

Zakia R. Khwaja

Nastaliq

Cat-lazy afternoons, my lead-smudged
fingers trace nastaliq script—a fusion of curling,
arcing Persian and geometric Kufic Arabic.

Straight-backed *alef*, big-bellied *chey*, the *qāf*
vocalized deep in the uvula—harsh, unlike the softer
kāf; I give a turban to *tey*, a *bindiya* to *zwād*,

thinking of calligraphy in a *Sādeqain*, *Faiz ghazals*
sung by *Noor Jehan*, rhyming riddles and my grandfather
reading Urdu poetry, quizzing me on poets' names.

Absorbed in eternal lines of nastaliq, in trance
like mystic Sufis, I decipher God and Love and
Self until the sweaty, blunted pencil slips.