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Search for Medium

Razi Abedi



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(COLLECTED ESSAYS)

Written & Thoroughly Revised
by
Razi Abedi



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Due care has been taken about the exactitude of the information provided in the book, sanctification of the religion and national interests. The publisher, please, be informed if something is found against religion and national interests, to be rectified without any delay, with due regard.
The readers are requested to give their opinions & suggestions for the improvement of this book.

❧ PREFACE ❧



Razi Abedi's collection of essays is distinguished by the range of concerns from Third World Literature to post modernism, and Mehmud Derwish to Jean Annouilh and Manto. The essays have drawn on progressive writing in various genres, and the sheer range and number of texts referred to is most impressive. Prof. Abedi belongs to a now dwindling band of liberal humanists inspired by literature committed to the ideals of social justice and freedom from a wide range of 'dehuymnisation', whether of a class society, racism or colonisation. In his commentaries on the resistance poetry of the politically marginalized communities, he is courageous enough and unfashionable enough to focus on ideas of revolution whose scope is secular and all the more profoundly moral, in a culture where struggle and resistance are being dangerously subverted by obscurantism and bigotry. He has chosen to write in the English language which in itself is significant—as it repudiates the notion that employing the language is perpetuating the slavery of colonisation and asserts instead the creative possibilities of its use in the process of making it one's own.

Prof. Abedi has shown how literature can be one of the highest 'forms' of politics, and the language of politics and political ideas can be as eloquent, and evocative as that of literary discourse. Given the range of subjects covered, divergent readings and opinions are inevitable; inevitable too are some problems of in-depth analysis which may suffer at

the hands of generalisations and assertions which need greater substantiation. However, the essays promote with the critical and literary texts in questions. Hence the broad drift of the essays is towards an opening rather than a force closing of discussion and this is a positive and heartening fact in the dark times we are a witness to.

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❧ FOREWORD ❧



These essays published in various national and international magazines and also on the internet cover almost half a century of hopes and despair through which the world has passed in these most turbulent years of the history of man.

Time has run so fast in this period that even the most devouring brains have failed to keep pace with it. Analyses, criticisms and forecasts changed almost everyday.

However, despite all kinds of oppressions and apprehensions, this period also witnessed the rise of liberation movements all over the globe. It is true that utopias are never realized but this is also a fact that man's struggle to overcome the difficulties of existence never ceases.

The following essays reflect man's determination to fight against all odds in which literature too has in no way lagged behind the freedom fighter. They reiterate the faith that life is invincible.

Prof. Razi Abedi, as a teacher and a writer, has acquired high respect in the academic and literary circles. He has extensively written on topics relevant to life and literature ranging from educational problems and literary criticism to socio-cultural concerns of the people of Pakistan.

SEARCH FOR MEDIUM is an impressive and truly cross-disciplinary study that tackles some of the most troublesome issues deeply ingrained in national psyche.

It is an interesting and inspiring collection of essays which I particularly recommend to those who did not personally go through the difficult times, though others may find in it something to satisfy their nostalgia.

Dr. Mubarak Ali



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❧ Chapter 01 ❧

Third World Literature^{*}



I

The artist portrays beauty, and when beauty disappears, it becomes a duty for him to struggle for it. It is in this sense that politics finds its way into his aesthetic pursuits. "Third World" literature does become political in one way or another, and in the sensibility of the renowned intellectuals of this world, the emotional and the material concerns have so merged into each other that they can hardly ignore the hazards of life in the passion of love. The literature of the advanced world itself is largely influenced by politics. The intellectuals of Europe and America have been protesting against all kinds of social and administrative oppressions. Politics has been dominating all spheres of human activity due to ever developing sophistication in governmental machinery and in the media. Even strictly personal and social affairs are also falling within the orbit of law. Western literature is mostly a literature of protest, or it has assumed the role of "peeling the labels". But the third world literature goes beyond this and studies the consciousness subjected to the changing realities of life and while defining its nature tries to lead this consciousness to a better grasp of reality.

As life is directly subjected to circumstances, in the same way literature too cannot remain unaffected by them. Third world literature is an interesting and comprehensive document of the circumstances prevailing in this world and their psychological and aesthetic implications, and at the same time reflects the subjective and emotional attitudes of its intellectuals. The study of literature is also

* Though the identity of the second world has been blurred with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the third world still stands intact, with all its problems and prospects, and its struggle has not lost its relevance to the reality as it exists now.

as important as the study of politics, economics and ideologies for gaining a better awareness of life.

Arnold quoted Sainte Beuve's remarks on Napoleon's exclamation, "Where is there not charlatanism":

Yes, in politics in the art of governing mankind that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance.

(Study of Poetry)

Third World is a vast and varied world, but one thing which is common to it is its struggle against colonialism. The literatures of different regions of the Third World reflect the stages which this struggle has entered. Rather, a deeper study may also reveal the stages through which the struggle has passed.

The media account of the state of affairs in these countries is open to question. But their literature gives an undeniable picture of reality, since, on the one hand, literature never serves expediency and, on the other hand, it goes directly into the heart of the reader and so has a hold on it. Study of literature with reference to circumstances may become controversial, but an attempt to see the situation as reflected in literature is simpler and authentic, since literature reflects the impressions which the circumstances create on the mind. However, it is not easy to get access to such literature since its tone is rebellious and the media cannot afford the risk of publishing such literature. Still, whatever meagre literature finds its way into print sufficiently reflects the reaction of the poets and the writers. Then, most of such literature is not literature in the strict sense, since in the struggle against oppression and violence a lot is said which, though mostly true, falls rather into the category of journalism or propaganda. Even then good literature is not lacking either. These writers have not only sought new subjects and laboured at their analyses; they have also adopted new techniques and experimented with the old ones. They have worked hard to make their medium effective. Surrealism and symbolism have also been tried, and special attention has been paid to folk art and literature. Prose-poem has also been further developed.

II

Different regions of the Third World are struggling for independence at different levels. These stages indicate their

progressively maturing awareness of the situation. Therefore, according to its psychological and artistic maturity, this world can be divided into five distinct sections.

1. In those countries where political and social revolution has been stabilised to some extent, the problems they confront are more cosmic, emotional and idealistic than political or related to class conflict. More than the known they now seek the unknown and are engaged in unveiling the secrets of being. But in their search they are led by confidence rather than fear or doubt and they never lose their hold on truth or gloss over their disappointments.
2. In those countries where the revolution is still in an experimental stage, literature is also passing through a transitory phase. Here the war is being fought both externally as well as internally, fighting the enemy while at the same time struggling with the mental and emotional chaos. Their dreams are fascinating, but the dangers lurking around force them out of their reveries. Standing at the cross-roads, sometimes they get confused too and their determination weakens. Some even desert their ideals and a few develop nihilistic tendencies while others carry on the struggle single-handed. However, they suffer no doubts about their goals though they may have reservations about strategy and tactics.
3. Then there are the countries where the opposing forces have been clearly identified. Here literature is engaged in an open confrontation. This war is not confined to the political front. Here literature is fighting imperialism as well as convention and self-deception. Self-created illusions are their worst adversaries. Literature is leading this war against all sorts of prudishness, false decency and hollow sophistication and is engaged in the task of reforming consciousness.
4. In those countries where the struggle is militant, literature emphasises patriotism and the glories of the battlefield. There the war is waged for the reawakening of the consciousness that has been obscured or even cramped by colonialism. They are developing an acutely growing sense of regaining their mental freedom and intellectual calibre

which is essential to fight their highly advanced enemy. One of their main fronts is against ignorance and backwardness – both mental and social. This literature emphasises education and character both.

5. Those countries where the polarisation is not yet clear are suffering under the legacy of the old colonial structure which is still intact. Here one clearly sees oppression but the oppressor is not identified. Here, while on the one hand, a sense of extreme depression is expressed, on the other, vociferous slogan mongering much beyond resources or capacity is witnessed. However, there are glimpses of the awareness of the situation in certain quarters. On the whole, this literature is dominated by fear, and there is generally an attitude of absolute silence about the real issues. However, in the din of confusing noises, one may some time hear some young voice which echoes a sense of real apprehensions along with a courage to face them with determination and fortitude. But no voice is yet so strong and clear that it may carry others with it.

III

Those countries where the revolution has been more or less stabilised present a beautiful scene. One of these is Hungary. The veteran Hungarian teacher, poet and writer who was also the minister of education in 1946-47, Dezo Keresztury, opines in one of his recently published interviews on literature:

The lesson to draw from my experience of that time is that excessive, uncontrolled openness in intellectual life, and belief alone in self-defending power of the spirit may also lead to the self-destruction of the spirit. Man, as is written in the Bible, became a creature inclined to evil after his expulsion from paradise, and this inclination of his must always be somehow kept in check. The thing that always helped me to get over everything in my life so far was this modest tolerance – received as a gift ... In addition to all my desire for freedom, I always possessed a serious self-discipline, a sense of quality and, on occasion, a determination to defend this freedom against the terrorism attacking it.

(The New Hungarian Quarterly, 96)

He gives expression to his feelings in a poem;

*You were born, the world accepted you
You'd run and finally accept
That it throws you up, and drags you down;
Tackle all your tasks;
Chaos will improve to order,
If you understand the eternal rule,*

Another educationist, Istvan-Zsolnai Bessenyei, emphasises the subjective aspect along with the objective factors in education and training. While acknowledging the importance of the teaching of science subjects, he insists that the curriculum must also undertake to discipline and improve consciousness. Criticising the prevalent system of education, he writes:

Current teaching practice lays the emphasis on the transfer of a body of knowledge and neglects the learning of skills employed in the search for truth. It endeavours to transfer scientific knowledge concisely, and does not consider every day experience and artistic perception to be of equal importance.

Apart from these theoretical attitudes Hungarian poetry has also embarked on some experiments. On the one hand, such free verse is being created which follows no conventions of rhyme or metre or even rhythm, and hardly looks like poetry – a formless metaphoric and imagistic euphoria. Experiments, innovation, emotional distance, and prosaic quality mark this poetry, e.g., *The landscape is as lonely as an editorial*.

Some poems are very much in the impressionistic style, which arouses visual effects rather than meanings, for example, the poems of Dezso Tandori written on the paintings of Claude Monet and Renoir, such as this one on Renoir's painting:

Here we came a little closer to our circular island; we see its side-planes, encircling them the band, or whatever is floating. And it's all but certain now; the terrace. But where is the security afforded by the waves' approaching. Neither light nor chiaroscuro, together with that metallic sheen which, beyond the burning sun's benefactions, does not want anything else, absolutely does not want anything else, only that.

It is a very good attempt at moulding a painting into words. In another such poem we have the terrace, the sky and the sea, and with these as background, the people sitting under an umbrella who present a tranquil mood, as if beauty has been captured in a moment of rest, which at the same time gives a sense of delicate motion.

This very poise, this order is also reflected in the stories coming from Hungary. This is the subject of *Farewell Match*, or *Our Injuries Half Way Through Life*, by Peter Modos. This is the story of "The defeated adult, literally destroying himself," and runs as follows:

Gyozo Csermely, a family man and co.-tenant of a flat, is trying to cling to his youth by playing in a team for ageing footballers. He is less and less able to fit the matches into his daily routine of schools teaching. He always arrives at the last minute on the pitch and finds himself playing more and more fitfully. He decides to play just one more game, which he intends to be his farewell match; but he injures himself in a collision with a similarly fitful and embittered player on the opposing side; both of them land up in hospital in the local casualty ward. Half way through the life of a man the physical and mental injuries start gnawing and consuming him from within; of these Gyozo Csermely, too, will probably die an untimely death.

A similar delicate balance the loss of which is utterly destructive is also the subject of the stories of Margit Acs. How absolutely difficult it is to restore this delicate balance is the theme of her story entitled *The Gap*:

A cashier in a supermarket is on sick leave when her husband goes abroad for a week. The convalescent woman feels a certain relief at her husband's absence and is planning to go on long walks, visit a swimming pool and, may be, to have a love affair; "...why not, every married woman would have a love affair, it does not matter. She has not had one so far." But she feels too tired even to go shopping for herself. She starts doing this and that at home only to leave off dejectedly. Slowly she sinks into apathy. She becomes aware that she wishes her husband would never return and that she would never have the energy to bring back the old order of her life. "She has realised more and more clearly that in fact she exists only as someone who does what has to be done or, rather,

that only what has to be done exists, and she herself does not even exist after all ... where she ought to see herself there is a vacuum." This week, in the absence of her husband, her life develops a gap through which all sorts of horrors flow and through which all energy escapes. When her husband returns, appearances can be kept up only for a very short time. But the tension explodes without result; the woman is unable either to regain her old life or to begin a new one; she does not want a divorce, and all that remains is to rush out to the balcony and start screaming. That is where we leave her, there – at the cross-roads of frenzy, suicide and resignation.

Literature from Romania reflects the same discipline with the same delicate balance. *In Defence of my Son* by Mircea Palaghiu is a good example of this approach. The experiences of and about a young student have been used to throw an analytical light on the complex social attitudes of people otherwise reacting to life in their varied specific and purely subjective ways. Marius comes home from school crying. He had a beating from the teacher and felt hurt and humiliated. The mother blames him for everything while the father is rather indulgent towards him. Marius laughs at the quarrel between his parents. To the mother "He is a fake, he is never on time, he is a liar, he is conceited, he is lazy, he does not learn, he never does his home work, he always loses his head in the clouds." The father, on the other hand, thinks that his son is a special child. "I shall talk about it with his teacher the first time I meet her." He goes to school and finds the company there crude and ugly. "A lot of mothers have come dressed in their Sunday best, smelling of scent. Would it have been as good to have their dressing gowns on and smell of soap?" There are others who are rather conceited; "No politeness at all. Sitting with crossed legs and gazing vacantly at the people around her as if these people ought to be grateful for the pleasure of being looked at by her;" while another "might think her rat of a son is unique..." "Then the teacher arrives. He is not impressed; "Quite pretty, can't deny that, but too small. How can children obey such a chit of a woman?" In her presence he is utterly confused – impressed, in spite of himself. He almost has a row with her. She tells him that for conduct, "I gave him an eight, to spare him a six." He concludes, "Marks are given arbitrarily, according to Miss's good or bad temper." Another mother is so desperate and protests loudly, "Parents, take care of your children, for nobody knows into whose hands they will fall." Thus if the mother thinks her son a fake, to his

father he is a special child. One mother thinks that the entire education system is faulty while the teacher finds the boy impudent and lazy. Thus, different people have different, even divergent views on the same subject. All are justified in their views. They are honest, straight-forward and act with a sense of trust and responsibility. But their perspectives do not coincide. The story emphasises balanced thinking, and respect for the opinion of others. It depicts a society which emphasizes collective thinking and which considers personal assertion the root of social evils. In other words, the attitude that it recommends accepts subjective reactions as quite natural and significant in their own place, but sees the society as a unity which includes all subjectivities.

Romanian poetry portrays similar ideas and attitudes. Aladar Lassaloffy's poetry provides a good example of it. The sense of what is personal and what is collective or the collective in the personal is very well brought out in the following poem:

WHAT URGES ME TO LIVE

*If only it were mine, as I believed.
But even this unique sensation,
in the water of spring, at the sight
of the mirror of the sky, is leaving me –
because it is not mine, it was experienced
before by another, and what it could
stir in a man – it has already stirred.*

*The moon is an older decor, and perishable
are the women, in you they lose their very
being, not understanding that
in themselves they cannot remain
the same as in love, growing
rigid, blossoming open like plants
for love is meant for life itself.
It can be endless, or it can
do nothing – trees are not fugitive,
but your looks, your things,
remain in alien hands, while
nearly all those you love die before you.
If the poet could return from the literature
of the world and if he could live again,
he could concentrate thousands of answers
in his consciousness hard tried by time*

*and yet unseen scenes would be acted around him,
and he would be granted the respect due to him
and nobody would dare deceive him.*

This is a very beautiful picture of the relationship between the ego and the world to which it belongs, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This is an attitude which can develop only in a mature intellectual and aesthetic atmosphere. This is a moral stance as well as a philosophical position. It is symbolic and at the same time analytical. The poet poses questions and seeks their answers. He is a poet of the modern world and wants to know the destiny of the man of today. He has full confidence in the powers wielded by the modern man, and is sure of his creative capabilities. The following poem of Vasile Poenaru expresses similar feelings in a different context :

*A leaf cuts the
sky, the wind's about to die
a tree sucks up the world
and water drowns the earth*

*All of which is wrought by the great god,
called transformation,
nor do I remain always the same,
I advance on the straight path
My forehead furrowed by the rainbow.*

This is power poetry, and it has a delicacy about it. This is an attempt to see the relationship in which man, the individual, is bound with the cosmos, while at the same time it reflects a desire to gain the awareness of the progressive march of life. It also expresses the feeling that at the back of this world of perpetual change there is only one reality; continuous transformation is the essence of progress.

Bulgarian literature reveals an aesthetics which is no different either. A spontaneous expression of it is the following short-short by Nikolai Haitor:

MY MEETING WITH A DONKEY

We met on the track through the beech-wood thicket. I expected the animal to move and let me pass, but the brute just stood there rooted to the spot, blocking the narrow track.

Gee up': I shouted, but it stayed put.

Gee up': I shouted again, but stubborn beast showed not the slightest interest in my attempt to settle things amicably. I thought I might slip round the back of him, but I wasn't going to risk getting kicked. He only had to let fly with those great muscley legs and their metal shoes, and I'd be well and truly done for. No, I'd try shoving through the beech-scrub. I started to push my way through the undergrowth but that's just what those wretched beeches were waiting for. They blocked my path, pinned me down and jabbed me in the ribs, using their branches as cudgels, they bashed me and beat me and scratched me all over, tripping me up and knocking off my hat. In the end, though, I came out into the track, my feet all cut, my face a mass of bruises and my trousers in tatters. I saw the state I was in and got wild with that wretched donkey for shoving me into the beech-scrub.

'You got through, so on you go and forget about it', advised a little inner voice called discretion. But another voice was fanning the fire. 'Back you go', it urged. 'One donkey today, another tomorrow, and the number of donkeys there are around, if you get into the habit, God help you.' And this voice sent me back the way I'd come for a repeat of the bashing and battering before I emerged once again to face the donkey stuck across the track. The animal raised its head – it had started to graze – looked at me and fixed me with its eyes. Not wasting any time, I snapped off a branch, stripped off the leaves and, taking a firm grip of my untrimmed club, advanced.

The donkey spotted the branch in my hands and, without a moment's hesitation, moved off the track, quietly took up position facing me, wagged its long, floppy ears and, bowing its head, moved aside to let me pass.

The same theme once again; the delicate balance of life is rather fragile, and once threatened or violated, it cannot be restored through delicate handling. Firm and resolute action is required to set it right.

Bulgaria's poetry carries quite an altogether different tone. Two short poems by Dora Gabe are worth mentioning here:

*Deep down
seeds hid
So the wind*

*would not blow them away
Before they
Had absorbed
vital strength.*

*Was the white snow drop
Hurrying
About the snow
To greet
Life
with its purity? ...
and
I now meet the end
of my life
I'm giving
Away all I have
and am no more sinning
But what other world
will take me
with an empty
Heart?*

Two trends are prominent in the literature of this world. On the one hand, complete harmony between the individual and the society is stressed. On the other hand, the emotional and inner needs of the individual, his apprehensions and a permanent tension between him and the world are its subjects. On the one hand, there is perseverance in the face of hardships, determination to fight oppression, while on the other, there is a spiritual restlessness, an emotional irritation, a metaphysical urge and the compulsion of ego. This literature reflects a society in which basic needs and class conflicts bother no more but where the very existence of the poet becomes a great question mark for him. He becomes an enigma to himself which is both a torture as well as a quest. At times lyricism and abstract philosophising are so mingled that a kind of mysticism seems to impress the mind.

IV

Chinese literature represents those areas of the third world where the revolution is still in a transitory stage. Even otherwise too, the literature of China presents an interesting study of the intellectual and aesthetic progress of the writers from Lu Hsun to the young intellectuals living today. The sensibility as reflected in the pre-revolution literature and the change that came in it after the

revolution as well as the internal contradictions which appeared with the change are adequately reflected in Chinese literature which is an authentic document of the great struggle and the vicissitudes through which it passed.

Two trends are prominent in the writings of Lu Hsun. On the one side, there is an account of the cruelties perpetrated under the feudal system and their analysis while, on the other, the creation of such ideals as can confront these difficulties. These ideals appear as central characters in his stories. These are very serious characters which have been delineated realistically and with a firm hand. There is a kind of authenticity and toughness about them. But though they are ideal characters, they are not ridiculous like Don Quixote or his likes. Their role is, however, paradoxical. They provide encouragement through their idealism, while at the same time they weaken the people through their fanatical assurances and thus arouse the feelings of dejection and despair. Then sometimes when these ideals confront reality these are smashed into pieces as well. Thus sometimes it also happens that they become an instrument of the same oppressive system against which they had been struggling. They are also caught in the cobweb of their ego and are doomed. There is a painful awareness, in the writings of Lu Hsun, and also a firm resolve to fight evil. But all this exists only on an ideal plane. It appears more a phantasmagoria of hopes and desires than a real encounter. In a *Small Incident*, a rickshaw man is shown inspired by the emotions of sympathy and sacrifice. An old woman is hit by his rickshaw and he himself takes her to the police station, even refusing to carry his passenger any further and foregoing the fare. Perhaps such moralising was considered necessary in order to keep up faith in human goodness. However, perhaps the point that Lu Hsun wanted to draw here in this story is that in a revolutionary struggle the intellectuals must not only be on the side of the labouring classes, they should also prepare themselves to learn from them. In *The Tavern* is a story in which Lu Hsun is warning the intellectuals against romanticising revolution. This is the story of a young dynamic rebel who is fanatically committed to revolution. But revolution is no impulsive adventure. It is a long-drawn battle, fought on scientific lines and sustained with undaunted courage and perpetual appraisal and self-examination. Emotional revolutionaries may be swept off their feet by the slightest set-back or reversal. This is the story of such an activist who, seeing that his cherished dreams are not going to be

realised, not only turns a reactionary, but becomes a fatalist seeking relief even in superstition.

Another story by Lu Hsun, *Kung I-Chi*, tells of a young ambitious man who is caught in the trap of the covetous Civil Services racket in which young intellectuals are lured to serve as tools for exploitation and domination over the people in order to strengthen and perpetuate the hold of the ruling classes. Kung I-Chi fails to pass the civil service examination and his inflated ego does not let him accept a humbler calling. This is what happens to the intellectuals coming from poor families. In the competitive examination although thousands appear every year, not even a hundred get the coveted jobs. A large number of young and promising intellectuals are thus added to the frustrated young cadres every year. The superior services competitive examinations serve a two-fold purpose. Those who are really capable from amongst the poor classes are raised on the class ladder and thus the ruling class perpetuates itself in this way in the absence of a hereditary aristocracy of the feudal age. On the other hand, all those who though capable but not needed by the rulers are made incapable and frustrated and thus the edge of their talent is blunted. They are left in such bewilderment that they cannot even think of the trick that has been played upon them, and in their despair lose even the awareness, the sense of the historical compulsion. Among the poor people thus you have some who join hands with the exploiters and are accepted in their ranks. Then there are those who permanently suffer from inferiority complex, frustration, diffidence and incompetence. The rest are so ignorant or ill-equipped that they pose no threat at all.

Lu Hsun wrote at a time when revolution was a big question mark. He saw many ardent fighters and fiery intellectuals go down in the struggle, breaking, and even turning mercenaries. He shouted in despair:

*All is quiet in this new garden of letters.
On the old battlefield today peace reigns;
Between the lines, one last solitary soldier,
Shouldering my spear I wander on alone.*

(2nd Collection, Wandering)

Though the revolution was not very far away then.

After the 1949 revolution literature also embarks on the task of defence and consolidation. Even up-till 1972 Chinese literature has been more or less submerged in propaganda, and a propaganda which is rather obtrusive and crude. There is hardly any literary merit in it. It is either full of lavish panegyrics on the revolution or sings the praises of Mao. Similarly the fiction of this period is cliché ridden and unimaginative. Romantic tales of valour and sacrifice, excessive sentiments of patriotism, exaggerated stories of guerrilla actions and fantastic feats of the revolutionary cadres are hurled in stories, plays and poems aimed at creating a halo around them and turning them into some sort of superhuman beings. The literature of this period appears contrived. It seems that literature had over-stretched itself and gone far ahead of life. The literature of this period seems to convince the readers that in those days the Chinese had absolutely given up the emotions of love, hatred, jealousy, good and evil, and had ceased to be human, reduced to mere cogs in the machinery of revolution. The literature of this period can hardly boast of any technical merit. It lacks style, which makes its cheap sentimentalism still more obtrusive. This literature gives an impression that in the first twenty years or so, the revolution had been rather on the defensive and had not yet inspired that assurance and tranquillity which allows minds to ponder upon the day-to-day affairs of life. At least the literature coming through the usual channels of communication is of this kind. There might have been some genuine literature too but perhaps that was not favourably received in official circles.

The state of literature in China today can be inferred from the following statement by the author of *Mimosa*. In the preface to its English edition published in 1985 he writes:

In each of China's past political movements, intellectuals have always been first in the line of fire, and many were declared "bourgeois Rightists", "anti-Marxists" or "Reactionary academic authorities" and punished. Whether in order to try and get out of the way, to defend themselves or to come to some kind of individual understanding, these intellectuals all tried to determine in their own minds the true nature of Marxism.

Zhang Xianlian does not hold any one individual responsible for this state of affairs. Bitter experiences have perhaps created a mental and emotional posture – or may be fear – which encourages a one-sided approach or an extremist attitude. This was, however, saved from

deteriorating into a sort of Victorian compromise by strict adherence to ideology. Thus in the same preface he remarks:

In a country with such a long history and in such a backward state of economic development, modern political trends may superficially appear to be determined by particular people. In fact, they are governed by a variety of factors answerable to historical categories and not to individual human will.

A similar trend of thinking is visible in literature also. *Weishan Lake*, a short story by Wang Hongzhen and Zhao Peisheng, shows how a man may feel completely lost in the face of repeated shocks that he receives from life. This is the story of an old sailor, who owns a white sailed junk ferrying stones, and his young daughter. Both are courteous and amiable. The daughter is pretty too. Young men are continuously drawn towards their small boat and they help them. The girl develops a liking for one of the young visitors. When the father sees her growing belly he becomes enraged. He orders her to go to the city and gives her money for abortion. Her elder sister had died after an abortion. Now she was being asked to follow suit. He orders her to leave. "I hope it all goes all right. Afterwards, I'll treat you like a boy ... if ... you go and keep your sister company, if you have to die, then die elsewhere. Don't pollute ... Weishan lake"... The daughter resists – protests and ultimately leaves. The father is left alone. He stops meeting others. Doesn't speak at all, and inhabits an isolated deserted place away from people. Long after, the girl returns and brings back his grandson with her. He does not talk to the daughter or to her husband. But the child draws his affection. Then one day he gives the savings of his life to the daughter. After that he lives a happy life at son-in-law's but rather quiet and withdrawn. The story comes to an end on a suggestive note:

Whenever he saw the south west or east wind swaying in the tree-tops in front of their door the old man would mumble to himself, "A good wind, a good wind." And when he had nothing else to do, he'd go to the east-end of the village and, squatting by a tree, gaze eastward, a cigarette between his fingers.

It seems that the Chinese intellectual has been absolutely stunned by the successive revolutions, and he appears to have paralysed his power of judgement in the whirlpool of acceptance and rejection. Each issue has become a tangle.

Another story gives a similar impression. Jin Yiming has very beautifully woven reality and romance in *Early Evening Rain*. This is the story of a soldier who is seriously wounded at the front. He is in a semi-conscious state and is too weak to open his eyes. A girl from the signal troops carries him on her back to the headquarters. He talks to her, but he can't see her while going away. She tears the badge from his collars and carries it with her. After recovery he desperately seeks her everywhere, but with no success. Then one day she writes to him (reaching him with the help of his badge). Correspondence starts between the two. They quietly fall into liking each other. They exchange letters, become friends and fall in love. But though he very much insists, she doesn't send her photograph to him. Rather she in a way admonishes him by saying:

Tiening, I understand. But I'm still not going to send you my picture. If you think of me as pretty, it shows you're hoping you're in luck. If you think of me as ugly, then your feelings for me are merely gratitude ... but I don't really like either.

Then she decides to meet him at an appointed place and time, but with a reservation. She writes to him:

The first time we meet, I'll wait at an agreed place. But since we haven't seen one another, look for the sort of person you have in your mind's eye. If you hear my voice and realise I'm the one you are looking for, but feel disappointed, then you can leave right away. I won't hold it against you ...

A cinema is fixed as rendezvous. It is raining as he arrives there. There is a queue at the box office. The crowd is swelling every minute. He begins his investigations by asking the girls in the queue whether any one has a spare ticket. The voices he hears in response are all wrong. The film is about to start, and hardly any one is left in the vestibule. There is only one girl left. She is rather plain looking. Nothing extraordinary or captivating about her face. He makes towards her, and so the two meet. She tells him;

I got here early. I saw you speak to quite a few girls, all of them pretty, but you didn't come up to me.

He finds that he had been caught unawares. But he tries to save the situation by assuring her that he finds her beautiful too. He gropes for justifications:

I still think so. That is, a person should be beautiful in more than one respect. Naturally before I saw you, I had to

imagine what you were like, but in imagination things are always perfect and harmonious. But reality is usually different. Despite this, I still feel that my image of you basically corresponds with reality. Probably that's because you're beautiful in the most important way. Please forgive my directness.

But the worst had happened. The charm of words could not exorcise the impression created by his excited investigations and the glare in the eyes that pursued each beautiful face in the long queue. The girl slowly walked away, though he kept murmuring, feeling somewhat empty inside. She boarded a bus gesturing to him, by which he "guessed she meant she would write." The drizzle persisted.

It is a beautiful story with a wonderful plot. Ideals do not correspond to reality, and, if the man ultimately decides to compromise, reality may still elude him. Revolution is too a similar idealism – a wish, but at the same time a reality. To Lu Hsun the revolution was an ideal yet to be realised. It was a fact during the period between 1949 and 1972. And now in 1985 the reality and the ideal have come to a clash. Literature is perhaps a more convenient and authentic source of the study of political and psychological complexities of an age, and their repercussions on individual sensibilities.

A large number of contemporary Chinese writers are rather young. An upcoming poetess Li Qi paints the mood in *Ice Sculptures*:

*Warm hearts
Amidst the bitter northern cold
carved these sculptures
made them beautiful
I seem to have suddenly realised
That through the caresses and promptings of
severe cold
Even water, soft and weak
Can stand up firmly
And, in different shapes and stances
present the miracle of life

When spring comes
and they melt
They will not sigh in regret
For they have stood proudly*

*They came into being with joy
and were willing to disappear happily
Oh northern land
Turn me into a sculpture too
Into an innocent fawn
Into a carefree fish
A phoenix or a swallow
Even though
One day I would have to vanish
It would be in spring.*

In these lines, there is a longing for the ideal. Also there is a realisation that this ideal will not last long. But there is no trite sentimentalism in this desire and the fear that accompanies it. This is a paradoxical wish – for the life in the autumn, annihilating in the spring. The accomplishment of a successful struggle is all that matters. The future will take care of itself. These literary endeavours sufficiently suggest the phase through which the Chinese revolution is passing in these days and the involvement of the Chinese writers with this process.

V

The third state of literature relates to Latin America. Many renowned writers have been born here. These include Nobel Laureates like Neruda and Marquez. A prolonged fierce war against oppressive colonialism has been raging here with great determination and perseverance and has resulted in revolutions at various places. These revolutions have been opposed too, and in many instances the opposition has been successful. The literature produced here reflects a comparatively maturer awareness.

Latin American literature is Latin as well as American. The clash between the old and the new worlds finds full expression here. Along with conventional and superstitious references, the new literary experiments like impressionism, expressionism, and the absurd can also be seen here. This 'New World' is itself a colony -- political as well as mental. Thus, "Identity" becomes an important problem for them. They keep struggling against illusions and confusions, or at least try to fight against them. Illusion is their main theme which has been treated in various forms. These are (1) the illusion of history, (2) the illusion of convention, and (3) the illusion of the words. Tearing through all these layers of illusion, the Latin American intellectuals probe right back upto the genesis and try to

achieve self-awareness with reference to Nature. In other words, they seem to be touching the regions of the unknown in their struggle to know themselves with the help of all the aspects of the known reality, and so a beautiful blend of realism and surrealism becomes a distinctive feature of the literature of this region. Consciousness has become so tangled and muddled that an absolute negation of all that is known becomes essential in order to retrieve it. It thus takes the form of a positive negation. These writers try to study the individual and collective psyche of man in a state of existence in which the mind had not yet been affected by contradictory and vague apprehensions.

Latin America has long been a region torn with revolutions and civil wars, to the extent that sometimes the very meaning of revolution is lost in the confusion. It becomes difficult to distinguish friends from foes. Sometimes the conflict is associated with specific individuals or families. Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a study of this tangled situation which is very realistic and at the same time very symbolic. This is the story of a colony narrated with reference to a family. Five generations of this family have passed through more or less the same kind of paradoxical situations. On the one hand, these people have been revolutionary heroes valiantly fighting fierce battles while, on the other, they are caught in self-created illusions. They have to fight on various fronts at the same time. On the one side are the vested interests represented by business, church and bureaucracy, on the other are superstitions, charms, supernatural happenings and internal conflicts which confuse the situation. Still another problem is created by new technical innovations, for example, magnet, ice, artificial teeth, the magnifying glass, etc., which are even more astonishing and horrifying to them than superstitions and miracles. Two facts are revealed here symbolically, the one that the revolutionary struggles of this family are individual and not collective, and when the revolutionary objectives are frustrated they revert to their isolated individual shells. Secondly, they try to challenge all the forces, but wage their battles with the weapons of the enemy. In order to fight superstition, they create their own myths. In order to fight conventions, they create their own private conventions, and in order to meet the challenge of new discoveries of science they confine themselves to their own private quarters engaged in making magical discoveries. They have established their own distinct family traditions. For instance, intermarriages within the family result in children with pigtailed. A shining beauty of the family is a girl with

the strength of giants in her. She is miraculously raised to the heavens. Malcados is resurrected. When a Bundia elder dies there is a rain of little yellow flowers.

Historical study is a trend of modern literature. Eliot and Yeats in English and Qurat-ul-Ain Haider and Intezar Husain in Urdu literature are significant in this respect. Marquez has tried to verify history. The history of the colony of Macondo a hundred years after its creation is the theme of his celebrated novel. As the title of the novel suggests, this is the story of a hundred years of solitude. According to this account revolutionary struggles waged at individual levels are sentimental, impulsive and egotistical which result in confusion, despondency and a hopelessness that is reduced to selfishness and a sense of personal fulfilment. Revolutionary heroes are confined to their own shells and the shells go on narrowing so much that the last pair of the family completely strips (or, in other words, spurns all objective reality), succumbs to sensuality and thus meets its end, although they had been warned generation after generation that intermarriages will produce children with pigtailed. Their women are incapable of marrying outside the family. This isolation does not only putrefy their lives, it corrupts the relationships as well. Incest is a comprehensive symbol. It reveals that mental filth and frustration which results from a break with the outside world and either poisons the blood through stagnation or pollutes the life itself as in Sartre's *The Condemned of Altona* and Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*. Marquez also considered morbid sexual relationships as symbolic of negative social attitudes. This solitude is not confined to individuals or families. The town of Macondo is itself an island which has no links with the outside world. It is caught in its own superstitions and conventions. This novel from Central Latin America is an aesthetic assessment of the limited and localised revolutionary struggles.

A society's relationship with its contemporary world is certainly very important. But how it relates to its own past is also the subject of Marquez. He understands that such a study is very difficult and can be misleading since history is a deception. Eliot wrote :

*History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors,
And issues, deceives with whispering ambition,
Guides by vanities.*

(Gerontion)

Eliot puts the entire blame on history. On the contrary, Marquez sees history as a weapon of exploitation in the hands of vested interests. Workers go on strike in the Banana Company. The issue is taken to the court where the lawyers prove that there was neither a banana company nor any labourers worked in it. History does not mention the banana company at all. The soldiers machine gun the strikers in Macondo. Around three thousand workers are killed. Jose Arcadio Segurd himself gets wounded. He is also thrown into a goods train along with the injured and the dead who are being carried to be thrown into the sea. In the dark night he jumps off the train. When he comes back to the town, no one believes his account of the accident. No one believes that 3,000 have been killed. He is silenced, declared insane. According to official record there was neither any strike nor a single shot was fired. No one was injured or killed. History makes no mention of it.

A new consciousness of history is awakening in Latin America. Argentina's Juan Celman gives expression to this awareness in the following poem:

HISTORY

*Studying history
dates, battles, letters written on stone,
famous phrases, luminaries smelling of sanctity.
I see only dark, metallurgical,
mining, sewing, slaves hands
creating the brilliance, the adventure of the world,
they died and their fingernails still grew.*

Pablo Neruda is also sceptical of history. That is why he begins his story from the pre-historic days:

*Through a confusion of splendour,
through a night made stone let me plunge my hand
and move to bet in me a bird held for a thousand years,
the old and unremembered heart;*

(The Heights of Macchu Picchu, Canto General, 1950)

He wants to study that period of history in which man and nature were identical, kneaded into the earth along with flowers, plants and animals -- a study of history different from the official accounts. He goes from the present situation of man caught in the political confusions of the day to the vision of unalienated man who

“did not stand out from others” because “he was the wholeness, the element, earth, coal or sea, in the guise of a man”. (*The People*)

He wrote of the Fauna and the Flora and of the empty spaces -- of the solitary Antarctic. But at the same time he was greatly agitated by the Spanish Civil War. He who wrote of man and his place in the eternal scheme of things, and who did not consider himself to be a political poet was so shocked by the sacking at Alberti's house and the death of Lorca that he braced himself up for a political strife, protesting in anguish.

*Treacherous
generals
see and dead homes
look at broken Spain,
from every house burning metal flows
instead of flowers*

(I'm explaining a few things)

This is the Spanish emotion, the Latin American heritage, which asserts itself here, the same that found best expression in the work of Lorca. From the genesis to the present turmoil, from the occult to the real world of deception, oppression and exploitation, Neruda sees the entire phenomena from a human perspective. He remains the poet of man, the ultimate reality.

*War destroyed doorways and walls,
the city was a pitful of ashes,
all the dresses withered into dust,
and he persists*

(The People)

And his man:

*he never fought with another of his kind
his struggle was with water or with earth*

Latin Americans were rooted in their earth before the discovery of the “New World”. Such feelings are expressed in the following poem of Peru's Carlos German Belli:

INSTEAD OF SWEET HUMANS

*Instead of sweet humans
Why did not my ancestors exist*

*as stone as elm, as deer,
 who apparently do not discriminate
 and never tell one;
 "Don't leave this thicket", in which you
 already know
 from where the north wind comes,
 to where the south wind goes.*

Marquez's Macondo had such a beginning. This is a new place where plants and animals had not yet been named. But then, human consciousness that is nourished on names acquires an artificial context for the mind. It is reduced to relationships that are very different from those found in the world of nature. Distinctions replace harmony. Walls of groups, religions, families and interests are raised all around. These are the barriers which hinder man's return to nature and do not allow him to live a meaningful and quiet life. Uruguay's Idea Vilarino conceives the difference so clearly in *What Was life*.

*What was life, what rotten apples, what
 left-over what was,
 If it was a rose, if it was a golden cloud, and
 should have flowered, light, in the air,
 If it was a rose, if it was a gay flame, if it
 was anything.
 Weightless, that causes no pain, that is content to be
 anything, anything, that is easy,
 easy.
 It could not have been made up of corridors,
 of sordid dawns of revulsion, of unlit tasks,
 routines, of credits, it could not have been,
 it could not.
 Not that, what it was, what it is, the dirty air, of the
 street, the winter, the many errors, the miseries,
 exhaustion
 In the deserted world ...*

The word is the greatest hurdle in all endeavours to establish a genuine relationship with nature -- word that becomes history, takes the form of literature. An epidemic grips Macondo in which people start losing their memory. In order to maintain their relationship with the external world and with their own past they resort to the word. They write the names of things on plates and hang these on them, such as, house, chair, table, cow, etc. But words are mere signs

representing experiences, not the experiences themselves. Thus the inhabitants of Macondo are confronted with the dangerous situation that an absolute dependence on words will ultimately reduce life to names alone. All meaning will be drawn out of it. Dependence on history is fraught with similar risks. Therefore, in order to retrieve experiences, the writers who sought meanings in history could not appreciate this. Such is the Latin American consciousness of history, which is not confined to Marquez. Javier Heraud of Peru writes in *"In Praise of Days -- Destruction and Eulogy to Darkness."*

*... now we must do everything
with our own hands
build words
like the trunks of trees,
neither beg, nor weep
but end
put an end to the dead earth with blows.*

Neruda has great faith in the word. With a vision of justice and equality on earth, in a spirit of social commitment, he holds on to the word, since

*this is the wavelength which connects us with the
dead men and the dawn of new beings not yet come
to light*

He considers the Word to be the very essence of his being:

I utter and I am...

(The Word)

But this is "word" created in action -- not an abstraction.

Beside the deception forced by the outside world, there is another kind of illusion which assails man from within. In the world of conventions, affectations and etiquette the mind itself assumes a form for which the perception of reality becomes impossible. Reality seems to be shaped into the moulds created by the mind. The short story of Argentina's H.A. Murena, *The Cavalry Colonel*, analyses this illusion. The story exposes the ridiculous and stupid character of the army officers behind the facade of military discipline. A very cunning man joins the people gathered for a funeral. He ridicules the apparent awe, seriousness and authoritative posture of the army officers and makes them look very small and manageable, ready to

follow any instruction. According to the Cavalry colonel the life of the soldiers in the barracks is like that of the monks, “maintaining in discipline between one man and the rest”. He asserts, “a man is nowhere more alone than he is in barracks”. He loses all social sense, becomes indifferent to environment and the other people mean nothing to him. He is left with only three antidotes to boredom; drinking, gambling and marriage. He acquires such mechanical efficiency and agility that he can be put to any task. Thus the clever stranger succeeds in breaking the seriousness of the company through his cunning. Initially people only smile stealthily, then gradually though slowly join in the laughter. He starts a game of speaking without opening the mouth, articulating through nasal sounds. Many men and women make strange faces. Grotesque and repulsive noises fill the whole place. The people even become oblivious of the fact that they have come to a funeral and the dead body is lying in the adjacent room. Then he starts the trick of wagging the ears which he had learnt at school where as a punishment the children were made to sit idle for hours, not allowed to do anything, not even to read. This was also a discipline. He moved both the ears together, then one at a time. People joined him in the exercise. He cast such a spell on them that not only were women very much taken in, but even the husbands took his jokes to their wives gallantly, smiling. Then he made an officer ride another who went on all fours like a horse. Thus he indulged in all sorts of monstrosities in the name of good taste, and etiquette. No one saw any thing wrong in it. It is in this way that deceptions habitually accepted become a style of life.

