The Aesthetics of the Fragment


Modernism has been retheorized as a global phenomenon, through phrases such as "geomodernism" or "planetary modernism". This article considers Urdu literary modernism, as it developed in South Asia in the 1930s and 1940s. It offers new readings of canonical texts by writers connected to the All-India Progressive Writers' Association: “Khol Do” by Saadat Hasan Manto, “Subah-e Azadi” by Faiz Ahmad Faiz and “Lajwanti” by Rajinder Singh Bedi. Against Urdu scholarship which views modernism (*jadidiyat*) as a postcolonial phenomenon, the article argues that in their critique of modernity, reinvention of tradition, approach to myth and interest in visuality these texts demonstrate that progressivism should be understood as part of the history of Urdu literary modernism in South Asia. Manto, Faiz and Bedi deployed an aesthetics of the fragment not only to critique Partition and its protocols, but also to investigate Partition as a crisis of nation, modernity and humanity.