simple and uncomplicated Urdu, plus a fascinating tempo of unfolding events" (Ahmad: 3), and he quotes a young friend who describes Ibne Safi's Urdu as "beautiful, easy flowing and witty" (Ahmad: 4). His language usage really stands out as of exceptionally high standard.

With the tremendous output he churned out every year Ibne Safi could not be expected to avoid repetition. Some of his stories also appear too muddled, and sometimes the action starts

to drag. But as a whole there can be no doubt that he was among the best story tellers, if not **the** best storyteller in his genre.

Finally let me draw some conclusions regarding the social and ideological aspects of his writing.

Studies on popular fiction in the West stress the manipulative aspect of popular fiction. In the words of Jerry Palmer:

“Popular fiction manipulates its audience. But manipulation presupposes the existence of wish-fulfilment fantasies on the part of those it manipulates, a desire for something other” (Palmer: 110) which has often been called the ‘utopian moment’ of popular literature. These concepts are based on F. Jameson who formulated that popular literature manages desire, for it “strategically arouses fantasy content within careful symbolic containment structures which defuse it, gratifying intolerable, unrealisable, properly imperishable desires only to the degree to which they can be laid to rest’ (Jameson: 141).

Can we judge Ibne Safi’s writing according to these postulates? Going by the number of sales of his books and by the serialized, predictable, formula-based genre features of his stories he certainly belongs to the realm of mass literature. However, two things will have to be kept in mind: 1. Ibne Safi was his own publisher, hence he wrote in accordance with the demand from his readers, but also his own concepts and perceptions, without the mediating influence of any publisher or marketing strategist. 2. The stories are written in a sophisticated literary Urdu. The target audience needs to be well-educated in Urdu, and to understand the numerous allusions in the texts would also need a fairly broad literary background. The modern Indian hardcover editions of his books are priced between 52 and 75 Rs. and the Pakistani paperback editions between 75 and 100 Rs. We could thus safely assume that the readership would be middle-class Urdu speakers, male as well as female. So what made these writings so popular, in addition to the obvious elements of fantasy, suspense and action? Does Ibne Safi relate to ‘hidden’ or not so hidden wishes of his readers? Does he also somehow voice their concerns?

Let’s have a look at some examples:

Ibne Safi in many ways boosts the self-confidence of Muslims. His Muslim heroes are not only clever and brave, they are also extremely virtuous. The only vice which they may commit when need arises is lying. They try to solve all cases with as little bloodshed as necessary. They never touch alcohol and, with the exception of the playful, but innocent dalliance of Hamīdī, their interest in women is confined to getting their cooperation in solving a case. Non-Muslim characters, and particularly Christians, are shown to be involved in all kinds of

bad habits, such as drinking, taking drugs, illicit sexual relations etc., which weaken them not only morally, but also physically, and thus make them intellectually and physically inferior to their virtuous Muslim counterparts. Hence the books can be regarded as safe and edifying reading for Muslim youths and for the whole family. At the same time the stories satisfy the voyeurism of the readers by showing how the bad guys or Westerners in general indulge in any number of despicable acts.

As in many classical English detective stories, the police are not to be relied upon. Many police officers are either corrupt or incompetent or both. In many stories they are shown to be hand in gloves with criminal gangs, black marketers and corrupt government officials. This general distrust of the police and the authorities corresponds well with real-life experiences of the readers who can then feel gratified when the culprits are unmasked and eliminated.

A recurrent feature of the later stories is the race of the super powers to gain control over Third World countries to make them subservient to their interests. These attempts, especially on the part of the US and Great Britain, are shown in a negative light. Although they are often depicted in a fantastic manner which is very close to science fiction, we can easily detect the historical background of the Cold War and the US designs in a country like Pakistan. These passages in the books bear a distinct anti-imperialist stamp and voice a kind of Third World patriotism which seeks to resist all such attempts at super power control. It is interesting that the powers that be in the country where the action takes place (which is never named but lies somewhere in the mountains) are not to be trusted at all as they tend to submit all too easily to super power pressure or temptations. Here, too, we have a point which certainly served to make the books popular with many readers and which would still, or even more so, be seen as relevant by contemporary readers.

I would argue that in Ibne Safi the sheer delight of story telling and the experience of commercial success were to some degree combined with the critical impetus of his youth, exemplified by his engagement in the Progressive Writers' Association. He usually abstained from ideological statements and explicit social criticism, but his critical stance is perhaps most pronounced with regard to the corrupt state and its connivance with the designs of Super Powers which are felt to run counter to the genuine interests of the people.

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### 3. Internet Resources:

<http://www.ibnesafi.com>

<http://www.ibnesafi.info>

<http://www.compast.com/ibnesafi/>