VI

Latin American literature provides evidence of a new and maturing awareness in which quite a significant contribution comes from the Blacks who have been much influenced by the Négritude of Aimé Césaire. This is the literature of the Blacks who live in predominantly White societies and share their miseries with other oppressed sections of the society. Their problems, their feelings and aspirations are very different from those of the black people living in Africa, since in Africa the blacks are in the majority. History and geography are both on their side. They are confident that Africa will ultimately belong to the Africans and the White will be reduced to a simple minority. Thus, there is a generosity in their approach. In spite of the most horrible atrocities committed against them, they can still talk of love and hope, like David Diop of Senegal, who talks

*Of foreigners who did not seem human
 who knew all the books but did not know love
 But we who fertilise the womb of the earth
 In spite of your songs of pride
 In spite of the desolate villages of torn Africa
 Hope was preserved in us as in a fortress
 And from the mines of Swaziland to the factories of
 Europe
 Spring will be reborn under our bright steps.*

(The Vultures)

The mood is very different in Latin America. Rene Depestre of Haiti roars in *Confession*:

*Better to fight and win
 better to smelt down
 my anguish
 my confidence
 my strength
 in the crucible of hot encounters
 so that my life
 young
 resolute
 may spout froth, leaping over a world in ruins.*

Or, David Fernandez Cherician of Cuba defines the *Third World* in the following way:

*... We are intransigent
 because we call bread
 man's most essential need,
 and "Gun" the most appropriate means
 for getting it.*

Similar sentiments are expressed in Latin America's "Caliban Culture" among whose exponents is Cuba's Roberts Fernandez Retmar. According to him Caliban is Shakespeare's anagram on the word Cannibal, as Columbus conceived the inhabitants of the New World to be. This is, to Retmar, a metaphor of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. He elaborates the point:

Our symbol ... is ... Caliban. This is something that we, the Mestizo inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived, see with particular clarity: Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself

understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language --- to day he has no other - to curse him, to wish that the "red-plague" would fall on him? I know of no other metaphor more expressive of our cultural situation, of our reality.

(Translated, in *Massachusetts Review*, winter 1974).

VII

Another stage of bloody struggle for liberation is reflected in the literature of Africa and the Middle East. An open war against colonial oppression has been raging here since long. Colonialism has made inroads into both these regions with ruthless cunning and has been equally resolutely resisted by both. The enemy is not just the outsider, though this too is an important front, and most of African and Middle Eastern literature is directly addressed to the white exploiter who is forced to listen:

*White people are white people;
They must learn to listen.
Black people are black people;
They must learn to speak*

(M.W.Secreté)

But more than all that a new sun is rising on the horizon of Africa. A new age is beginning. It is no more enough to challenge the enemy and overpower him, since as a result of it the white enemy may only be replaced with a black one. Therefore it is not sufficient to demolish the visible form of oppression alone. It becomes essential to destroy the roots, to release the mind from all bondage. The predominant theme of the literature of the Third World, even more than the war against oppression, is decolonization of consciousness. South Africa's Can Themba's story *The Urchins* is a good example of it. This is the story of such wayward youth who have never had the opportunity of going to school. They consume their energies in mischief, rioting and even violence. Thus they try to create some "meaning" in their otherwise aimless lives. Their minds have already been corrupted, their ideals perverted. Living under oppressive and cruel circumstances they have developed a devilish egotism giving rise to a destructive competitiveness. Their values are negative. Cruel and frustrated desperadoes are their heroes. They consider vandalism as heroism and violence as rebellion. If any sense of community has been left in them it is the collective sense of thieves

and rascals. They form themselves into gangs and fall upon other gangs and cause blood-shed. Their object is only excitement or ego satisfaction. This violent disposition is only further aggravated by the law enforcing agencies. Jails are training camps of violence. The prisoners relate stories of torture in the jails with a relish spiced with feelings of fear. Those who suffer torture become ideal heroes. They are made absolutely callous as a result of a wayward life and the punishments inflicted in the jails. Even motherly affection fails to move them. And all that because they never had an opportunity to be educated, to be civilized.

The story of Ghana's Christian Anna Ata Aidoo, *The Message*, presents the same theme from a different angle. An old woman's grand daughter is admitted in the hospital. She has been told that her grand daughter has been "cut up". It was a delivery case and "They opened her up". This old uneducated woman does not understand a caesarean birth. She only knows that the girl has been ripped apart. It is enough to frighten the ignorant people. These are war times. Even those who have their stomachs are on the brink of death, then how would she do whose stomach is open to the winds. The old woman had more than ten children. She can't even keep the count. But all died except one. And his daughter has now been cut up in the hospital. She boards a bus to go to the hospital. The bus is a world by itself. People have been mercilessly crammed into it. There is no seat for women. It is such a difficult living. There is an educated man in the bus who is ridiculed by everyone. He is out of job. People make fun of him. They say that even his clothes are borrowed. Then these backward people also have misgivings about the new world. They consider the new life and the new woman very weak, as generally our villagers consider the city dwellers to be weak, 'adulterated' and callous. They believe that the people of the new world lack the feelings of sympathy. They have no sincerity in them. But when these people arrive in the city they are very politely received, on the road as well as in the hospital. The grand daughter is in good health. There are no signs of her having been 'opened up'.

It is poverty, with ignorance, which is the main cause of backwardness of a society that is reflected in infant mortality, scare of the new knowledge, distrust of others and extreme disregard for education.

From Nigeria, Amos Tutuola's novel, *Bush of Ghosts*, is a metaphor for the awakening of consciousness narrated in the manner

of folk love and ghost stories. This is the story of a boy who sits separated from his brother and other people when slave traders raid their town. He knows the word 'bad' because he had heard it and experienced it. But he has no conception of the word 'good'. He has never come across it. His father's wives are always quarrelling and abusing each other. He is not aware of love, sympathy and sincerity. Separated from his own people he runs into the Bush of Ghosts. There he is first transformed into a cow, then a ju-ju, a horse, a camel and a monkey. He lives among them as a slave. He also marries a ghostess. Finally he manages to escape and return to his own world. There he realises that however an earthly person might love ghosts, ghost cannot like him heartily in any respect. They do not allow the ghostess, his wife, to go with him.

This is how the Africans react to the strangers, seeing them only as exploiters and cruel intruders who can not be trusted upon, and who even mutilate the personalities of the helpless subjects to serve their own selfishness and mean interests.

The same themes are found in African poetry too. Here too the same ghoulish crowd and their inhuman deeds frighten the poets as nightmares, as the following lines from Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor's poem, *New York*.

New York at first I was confused by your beauty, by
those great golden-legged girls.
The Skyscrapers which defy the storms with muscles of
steel and stone – glazed hide.
No smile of a child blooms, his hand refreshed in my hand.
No mother's breast, but only nylon legs. Legs and
breasts that have no sweat nor smell
No tender word for there are no lips, only artificial
hearts paid for in hard cash
Nights of insomnia ! oh nights of Manhattan! So agitated
by flickering lights, while motor horns howl of empty
hours.
And while dark waters carry away hygienic loves, like
rivers flooded with corpses of children.

Similar thoughts reverberate in Palestinian literature, since there too, besides an encounter with lethal weapons and exploitative manoeuvres, a fierce war is being fought for the liberation of consciousness. Sameeh-al-Qasim makes bold to say:

*my homeland – This land from the time of ancients.
Full of beliefs woven falsehood, and lies,
Full of fabrications built on old fables,
But to you the light of the Prophet has come.*

(Wait for Me)

And he protests:

*The excuse of fate is the weakest faith of all,
It kills the hope in the heart, takes the light from the eyes.*

(Remember My Card)

In the same vein the Palestinian poet writes:

*The mirage of the past has lost its hypnotic power,
Our people no longer gaze up at the star,
Our people now believe in the power of the sword.*

(A Martyr's Will)

Third World's real battle is being fought for the decolonization of consciousness, and this has been fought with such a success that the exploiting world has been forced to change its strategy. It was inevitable according to the laws of dialectics. In any war the slightest negligence about the strategy of the enemy and the sophistications of his tactics can prove fatal. It is for this reason that the Third World is entering a new stage of struggle. Long ago Ali Shariati warned in clear terms:

As the philosophy of history and the game of dialectics helps the growth of awareness in the proletarian revolution which will destroy capitalism from within, by the same token, capitalism realises the historical social and class factors, their direction and behaviour that endanger its existence and which would ultimately destroy it.

(Capitalism Wakes Up?)

Consciousness enhances on both sides in a dialectical confrontation. As the oppressed becomes better aware of his state so does the oppressor become cleverer. New modes of exploitation are invented and it becomes imperative for its fighters to make continuous assessment of the struggle and carry it on. Thus consciousness marches on. The war for decolonization of consciousness in the third world has entered a new phase. The forces of exploitation have started realising their weaknesses and are

rectifying them, while the oppressed have made fresh determination to fight oppression in all its forms and they are now more determined than ever.

VIII

In the Indo-Pak literature it appears that the war of decolonization of consciousness has not even started yet. Apart from a few rather less known individual efforts (which include some plays and poems not available in print). The scenario of Urdu literature seems to be almost devoid of new consciousness. In spite of spurts of anger and pain here and there, neither the enemy is identified nor is the destination clearly perceived. The writers and poets of this region appear to be lost in vagueness and seem to have grown peevish. Their writings reflect boredom, despair and helplessness. In the words of Faiz:

*They enquire from every stranger
the direction to their own house;
In the alleys full of strangers,
thus goes the cycle of day and night:
Talking now to him here, now to him there.*

(My Heart The Traveller)

Still greater despondency is reflected in a short poem by Munir Niazi, *I want to Build a House*:

*I want to build a house, I have no house:
at the foot of a hill, or by the riverside;
beyond the deserts, on the high peaks;
in a congested habitation, or near unbounded seclusion;
on the edge of the bright day, or near the dark night.
No one guides me in this chaos,
I have only aspirations and no skills
I want to build a house,
I have no house.*

Even those who think they are determined appear to be determined about nothing:

*This is the dawn, the longing for which carried the
friends on, hoping to find somewhere
The destination of the stars in the desert of the sky;
The verge of the slow moving tide,
The anchorage of the bark of heart-ache*

(Faiz : Freedom's Dawn, Dast-e-Saba)

Even Faiz himself was not so uncertain in the beginning. Thirty years ago he had written *Nisar Main Teri Galyon Ke....* At least there was a sense of the home then. That too has been lost now. In the progress of consciousness the Pakistani intellectual has been left far behind, has actually regressed. He absolutely lacks the sense of his own identity, though he seems to know all about Palestine. It will not be wrong to say that our literature reflects stagnation. It is quite a different thing that new experiments are being made in technique – original or borrowed. There is a marked advance in technique. Information about the current affairs has also increased. Even then it appears that for the last thirty five years or so every writer and every poet has been repeating the same things over and over again. Search for identity is no more an obscurantist slogan. Every one is trying to identify himself. This has become almost a fad in literature. In Anis Nagi's *Behind the Wall*, the hero keeps going round and round in his own orbit, and when the man from special police shadows him, he exclaims in desperation:

You want to come near me, stupid;
I haven't yet approached myself. How can I allow you to
reach me?

These trends are obvious in our literature: On one side are those who have been totally shocked by the circumstances and seek an escape. There are others who have been either frightened by the situation or have failed to grasp it properly and so have taken refuge in fantasy. Still others are those who have tried to seek their identity in mythology and history. In the first category falls that character of Anis Nagi's *Third Tale (Hikayat/3)* who has been disillusioned by life, and is so scared of accidents that he walks neither right nor left. The constable who is sipping lemon crush on a shop says that he is no more on duty; "Should we go right or left can be told only by him who has now come on duty. And he who is now on duty is not there." The enquirer is in great despair. He has lost nerve to face the situation. He has lost all hope or even desire for the destination:

The traffic was flowing as normal. Hamid raised his eyes to the scene but they were blinded. He dropped the idea of going up to the end of the road. It was better to remain in the office. He was walking right in the middle of the road. There were repeated noises of horns at his back. Although he was walking on the right, yet there was an accident. He frantically waved his left arm then his right arm. The horns

were still blurting—neither right nor left. Hamid was grumbling, walking in the middle of the road, and the horns of a crowd of cars and rickshaws were frantically blowing behind him.

His eyes are blinded by the sun. Horns are trumpeting all around. The reality is forcing itself upon consciousness. But he lacks courage, is absolutely incapacitated.

On the other side is Anwar Sajjad, according to whom “The Third Panel of Boche’s garden of bliss is the Third World”, and he seeks to discover the Third World in Boche. Latin American writers understood the deceptiveness of history. Our writers have been taken in by it, perhaps in the same way in which Browning and Tennyson sought the Victorian era in the Middle Ages. But there is a difference. The Victorians were flattered by seeing their image in the past, and revelled in a false optimism. Boche’s mirror disillusioned Anwar Sajjad. Thus, instead of breaking the web of fantasies, he gets more and more entangled in it. His latest novel, *Janam Roop*, is a long soliloquy like Anis Naji’s *Behind the Wall*. It appears that he is gradually shrinking within his own self. He is engaged in the endeavour to express his psyche in symbols. He wants to seek the secret of life deep within his heart. But the vision that he has received is very dark and horrifying. *Janam Roop* ends on this note:

He retraces his steps towards the castle reflected in numerous mirrors where ghouls have imprisoned their destiny.

Glow-worms in the bushes in suffocating atmosphere. Insects with luminous bulbs pressed beneath dry leaves on the black earth. And breathless stars that illuminate at one time half of this mysterious land of Adam’s progeny.

Layer after layer, layer after layer, the sea polluted with the dregs of troubled life, shade of the rainbow, a drop like the beating heart. Those, innumerable, exist within as a unity, powerful, glittering, searching, impatient for salvation.

Excited, ready to force their swords into the breasts of oppressive centuries.

India’s Balraj Mainra’s short story, *The Last Composition* (The title itself is significant; a composition, that is, writing for the sake of writing, an exercise in composition, and that too, the last one, or, in terms of painting, a desperate attempt in the abstract) also ends on a similar note. Here the scene is inside the jail:

Wall inside the wall inside the wall, the walls in a series; back to back, sitting face to face, innumerable those, who were seeing me, or one another, the second to the third, the third to the fourth, the fourth to the fifth, the fifth...

Strangeness converted into meaning received by smiles alone; smiles that were the only gratitude; all are friends; words were also found here, and their meanings too. Now the time has come to give meanings to words. The word strung eye to the eye, and when – when the moment came, all hands rose together, all faces rose together; the feet struck against the walls. The wall fell to pieces, when I regained consciousness I saw I am lying in a deserted forest, the blood is seeping into my veins drop by drop.

After a short time I was informed. Three of our comrades had been killed. Two are missing and the rest are on the front.

Here fantasy is no mere technique. It is the object. How utterly hopeless is the feeling reflected in these lines; what helplessness! This is the literature of fear subjected to the feelings of oppression, violence and frustrated aspirations. When these realities are ignored and “identity” is sought within fantasy is the inevitable result. It further aggravates fear through nightmares so much so that the idea of revolution turns into a horrible dream.

*He kept running, just like my boyhood;
Boy's dress was tattered, blood on his forehead.
Still he refused to submit
Seeing dreams in the fire of construction crying in a
shrill voice, "Revolution" revolution"
From across the road
I hear my own voice*

(*That Boy and Me*, Translated from Bengali,
Sunil Gangupadhiay)

This entire literature is the product of an atmosphere of fear. And this fear obliterates the perception of reality. Then, literature is used not for expression, but suppression of feelings. What greater proof is needed to support this assertion than the fact that the most vitally significant event of Pakistan's history – namely the event of its dismemberment – hardly became the subject of any novel, poem or even a short-story. India herself had passed through such an experience when it was dismembered and divided into two sovereign states. But Indians too wrote of the division of India. Nobody wrote of how he was broken by it. (One of the few examples is Manto's *Toba*

Tek Singh). Intellectuals of both the countries have by-passed these experiences, or have viewed these at the most as individual, personal or cultural catastrophes. In the same way as *Aag Ka Darya* is not the tragedy of India, *Akhar-e-Shab Ke Hamsafar* is not the tragedy of East Pakistan. If at all these experiences seriously shook the writers, they sought refuge in history since history is an illusion that restores the confidence at least for the moment. There is another advantage of it too; we are absolved of all negligence and default by putting the entire blame upon history.

It is generally believed that man learns from experience and his consciousness matures. Brecht did not accept the idea. He thought that the majority of men learn only as much of life from experience as the frog learns of his anatomy after the dissection. And here the situation is just the reverse. Experiences followed one another --no ordinary experiences, rather traumatic experiences, of the breaking of the country, of the shattering of the ideals. But our writers see the situation with no better perception.

The impact of the creation and dismemberment of Pakistan on the psyche of this nation and the manner in which individual consciousness has been shaken by these form no part of our literature. Though some writers have made random comments on them, these have not been incorporated in literature as such. When the 1935 Act was promulgated Manto wrote *The New Act*. We have three or four laws simultaneously operating in our country, causing no small trouble and confusion, but these will hardly find a reference in the history of literature. The Martial Laws followed in quick succession. There were public whippings and executions on the main roads. These events were no doubt mentioned in a journalistic manner, but no one bothered to examine their effect on our psyche. Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* on witch-hunting, but it appears that no such thing ever happened in our country. When power breaks down for two hours in New York, their writers – good or bad – write volumes and tear the entire social fabric of America thread-bare. Our literature reflects only an uneasy, horror-stricken silence. The literature here made no attempt to face the situation. This failure of the intellectuals resulted in the division of Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq into two factions in the seventh decade of the century. The “Political” writers abjured literature, and the “Literary” ones shunned politics.

Our experiences have been acute. But after each new shock, instead of having any clearer perception of the situation, the

consciousness was only further confounded and blurred. The characters of Qurat-ul-Ain's *Aakher-e-Shab Ke Hamsafar* are so mixed up. Perhaps the earlier generations were never so confused:

"Rehan, you made such awful compromises.

In Calcutta as well as here!"

"Compromise: Didn't you make compromises?

Not in the Port of Spain!"

"I have not bartered away my conscience. Have you been to a mad house?" She exclaimed rather sharply, "I once went to a mad house with my husband, Lalit, in a city in Brazil. There a man considered himself a kettle. The other said, 'I am Jesus Christ'. Once a woman believed that she had swallowed Grandfather Clock. She was continuously emitting the sounds of Tick, Tick. Thus Rono, all of us think ourselves, to be what we are not."

(The Conference Hall)

Is the new generation really mad, or is it seeking refuge in madness, like Hamlet's antic disposition, since at least this much awareness is still left that "History is the name of learning nothing from the pages of History."

Qurat-ul-Ain reversed the flow of time in the effort to seek herself, and, resorting to the concept of transmigration of souls, she declared that history is a cycle and we are caught in a whirlpool. She elaborates the following theory of T.S.Eliot about the development of the mind, without fully grasping its meaning:

That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery.

(Tradition and the Individual Talent)

Eliot is here talking of the creative process, not of the elements of creation. Thus the symbol for torture employed in the short story, *There is a commotion in the Prison House that Hind is Coming*, is not confined to one Karbala. It has been the same in concentration camps, in Palestine, in Africa; now, in the past, in the Middle Ages. It is still

the same. The conclusion; cruelty is a fact of life. It has existed with life, and it will last till the end of life. There is oppression, and oppression will persist. "Conventions vary from land to land. Here it is the rope, there the sword". Earlier "Gas" was the mode. Also the sub-title of this story is "The Tragedy of the World", suggesting that tragedy is the destiny of the world. Then the technique has also supported the theme. Qurat-ul-Ain has not only used the elegies of Anis in this story but has also freely borrowed from reports, editorials, commentaries from the journals all over the world, and well known sayings, verses and lines from other poetry. She has closely followed the method of T.S.Eliot, who makes lavish allusions to all the literatures and learnings of the world, specially the poetic and philosophical utterances of the west, in his poems, particularly in *The Wasteland*, or, of the other novels from Latin America which reverberate in the fiction of Marquez. She too has used quotations and allusions in her fiction. This is a way of asserting that ours are no personal or isolated observations. Others are also saying the same things. This is a technique of giving a universal colour to a personal opinion. Qurat-ul-Ain has made cruelty and suffering universal, eternal and perennial, that is, oppression is man's destiny, not his fault, weakness or stupidity. And if it is not a mistake, it can neither be eradicated nor condemned. It is absurd to try for any improvement or reform in this respect.

Then there is Intezar Hussain. Though in a way all modern writers are "lost souls" in one sense or another, the sense of being lost is very acute and intrusive in Intezar Hussain. And this sense is so complete that it does not only cause isolation, it is incapable of establishing any relationships at all. First faith is lost in others, then in one's own self. The Last Man does not only lose his identity; he is transformed into a monkey. He is cut off from his roots:

Those who are alienated from their own land, no other accepts them.

(Shehr-e-Afsos)

And when the stranger packs up for the last journey he is stuck at the railway station, as the last train has left. The train for Amritsar will arrive no more. When the return becomes impossible he resorts to fantasy. Intezar's lost man seeks himself in Andulus, Palestine and Mughal India. He tries to find the causes of his helplessness in promising dreams and nightmares and resorts to myths and Jataks:

It's strange my dear; earlier you complained that I am engrossed in Islamic history, now you find fault with my interest in Mahabharat. There is no help, brother; to me the present draws its significance only from the past.

(Monkey's Tail)

It is not just the past that matters here. It reflects the desire to escape the fact of one's existence. Every stratagem is employed to achieve this end:

"We", he thought, "become aware of our existence through our thinking. I think therefore I am." And in this state of suffering how much had he compelled himself to think and had tried to recall those memories which had flown away like sparrows... "Because I have memories therefore I am...", he thought, "If I stop thinking, or put that aside for some other time"; and he thought as if he was not thinking, as if he is not...and released from the bondage of "I" wandered far and wide.

(The Legs)

This means that man can either live in the past with the help of memories, or, through his thoughts, in the abstract. Life is very difficult in the living world of action. Then, in the past, or in the abstract, this journey is not even a release from "I"; rather there is a great desire and effort to deny the fact of "I", since in spite of changing the objective references of "I", or by assuming that they have changed, the reality of ego does not change nor do its conditions alter. All these efforts ultimately prove to be self-deceptions.

As he arrived in that strange island, he thought that no son of Adam lived there. A witch rules there. Man enters the place and is turned into an animal. All of these were once men, then turned into pigs, goats and dogs. She took pity upon me and converted me into a deer.

(The Legs)

This means that to change one's form is acceptable, however fantastic, but to change one's circumstances, however real, is not approved. Perhaps the reason is that to change the form is literature while to change the conditions of life is politics. But then this delusion is neither the solution nor does it last long:

Moving among pigs and dogs and goats in the palace of the witch he pondered with pain "How long shall I sustain myself thus?"

This was the end of one journey, while the adventurers in *Aakher-e-Shab Ke Hamsafar* arrived at this conclusion:

Now it appears that we were hitch-hikers, waving our thumbs on the roadside. A car stopped, offered us lift and carried us to Moscow. Another car stopped, and took us to Washington. Some rode on the camels towards Makkah and Medina. Others left for Benaras on Bullock carts. The car that stopped for me broke down at a short distance.

(Richard Barlow)

Qurat-ul-Ain fumbled and Intezar Hussain took the wrong road. Had he tried to understand *Dastans* (tales) through life, rather than understanding life through *Dastans*, he would have certainly created great literature. He has expression, style and technique, as well as themes. But he has an inverted consciousness. Both Qurat-ul-Ain and Intezar instead of finding their own way, sought it in the beaten tracks. Had it not been so, Qurat-ul-Ain Haider would have not wondered that Ali Hussain exists in Dacca as well as in Calcutta and Karachi. She has not even tried to appreciate the tragedy of Ali Hussain.

The fact is that our intellectuals have not yet started thinking. They are not even aware of the issues. Rather they have been only engaged in answering the questions raised elsewhere -- in Africa, in Palestine, in Latin America and in Europe. They have not yet formulated their own questions. Thirty or thirty five years ago they protested, gave vent to their anger. Now it appears that they have cooled down. There is complete silence. And this is the vital question -- what is this silence? and why? Once they have formulated this question only then the first step towards revolution will become possible. And this question will not be formulated in the mind of any philosopher. It is already reverberating in the atmosphere, shouting from roof tops in market square:

*No window is without a sound,
Though no one speaks.*

The walls and the doors are all resounding with loud voices, but those who should speak are silent. The intellectuals are dumb, the poets are

❧ Chapter 02 ❧

Poetry and Revolution in South Africa*



In a desperate and bloody struggle against colonialism, the poetry of South Africa stands out as a symbol of spiritual renaissance giving life and shape to a process of decolonisation of consciousness which renders a profounder meaning to political and armed resistance against oppression.

The centuries-old exploitation of man by man has precipitated in a black and white contrast. The aggression is so naked and the injustices inflicted so obvious that even the most glib tongues and the latest techniques of word play have failed to create euphemisms. The worn-out slogans of bringing civilization to the savage, Christianity to the pagan, and humanity to the barbarian work no more. For generations the black man has suffered without knowing why he was suffering. He has been very humble, honest and efficient. He has been through the anguish of physical misery and personal degradation. He has now arrived at the excruciating awareness of his wretchedness, and cries in pain:

*Do not look to where we turn and seethe
We pale humanity, like worms (the ululations might bind you to
our grief)
Whose feet carry the duty of life,
fully realising that all this toil and suffering will bring
him no good, still persisting,
Yet knowing ours is a return of emptiness.*

(Mazisi Kunene, *Farewell*)

The aggressor has failed to fabricate any excuse for the heinous crime while priding himself over his noble ideals of democracy,

* Though the situation in South Africa has now changed, their struggle is still a beacon of hope to all freedom fighters.

fraternity and social justice, and all this in the name of an advanced civilisation.

The world has repeatedly and unequivocally condemned this oppression. But before the world conscience could be so aroused, the shrieks of the sufferers had to be loud enough to reach its ear. For quite some time, the world had known the misery and had glimpses into the heart of darkness. But instead of indignation, such revelations could only arouse compassion in some feeble hearts. The general reaction that was created was that some irresponsible, greedy and cast-out white men were committing such crimes against the innocent natives. The white conscience was satisfied quite easily by disowning and condemning these 'ruffians'. But as a corollary, the poor native was described as backward, uncivilized and ridiculously close to the animal. Insult was thus added to injury, and he protested. He asserted his humanity:

*Do you know
What love is
White man?
You took me
While my baby slept.
And she is as beautiful as yours
Loves as yours
But you took me
Took love
When you had yours.*

(Molefe Pheto)

Even such renowned liberals as John Stuart Mill considered the non-white races as 'grown children' who needed patronage and overseeing. Writing in 1859, he observed:

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine (liberty) is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. We are not speaking of children, of young persons below the age which law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood. Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by the others must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury. For the reason, we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its non-age.

(On Liberty, Introduction)

The thesis is still valid in South Africa. There can be no equality among the healthy and the sane, on the one hand, and the blind, maimed, sick, feeble-minded, ignorant, or poor, on the other. There can exist only the relationship of the ruler and the ruled between them.

The history of this patronising attitude begins with the colonial adventures of the west in the 15th and 16th centuries. The first 'pioneers' were the thieves, cut-throats, procurers and the cast-out of the society, the Magwitches and Compeysons of Dickens's *Great Expectations*. The entire crew of ships which went out to seek fortune was made up of convicts. The colonies actually served as safety valves for the societies at 'home' for dumping criminals and the social misfits in them. These were the first harbingers of the message of peace and the light of Faith to the dark regions of the world. Humanitarian ideals of love, compassion and fraternity were only the cherished dream of the most enlightened. These find expression in such works as Shakespeare's utopian island of *The Tempest*. But, unfortunately, the men who actually occupied foreign lands were no Prosperos. They were rather the progeny of Iagos, Richard IIIs and other villains of the Shakespearean age, who were fired only with a Machiavellian passion. The world of Shakespeare was actually caught in the contradictions of commercialism and idealism which produced either villains or confused Hamlets. The melancholy of Antonio, in *The Merchant of Venice*, which the critics find so mysterious or enigmatic, was actually rooted in this contradiction. Antonio is a very successful and prosperous merchant. He is also a very devout friend. The acquisitive talent of the trader does not go well with the demand of sacrifice for a friend. The veil of mystery no more obscures the situation. In Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*, for example, the message of faith is forcefully carried to the region where a fresh deposit of silver has been discovered. Even sectarian clashes occur when different Christian denominations contend for the souls of men now glittering with silver trappings. Similarly, his Lord Jim is only a Hamlet whose anguish is not veiled or diffused by confusions.

The cruel reality stares hard in his face. The African, suffering these hypocrisies, is under no delusions any more, and cries out in pain and protests:

"Look at what Mlungu the Christian is doing"
(Mlungu stands for the white man).

(O.M. Mtshali, *Kwa Bhanya*)

Caught in his own professions and high falutin pretensions the white man could now satisfy his conscience only by convincing himself that the 'inferior races' are not human beings, that they are a sub-human species. This thinking was reflected in the policy of racial segregation. The habitations of the blacks in South Africa are called 'locations'. Harry Bloom describes a 'location' in *'Transvaal Episode.'*

The place where they live is something different from the poor quarter of a town, something different from the usual segregated district. It is a special kind of living arrangement that cannot be compared with anything outside this country. They call this place the location, which is itself a significantly unique use of the word, for it denotes not a place where people live, but one where something is to be found.

This is not a slum. This is not even a ghetto, because a slum or a ghetto are human dwellings, however mean and ugly. The location is a good example of what Aime Cesaire calls the "Thingification" of human beings. This is a process which the capitalist system is producing in advanced countries as well. It is illustrated in the plays of Ionesco, where human beings are shown transformed into chairs or thick-skinned rhinoceros. The location is treated either as a trash-heap outside a city, or as something dangerous and harmful which must be enclosed in barbed wire. This protectionism is called Reservation in the USA, where Indian tribes are segregated and these places are converted into tourist spots. The Reservation serves as a symbol of white man's concern for the unprotected helpless savage life. This is as good as a zoo:

*When I visit Europe's and America's zoos
I See caged, fenced, and all locked up
African and Asian animals
I often depart
From the prisons with blues
Why do Third world animals
Have to pay...such heavy, life-time dues?*

(Anon)

But this is also a Zoo story of America. Edward Albee makes it a symbol of the savagery and deprivation of life in America in *The Zoo Story*. Whether it is the Zoo or barbed wire dwelling, it is visited upon the Western world itself in the form of ghettos, slums and concentration camps. Amie Cesaire has said, in *Discourse on*

Colonialism, that apartheid is just another form of Nazism. The west tolerated Nazism. It even collaborated with Nazi Kaiser and the fascist dictator in the Spanish Civil War. It paid heavily in the form of World War II, which was a colossal disaster, not merely an economic or political disaster. It has shaken the very foundations of western civilisation, which finds it more and more difficult to stand on its feet as each day passes. In South Africa, blacks are separated from whites, and in Europe and America all sorts of walls are being raised everywhere between man and man. The gulf created between man and man, whether in the form of apartheid or in that of fascism, is at the very root of capitalism whose underlying principle is expropriation rather than humanitarianism. The oppressed of South Africa even reminded their white oppressor of the ideal held so dear by them. They called upon the Whites to make a joint front against injustice and inhumanity. They cried:

*Go catch the Kaiser
Let the Kaiser come and talk with us
We'll tell him how the Zulus won at Sandlwana
Of Thaba Ntsu where the Boers were baffled...*

(Samuel Mqhayi)

But Kaiser was only the other face of the White, his real face is South Africa. He never respected humanity. Man was a slogan. He never cared for the national spirit. Nation was a hoax. To him nothing mattered beyond naked and unscrupulous self-interest. And when men demanded their rights, when nations cried for liberty, the white man only reacted by saying that it is some vicious white men who are instigating them. They branded their revolt as collective madness. The black man shouted in anguish:

*Oh all you frustrated ones, powers tombed in dirt,
Aborted not by Death but carrion hooks of birth
Arise! The brassy shout of Freedom stirs our earth:
Not Death but death's-head tyranny seethes our
ground.
And plots our narrow cells of pain, defeat and
dearth:
Better that we should die, than that we should lie
down.*

(Dennis Brutus, At a funeral)

The intellectuals, the creative writers from South Africa came forth to demonstrate that their revolt is not just the shrieks of the caged animal, that they are humans, endowed with all the human faculties, and that they can speak to the west in its own language, perhaps making a better, at least a more effective, use of their symbols, of their technique. Though a lot of literature has been produced in African languages, some write in English, French and Portuguese. They realise that the intellectual activity must be geared towards the cause of national liberation. They derive impetus and inspiration from national liberation movements.

There is struggle. But it is not merely a political struggle. It is an entire way of life, a rich tradition, a healthy and sacred culture:

*More than Christians hanker for their
Jesu and heaven in the clouds.*

(Kwa Bhanya)

It is this world that is threatened. The exploitative system has destroyed a rich past and replaced it with selfishness and greed. The struggle aims at reviving those days:

*Those days the custom of the tribe did rule.
Large herds of cattle were the goal supreme,
The cows did yield of milk, the gourds were filled,
Men bred the racing oxen for their sport:
They wedded wives, and there were nuptial feasts.
Of daughters, too, the mothers were most proud,
And so of youth the thoughtful aged men.
It was a world where
Belief passed down from father to son
That spirits of their ancestors had guard
O'er those who kept the custom of the tribe.*

(James J.R. Jolobe, Thutula)

This beautiful world of sports, feats and ceremonies was being destroyed. It was a world of beliefs, customs and ancestral bliss which had created an economic system, and strong bonds of tribal, family and human relationships. These were the foundations of a cohesive social structure and a just political system. It grew out of their lives. There was no foolishness about it. This world was not an idea. It was a fact, a living fact, a vital force, that grew with them and nourished them:

*So many are asleep under the ground.
When we dance at the festival embracing the earth with our feet.
May be the place on which we stand
Is where they also stood with their dreams.*

(Mazisi Kunene, *Cycle*)

This is the world of tradition, the world of “Timeless Become” which the man rooted in his past hourly creates and recreates. It is no dream as the modern western man dreams, when he gets an idea of tradition from the sons of the soil *a la* Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, which provided much of the material for his poetry to T.S. Eliot. Eliot tries to recreate this world in the haziness of a dream in *East Coker*:

*Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter
Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the corn.*

But the dream flies away with the dawning of the day, and the reality that stares naked in the face is no more than the nightmare of *The Wasteland*. Even a dream is no relief, as it will be the dream of a Prufrock. Reality presses itself differently on the minds of the natives of Africa:

*I see myself in short pants and Khaki shirt,
Running a race with my shadow,
Trying to catch the tail of Gugu, our fluffy cat:
And then collide with my many friends.
Sikobho, Fabiyana, Thami, Jimisino,
They are all dead now,
I will follow them.
When crabs and frogs have grown horns.*

(Oswald Mbuyisene Mtshali, *The Removal of Our Village--Kwa Bhanya*)

Man, animal; childhood, youth; life, death; all combine to create the bitter-sweet memories of a past of paradisaal bliss made extremely painful by the sense of loss and the deprivation of the present. It is no dreaming. It is living; the loss, the despair, the bitterness, ending in the resolution of the last line, which speaks daggers. This is how love turns to poison. This is South Africa today.

This sensibility gets a fresh impetus from the national liberation movements. The revolution blends the shrieks of the tortured with the courage of the fighter. It breeds hatred and inspires vengeance. There is no room for love in the face of sadistic violence:

*The sergeant laughs with strong teeth
His jackboots nestle under the springbok horns.
Those bayonets are silent,
The spear of the nation gone to the ground.
Warriors prowl in the state of their dungeons.
I've seen the nebulae of a man's eyes
Squirm with pain, he sang his life
Through cosmic volleys
and his pain becomes so sharp when
They call it
genital therapy, the blond bosses.*

(K.A. Nortji, *At Rest From The Grim Place*)

It is the struggle, political and armed struggle, that gives them confidence. The black man is no more a wretched helpless creature. He can now dictate terms:

*White people are white people
They must learn to listen
Black people are black people
They must learn to talk.*

(Mongane Wally Secrete)

This Negro revolt finds expression in a parallel movement of Negritude in America and the Caribbean. It is an assertion of black pride. Césaire is its strong advocate, while Mphahlele opposes it with equal vehemence. Arguments are strong on both sides. Mphahlele asserts that the Negro must not force an apartheid in the reverse by a self imposed isolation. He may be correct, and in the long run perhaps his view will prevail. But Césaire believes that the white man no more understands human language. He must be challenged in the language that he understands; the language of violence, hatred and vengeance. Perhaps the difference is rather geographical. Mphahlele is South African. He belongs to a country predominantly black, and even in his extreme misery can afford humane generosity to the small white minority which he is confident to bring to reason one day. Césaire, on the other hand, belongs to the West Indies, in the middle of the white world, into which he does not want to be assimilated and

with which his racial pride will not allow him to come to terms. His is the tragedy of black man virtually living on the crumbs of white generosity. He is an exile, and shares the sentiments of an exile, like Arthur Nortji:

*I drag my shrunken corpulence
libraries
Among the tables of rich
Famous viands tasted like ash...*

The South Africans are facing a real situation. Their struggle is not for an idea. They are not fighting for a concept. They are crying with the pain of lacerating wounds:

*My mind burned and I shackled it
With squalid love, the violence of the flesh.
The quiet scars over my veins bit
less deep now than the knife or lash
Could feel content about;
No longer need I shout
Freedom in the house.*

(K.A. Nortgi, *Up Late*)

Slogans do not mean anything to them, not even the slogan of Bantustan, which will pay homage and reverence to the Bantu culture, admire their humanity, but deny them property, liberty or free nationhood.

This awareness is coming to the oppressed in an unprecedented rule of terror. Suppression is absolute in South Africa. In the censor code there are as many as 97 definitions of what is 'undesirable' and punishable by law. These include the advocacy of social change, in any form. There are more than 13,000 publications which are banned in South Africa. Any writer who is censured by the law gets all his writings automatically banned, enormously adding to the number. The police has wide powers. Returning once more to Harry Bloom, the picture of a location comes out so vividly:

The location people live in desperately close contact with the police. Any knock on the door might be that of a policeman. Any day might be the one when a husband fails to come home from work and is found to be in gaol, arrested for an irregularity in his pass, for possessing a spiked stick, for sitting on the wrong bench in the park, for leaving his tax

receipt at home, for disobedience, impertinence, trespass, nuisance, disturbance--for any one of the countless possible crimes; the day when money must be hurriedly found for bails, fines, and lawyers' fees; the day when a man is last seen before disappearing for weeks, months, sometimes years, while in his absence his house is sold and his family uprooted. Any night might be that when the police stage a raid on the location for beer or spirits, dangerous weapons, passes and permits, stolen goods bursting into houses at random, ordering father, mother, and terrified children, lodgers and visitors at the point of a gun to stand in the street while they ransack the room.

(Transvaal Episode)

The passage does not really portray the anguish and humiliation of the man in the location, though the picture created by Harry Bloom is so vividly ironical that it looks like a fiction:

There is a multitude of papers—pink papers, green papers, buff papers, for every thing must be written and authorised. Life in the location is stifled by the dense webs of bureaucracy. A man in the location goes about with the superintendent's signature all over his person. He becomes a piece of paper, his family becomes a lustre of papers, his house a number in a register, his job a yellow form; and his life and security exactly as valuable and durable as the scraps of paper that fill his pockets.

Still these are the externals of the situation; the real anguish, the desperate sense of humiliation, the torture that is hurting the inside of a man when his entire world is thrown into pieces, is echoed through the medium of poetry. Even when the police do not come, their weird ghosts keep haunting the location. It is sometimes even a relief to see a raid coming:-

*When they come for me
I wonder many times
Who the victor is
Blasts of bangs
On dead doors
In the middle of the night
Unconcentrated torch lights
Of fear*

*From those who have
 Come for me
 Nights without sleep
 Are now ended for me
 Because at last
 They have come
 And I with victory
 Know my fate
 Brave talk of fears
 Emanates from hoarse throats
 As the house search progresses
 Papers, any sort, strewn around
 I watch, they watch
 We watch
 But Who's scared?*

(Molefe Pheto, *When They Come*)

When a man, a nation, a whole race is mocked so savagely, irony becomes poignant. As the struggle of the oppressed has a history, so has oppression a history. The Caesars of yesterday have been reincarnated as the Nazis, fascists and the white racists of today:

*They rode upon
 The death chariot
 To their Golgotha
 Three vagrants
 Whose papers to be in Caesar's empire
 Were not in order.
 The Sun
 Shrivelled their bodies
 In the mobile tombs
 As airtight as canned fish
 We 're hot!
 We're thirsty!
 We're hungry!
 The centurian
 Touched their tongues
 With the tip of a lance
 Dipped in apathy:
 "Don't cry to me,
 But to the Caesar who
 Crucified you".
 A woman came*

*To wipe their faces.
 She carried a dishcloth
 Full of bread and tea
 We're dying!
 The centurian washed his hands.*

(Oswald Mybuyisene Mtshali)

Though writing in no less bitter ironic vein, T.S. Eliot did not make such meaningful use of Roman history in *The Wasteland's* "The chair she sat in..."

This is the poetry of revolt. There is desperation in it. There is frustration too. There are wild shrieks of writhing pain. But there is no disillusionment. There is a resolve to fight, a determination to humble the enemy, and a hope in a future healthy, humane and free. In their poetry, they have utilised all the poetic resources of the past and the present, of indigenous culture and Western civilisation. They have been able to create a rich and genuine poetry which rises from the soil and speaks to the world beyond. They can justly claim:

*Our sapless roots have fed
 The wind swept seedlings of another age.
 Cultivated weeds have grown where we led
 The virgins to the water's edge.*

(Lenrie Peters, *Home-Coming*)

If the excellence of poetry is to render reality in images infused with passion, then the metaphor of heart transplant for colonial usurpation could only come from South Africa, the land simultaneously known for both the phenomena. Thus writes Gideon Mangoaela in his *Ode to Christian Barnard*, Captioned *Lend Me a Heart*:

*Hail to you gallant son of Barnardi!
 That you've restored human pride
 To us descendants of Phale
 And have assured us a home of comfort in eternity.
 No more may our hearts be clothed in cold dust
 Because you lay them in white sepulchres
 Carved in live bodies of the purest white
 Whose corpses no black hand dare ever touch!
 But alas, beloved Christian,
 Dear son of my father!
 We feel ill at ease*

*For here we sit awaiting the great day of Nangqawuse
When these white bodies
Shall be hurled onto the seas
Yet we know not
What the ancestral spirits will think
When they behold strange hearts
Emerge from alien bodies
And forever lose their homes
In the land of shadows.*

There is also heard here an ominous note suggesting white enclaves in the land of shadows of Black Africa.

(1983)



❧ Chapter 03 ❧

Central Asia *Seen Through Its Literature*



Two important things about Central Asia are that it is Asia and that it is Muslim. A third characteristic, which is of a recent origin, is its choice to associate with the Soviet Union*. How far that choice was voluntary, or how many compulsions forced it on them, falls outside the scope of this study. However, all these factors are reflected in the literature of this area which at the same time inherits one of the richest and profoundest traditions of bold scholarship and scintillating creative achievements that characterised the Middle Ages and ultimately led to the age of enlightenment in the west. It is in fact this deep-rooted tradition that uses the various, sometimes even discordant, elements into a rich progressive culture.

The study of a people's progress in life through their literature has a certain advantage over other studies. All other estimates rest on specific data and its interpretation. A historian, an economist or a scientist, for example, concentrates on certain aspects of the life of a community. But, as is quite well known, data can be misinterpreted and manipulated, since such studies are always made according to some assumptions or even to prove certain preconceived notions. A study of life through literature is more authentic because literature is primarily written for the common man who is its target. It is not initially written for the consumption of the posterity or for the use of the specialist. Moreover, it is generally written for the entertainment or edification of the readers. It is not written for any purpose outside itself, and is not influenced by any ulterior motive. It is a record of people's reactions to the day to day problems and interests of their lives.

* That association has left a lasting impact on these states and is still relevant to their culture

The world behind the Iron Curtain has long been a mystery, though we are tied in strong bonds to Central Asia which find expression in our literature where cities like Bukhara and Samarkand have the same spell for us as Delhi and Asfahan and Baghdad. Since the Russian revolution these names had almost lost their reality for us and had become hardly more than fairylands. With the recent change of attitude brought about by Perestroika and Glasnost, this world of our fantasy has once again come to life. Much interest has now been aroused in Central Asia. War in Afghanistan has focused the attention of the entire world on this region. We have also come to a pleasant realization that this fantastic world is much closer to us than we imagined. It is no more a part of our Arabian Nights sensibility, which persisted even after the Declaration at Tashkent, a name that allured us only to dreamlands.

Perestroika is, as its authors claim, a policy of inviting criticism and benefiting from it. According to Alexander Yakovlev, member Politbureau and Secretary, Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "Today socialism's fundamentals (the choice of social system, the forms of ownership, democracy and glasnost, popular power, and the party's role) are the most common subjects of debate. This raises issues of morals both in daily life and in politics". (The Pakistan Times, Lahore, 7 November, 1989). One of such moral questions relates to the fact that "Islam has the second largest number of followers among the 40 religions and religious trends existing in the USSR", according to Sheikh Abdulgani Abdullah, Vice Chairman, Muslim Board for Central Asia (The Pakistan Times, Lahore 2 November, 1989). The most important fact in this regard is the way of life that prevails in Central Asian republics which is very different from the western life style of the rest of the USSR.

The Central Asian republics belong to the oriental tradition, which they still retain. Family traditions, respect for the elders and some remnants of their past nomadic life are the salient features of their world which distinguish it from the western world. The family ties are still very strong here and they feel no embarrassment in giving expression to their sentiments. The "People's Poet" of Uzbekistan, Hamaz Hakim Zadeh, does not feel shy in expressing his emotions in public as his poem, *Compliments*, shows:

*If you arrive safe in the homeland,
Pay my compliments to the father.*

*If my mother comes out excited with emotion,
Step forward and convey my regards to her.
Kiss the forehead of the younger brother.
I often remember him, give him my love.*

Not only in the emotion, in form too these verses follow the oriental tradition of writing in couplets in set metric lines. These personal sentiments are with as much sincerity also transferred to the entire community:

*All the elders and the young are equal;
Go to everybody's house and pay my respects.*

The institution of the family and the regard for the entire neighbourhood no more exist in the western society in this form. Rasool Hamzatov, the Lenin laureate from Daghestan, gives a beautiful description of the departure of a traveller from a habitation where he had stayed for some time, in the following words:

The saddle was tightened. An old man who looked like my father gave the reins in my hand. A small girl with a mischievous smile gave the thong in my hand. From the neighbouring house a damsel emerged with a pitcher full of water. This is a traditional way of saying good bye to those setting out on a journey. Everyone whom I come across bids me bon voyage.

(My Daghestan, p. 55)

At another place in the same book Rasool Hamzatov gives an illustration of how the younger ones show the great regard in which, the elders of the community are held by everyone:

Sometimes it so happens that some young friends are sitting round a bridegroom when suddenly they have to rise and leave because some elderly persons have entered the room and it is essential to show them respect and leave the place

(Ibid. p.29)

Similarly the eastern traditions of hospitality are as much a part of their tradition as of ours. A guest comes as a blessing of God and he must be received with respect and served with devotion. Daghestan in no exception:

A hill woman is lighting the fire early in the morning to make the food left over from the night hot. This food must be

enough for the family. Suddenly some unexpected guests appear. She puts away the last nights' food and starts preparing fresh food.

(Ibid. p.29)

Traditions, customs and the values of the society are held in great esteem and this has been particularly in a small quotation prefixed to the book:

*If you fire past with a pistol,
The future will charge you with a cannon.*

My Daghestan is a book written very much in the oriental tradition. It is allegorical and is instructive in tone. The narration, which is in the oral tradition of the long stories told sitting round a bonfire in long winter nights, is punctuated with anecdotes, sometimes enlivened with crisp lines of poetry. A tribal multilingual society is revealed here, a society that transcends all differences in its shared fears and aspirations. It is still a nomadic world with the only difference that instead of the bonfire now they sit in cosy spacious halls. This literature has risen from a rich and ancient tradition. Rituals, lyrics and the shepherds' songs, which absorbed the experiences of the people, have their roots in the distant past. Their stories are tied to the folk-lore and the techniques brought from the age-honoured folk tradition.

In the Kazakh stories we come across wedding songs, the songs of the departure of the bride from her all, the songs of her mother and father. There are songs sung by the young friends of the bride, as in our own marriage ceremonies, and by the djigits (young fellows), again like the songs of the professional singers as we have them. These songs also carry advices, precepts as well as praises of love and the bitterness of rivalry. One wonders if such customs in our own society are really borrowed from Hindu Culture, as some would have us believe. We see our own experiences, practices and habits reflected in these ceremonies. This culture, while it connects us with them, it in turn connects them to our common glorious world of the Middle Ages. This cultural heritage is continuous.

The Central Asians are strongly tied to their traditions which find expression in the most pristine forms in their literature. One such symbolic rendering is the story. *The White Dromedary* by Satimazhan Sanbaev from Kazakhstan. It is the story of an unfortunate man, Myrzagali, who is crushed by circumstances and betrayed by his

wife, and he is ridiculed for this. He shifts all his attention and love to a white aruana, the she-camel. Though he has neither love nor care for his wife, he bears to live on with her, but all his attachment is for this dromedary which he has brought from a far off place, Mangystau. The dromedary is absolutely unhappy there, does not reciprocate his love and tries thrice to break away and go to her native place. The old man himself had accepted the bitterest shock of his life and was reconciled to reality. He had compromised. But the dromedary was made of a different stuff. She does not submit to the circumstances. She tries to run away. She refuses to mate with a single humped brown male. She is forced to mate with this inferior male only when the veins of her eyes are cut and her legs and head are tied fast with a rope. This operation, too, is ironically performed on the dromedary by the paramour of Myrzagali's wife. Although the dromedary bears a calf in her blindness, she ultimately runs away and perishes in the steppes. Power and passion refuse to bow before oppression and coercion. This is an ironical comment on the master who accepted his misfortunes lying down.

Even at instinctual level, people are fast bound to their world. They respect its traditions and are thoroughly steeped in them. This is revealed in the interest they express in the most trivial things of their life and the keenness they show in giving the minutest details of something which may have no significance for a stranger. Such a trifle is the description of the preparation of sugar candy in Sadrudin Aini's *The Way To Bukhara (Under The Blue Mountains)*. The description covers pages after pages right from the browning of the flour to the final preparation of candy, not leaving out the minutest detail. Similarly the taste for KUMYS has been described in all its exquisite refinement in Dukenbai Doszhanov's Kazakh story of the same name:

Of course I knew there was a great difference between KUMYS from the steppes. In town KUMYS is rather sharp in taste, rank and watery. After all, the fresh mare's milk and the fermenting drink and the finished KUMYS itself, until it is sold, are kept in a tin or glass container. Hence the after-taste. At least, that's how I see it.

(The Voice of the Steppe p.293)

The writer enjoys telling us the whole process of the preparation of this special drink, which is not simply a drink, but a whole way of life, as:

The fermented milk's sharp odour must have reminded him of his irretrievable, dashing youth, the resonant clatter of hooves over the boundless expanses of the steppe, the wild game of *Kokpar* which used to make the blood boil in his veins.

Kokpar, the popular game of the olden times in Kazakhstan, has been described in another story with this title, by Taken Alimkulov. It is a goat fight, rather a fight for the carcass of the goat. The booty is the goat beheaded, its legs cut off upto the knees, and the carcass carried across the back of a horse, many contenders trying to snatch it from the owner. The game picks up pace:

They joined in a skirmish. Tarban set his horse at a gallop, but they continued to pull the goat from both sides. Now there was nothing Tarban could do but contend first with one and then with the other, depending on who was getting the upper hand. In so far as they were both inveterate horsemen and didn't yield to one another in either strength or dexterity, the carcass slid back and forth on Tarban's saddle and he himself was gradually seized by excitement, for the first time in his life feeling the rapture of a genuine goat fight. Say what you like, but Turban actually did participate in the Kokpar—he grabbed onto the goat's fur tenaciously, zealously pulled the carcass towards himself, and most important, wasn't afraid of the horses colliding. In a word, he was pleased with himself.

This is only a small quotation. But it gives sufficient idea of the writer's interest in this ancient game and the fascination he feels for it.

But the past is not simply nostalgia to them. It is woven in the fabric of their life. It is a living experience, and a formative experience too. Their emotional responses follow the habits imbibed through generations of living within a set pattern of custom and honouring the wisdom of the most revered ancestors. *Separate Ways* by Sattar Tursun from Tajikistan is a story which reveals the bitter-sweet pangs of romantic love in the face of full realization and complete acceptance of the reality of the socio-economic compulsions of a way of life that is heavily custom ridden. It is a conventional triangular love story, but the villain is no simple villain. He is possessive, assertive, callous and jingoistic. The woman is modest and bashful, the man restrained but tense. This is a typical oriental story in which the respect for the husband takes precedence over the concern for the unfortunate love,

and where marriages are contracted primarily on consideration of social status and economic position.

The city of Bukhara reminds of some ancient Mughal metropolis. This is how Sadriddin Aini describes his first experience of this legendary place:

We arrived in Bukhara just before the Isha prayer and entered the city through Samarkand Gate. All the twelve gates of the city were closed after this prayer, that is, about an hour and a half after sun-set. All the gates were locked and the keys were given in the custody of the 'Kotwal' of Bukhara, who was called *Mir Shab* (The master of the night).

The father told me that had we arrived late by another five minutes we would have been forced to spend the night outside the city ramparts in the open.

It was already dark in the city. Only the guard's cabin beside the main gate had a dimly lit lamp and that was all. There could be seen no light anywhere as the houses in Bukhara had only their walls along the street. Their doors and windows opened into the courtyards at the back. The dark streets with two to three storey houses made of small raw bricks stretching along with sides looked like graves.

(The Way to Bukhara p.99-100)

The ancient building that served as the hostel for the students in the Madressa was more than a hundred year old and was as dismal.

All this shows that Central Asia is very much Asia and its association with the European USSR appears to be rather incongruent. It is, on one side an integral part of Iran to the extent that Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad, who visited Central Asia on a fact finding Mission sent by the British Government from India in 1865-66, talks of Samarkand, Bukhara, Isfahan and Neshapur as part of an indivisible entity, in his book, *Sukhandan-e-Faris*. It is a continuous indivisible civilization. This is the land of Jami, Rudaki, Firdousie, Omar Khayam, Sa'di, Khasro, Sadriddin Aini, Chinghiz Aitmatov, as also of Imam Thermezi and Imam Bukhari, beside so many others who are the pride and honour of the ancient and modern Central Asia. From the days of Genghis Khan (1162-1227), whose terror swept half the world from Peking to the Black sea and who

devastated the whole land from Samarkand to Multan and through the mighty sway of Timur and Nadir Shah, we have been in the closest of association with Central Asia. Baber also came from this great region and established the magnificent Mughal Empire in India. Thus, historically, politically, spiritually, culturally and emotionally Central Asia has been inseparable from us. For some time this relationship had been eclipsed by the circumstances that followed the Communist Revolution in Russia and the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of which the Central Asian republics now form a part. It is a rich heritage and one that has the potential for still greater links in the future. Their advancement in every field of life, in arts, sciences and technology can prove an asset for all the people of the area.

These republics were once very backward in education in science and technology. The basic amenities of life were miserably lacking. Most of the time they were left helpless in the face of natural calamities. One such devastation has been described in detail by Sadriiddin Aini in *The Way to Bukhara*. It is a nightmarish story of a sand storm. It is a lurid recollection of a harrowing experience. As the boys are grazing their cattle and enjoying themselves by the canal, it starts blowing fast with the sand flying in the air. Suddenly one calls out, "The sand is moving". All run helter-skelter. Panic grips everyone. The sky darkens with thick clouds of sand. The night fell earlier than usual and the sand started pouring on into the courtyard, in the streets and over the walls in virtual torrents. It crept in through crevices in the doors and the windows. Villages after villages were devastated, the crops destroyed and the vines buried under thick layers of sand. The people are practically helpless against this universal catastrophe.

Before the communist revolution science and technology were simply unknown here. All their learning was backward, scholastic, medieval in approach, abstract and absolutely out of touch with modern sciences. There was no dearth of schools. Maulana Muhammad Hussain Azad also went on this mission to Central Asia disguised as a student. It was reported that as many as sixteen hundred students were enrolled in the schools of Bukhara every year. (*Central Asian Tour in the Nineteenth Century* p.57). But as Azad observes:

The people of these lands are ignorant and least educated. An inbred complacency and the difficult terrain that makes travel extremely hard discourage them from venturing out. They are excited even at the most trivial information.

(Ibid. p.68)

Their trade is run on the ancient barter system. Whenever a caravan arrives, the local people bring bread, ghee, milk, eggs, meat, chicken and hand-woven carpets and exchange them for cloth, sewing needles, brass rings, glass beads, etc. (ibid). At that time Bukhara was the biggest market in Asia, trading in goods brought from China, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan and India. The muslin from Dhakka was much in demand. But they hardly ever bothered to improve the communication system. Maulana Azad notes in *Sukhandan-e-Faris*:

Many years ago, Nasir-ud-Din Shah of Iran visited Europe. There on the advice of Sadre-e-Azam, the minister, a contract was made with the Reuter company for the construction of a road. When the news reached Iran, the Ulema declared Sadre-e-Azam, the minister, an apostate. The King also got the news. He left Sadre-e-Azam in the port and declared that he had been dismissed. At the same time he tried to convince the Ulema that the rail and road would be of great advantage. "You will also have better facilities for Hajj and Ziarat." They said, "many men and women of another religion will mix with the local people. Their customs and manners are opposed to the way of this land. Donkeys, mules, and camels have been carrying the loads of our ancestors. These are enough for us." The King preferred the humiliation of breaking off the contract with the company. But he could say nothing to them. This must also be particularly mentioned here that such venerable and dignified persons are only few and far between. The rest, who are called Mullas and scholars and Hajis are held in the least regard by the people. Such persons provide material for the witty comments of the poets.

(Lecture 6)

This was equally true of Central Asia, which had been an integral part of Iran, culturally, and even politically.

Now the situation is totally changed. In Uzbekistan, for example now four million people are engaged in industry.

The Tashselmash and Tashtextilmash machine building enterprises, the metal making factory in Backabad, the Azot production association in Navoi, the coal mines in Angren and the carpet weaving factory in Khiva are the republic's largest enterprises. Kazakhstan has the country's major fuel and power centre. Twenty electric power stations operate on the 300,000 tons of coal extracted daily. These power stations supply Central Asia, the Urals, and Western Siberia with electricity. Azerbaijan manufactures 70% of the country's oil equipment and exports such equipment to 35 countries. The republic has oil refineries and chemical factories. Rapid progress is being made in power engineering, the automated technology, the telecommunication industry, the metal making industry and electronics. In all there are 900 large enterprises and 20 various industries. Kirghiz boasts, beside other industry, of having Central Asia's largest silk making factory in the town of Osh. It processes cocoons from all over Kirghizia and from Uzbekistan as well. The antimony plant in the village of Kadamdzhai near Uzgen smelts super pure Su Extra antimony which serves as the standard of quality on the world market. The country's largest carpet making factory in Karabalty is famous throughout the USSR. In Tajikistan cheap electricity feeds the power intensive aluminium and electrochemical industries. The largest enterprises include textile machinery factories, silk mills and carpet mills. Numerically, ginneries surpass the other industries. In Turkmenia, beside old industries of oil production and ginning, now they have oil refining, gas extraction, chemical production, electrical engineering and machine building complexes.

(USSR-Yearbook-'88 Novesti Press Agency)

One can see how it compares with the situation as it existed before the communist revolution, a detailed picture of which is available in the literature of the area, where once damaged by some natural calamity even a canal could not be repaired, not to speak of constructing new water-ways, roads and rails. The situation this side of the Iron Curtain is still not much different. Qur'at-ul-Ain Haider gives the account of a journey to an area in the neighbourhood of Central Asian republics:

The author (of this account) undertook a tour to Khurasan by helicopter in the company of Shahinshah Muhammad Raza

Shah and Farah Pehlvi the Shah Banu of Iran in 1970. Through the barren lands and rocks of this part of the earth the caravans continue to pass as of old. Cities have come up which have the most modern amenities of life, but the schools and the mosques of Meshed, Toos and Neshapur with their gowned scholars in green turbans, young and old, and the Khanams wrapped in Chadars remind us that there has been hardly a moment's distance between the twelfth and the twentieth centuries.... A line of mules is going through the pass. People clad in Shalwars and wearing turbans are riding on them.

(Kare Jahan Darza Hai)

The situation in the field of education was no better. Going back to Sadriddin Aini once again, we come across this account of a village not very far from Bukhara:

There was once a school (a Maktab) attached to a mosque, which had been out of use since long. As a result nobody in Mohalla Bala knew how to read or write. People were greatly surprised to learn that the carpenter working in their mosque was literate. They requested my grandfather to stay in their village and discharge the duties of the Imam, since in this way there will be at least one literate person in the village. The previous Imam was himself illiterate. He had memorised only a few verses from the Holy Quran and some prayers.

(On way to Bukhara, p.11, Under the Blue Mountains)

The things have very much changed now. The main character of one of Manzoora Saborova Aidin has had her degree in Education from Tashkant Institute. She writes poetry, fiction and drama. Even women have got eminence in the intellectual field in a society where only a generation or two earlier, even male literacy was a rare thing. The main character of her short-story, *Years Later*, Qindalat is an agriculturist. At present the Central Republics can boast of a vast and highly advanced system of education. There are a number of universities and institutes of higher education preparing young people in all the modern disciplines. According to the statistics given by Shiela Gujral in *Asian Republics, U.S.S.R.*, there were 2837 women scientific workers in these republics at the end of 1979. (Their number stood at 1316 at the end of 1965). Of these 25 are D.Lit. and 623 Ph.D. Among the women there are 5 Professors, 153 Readers, 88 Senior

Scientific Associates and 189 Junior Scientific Associates and Assistants.

Obviously the progress is tremendous and, if the existing barrier of the Iron Curtain is removed, one hopes that the influence of this great advance in science and culture will surely come to their unfortunate neighbours where even a mention of the literacy rate is a matter of great embarrassment. No doubt the Central Asian republics have still a lot to do to vie with the most advanced nations of the world, as Shiela Gujral noted:

The economic progress in these regions, as I have pointed out earlier, has slowed down because of the old outdated machinery and lack of adequate investment in the fields of agriculture and industry. Moreover, the administrative inefficiency and nepotism, at certain levels, has further contributed to this sickness. The new policy of Mikhail Gorbachev, that of sweeping under the carpet, has pinpointed many a flaw in the administrative set-up specially at Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

(p.46)

We can hope for a better future for Central Asia, and along with it for Asia as a whole, in the 21st. century. This region has already taken a big leap into the modern world while still retaining its pristine glory. Others may hope to get the right inspiration, even practical help and co-operation from them, since progress is irreversible, and they are not likely to suffer by associating with the backward peoples in their neighbourhood.

(1990)

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❧ Chapter 04 ❧

Resistance Poetry of Palestine



A revolutionary war is waged on all fronts. The resistance that is built against oppression is never merely a matter of arms and equipments. The one difference between the mercenary and the revolutionary is that the former is only a soldier and fights on order, while the latter is motivated by a cause. Without the cause perpetually in mind, the spirit of the revolution cannot be created. And the spirit of revolution is so imbibed that the cause and the agent become one. It permeates through the heart and the head and is felt in the bones. The revolutionary himself becomes revolution personified, and this becomes the property of the total sensibility. The total sensibility when translated into words becomes poetry; and defines the emotional response to the struggle:

*The people have risen like an erupting volcano,
Thundering forth in revolt despite incantations
That promise the sun, the moon and the stars;
They cannot be lured by the pleasures of wealth,
No longer beguiled – Then badly betrayed*

Directly attached to this feeling of revolt and giving it meanings, is the action:

*The protest of the people rumbles in the sky,
The earth shakes with the turbulent storm of Al-Assifa.
The bolt of their thunder will strike at the foe,
The mountains will echo--a million times-No.
A million time--No.--a million times--No.*

(The Oath, Fata Athara.)

The emotion of defiance and revolt is interwoven with action, since emotion without action is mere slogan and action without emotion is blatant destruction. In Palestine, there are no slogans and no destructive vandalism. There is a struggle, deliberate and with full awareness and total commitment.

The spirit of revolution is no mere inspiration either. An inspiration is itself a cause infused from the outside. This fact is very important to consider for those who are in any way interested in revolution and its genesis and meaning, but who have not directly experienced revolution in action. It is one thing to admire the courage, perseverance and the spirit of sacrifice in those engaged in a bloody struggle, and quite another thing to be directly involved in it. Those who are not in it see the struggle as something outside them. They have only a rudimentary concept of it and appreciate only its externals. They think in terms of external forces as motivations. In material terms it may mean a supply of arms, or else, an inspired leadership, in a subjective sense. But to those who are in it, a revolution is a shattering and challenging experience, the arms and inspiration no doubt follow:

*The silent courtyards of homes that have been stolen
Are weeping the loss of frolicking children.
The grown-ups are asking: who lives in our house,
Where are the things we left behind – why, where and what,
Will there be any thing by the time we return;
Will any one remember when we return to live here?
The floodgates of tears, turn into blood drops of fight,
And the sigh of the heart turns into a call of rebellion.*

(Lines by Sameeh al Qasim)

To the Palestinians it has become a way of life. Revolution is their culture;

*You were six last spring in a camp without blossoms,
But your eyes look with pleasure at the belt of munition.
Your fingers should be counting on an abacus board.
But you lean your numbers by counting shells.*

(Lines by Al Sayeda Anesa Majid)

To such a people, revolution cannot be just an inspiration. It is a fact staring hard in the face:

*Our people no longer gaze up at the stars,
Our people now believe in the power of the sword.
A Martyr's Will--Al Sayeda Anesa Majid.*

This is everybody's war:

*Every family, every home has drawn the black blind,
Mourning a son in the death of a hero...
(ibid)*

All have been welded into one strong resistance. They have even become one with the land of their sorrows:

*The grains of wheat have fallen mingling with the earth,
Now the entire valley is filled with a rich crop of wheat.*

(*I Proclaim* by Mahmud Darwish)

A revolution is inspired when a people come to decide that there is some positive value in life and when this value is threatened or violated, the value becomes more and more meaningful, more and more real as the fight gains momentum. It becomes a tangible fact, which is deduced from the conditions of life. The idea of freedom to a people engaged in a revolutionary struggle is no abstraction. To them loss of freedom means loss of home, loss of life, loss of honour. It is not a test of endurance. Misery is a test of endurance to the slave. To the freedom fighter it is a challenge, not to endure any more:

*You can torture me, crucify me, then burn me,
And with the ashes of my bones fertilise the sand,
Mingle my ash with the sacred soil of my homeland;
I am a prisoner now but not for ever.*

(*The Prisoner*, Al Sayeda Anesa Majid)

There is no false boasting, no idle dreaming in the heart of a fight. The prisoner knows that he is a prisoner. He does not underestimate the power and cruelty of the oppressor, because he cannot afford to. Still he endures to endure no more.

The subjective response to the demands of an oppressive situation prepares the ground for revolution. When every one is infused with this spirit it becomes a total resistance, and when a commando falls,

*It could be Muhammad, Amir, Sadiq-- or Hasan,
It could be any of these or a thousand other names,
It makes little difference now that I know him.
A freedom fighter in his name.*

(*The Green Coat*, Nazie Alosch)

The struggle is always everybody's struggle. It is total war — not the war of factions. In a revolution there are no factions. There may be traitors, though. But the traitors are not a faction. The enemy, the oppressor, draws a wedge through the resistance movement by trying to split it into factions, into right and left. But this is a manoeuvre which may succeed in stalling a revolution, or in delaying it. Once the

revolution has started, such tactics do not work, because an actual struggle brings an awareness which clearly distinguishes between the friend and the foe. In the face of death, confusion, excuses and false securities evaporate and disappear. Words can deceive only when they do not kill.

But as soon as life is threatened, words are totally subdued to the instinct of self-preservation. That is how a revolution operates its own values, which emerge from action. The Palestinian revolution makes the point absolutely clear. In order to create confusion, and to belittle its significance, it has been labelled as a Leftist revolution, which, at least in Pakistan, suggests an irreligious character. This is a distortion of facts. The struggle of the people of Palestine is a struggle of a people who have an ancient history, a definite faith and a rich culture, and they are not ashamed to proclaim it. Of the many tragedies is the violated character of the occupied territories:

*If you raise your hand in Salam Alaikum
No one will greet you with Walaikum Salam.
The language of Arabic is a foreign tongue here;
None here practise the law of Islam.*

(Am I Stranger, Salam Jubran.)

The valiant fighter cannot be taken in by the tactics of the enemy. Subversive measures do not succeed with a people who have decided to make their destiny. But the one who is only contemplating a fight may be intimidated, misled or confused. Revolution is not a matter of the mind. It is a cause for action. And action brings clarity of thought as well as clarity of aim, which drowns all differences and forges a new and firm unity. It dispels confusion and misgivings. The land, the homeland becomes a symbol of this new unity:

*Our flesh is the bridge – lighthouse at sea,
Shining from that bank we did not betray.
This bank is our homeland – it will not betray us.*

(Lines , Taufiq Ziad.)

Geographical frontiers do not threaten their faith, because it is not so fragile. The land inspires them and invites them to become one with it. They merge their identity in the homeland:

*The harvest of decades is now ready for reaping,
The grains that have fallen even while threshing
Will never be wasted – for they have fallen to raise a
new crop.*

*The land fertilised by the gun powder of hate,
Now explodes in the faces of the men who have used it,
Has blasted away fear like mines shattering the hills,
Revealing the wealth of liberation, and the beauty of freedom.
The road has been paved for a red Revolution.*

(Lines , Al Sayeda Anese Majid.)

But this red must not suggest any ideological penchant. To a mind in hot struggle, colours are colours as guns are guns and oppression is oppression. There is no time to indulge in far-fetched metaphors. It is for this reason that:

My words — red words — dripping red words — Turn green in the sun.

The red is the blood of the warriors, and the martyrs, and the green is the uniform of the commandos, while the sun is the dawn of human freedom. In a revolution it is misery which is transformed into action, and the blood of the victim becomes the sword of victory. Endurance itself takes the form of assertion, and false idealism is totally defeated:

*They tell us that patience is the key to our problems
We keep telling ourselves that faith is the key.*

(Al--Fatah , Nazir Kabani)

And it is with this faith that

*The neck remained arched with the hand on the trigger.
(ibid.)*

In the heat of the strife these valiant sons of Palestine are poised for a new leap, ready to enter a new world, the world of a fresh assurance, and a hard won confidence:

*O my homeland, — this land from the time of the ancients,
Full of beliefs-woven falsehood, and lies,
Full of fabrication built on old fables,
But to you the light of the Prophet has come.*

(Wait For Me , Sameeh al Qasim.)

They have the vision, a clear faith, that is why they can no more be deceived or betrayed into false notions. It is the infirm and the weak faith people who can be misled into factional madness. It is when feeling is divided into the right and the left that the very aim of the revolution is defeated. It no more remains a symbol of resistance

against oppression, as it creates justification for oppression, if it is against the other faction. This causes an inversion of values and “slave camps under the flag of freedom, massacre justified by philanthropy, or the taste of the superhuman, cripple judgement. On the day when crime puts on the apparel of innocence, through a curious reversal peculiar to our age, it is innocence that is called on to justify itself”. (*The Rebel*, Albert Camus; “Introduction”). This inversion of values is the tragedy of Palestine:

*On his face they placed the chains,
His head they crowned with thorns,
His hands they tied to tombstones,
Pierced his feet, tore him limb to limb.
His arms they stretched to crucify him,
Then called him a murderer.
His food, his clothes, his home — they took,
His land they divided amongst themselves,
And cast him without trial into prison,
Made him sleep in the chamber of death,
Left him forsaken, forlorn and bereft,
Then called him a thief.*

*He was debarred from all foreign ports,
No city could offer him shelter,
For he belonged to no country;
His beloved land they had taken;
They left him forsaken,
Then called him a refugee.*

(*I Proclaim*, Mahmud Darwish.)

But his blood has vindicated the oppressed and the forsaken, and the world now proclaims the justice of his cause. Survival is possible only by confronting death. In Palestine a new eagle is rising from its own ashes. The rage of the innocent has turned into an innocent rage:

*The gun is in our hand, on our backs, in our arms,
The gun in our eyes, in our hearts, in our heads
The guns on our tongues, on our lips, in our ears
Our thirst is to be quenched by the blood of the foe,
Our hunger abated by the feeding of guns,
Our shame to be covered by belts of munitions,
Our insults avenged by the roar of the cannon.*

*The restoration of Palestine by
The unity of all--
The defence of Islam*

*O Merciful God, grant us Your forgiveness,
For after this day, we can no longer be innocent,
After this day, we must break your law.
After this day we must kill without mercy.*

(*Al--Fatah* , Niza Kabani.)

This is the spirit of revolution transformed into poetry. It is no mere impatience, no mere grumbling in helplessness. This kind of passion comes only from involvement, from action. This suggests the fierceness with which the commando falls on the enemy. Such poetry, which speaks death and vengeance so forcefully, cannot be created by contemplation alone. If revolution can be conceived as a being with a soul, then this poetry shows the soul of the revolution.

This poetry also reveals the genuineness of the struggle. It proves that the Palestinian resistance is no mere terrorism, because terrorism cannot be poetic. Only genuine human emotions can be poetic. This poetry established convincingly and beautifully that the resistance movement of Palestine is the expression of a profound faith—faith in the liberation of man. It has become a symbol of resistance against all oppression, in all its forms, anywhere in the world. It is the archetype of resistance in the same way as the land of Palestine is the archetype of human predicament:

*...This is the land which ye
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.*

(*Ash-Wednesday*, T.S.Eliot)

The irony has become much more poignant now than it appeared in 1930. Though the poetry here has only a secondary significance, the state of emotional involvement and excitement creates beautiful enchanting images. The land of his fathers haunts the forsaken poet:

*Strange faces of foreigners move in the streets,
Our homeland is now the land of airports and bags.*

(*Wait For Me*, Sameeh al Qasim.)

The hope takes the form of a weird nightmare:

*My homeland looks forward for freedom one day:
Like a child who longs for the joys of Eid,
Like a waft of breeze in a prison cell,
Like an old man crying for his son and his field.*

(*My Homeland*, Al Sayeda Anese Majid.)

❧ Chapter 05 ❧

Dalit *Literature of the Down Trodden*



In the commercialised world of today dominated by advertisement culture, even the miseries and hardships of the worker and his exploitation are glamorised. Two thousand years ago when Christ rose to ameliorate the misfortunes of the unprivileged, the crook (the shepherd's hook) became the symbol of the Messiah. Now the bishops honour this great tradition by wearing a crown (not of thorns) and carrying a crook in the hand. But these are made of gold. The exploitative system thus sanctifies even the instruments of torture and turns them into symbols of reverence. All institutions ultimately come to serve the vested interests. It is for this reason that the downtrodden and the wretched of the earth have now become suspicious of all institutions and movements and insist on preserving their identity. They do not want to be swallowed up by an ideology or a slogan. Such is the case with the movement called *Dalit* which started in western India in 1960s.

Dalit is the literature of the untouchables of Maharashtra. This is the literature of those workers who are disregarded even by workers. *Dalit* is the Marathi for 'the spurned'. The term was first used for the untouchables in 1930. It is a comprehensive term which is now used for the castes that include Harijans, such as Mahars, Mangs, Mallas, Chambhars and Pulayas. *Dalit* is thus a protest against all forms of exploitation, based on class, race, caste or occupation. *Dalit* are the people who are treated as worse than animals. Their entry is usually banned into upper class localities. Even then they are bound to carry clay pots hung from their necks so that they may not pollute the streets of the privileged ones by their spitting. They carry brooms tied to their rumps so that while passing through the 'upper lanes' they may wipe their footprints.

Arjum Dangle gives a harrowing picture of their wretchedness in a poem entitled *Chhavni Hilti Ha*.

(The cantonment has begun to shake)

*We fought with crows,
Never even giving them the snot from our noses.
As we dragged out the Upper Lane's dead cattle,
Skinned it neatly
And shared the meat among ourselves,
They used to love us then.
We warred with jackals, dogs, vultures, kites
Because we ate their share.*

Dalit has not yet been acknowledged as literature and no reference to it is found in the standard literary journals of India. But its reverberations are now heard all round the globe. This literature is asserting its value and, like the stories of Prem Chand, it projects characters who are received with great show of sympathy and humanness, who are approached in all visible humility to beg for votes, but no moral or political organisation has the courage to openly associate with them. Now we may find them in some stray literary pieces or sometimes in what has come to be known as 'art films.'

Dalit should not be confused with Marathi protest literature, since its subjects are very different. For example, the short story by Dr. Surendra Barlinge, who is also the chairman of the Sahitya Sanskrit Mandal, Mepan Maze, deals with the subject of the change of sex which could interest only the upper class orthodox readers. Similarly, Padminiraje Patwardhan's story, *Deepshikha*, is about a beautiful talented girl, Brahmin by caste, who overcomes her difficulties through marriage with a civil servant. No doubt these are genuine problems of modern life. But these are not the issues which interest *Dalit* writers. In their world women are stripped and molested, men are brutally murdered, and this has been going on for centuries, generation after generation. These are the untouchables who invite death if they dare to quench their thirst from a pond. Even the Brahmin's god is not their god. He does not accept their supplications. He is not even capable of feeling their misery. Keshav Meshram challenges this god in *One Day I Cursed That...God*, in these words:

*Would you wipe the sweat from your bony body
With your mother's ragged sari?
Would you work as a pimp*

*To keep her in booze?
 O, father, oh, god the father!
 You could never do such things.
 First you'd need a mother----
 One no one honours,
 One who toils in the dirt,
 One who gives and gives of her love.*

Basically *Dalit* is the movement of the untouchables. It is opposed to caste and class, but also suspects the intellectuals of the left as well as the Marxist ideologists, since many of them take Marxism as a dogma rather than a science. They assume the role of pandits of Marxism, and these wretched untouchables can trust no pandits. On the other hand, the theoretical revolutionaries can't even conceive the predicament these helpless people are in. They have not been through this excruciating experience. Namde Dhasal cries in pain:

*This world's socialism,
 This world's communism
 And all those things of theirs,
 We have put them to the test
 And the implication is this--
 Only our shadows can cover our own feet.*

Their suffering is not individual suffering and there is nothing romantic about that. Their problem is neither ideology nor philosophy. They do not go after poetic beauties. Similes, metaphors and symbols are not important for them. The reality of their life is hideously shocking beyond fantasy or imagination. Their tragedy is universal, a tragedy that is trampling down everyone like a ferocious beast, disfiguring them and corrupting their lives. Narayan Surve makes an ironical comment on the champions of revolution and their rhetoric in his poem, *Karl Marx*, in these words:

*In my first strike Marx met me thus:
 I was holding his banner high on my shoulder.
 The other day he stood listening to my speech at the gate, in
 the meeting.
 ...now we alone are the heroes of history, of all the
 biographies
 too, henceforth...
 He was the first to applaud, then
 laughing boisterously
 he put his hand on my shoulder and said:*

*'Are you a poet or what...
 nice...very nice...
 I too liked poetry
 Goethe was my favourite.*

Their bitterness is understandable. They have been subjected to the worst of atrocities. A young man's thumb is amputated so that he may not become a better archer than a lad of the upper class.

These people consider the class war that is going on at the global level as irrelevant to their cause. Class war is a long term struggle. The oppressed like them have neither time nor patience to wait for the tide to turn. The verdict of history may come too late. Prabhakar Bangurde spurns such an advice in his poem, *Comrade*:

*Don't be in a hurry for revolution.
 You are still very small.
 Your ability to resist
 the atrocities, boycotts and rapes
 that go on every moment
 has become nil
 comrade
 Tomorrow's sun is yet to rise
 sleep undisturbed until then...*

This is also their everyday experience that those 'leftists' who are not untouchables are very closely tied to social conventions and justify them in the name of culture and tradition. They are particularly concerned about their daughters who must be married according to custom and lead respectable and pious lives. This must be hard to swallow for them who see that 'they strip naked my mother, my sisters' and 'my own daughter's virtue is looted in public/ my eyes look on, my blood shakes'. These are in fact lines taken from a folksong.

Dalit poetry is not mere shriek and protest. A true eternal emotion also reverberates in it that speaks of love and sacrifice and lends a rare grace to it. Such a poem is *Mother* by Waman Nimbalkar:

*Dark, dark slender body---this was my mother.
 Drudged in the woods for sticks from morning on.
 All we brothers, sitting, waiting, watching for her.
 And if she didn't sell the wood, all of us slept hungry.*

And one day she died of hard work and left them wailing, though not without leaving a sweetness behind her:

*My eyes seek my mother,
I still grieve,
I see a thin vendor of wood.
I buy her sticks.*

Look at this beautiful poem, *The City*, by Daya Pawar. It begins like this:

One day someone dug up a twentieth century city
And ends on this observation.
Here's an interesting inscription:
'This water tap is open to all castes and religions'.
What could it have meant:
That this society was divided?
That some were high while others were low?
Well, all right, then this city deserved burying--
Why did they call it the machine age?
Seems like the stone age in the twentieth--century.

They are also burning with a desire for revenge. It is reflected in *You Wrote From Los Angeles* by Daya Pawar:

*In the stores here, in hotels, about the streets,
Indians and curs are measured with the same Yard-stick.
"Niggers! Blacks!" This is the abuse they fling on me.
Reading all this, I felt so damn!
Now you've had a taste of what we've suffered
In this country from generation to generation.*

But though it is the poetry of the oppressed, in it can be heard the echoes of a rebellious soul:

*I'm the sea; I soar, I surge.
I move out to build your tombs.
The winds, storms, sky, earth.
Now all are mine.
In every inch of the rising struggle
I stand erect.*

(J.V. Pawar: *I Have Become The Tide*)

(The poems have been reproduced here from *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol.17 (1987), Swansea).

(1990)

❧ Chapter 06 ❧

The SAARC *Shared Miseries and Hopes*



South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) is no mere political arrangement. It represents a common sensibility, a shared psyche. Oriental temperament is distinct and well-defined to the extent that some think that east is east and west is west, and never shall the twain meet'. This is a community, perhaps more homogenous and stronger than the European community. It is not just a geographical entity. It has a long, rather ancient common history. And within this common heritage, it enjoys a rich variety and diversity that lend beauty to the region.

SAARC includes countries which have rich religious, ethnic and cultural traditions and rightly boast of being the cradle of the most ancient civilizations. There is much that distinguishes these countries from one another and also much that is common between them. The SAARC idea might have been motivated by political considerations, but there surely exists a strong natural bond between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

SAARC countries are a part of the third world and like the rest of the third world, their literatures abound in themes of protest, revolt, exploitation and struggle. They also share the curse of ignorance, poverty and backwardness with these countries. These countries also belong to the rich Asiatic culture and civilization which are distinguished by their respect for time-honoured customs and regard for the elders as well as affection for the young. Another distinguishing characteristic of this civilization is its attitude towards women.

SAARC has stimulated interest in the literatures of the region and has inspired students to look for the factors common to aesthetic responses and creative achievements of these peoples.

In recent history these countries were bound in closer links that were rather painful. All these suffered under the yoke of British colonialism. Consequently, an ambivalent attitude towards colonialism developed here, particularly towards British imperialism. British rule exposed the people to the west and opened new vistas to them. Western literary trends and liberal ideas found their way into this world mainly through English language and literature. From Tagore, and even earlier, down to this day many writers in these countries have been writing in their native languages as well as in English. Some write exclusively in English and have earned international recognition.

SAARC nations have also waged liberation movements in different phases of their history and their echoes are heard in their literature. The Progressive Writers Movement has very much influenced the writers of Pakistan, Bharat and Bangladesh. Though in all these countries English enjoys the status of prestige language and is the language of the privileged classes, there is also a great resentment against it on nationalistic and class grounds. It has been a cause of great progress for the few and alarming backwardness for the great many.

Another link that binds the peoples of this Association is Urdu (Written in Arabic or Deonagri script) which is commonly spoken and understood throughout the region. It is the lingua franca of the area that bridges the cultural gap between them.

The misfortune that is common to all these countries is poverty and SAARC writers have written a lot on the subject. Bala Krishna Sama of Nepal writes:

*An old woman meshed in wrinkles was lying in a cottage.
She had reached the age of 83.
She had wrapped coarse jute round her body, very light,
That death may be kept out.*

Saleema Hashmi sees abject poverty in Maldives. The island “lacks everything that is considered essential by the people living in the twentieth century”. She described how people stand in long queues to fill water cannisters from public taps – a scene that is a common sight in all the SAARC countries. It can be anywhere – Bombay, Karachi, Dacca – or any other big city or small town in the region.

Bhutan is another country where the conditions of life are very bad. Daily wages of labourers employed in road building are Rs.3 (15

cent). Even these labourers are Nepalese or Indians engaged on contract. They work in very difficult conditions at rarified high altitudes with minimum of oxygen in the atmosphere. They keep smoking all the time. Their officers, however, have an easier time. Mostly young, not generally above 30, they live in wooden barracks where film magazines, crates of rum, beer, scotch and brandy are always available in sufficient supply. They play American Jazz records on phonographs run on batteries. Without these they will perhaps lose the nerve to work.

Bhutan, commonly known as "Forbidden Kingdom", opened itself to the world only recently, in 1952. There was no wheel here except the wheel used in temple rituals. Till quite recently it had no electricity, no post office, no modern school and no hospital. Bhutan has now already started on the road to progress. SAARC has very much motivated cultural and commercial activity here.

Religious plays are popular in the country which have a stamp of Buddhism on everything from patterns to embroidery. Monks, with veils on their faces, dance in beautiful silk and brocade costumes and fantastic gowns representing legendary characters and monsters. These actors present various aspects of the life of Buddha and seek enlightenment and salvation through these performances.

Bhutan is among the most backward countries of the world. In a population of over a million the literacy rate is just 6%. Majority of children from rich families get their education from the posh schools of Delhi and Darjeeling. There is no T.V. station in the country but there are T.V. sets in all houses that can afford them. But Bhutan is now bracing up itself to face the challenge of a rapidly advancing world.

Though not as bad, the living conditions for the majority are no better in other countries of the region. Poverty, exploitation and the worst kind of drudgery are the lot of the teeming millions going half-clad and half-fed in the countries comprising the SAARC.

Waman Nimbhalkar, a *Dalit* poet from India, tries to catch a glimpse of this darkness of a subhuman existence in these lines from a pathetic poem, *Mother*.

*Just as the day sank down and the dark's kingdom came.
We would sit at the door with no light in the hut.
In house after house the lamps would be lit.*

*The fire would be started, bhakri kneaded.
From some where the smell of lentils, of wange
Would hit our noses. In our stomachs all was darkness
And a stream of tears would flow from my eyes.*

The examples can be multiplied from all these literatures.

There are many shared customs and traditions also, prominent among them being the reverence for the family, the honour of the house, and the complications of the joint family system with all its blessings and miseries. The plight of woman has particularly attracted the attention of the writers of all these societies. Zothan Pasri of India (Mizoram) says:

*I am untouchable,
Because I attired as a woman,
And begging for love,
Writhed in your arms--
A woman--
Curse on the wretched generation
which power crushes.
And in her delicate body
The strength of the spirit, and all vitality is gagged*

And Faiz protest:

*The dark beastly spell of countless centuries,
Woven into silk and satin and brocade---
Bodies sold every where in alley and market,
Smeared with dust, washed in blood,
Bodies that have emerged from the oven of diseases,
Pus flowing from rotten ulcers---*

(Tr. Victor Kiernan)

The Indian poet from Maharashtra, Waman Kardak, bursts out in agony:

*Here, there, they strip naked my mothers, my sisters.
I don't get angry, I don't get angry
To-day I see my own honour dishonoured.
My own daughter's virtue is looted in public.*

The countries are now at the threshold of a new awareness. These have realised the need to forge ahead and move along the path of progress. SAARC may well symbolise this common goal. Through it

❧ Chapter 07 ❧

Against Insane Antagonism



*National character
A term that means nothing
The nation that boasted of Rousseau
Also massacred people
in Algeria.*

Thus spake Sheikh Ayaz, the renowned Sindhi poet from Pakistan. This is a far cry from the songs of national grandeur that reverberated throughout the globe in the last one hundred years or so. The mood is now changed. There was a time when the world was divided into nation-states which sneered at any thing beyond their boundaries. But such chauvinism could not be sustained by the isolated power of any single nation, however great and invincible. Thus emerged power blocs. International co-operation was sought primarily for military purposes. This was typical of the period which has come to be identified with the phenomenon called 'modernism'. It spread over almost six decades in the present century, roughly coinciding with the first world war on one end and the Vietnam war on the other. But the people soon became wearied of this jingoism. There could be heard protests like the following one from Sri Lanka, in Dhorja K. Deep's poem entitled *A Dove on The Barrel Of A Gun*:

*May be she is thinking
That she is not on the gun's barrel
But on a beautiful branch of the banyan tree
Or may be this harmless little bird
Under this sky reverberating with war cries
Could find no refuge
And is meditating lost in the vision of some other sky*

Later this division took a doctrinal touch with the rise of communism on one side and Fascism on the other. After the second world war this cleavage resolved itself into a direct antagonism in the

two confronting camps of NATO and Warsaw Pact. CENTO, SEATO, NAM, etc. followed. But the war in Vietnam, the liberation struggle in Africa and the Middle East and the intellectual movements in the Caribbean Islands and America gave rise to the concept of the third world. This is the world of the unprivileged, of those for whom war has no attraction.

*Their world has no boundaries
No one guards their borders
They do not have to fight one another
In fact they own no land anywhere
The whole world belongs to them.*

Hemant Sarseth from Nepal thus defines the third world. And Faiz visualises this world of the peace loving people who are infused with the passion of fraternal love for all human beings in the following manner:

*Now there shall be no war, nor even later at night
Will fire in the blood have to be quenched with tears.
No heart shall quiver at night, nor in any courtyard.
Shall ceaseless anxiety come like an ill-omened bird,
Shall fear come like a bloodthirsty beast of prey.
Now there shall be no war, bring wine and wine-cup.*

Third world seeks international co-operation in non-militaristic terms. A new orientation is emerging in the politics of the world. Not only that it is not war-oriented, it is positively opposed to the institution of war. SAARC is one such organisation. Whatever the motives behind its creation, it has the potential of developing into a universal brotherhood of man.

SAARC includes countries that boast of the most ancient civilisations of the world. Apart from Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa which are a singular distinction for Pakistan and put it on the map of the oldest habitations of man on the earth, Buddhist monasteries are scattered throughout the region, which despite its diversity, shows wondrous similarities in culture. In the Maldives, for example, Shamim Mehmud Zaidi finds that their musical instruments are very much like the ones that we use and the woodwork of these islanders resembles the craft of our northern region. At the same time their art carries a marked Buddhist imprint, not unlike the sculptures and inscriptions found in the hills of northern Pakistan. Ibne Batuta gives a fantastic account of these strange people in his travelogue:

Women do not cover their heads in these islands. Even their queen goes without a head cover. They comb their hair, tying them in a bunch on one side of the head. Most of them carry a loin-cloth which stretches down to the feet while the upper part of the body is left uncovered. They move about in the streets and bazaars in the same dress. When I was made the Qazi there, I tried my best to make them change this sartorial custom and ordered them to dress properly. But I did not succeed. At last I ordered that no woman should appear before me in a law suit without being properly dressed. I could do no more.

Though the countries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have ancient traditions, they have now acquired the consciousness of belonging to the present day world with which they share a common legacy and many problems. They have agreed to work together for the well-being of their respective people. But what is most interesting and very reassuring is the fact that this cooperation is proposed in non-political fields. In politics they have been at loggerheads with one another. There can hardly be suspected anything like cordial relations between India and the other members of the Association, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, they have agreed to work together on the cultural front. The atmosphere is largely that of reconciliation. And the poet is always an incorrigible optimist and tends to embrace even a good hopeful rumour as an article of faith, as Faiz expressed his wish for Bangladesh:

*We, who have been estranged after such long associations,
How many more contacts will we need to be reconciled?*

Thus SAARC in a way becomes a symbol of this happy change overtaking international relations.

Two important legacies that the SAARC countries share are their colonial background and abject poverty. The two perhaps are the two sides of the same coin. Both point to the ruthless exploitation that these countries have been subjected to. From Bangladesh, Mehmud Jamal sums up the tragedy in *The Peasant of Bengal*:

*My eldest son was swept away by the storm at the sea
My second son was carried away by the flood
My wife
She died at the birth of the third son*

*Whom they threw away pierced with bullets
He left no memento
Only the machine gun still raging across the river
Reminds of him...*

From the same land Hussain Muhammad Ershad hailed the establishment of the SAARC in December, 1985:

*Bound by the warm throbbing hearts
Of millions beating in unison
The dream of the seven lands is now a reality
A commitment realised through creative concord.*

This is an opportunity for the miserable peoples of these unfortunate lands, the opportunity for which they have waited so long. This is echoed in *Mother's Dream* by Gopal Parsad Ramal from Nepal:

*Mother, will he come?
As the sweet dawn sings with the chirping sparrows
so has the hope of his coming tickled my heart,
Mother
Yes, he will come
He shall come spreading light
Like the morning sun.*

But in this optimism the cries of anguish are never drowned. Hopes may be dupes, but the misery is real as presented here in W.A.B. Singhe's *The Nameless Daughter* from Sri Lanka:

*Little child
Since no one is your father
You need no name
I have to leave you
In the dustbin in this deserted street
But that day will definitely come
When the whole world will be your mother...*

Hope and misery are intertwined and are in the texture of their lives. Tilgu poet Suchida Nandan sees the pageant of tyranny in *Sculpture* in this way:

*Through this very street once
Passed the marble statue of our beloved king
The same familiar visage in all its grandeur
Is even to-day directing the traffic on this crossing
How many kings, politicians, leaders, artists and generals*

*Have passed in state through this lane
Now the curtain is dropped*

All the poetry coming from these seven lands sings of the same hopes and similar woes. In spite of all the political differences among them, the SAARC poets share one another's sufferings as well as aspirations. The milk of human kindness has not been dried up after all. This is not the situation obtaining only in one region. This is the general mood of this phase of history over the entire globe.

In Europe the iron curtain is being pulled down. In Central Asia the Republics are looking for their natural cultural allies. The same is happening everywhere in the third world and the same phenomenon is reflected in the SAARC region. The world is moving towards a genuine cultural cohesion and away from the barriers created by distrust and insane antagonism.

(1990)



❧ Chapter 08 ❧

Literature of Resistance



Whatever Pakistan went through in the last eleven and a half years of Martial law (1977-1989) was neither anything new nor unexpected. What actually happened was that the horror of so many years had accumulated and taken a concrete form, as if the hidden fears and apprehensions which we had practically banished from our consciousness had suddenly assumed a sinister face:

“Retribution visited upon us in the shape of Nadir.”

This was rather the logical consequence of a way of life, of an attitude of the mind. The current in which we were drifting was definitely to lead us into this mire. And so it did. This is the result of keeping consciousness in the dark and of hoodwinking it. Those who want to keep their consciousness awake, keep stirring it. In the plays of Ionesco fears and apprehensions take the form of ghosts and demons, in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and the stories of Conrad they put on horrid masks, in the plays of Lorca they appear as compulsions of traditions and customs, and in the plays of Albee they haunt us in the form of guests and social customs. But these writers do not succumb to these horrible apparitions; they rather try to know their reality and understand their phenomenon.

Our literature reflects all that happened to us in the last eleven years and a half, since literature mirrors the psyche of a nation. Literature has been written in profusion and read in abundance during all this period. This is not the occasion to reproduce here all that lies scattered in books, magazines and selections and has been within everyone's reach. It will suffice to say that if the oppression was ruthless, its condemnation was no less pronounced. But all this literature, which has been so bold and straight, raises some pertinent questions. It reflects despair, despondency, fear and a strong impulsion to vengeance. Mostly it is a literature of protest and at times only a literature of resistance. In short, it gives vent to all kinds

of emotional reactions. But it hardly gives an impression of a serious study and an objective analysis of the factors which led to this unfortunate situation, and which are also active today. Whole of this literature revolves around personalities and events. But personalities and events have at the most a symbolic significance, and the writer must strive beyond the symbols to the diagnosis of the sickness—the sinister force that is distorting the facts and the faces. In his introduction to *Translations from Brecht*, Dr. Mubarik Ali observes:

The function of literature is to give to the people a sense of distinction between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil, and justice and oppression. It should create in them consciousness that distinguishes between them. Once they acquire this consciousness, then it also becomes the duty of literature to inspire the people to struggle for the right, the true and the just, wage wars for this and offer sacrifices. It is this commitment that determines the purpose of life, particularly in a society where centuries of oppression have incapacitated that whole society and people have lost the courage to protest. Inspiring courage and giving strength to man is the most important function of literature in such a society.

I shall add to this observation of Dr. Mubarik Ali the fact that courage and protest without awareness is mere sentimentality and ultimately suicidal. Our literature has not created this awareness. The causes of this misfortune, that we suffered in the last decade or so, lie in our psyche, which is best revealed in our *Dastans* where huge monsters and big giants are easily subdued by certain magical incantations. In *Qissa-e-Chahar Dervish* whenever a Dervish is in some serious difficulty, *Maula Mushkil Kusha*, a kind of Deus ex Machina, comes to his rescue. During the war people here dream of horsemen clad in green or wait for the Seventh American Fleet to come to their help. In 1936 people convinced themselves that the revolution had come. So it happened in 1970 and again in 1988. People still nourish the hope of a revolution brought by a miracle.

My publisher recently complained that till the last elections in Pakistan the books were selling very well. But since the installation of the new Government people have stopped reading, and perhaps writing too. They believe that the revolution has come and that their job has been accomplished. This happened because oppression was construed to be a person. Once the person has been removed, the

oppression ceases to exist. This is the psyche which needs a thorough study. An allusion to it has been made by Intezar Hussain in *Tazkera*. He wonders why people are so excited about public hangings? How is it that flogging a bare back and stoning an innocent baby draw so many eager spectators? Why people watch these cruel spectacles with such indulgence? This love for violence is very much reflected in our cheap literature and commercial films. In *Les Mouche*, Sartre had attributed this to a morbid sensuality. At the time of the murder of Agamemnon people had drawn their shutters in fright. But along with the horror of the deed of murder they were also having a secret sexual pleasure in the proceedings, since they knew that the wife of Agamemnon was killing her husband with the help of her paramour. This perhaps reflects the French psyche. May be our psyche is different. Even so, there does exist a relationship between violence and sex, whether reflected in the modern films or in the Middle Ages haunted with the Inquisition. Is it not so because we ourselves have a secret love for cruelty? Is it not the fact that we feel a strange awe mingled with a certain kind of respect for the cruel, for the oppressor? Is it not ingrained in our nature? Is it not the virtue of the conventional beloved of the *Ghazal*? Are we not suffering from masochism as a nation? And if so, then who are we fighting against? The enemy is within us. For that we shall have to wage a war for the liberation of consciousness.

Marquez, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, while analysing the injustices in his society, pinpointed superstitions, sexual excesses, frustrations and the role of the vested interests as the root cause of the misery. Our literature gives no clue to the psyche that tolerated injustice for eleven years, nor does it show how that psyche was affected by this traumatic experience. It does not show how people react to various situations. Since we have not yet developed any democratic traditions, there is no concept of individual freedom either. The only form of personal freedom to us is the example of 'Mansur' whose sacrifice in the present day context will probably be taken as suicide.

A serious study of the situation has been rather rare in our literature. Seriousness emanates from profundity in thought which is absent from sentimental effusions. Profound thought either springs from a deep awareness of the issues or results from utter hopelessness, which is a very painful realization, and the pain is as deep as the thought giving birth to it. This sense of pain is wanting in

the literature of this period. Instead, we have despair, anger, hatred and a strong feeling for vengeance. But there is no pain, the kind of pain that is found in the verses of Mir, Ghalib, Fani, Nasir Kazmi, the elegies of Anis and the tragedies of Shakespeare or the novels of George Eliot. The literature of this period is a reaction to a situation, and with the change in the situation this literature has already started appearing somewhat irrelevant. On the other hand, when T.S. Eliot talks of the decline of the west, he traces its causes as far back as Dante, if not to the Biblical world. The western thinkers go to the extent of studying Calvinism in order to appreciate the phenomenon that was Hitler. Bertrand Russell considers puritanism as one of the hindrances in the pursuit of happiness. This in fact should be the concern of the intellectual, not just complaining and wailing.

The state of the theatre, however, shows some improvement during the period under discussion. *Ajoka Theatre* is very much in the forefront of the struggle, and other drama groups are also active. One proof of their success is that these have yet to gain official approval in spite of great public acclaim. Staging of Brecht's *Galileo* was not allowed in Lahore. The Arts Council found it substandard. Perhaps our critical values in the case of drama have become so high.

The other reason is that drama is a collective effort. This is not exclusively the product of the genius of a single playwright. The director, a number of actors, the painter, the musician, the carpenter and a number of other technicians jointly produce a play. The spectators are no less an essential part of this paraphernalia. This is the reason that drama has developed into almost a movement. Other literary genres could not create such a movement, since individual thought can hardly ever transcend the subjective. Genuine thought is always collective. When in a Television interview Ehsan Danish was asked why he was not writing poems, he replied that a poem is written only when everyone is writing *Nazm*. It means that as against *Ghazal*, which is the expression of a personal reaction, a *Nazm* reflects collective experience or mood. This becomes all the more important in drama, since it cannot be produced without collective endeavour.

A movement is needed in literature as a whole, since the function of the writer is to shake consciousness out of lethargy. This is also borne out by the fact that during the last decade or so, the writers felt a great need of broadening their consciousness, and translations were made from all the literatures of the world, which must bring a

larger awareness with it. We have yet to learn a lot from the thoughts and techniques of others.

One more thing that merits consideration is the fact that the literature that suffered most in the recent past has been humorous literature. Sense of humour reflects maturity of perception and enlightenment of thought. It is this sense which develops the habit of tolerance and the courage to laugh at one's own shortcomings and weaknesses. Its absence reveals the tremendous nervous tension under which the whole community laboured through these difficult years. One function of literature is to release the community from this tension.

In short, the last eleven years and a half have provided us with an opportunity to examine our shortcomings precisely and clearly and to think of the ways to guard ourselves against a repetition of this kind of excruciating situation, so that we may be able to launch a programme to achieve some positive and solid results in this direction.

(1990)



❧ Chapter 09 ❧

Search for Medium *Linguistic Barrier*



Francis Bacon identified four major limitations of the human mind. He called them *Idola*. He had come to the realisation that 'our mental constitution permits us to arrive at a knowledge of the world in so far as our innate capacity to create theories happens to match some aspect of the structure of the world.' He identified these limitations as *Idola Tribus*, *Idola Specus*, *Idola Fori* and *Idola Theatri*. *Idola Fori* stands for the limitation of the linguistic medium. Bacon found that the belief that language was a reliable means of communication was based on false assumption. Language is a mechanism of conceptualising experience. Language is not experience. Any attempt to reduce experience to linguistic formula is therefore at best an approximation to experience. Aldous Huxley propounded a similar thesis when he described man as an amphibian who lived simultaneously in the world of experience and the world of notions. Perhaps the primitive man lived closer to experience, as also Wordsworth thought of his rustic. Thus too, Bacon thought that mythology was the philosophy of the unsophisticated mind (*Wisdom of the Ancients*). Iqbal also said that the primitive mind could conceive only in concrete terms. It lacked the capability to abstract. When, however, attempts were made to turn realities into words, like the idols of mythology, words also took on specific shapes which developed a life of their own independent of the aspects of life these were supposed to represent.

With the growing complexities of life, words also became complex and multifaceted. They in fact became capsules of meanings. The user of words was forced to take the capsules as such. Ultimately life was reduced to linguistic formulae. The notions translated into words tend to acquire an independent existence of their own, a reality which dangerously interferes with the reality of experience. This

“autonomous” existence of language, according to Aldous Huxley, created all bigotry, intolerance and cruelty leading to regimentation of thought giving rise to fascist trends, not only in politics but also in religion. The Dark Ages of medieval Europe were largely sustained by the scholastic rhetoric of the most intransigent fathers of the church. The same linguistic finery and fascination with the word, rather than the truth behind it, was at the root of sectarian controversy which caused so much bloodshed and burning at the stakes, and which according to George Eliot, forced the Republicans to kill the Royalists and the Royalists to kill the Republicans in the name of the same God. The modern schoolman, T. S. Eliot, also insists on the verbal formulae which he calls the “Objective Correlative”.

Unfortunately, as Aldous Huxley rightly pointed out, it is not possible to ignore the formulae altogether, since all human progress in science and philosophy, the very evolution of civilization, has been the progress of thought and thought cannot exist without words. Therefore a method has to be discovered whereby the words are made to serve thought, not to dominate or dictate it. It is not possible for the theoretician to do away with words or to soften their constrictive power. It is the poet who has successfully grappled with words and has got the better of them. He is perpetually engaged in the struggle to bend words to his meanings. He has succeeded to such an astounding degree that even the linguists have felt threatened and thrown on the defensive. They launched a desperate campaign to separate language from literature.

Since words can render only inexact equivalents of direct experience, their deceptiveness can be controlled only by debunking their apparent precision by resorting to deliberate ambiguity in expression. This can be a valid starting point, since, as Chomsky observes: “It is an open question, surely, whether the species of instinct’ that determines ‘the experimental reasoning itself does indeed ‘act in us unknown to ourselves’ as both Hume and Leibniz held, or perhaps even lies beyond introspection... It might be, in Kant’s phrase, that the ‘schematism of our understanding’ in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze” (*Problems of Knowledge and Freedom*). It was in this context that Matthew Arnold asserted, “The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time

goes on, will find an ever surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve... The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry. (*The Study of Poetry*). The poet fathoms the depths of human soul and opens the mystery to our gaze by using his insight with the help of his artistic skill. Artistic ambiguity is also necessitated by the fact that existing words tend to have fixed meanings which, according to Wittgenstein, are not given to them by "a power independent of us". But they have the meanings which someone, has given to them. Thus, to make words yield to his meaning, the poet has to create some sort of ambiguity around them.

Then, we have Ezra Pound's three--dimensional communication theory of word related to Phanopeia, Melopeia and Logopoeia. Words evoke pictorial, auditory and logical associations. The poet does not confine himself to the logopeia alone. He explores the other dimensions also.

All these limitations in the use of words, combined with the syntactical significance they acquire when used in a specific context, restrict expression for the theorist. But at the same time they provide a strange freedom to the poet because in the nebulous state of meaning created by words he can make excursions into the mysterious world evoked by the multidimensional nature of the linguistic medium.

The words and the way in which they combine to form sentences are the symbols that the poet uses to interpret and communicate experience. These symbols are arbitrary. The poet, however, is concerned with his experience and with his conceptions, and it is here that the real problem is faced. The conception of any one experience is not the same for two persons. Technically speaking, communication is a two-way process: objects—the concrete things as we know them—do not remain the same when they become concepts (in the mind). They are coloured by the experience which accompanies them from the purely objective state to the mental state. So in the first part of the process the percepts lose at least some of their objective character. Now the concept so formed is to be retranslated in concrete symbols so as to be communicable. This is phenomenological process. Again it will be the poet's experience which will determine the symbol for him which in his case is the word or the sentence. But the word and the sentence are arbitrary symbols and do not provide for the variations of experience. Each

word or symbol is a sort of vague generalization of a typical complex of experience. Thus, in the second half of the process of communication the problem of the poet is to find out a word or a phrase which may recreate the same experience in the reader's mind as is taking place in the poet's own mind. The musician manipulates notes, the sculptor stone, and the painter colour. The medium in each case yields to the skill of the artist. It is there before him, in its objective form. But the poet's medium is the word. It is not there before him. It exists in the mind of the audience. And there it lies with its various associations that are different for different persons, and also for the same person, in different situations. The poet has to break it and remould it there right in the minds of his audience. He takes resort to metaphor, elaborating by similarities and contrasts.

We have been given to understand that as humans we are rational beings, and as such language is the most rational medium of communication for us. In order to express ourselves and to make us known to others language is inevitable, and to avoid confusion language must be standardized. But the twentieth century had great shocks in store for us. It told us that just a mere fraction of us is rational at all. The rational is confined to the conscious mind which is to the unconscious what the ripples on the surface are to the entire ocean beneath. An experience is no more considered confined to the surface, the conscious or the rational level. It brings the entire latent energy of the unconscious into play. In order to realize its full significance the poet must go deep into the unconscious. Depth Psychology shows one way. The poet regresses. He tries to explore the psyche to its most elemental states. He goes into the farthest past. T.S. Eliot's idea of tradition is an instance to the point. Another significant example of the treatment of the unconscious is Conrad's *Lord Jim*. The poet has now realised that an experience is modified by the perspective, by the way it is interpreted. He therefore wants to get to the pre-interpretation state, to the state in which he felt without yet knowing any particular mode of feeling. This revolutionary movement practically started with Wordsworth who sought to use the 'real language of men'. He was successful at least in creating an awareness of the acute limitation of the conventional mode of poetic expression. But Wordsworth did not have at his disposal the valuable resource of modern psychology. His theory could not satisfy the 20th century poet who easily saw, as already hinted at by Coleridge also, that Wordsworth's rustic was not man in the 'state of Nature', but was only a century or so behind the contemporary civilization. His

attitude was as such sophisticated, though it was an outdated sophistication.

The modern poet wants to go deeper. He tries to grasp the experience in the pre-conceptual state as he knows that concepts only partly represent experience. The editor of *The Faber Books of Modern Verse*, writing as early as 1936, remarked that in the near future we may see greater emphasis placed on poetry as a means of appealing directly to the sub-conscious mind, and less on poetry as a conscious criticism of life.

It was this quest, under the influence of Jungian psychology, that took many a modern poet, almost every one prominent among them, to the classical myth, ritual and folk-lore, etc. Yeats and Eliot may be mentioned here; but this again is not the appropriate machinery to explore the unconscious. Myth, ritual and folk-lore used as poetic techniques are significant to us through the rational process. We understand them, explore them and analyse them. So here too we are unable to free ourselves of the limited rational sphere. The best that could be achieved here is merely to deepen and enlarge this sphere.

The concern of the modern poet, faced with this problem of the unconscious, is now, somehow or the other, to free himself of the seemingly inevitable shackles of the logic. The emphasis now naturally shifted to the illogical, the absurd. Much earlier we see the French symbolists taking this attitude. Symbolism started in France as a literary movement in the second half of the 19th century. The credit goes to Jean Moreas who in the *Figaro* of September 1886 declared that he and his associates were seeking to create beauty through a search for the pure concept and the eternal symbol. Arthur Rimbaud, among them, declared, 'I consider sacred the disorder of my mind'. In the 20th century 'the absurd' has become rather a vogue. Naturally it created a problem of communication which fell outside the scope of the rational, hitherto considered to be the only mode of comprehensibility.

We can, however, seriously study the absurd as an experiment, a search for medium. The absurd is nothing new in literature. Shakespeare used it as an instrument of exploration. The speeches of Hamlet and Lear, besides those of the wise fools of these plays, have been noted for this purpose. Later, *Alice in Wonderland* has been a popular reading, not only with the children, but with the grown-ups

too. Similarly nonsense verse has its appeal. But beyond this it may also serve a purpose, as did the conceits add paradoxes which were lightly indulged in by the 18th century poets but were seriously applied by the Metaphysical poets of the 17th century and by those of this century, like T.S. Eliot, as exploratory devices, to unravel the mysteries of existence. But the secret of enjoying such literature is to approach it with an infantile innocence, a childish credulity. Any employment of the rational apparatus will spoil its whole charm; without it, the enjoyment will be as much as provided by any good piece of art. Thus we get a clue to overcome this difficulty of obscurity and to clear the way for the artist who wants to communicate through more than the rational faculty. The watch-word for modern poetry is experience; experience first, and reason may follow. Good poetry is enjoyed before it is understood.

This breaking of the rational barrier has been attempted by the modern poet through various devices. One is to make the successive images in a poem logically independent of each other, by withdrawing the conjunction. Any one image carries with it a very large number of associations. But in relation to another image only the associations relevant to both will find prominence while others will be rendered ineffective. If it is not an over-simplification, consider the most commonplace conventional image of a rose. It has been vastly used to depict the beauty of the beloved. Its softness, mellow shades, mild fragrance, delicacy and freshness are the associations utilised in this respect. But a rose in itself has much larger associations. It is, for example, short lived, grows on a thorny stem and draws its life and loveliness from the soil. These associations will, however, be invoked in a different context. Thus confined by logical relationship an image loses much of its significance. So, in order that an image be fully realised, thus releasing to the maximum the communicative value it may carry, the image must be made logically independent. In this way the poem becomes a succession of seemingly irrelevant images. This method is successfully employed by T.S. Eliot. In his poems the images, in general, are not related in the usual rational sense. There coherence is not that of logic but of impression. Every image invokes an impression which reinforces the preceding and the following images in creating the desired impression. Such impressions transcend the rational and enlarge the scope of communication. It was further discovered to be very difficult to disentangle ourselves from the logical habit while every moment we are practising it in the use of language which is the most rigid logical system. A number of words

make a sentence only when logically connected. The poet thus genuinely tries to break through this strictly logical practice. The method here is to disturb the logical order of words in a sentence in order to free the individual word from the logical relationships which limit its associations. The degree of logical or grammatical disorder is mentioned by Empson as a dimension of ambiguity. Word basically is an image, a symbol. Such experiments, which appear as acrobatics played by words in a sentence, have been made by modern poets, such as this from E. E. Cummings:

for love are in you am in I are in we

In certain other cases the usual syntax is shaken and the words have been put in a seemingly haphazard manner, as:

*death is more than
certain a hundred these
sounds crowds odours it is
in a hurry*

Not only the arrangement of words, but the words themselves have also been subjected to such experiments. Words have physical existence of their own and exist in definite solid forms (not just as impressions on a piece of paper or slate, but as meanings). The poet attempts to break this solidity. One line in Cummings, for instance, ends with the syllable *an* and the next begins with the two syllables *imal*, thus splitting the word animal into two lines. Such experiments serve mainly two purposes. Firstly, as mentioned above, they provide the fullest possible play to symbol to utilise its maximum communicative power. Secondly, they help unteach the mind the habit of logical approach which has so much attenuated our faculties of communication. They help in the process of derationalization which must precede an impressionistic or surrealistic response to the things around us.

Further, the experiment of breaking the words and even of rearranging the letters composing a word, from another point of view, may help in giving a clearer idea of the relationship that exists between a symbol and the experience connected with it. What happens to the relevant concept when the symbol is broken or disturbed? Is the concept also broken or disturbed? Thus, the emphasis is upon discovering more appropriate equivalents for the abstractions than are provided by the usual concrete symbols which traditionally stand for them. The endeavour is in fact to discover

some medium for experiencing the abstract. A word will be so broken as:

f
ilthi
es
t

Here *f* and *t* stand as two lines. As consonants they cannot be pronounced by themselves. But here they are placed in this abstract way. Probably to test our capacity of experiencing the abstract.

There can be still another purpose of such jumbings. The poet feels that with all his endeavours to keep the images logically independent, the reader, who is accustomed to rationalise and impose some sort of logical pattern upon scattered impressions has got into the sequential groove of cause and effect directed by a single express purpose. This does not agree with the modern poet's concept of reality as a state of flux.

*There is, it seem to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.*

It may thus well be to check the possibility of forming logical patterns that the poet suddenly disturbs the arrangement of a word or a sentence, reminding the reader to keep his rational tools away in the appreciation of his poem.

This violence to language by the modern poet has been occasioned by another assumption, that the language has become too sophisticated. Due to mechanical artificiality of language the average man has been cut off from most of his real self. The linguistic mechanism that man has developed is rather cramping. A pretty large number of experiences, particularly those emanating from the unprecedented complexity of the modern sensibility, simply cannot be comprehended through this apparatus. Thus, much that passes as experience is no more than a dexterity in the handling of language. This is a legacy from the age of reason which defined poetry, in the words of Pope, as that which oft was thought, but ne'er so well express't. The conventional language response is possible within the framework of a set phraseology. The poet seeks for a language which

Though apparently genuine, this concern with the technique is symptomatic of a much more serious dislocation, that of the individual from the society—from the objective conditions of life. Disintegration of a homogeneous society, of the relationship of man to man, through a division of humanity into castes, creeds and classes, each division reducing the perspective of man and making his view of life narrower at each step, ultimately forces him into the narrowest unit of his own mind. Consequently he is convinced that reality is conceivable only in subjective terms. This makes him an introvert, recognising only his ego as the reality. He gets imprisoned in something like Leibnitz' monads, which have no windows. Now, when he tries to establish communication with others he finds the outside world absolutely incomprehensible, and all his efforts at communication are frustrated. Like all transcendentalists and idealists, the poet thinks that this cleavage is superficial and can be bridged only through formal reforms, through modifying the structure here and there. It is however not language that is at fault. Language is the effect, not the cause. Language is only the symptom. The dislocation is in the human society. As soon as humanity is brought into one fold, as soon as every man succeeds in establishing human relationships with other men, all problems of alienation and isolation will be automatically solved. Sharing of experience essentially means sharing of hopes and fears, of expectations and apprehensions. In a class-oriented society, where the problems and apprehensions of one class differ from those of the other, experience cannot be shared, however efficient the linguistic apparatus. The poet will himself discover this truth if he abandons the rather sophisticated and apparently impressive grapple with the ghost of the abstract and comes down to face the realities of the objective world where he will realise that not language but life is his concern, and life in all its mundane nakedness, with right thinking and right language, will not be hard to conceive.

(1979)

❧ Chapter 10 ❧

The Essay



It is very strange that a heated controversy is raging about the essay, but no attempt has been made, neither in the east nor in the west, to define the genre. All the debates on the subject appear to be more impressionistic than critical. It seems that much confusion has been caused by Bacon's remark about his *Essays* as 'dispersed meditations'. But a genre, however 'dispersed', has a definite regular form. Entire discussion, today, on the essay has been mostly beside the point, mostly defining it in terms of the subject matter. The subject, though it distinguishes the species within a genre, cannot establish its identity. For example, drama is a genre which has a well defined form. It can be divided into comedy and tragedy. Ingredients of the novel are plot, character, diction, etc. But according to the subject, it may be categorised as romantic, psychological, social or industrial novel. Majority of critics have evaded the issue by asserting that the essay has no form. They believe that an essay follows no fixed formal pattern. Some even go to the extent of claiming that any piece of writing that cannot be assigned to any recognised genre is an essay. Thus its tentative character was emphasised and it was defined as a composition having no pretensions to completeness or thoroughness of treatment, in the words of Bacon, 'as grains of salt, that will rather give you an appetite than offend you with satiety'. This elaboration, however, has nothing to do with form but is a simple question of intention.

Another characteristic of the essay, whether the writer is Montaigne, Bacon, Sir Syed or Munshi Sajjad, is that it is written on a specific topic such as, *Adam Khore*, *Death*, *Ummeed*, *The cries of London*, *Holi*. Other literary genres have no topics, they have names, such as, *Tehri Lakeer*, *Kachhway*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hyperion*.

A favourite device used in the essay is that it freely gleans from other writings without restricting itself to any one model. It may, for

example, adopt the narrative form of the tales. But if the narration is continuous and the whole piece is written in this manner, than it will remain essay no more; it will become a tale or a Dastan. Similarly some essays use dialogue. But built entirely on dialogue it will make a play. Verses are also used in the essays. Verses alone compose poetry. Though portions from other genres may be incorporated in an essay, no portion of any other genre can be called an essay. Richardson has used epistolary form in *Pamela*. But *Pamela* is a novel, not a collection of letters. Similarly, any edition of Ghalib's letters, however intelligently arranged, will not make a novel. Commentaries scattered in a George Eliot novel provide another interesting example. Had these not been the part of the novel, these could easily pass as essays. These have never been identified as essays and have not for that reason been included in any anthology of essays. A piece of art is an organic whole whose ingredients have no independent existence of their own. Thus, whatever constitutes an essay becomes a part of the essay, and no portion of any other writing makes an essay.

Some critics have emphasised upon ingenuity, brilliance and unity as the distinctive features of the essay. But these features are common to all literary genres. Therefore, unless these are specifically identified with the essay, these cannot make the basis for its definition.

The fourth significant aspect of the essay, which has been much debated, is its personal element. But here, too, it is the content and not the form which has been emphasised. It has been argued that either the essay brings to light some important hidden aspect of the writer's personality, or reflects his thoughts and feelings. But this applies to all kinds of literature. Much can be surmised of the personality of Shakespeare from the study of his work. His sonnets have suggested to the critics that Shakespeare was lame and that he was jilted. The personal character of the essay is in fact an aspect of its form. But it is personal in the sense that here the writer expresses himself without resorting to any fixed moulds of art and thought. He is not bound by the form like a poet, a novelist or a playwright. He is not restricted by any philosophy or any ism. He speaks directly without apparently much technical nicety. The limitations of artistic demands do not hinder his revelation of inner feelings which is made through a kind of intimate confidence between him and the reader. In this way the essay is more expressive of the personality of the writer than other literary genres. But the felicity in personal effusions is very different

from the brevity of style and the spontaneity in language found in other literary forms. Every essay is not personal and subjective. Beside personal or familiar essay, as that of Lamb, there is also an impersonal or formal essay, such as Locke's essay concerning human understanding. Between these extremes we have another popular brand of essays, as those of Bacon, which are, according to him, dispersed meditations upon how men think and act. Generally an essay is built upon free association of ideas and feelings. There is no obscurity or ambiguity of personality, thought or expression. Further discussion of the personal element in the essay will be taken up later.

An essay is primarily an organization of impressions. It carries the essence of the writer's experiences. The essayist does not take us into the details of the processes of thought which led him to the specific conclusions that constitute the essay. He gives us the fruits of his labour, not the complexities of his cogitations. He offers not the details of psychological process but the finished articles: the social and psychological products'. Also, he does not try to communicate his conclusions through established artistic or intellectual devices. He addresses the reader directly, bringing home to him in the most concise and pithy form the results of his investigations without going into the labyrinth of logic. Thus Bacon, writing *Of Truth*, neither indulges in philosophy nor dilates upon the difficulties encountered in the pursuit of truth, though he does allude to various philosophies and points to certain difficulties. An essay is different from a novel, a short story or a play in that whereas all these forms of literature attempt at the communication of the experience, an essay tries to give the writer's reaction to the experience. The novelist and the dramatist portray the experience and leave it to the reader or the spectator to draw his own conclusion. If they try to give their own conclusion they will sound didactic and art will deteriorate into sermon. In other words, an essay tries to communicate those impressions which are artistically incommunicable through any other form of literature. It does not give only a picture of life, but comments on it and raises this comment to the level of art. This comment is always direct, thought sometimes embellished with metaphors and allusions. Such a comment is always implicit in any literary work, but it is never overt. In an essay it is clear, direct and deliberate.

Montaigne had said that truth and nature are superior to reason. The essay reflects this superior reality. It does not so much pursue argumentations and assertions as it draws upon tradition and

practice. It gives illustrations and references and cites authorities. Witticisms and conceits are its stock in trade. Thus it amuses and tries to persuade rather than convince. The essayist is pragmatic and uses common sense. It is only through such devices that the minds can be best influenced. An essay gives the writer's total response to life's complexity. It appeals to reason, sentiment and feeling which simultaneously operating upon the reader's sensibility create remarkable effects. The three levels of perception, acting together, create a tension which introduces a dramatic element in the essay that finds expression in the use of conceit. This delicate conflict lends brilliance and charm to the style. Cutting phrases and biting remarks enliven the observations, create humour and make room for sharp irony. Thus, pleasant satire, pithy expression, innuendo and far-fetched allusions characterise the essay.

Tension and conflict also help in revealing the personality of the writer. Confined to reason the individual's personality will be lost in logic. Restricted to emotion it will be obscured by romanticism, while living at the level of feeling, it may be reduced to sentimentalism. When all the three levels are operating simultaneously, the personality is revealed in all its concrete complexity. It is in this sense that the essay becomes personal, familiar or informal. Otherwise confined to reason alone the essay becomes a dissertation, and given to sentiment, it results in fantasy.

Ideas and thoughts presented in an essay are never conclusive. These are rather pragmatic, suggestive and of a relative significance. These are opinions and comments, hopes and disappointments, or attitudes which have been charged with life. Of the essay, Addison wrote in *The Spectator*:

I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables, and in coffee--houses.

He further claimed that the purpose of his essays was to reprehend,

Those vices which are too trivial for the chastisement of the law, and too fantastical for the cognizance of pulpit...

Philosophies interest philosophers. In day-to-day life only trivial things matter. But the apparent triviality sometimes carries behind it profound causes which the essayist makes familiar by his art. Metaphysics is translated into the language of daily business, while

ordinary affairs are beautifully clothed in mock--philosophic terminology. This creates a conceit--like effect which amuses and at the same time moves to serious thinking. It is for this reason that fine taste and urbanity have been recognized as distinctive features of the essay. Satire is always genial and irony playful, 'written in the spirit of benevolence and with love of mankind'. The ideas are usually profound, but the language is as a rule simple. Such a genre could naturally be created in an age that revelled in scholastic conceits which found expression in the poetry of Donne and the prose of Bacon, and which enriched the plays of Shakespeare.

The essay ventures in all fields, from the most commonplace observations to the profoundest speculations. Here intelligence has more play than reason, and attempt is made to grasp one experience with reference to other experiences. The essay appears at the height of intellectual and literary development. Contemporary literary forms provide its source material. It attempts to conceptualise experience and concretise thought. The raw mind conceives experience in physical forms when it has not yet succeeded in forming concepts. This creates mythology, and along with mythology then appears poetry. But when the mind develops to the stage where it can comprehend abstract thought, the essay is created. This is the reason that the essay is just four hundred years old whereas poetry belongs to prehistory.

Here we come to the genesis of the essay. It started in France in the sixteenth century. Montaigne published his *Essays* in 1580. In English it was introduced by Francis Bacon. Three editions of his *Essays* appeared in 1597, 1610 and 1625 respectively. Montaigne introduced his essays with these words:

I desire therein to be delineated in mine own genuine, simple and ordinary fashion, without contention, art, or study, for it is myself I portray.

In the first edition of his *Essays*, Bacon described them as:

Fragments of my conceit.

In the second edition he mentioned them as:

Certain brief notes, set down rather significantly than curiously, which I have called *Essays*.

He called them 'dispersed meditations'. And also claimed:

I have endeavoured to make them not vulgar, but of a nature whereof a man shall find much in experience, little in books, so as they are neither repetitions nor fancies.

In the last edition Bacon offered his essays as:

which of all my other works have been much current; for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms.

Thus we see that both the pioneers of this new genre were attempting to create a form of writing in which the writer speaks for himself, without reservations or assumptions, about day-to-day affairs of life.

There was much room for this kind of writing at that time. Established beliefs and notions were losing validity during the Renaissance. It had become very difficult for a writer to fix a belief and stay loyal to it. An intellectual chaos was created by the clash of new compulsions with old notions. This confused and flabbergasted every thoughtful person. Thus it is practically impossible to derive any clear attitude to life from the work of Shakespeare who, according to Dr. Johnson,

Carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance.

Shakespeare's plays are more or less all "problem plays". Though only a few of these, such as, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, etc., have been identified as such. The reason is that in these plays the issues are not clear and it is difficult to decide who is right and who is wrong. This state of affair made it very difficult to express the chaos in traditional literary forms. A new kind of writing was needed which could handle this confusion of thought and action.

Two kinds of spontaneous writings already existed before the appearance of the essay. These were personal diaries, in which people not only recorded significant events of their daily lives, but also commented on them quite freely and frequently. A Diary was the mirror of a person's life which could not be as such portrayed in the prevalent literary genres. The other kind of writings were known as Commonplace books. In these people generally noted favourite lines from poetry, significant sayings, memorable quotations, aphorisms, taut phrases, witticisms and truisms. Montaigne and Bacon took up

such pointed expressions, sharp phrases and clever sayings, polished them and put them into a new artistic form. Addison and Steele gave it new dimensions.

There were two other kinds of writings also, very popular as pamphlets and published sermons. These were generally rhetorical in tone, and were full of witticisms and flights of imaginations. These were mostly controversial in form and content and revelled in charged elocution. The essay transferred this charged expression from pulpit rhetoric to the new genre, which, however, avoided controversy and adopted a manner that soon met popular approval.

Addison and Steele wrote under journalistic compulsion. Newspapers and magazines played a major role in the development and popularisation of the essay. On the other hand, the Civil War had so scared the English mind that people shunned all serious controversy. They were very particular to observe restraint, decency and good humour in speech and writing. Controversial subjects were kept out of discussion as much as possible. Instead, trifles of everyday life which consisted of such affairs and foibles as hurt no one became the popular subjects of essays. Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is a good specimen of it in poetry. As readership enlarged, the impact of the written word also increased, bringing essays into great demand.

The rapid pace of life in the industrial age also contributed to the popularity of the essay. There was neither leisure to read voluminous books nor mind enough for erudition and pedantry. Business and social activity had increased leaving little room for serious intellectual pursuits. People had become practical and wanted to know and read about their day-to-day affairs. Essays provided light, short and useful reading which was instructive as well as amusing. Also, with the advancement of learning and the broadening of the horizons of knowledge, specialization became inevitable. Now a kind of writing was needed that could introduce a subject to the common reader without putting too much burden upon his mind or demanding too much erudition. The essay had the trick of satisfying the curiosity of the layman and giving him the confidence of a scholar. The Gravediggers in *Hamlet* possessed sufficient knowledge to give them the assurance of the learned. The essayist not only introduced new subjects, but also added a relish to their treatment. The Renaissance atmosphere was very propitious for the development and popularization of the essay.

It will be unjust to say that the essay is a non-serious writing of a serious writer, though Bacon did try to create an impression that his essays were casual writings written at leisure during the relaxed moments while working on more serious dissertations, and were meant to be ready by the serious reader in the moments of relaxation. Instead, the essays are the fruits of most serious thought and reveal a great mental effort behind them which, the essayist is deliberately and intelligently trying to spare the reader.

The whole discussion may be summed up with the conclusion that the essay is a regular, serious literary genre which is a complete whole, and has a specific subject as its title. It is an organization of experiences and impressions which freely gleans from other art forms. Reason, emotion and feeling are simultaneously at work in an essay, creating a state of tension. This conflict gives it a dramatic quality and makes room for wit and humour. It reveals the personality of the writer, and the tension created by the complex personality is expressed in sharp wit and innuendo in an aphoristic style. It avoids technicalities and pedantry, and treats difficult subjects in familiar and pleasant language. Intelligence, more than reason, is its essence. The argument mainly rests on illustrations, only occasionally resorting to metaphor and, that too, more for the sake of relish. Here the writer does not assert. He expresses an opinion, which is generally suggestive, and only rarely challenging.

(1984)



❧ Chapter 11 ❧

The Clown in Literature



In almost all societies of the ancient world the clown was a popular character of drama. In India, Greece and Japan, practically in all the places where the stage flourished, the clown was there. In conventional plays his role spreads over centuries. But modern drama is either too serious to have room for him, or it has itself become so non-serious that there is no need to have a clown. For example, in the absurd plays everyone behaves like a clown. A class of the present day dramatists sees only absurdity everywhere.

Perhaps the role of the clown originated in the fact that people have always been interested in stupidity. It was a popular subject of poetry in ancient societies, and Aristotle had defined comedy as an incongruity. Even today literature like *Alice in Wonderland* is quite popular. Perhaps it is because a life lived according to the dictates of reason tends to develop a certain kind of sophistication, and, as Bertrand Russell also observed, scientific thinking is against human nature. Man is slave to feelings and emotions and always finds pleasure in escape from rules and reason. A popular Persian proverb says that those who have great wisdom have much to worry. Also stupidities, and more so calculated stupidities, provide an escape from a life that strict discipline makes so monotonous. Besides, if used artistically, chaos and confusion create humour through incongruity.

In the plays the role of the clown originated in the form of short sketches. There was no room for it in Greek tragedy. Interludes were thus introduced to soften the harshness of the presentation.

Ancient Japanese drama followed the same pattern. But here the clown was not simply a stage device. He had a role in society. Court jesters and household clowns were quite common in those days. Later they were associated with companies, clubs and hotels. The stupidity represented by the clown always had a universal dimension. According to the Fool in Shakespeare's *Timon*:

“Tis a spirit: sometime appears like a lord: sometime like a philosopher, with two stones more than’s artificial one. He is very often like a knight, and generally in all shapes that man goes up and down in from fourscore to thirteen, this spirit walks in”.

There is nothing unusual or strange about stupidity. It is an integral part of life. Conformity is compulsion. Poets and mystics have propagated the idea that the intellect is a deceiving elf and appears in many guises, while poor “love” is neither the priest nor the philosopher. In almost all literatures of the world, ancient as well as modern, the priest and the philosopher have been the main victims of poet’s cutting innuendos and even unceremonious jestings. Dr Faustus ridicules the Pope and the gravediggers in *Hamlet* have the presumption of being philosophers. *The Festival of Fools* was a regular feature in France from fifteenth to seventeenth century. The butt of ridicule were mainly the priests. *Secular Poets Societies* also appeared in Europe. The clown was called Merry Andrews in England. The Fool in *King Lear* was no doubt a great character, but the Mountebank and Nano, the dwarf of Ben Jonson, do not lag far behind. There has been a great tradition of the role of the clown in drama from Shakespeare and Kalidas to the present day. Wherever there is the stage, there is the clown.

No tradition of drama could develop in Muslim societies. One reason was that stage presentation was considered un-Islamic, and the other prohibition was that the representation of living creatures was not allowed so much so that in the architecture of the Muslims, as in the engravings in the Badshahi Mosque at Lahore, even the leaves and the flowers are no particular leaves and flowers but only abstract geometrical figure. However, now with the coming of the T.V. the religious scholars no more object to photographic imitations.

A further hindrance in the way of this tradition was that drama is based on conflict, criticism and direct argumentation. There is no room for conflict in religious belief. The Muslim emphasise firm faith and absolute truth. Argument and analysis, they believe, lead to doubt and disbelief. Thus drama could not flourish in Muslim societies, though religious controversy held the stage and sectarian riots rather than reasoned debates engaged the people. (Lorca had observed that a nation which has no stage is ever on the decline).

Even in spite of there being no tradition of the stage, Muslim societies did give due importance to the role of the clown. It found expression in other literary genres. Tales and romances welcomed the clown. Mulla Naseer-ud-Din, Bribal and Mulla Dopiyaza, whatever their historical reality may be, are essentially the characters of fiction. These were most probably created for the amusement of the rulers. Or, at least in this way, an attempt was made to project them as very humanitarian and liberal monarchs, since in the courts of the ruthless autocrats no one could violate the decorum. People always stood there with their hands crossed on the breasts and the eyes downcast and their fate, even their lives, depended on the lifting of an eye-brow.

In ancient Indian drama the clown was called *vidusaka* which means an abuser. He was usually a dwarf. The subjects of the ancient Indian drama related to gods, kings and the courtiers and so had no room for anything trivial or flippant.

Court life was even otherwise very sophisticated and formal in which men always felt rather restricted and strained. Comic characters were introduced to reduce the burden of this mechanical and highly stylised life. Such a character was Madho in the *Shakuntla* of Kalidas. He was the favourite of Raja Dushemant and was specially brought up right from the childhood to give the Raja company and pleasure. He was a friend, a critic and an advisor.

Francis Bacon, in his famous essay *Friendship*, has discussed in detail the social and psychological compulsions that forced the princes to seek someone's companionship. He quotes a saying: 'Whatsoever is delighted in solitude, is either a wild beast or a god'; elaborating it with the remark, 'For it is most true, that a natural and secret hatred, and aversion towards society, in any man, hath somewhat of the savage beast'. He calls this saying a half truth since according to him it cannot be a divine attribute. It is a fact that the kings, due to their unique and exceptional position in the society, did develop this kind of inhuman or beastly tendency. The personality of the prince inspired so much reverence and awe that even the most exalted of the nobles could not dare to speak to him from a position of equality, or affect familiarity. Thus the Prince was condemned to utter loneliness. To overcome this state of isolation the princes usually raised one of their courtiers to the level of companionship. These were given the name of favourites. But sometimes this practice became quite embarrassing, and the favourites gathered so much influence in

the kingdom that they became a threat to the sovereign. They even staged a coup and grabbed power. Malik Kafoor, for example, made things very difficult for Razia Sultana and ultimately caused her downfall.

The wise rulers avoided this threat by employing a jester for this purpose rather than elevating one of the courtiers. This jester entertained the king and the courtiers by his antics and witticisms in his attempted half wit or even apparent false wit. He enjoyed sufficient licence in the court. He was free to utter all kinds of stupidities. But since he was an ordinary subject and enjoyed no position in the court, he posed no threat to the rule. Madho of Kalidas is also a clown of this category. He is witty, crude and spoiled due to the favours lavished on him. Since it is a strictly class ridden society, the fool is a Brahmin by caste. He is a severe critic of the prince. He checks him from falling into bad ways and also keeps reminding him of his princely duties. He is a companion as well as a confidant and an entertainer. He is in a way the other self of the Raja, and sometimes acts as his emissary, or even as his deputy. He is not simply a clown but also a mature, intelligent and responsible counsellor. This role is revealed in the 'asides' that he directly addresses to the spectators with his back to the king.

The Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear* serves almost the same purpose. Though he speaks like a fool, his observations are very serious. He ridicules and chastises the king so bluntly that anyone else venturing on such liberties would not escape the wrath of the king. A very important courtier, Kent, who is also otherwise very close to the King, is banished from the court for much less offence. The fool says more bitter things in his half--stupid half--serious manner. He is secure from reprimand since he fulfils a very important emotional need of the king. The king, as a king, or even as a father, cannot express his love to his children or expect the same from them. He fills this vacuum through the gibes of his clown.

But the clown is not stupid. He uses stupidity as a policy and beneath his apparent jollity there lies concealed a bitterness which no catharsis can relieve.

(1986)



❧ Chapter 12 ❧

Ghalib

The Poet With a Scientific Mind



Four clear strains can be distinguished in Urdu poetry. Actually they created four strong poetic traditions. These may be identified with four masters of Urdu poetry, namely, Sauda, Mir, Ghalib and Anis, in chronological order.

Sauda's poetry is marked with a satiric tone and represents a comic view of life. This tradition is continued in Nazir Akbarabadi, Akbar Allahbadi, Syed Mohammad Jafri, Zamir Jafri and so many others.

The second strain is identified with Mir and represents the natural mood of Urdu poetry. It is a tradition directly coming down from Persian and still dominates Urdu verse. Most of Urdu poetry is in this strain which is melancholic, lyrical and highly sentimental. It has been so much the mode of Nasir Kazmi's poetry that his own personality is almost erased before the master.

Ghalib and Anis are contemporaries. Anis was born in 1802, only 3 years after Ghalib who was born in 1799. After Mir, it is the tradition set by Anis which has been so prominent in Urdu literature. His poetic diction rhythm, sublimity of tone as well as of thought, and more particularly the form of Musaddas, which he carried to perfection, have brought laurels to so many renowned Urdu poets. Included among them are Shibli, Hali, Iqbal, Chakbast and Josh, beside a host of writers who gleaned a lot from the big harvest of Anis.

Ghalib could not have many emulators. The only name that stands out among the disciples of Ghalib is that of Yas Yagana Changezi. Though he is not emulated much, however greatly admired, he sums up the great tradition that comes down from Roomi and Omer Khayyam. His poetry brings to a finish the long glorious

scholastic tradition of the orient. Like all schoolmen, he takes the whole life as his domain, and finds nothing irrelevant. Everything to the schoolman is related to every other thing, and to man in the relationship of the microcosm and the macrocosm. This is the perception that lies under the use of conceits, so peculiar to these writers.

There are many facets of Ghalib's poetry which need to be uncovered. This is the reason that he is of so much interest to the critic who can analyse and interpret his verses without end. Mir, though a poets' poet, is not a favourite with the critics who find little in him to speculate on. His poetry is pathetic and tearful and is so full of a sense of futility and frustration of life. But his style is so simple and bare, so much expressive of his deep feelings and so comprehensive that it needs neither elaboration nor analysis or interpretation. Ghalib, on the other hand, is a treat for the critic and the speculator.

Sauda's tradition has not been taken with the seriousness it deserves, partly because our critics seem to believe that humour is a non-serious business, though nothing can be more serious than cutting a gibe at the follies and foibles of the people. Even otherwise, as a nation we miserably lack the sense of humour. It needs a very balanced mind and a culture steeped in classical spirit to detect incongruity and laugh at it. The sense of incongruity demands a mental poise and a stable society—a society with a mature culture. Nazir is not even considered a poet by many. Mir too could not appeal to the critic for the simplicity, naturalness and spontaneity of his poetry. His poetry is every heart's echo and there is not much in it to speculate upon.

The tradition of Anis suffered for other reasons. According to some he deliberately restricted his field, though within his self-imposed so called limitation he is as universal as Homer despite his mythology. Ghalib has, however, been a hot favourite with the critics.

Though commentaries on Ghalib keep appearing occasionally, the great poet has not received the attention he deserves. He probably suffers for belonging to a backward society. Had he the prestige of an empire behind him perhaps he would have fared better. The praise of the small is small praise, and we are no doubt a small people. There are many facets of his poetry which still need to be uncovered. Critics have written about his broad interest in humanity. He is a poet of all moods. Ghalib's name has become a metaphor for a culture that

created Urdu poetry. Beyond literature, he has drawn the attention of people from all walks of life. He has been naturally very popular with the singers for the delicacy of his feeling, profundity of his thought and the lyricism of his verses. He has been equally a favourite with the painters. Chughtai and Sadequain and many others have found a lot of pictorial stuff in his poetry. They have translated his verses into colours and have added to their canvas by the rich shades of life so much a mark of his poetic genius.

But Ghalib, above everything else, has a scientific mind. He looks at things scientifically. This comes as a surprise from a man who belonged to a society which had no scientific culture. There was no scientific activity in the world in which he lived. There were no laboratory facilities and modern technology had not reached India yet. But he had a scientific outlook which is basically characterised by observation and analysis. He himself points out two pre-requisites for a poetic sensibility: the capacity to absorb and the power to express. He protests that each hair of his has turned into an eye, and still he has not been able to enjoy the pleasures of beauty to his fill. Similarly he bewails of the inadequacy of expression. His liver has not yet become all blood and has not dropped from his eyes. He beseeches death to give him some time, very much like Keats who feared that he may cease to be before his pen has gleaned his teeming brain, since he had yet to do a lot.

Ghalib had a highly receptive sensibility. A poet is neither a philosopher nor a historian. Philosophy and history interest him only so far as they impinge upon the sensibility. He is not simply a chronicler of facts. He records their effect on the psyche. A poet sees much that a common man misses. The court at Delhi, for example, is quite oblivious of the lurking dangers. Ghalib cries out that in the court the people are busy in appreciating poetic niceties while outside there are the gallows and the rope. He is very conscious of the fact that beauty is going out of life and only a melancholic sense of loss has been left in its place. A burnt out candle is the only sign left of the revelry of the night. But whatever the situation, the poet always speaks the language of beauty. Even the saddest situation is seen tinged with beauty with a sense of humour that is so abundant in Ghalib. He would let the stream of blood run out of his eyes and would enjoy the spectacle of two candles glittering in the darkness. In a strain that brings out the mystic within him, he, very much like Iqbal, has the temerity to complain rather mischievously that if his

age is not prolonged even after fervent prayer he would pray for the long age of Khizar. He is so frustrated by disappointments in life that an isolated instance of favour loses any interest for him. One person's loyalty means nothing while the whole world has betrayed him.

Ghalib is a man of varied moods and he has taken whole life for his subject. Mir is the poet of love, Iqbal of action, and Nazir that of the ridiculous. Ghalib is the poet of man and of all his moods. He is so steadfast in love that even if it is unrequited, he still goes on loving. He little cares whether his beloved is loyal and God fearing or a flirt and a heathen. He is all for love. The vicissitudes of life cannot distract his love. However buffeted by the miseries of life, he has never forgotten to pay homage to love.

Ghalib is not just a dreamer. He is not a mere idealist. He knows the value of action. He sees the world so replenished with the bounties of life and wonders if there had not been sufficient men of action to exploit these. If the cups are all filled to the brim, the tavern must be without any wine left in it.

All this shows how realistic, objective and scientific he is in his approach to life. And this sense of reality is so excruciating. But it is his realism; his rationalism that make it bearable for him. He believes that it is easier to wrap a flame in silk, but not so easy to hold suffering in the heart. And the "Hikmat" that helps him to endure this misery is his reason. It is reason that keeps passion in control, though his reason appears baffled when he considers why there is so much pain in a world ruled by a benevolent deity. Iqbal too wondered why there is so much exploitation of the poor labourer in a world that is ruled by a just and omniscient God.

These are various aspects of Ghalib's poetry which have been very popular with the critics. But there is one aspect of his thought which has been only casually touched upon and that is his scientific bent of the mind. Scientific observations and analyses abound in his poetry. Though a great emotional poet, emotion is subdued to reason in his verses. He can be very objective and detached even in the most disillusioning situations. He shakes off his despair with a touch of humour. Such are the mysteries of love that he believes with great disbelief. Had he believed in the promises of the beloved he would have died of happiness. His scientific approach saves him from sentimentality as well as from despair. He exhibits a strong acceptance of reality and never befools himself with false hopes or undue despair.

Beside social and psychological realism, the scientific mind of Ghalib is best revealed when he refers to natural phenomena. Wordsworth had asserted that poetry should explore the laws of nature. Poetry is the science of emotions and studies the fundamental laws of human nature. References to various branches of science are quite common in Ghalib's poetry even though these were not formally introduced to the world he lived in. For example, the following verse makes a direct reference to acupuncture:

جاں فزا ہے بادہ جس کے ہاتھ میں جام آگیا
سب لکیریں ہاتھ کی گویا رگ جاں ہو گئیں

Once the cup of wine came into the hand, all the lines on the palm became the life-lines.

Similarly this verse is a good example of demonstrating the law of interference of light:

نظارے نے بھی کلم کیا واں نقاب کا
مستی سے ہر نگہ ترے رخ پر بکھر گئی

The spectacle itself became the screen as the threads of the eye scattered on the face.

Donne, an English metaphysical poet of the scholastic tradition, also used this conceit of thread for the beams of the eyes:

Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes, upon one double string.

Still the best use of this metaphor to describe the phenomenon of the interference of light is given by Anis in the well-known verse, which has been, rather ironically, presented by critics as an example of fantastic exaggeration. While giving a picture of the scorching heat of the sands of Karbala, he writes:

گر آنکھ سے نکل کے ٹھہر جائے راہ میں پڑ جائیں لاکھ آبلے پائے نگاہ میں

If it pauses after coming from the eye, the eye-beam will get a hundred thousand burns on its feet.

It is no exaggeration. It is a scientific observation so often missed by a common man. This is not an uncommon experience, though not commonly observed, that if one shuts his eyes after it has

fallen on the glare of burning sand, rings of light keep dancing before the eyes for some time. These are called Newton's rings.

Another verse of Ghalib attempts to describe the theory of relativity:

ہر قدم دوری منزل ہے نمایاں مجھ سے
میری رفتار سے بھاگے ہے بیاباں مجھ سے

Each step that I take takes me farther away from my
aim;

The desert recedes away from me at my own speed.

The following well-known verse gives expression to the process of evaporation:

ضعف سے گریہ تبدیل بہ دم سرد ہوا
بادر آگیا ہمیں پانی کا ہوا ہو جانا

Weakness turned tears into cold sighs
I am convinced that water turns into air

But the most enticing image is that which explains the phenomenon of condensation. It is so precise and so true:

فشار تنگی خلوت سے بنتی ہے شبنم
صبا جو غنچے کے پردے میں جا نکلتی ہے

Caught in the narrow space of the blossom,
The air is condensed and turns into the dew

Another verse attempts to explain the law of conservation of energy:

رہا آباد عالم اہل ہمت کے نہ ہونے سے
بھرے ہیں جس قدر جام و سبو میخانہ خالی ہے

The plenitude of the world shows that
Man has not properly exploited it;
If the cups are so filled, to this extent
The tavern must be without the wine.

Entropy is an important law of science which states that the available energy in the universe is gradually decreasing. Ghalib observes:

ہیں زوال آلودہ اجزا آفرینش کے تمام
مہر گردوں ہے چراغ رکھڑا بلویاں

All the elements of creation are in a state of steady deterioration;

The sun is no more than a lamp exposed to the wind.

Time has been an interesting subject to speculate on equally with the philosophers and the poets. Ghalib also meditates on time. He has brought in both physical and psychological time in one poetic line where he observes that the journey from morning to evening is no less than expedition of digging a canal of milk through a mountain:

صبح کرنا شام کا لانا ہے جوئے شیر کا

Still more striking, however, is his concept of the time period as a symbol simultaneity of freedom and confinement:

کشاکشہائے ہستی سے کرے کیا سعی، آزادی
ہوئی زنجیر موج آب کو فرصت روانی کی

No escape is possible from the vicissitudes of life;

The very free flow of water is caught in the chain of waves

In Ghalib's poetry we also find the concept of the boundlessness of the universe.

ہے کہاں تمنا کا دوسرا قدم یا رب
ہم نے دشت امکاں کو ایک نقش پایا

Where is the next step of our aspiration?

The entire wilderness of the universe is not beyond a foot print

He even feels so cramped in this world that he would build a spectacle higher than the heavens if his abode had been beyond the heavens.

منظر اک بلندی پر اور ہم بنا لیتے
عرش سے ادھر ہو تا کاش کہ مکاں اپنا

Even the phenomena of reflection and refraction do not escape his deep meditation, as he says that a refined medium cannot glitter without a coarse background. Similarly the garden provides a foil to the mirror of spring breeze,

لطف بے کثافت جلوہ پیدا کر نہیں سکتی
چمن زرنگار ہے آئینہ باد بہاری کا

Similarly Ghalib expresses the idea of the conservation of energy when he writes in a couplet that all the fauna and flora are, as also in the words of T.S.Eliot,

“Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the corn”,

سب کہاں کچھ لالہ و گل میں نمایاں ہو گئیں
خاک میں کیا صورتیں ہو گئی کہ پنہاں ہو گئیں

At the same time, he is aware of the flux of life and the illusion created by it,

جو تھا سو موج رنگ کے دھوکے میں آگیا
اے وائے نالہ لب لعلیں نوائے گل

Everyone has been carried away by the wave of colour;
It's a pity no one realized the pain of the rose.

Finally, we find in Ghalib a strong interrogative mood, which is the essence of scientific thinking,

یہ پری چہرہ لوگ کیسے ہیں
عشوه و غمزہ و ادا کیا ہے

Who are these fairy faced people, what is vanity, what is style,

Where have these greenery and flowers come from
And what are the clouds and the winds?

Though Ghalib has freely roamed in the world of imagination, nothing is expressed in the abstract. Even the vision of God has been expressed through the metaphors of the cup and the wine. The poet has aesthetically responded to the questions inspired by the experiences of living and has answered them with the help of imagination which can go deep into the intricacies of relationships. He has clothed his observations and experiences in beautiful metaphors and symbols.

A still greater evidence of Ghalib's direct interest in science and of the scientific orientation of his mind is the commentary or review that he wrote on Sir Sayed's *Aain-e-Akbari* (Akbar's Law). Since Ghalib and Sir Sayed had a great regard for each other, the bluntness of Ghalib's disparaging remarks is shocking. This review or *Taqreez* is in poetic form and consists of 38 verses. It shows Ghalib's impatience with the wastage of talent and precious time in a useless pursuit while there was such a lot to do. This nostalgia of Sir Syed was out of place. Below is given a paraphrase in simple English of some significant verses from the review.

Such a work is an insult to such a powerful intellect.
It is nothing but self-indulgence.

Further reprimanding Sir Sayed, it continues;

Even if the subject is law, then see the achievements of
English in this field.

After referring to their administration and the reforms brought about by the English, Ghalib adds:

They worked a magic on the water that in the form of steam
pulls the ship.

Sometimes the steam moves the wheel on the Earth, and
sometimes it moves the lever and works like the horse or the
ox.

These people create music without the organ, and make the
words fly like birds.

Why don't you see that the messages from a hundred miles
are carried in a couple of hours?

They ignite the air and it glows like the burning coal.

See the glowing garden in London which glitters in the night
without the lamps.

Some critics are of the opinion that Ghalib was highly handicapped by his medium. *Ghazal* does not allow the freedom that a vast and fertile imagination needs. But *Ghazal* in fact provides more freedom than any other genre. In conventional poetry there is the restriction of rhyme and rhythm. In poems, even in free verse and prose-poetry, there is the restriction of the subject. But *Ghazal* offers freedom both of form and subject. Each verse in a *Ghazal* has an independent status. And all couplets are loosely connected by a rhyme only in their second lines. When Ghalib complains of the narrow strait of *Ghazal*, he actually means to say that even as free a medium as the *Ghazal* is not adequate for the effusion of his thoughts and feelings.

(23-1-99)

❧ Chapter 13 ❧

Akhtar Hussain Jafri *Protest and Communication*



Akhtar Husain Jafri's poetry is a protest as well as an effort at communication. He takes great pains and makes many experiments to ensure communication, to ensure that the great sufferings of life which he is trying to express in his poetry must not only be understood, but also experienced by his readers. According to the preface to *Aina Khana*, his subjects are nature, society, man and his exploitation, which according to him are the complaints of the earth which it makes through the stars, the flowers, the moment by moment drying up ocean, the torn sails, vacant houses, the sheet with patches, the rising sun and the moon in eclipse, every element creates its own metaphor. The torn sheet with its patches, too, has its own idiom and the scale of justice on the earth becomes the crucifix. These are the symbols of Akhtar Husain Jafri. The preface elaborates on both the content as well as the form of Jafri's poetry. According to his own statement, he has learnt communicative devices from Ghalib, T.S.Eliot, etc. It means that along with tradition he is also influenced by modernism. Historical legacy and exploitative perspective are also reflected in his poems. Distortion and dislocation of the language are also the elements of his poetic style. He says that languages are created, corrupted, reformed, and distorted perpetually, but new modes of expression of emotion also keep evolving. He also identifies language with patriotism while, on the other hand, he ascribes the change in language to the change in society. He also seems to imply that the social order can be changed by changing the idiom. This very much reflects the influence of T.S. Eliot. It is for this reason that his language seems to take an oblique path with reference to convention. But the language of the preface as well as the poems that follow shows that after abandoning the traditional diction he is not embarking on some new mode of expression. Instead he seems to be returning to old conventional forms. This is strange that he writes poetry in prose but in prose he employs a diction which can be called poetic.

Then, he also asserts that absolute truth is rooted in human instinct and is self-evident. Thus he defines the aim of the poet too whose real concern is to reinterpret the earthly and secondary truths in the light of present compulsions. It means that though truth is absolute, its implications keep varying. This reveals two facts. One is that the poet's stance is optimistic, and secondly that he emphasizes the value of action. This requires that along with perfection in art, critical training is also important. It also emphasizes an acquaintance with the latest knowledge as well as the modes of expression, otherwise literature will suffer stagnation which will make the writer lazy and he will simply go on repeating himself and lose the ability to give expression to fresh experiences.

In short, the poetry of Akhter Husain Jafri tries to respond to immediate issues while remaining within the orbit of tradition. Therefore contemporary sufferings find a prominent place in his poems. The miseries of the time are closely bound with those pains, complaints and deprivations which are scattered all around us. A regular metaphor of the poems of *Aina Khana* is Karbala. This is a metaphor for his age. Allusions to it are made frequently in his poetry and in different forms. Horses returning without the horsemen in the battle evening, ring within ring of iron collars, the sound of wailing and the chains at the gate, the demand of allegiance and the bleeding throats – all these refer to Karbala. Besides, there are allusions to caravans arriving at Karbala with their leather casks and that violence was forbidden in this month. All these are metaphors of Karbala as well as of contemporary facts. There are also some elegies as well as heart-rending descriptions such as the prayers, of women sitting on green mats, which are no more answered, a procession with unspectacular Tazias and praying for the dead in the theatre of carnage -- these scenes of violence and bloodshed and of oppression and pain are no conventional metaphors. These are fresh wounds and directly suffered. The poet seeks their direct first hand expression. But direct personal experiences may be stated, these cannot be communicated as experiences. That's why the poet has to resort to metaphor. Conventional language can express conventional experiences only; it cannot communicate a purely personal experience. What the poet wants to express evades expression. He tries to communicate the incommunicable. For that he uses the language of suggestions. He distorts the language in order to force his meanings into it.

Aina – Khana is a collection of free verse and prose poems. These are experimental poems -- thematically as well as technically.

Exploring new subjects and making experiments in form is the mark of distinction in Jafri's poetry. Since these poems are experimental, it is neither possible nor even proper to pass any final judgement on them. Before him Faiz and N.M. Rashid had also made similar experiments. Faiz got a better response of the two since he succeeded in creating a beautiful blend of the old and the new. Rashid, on the other hand, took to quite a divergent path and his poetry could not evoke the desired emotional and intellectual response. Besides, the association of Faiz with a popular movement also helped in popularizing him.

When in a literary sitting Josh Malihabadi was asked to comment on free verse, he said that art forces its recognition. It itself compels people to acknowledge its merit. If among the writers of free verse there emerges someone of the stature of Mir, Ghalib or Iqbal, he will assert his merit and free verse will also find a place among great literature. The same is true of the prose-poem. Though free verse has achieved some popularity, it is yet to establish itself as a serious poetic genre. Prose-poem has yet to meet public approval.

Prose poem is a creation of the needs of the modern times. I think that it was originally used in translations of poems. Now the world is shrinking very fast. Civilizations and languages are drawing closer to each other. There is a general tendency of translating foreign poetry into native languages. Translations are in great demand in these days. But the problem with the translations is that though the thought content of poetry can be rendered from one language into another, the linguistic beauties cannot be translated. Every language has its specific tone, its conventions and traditions. It has an idiom which is rooted in its culture. These find no equivalents in other languages. Thus translations created a kind of poetry which was rich and profound in thought but which very much lacked in the formal beauties of the language. But an art is distinguished mainly by its form and technical excellence. Thus, on the one hand, the poets, under the compulsion of the modern age, made emotion subservient to thought in poetry. On the other, they made provision for the effusion of emotion and imagination in it.

Prose poem is particularly indicative of the effort to discipline emotion by reason. But reason alone does not create poetry. It must find room for emotion. Prose is the language of reason while poetry is the language of emotion and imagination. This is the problem of the modern poet that while living in the age of science he must keep poetry within the orbit of reason and at the same time use it for the

expression of emotion and flights of imagination. The other problem is that purely personal experiences must be expressed in words that are a conventional mode of communication. Thus the poet is caught in the conflicting demands of direct experience expressed in a conventional medium. He sees something of the absurd in this situation. However, the main object for a poet is communication – if not communication, at least expression. Akhtar Husain Jafri himself aims at that as he expresses in a couplet that he is neither looking for metaphor nor simile, he wants to make use of the naked word. But naked word cannot fathom the depths of consciousness. This asks for more room in language. Communication is the very objective of art; it may be only self-communication. Communication is the object, though it may not be on the conscious level.

New experience demands new language. But language is a social function. And if language is new, that is unconventional, it will become obscure and incommunicable. The poet is forced to seek meanings other than conventional. This has been a problem for every poet of our times. Thus in poetry as well as in fiction new experiments in the exploitation of language have been attempted, now for a century in the West and for about half a century in the East, in the form of impressionism, expressionism, stream of consciousness, free verse, prose poem, etc.

The word is the unit of language. It communicates at least at three levels. Its communication is three-dimensional. It has a literal meaning, the conventional dictionary meaning. It is the logical dimension of a word. Then a word evokes a picture also. This is its visual dimension. The cup, the grail and the bowl mean the same thing but arouse different pictures in the mind, and with them different emotional responses. Then, a word has a sound also. This is its auditory dimension. Pope used *sol* for *sun*. This change of sound effect adds a beauty to the expression which enriches the poetic line in an artistic way. Prose uses only one dimension of the word. A word used in prose is a single dimensional word. It conveys only its literal meaning. A word in poetry is 3-dimensional. This is the basic difference between the language of prose and the language of poetry. A word used in poetry, though the same word, does not remain the same word when used in prose. In poetry it becomes much richer. Even prose that intends to evoke visual or/and auditory responses is for the same reason called poetic prose. It is something between prose and poetry. The three responses simultaneously evoked lend a completely new meaning to a word used in poetry.

Then, there is also another level of poetic expression, still another dimension. According to the psychological theory of *Gestalt*, a thing is more than the simple sum of its components. That is, $2+2 \neq 4$. $2+2 = 2+2+K$ or $A+B = A+B+K$. K is the function of the process of addition.

As individuals people are generally quite reasonable. But in a crowd almost all become unreasonable. This is called crowd psychology. The teachers generally experience such a phenomenon. Each student by himself is very humble and obedient. But when they are together they become the very devils. This devilishness comes in them as a result of assembly. In *Gestalt*, the theory is illustrated with reference to the cinematographic film. A movie film consists of frames of still pictures. When sixteen of these frames pass through the retina in one second, succession is transformed into duration and creates the impression of movement. This motion is not in the individual frames but is a result of their cumulative effect. Similarly when the three dimensions of a word are simultaneously evoked, they create a fourth dimension. And this is the magic or charm of poetry. There is no poetry without this charm.

The problem with the modern poet is that he wants to keep poetry within the bonds of reason. But reason is absolutely inadequate. It cannot circumscribe consciousness. This requires a much greater range. When a poet wants to communicate an experience comprehensively, he exploits all the dimensions of the word. In this way charm inundates reason. The problem of the poet in the present time is to use the word in its nakedness, denuded of metaphoric or symbolic ambiguity. But naked word cannot communicate. The poet is forced to take resort to metaphor, and so reason is subdued. On the other hand, a conventional mode of expression cannot communicate direct personal experience. This is the biggest problem of the poet to day. And this is the difficulty that Akhtar Husain Jafri struggles to grapple with.

The effort in itself is, no doubt, commendable. But the problem is that poetry loses spontaneity and becomes scholarly, which requires a lot of erudition to decipher it. It becomes a matter of interest only to the pedants. The common reader is cut out.

The poems of *Aina Khana* and *Jahan Darya Utarta Hai* are experimental poems. This is their real merit, and they deserve attention for this more than for anything else. Although the purpose and the effort of the poet is to create a harmony between the traditional and the new, yet the experiment has not been very

successful. Still the effort is positive. The struggle has now been going on for almost a century. The journey continues. But the expression has not yet matched the passion. However, in his second collection, *Jahan Darya Utarta Hai*, Jafri has a stronger grip both on content and form than in the earlier *Aina Khana*. He now seems to be more confident and the art is in better control. *Aina Khana* expresses the desire to transcend convention and the difficulties in the way of achieving it in the following way:

That sweet sounding stream
Which is running in green forests away from scorched
earth
Pouring out its music
No trained bird will ever be able to land on its banks.

(*The Trained Birds*)

It means that conventional thought or traditional modes of expression will never be able to reveal the secrets of life. On the other hand, the mood and the tone in *Jahan Darya Utarta Hai* is very different;

You came
You came, and the incomplete poem was perfected
Now there is no word left that hangs on the eyelashes till the small
hours
How long could the stream of false waters
Keep its flow?
How long could the poem survive on borrowed passion?

(*The poem Living On Borrowed Passion*)

Here the grasp on the subject is surer and the communication is also more lucid and smooth. The latter poem does not reflect the confusion and the tentativeness of the former. Still it is not fair to make such a distinction between the two collections. Both the effects are visible in the two collections, though the latter is comparatively more lucid than the former. The experiment better succeeds here. There are indications of a new horizon in poetry. Now it is for the poets that follow to take the experiment forward so that this new poetry may become more intelligible to the reader and evoke the desired response.

(22-03-99)



❧ Chapter 14 ❧

The *Musaddas* of Josh



There is no equivalent for Urdu *Musaddas* in the English language. The closest in intent and effect is perhaps the Spenserian stanza. But of that later. Josh is the rightful heir to the great traditions of Urdu poetry and a harbinger of the new ones. On the one hand, he has carried forward the traditions of Sauda, Mir and Anis, on the other; he strengthened new traditions of resistance poetry and the poetry of revolution. He makes a beautiful blend of biting satire of Sauda as well as his elegies on the social graces that have departed the lyricism and melancholic satire of Mir as well as sublimity of the great poetry of Anis. According to Shibli, the poetry of Anis presents a model of the very best that can be found in any genre in Urdu poetry, and the beauties that distinguished his poetry are unparalleled.

Josh presents a beautiful and strange commingling of the feudal temperament and a revolutionary zeal. On the one hand, there is a great regard for the old values, on the other, a strong sense of the rapidly changing world. He strongly feels that the Indians must come out of their narrow shells. Though Josh has written some beautiful *Ghazals* too, he was bitterly opposed to *Ghazals*. He considers the writers of *Ghazals* no more than conventional imitators who have not yet outlived the tales of Wamiq and Farhad. It has lost its vitality and freshness. The *Ghazal* writers have been enslaved to the rhyme. When in a literary gathering he was asked why he opposed *Ghazals*, he remarked,

“ Silence means secrecy, which screen reflects God? The covering of Ka’aba is black. I am mad and life is all illusion.”
This makes the *Ghazal* --- “a chaos of irrelevant ideas.”

He sees *Ghazal* as a mere medley of incongruous thoughts. He saw no sense in it and could make nothing out of it. Josh believed in art for the sake of life. He considered art to be a function of life, and he was of the opinion that every act of man, including poetry, must be devoted to the service of man. He was the poet of revolution and wanted to see perpetual vitality in life. *Ghazal* is a strictly private and

subjective mode of expression, which lacks the ability to move the readers to action. When Ehsan Danish was asked in a radio interview, why he did not write *Nazm*, he replied that *Nazm* is a collective activity. It can be written only in a literary climate in which everyone writes *Nazm*, when the hearts of all the people beat in unison. In a chaotic world everyone seeks his own shell. The *Ghazal* addresses the poet himself. It is a kind of self-talk, a soliloquy. The *Nazm* addresses the whole community. But this is possible only when all the people are fired with the same passion and have the same taste. In the age of Josh the whole nation was charged with passion for freedom. There was the same enthusiasm everywhere. Otherwise too, the Progressive Writers' Movement had given a direction to literature. This had created a kind of unified sensitivity, though somewhat forced. This climate best suited *Nazm*. There was little room for *Ghazal* in such hectic activity. Then, the field of *Ghazal* was rather barren. There were few respectable writers of *Ghazal*. Everybody was writing *Nazm*. Josh too wanted to address the whole society. He wanted to drag poetry, as well as life, out of the rotten outdated grooves and wanted them to confront the new challenges. This was the reason that from the very early days he associated himself with the Progressive Writers' Movement and was in the forefront in the struggle for independence. He participated in the Ahmadabad session of the Congress and met Gandhi, Abul Kalam Azad, and Malwala among others. But Hasrat Mohani impressed him most. Sarojni Naidu motivated him to start the literary magazine "Kaleem" whose objectives were "The destruction of the British Government, internment of capitalism, propagation of socialism, satirical condemnation of clichés and superstitions and consolidation of the Congress, etc." The result was that "the titled crusaders of the Muslim League, the officials who were the lackeys of the government, the government-paid religious scholars writing and screaming on the pulpit, all tied their belts and came in the arena against us."

Josh never saw poetry detached from life. He therefore needed a poetic genre that could address life directly and at the same time satisfy the demands of poetry. Though Josh has used almost all poetic genres, his real talents flowered in *Musaddas*. *Musaddas* is a poetic genre which effects a beautiful blend of the subjective and the objective in the poetry. Mir Anis had done the pioneer work in this field. Anis perfected *Musaddas* which perhaps originated in the seventeenth century. There are no traces of it before Sauda. This is purely an Urdu genre of poetry. According to Hamid Ullah Afsar,

The form that *Musaddas* has developed in Urdu is found neither in Arabic nor in Persian nor in any other language.

Among the literary genres it is neither *Tarkeeb Bund* nor *Musammāt*. It may be concluded that the Urdu poets have carved a new path of their own and then developed it to the extent that of all literary forms prevalent in Urdu, none has such a vast treasure of great literature in it as the *Musaddas*.

Ram Babu Saxina thought,

If considered seriously, Azad, Hali, and Saroor, etc. owe their interesting powerful poems to gleanings from the *Marsia*.

Musaddas, the form used for *Marsia*, has greatly contributed to make the great Urdu poetry sublime. Description, narration, portrayal of emotion, in every respect, it has been a very effective genre. Hali used it for didactic poetry, Iqbal for his *Shikwa*. It has been used for criticism in *Shehar Ashob* as well as in as vulgar a poetry as *Wasokht*. It has proved itself a form appropriate for any kind of subject from the most sublime to the very mean.

Musaddas is composed in stanzas of six lines. The first four lines, which rhyme together, create an atmosphere, invoke a mood. The last two lines form a couplet which gives a finishing touch to the stanza. In this way freedom and regularity create a beautiful blend. *Musaddas* in this way combines the narrative and the lyrical. The first four lines provide space for the narrative, while the final couplet effects lyrical precision. The stanza may be seen as an extension of a verse of a *Ghazal*, the first line of which sets the tone which is spread into the first four lines of *Musaddas*, while the second line which brings the meaning home is extended to two lines. As an illustration, consider this stanza from Anis,

خاقت کا ہے مجمع در دولت پہ سحر سے جو آتا ہے روتا ہوا آتا ہے وہ گھر سے
سب کہتے ہیں برسا کے لہو دیدہ تر سے چھپ جائے گا اب فاطمہ کا چاند نظر سے
اندھیر ہے گریہ شہر والا نہ رہے گا
پھر شہر کی گلیوں میں اجالا نہ رہے گا

The whole subject could be condensed in a verse of *Ghazal*,

اب میں ہوں اور ماتم یک شہر آرزو
توڑا جو تو نے آئینہ تمثال دار تھا

In this way the *Musaddas* has provided for the narrative within the lyrical form of the *Ghazal*. *Ghazal* represents the natural mood of Urdu poetry. *Mathnavi* is the conventional form of narrative poetry. But *Mathnavi* by its very form is not much suited for lyrical

expression, though in it too sometime occur verses which are close to the lyrical, such as,

جو بھی دیکھے گا خوب روئے گا
آگے پیچھے جنازہ ہوئے گا

But out of context the effect, and perhaps also the meaning of this couplet will be largely lost. Mir Anis continued the narrative and the lyrical in his masterly handling of the *Musaddas*.

Spenser had made a similar experiment in the *Faerie Queene*. He combined the Ottava Rima and the Rime Royal to create the Spenserian Stanza. Like *Musaddas* this also became very popular and assured greatness to many English poets. Those who made a mark in English poetry due to the use of Spenserian stanza include Byron, Shelley and Keats. This stanza resembles *Musaddas* in its structure and creates a similar effect. It is composed of nine line. The first eight lines are in iambic pentameter and make a complete set. The last line which is a hexameter has a caesura in the middle which divides it into two. This bifurcated line serves the purpose of the final couplet in *Musaddas*, while the first eight lines provide space for the narrative as do the first four lines of the *Musaddas*. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is a long narrative poem with rich lyrical effects. However, the imitators of Anis, like the imitators of Spenser could not equal the crafts of their respective masters except at places, as in Hali's *Musaddas* and Iqbal's *Shikwah*, as in *Adonais* of Shelley. By and large these poems remain rather uneven with spurts of genius here and there. They lack sustained sublimity. There is hardly any narrative.

This absence of the narrative is due to the fact that the narrative can flourish only in a society where a consensus, or near about a consensus, exists among the people, where all think almost in the same way, where there is a fair degree of homogeneity in thought and feeling, where, in short, the events affect the minds almost in the same way. But in a chaotic and disintegrating society where everyone has his own personal thinking, his own individual response to events, there the event no more remains important. Speculation on the event becomes more important than the event.

When the *new Marsia* is discussed, with reference to Josh, it is generally asserted that here speculation has become more important than narration. The subject of *new Marsia* is not the events of Karbala, but the philosophy behind the events. This is not confined to *new Marsia* alone. It is a change that has affected all forms of literature all over the world. The narrative poetry no more exists and the story has

gone out of fiction. Joseph Conrad elaborated upon this modernistic literary tendency in the statement that the truth does not lie in the event as the kernel in the gourd, but around it, as the halo around a star. Thus Josh learnt from Anis the art of pictorial description but could not benefit from his art of narration. Take this stanza as an example,

جب چہرہ افق سے اٹھی سر مئی نقاب
کائنات نجوم زرد ہوا روئے آفتاب
کھلے فلک کے جام کھلے سرخیوں کے باب
اڑنے لگا غیر برسنے لگی شراب
سبزے کی آب و تاب چرانے لگی فضا
آہستگی سے ہوش میں آنے لگی فضا

Now put beside this, the following stanza from Anis,

یوں گلشنِ فلک سے ستارے ہوئے رواں چن لے چن سے پھولوں کو جس طرح باغبان
آئی بہار میں گلِ منتاب پر خزاں مر جھا کے رہ گئے ثمر و شاخ ککشاں
دکھلائے طور بادِ سحر نے سموم کے
پڑ مردہ ہو کے رہ گئے غنچےِ نجوم کے

The influence of Anis is obvious. Josh learnt the art of description from the great master but he could not emulate his narrative skill. Narrative demands a balance, a poise, a profundity in nature and a maturity in thought, which perhaps was not possible for the violent impulsive nature of Josh. This in fact reflects the difference between the classical and the romantic temperament. It is a difference as one finds between the classical epic of Milton and the romantic epic of Wordsworth. The former is narrative while the latter is reflective. But in the art of description Wordsworth is not inferior to Milton.

Josh changed the whole tone of *Marsia* partly due to his own temperament and partly due to the compulsions of his time. Now *Marsia* instead of an elegy has become more a call to action, a struggle against oppression. The events are now no more narrative of painful experiences, they have assumed a rebellious stance. Josh introduced in a conventional poetic form, the new tradition of resistance and revolt.

(21-03-99)

❧ Chapter 15 ❧

The Metaphysics of Presence



Some 2500 years ago Confucius observed:

To be patient and gentle, ready to teach, returning not evil for evil, that is the strength of character of the people of southern countries. To be under arms and meet death without regret, that is the strength of character of the people of the northern countries. It is the ideal of the brave man...

In this way he suggested the idea of some kind of geopsychological differences of character between the people belonging to different regions. The dichotomy of north and south has once again been the subject of discussion for some time now. In recent past this division has also been referred to as that between east and west. While the east has become a term synonymous with backwardness, the west stands for progress. This difference between the east and the west has baffled many and some very interesting explanations have been put forward by the scholars. One strange observation has been that while the west has given birth to philosophers; all the prophets have appeared in the east. All the great religions of the world have also had their origin in the east. Thus science is the metier of the west and the occult the domain of the east. The former has concerned itself with the matter while the latter with the spirit. The predicament in which the east finds itself now also demands an explanation.

Some thinkers insist that the west has a world view which is peculiar to it. One such modern thinker is Jacques Derrida, Professor of Philosophy at Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris and a prominent member of the group of French thinkers known as Structuralists and post-Structuralists. He has significantly contributed to the advance of modern linguistics. One of his innovations has been the exploration of western "*logocentrism*" or "*The history of metaphysics*, like the history of the west, is the determination of being as presence in all the senses of

this word." He further elaborates this contention by the assertion that:

It would be possible to show that all the terms related to fundamentals, to principles or to the centres have always designated the content of a presence--*edios, archie, telos, energia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness or conscience, God, man and so forth.

This statement may be helpful in understanding the western mind and explaining its achievements in the practical field of life. But first the concept of western logocentrism or the metaphysics of presence must be clearly grasped. Following illustration may be helpful:

Descartes said, " I think, therefore I am". Similarly Camus asserted, "An analysis of rebellion leads us to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed". In both the cases "I" is a being that is present before the speaker.

Or, take another example, this time from T.S. Eliot:

*Or say the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now*

(Burnt Norton)

Coleridge's definition of the primary imagination expresses the same idea in his typical *oracular sublimity*:

The living Power and prime agent of all human perception,
and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of
creation in the infinite I AM.

Derrida would have stated that in a similar way: that all is present: the past being an earlier present, and the future an anticipated present. All is existence. The present exists, the past existed, and the future will exist. Thus self is a presence, time is a presence, and in the same way, an idea is a presence. A notion, or a meaning, is present to a speaker, which he makes present to others by expressing it in speech or writing or through some other symbol. So much so that Donne cannot even talk of absence without making reference to concrete presences, as here, in *A nocturnal upon S. Lucies Day*, being

the shortest day, where he is trying to emphasise his won nothingness:

*If I an ordinary nothing were,
As a shadow, a light, and body must be here.
But I am none.*

This is what Derrida would call western logocentrism or the metaphysics of presence. But this does not mean that there are no exceptions. T.S. Eliot seems to subscribe to the other point of view also:

*And what you do not know is the thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not*

Sounds very much like the concept of nothingness in Ghalib:

*Haan Khaiyyo Mat Farabe Hasti,
Har Chand Kahen Ke Hai, Nahin Hai
(Oh, do not succumb to the illusion of life,
Howsoever they may say it is, it is not.)*

Making allowance for such exceptions, it can be asserted that the metaphysics of presence is the metaphysics of the west. East has conceived existence in terms of absence. Urdu literature, which is the end-product of the oriental tradition, of the middle east and the middle ages, provides beautiful examples of the metaphysics of nothingness. Fa'ni Badayuni says:

*Na Ibeteda ki Khabar Hai, Na Inteha Malum,
Raha Yah Wahm Keh Ham Hain, So Woh Bhi Kiya Malum.
(Neither the beginning nor the end is known,
As to the illusion of our being, that too is not sure.)*

Man's destiny is conceived as a mystery, as Ya's Yagana Changezi puts it:

*Ummedd-o-beem Ne Mara Mujhey Do Rahe Par.
Kahan Ke Dair-O-Harm, Ghar Ka Rasta Na Mila.
(Hope and despair baffled me on the cross-roads:
Not to speak of the Mosque and the Temple, I have lost the way to
my home.)*

Iqbal considers time to be an illusion:

*Barhe Ja Yeh Koh-e-Garan Tor Ker,
Talism-e-Zaman-o-Makan Tor ker.
(March on, smashing this huge mountain,
This charmed world of time and space.)*

Ultimately reaching the conclusion:

*Awwal-o-Aakhir Fana, Batin-o-Zahir Fana,
Naqsh Kuhun Ho Keh Nau, Manzil-e-Aakhir Fana.
(The beginning and the end, the visible and the hidden: all is
nothing:
Old or new the imprint, in the end it is all nothing.)*

But this must not be understood as Iqbal's final position on the question of time. At other places he has other comments to make, as here in his lecture, *The Revelation of Religious Experience*:

Personally I am inclined to think that time is an essential element in Reality.

But also he makes it clear that real time is not serial time to which the distinction of past, present and future is essential. In spite of this observation, his view of time only reluctantly accepts its presence:

Space and time are possibilities of the Ego, only partially realised in the shape of our mathematical space and time.

(The Meaning of Prayer)

Thus, even in the metaphysics of Iqbal too, time is not a concrete reality, not a presence. This is all in the oriental tradition, where even consciousness, according to Ghalib, is no reality:

*Hai Ghaib-e-Ghaib Jis Ko Samjhate Hain Hum
Shahood:
Hain Khwab Main Hunuz Jo Jage Hain Khwab Se.
(It is only the absence of absence that we consider as
Consciousness:)
Those who have awakened in a dream are still in the
dream.*

There is neither space nor time, nor even the self. Consequently there is no meaning, and the speech does not show the presence of meaning as, once again, in Ghalib:

*Bak Raha Hoon Junum Mein Kiya Kiya Kuchh,
Kuchh Na Samjhe Khuda Kare Koe.
(How am I rambling in my madness,
May God, no one gets anything out of it.)*

These illustrations, although so few, indicate that the metaphysics of the east is the metaphysics of absence as against the metaphysics of

the west which is the metaphysics of presence, the western logocentrism. This is the difference of the world-view between the east and the west.

The metaphysics of absence has given the eastern mind a strong tilt towards the occult, so much so that some of our intellectuals even now on the threshold of the 21st century highly deprecate education, even literacy; science is considered a threat to the spirit. The great mystic of the west, Wordsworth, on the other hand, sees the spirit itself as a scientific reality, an empirical entity, as in these lines from the *Prelude* (echoing, David Hartly's Associationism):

*The mind of man is fram'd even like the breath
And harmony of music. There is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society.*

There is, however, one difference between the two approaches. The west has been very much affected by the two World Wars, and the horrible situation created between them, which gave rise to Communism, Fascism, Nazism, and Schism in the Church. This shook man's faith in the concrete reality of the present. They now question the metaphysics of presence and are led to accept the absurdity of life. It is a negative approach. The oriental approach has been a positive approach. Its rejection of the presence is not due to disgust. It believes that absurdity is in the very genesis of being. To the modern western mind absurdity is destructive of being. To the oriental mind absurdity is the essence of being, not an intrusion in being. Destruction is in the being,

میری تعمیر میں مضمحل ہے اک صورت خرابی کی

There is a latent form of destruction in my very being,
Says Ghalib.

Thus, the west, following its rational tradition is logically reaching the conclusion that the east has always cherished as inherent faith. The eastern approach is a positive approach and exhorts man never to put too much trust in his wisdom and be prepared for anything, since anything can happen in life. There is much in life that lies beyond the reach of reason. You can never be disillusioned if something happens against your wishes, since you believe that

anything can happen. To the western mind anything that is rationally inexplicable, gives a shock to it and shatters the very foundation of its faith. This creates disillusionment.

This difference of approach may provide an explanation of the advancement of the west and the backwardness of the east in the field of science and technology, and even in social sciences. The west accepted life as a reality and tried to bring it under control. The east took life as a mystery, even as an illusion, and tried to escape it. The east succumbed to the mystery; the west mastered it. Though, in the end, the west is disillusioned while the east rests assured and wallows in its complacency.

(1988)



❧ Chapter 16 ❧

Mehmud Derwesh *The Citizen of an 'Unborn Kingdom'*



If poetry is the yearning of the soul to capture the romance of a bloody struggle against the forces destructive of life and destiny, then the resistance poetry of Palestine is the throbbing heart of the collective defiance in the face of a naked and ruthless aggression. The war of liberation conceived in aesthetic terms is like the lover's pinch 'which hurts, and is desired'. Thus, in all patriotic poetry, be it that of Faiz or that of the bards of Africa, the homeland is symbolized as a beloved, for the stealing of whose one glimpse the poet would shed the last drop of his blood. The war fought on the battlefield is the exteriorization of a passion, and the poetry echoing it is the re-interiorization of the same passion as conceived in the blood of the martyrs, the woe of the bereaved and the wrath of the exiled. It is in this sense that the love of the homeland becomes the main motif of the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish. His whole being is steeped in it:

*It is difficult for you to separate
The juice of fruit from the corpuscles of my blood.
But it is my homeland.
It is difficult to find a single difference
Between the fields of maize
And between the lines of my palm
But it is my homeland.*

More than an emotion, it is a real home, and more than a home it is an emotion:

*You spread along my body like sweat,
You spread into my body like lust.
Like invaders you occupy my memory,
And like light you occupy my brain.*

The homeland is a physical reality to him. It is a reminder and a symbol of all his relationships. *Letter from Exile* spells out his

attachment to the motherland in its various dimensions. He asks about the welfare of his father, and through him is reminded of the deplorable condition of his village where 'no one can read a letter', and where his father intended to raise his sons as teachers. To fight against darkness is their legacy. But this letter is really a soliloquy since the poet is writing it to a destination where he definitely knows it will never arrive:

The homeless greeting the homeless

But through this ghost of a letter he recreates the entire world of his childhood. He remembers his sister:

*Has she grown up? Have suitors come for her hand?
And how's my grandmother?
Does she still, as of old, sit by the doorway praying...*

A whole living society, a vital culture is there before the eyes of the poet in exile. He even measures his life, the passage of time in terms of his exile:

*Mother, I've become like other youngmen
I smoke and lean against walls
And say hello to pretty girls*

This homeland is not just a village existing on a map. It extends far into time, and is itself history in miniature, a history of love and betrayal:

*O country whose names are known by mood
By history's whips
By history's prisons,
By history's place of exile
O you who have fallen into captivity in every age.*

This is the country of Ruth whose laments reverberate in the song of nightingale in the Ode of Keats. No wonder that this love is so demanding and is so much full of pinch and pleasure that the poet cries out:

And why are you so beautiful to the point of suicide?

Out of this passion for the homeland emerges the great fighting spirit of the Palestinians. In a world full of exploitation and oppression, where the community of the exiles is growing, with each passing day, we hear a different voice. That this could also be the strain of a refugee song sounds so strange. While the songs generally sung by

the most celebrated of the displaced persons, such as the Absurdist like Ionesco or the self-alienated poets of the modern Western world, speak of disillusion, boredom and isolation, Mahmoud Darwish and his fellow Palestinian poets sing of a new dawn, looking for the birds that will sing once more, because they are sure that the term 'refugee' is misapplied to them. A Palestinian does not feel like a refugee. He is oppressed, and is fighting against oppression:

*They took his food, clothes and banners
Cast him into the condemned cell
And said: 'Refugee'!
They drove him away from every port
Took his young sweetheart
Then said: 'Refugee'!*

This is a bad name for the one fighting for a good cause, one who carries the cause personified in his affliction:

*It has made me into a cause
The lengthy state of dying.*

This cause he carries with himself wherever he goes. This is his burden:

*O homeland repeated in massacres and songs
Why do I smuggle you from airport to airport?*

This is his homeland which does not exist anywhere, being 'an unborn kingdom', yet it lives everywhere with him, though this existence gives the poet no consolation:

Because my back is not supported against you with nails.

Such Christian symbols, as this of crucifixion, in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, remind one of the historical ethos of the land of Palestine. Christ was a Palestinian. Palestine is in a way the archetype of the earth inhabited by sin and betrayal which even the blood of Christ could not redeem. The Palestinian fighters, with the poetry as well as with the gun, are paying the ransom for the sins of humanity. It is in this context that the symbols of crucifixion, baptism and psalms become relevant: even the tears of Mary Magdalen assume a new meaning in this context. It is for this reason that the poet may say:

My blood is the postal mail of prophets.

In spite of the greatness of his endeavour, in spite of the onerous duties he has assigned to himself, the revolutionary fighter feels reduced to a nonentity because he is conscious that he lacks identity:

*Because I am like that
Being a citizen in an unborn kingdom*

The feeling of deprivation expresses itself in very apt metaphors:

*Because my voice is dry as a flagpole
My hand empty as the national anthem.*

The feeling is further aggravated by an acute embarrassment:

*What is the worth of a man
Without a homeland,
Without a flag,
Without an address,
What is the worth of such a man?*

Ghalib, in a couplet, had moaned:

*I sing excited by the passion of an idea
I am the nightingale of the unborn garden.*

He mourned that the idea could not be realized. Mahmoud Darwish, on the other hand, bewails of a reality that has been reduced to an idea:

*O homeland repeated in songs and massacres
How are you changed into a dream and steal
wonderment!*

The land exists though, and at two levels simultaneously: as an ideal to be realized and as an excruciating reality that is symbolized in

*My homeland is a clothes-line
For the handkerchiefs of blood
Shed every minute*

At times this image of the beloved land becomes too cruel to bear:

*My homeland is the anger of the exile at being made to
grieve,
A child wanting festivities and a kiss
because
Home is sipping my mother's coffee,
And coming back safe of an evening.*

But long-drawn-out deprivation takes him into sterner moods and lest he is misunderstood, he makes it clear, in *Identity Card*:

*Put it on record on top of page one:
I don't hate people,
I trespass on no one's property
And yet, if I were to become hungry
I shall eat the flesh of my usurper
Beware, beware of my hunger
And of my anger!*

This is the passion of an honest patriot. Put beside it the artificially created sentiment of an imperialist, who, in the words of T.S. Eliot, in *To the Indian who died in Africa*, makes the declaration:

*A man's destination is not his destiny,
Every country is home to one man
And exile to another. Where a man dies bravely
At one with his destiny, that soil is his.*

This is the indoctrinated patriotism of an empire builder who is not committed to the homeland but to the 'idea' of the empire. It is the drilled response of the Israeli soldier who confesses:

They taught me to be in love with love of it.

Mahmoud Darwish spurns this imperialistic jingoism in favour of service to the homeland:

*The Nile will not flow into the Volga,
Nor the Congo or the Jordan into the Euphrate
Each river has its source, its course, its life.*

Each one has to fight his own battle. No one will win freedom for the other. Freedom cannot be transplanted nor borrowed, nor can it be received in aid. It is absolutely certain that

*Each land, has its time for being born,
Each dawn a date with a rebel.*

And the land of the poet has been personified in his own being:

*I am he in whose skin
The shackles etch
A likeness of the homeland*

In this state he is unable to speak the language of the roses. He is all fire and blood:

*For me it's essential to reject the rose
That comes from a dictionary or a volume of poetry.
Roses sprout from a peasant's arm, a worker's grip:
Roses sprout on a warrior's wound,
On the forehead of a rock.*

This reminds one of a poignant remark by Gorky in which he expresses wonder how a small volume of poetry of mediocre stories can be termed as 'creative work' in a world where the 'working class is not only building huge factories, but is completely refashioning the face of the land'. That is why to the poet:

*The rose became a wound
The spring a thirst*

Here a remark of Brecht, made with reference to popular government, sounds just too apt: it is a reality to be grasped not by the mind but by the hand.

We have passed the state when man went out to seek the truth. The truth is naked now. Who will doubt the credentials of a freedom fighter in Palestine or South Africa? There has been enough of exposure. Now is the time to change. Now is the time, not to know the truth, but to seize the truth, even at the point of gun, if the oppressed are pushed too far. It is through this awareness of the truth that poetry becomes a weapon in a war of liberation. It is then that the poet, like the worker in the quarry, worries for his people, sweats for them, makes sacrifices for them:

*For them I wrest the loaf of bread,
The clothes and exercise books
From the rocks
And beg for no alms at your doors.*

This is his share in the strife and thus he fights for himself and for the generations to come.

(1989)



❧ Chapter 17 ❧

Translations *Possibilities and Pitfalls*



Some very serious problems are encountered while making translations into Urdu. For one thing, Urdu is comparatively a young language still in its earlier stages of development. It is already very much indebted to translations. Arabic, Persian and Hindi have largely contributed to its formation and early development. *Dastan*, *Mathnavi*, *Qasida*, *Ghazal* and *Geet* have found their way into Urdu through translations. This, however, is also a fact that the period of the inception and growth of Urdu has been a period of decline in the society that saw the emergence of this language. It is consequently a product of the age of slavery. That is why Urdu writers generally favoured a highly decorative and ambiguous style of writing thereby making it incapable of straightforward and truthful statements. Also, being the language of a pluralistic society, courtesies and undue decencies become its stock in trade thus favouring expediency against truth. Manner got precedence over matter. Artificiality and exaggeration became the high excellence of speech. But, when the times changed, an exposure to the English language revealed a manner of speech that was confident and clear. Translations from English helped Urdu to emerge from its medieval mannerisms and prepared it for an encounter with the thought and speech of the modern age.

The weakness as well as the beauty of Urdu is that in its essence it is the language of the Middle Ages, the two main characteristics of which are mysticism and lyricism (*Taghazzul*). Mysticism is more concerned with the unknown than the known, while lyricism admires ambiguity at the cost of clarity. Thus science which concerns itself only with the known and aims at explaining the nature and properties of things finds Urdu a very inadequate medium of communication. The scientific thought of the modern age has encouraged the use of

scientific methodology even in those disciplines which have been considered different from the sciences. Urdu is yet to cover a long distance to reach that stage. Its mode is still oracular. Analytical approach is somehow incompatible with the habits of this language. Therefore, the first difficulty which the translator encounters is the scarcity of vocabulary. The other is the difficulty of finding equivalents for most of foreign expressions. Finally, the detached, straightforward and uncharged expression which is a characteristic of modern languages is practically untranslatable into Urdu.

This inadequacy of the language is very much due to the fact that the creation of a language is directly linked with the productive activity of the society to which it belongs. As new discoveries are made or new machines are invented, names are also assigned to them, such as radio, television, computer and engines. Newly created processes get their names similarly. Our intellectuals have been very much enamoured of terminology, although they know quite well that the modern sciences have mostly either used the various terms and nomenclatures assigned to them by their inventors or discoverers or they have made suitable adaptations of them. Greek, Latin and Arabic names abound in all these sciences. Progressive nations have concentrated on work rather than names. All the money, labour and other resources which have been practically wasted in the coining of terms could have more profitably been utilised in research and real work. Names are needed only when something new comes into existence or some new experience is encountered. Serious study and its experimental verification extend the limits of knowledge and this becomes the basis of expansion in the language. The language of a society grows if it encourages free enquiry. New experiments and discoveries bring in new words and new modes of expression. Terminology is the effect, not the cause of progress. In the absence of real work only fantasy is given a free rein. Our aspirations and dreams of great achievements never go beyond poetry and fiction. We do not yet possess that technology, neither in science nor in politics nor in literature, that may equip us to meet the challenges of the advanced world. We make up for this deficiency by resorting to translations and compensate for lack of practical struggle with not only borrowed technology, but also with borrowed ideas and emotions.

Now we have diverted our attention towards translations in order to import movements from outside. There is nothing strange or

discreditable in this. The present day world is largely a fabricated world. There are artificial lungs. As transplanted hearts or lungs perform their functions efficiently, similarly fabricated and borrowed ideas and emotions can also provide incentives. This may not produce original work, but it is far better than idleness, outgrowing its traditional sentimentalism. Urdu literature has also shown signs of a maturer creativity.

Language is directly linked with culture and civilization. According to Aldous Huxley a language is an implied philosophy of life, “a theory of man and the universe”. Urdu does not yet appear to carry any influence of the gadgetry that is raging around us in all its complexity. The reason is that this cultural change is only superficial, because all this technological culture is imported. We have no direct hand in its creation. That is why we are still caught in the romance of *shama* and *mehmil* or *gul* and *bulbul*. We cannot yet afford to give up the outworn metaphor. This is the makeup of Urdu language and literature. Anything that lies outside our experiences and in whose creation we play no part cannot be assimilated into the sensibility and cannot be absorbed into the language. Words only denote experiences and name experiments. Without experiments there are no words. Swift has created a society of rational creatures, Houyhnhnms, in *Gulliver's Travels*. These creatures have no concept of lying since it is not practised in their society. When explained by one of them, he translated the word ‘lying’ as ‘the thing which was not’. Similar is the case with Urdu which has not yet been exposed to scientific thought or the methodology of science. For this reason it cannot adequately translate from other languages. It is for the same reason that some of our critics think that most Urdu translations of poetry written in other languages are rather dull and colourless. What they really mean is that these translations lack the poetic flavour, which, according to them, is nothing but medieval lyricism or metaphysical conceit or other linguistic tricks that have nourished our poetic taste. In other translations we miss the realism of observation and the complexity of expression that constitute the real beauty of the original.

The taste in Urdu is still very much of the oracular type. An idea comes like a flash and leaves a half formed impression behind it that lingers on in the mind as something strange and fascinating. This is then composed in a conventional pattern of rhyme and rhythm and a verse is created. Such a creative process has nothing to do with reason and analysis. It is only rhyme, not reason. The idea that is summarily

❧ Chapter 18 ❧

Bahao (*The Flow*)



There has been of late a tendency of going down to the roots to retrieve one's identity. The motives behind this search are, however, complex. There are those who are interested in the glory of the family and those who are interested in their pristine entity, their attachment to the soil. Qura't ul Ain Haider falls in the first group, while the second group finds a voice in Mustansar Husain Tarar's latest novel, *The Flow*. Qura't ul Ain is interested in the quality of life. Mustansar Husain is concerned with the very struggle for existence. This reflects, apart from other factors, the class difference of approach. The lower class is rooted in the earth which sustains it. But the dominant class is rooted in its interests. It is the interests that take the 'elite' from place to place, like the ancestors of Qura't ul Ain as described in *Kare Jahan Daraz Hai*. But Mustansar's Paroshni refuses to budge from her place though even the earth has refused to sustain her; to the latter it means death, like an uprooted plant which is doomed to wither.

Comparisons are odious, but sometimes they become inevitable. About *Bahao* Mustansar himself confessed that he took great pains and even deviated from his theme at times in order to avoid comparison with Qura't ul Ain. But these apprehensions were baseless, since he had no possibility of ever falling into the footsteps of the senior novelist. He was clearly on very different grounds. Their backgrounds and consequently their interests are diametrically opposed. She belongs to the race of the conquerors who believed that every land was their land, if they could master it. He belongs to the 'sons of the soil', or at least he thinks so. People living near the river *Ghagra* remained 'glued' to the land. They never went out to seek life. Life came to them in the form of rains and 'big' waters that came to irrigate their fields. There was no danger of plagiarism either. He did write his novel. He did not fail like Keats to write drama because of

Shakespeare and epic because of Milton. Even if he had, as he apprehended, followed the design of the former, he would have written only of *Anasa* (*people with flat noses*), while the riders of *Aswa* (*the horse*) would have remained in the background. *Aag Ka Darya* is the story of the horsemen from strange lands, the natives are seen only with the eyes of the new comers.

This interest in the origins thus has two clear and also divergent dimensions. One aims at the assertion of superiority and the other at devotion to the mother-earth. *Bahao* is basically the story of those who labour, though there lurk in the background those who enjoy the fruits of labour. And Mustansar, in spite of himself, has conceded superiority to the latter.

But the motif of *Bahao* is fear, vague and abstract, even at times unfounded. It is the fear of annihilation. This is another point of departure from *Aag ka Darya*. Qura't ul Ain never apprehends that the flow of life will stop. Her concern is with the growing complexity of life which results from the joining of too many streams. She apprehends change. To Mustansar it may be the end-game. *Bahao* is a serious study of our psyche as it has developed over the years, particularly in the last decade. Mustansar has taken pains to formulate and communicate his vision, and *Bahao* deserves attention. It is a challenging attempt, both in content and form. There is a lot beneath the surface of a seemingly old world story, the attempted reconstruction of a rich civilization which challenges the imagination of the artist to recreate it.

Published in 1992, *Bahao* carries the sensibility which reflects the mood of the eighties in Pakistan, the period dominated by the last Martial Law. It is the scare of that decade of oppression and intrigue which has shaken the very fabric of our national as well as individual psychology. This scare has been the subject of the literature of the period, though not overtly so. Fear forced them to conceal it, still it emerges unmistakably in Shaukat Siddiquee's *Jangloos*, Intezar Hussain's *Tazkera* and Abdullah Husain's *Qaid*, beside the large number of poems, plays and stories written in these years. Afghan war, Sind operation, public hangings, murders, decoities, inflation, sectarian and regional dissensions and legal chaos created a nightmare which disturbed everyone. The fear took such deep roots that some started taking it as the very texture of the fabric of human life. Mustansar also treats it as a primeval fear, a fear that is in the very nature of being. And he is so scared that he dare not look it in the eye. He recreates it in a fictional world of prehistory, in the stone

age, before the discovery of steel and the use of the horse as a domesticated animal. Even the cow had not been domesticated yet. He takes us into a world where in a small habitation along the now lost river Ghagra, later known as Saraswati There live a people under the matriarchal system where collective labour is the order of the day. This riverside habitation where people had been living an easy life is now facing the threat of death. The whole novel is haunted by the images of death. The mewing of the peacock, which lives in the adjacent forest along with the sacred bull, is repeated at intervals and works as the strain in the symphony, reminding of the impending death, since, according to the belief of the people, the spirits of the dead go into the bull and the peacock.

This impending death does not come only in the form of drought, the natural calamity, since there have been no rains and the 'big' waters have also not come to irrigate their lands for five years. Their existence is equally threatened from the earth as well as from the sky. The place seems to be under some sinister spell. Lakes have dried up, the mire has become the solid ground, and the birds, a symbol of life, or of the soul, come here to meet their death and drop like rainfall and the whole place has become a mortuary of birds with their bones scattered all around. Apart from this, the threat is internal also. Men have lost virility and women have become barren. The whole world, from inside as well as outside, is turning into a wasteland. Even fertility rituals do not save it. They are threatened with external invasion also. Men with high noses are usurping village after village. They have come from far off lands, riding horses and brandishing steel. They have already destroyed Hariyopia (Harappa) and are now heading towards Mohenjo-Daro. They are spreading over these lands like an epidemic. And, according to Puran, one of these intruders, it is the land itself that invites intrusion. Its roofs are a big flat open field which horses can cross galloping freely. Even without the intruders the city of Mohenjo-Daro is a city of oppression and exploitation. The kiln workers have been reduced to subterranean creatures, to mere insects.

Though the world, depicted here is pre-historic, topical references cannot be missed. We see the lot of the kiln workers of our day in the dark dungeons of Mohenjo-Daro. We are also told that these people always remain under debt and every newborn baby comes into life with a heavy burden on his back. Then, the people are always haunted with foreign invasion.

Haunting pictures of a legendary world have been successfully brought to life by the author. Mohenjo-Daro has been described in detail. Its streets are dark and totally blind, with doors and windows opening inside the houses or in the back lanes. This brings to mind the description of the medieval city of Bukhara by Sadriddin Aini in *The Way to Bukhara*:

It was already dark in the city. Only the guard's cabin beside the main gate had a dimly lit lamp and that was all. There could be seen no light anywhere as the houses in Bukhara had only their walls along the street. Their doors and windows opened into the courtyards at the back. The dark streets with two or three storey houses made of small raw bricks stretching along their sides looked like graves.

Perhaps all the cities of the ancient world were like that, most probably for security reasons. But the inhabitants of Mohenjo-Daro think that it is to keep out the strangers and the light of the sun (which may mean reason or enlightenment or education), a reflection of their deep rooted fear. It may also refer, in contemporary context, to the secluded life of present day rural Sind where adventure is considered dangerous. The people are warned that it is the domain of death beyond, exactly as the people of this village near Ghagra were told that only the dead go across this river. In Mohenjo-Daro too the kiln workers were never allowed to go out, and if any one ventured to do so he was forcibly brought back and thrown into the dungeon. There was only one way of release, and that was death.

Perhaps there is another and a larger symbolism also. The symbolism of a regressing society. The novel suggests that we too may be regressing into the old world. We have put ourselves in the reverse gear and are going to meet the fate of the cities which have been effaced from the surface of the earth, like Varyana, the dead city described in the novel, or Hriyopia and Mohenjo-Daro. All that we may do proves counter-productive. An important character, Dorga, runs away from the kilns of Mohenjo-Daro and comes to this land which is slowly dying. Here he builds a new Mohenjo-Daro for himself and is ultimately buried in it. The same regressive tendency takes Maman Masa and Cheva towards what they think to be their origin and are reduced to the branches of trees. They become vegetables, a symbol which Albee has used to the same purpose in *The American Story*.

But these unfortunate people refuse to assign the cause of their doom to the occult. They do not believe that the curse has fallen on them because they have stopped to make offerings to gods. Nobody takes that warning of the priest seriously. They believe, as Dorga says, that grumblings and bearing with the suffering have brought the doom upon them. Dorga asserts that when men groan they invite doom. He asks the inhabitants of the unfortunate dying land if they never heard the groans of the dying cities, suggesting thereby that oppression must be encountered wherever it raises its head. It is everybody's duty to fight cruelty and injustice, it may be any where in the world. To be indifferent to the misery of others, to turn a deaf ear to the shrieks of the victims of injustice, is a sure invitation to injustices and cruelties.

Paroshni, the main character of the novel, who is also the symbol of the stream of life, since she is believed to have been born of the river, refuses to leave her place. She believes that her own barrenness and the barrenness of her lands are not due to external causes. The root of the evil is within her and she must fight it as best as she can. Emigration is no solution.

The novel, *Bahao*, is rich in symbols which are tightly woven into a pattern that reveals layers of meanings as you read between the lines. The novel ends on a dismal note, but holds out hope also. Paroshni has not died. She may still be saved. She may yet be revived. But how? The novel does not say. But Paroshni is fighting the fear.

(1992)



❧ Chapter 19 ❧

Need for a New Poetics



Commenting on Mumtaz Hussain's book on Hali's ideas on poetry, Sajjad Haider Malik observed that Hali's poetics did good service to Urdu literature during the last one hundred years. He, however, finds that poetics out dated now and calls for a new poetic theory that may lead the intellectual current in the next one hundred years. Perhaps the concern is not well founded, since a poetic theory does not follow the calendar. Poetic ideas follow a logic that is conditioned by life. When a change occurs in life, its demands also change. And a poetic theory is one of these demands.

It is the advent of the 21st century that inspires such questions. But the pertinent point to ask is what the advent of the 21st century means to us. Have we really lived through the 20th century? It has actually been the century of the west. Only some ripples of that commotion have reached us. Otherwise we are still living in the Middle Ages, emotionally as well as intellectually. This will be very well appreciated if we critically follow the thesis of Mumtaz Hussain.

Mumtaz Hussain has referred to technology, metaphor and rational discourse. A discussion of these will show the difference of our world view from that of the west. Technology has brought significant change in the mode of thinking in the west. This change has been brought about by science which has not only extended man's control over nature, but has radically transformed the mind. We have been somewhat affected by the technology, but very little by the science behind it. Our relationship with the 20th century has been only superficial. Like a young child who has been made to learn a few axioms of philosophy without having any idea of them, we have been exposed to technology but not really influenced by it. It has affected our lives but not our sensibility. We still live in the world of chivalry, of the romance of caravans, not yet initiated into the world of aeroplanes, even that of motor-bikes. How unpoetic do these new names sound to us?

A survey of critical theories from the time of Plato to the present age reveals that the poetics of an age is formulated towards the end of that age. For example, Aristotle's *Poetics* appeared at the time when the classical age had already produced its crowning achievements in arts and literature, and Greek literature had lost its lustre. Similarly Wordsworth's poetic theory followed the industrial revolution in Europe when Rousseau's theory had already made its mark. It did not precede that revolution as a theory of the industrial age. Rather it came at a time when the world was poised to have a new proletarian revolution. After the revolution in Russia a new poetics based on the ideas of scientific realism is being evolved, though its final statement is yet to be made, since communism itself is still in the experimental stage. Also, poetics is built on some model, which for Aristotle was Sophocles, and for Wordsworth his own and Coleridge's poetry.

On the other hand, the English writers of the renaissance never had a poetics. Johnson reprimanded them for their lack of any standards, emphasising in particular the disregard of norms in Shakespeare. But the weakness of the criticism of Johnson is that he judged Shakespeare on the canons of the Age of Reason. Goethe's criticism of Shakespeare, on the other hand, reflected his own egotism and the romanticism of his age. Hegel applied his theory of dialectics to the plays of Shakespeare. None of these could define the poetics of the renaissance. The question is still open to speculation and controversy, ranging from T.S. Eliot's theory of the artistic failure of *Hamlet* to the Russian interpretation of that play. Each of these theories leaves out much that is important from a different point of view. One reason is that all of these exegetical exercises have come much after the age, and no speculation can capture the mood and the sensibility of an age far away in time. Another reason is that Johnson's canons were mostly borrowed and Goethe and Hegel were outsiders – Germans.

In short, the poetics of an age can be formulated only by a mind which belongs to that age and, moreover, it can be derived from the most representative masterpieces of that age. It means that poetic norms can be extracted only from poetic creations, they cannot forestall them. Thus to prescribe a poetics for the 21st century is mere romantic idealism. We may, however, attempt a poetics of the 20th century. But this, unfortunately, has not been possible, since a poetics is based neither on borrowed ideas nor on fanciful slogans. And that is exactly what our critics have been doing.

If we try to design a poetics for the 20th century, we shall inevitably start with Syed and Hali. Dr. Ibadat Bareilvi's doctoral thesis, *Urdu Tanqeed ka Irteqa (Development of Urdu Criticism)* has been perhaps the only scientific study of the subject to date. Unfortunately the book is not available, but, generally speaking, it identifies three distinct streams in the critical approach in Urdu literature. These refer to the theories of Shibli, Azad and Hali. Shibli's *Sher-ul-Ajam* adheres to the Persian tradition and is elitist in approach. Obviously its scope is very limited and writers like Nazir Akbar Abadi can find no place here. Hali had attempted a blue print for the poetics of the future, while Azad tried to mediate between the past and the future. Hali was influenced by certain ideas which were rooted in the west. The main factor operating behind them was the industrial, more precisely, scientific revolution. Wordsworth's theory of poetry and poetic diction was the aesthetic response to the new situation. We never had an industrial or scientific revolution. But the poetics created by this revolution fascinated us and we adopted it. That is precisely the reason that Hali now appears to be so unsatisfactory.

This brings us to the question of vital importance in poetry--metaphor. Hali felt, and quite rightly, that the world had gone far beyond the swords and the arrows, the rose and the *bulbul*, and the moth and the candle. Thus the old metaphors have become obsolete. But the metaphors of the new world, electric bulb, motor car and railway train have failed to find favour with poetry. The reason is that though these new machines have very much entered our lives, these have not yet penetrated our sensibility. Hali did realise that our poetic approach has been antiquated, but he could not appreciate that it is not only with respect to the western society, not only with reference to the mode of life prevalent here, but mostly due to the fact that the Indian Muslim culture of the 20th century is hardly different from that which the first Muslim conquerors had created here in the 11th century. Hasan Askari rightly objected that Hali was revolting against the metaphor which was rooted in life. And there was no room yet for the new metaphor, since there was hardly anything new in our response to life.

Coming to rational discourse, the fact is that the emotional hold was so strong that it was practically impossible to transcend it, or even ignore it. Life had not yet gathered the momentum that could overcome the inertia. Sentimentalism could be countered only with

rationalism. Sir Syed rightly concluded that only the analytical method of scientific thinking could rescue life from sentimentalism.

Hali fixed his eye on realism, beyond obsolete metaphor and inane emotionalism. But his theory was rooted in the revolution that took place in the west. The social change brought about by this scientific revolution in thought resulted in two diverse streams in Urdu literature. One culminated in Iqbal and the other in Faiz. Hali tried to create a theory based on borrowed ideas. Iqbal and Faiz tried to support it with slogans. Iqbal was exhorting the Muslims, who had yet to find their feet, to imbibe the spirit of *Shaheen* (Eagle) and Faiz was propagating for a revolution of the proletariat under the leadership of the elite. These are the facts which stand in the way of the formulation of a poetics of Urdu literature for the 20th century. A poetics is based neither on borrowed ideas nor on slogans.

Hali, however, tried to introduce new techniques in Urdu literature. But form alone cannot make the basis of a poetic theory. Although Aristotle's *Poetics* is basically a formal treatise, it was based on the values that sustained his age. The poetics that Hali recommended was superficial, and the literature created under its norms was as much wishful thinking--it may be the ecstatic call of Iqbal or the rebellious note of the Progressives. Neither the one nor the other succeeded in suggesting the ways of bringing about a revolution. This has been the tragedy of both the right and the left with us. Both want to bring about a change only in theory whereas the fact is that life is action and any theory which is not rooted in its realities is no more than a pleasant dream. New poetics will be created by new realities. Let us strive for them.

(1990)



❧ Chapter 20 ❧

Parables of Taufiq Rafat



A prominent feature of the poetry of Taufiq Rafat is his skill as a narrator. His narrative art derives from folklore tradition. He has profitably exploited the universal appeal and easy credibility of the art of story telling to give expression to some of the most complex thoughts and feelings. A number of his poems can be described as parables. Consequently, there is something enigmatic about his vision of life as it emerges from his poetry, with a predilection for didacticism. This moralising tendency appears the most complex and at times throws in unpalatable truisms in an amazingly unselfconscious manner. It is more a matter of technique than intention and is integral to the art of story telling. Even the grown-ups respond to a story with a childlike innocence.

Taufiq Rafat is not only a skilled narrator, he has also made extensive experiments in this mode of poetic expression. In our *Dastans* as well as in the folk literature the art of narration has been used to great moral as well as technical advantage. Punjabi and Sindhi mystics like Bullhey Shah and Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai have enriched their work by employing this age old oral tradition and have created classics of undisputed merit.

Taufiq Rafat has grafted this typically oriental technique on English poetry. These poems are different from the tales of Boccaccio or Chaucer in that the western writers give direct linear narration while the eastern writers mix narration with reflection. They tell simple stories punctuated with profound comments. In this way they succeed in creating a delicate balance between instruction and entertainment by simultaneously achieving a distance and an intimacy with the audience or the reader. This enchants simple folk and impresses the scholar, and at the same time lends a dramatic quality to the poems. The poet is one with the audience but also elevated above them. He stands on a high pedestal and has a loud

and commanding but at the same time friendly voice. He seems to be entertaining, but whatever he says is profound. Taufiq Rafat has made a good use of this technique in various forms. At times he may speak in a very matter of fact tone of a story teller:

*Once upon a time I had beautiful teeth.
And every now and then
I would laugh into mirror
So I could admire them.
But that was long ago.*

This sounds so matter of fact, so 'unpoetic'. But the beauty is that no tale is told here. It is only an artistic device of arresting attention of the reader. Losing a tooth is neither tragic nor heroic, nor even comic. Still the poet insists on turning this trivial happening into a momentous event. The falling of a tooth becomes a symbol of the passage of time and consequently of what one has made of his life during these years. Here too he takes his life to be a tale, and the background reverberates with the echoes of the great epic story which reflects a new face in the mirror:

*All in all, a face
still capable
as recent experience has shown
of launching a bicycle or two*

The bathetic self-assessment achieves the desired effect by turning a dismal fact into a poetic idea through the understatement of telling a tale thus reducing, or perhaps accentuating, the pain of a personal failure. It is no burlesque like *The Rape of the Lock*. The sarcasm implies a serious concern with the growth and decay of life which has been universalised through the narrative mode. Also, looking into a mirror is a stock-in-trade of a large number of folk stories and fables.

Circumcision is not a tale. It is description and a reflective recreation of a strangely bitter experience. But the poem starts like a short story, in *medias-res*. Once again, an ordinary incident of life has been made into poetry by the use of the narrative technique. In the tradition of classical parables this account too ends on a moral note:

*I have since learnt it was more
than a ritual, for by the act
of a pull and downward slash,
they prepare us for the disappointments*

*at the absence of golden birds
life will ask us to look at
between our circumcision and death.*

This didactic note is not a weakness of the poet. It is the demand of the medium. The story teller cannot help but be a sane counsellor.

The most difficult task for a poet is the objectification of a personal experience, the universalisation of the particular. Wordsworth had also tried to tone down the egotistical sublime by recreating the growth of his ego through the stories of his childhood, though he was more inclined to meditate than narrate.

Taufiq Rafat also used the narrative technique to express the most personal in his psychic development. The description is anecdotal.

*The oblique house
in Shahalam where my mother was born
is no longer there, in its place
stands a dry fountain, a symbol of
the act that severed a continent.
But it inflames the eye of memory
like a mote: room piled upon room.*

A comparison with T.S. Eliot's lines from the *East Cocker* is irresistible.

*Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a bypass.*

Taufiq Rafat is also very much concerned with the problem of time like T.S. Eliot. It is the motif of the *Four Quartets*, and Eliot has also used the narrative technique in this exploration. The narrative, which is always about something in the past, has a direct bearing on the present and helps in peering into the future, thus 'mixing memory and desire'. Here reminiscences are mixed with aspirations and the poet feels:

*The hands of the clock in moving
forward are moving back.*

Nostalgic recollections of the childhood days and a preoccupation with the fear of old age and death are the common

subjects of majority of poems in *Arrival of Monsoon*. *Snake* tells a story of running after a ball in the hills:

*I was there at last, at the
bottom of the khud, and began to look for the ball poking
with a stick that I broke
off a bush, when a snake
slithered past me into
a cleft. It was dark there,
but not too dark to recognise
that slimy form. I was petrified*

The Heart At Forty tells the feeling of the coming of old age:

*.....it takes something
out of us, and though we are growing old
Hair and teeth have begun to dwindle:
the wind outside is cold.
Inadequacy looms.*

*After all the bitterness and pain
we catch our ears and say
Never again, never again.
But the very next day an upturned breast
will fill the mouth with saliva.*

This feeling of inadequacy at this age sounds so abnormal. But the same feeling when expressed through the telling of a story makes the experience look so normal, as in *Out of Breath* where the hunter running after a stricken bird feels the encounter too heavy for him. That which appeared rather ridiculous and abnormal in reflection has acquired credibility in the narration:

*Vain hope! Cigarettes and an easy life
had played havoc with my stamina.*

But he gathers strength and finally pounces upon the injured bird:

*Till he was cornered against the sheer bluff.
Trying to shrink into nothingness, and I
took in great gusts of breath as I stood.
There, leaning on my stick,
and he still
evaded me a few times, but I had him.*

There are also a numbers of poems which tell stories about death. One of the them *Picnic In The Sun* is about a cancerous woman who is enjoying her last sunshine with her son:

*The woman is cancerous, and knows it,
and so does the boy, her son.
After this, what can one do
but stare through the infirm
light of December at these strange creatures
Who have taken time out
from themselves
for a picnic in the sun.*

Some of these narratives are dramatic monologues, like *The Medal*:

*When the telegram arrived
I was combing my hair in the sun
and gossiping with the servants.
It said the Government were sorry
my husband was killed, in action*

Or again:

*My name is Nachiketa.
You must have met my father,
he is the big landlord of our village,
corpulent, tight, evasive.*

Another monologue is *Mother's Daughter* which highlights the theme of domestic friction in an oriental home.

He has fully exploited the mode of narration and his narrative poetry clearly stands out in this connection both in numbers as well as in quality.

Taufiq Rafat has written poems on a variety of subjects. *Gangrene* is about ignorance and superstitions in a backward society. *Python* is about the snake-charmer who is a familiar figure of our folk culture, while *Wedding In The Flood* is about the social scourge of dowry:

*They might have given a bullock at least,
grumbles the bridegroom's father, a couple of oxen
would have come in handy at the next ploughing.
Instead, we are landed with
a cot, a tin trunk, and a looking-glass.
All the things that she will use!*

As contrasted to that is the story of the couple who have decided to part as friends:

*Their divorce is final,
but they still meet by appointment,
and are helpful and friendly to each other.
They call this civilised behaviour.*

Another theme which almost overwhelms Taufiq Rafat to the verge of morbidity is sex. It has a Freudian resonance

*Like all the others living by their wit.
The snake-charmer is a psychologist.
He picks up the python whose smooth length.
He handles with such a sexual fondness.*

He seems to be so obsessed with sex that even in face of the horror of death he muses about sexual life rather indulgently and seems to take a vicarious pleasure in the idea of the molestation of his own wife while thinking of the impending devastation brought about by the war, as here in *Under Fire*:

*Or is it that my wife is young and beautiful,
and I cannot bear to think
of another man sprawled over her
making her moan and heave for him
as she has done for me a thousand times?*

Sex is the subject of many poems in this collection which even the understatement of a narrative could not save from being morbid. Rather it is narrative that makes the statement so blunt. Use of metaphor or suggestive symbolism could have clothed the bitter truth, but he insists to state facts, real or imaginary, rather than sugar-coat the bitter pill.

These poems reflect the highly strained sensibility of the years of Partition, the Indo-Pakistan wars, the tragedy of East Pakistan and the apprehensions about Pakistan itself, which he conceives as:

*A cripple at twenty-three
She has limped to the edge, and now
stares blindly at the sea.*

The poems written in the seventies particularly reflect a disturbed mind, and it is mainly in this period that Taufiq Rafat turned to narration and avoided reflection. Also in this period he seems to be more interested in the birds. Stories and birds perhaps are the two occupations that seem to lessen the burden of life for him. In the

earlier period his interest in birds is that of a hunter. It is an ambivalent relationship, as in *The Kingfisher*:

*I'll learn to love you then, for lost
causes link all temperaments.
What drains my speech of sap will blunt
your keen iridescent thrust.*

It is here the hunter's identification with the kingfisher that arouses interest in the bird and sorrow for 'the luckless minnows'. Similarly *A Partridge Calling* evokes the bitter-sweet sense of triumph and pain while these innocent birds 'join the chorus of doom' and:

*On a prearranged gesture
We move to that death
in a shrill arc. Then pain
of love the bird rises
to a merciless rain.*

But it is love for the narrative which he aspires to write but which he cannot since he is aware that the age of the great epics will return no more:

*The breath-taking poems
about gods and godlike men
which incited or consoled
those credulous generations;
Such belief
is historical only.*

As a consequence he feels that his narratives are rather insipid and he hasn't much faith in them:

*Can such plainness
be oracular?
Or grow to a vision
Where all is consonant,
precise,
an overwhelming reality
the variest cynic may enter
to stop, and listen,
and be satisfied?*

The poet despairs of writing a 'real' poem, since the age of the epic has gone and in the present world he feels miserably isolated and consequently his aesthetics has become passive:

*Watching an impromptu
football match on a sketchy field
Fascinated, but afraid to join in,
lest he gets hurt, and the clothes messy.*

(One kind of poet)

Taufiq Rafat feels at home in telling stories from life. But life is hard to bear. He refuses to gold-plate the brazen fact of living. He would not seek refuge in the world of imagination or in the niceties of poetic effusion. The challenge of life is hard and the monotony of a perfect paradise horrifies him. All this leads him to seek cathartic release in poetry:

*(to hell with the ulcers)
and be cheerful of heart
If nothing else will a poem might start.*

*(In a Stalled Van)
(1990)*



❧ Chapter 21 ❧

Literary Drama



Recently Basir Kazmi came out with a play, *Bisaat (the Chessboard)*, in book form. He claimed that drama is also a literary genre which may be read as any other work of literature and it is not essential that it is presented on the stage. In support of his claim he cited the examples of Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw and others whose plays are widely read and enjoyed by the people many of whom might not have seen even one of them on stage. Though such a thing as 'literary drama' does exist, it has nothing to do with the concept of a play without the stage. It is quite another thing that a play may be published before it is staged, as *Anarkali* of Imtiaz Ali Taj is reported to have been published much before it could find its way to the stage. Similarly Raymond Williams also wrote a play, *Kobe*, which was perhaps never staged and which is appended to his critical book *Modern Tragedy*. No play is, however, written with the intent of never taking it to the stage. There are other factors which prevent its staging. As for projecting it on the screen of his mind by the reader, it will not be the play, but its interpretation.

The term 'literary drama' has existed in English literary criticism. But it is used for such plays which were written with an eye on literary embellishments with little regard to the conditions of the stage. Sir Herbert Beerbohm produced some such plays which included *Ulysses* and *Nero*. Tennyson's plays fall in this category. But these too have been staged. Thomas Hardy had also written an epic drama *Dynasts* which was considered to be absolutely unsuited to the stage. This too has been beautifully presented on the stage. Thus a literary drama is not a play that is not meant for the stage. Granuel Barker made many such plays possible and these were successful. Therefore, technically speaking, a 'literary' play is not one that is not meant for the stage, but one that is written as a piece of literature more than as an action projected on the stage. By another definition it is a play written by those who are not regular playwrights, as Hardy

was mainly a novelist and Keats was a poet. No one claimed that he wrote a play only for reading. Stage was always considered essential to drama.

Even technically stage is essential to drama. It is one of its constituents. Genres are in fact distinguished on the basis of their constituents. *Ghazal*, for example, cannot be written in prose. A painting on the canvas cannot be called sculpture. Plot, character, diction, dialogue, etc. can be used in a novel, a poem or a short story. The special feature that makes a play, a play is action on the stage. Even literally drama means 'to show in action', or 'to do'.

Why then this insistence on doing away with stage? Perhaps it is because ours is the great age of drama and some of us also like to be great playwrights. But this is not possible in the absence of stage. Unfortunately we have no tradition of drama. Another possible reason is that drama is a collective enterprise and we have yet to develop habits of working collectively. But perhaps the greatest reason is that drama demands a courage to listen to the other point of view. It demands patience and tolerance to accommodate the opinion that you do not agree with or approve of. There is no room for drama in a bigotted, dogmatic and irrational society. Our national temperament is emotionally inflammable. We would rather eliminate the holder of an opinion than the opinion that he holds and advocates. Lorca held with a sense of conviction that a nation's stage is the gauge of its maturity. It is the barometer which registers the greatness or decline of a country. In his words, "The theatre is a school of weeping and of laughter, a rostrum where men are free to expose old and equivocal standards of conduct, and explain with living examples the external norms of the heart and feelings of man". How can we afford such a dangerous art form? We have not yet outgrown the old habits and equivocations are our only refuge. Drama is one art form that is the enemy of obscurantism.

One more reason for relegating the study of the formal aspects of a literary work to a secondary place is our unliterary approach to the teaching of literature. We treat a play, a novel or a poem as a theory, a case in psychology or as an approach to history. We study it with reference to its socio economic background. For example, it may be quite instructive to know the world of *Hamlet*, the state of Denmark or the salient features of the renaissance. But what makes *Hamlet* a masterpiece of literature is the fact that it is a great play, not a great thesis. The merit of a poem is its poetic excellence. We give

little importance to these formal aspects in the teaching of literature. Thus we lose the very sense of their significance. This leads to such ridiculous ideas as a drama without the stage.

There are also some historical reasons for the absence of drama from our literary tradition. Arab and Persian societies never had the tradition of drama. Arabs made great strides in all branches of arts and scholarship as well as science. But they had no taste for drama, though they translated Aristotle's *Poetics* and held it in great esteem. Its reason, as some argue, was not religion alone. Had it been so, we would have had no portrait paintings either, and these portraits even include the paintings of prophets, their miracles and other events from their lives. Then, even pre-Islamic Persia had no drama though they were so close to the Greeks, and Aeschylus even wrote a play called *The Persians*. The fact is that when the Arab civilization was at its prime and their scholars were exploring all the fields of knowledge, they had before them the great Greco-Byzantine civilization which had inherited all the grandeur of the Greek legacy. The Arabs fully benefited from their philosophy, science and arts. There was, however, no drama in the Greco-Byzantine tradition. The Greek drama had virtually disappeared from this tradition by the time it reached the Arabs. Thus, at the height of their cultural supremacy, the Arabs had no drama. When again, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a great age of drama dawned in the West, particularly in the Elizabethan England, the scholastic talents of the Musalmans had been exhausted and the climate was no more congenial for the promotion of drama. Even in India, where a classical tradition of drama already existed, the Muslim period had nothing to do with it. In ancient Persia, perhaps its absence can be attributed to the fact that drama is the literature of a pluralistic democratic society. It cannot flourish in an atmosphere of monistic ideals. It finds no entry in a totalitarian state except as a travesty of it, which it will be if it is conceived as drama without the stage.

(1988)

❧ Chapter 22 ❧

Pakistani Literature in English



Writing in a foreign language is neither unprecedented nor unusual. Many Pakistanis have been writing in English. Alamgir Hashmi, Athar Tahir, Waqas Khawaja, Shahid Hussain, Taufiq Raffat and Bapsi Sidhwa, among others, have found some readership abroad and a few universities have accorded them recognition by the inclusion of their works in the comparative literature studies. Most of their work, however, reflects literature of the displaced persons, of the aliens. This alienation may not be physical and political. Some of them seem to be cultural aliens. Bapsi Sidhwa, for instance, knows no language other than English or at least, does not write in any other language. Such writers seem to belong to the colonial past. They have failed to identify themselves with their new nationhood and do not bother to address their fellow countrymen. They may claim to write for the entire humanity, but internationalism is only an ideal which may be realised in some distant future. Even so, in order to belong to the entire world one has to begin somewhere. These writers, it seems, are not happy either with their native language or with the native readership, or with both.

The practice of writing in a foreign language is not confined to former colonies alone. Beckett and Ionesco write in French which is not their language. Joseph Conrad wrote in English while his language was Polish. Many African and Palestinian writers use English or French as their medium. Quite naturally, some questions arise as to their choice of linguistic medium. What reading public do these writers cater to? What is their target? What satisfaction do they seek from such a practice?

The position of writers like Conrad, Beckett and Ionesco is not so indefensible. Conrad lived in England and wrote in English. Beckett and Ionesco live in Paris and write in French. They are emigrants. But once they settled in the new home they gave their

unreserved allegiance to it. They left their homes because of the oppression which had become unbearable for them. But in the new land they did not thrive on the condemnation of their motherland. Conrad wrote about the British Empire. He did not discuss the affairs of Poland in his fiction. Beckett never wrote of the Irish problem. Ionesco makes no mention of Romania in his plays. On the contrary, our English writers do not write of the world they live in and do not live in the world they write about. The Indo-Pak sub-continent, as someone has remarked, is a vampire that never loosens its clutches on its people. This is also the reason that Pakistanis living abroad do not have the same perception of the situation here as those who are living here. Those living in Pakistan are justified in their protest that the emigrants should come and live here and then criticise the affairs and those who suffer them.

There are, however, a considerable number of writers who use a foreign language for expression but then they seem to have a clear objective before them. When, for instance, a Palestinian or an African writes in English or French, he tries to expose the oppressor and the exploiter and at the same time conveys his reaction to their cruelties to the whole world, and that too in the language of the oppressor. He is clear about his objective and he knows his reading public. This lends authenticity to his writing which rings with sincerity and carries a definite and clear point of view.

The Pakistanis who write in English on the assumption that they lack proficiency in their own language actually suffer under a great delusion (and a large number of these consists of young aspiring students). They think that it is easier for them to write in English because they have a better command of it. The fact is that English is a highly developed language and it is very rich in literature on all subjects. Standard works are available in plenty on social as well as scholarly topics. There are readymade words for any idea, theory or system. Thus precisely framed questions and appropriately worded answers are easily accessible to everyone. Thought and expression both come with comparative ease. While writing in Urdu, not only does one have to think for himself without much help from anywhere but words have also to be coined and terminology devised. Obviously if there are issues, there must be some way of expressing them. It is the writer, the intellectual, who takes pains to identify the problems and to give them precise expressions. Thus preference for English over Urdu or one's regional language for a Pakistani writer actually

amounts to shirking from the hard work that his calling demands from him and exposes his intellectual honesty to serious doubt. Even otherwise, any writing in a foreign language is hardly given recognition, except for those who give their full allegiance to the world in which they decide to live, like Conrad, Beckett, etc.

Nostalgia and inertia seem to be a part of our sensibility. We can never detach ourselves from the past. Abandoned houses always haunt us. Ghost is the word for the past in Hindi. And the ghost either grips you or haunts you. As against this, the ghosts in western literature either belong to the world of science, like Dracula or Frankenstein, or they are ghosts of the modern world which pester the people in the shape of guests, relatives or social institutions like the policeman or the tax-collector, as in the plays of Albee. The past has hardly any meaning for the western mind. It lives only in the present. Pakistanis living in New York or London pine for Lahore. Even a thousand years stay in India could not cure the nostalgia of the Muslims for Smarkand and Bukhara. They could not accept Delhi as their home though generations had lived there. But as soon as they were thrown out of it, Delhi became a passion to them. We always enjoy the bitter-sweet memories of a lost bliss. Iqbal not only bewailed the lost glory of Andulus, he even pathetically thought of Delhi in the suburban ruins of Rome. Nobody in the world can be as displaced as a displaced Pakistani. Once uprooted he cannot find roots anywhere. This is perhaps not so with people from other lands. Should our writer not therefore be a true Pakistani both in letter and spirit?

One last question remains. What is the future of Pakistani literature in English? One universal test for the evaluation of literature, which has been accepted as a principle by tradition, is its popularity and universal recognition. A genuine work of literature makes its own place.

If any of our English writers gets this universal recognition, this literature will also be acknowledged. Till such time, the status of Pakistani literature in English will remain only tentative.

(1989)

❧ Chapter 23 ❧

Post-Modernism *And the Third World*



The term Post-Modernism got currency towards the last quarter of the present century. The first three quarter were dominated by what is given a package deal under the rather vague nomenclature of modernism. This included all the major trends of the period in arts and literature. Modernism is a very wide and a rather loose term which stands for everything that happened to western arts and literature roughly between the first world War and the Vietnam War. The period was marked with protest and revolt. T.S.Eliot embodied it in the figure of the frustrated impotent angry young man, Prufrock. Thematically, modernism stood for practically everything from the biological, historical and religious determinism carried over from the previous century to the almost violent desire to change the world. In technique, too, the age was very explorative and ingenious. Symbolism, imagism, cubism, Dadaism, expressionism, impressionism and renewed interest in folk arts have all been identified with modernism. The perspective, however, radically changed after the war of Vietnam. Neo-colonialism and national liberation movements caught the fancy of everyone everywhere. The issues related to colonialism were now seen in a new perspective. The arrogance of the oppressor and the timidity of the oppressed were no more the same as before. Each tried to understand the situation of the other now, without sympathy at times. Thus developed an ambivalent attitude which characterises the general mood of the present world. Post-modernism has been inextricably involved with post-colonialism. This was the subject of a lecture by Sara Suleri.

Sara, an Associate Professor of English at Yales University, spoke on post-modernism at the National College of Arts, Lahore. She has been educated both in the east as well as in the west. Having done her Masters in English from the department of English at the Punjab University, she did Ph.D. from Indiana in the United States. Her mother, Mrs. Suleri, a Welsh woman, also taught at the Punjab

University. Sara saw post-modernism in the context of post-colonialism, a quite genuine, but as transpired from the talk, a somewhat embarrassing approach too.

The embarrassment lay in the clarity of perception, on the one side, but a reluctance to accept the conclusion to which its study led, on the other. The speaker unconsciously carried an eastern sensibility but was overwhelmed with western prejudices, specifically the American apprehensions about the new trends of thought and feeling. The nations which are struggling for political, economic and cultural emancipation under the post-colonial conditions insist on their common lot and try to pool their energies in a collective endeavour to fight a common enemy. It is reflected in the creation of associations like the Non-Aligned Movement or the Group of 77. There is much talk of North-South dialogue also. The down-trodden nations of the world have found a new sense of identity in the concept and the movement of the Third World. The Americans are allergic to the idea and strongly reject the term. They insist that the countries aligned under the banner of the Third World are so diversified, and even sometimes antagonistic to one another, in their interests and in their perceptions of the global politics, that they can hardly form a group or forge a policy that is acceptable to all. Thus we have a whole lot of alternative terminologies to describe the present world. But the fact is there. Call it post-colonial, under-developed, developing, or the exploited world, it does become an entity which cannot be ignored. A prejudice is at loggerheads with a reality, and when you cannot give up either the one or the other, it is, to say the least, embarrassing.

American capitalism is based on the idea of distinctions. A competitive society firmly believes in degrees of competence and is inimical to the idea of equating everyone, as echoed in the slogan of the French Revolution; liberty, equality, fraternity. These ideas were primarily embedded in the doctrines of communism. Sara's assertions echoed the apprehensions of a society based on competition, but with an undercurrent of her own, though perhaps unconscious, reactions of a person belonging to the underprivileged world. She thought that the earlier part of the 20th century was a period of manifestos which were rejected in the second part. The latter part discarded all isms and theories, and so was a period of iconoclasm, of disintegration. This doctrinal generalisation led to the inevitable conclusion that no manifestos are possible now, that any constructive and positive thinking is out of the question. So we must wait for the dawn of the next century for that. The initial couple of decades of the 21st century may repeat the enthusiasm of the corresponding years of the present

century. Only disillusionment rules the interim. Both humanism and communism have failed, it is argued, and no good will come out of any human endeavour. Post-colonialism is a bad patch on post-modernism. No east-west detente is possible 'Never shall the twain meet'. At the same time, however, there is a promise in the writings from the post-colonial world which cannot be ignored or underestimated. English writings from the sub-continent and the Caribbean Islands and French writings from Africa evince perceptions of the reality.

The fact is that neither humanism has failed nor communism. The one that failed was a particular kind of humanism, the renaissance or romantic humanism. This humanism made man the measure of all things. It was a shift from the theocentric to the anthropocentric world view. This romanticised man and encouraged egotism. By placing man in the centre of the scheme of creation this humanism goaded him to transcend all limits and gave birth of Faustuses. Instead of serving humanity, this humanism propagated the idea of hero-worship. Since it ignored humanity as a whole and exalted only a few individuals, this humanism became individualistic, adventurous and discriminative, shutting its eyes to the common problems of the human beings and their collective resources. It is this humanism that has failed. But as long as human beings inhabit this globe and live in society, they must strive to find some idea, some theory, some philosophy to regulate relationships amongst them. What the world needs today is a humane humanism, not a humanism that creates distinctions and exalts some above the others, thus creating alienation instead of harmony in the society. This humanism has not failed and cannot fail. In the same way the idea of communism has not failed either. Only a stage in communist revolution has passed and it is now entering its next historical phase. Change is the law of life. But it must be a change for the better.

One of the paradoxes of post-modernism springs from an ambivalent attitude to change. The Third World countries are eager for the change, while the advanced ones are apprehensive of it. This is the dilemma faced by the modern age caught between two divergent interests. That is one reason why Pakistanis writing in the English language feel alienated. It is very difficult to determine who they are writing for. Sara Suleri is also caught in this difficult situation. This is the situation of all western oriented easterner who want to face the advanced world of today with sufficient amount of self respect. They are committed to their ideals which have been blurred by an education overburdened with disinformation.

Some kind of detente, some east-west harmony, some mutual understanding is the spirit of post-modernism which has been made possible by the post-colonial attitudes of the so-called developing world. This is reflected in the literature of this period. Writers from the Third World are gaining recognition in the west, while those from the advanced countries are now seen in a new light in the east.

KM(PVT.)LTD

❧ Chapter 24 ❧

The New Poetic Horizon



Naya Sheri Ufuq (The New Poetic Horizon) is a reiteration of a case for the “New Urdu Poetry” made some twenty years ago. That Anis Nagi has decided to restate the position, with no alterations and with a couple of additions is an assertion that the views held two decades ago are found still valid by him. This may mean that either there has been no significant change in the sensibility or its poetic realisation (as there was between 1936 and the 60s), or no specific contentions were made in the dissertation presented in 1969 which need to be questioned, and that it was a very generalised case for a kind of poetry which was different from the conventional and popular creative works. Perhaps the latter is more to the point.

The emphasis is more on what this new poetry is not rather than on what it is. This impression is further strengthened by the controversial tone of the criticism, which at times is more disputation than criticism. *Ghazal* and Progressive poetry are the main offenders and have been thoroughly and repeatedly reprimanded.

Anis Nagi has presented his thesis with a profound analysis of the “New Urdu Poetry” and has practically demonstrated its validity by applying this criticism to some of the poets of the “new” school.

In both form and content, the new Urdu Poetry is clearly different from conventional *Ghazal* and the poetry of the 1936 movement. There is no doubt about that. But what direction the change takes is the point here. The influence of T.S. Eliot both in theory and practice has been only too obvious, though it is strange how a man who asserted that he was a Catholic in religion, a Conservative in politics and a Traditionalist in literature could be a model, no less an authority, for the “new” Urdu poets who believe in revolt and individual freedom. Much of the confusion of the “new poetry” is a consequence of this anomalous heritage. It is also Eliot’s domineering personality that dictates a long-winded, and rather

unnecessary, debate on tradition and culture. Perhaps the conclusion that culture is realised tradition with some additional dimensions would have sufficed. Influences from the west generally take around 50 years to reach us. It was so in the case of Romantic and Nature poetry and so has it been in the case of T.S. Eliot, who started as an angry young man around the first World War and uneasily recoiled into Conservatism after the revolution in Russia. The “New Poets” do not always take due note of the difference between the earlier and the later Eliot. Thus the confusion that baffles so many. Brecht and Lorca took almost the same time to have any meaning for us. The “absurd” still appears to be only knocking at the door, though some bizarre attempts have been made to appropriate this mode, too, with little appreciative response so far. Echoes from the “absurd” are also heard at times in the new Urdu Poetry. At places it tends to advocate the theory of art for art sake by insisting on the entity of a poem existing in its own right, without being an imitation or an interpretation of life. In some of the “new poets” one can hear strong notes of protest and revolt. But the new Urdu poets would not go to the extremes of the iconoclasm of E.E. Cummings and of the “pure poetry” of Wallace Stevens. The new Urdu Poetry, as also the criticism of Anis Nagi, is a blend, not always so happy, of the “new criticism” of the west and the progressive approach of the Left.

The New Urdu poetry, according to Anis Nagi, has a very wide spectrum, leading from one pole representing the progressive poetry of Safdar Mir to its opposite pole that echoes the personal frustration and impatient outbursts of Abbas Athar. Linguistically it ranges between the conventional diction of Zahid Dar and the violent dislocation of syntax and the use of unfamiliar and bombastic words of Iftikhar Jalib. Even Anis Nagi himself does not seem to be very sure whether poetry is social commitment or mere form. He seems to put equal emphasis on both the approaches in different places in his criticism.

So far as the subjects are concerned, Anis Nagi has described new Urdu Poetry as the poetry of isolation, chaos, partial rejection of the past, disintegration of cultural institutions, oppressive social order, support for the oppressed, martyrdom (as fruitless struggle in a desperate situation), despair, fear, weariness, sexual frustration, and anxiety which leads to romantic agony. This, quite obviously, is a catalogue of the subjects of western modern poetry now being introduced into the new Urdu poetry. This is further borne out by the

catalogue of symbols used in the new poetry as given by Anis Nagi. The most common symbols are crucifixion, martyrdom, murder, cul-de-sac, cinders, mire, nudity, pregnancy, mythology, boat, storm and smoking chimneys. These obviously are not the symbols from our society. These are borrowed from the west and ultimately lead to a semblance of western sensibility. These symbols do not spring from the experience of these poets, none of whom is an industrial worker and none has ever seen a boat in a storm.

Ghazal has been severely charged with corrupting the taste. It is perhaps not very correct to say that *Ghazal* created the taste. In fact it catered to a taste, and now that the taste is changing, it has the capability to respond to the new aesthetic values. *Classical Ghazal* was written in a context which drew its norms from a specific metaphysical world view. Though Anis Nagi correctly pointed out that a special taste, which he calls *Taghazzul*, permeated all the literary genres in Urdu, he himself confounded *Taghazzul* with *Ghazal*, *Taghazzul* was no corruption or weakness of *Ghazal*. It was a trend of the time, a general mood. *Ghazal* has itself undergone a revolution in tone and experience and even in form. Modern *Ghazal* is a very different thing from the classical *Ghazal*. It is specially suited to convey certain kinds of experiences. It can maintain a beautiful balance between form and formlessness, since it can embody any variety of ideas in a flexible form. *Taghazzul* is not exclusively associated with *Ghazal*. It is a part of the sensibility which is built on a life style having no real productive activity. Absence of real creativity forces the mind into *Taghazzul*. The concept of flying on the flying carpet has undergone a radical change with the invention of the aeroplane. It is no more a romantic dream. It is a scientific reality now. The new Urdu poetry is no less steeped in *Taghazzul* than the poetry it stands to demolish. The new poetry itself is personal, subjective, lyrical and highly introverted. It is frequently close to the fantastic and even arouses phantasmagoria.

Where the progressive poetry failed was in fact a disregard of the socio-political reality. It sang of a revolution which was not there. The idea of poetic justice was carried a bit too far. It borrowed revolutionary ideas from abroad. But then, the new Urdu poetry is also playing upon themes which are not indigenous. As for the charge of thesis dominated poetry in progressive writings, it is no less true of the "new Urdu poetry". Only the thesis is not ideological. It is formulated on themes deliberately picked up from modern western

literature. No doubt, too, that progressive poets emphasised reason and truth and failed to bring emotional sincerity to their writings. Since the emotion was not in the fact—that of a situation not really revolutionary—the emotional tone was clearly deliberate. The new poetry failed in the other aspect. It brought in emotion, but ignored the fact. In fact the 'new Urdu poetry' is not a revolt against progressive poetry. It is rather, as Anis Nagi himself suggests, a product of it, with the difference that its approach is not collective, but personal; not ideological, but wishful. As against progressive poetry, the new poetry lacks a vision of the future. Thus, from the perspective of progressive poetry, the new poetry seems to be reverting to a kind of *Taghazzul*.

It does not, however, mean that the new poetry has not accomplished anything. It has succeeded in demolishing cliché and has rid poetry of a stereotyped diction. But it is an exaggeration to say that the new poetry reflects the industrial society, simply because no such society has yet come to exist in this country. Whatever industrial culture is reflected in the new Urdu poetry is borrowed. The new poetry echoes the poetry of the modern world. It may ultimately lead to a change in the right direction, thematically as well as linguistically.

Anis Nagi contends that the new poetry differs from the progressive poetry and *Ghazal* in the sense that it has no ideology and seeks a new diction with the object of making poetry a direct expression of experience (but, then, experience can be empirical as well as occult). A very strange assertion is made here, that word is made the basis of experience, as if the word order takes precedence over the world order. This seems to advocate literary life instead of living literature. No doubt, the new poetry is more literary than living and fails to comprehend the duality of word and meaning. Then, very strangely, Anis Nagi, charges *Ghazal* of obstructing the struggle for liberation, justice and progress, thus claiming an ideological character for the new poetry.

This claim also echoes the Western attitude that the new poetry is the poetry of the educated of the middle class who are sceptical, confused and impatient to seek answers to their questions. This impatience itself indicates their romanticism which idealises a very ugly oppressive situation into a clash of faith and faithlessness. This phenomenon has not yet appeared in our society which in fact is characterised by an atmosphere that shows neither faith nor

faithlessness. It is neither strongly religious nor strongly heretic--not even sceptical, but only indifferent. The approach is generally non-committal, "a free approach to problems". This can hardly be called an approach—claiming to strive for humanitarianism and a just social order but, paradoxically, neither humanistic nor political—simply non-committal.

The new poets claim to integrate idea and emotion which the progressives are charged to have ignored. The new poets claim to achieve his integration by giving "I" the central position in the scheme of things. This unity is forged by the use of metaphor, and gives a body to experience. New poetry does not imitate. It reorganizes experience into new emotional patterns. Broken images are characteristic of new poetry which seeks to put heterogeneous material together, in an Eliotian manner, creating a montage that seeks to depict the process of thought rather than making a simple statement of the conclusions of the thinking process, aiming at physical perception of mental and emotional states (which Eliot calls 'the objective correlative').

But this poetry lacks vision--does not in fact believe in it--and clarity of form is not possible without clear vision. Even perception of confusion requires a clear vision of confusion. While working on *Hamlet*, Shakespeare was not confused, as T.S. Eliot would have us believe, he was recreating a picture of confusion. Even Gestalt does not mean a jumbling up of chaotic impressions. Gestalt is itself a vision. And "I" is no substitute for vision.

It is very difficult to pass judgement on an effort which is still in the experimental stage. So far the new poetry seems to have succeeded only in replacing traditional ambiguity with a deliberate obscurity. Linguistic change without a perception of the end can only lead to chaos. But to the new poet, poetry is not a means to an end; it is an end in itself. Change for the sake of change leads to confusion. A change in idiom is definitely needed now, since with the change from scholastic to scientific perception of reality, the terms of reference have already changed. New modes of living have created a new vocabulary which is already the current language but which has not yet been assimilated by our poetry. All change must be subservient to the facts of existence. The new poetry should conceive life in the new context, not just depend upon linguistic agility to create a new form of experience.

Naya Sheri Ufuq brings a profound and systematic approach to the understanding and evaluation of the “New Urdu Poetry”. This criticism is fresh and challenging but strangely it has not received the response it deserves (which only exposes the weakness of critical culture in our society). The questions raised by Anis Nagi and the answers he suggested to them may not be satisfactory, but their validity is beyond doubt. The case for the new poetry is overstated, but the lines on which ‘new poetry’ should develop have been indicated. The tentative and at times confusing verdicts result from a mixing of the practice and the ideals. One hopes that the new poets pursue the ideals with greater clarity and better grasp. A genuine pursuit itself clears many dark corners.

(1990)

❧ Chapter 25 ❧

The Land of the Spring Morning



Dayar-e-subh-e-Bahar (The Land of the Spring Morning) is a travelogue with a difference. It is a straightforward, analytical and critical study of the USSR, giving first-hand information and spontaneous reaction of the first ever journey to that land undertaken by Humair Hashmi. Though as the impressions of a psychologist, it is objective and scientific, still it carries an emotional charge, since its genesis lies in the memories of Faiz. Humair had planned a documentary on the life and activities of Faiz with the help of his wife, Muneeza, who is a seasoned telecaster. Humair wanted to pay this homage not just to a father-in-law, but more so to a mentor and a visionary whose poetry and active struggle for a people's revolution had earned him a place in every heart. It is a blend of the subjective and the objective, the personal and the universal which gives authenticity and vitality to the book. This interesting account of the places and peoples of the Soviet Union has been made vivid and lively by personal interviews that recall the warm associations of Faiz with this great country.

It may, however, be mentioned here that these impressions preceded the changes in the socio-political scene brought about by *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. This may, perhaps, explain the feelings of dullness which mark the author's first encounter with this new world and which are reflected in the comparatively drier and rather disinterested description of Moscow. The author makes no apologies for this lack of interest and seeks no rationalizations or justifications. He does not even try to disguise the feeling or ignore it. He finds Russians soft-spoken, impressionless and quiet, though energetic and efficient. He observes that the people are generally reserved. In this great metropolitan city there is no noise, no visible excitement and no juvenile excesses, though, of course, he notes that people like boating and bathing in the river, enjoy themselves in the parks, have breakfast there, bask in the sun or read the newspaper. They also go to hill resorts where they have skating rinks. He watches a game of chess.

There are over a hundred people in the great hall. All are deeply absorbed in the game. But there are no shoutings, no abuses and no arguments.

Moscow has good evening life too, such as floor shows in the hotels, but there is no rowdyism, no obscenity, no showing off. Music and dance are not much lacking. Above all, there are the world famous operas, ballets, theatres and, not the least, the Russian Circus. Humair finds that, quite contrary to the general propaganda, the ideological commitment of the Soviets does not interfere with their aesthetic enjoyment. They tolerate dissent and even appreciatively respond to it if it is in good taste. We are told of an exhibition of a painter, Glazounev, in an art gallery in Moscow. Though the painter is disapproved by the Soviet intelligentsia for his character and ideas, he is allowed to hold public exhibitions of his work. There are long queues of people outside the Gallery waiting their turn to see the painting of a condemned artist. To be controversial is no censure. Western music as well as Western films are quite popular in the USSR. The state radio plays western tunes and a cartoon of "Around the world in 80 days" is watched with interest. Western art is admired and the Masters venerated. There is no wholesale rejection of the west, as the propaganda would make us believe. It should no more be surprising now to be told that Pepsi cola is the favourite drink there.

But all this Humair misses on his first arrival in Moscow. It is only when he goes to Leningrad that he feels a little relaxed and finds some interest in this strange land. Perhaps the city's associations with the Revolution have something to do with it. But the real excitement comes when he visits the Muslim regions. There is a spurt of enthusiasm. No details are now missed and no opportunity lost to bring home to the reader the excitement of this singular experience. This enthusiasm is retained even when Humair returns to Moscow. The city now appears to be throbbing with life. Perhaps the initial feeling of dullness was a psychological reaction and, so too, in a larger sense, is the later excitement. It is really an experience to fly thousands of miles in a strange land and suddenly come upon people who greet you with *Alhamdolillah* and where the T.V. transmissions start with *Assalamoalakum*. There is an atmosphere of familiarity in the towns which remind you of Wazirabad and Abbottabad back home. It is exciting to be in Kazakhstan and reminded that it was here that Babar picked up most of his soldiers for his historic venture that resulted in the establishment of the great Mughal empire in India.

Apart from these warm associations, the real merit of the book is that it is a perfect travelogue describing the people, the places, the institutions and the manners, customs, habits and attitudes of different sections of this vast society. The USSR is a tremendous land with variegated scenic beauty, cultural variety and ethnic diversity, blending these into a fascinating whole with a rhythm and harmony that is reflected in the great leaps made by the Soviet union in all walks of life. On the one hand, there are the monuments of the past, the churches and the palaces; on the other, there are huge modern buildings and the underground railway system. This unity in diversity and the blend of contrasts is particularly very charming in the Muslim areas where you have the Metro and the donkey cart, the skirts and the shalwars, creating a pleasant amalgam of socialism and Islam. A passenger in the aeroplane in his eagerness almost snatches a copy of *Sura Yasin* from the hands of Muneeze while another requests for a copy. These citizens of the most scientifically advanced country of the world who do not receive inspirations for action from the occult, are, nevertheless, very much attached to their religion. Everything appears to be so balanced and so composed. There is no single national language in the USSR. Education is everywhere imparted in the mother tongue. Russian is the link language, which is also the second language in all the regions outside the Russian Republic.

The account of the scenic splendour of Mahach Qila in Daghestan in the Qafqaz range at a height of 1500 metres makes the reader spellbound. Around the hilly track exotic fruit grow almost wild. The atmosphere is extremely intoxicating, inducing drowsiness. The breeze, in the words of Ghalib, is loaded with wine. Qafqaz, the *Koh-e-Qaf* of our legends, is a perfect idyll where nectar flows and fairies dwell. It is a land where beauty rules. Humair has been very successful in transporting the reader to this enchanted world.

As stated earlier, the purpose of the tour was to make a documentary on the life of Faiz and it was to be shot at the sites where the poet had spent some time, bringing to celluloid the charm of the places and the first hand impressions of the people who had associations with Faiz. But what enthralled Humair was the warm reception he enjoyed everywhere. Like Miranda of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the author makes a discovery that the man living behind the Iron Curtain is no monster. It is rather a spirit akin to us:

...It eats and sleeps, and hath such senses. As we have.

He almost cries out in wonder:

How many goodly creatures are there here:
How beauteous mankind is: O brave new world,
That has such people in it.

This is no poetry on my part. Here is a verbatim rendering of what Humair writes:

This was my first experience of seeing these socialists at work in their own country. I was a little surprised that they were also human and were busy in the same manner as the people in our P.I.A. We have strange notions about them thanks to the western media. Obviously, the people of the socialist countries must be human like us, having similar hands, feet, ears, nose and head.

While expressing a genuine emotion, these words unmistakably carry a note of irony too.

Humair protests that people in Pakistan, and for that matter the world over, are terribly ignorant of the reality that the USSR is. In the first place, they call it Russia, though Russia is only one of the 15 republics, 20 autonomous republics, 8 autonomous regions and 10 autonomous territories which constitute the Soviet Union. There is complete ethnic and religious harmony, and it is impossible to find any publication that hurts the religious sentiments of the people. This is a claim that few enlightened countries of the world can make. (Humair could not have visualised the present ethnic trouble which is a post-Glasnost phenomenon).

The book gives rich statistics on economics, education, women and workers. Their museums and national monuments have been described with great interest since they honour their heroes, not only the soldiers and the politicians, but workers, teachers, common people and intellectuals as well. From Roodki and Bu Ali Sena in the past to Aba Abai and Suleman Atov of the modern Soviet world their intellectuals have been publicly honoured. They are as much venerated as Lenin himself whose statues are seen everywhere in the country. People hold them in great regard and a tradition has developed that young couples visit these monuments as a mark of their devotion to these national heroes. Eminent women also have their share in this roll of honour. Teacher's day and Women's day are celebrated with special enthusiasm.

The book particularly mentions the institution of the family in USSR and extols its prestige among the people. The Soviet education system takes particular care that respect for the family is inculcated in the young right from the formative stage of their life. Children are taught to respect their elders, and the grown-ups are expected to deal with the young with love and affection. Children and old people are treated as privileged persons.

However, a drawback of the book, which is actually its merit also is that it successfully arouses the interest of the reader in this hitherto obscure world, but leaves him bewildered and guessing on many occasions. For example, he tells us of an hour's tour of Moscow, but gives us no idea of what he saw there. At one place he states that they had a breakfast of typically Russian style, and the reader only wonders what it was. Similarly his admiration of the institution of the family in the Soviet Union arouses curiosity, particularly when it is generally propagated that communism aims at the destruction of the family as a sacred institution. The author neither takes us to a real home nor cares to introduce us to a family. Sometimes this reserve about details is really tantalizing, as when he says that the institutions of domestic servants no more exists in the post-revolution USSR, but then he mentions a Russian girl serving food in the house of the ambassador of Pakistan. One wonders what she was doing there. Also, though it is not objectionable for an author to include the portraits of his family in his book, it would have been more interesting and useful to give pictures from Soviet life.

So far as the criticism of the Pakistani missions abroad is concerned, I believe that Humair's disappointment is misplaced. Our missions do 'reflect' our country. My own feeling, during my stay abroad, was that one must visit these missions occasionally lest he forgets what kind of world he has to return to. The same casual approach to work, similar negative attitude and an indigenous inefficiency are the hallmark of our representatives in the foreign countries. One wonders how they retain their native hue in the most highly efficient and scientific environment.

One thing, however, is very clear. Humair Hashmi found this world so exciting and so different from his own that he was left completely flabbergasted. Though the aircrafts are not sophisticated and lack modern comforts, like air-conditioning, and though there are no air hostesses on the flights and sometimes the service and amenities in the hotels leave much to be desired, forcing the writer to

protest that one needs the patience of Job to live in the Soviet Union, the people generally lead a peaceful life, without the tension of a competitive, commercialised society, free of friction and ill-will. They are rather shy and humble, shun publicity and are least aggressive in their attitude. They are motivated, not by any occult fears nor by superstitions, but by humble human considerations of sympathy, love and collective good which is imbibed in them from the early days of school life. They take their work not as duty but as voluntary experiences with rude and unreasonable people. He finds that people get involved in long arguments on such petty things as a broken aeroplane seat. The Taxi drivers are sometimes as quarrelsome as elsewhere. But all this does not shake his confidence in the noble character of these people.

The experience gives him a big jolt. This is very upsetting and causes much uneasiness. It results in nightmares. Humair feels uncomfortable and has awful dreams. Being a psychologist, he tries to explain them away. Though I am not qualified to contradict him, I feel that this uneasiness was the result of contrasting this world of strange discovery with his own world back home. Also, the world, where the concepts of rest and recreation are very different from those prevalent in our own, where employment is a right and idleness a curse, creates a tension which sometimes leaks out in bad dreams, mixing reality with fantasy, couched in symbols horrifying and lovely at the same time, as in the following dream:

A girl is going to another country. She asks me what colours she should choose for the journey and which to wear on arrival. I see that I am standing with Muneeza in a crowd of girls and boys. Our only escape is through a pond full of water. Muneeza does not know how to swim. I raise her on my shoulders. Then I swim through the pond while the spectators are charging us with poisoned arrows which pierce my body with great pain.

It cannot be just weariness that induces such terrible dreams. The tension must lie much deeper.

Genuineness and sincerity of the sentiment is unmistakably revealed in the homage that the author pays to his teacher, Dr. Nazir Ahmad. Apparently there seems to be no relevance of this note of dedication in a travelogue. But Humair is so overwhelmed with the affection and love that he sees flowing all around him in the Soviet

Union that he is irresistibly reminded of all the affection that he received from Faiz, from his own mother and from his affectionate teachers. He feels choked with emotion and becomes nostalgic for the streets of Lahore and the company of friends.

The book has a literary merit too. Apart from the easy and fluent Urdu of Humair, which is so direct and so relaxed, there is a lot in the book that is of specific literary value. Humair Hashmi is neither a professional writer nor a seasoned journalist. He has no pretensions to critical literary training, but the works of high literary merit reproduced in translations and quotations from Faiz give evidence of a fine sensibility. They lend a peculiar charm and a degree of profundity of what after all is but a travelogue. He is enthralled with the land and carried away with Soviets' love for Pakistan which he reciprocates.

The book does not lack in humour either. He has been quite witty at places. Once annoyed with a porter he abuses him in Punjabi which the porter takes as a compliment. At another place, in true Pakistani style, when they try to break the queue, the Russian guide makes a request to the people in queue and they willingly allow them to pass. Humair and Muneeza are impressed with this courtesy to the guests. But the guide tells them that she had told the people that Muneeza wanted to go to the toilet. Still at another place Humair observes that he had taken too much of cheese and biscuits that he feared he would turn into a mouse.

The book merits wide reception as it brings the reality that is the USSR within the reach of an average reader without exaggeration or understatement. It is well documented, but the author's emotional involvement saves it from being a dull account, which is a drawback of so many books of travel.

(1990)

❧ Chapter 26 ❧

Sunshine in Purple Rain



The land of the rising sun has fascinated many. Japanese love for natural gaiety and their great advances in the field of modern technology have been no less than a wonder in the present world. From the *NOH* play with its traditional theatre decorated with bright colours and scintillating decor to the colourful limousines gliding along the polished roads in all the countries of the world, from the gorgeous and elaborate costumes of the old theatre to the gay kimonos of the geisha girls still seen around and from the haunting music of the primitive stick-drummers, hand-drummers and flutists to the hi-fi decks of the latest musical paraphernalia, it is an impressive pageant reflecting Japanese fascination with the riot of colours and odours. This world of sound and light has been irresistible. Not only the native Japanese, the poets from far and wide have sung of the charms of this land which mixes the beauties of the past with the grandeur of the present in myriads of variegated forms.

Tabassum Kashmiri, who found his poetic genius cramped and his talent as a teacher frustrated in the stifling academic atmosphere of the Punjab University, felt his wings fluttering in this new world buzzing with creativity. He has been in Japan for almost a decade now, and this is what that land has done to him:

*I am watching those virgin lands
Where the air blew for the first time
Where the first seed of the sun sprouted
And the moon descended
From the sails of its pristine light
Where the sweet odours, flowers and colours
Breathed for the first time
And perhaps for the first time
New alphabets appeared on a new tablet*

*And perhaps, once again, for the first time
In the open seas of the orange sunshine
A dove sang the song
Of everlasting peace*

The freshness of the experience tickles the sensitive spirit and the poet explores all the avenues of thought and feeling and brings to his aid all his power he has on the words to create metaphors that may do justice to the excitement of entering a new world of feelings. The world appears so beautiful to him that he shouts with the new confidence:

*You write poetry
I will grow poetry*

And he explores the remotest corners of the unconscious to find the soil on which to plant this new happiness:

*I remember those days
When the moon was sleeping
Pillowed upon the threshold of her warm breast
And when the sweet smells
Were planting red seeds on her slips*

Here the gaiety of sound and colour unmistakably reflect the world of the Japanese *haiku* which had so fascinated Ezra Pound that he rendered one of these into English:

*The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:
A butterfly.*

He tried to capture the feeling not in words but 'in little splotches of colour' which he called an 'image' or 'vortex' which 'presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'. He adopted this as a technique for writing poetry and composed a two line poem in its imitation in *A station at the Metro*:

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough*

A still more beautiful use of the 'image' has been made in another poem. *The Garden*:

*Like a skin of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Garden.*

After Ezra Pound and Yeats, Tabassum has also felt the infatuation. He also tries to capture 'the image':

*I shall steer the boat in the river of light
And you will grow flowers in the garden of sweet odours
I shall fly deep in the forest of voices
And you will swim far into the sea of silence
I shall sing to the caravans and the camel riders
And you will sing to the caravans and the camel riders
And you will sing an enchanting song on the palms of air
On the mountain trees I shall fall like the snow
And on the spring flowers you will shower like colours*

This love for the brilliant and the glorious is not confined to a people or to a region. It is universal. But the vision is corrupted by a dull atmosphere and even the obvious becomes invisible. It is very hard to acquire the innocence of vision, the direct uncorrupted experience of reality. Tabassum Kashmiri was lucky to have a glimpse into an alien world. At home, that master of the metaphor, Josh Malihabadi, once captured a similar 'image' when he saw very attractive dark beauty glittering through her make-up. He spontaneously remarked, '*a Jaman sprinkled with salt*'.

Tabassum's response to the Japanese experience is not confined to the beauties playing on the surface. He sees deeper meaning in the phenomena. He is fully aware of the Buddhist background of the Japanese sensibility:

*A flute and
Some sacred incantations
Two wheels, a pair of wooden sandals
A gown
And with a dove
March on--
On an unfinished and unnamed journey.*

Tabassum Kashmiri has successfully come out of the constrictive poetic tradition into the freer atmosphere of the new strange world. He has enriched Urdu poetry by giving, or at least attempting to give, it a new and fresh idiom. He has come out of the cloying sameness and nauseating richness of *Taghazzul* which draws upon scholastic inanities, as the foregoing quotations from some of his

poems illustrate. It will be very difficult to show this linguistic difference in a translation, since the very process of altering the language changes the idiom. The use of words like boots or vacuum cleaner will immediately be declared unpoetic by any 'man of taste'. The poem entitled as *The Poem* attempts at a kind of expression which may find few precedents in Urdu:

*I have just seen
A piece of poem out of breath
With a horrible freak
Roaring in it
Passing over the habitations
A piece of the poem comes swooning in pain
It has many flowers on it and the flowers have
the imprints of heavy boots
The other pieces of the poem raise their hands
And call out to me for help
I am scared and breathe heavily.*

Tabassum has enriched his poetic sensibility with large scale translations as well. He has extensively translated from Japanese, Spanish as well as English. He has rendered Pablo Neruda's long poem *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* into Urdu with a success that has been reassuring to him. The translations of long poems besides enriching Urdu literature with a genre almost unknown to it, since traditional long poems in Urdu are rather impulsive, catching thoughts and emotions in snatches, never attempting to venture into the travails of long sustained thought, introduce a new tradition, that of using poetry as a vehicle of serious study of life.

Nohe Takht Lahore De was an attempt to use this new genre. In his latest collection of poems *Kasni Barish Mein Dhoop* (*Sunshine in the Purple Rain*), beside beautifully exploiting his Japanese experience, he has also attempted a poem of moderate length (some 500 lines) which realistically depicts the mechanism of the modern industrialised life and at the same time radiates with a new humanism:

*Isn't it the season of spring!
You know this tree will soon grow big
And will be heavy laden with boughs till you return
Perhaps you will see some birds
Singing on this tree*

*May be you get fresh fruit too
And if you come in the summers
It will also give shade to you.*

Studies in Western literatures have enriched Urdu literature, particularly the writings and literary theories from France, Germany and America. Literature from Russia and Eastern Europe as well as from Spain has also inspired some of our writers. Quite a number of them have also gleaned from the creative achievements of the third world. It is for the first time that inspiration has come from the far off land of Japan. It has been really a blessing in disguise that Tabassum Kashmiri was forced to leave the Punjab University. He actually found a heaven in the land of the rising sun and brought back with him the colours and the music of that great country.

Kasni Barish Mein Dhoop (Sunshine in the Purple Rain) is a valuable addition to the already expanding horizon of Urdu poetry.

(1990)



❧ Chapter 27 ❧

The Ideal That Failed



Socialism was a powerful political and intellectual movement in pre-partition India. This movement can be divided into three phases, though in their geneses these were quite different from one another. The first of these, ironically, was the direct product of the Balkan Wars (1911-1920) which brought to Indian Muslims a sharp consciousness of the colonial exploitation of the Muslim world by western imperialism, particularly the British. The second phase of the socialist movement among the Muslims of the sub-continent, again ironically, was the consequence of the struggle for Pan-Islamism that coincided with the Khilafat movement which ultimately led to the nationalist struggle for the independence of India. In both these cases many Muslims migrated from India to Afghanistan, Central Asia, Turkey and some western countries while their comrades in India carried on the struggle from here. But they ended up disillusioned with Islamic revolution and highly impressed with the ideology and the policies of Soviet Russia. The third phase started in 1930s and has been very much identified with the Progressive Writers Association. In fact all the three movements, though unsuccessful on the political front, made a great mark on the literary scene. They took full advantage of the traditional love of literature in Muslim societies.

This is how Mr. Ansari has commented on an important aspect of the socialist movement in India in his brilliant and well documented study, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought among North Indian Muslims (1917-1947)*. It is an excellent piece of research, detached, scholarly and very lucid and readable at the same time. It is interesting to read in some detail how socialistic and liberal ideas found acceptance with almost all sections of Indian intellectuals including such diverse personalities as Maulvi Abdul Haq, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Niaz Fatehpuri, Josh, Premchand, Yaldram, and not the least among them, Hasrat Mohani who, of all the people, protested when under the pressure of reactionary critics the PWA

introduced a formal motion at its Urdu conference held in Hyderabad (Deccan) in 1945 to condemn pornography in literature. He found this capitulation unacceptable.

The book gives a graphic account of the achievements and failings of the progressive movement, political as well as intellectual, that swayed practically everyone and elicited sharp responses, some discordant too, from all quarters.

The three movements, though equally inspired with socialist ideas, were motivated differently. The Balkan wars convinced the Indian Muslims of the injustices perpetrated by imperialism, particularly British imperialism, against the world of Islam. At home, this was seen in the abolition of the division of Bengal (1911), the British Parliament's rejection of the proposal for the establishment of a Muslim University at Aligarh (1912) and the Cawnpur Mosque incident (1913). On the international scene it was reflected in the annexation of Muslim territories by the European powers, such as Italy's assault in Libya (1911-12) and European support for Balkan Christians from 1913. Similarly Hasrat Mohani was imprisoned in 1908 for writing an article criticising British education policy in Egypt.

Jamal-ud-Din Afghani's call for Jihad against the British aroused enthusiastic response in the Muslims of the sub-continent to the idea of Pan-Islamism. This generated tremendous political activity within and outside India. Kabul, Constantinople, Berlin and even London became the centres of this activity. Turk and German support was sought for fighting against Britain in the First world War. But Arabs revolted against Ottoman Turkey, no military assistance came from Kabul and the repression of the Kabul regime against the Mohair, apart from cultural, psychological and linguistic repression, shattered all illusions about Pan-Islamism. On the other hand, the hated Tsarist Government was replaced with the Soviet Government in Russia which showed great goodwill to the neighbouring Muslim countries. Occupied areas were returned to Persia and help was offered to various liberation movements, 'To all Muslim toilers of Russian and the East' and 'Declaration of the rights of Toiling and Exploited Peoples' "tore up the secret treaties agreeing "to Tsarist annexation of Constantinople, partition of Persia and the dismemberment of Turkey". This brought Muslims not only to admire the Soviet government and the people but Soviet socialism too.

A rationalistic approach to religion became the fashion and affinities between Islam and socialism were highlighted. In their zeal to launch an international movement against British imperialism, Indian Muslims were drawn closer to the ideas of socialism. On the national front this led to the secularization of the struggle and the Khilafat movement was practically hijacked by Gandhi. The failure of the movement disillusioned many with the Congress as well as with any hope of Hindu-Muslim unity. Sir Syed's efforts reflected the need to come to a compromise with the western scientific outlook in order to equip Muslims with the new education necessary for advancement, even survival in the modern world.

Muslim socialist response to the revolutionary ideas was purely emotional. They neither understood the basic assumptions of socialism nor were committed to its ideology. According to the Appendix of this book by Khizar Humayun Ansari, the general educational level of these intellectuals was extremely low and their knowledge of modern subjects was practically nil, with almost half their number not having studied beyond metric. The motive behind these earlier movements was the struggle for liberation from the British Empire.

Though the socialists who appeared on the scene in 1930s were more articulate and better educated and though they radically influenced thought and provided for emotional education of the people against the psychology and mechanism of exploitation, their influence was also short lived, at least in politics, though in the field of literature they achieved tremendous success and made a headway in bringing workers and peasants closer to the writers, thus overcoming the alienation of the intellectual which has been a bane of the modern age. This affected a radical change in sensibility. Recounting their achievements the author notes:

The Muslim socialists who became Progressive Writers were especially concerned with the problems of contemporary Indian Muslim Society. They developed a socialist critique of the values and conventions of Muslim society, in particular, of the moral framework presented by the mullahs and the treatment of women as second class citizens. Nevertheless, their outlook was fundamentally secular and non-communal; they would not ignore the major concerns of Indian society as a whole. They focused their attention on the poverty of their countrymen, on the need to bring an end to colonial rule.

The book also studies the causes of the failure of the socialist movement among the Indian Muslims and concludes that there were basically four causes for that. First of all there was an inadequate understanding of socialism which forced them to seek guidance from abroad, thus towing the Party line which did not always suit the conditions prevailing at home. For example, they first declared World War II as an imperial war for which the Indians should not be used as cannon fodder. But when in June 1941 Germany attacked Russia they declared it a war of the people and some, like Faiz, even joined the imperial army to fight against Fascism. Similarly, they started as the champions of the entire Indian society but were later inspired by the idea of self-determination for the nationalities and supported the demand for Pakistan. When however, communalism in India seemed to be going out of hand and there were countrywide riots, they also proposed Roman script in place of Persian and Deonagri Scripts to resolve the Urdu-Hindi controversy. However, PWA was so much dominated by Muslim writers and identified with Urdu that Premchand described to Sajjad Zahir, and perhaps himself considered, “this literary movement (the PWA) as a device to trap them”.

Beside a weak understanding of socialism, lack of commitment to its ideology and their shifting policies (which created fissures in their ranks and cost them credibility with the people), the final cause of their failure was their elitist background. They indulged in intellectual luxury. Sajjad Zahir confessed:

What else could we do? We were incapable of manual labour. We had not learnt any craft and our minds revolted against serving the imperialist government. What other field was left? ...

PWA was formed in London. It was founded by the sons of the most privileged class of the Indian Muslims. It got inspiration from Russian, French, English and other European intellectuals, and received nourishment from ‘Oxford Outlook’ and ‘Cambridge Left’. This distance from the proletariat was also used to their advantage by the Progressive Writers who shared a common background with the Congress. ‘Had the PWA emerged from the masses, it would have been strongly opposed. That it emerged from the professional and service classes ensured that it was regarded, not as subversive, but just as another manifestation of modernity’.

Notwithstanding their weaknesses, their contribution to literature was substantial. Mr. Ansari concludes:

First, they developed new literary forms in order to communicate contemporary themes and progressive concerns. Secondly, they laid great emphasis on 'Realism', as they sought a deeper understanding of the individual and his place in society. Thirdly, they fashioned a style of 'revolutionary romanticism' which they felt did justice to the urgency of their message. Finally, they created a proletarian style in order to reach new audience through their literature.

This is a very interesting and instructive study, since our intellectuals are still caught in the same confusions and have not succeeded in evolving an indigenous revolutionary theory.

(1990)



❧ Chapter 28 ❧

Revolt Against Convention



Prose-poem is a revolt against conventional poetry, at least a radical departure from it. It is a revolt against the content as well as the form.

The approach of a conventional poet is intuitive, the expression of a mood, while the attitude of the prose writer is discursive. Prose works through reason and argument and tries to reach its conclusions in a logical manner. Its approach is detached. Thus, a prose-poem, must have some characteristics of prose and some of poetry. In other words, it must combine in itself both intuition and logic. Consider this verse as an example:

*Weakness turned the tears into cold sighs;
We understood how water turns into air.*

Here Ghalib appears to advance an argument. But this is no arguing. It is a poetic use of an argument. The idea is not to prove how a man shedding tears of anguish ends up by emitting cold sighs and what pathological or psychological changes accompany this change of condition. It is just an idea inspired by an observation which has been made into a verse. As against this, the poem *Khizr ke Saath* from the collection, *Dehr ki Nazmein* by Syed Sajjad adopts this method:

*(He) took me to those scientists
Who were studying the stars moving in the skies.
But when it rains they exclaim,
'Gad has blessed us this year'.
I took him to the prostitutes,
Who complained if there was no client,
'Maula is not pleased with me today,
I shall make an offering to the Datta tomorrow'.*

Here a fact has been directly recorded not the idea inspired by it, though the feeling generated by this observation is surely reflected in

these lines. But the feeling has been kept in the background and the observation is recorded so as to enable the reader to recreate the inherent emotion for himself. These lines communicate a feeling almost as directly as a personal experience of this kind would.

The other radical departure is that conventional poetry gives primacy to the word. Naturally, where the observance of metre and rhyme is the rule, the word will become important. This convention further led to the idea of poetic diction. Words are distinguished as poetic and unpoetic. This becomes the basis of the theory that the language of poetry is different from the language of prose. A prose-poem attempts to demolish all such barriers in the process of poetic composition. Meaning is given precedence over the word. The idea of the prose-poem was perhaps suggested by the translations from poetry in other languages, particularly the free rendering of the classics, into English. Words, rhythms and cadences of a language cannot be reproduced in another language. Only the meanings, and to some extent the symbols and the metaphors, may be translated. From this experience the poets might have taken the cue that the beauty of a poem does not solely rest in fine words and that verbal excellence is not the only criterion of good poetry. Verbal nicety is not essential to genuine poetry, which can well do without that. The prose-poem tries to explode the myth of the word that conventional poetry held in such esteem.

Conventional poetry has been warped by *cliché*. Its symbols and metaphors have been fossilized. There is no room for the expression of a new idea or a new experience. The poets now feel a pressing need for new modes of communication rather than wasting themselves in outworn expressions. Syed Sajjad has described conventional poetry in these words:

*It has only worm-eaten manuscripts
With golden figures carved on them.
They do not read them.
Their minds are locked
And they have no inclination to know this world,
no curiosity.*

(Ek Purana Qafela)

Indulgence is not the end of a prose-poem. It is explorative. But it can explore only by keeping the changing realities of life constantly

in the mind. Now when the pace of life is gaining momentum, new words have also appeared without which contemporary poetry cannot be meaningful. Conventional poetry is found absolutely inadequate when it comes to the use of words associated with the machine age. Similarly, it cannot comprehend or communicate the new experience, such as:

*People hurrying to their offices at eight in the morning.
Earth rising to vehicles,
Murderous buses and wagons raising dust.*

Here 'murderous' is also a conventional word and cannot communicate the horrors of an accident realistically. Though there is a strong compulsion to capture the new experience, the hold of the convention is still strong.

Ambiguity has always been an important device in conventional poetry. Urdu *Ghazal* has thrived on it. New aesthetics, under the influence of new modes of life does not give the same value to ambiguity. It has given this place to dialectics. Romanticising life by giving an ambiguous touch to its contradictions is no more accepted as a valid poetic approach. There is a growing feeling now that the ambiguities of life should be comprehended through an analysis of its conflicts. Available poetic forms do not allow this kind of treatment.

Contradiction has otherwise been used cleverly and with dexterity in Urdu literature. But the function of this dialectics has been mainly decorative. No resolution is ever contemplated. For example:

We live by seeing the infidel for whom we die.

(Ghalib)

This is a good illustration of the verbal contradiction exploited by the poet. And this one:

*Had we not cried, our house would still have been the
wasteland;
Had the ocean not been the ocean, it would have been a desert*

(Ghalib)

It is a metaphoric contradiction. This can take the form of still another paradox:

*It was for this that you were warned against the
massacre of the lovers;
Now you have been left alone like Yousaf without the
caravan.*

(Ghalib)

Here an observation has been humorously rendered into a verse. Still another form of contradiction which is closer to life and is also unromantic is as follows:

*The capitalist carried the game by his deceitful tricks:
The worker lost because of his extreme naivety.*

(Iqbal)

This is an oversimplification, since behind this contradiction there lies a whole world of exploitation which demands a thorough analysis that this poetic tradition does not allow. Moreover, the emphasis on the beauty of expression has actually concealed the bitterness underlying this comment, and so the sting and the power of emotional reaction have been totally lost. The emotional reaction here is that of quiet amusement, not of violent agitation, which probably was the intention. The poet today is not interested in poetic brilliance. He wants to highlight the bitter realities of life in a manner that may shake the reader's complacency and move him to action. The following lines from *Anjam Ki Taraf* from the collection of poems under review suggest this new approach:

*In the eyes of the children instead of the pictures of the
fairies.
There are the ads. of the chewing-gum which they have
picked up from the T.V.*

No attempt has been made here to beautify or romanticise the situation. However, the general tone and the style of this poem are very close to their treatment in a *Ghazal* and there is no evidence of any analysis or consistent thinking on the subject. It is more emotive than logical and thus fails to attain the balance that a prose-poem should strive for.

The new poetics demands that poetry should be made an active exercise and its role in life should be defined, and if poetry has no

bearing upon life then it will be reduced to sheer entertainment and would never touch the sublime, that high seriousness which is in the countenance of all great art. It never will become the expression of the best that man is capable of. Poetry must concern itself seriously with life. It must be explorative, not only of the inner recesses of the soul, but also of the processes of the mundane life. It must be scientific.

Urdu poetry has yet to cover a lot of ground to be able to assume such a role, since neither the poet has acquired that technical proficiency, and intellectual maturity, which is a pre-requisite of such a venture, nor is the reader trained to accept poetry as an analytical explorative exercise. This is particularly very difficult in a literary climate where even the most serious discussion falls into sentimental poeticising and an argument is rounded up with a couplet from a *Ghazal*. Issues are thus reduced to matters of a refined taste and encourage indulgence at the cost of discrimination.

A prose-poem does not aim at providing childish wonders to an underdeveloped sensibility. It tries to liberate consciousness and to bring it face to face with the realities of life. Our literary sensibility still labours under the spell of the *Ghazal* or, more precisely *Taghazzul*. The reason, perhaps, is that by temperament we give emotions precedence over issues. The emergence of the prose-poem in our literature is also indicative of the shift in emphasis in favour of the issues of everyday existence. Perhaps we may cease to be creatures of sentiment.

(1990)



❧ Chapter 29 ❧

Sense and Sensibility of the Age



Here is a poet and a poetry that represent a definite phase in our tradition, social as well as literary. Dr. Safdar Husain represents the sensibility of the age with all its conflicts, compromises, illusions, disillusion, romance and realism, and so does his poetry.

All the poems in this collection carry a prominent impression which is formed by the anomaly of an extremely traditional reserve on the one hand and a blunt confession and a rather unscrupulous declaration of bare facts and motives on the other. The two strains run simultaneously throughout the fourteen poems of *Raqs-e-Taoos*. If, on the one hand, as in *Bazyaft*, the poet very sincerely confesses of having been enamoured of the charms of his pretty interlocutor, he cannot lead the conversation beyond a scholarly discourse because, as he tells in *Marboot Fasle*, a sense of responsibility, the difference of age and demands of decency would not let him cross the limits. Similarly he would be reticent about the identity of his beloved and would rather conceal it under the cover of abstract allusions and generalisations, and at the same time would write a panegyric to his love, his cousin (*Binte-Um*).

These are the extremes, apparently poles apart, which define the poetry of Dr. Safdar Hussain. It is truly speaking the performance of a scholar poet, a judge as well as an artist, a rational as well as an emotional being. Actually he is standing on the crossroads of tradition and with a full awareness of the divergent paths before him. In this respect *Raqs-e-Taoos* occupies a significant place in our literary tradition. It is an enunciation of the sensibility of the age. Let me explain it in some detail.

We inherited a very strong romantic tradition in Urdu poetry which for precision we may call the '*Ghazal*' tradition, which was a logical outcome of the environmental conditions. *Ghazal* is the creation of a social set up which accepted God in the heaven and convention on the earth. A lot of problems that baffle us today simply

did not exist. A large portion of our living conditions, physical as well as metaphysical, was taken for granted. The place of the individual in society was fixed; there was no scepticism about ultimate causes or about defining man's responsibilities in life. Once spared these metaphysical considerations, the individual was left free to pursue his most immediate ends within the limits of religious and conventional sanctions. Any consideration of revolting against these sanctions was out of question. But the immediate ends were difficult to realise. In a class conscious society, further oppressed by a very strict tradition of the segregation of sexes it was almost impossible to fulfil any ambition social or emotional. Dejection, melancholy and fatalism were inevitable. Again, the veiling of women had put it entirely in their hands to allow a glimpse of their charm to the lovers. Even with utmost generosity such glimpses could not be satiating for the passionate suitor. This interesting situation brought many peculiarities to our poetic tradition. The lover was forced to make passionate entreaties to the beloved and write panegyrics in her praise, thus of necessity exaggerating her virtues, physical or otherwise. Beauty being elusive, poetry became abstract and generalised. The beloved was not only made something celestial, a nymph or a houri, she assumed, in a highly class conscious society, a status of superiority. She was the princess for the lover who was her courtier. Thus the love of *Ghazal* tradition is courtly love and employs an inflated, highly sophisticated, decorative diction which implores the queen of beauty to be condescending to the passionate lover.

This was the tradition of Urdu poetry which held complete sway right up till the first quarter of the present century. This was the dominant trait not only of *Ghazal*, but of all Urdu poetry and even other literature in Urdu.

During the second quarter of the century, and particularly in the thirties, we started experiencing new strains in our overall pattern of life. There was a marked shift in our social, political, religious and even emotional outlook. Art and literature were also tremendously affected. The old system crumbled down and probably for the first time the enslaved people of the sub-continent realised their potentialities. The fatalistic attitude of despair and resignation was replaced with a confidence in national capacities and a self assurance in the individuals. We started facing facts and the imagination lost some of its charm for us. Women gave up purdah and the illusion of their celestial charm was broken. They demanded social equality with men and lost the place of pride and privilege which the old feudalistic conventional pattern allowed them. Instead of singing hymns to

Platonic love the poets started talking of sexual relations. The emotional tone of the poems gave way to a dispassionate analytical language.

In Europe we can thus talk of modern sensibility, but not so in our context. We in the east have inherited a very strong and profound tradition which the west never had. The Age of Reason there denounced everything that preceded it and romanticism condemned the domination of Reason. 19th Century succumbed to conflicts of attempting to reconcile the two and the twentieth century found the west, extremely discouraged by the two Wars, completely disillusioned. Thus Europe had all through been trying to find its tradition and each of its ages had had a sensibility peculiar to it. The things in the east have been quite different. There is a strong well established tradition that is thousands of years old. It has remained almost the same through ages and is as much a part of us as flesh and blood. The outside influences have no doubt enriched it, but never shaken it. Thus anything new must adjust itself to the old which is formidable. So the meaning of modern sensibility in our context is not the same as in the European context. Even the idea of the isolation of the artist is a complete hoax in our society. In the west it is understandably genuine, but it is foreign to us. Our society is based on family system which is patriarchal. The father is solely responsible for the whole family and when his energies exhaust the responsibilities shift to the son. Almost every young man in our society has parents, brothers and sisters, at least some of them to worry about, and the intellectual who bewails of his feelings of isolation over a cup of tea at late hours in the evening does not actually feel isolation. In most of the cases his problem is that he has so many attachments to worry about and from these responsibilities it is in the idle gossip that he seeks escape. Thus for us the modern sensibility is not the sensibility of a person completely cut off from tradition. On the other hand, it is the strong hold of tradition that is resisting any innovation, and of the new currents that are trying to break through the old mass. It is a recognition of this vital situation that is most needed now. What is actually happening is that we have been divided into two camps. On one side are the adherents to tradition and on the other the rebels from it. Each is suspicious of the other to the extent that neither wants to know its rival. As a result their shells are tightening and narrowing down. And since this awareness is lacking there is no meaningful artistic activity and we are facing the acutest decadence and stagnation in our literature. Precisely speaking, there is lack of intellectual honesty and so much of prejudice and suspicion that none likes to know the truth.

Raqs-e-Taos is most significant in that it brings out this recognition of the contemporary situation. The grip of the old is strong, but the force of the new is also irresistible. At a time when to talk of romance is thought philistine, to write romantic poetry and boldly acclaiming it as such is the surest evidence of the poet's intellectual honesty. He feels the romantic impulse and unhesitatingly pursues it without any apology. Simultaneously he is aware of his responsibility to a society whose values he accepts. Intellectual honesty combined with a moral social sense is a thing which we feel missing today and which is the most vital need of our time.

Dr. Safdar Hussain has tried to bring about a compromise. What degree of success he has achieved is still too early to decide. But the undeniable fact is that he has pointed the way. Our enthusiastic realists have taken it into their heads that it is realism to concentrate on isolated facts. Knowledge of ultimate truth having not been ordained to man, a fact is significant only in its context. In any other context it may not be a fact at all. Thus a modern teacher bred in the decencies of a sanctimonious teacher-pupil relationship finds himself faced with quite a new situation in which the teacher and the pupil meet one another on almost equal and informal terms. A very conventional old timer experiencing great emotional tension and avoiding an open avowal of it typifies the average individual of the present age. Thus, embarrassed by the scintillating beauty of a Shalimar social evening to the extent of nervousness, he starts talking of Zebun Nisa, Noor Jehan, Anarkali and Jehangir's Harem. The emotional tension is so great that it may break through the barriers of moral decencies, of which the poet is too conscious. These are the situations which Dr. Safdar Hussain has tried to study in the fourteen poems in *Raqs-e-Taos*. And he has undertaken these studies without reservation. This is the greatest merit of these poems. He expresses himself directly as he feels and experiences.

As in the content so in the form a compromise between the old and the new is attempted. The form of these poems is the favourite *Ghazal* form with the rhyme dropped. *Ghazal* is the form capable of the greatest variety, in Urdu poetry, even perhaps in any poetry in the world. Its most remarkable and unique characteristic is its fixed form with unlimited freedom for content. All the couplets in a *Ghazal* are formally fitted in one pattern, but their subject matter may be as varied as desired. A poem, on the other hand, is restricted in its meaning to one subject while in form it may be as free as free verse. Thus in one poem only one set of ideas can find expression. Combination of the two may give maximum freedom to the poet.

❧ Chapter 30 ❧

Mind-Matter Relationship in Wordsworth



Wordsworth's world is the world of the eighteenth century. His roots lie in the age of reason. He started with the Augustan positives, (Reason, Truth and Nature), and ended up by finding them inadequate. Reason, common sense and nature were his initial references. He believed in the Newtonian world of mechanical relationships. Locke, Hartly and Godwin were behind him. To him the mind was sensitive medium which made him feel with "A corresponding mild creative breeze", and his soul got nourishment from the "Eolian visitations". Having been bred in the Eighteenth century atmosphere of rationalism, Wordsworth could have no sympathy with the abstract and the metaphysical. He believed in the common man and in the language of the common man. Milton could still use mythology sincerely and Pope could utilise it artistically. For Pope it was a convenient and attractive device. But Wordsworth would have none of it. To play with an idea in which no one believed would be juvenile pastime and the time in which Wordsworth lived could not take life so causally. It was a time of great things happening all over the world. It was a time leading to turmoils and revolutions. It was an insecure world in which Wordsworth was to find a way for himself, a meaning for his life and his art. It was not the complacent world of the earlier Eighteenth century in which Pope could laugh out at the petty follies of women and think that he had taken his craft to perfection. In a conventional world he exploited the convention so successfully that Dr. Johnson remarked that Pope had said the last word in poetry, and "to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity", (though he admits the possibility of "new sentiments and new images".) This is sufficient to show how ignorant the age of Johnson was of the things which were only a few decades away. Wordsworth saw the changing world, and in this changing

world he had to discover the new order of things, the new relationship between man and his world.

The Eighteenth century rationalism made it impossible for him to return to the world of mythology. Mythology filled the gap between man and his world. It created an order of intermediate beings which related man to the inanimate world of nature and its fauna and flora. Wordsworth's poetry carries within it a great sense of deprivation. It is not simply a psychological deprivation. He feels that he has been cut off from nature, that he has been left lonely in a world of dead objects. In the famous sonnet 'The world is too much with us', he starts with a disgust at the commercial and worldly occupations of man: "Getting and spending, we lay waste our power". But suddenly a feeling of being abandoned, of being deserted takes hold of him and he protests:

*The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything we are out of tune.*

This is not a psychological state of despondency. There is a nostalgic reverberation in the lines that follow:

*It moves us not--Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.*

He is here seeking a pagan world which was peopled with the living creatures of mythology. A Pagan never felt himself alone. The Dryads in the forest, the Naiads in the water, the spirits in the stars and the breath of Zephyr were always with him: "When holy were the haunted forest boughs, holy the air, the water and the fire". Such a world was denied to the age of science in which the bright sun of the new knowledge extinguished the light of thousands of small stars of superstition.

It was the scientific attitude of the age, the attitude that saw a free relationship between the mind of man and the universe, which rejected abstractions, superstitions and myths. But up till now man had conceived of nature either through abstractions, or through myths, either as a big machine, a divine clock-work, or as a

supernatural agency. Wordsworth rejected both. Neither did he trust abstraction which would put down the universe to a formula or a mathematical equation, nor could he believe, as simple folk did, that all the world was infused with a soul of one kind or another. As Bacon said in his *Wisdom of the Ancients*, mythology was the philosophy of the unsophisticated mind. Wordsworth rejected both the philosophies. He could not believe in the sophisticated philosophy of abstractions and he did not adhere to the simple beliefs reflected in so many myths of the common man, whose spokesman he desired to be. The result was that he was left groping in the dark, dealing with a dead world, since, according to Coleridge, “objects as objects are essentially fixed and dead”. He could turn only to the physical world. But the physical world had a direct relationship with the mind, and he could see “those first born affinities that fit/Our new existence to existing things”.

Wordsworth found a blessing in the gentle breeze. These Eolian visitations allured his soul to their music. He felt indebted to the nourishing influence of nature and reprimanded himself for:

*Unprofitably travelling towards the grave,
Like a false steward who hath much received
And renders nothing back.*

He was actually conscious that “Fair seed time had my soul, and I grew up / Foster’d alike by beauty and by fear”. Thus were his “sympathies enlarged / And thus the common range of veritable things/Grew dear’ to him. This thinking had the approval of the prevalent philosophy of nature typical of Rousseau and finds expression in:

*Man was entirely free, alone and wild,
Was blessed as before – for he was nature’s child.
He, all superior but his God disdain’d,
Walk’d none restraining, and by none restrained,
Confessed no law but what his reason taught,
Did all he wish’d, and wish’d but what he ought.*

This bliss continued till the domestic joy decayed, “As despot courts their blaze of gems displayed”. This was the world of the French Revolution, of the turbulent decades in which Wordsworth found the best of poetic inspiration coming to him. This was the climate which inspired him to claim, by words which speak of nothing more than what we are,

*Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of death.*

And all this to show how exquisitely the individual mind was fitted to the universe. This was the world of concrete reality and of concrete effort, where men

Were called upon to exercise their skill
No in Utopia, subterraneous Fields,
Or some secreted Island, Heaven knows where,
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us, the place on which in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all.

This was the world of youthful exuberance, with a great sense of individual liberty, and of a freedom that aroused men to action. But the French Revolution belied the dreams of those enthusiasts when the Frenchmen became oppressors and changed a work of self-defence for "one of conquest". Betrayed and frustrated, Wordsworth sought departure from Godwin and his mechanical philosophy.

This history of Wordsworth's progress of mind leads from politics to mysticism and, as is seen by him in his own review, *The Prelude*, as a history of his regression from the world of objects to the world of mind. In the first book of *The Prelude*, there is the hint of an Eolian-Orphean relationship between mind and nature. The first aesthetic response to nature is turned into a companionship with nature. But nature, which was the initial source of inspiration, was gradually relegated into a subsidiary position until it was totally subjected to the mind in a manner,

*That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,
Else never canst receive.*

The first two books of *The Prelude* give a graphic picture of this transition. From the very beginning the mind starts responding actively to the external world. Though it is the sweet breath of heaven which creates "A corresponding mild creative breeze", it is not the only creative agent. In the mind the sense impressions become "A tempest, a redundant energy/ vexing its own creation". The mind becomes a medium which nourishes the experiences of the external world to ripeness. This is why Wordsworth does not make "A present joy the matter of [his] song". He believes that ideas should be allowed to be cultivated and matured and further reinforced by the mind's

“Internal echo of the imperfect sound”. It is the mind which develops and carries to perfection the experiences received from the outside world. The Eolian harp is now endowed with a vitality of its own, and hence the poetic theory of thoughts recollected in tranquillity. Though the world of experience is still important, Wordsworth has now started finding another reality in the “auxiliar light” of the mind. Very closely following Longinus on the sources of sublimity, Wordsworth states in the first book of *The Prelude*, lines 157 onward, the requisites of creative energy as “the vital soul” and “general truths”. Beside these two inborn talents, he also enumerates other ingredients of the creative faculty, such as social awareness. Idea and experience still go side by side. But a change starts becoming evident as he recounts how he thought of choosing a subject for a great poem, and considered and gave up at least eight topics till he came to a definite decision. All these eight abandoned subjects, it is interesting to note, related to great revolutionaries and fighters for liberty. Finally Wordsworth settles down to a philosophic song of Truth. Disappointed with the outcome of active struggle, he found deliverance in transfiguring the world not by political action but by the modifying colours of the imagination. This change, however, as *The Prelude* tries to make us believe, came slowly but steadily. In the beginning the mind and the universe are seen in a dialectical relationship. The material for thought is supplied by the universe, but it is refined and perfected by the mind, the mind which is a plastic power, which is framed “like the breath/And harmony of music”, which symbolises the soul that is “Wisdom and spirit of the universe” and which is “an agent of the one great mind/ Creates, creator and receiver both/Working but in alliance with the works/Which it beholds.” There is now a distrust of science, which is “not the glory” but a succedaneum and a prop to infirmities. The intellect cannot be parcelled out by geometric rules. To him the unity of all has been revealed, and the soul is such a composite thing which “Hath no beginning”. The orientation is now almost complete, since there is now a wish “for things which cannot be” and for “infantile desire”, because in innocence and love is humility. This is a paradoxical wish, simultaneously aiming at the indefinite and the humble. This conflict, which is the subject of the celebrated odes of Keats, seems to have been effortlessly resolved by Wordsworth in the symbol of the ruins. The English countryside (which is the subject of one of the best descriptive passages in Bk-II of *The Prelude*) and the old England pictures attempt to capture in the monastery, the castle

and the wayside inn the human drama condensed between life and death. The ruins suggest the transitoriness of life; but the associations which surround them tend to lift them out of the bounds of the temporal. These are symbolic as the *Grecian Urn* of Keats, and "the invisible bird" reminds us of Keats's *Nightingale*. The mind of man, according to his symbolism, comprehends reality, but at the same time transcends it and becomes "an agent of one great mind", ultimately creating the sentiment of a being spread.

*O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
O'er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart
O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
And mightly depth of water.*

With these almost Biblical utterances we enter a new level of consciousness, where the physical world seems to lose significance and the soul is exposed to a different order of experience, and the poet forgets

*That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in my mind.*

In a note to *Immortality Ode*, Wordsworth elaborated further that "many times while going to school, I have grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from the abyss of idealism to the reality".

It was this state of heightened sensibility which at times made him feel that the sky was not a sky of the earth and the huge hill rose up and strode after him, thus giving him a mystic experience of "unknown modes of being" in which he could hear the sounds that are "the ghostly language of the ancient earth, "It was in such experiences that Wordsworth nursed the spirit of "religious love" in which he walked with nature, thus carried through devotion to transport.

But, as Basil Willey has remarked, Wordsworth's mysticism remained deeply rooted in the earth, since belief in him followed experience. His vision did not spring from belief, rather the belief itself was the offspring of his experience. And even his mysticism is not basically detached from the mechanism of Hartley, since "the

soul/Remembering how she felt, but what she felt/Remembering not,
retains an obscure sense/ Of possible sublimity”.

These lines echo Hartley’s theory that some vibrations of sense impressions from the world of experience are so faint that we are not immediately aware of them. These, reinforced in the mind, sometimes come to us as intuitions or sudden revelations. Thus, even Wordsworth’s mysticism is basically empirical, and we may conclude by saying that though Wordsworth felt himself transported to mystical visions, he did not, till the end, abandon the earlier training in scientific thinking, which was the original impulse of his poetry. The same three-tier empirical mysticism is behind the three-fold distinction of Fancy, and Primary and Secondary imagination of Coleridge.

(1977)



❧ Chapter 31 ❧

Social Relevance of Drama



There has been a debate in recent years whether drama is possible in the modern age. Some believe that tragedy is possible only in a religious society. But we have had in our times such a success with tragedy that not only we have so many of them, but also that these have been very good and at the same time very popular. Our own times have in fact been rather distinguished in this field and it is one of the three great ages of drama, viz., Greek drama, Renaissance drama, and Modern drama, and the modern drama has in some respects even surpassed the drama in the preceding two ages, particularly in its range of subjects and its unprecedented popularity. This whole debate in fact raises two basic issues: the function of drama and its relevance to the present society.

If we make a working definition of drama, it may, more than anything else, be described as a play of conflict, and this conflict is presented on the stage primarily through spectacle and dialogue, in front of the spectators. The presence of the spectators is an important feature that distinguishes drama from other arts. These spectators are an integral part of drama and cannot be separated from it. Apart from the spectators the drama will simply not exist. It is this single feature which brings drama so close to reality. The dramatist projects the conflict before the spectators, and the spectators are drawn from practically all walks of life. Literature is mainly for the literate, and other arts demand a certain cultivation of taste for proper appreciation. But drama has the widest possible appeal, and reaches out to the largest public. Consequently, it deals with the subjects which have the most general appeal, since the success or failure of a play is determined on the spot. If the spectators like it, it is a success. If they hiss at it, it is a failure. The spectators are vitally involved in the play, and no dramatist can ignore the moment to moment response of the spectators. Last, but not the least, is the factor of the box-office. A dramatist has, therefore, to be as much integrated with

his spectators as possible (that is why some question the relevance of drama to a disintegrating society and consider it valid only in a religious society). Drama, therefore, has to be very close to reality; and if art reflects life, then nothing reflects its times better than drama. Drama is, therefore, a very authentic record of any age. In a disintegrating society drama presents a picture of disintegration and in an age of cohesion drama is the vehicle of a comprehensive view of life. In the modern age of confusion and divided aims it should therefore not be surprising to see that the modern drama, though in a sense very realistic, has evaded direct answers; and the critics of modern drama do have a point when they claim that drama is possible only in a religious society.

The charge will become clearer if we see what drama was, and what it did, in a religious society. The Greek society was, for instance, such a society; corporate, homogeneous and cohesive. In Greek drama we see that the conflict which was its subject was not an individual's conflict, not a personal dilemma, since the fears, aspirations and conflicts of classical drama were not the fears, aspirations and conflicts of an individual, but concerned the whole society. The dilemmas were social dilemmas. Greek concept of life had no room for the individual idiosyncrasy. There were no individuals, but members of a group—members in the sense of not being alienated from the group, rather being corporate with it. This is obvious from the fact that Greek drama was basically choric drama. We have this from Aristotle that: (1) 'The number of actors was first increased to two by Aeschylus who curtailed the business of the Chorus, and made the dialogue, or spoken portion, take the leading part in the play (2) A third actor and scenery were due to Sophocles.' Thus, before Aeschylus there used to be only one actor. Still earlier Greek tragedy had no actor at all. The play was performed by the chorus and the leader of the chorus, and before this even the leader of the chorus did not exist. Then it was purely a choric performance. The chorus is a group, and represents a group. There is no room for the individual. Through subsequent development and modifications, such as the addition to the number of actors and the introduction of dialogue and scenery, the Greek drama retained its choric character, and the chorus remained the dominant feature.

Another interesting fact is that these actors played various roles in the same play. An actor played one role in one scene and another in the next. This leaves no room for any identification with any one actor

or any one role. Also, these actors put on masks. All performances were masked performances, and a mask has no personality, no individuality. Thus we have from Aristotle that the plot had precedence over the character. According to him the poet first made the plot and then created characters to project the plot. The characters were the props on which the plot was spread. Later, T.S. Eliot also advocated a drama in which plot should be the main thing, and characters given a subsidiary place. In his essay, *Four Elizabethan Dramatists*, he notes that the reproduction of the classics on a modern stage is very misleading because of the intruding personality of the actor. He is against the actor of genius and pleads for simply an actor, since an actor playing a role according to his genius will not do justice to the role. He advocates conventions for drama on the lines of the conventions of Russian ballet, in which an actor, when he is on the stage, has only a stage personality, not the personality of his everyday life. This is in line with Eliot's theory of the impersonality of the artist. An actor in a Greek play had no personality as such. Another suggestion that comes from the classical scholars is that Aristotle was misread by the Renaissance critics who introduced a personal element in his *Poetics*. The change of fortune was thus translated as the change in hero's fortune, and *Moirai*, which means portion, was translated as hero's destiny.

The most obvious example of this impersonality of drama is the Greek drama itself. Take, for instance, *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus. Here Orestes is called upon to avenge the death of his father. But his father, Agamemnon, has been murdered by his mother, Clytemnestra. Now, in order to avenge his father, if Orestes murders his own mother, he violates a sacred relationship and the Erinyes of his mother will haunt him. But if he does not take the revenge of his father's murder, as is obligatory upon him, the Erinyes of his father will pursue him. This is the dilemma of Orestes. But to see it only as an individual's dilemma is to miss the point of the play. This was actually a vital dilemma, the dilemma of the Greek society, which had, perhaps recently, emerged from a matriarchal system into a patriarchal system. It was perhaps the debate of the day, and Aeschylus projects this debate, between the filial duties, between the claim of the mother and the claim of the father, which is settled through divine intervention, on the verdict of Athena. This is also clear from the fact that Aeschylus here sought a social reconciliation and not a personal justification. Similarly Oedipus faces a tragedy that is primarily not his tragedy, but the tragedy of Thebes, which he undertakes to relieve from the curse,

which too is a family curse. Thus, Greek drama is a social drama, and the Greek dramatist writes with a sense of social responsibility, a responsibility which Plato found on the decline in his time and debarred the poet from his Republic. In Greek drama the catharsis was a social catharsis which restored the balance and harmony of the society.

This homogeneous society, however, disintegrated, and was lost in the darkness of the Middle Ages, lost once for all, and its cohesive character has not yet been restored, though in the Dark Ages it had a different kind of uniformity, as its name suggests, the uniformity of Darkness. No drama could be possible in that age, neither comedy nor tragedy (except for Morality plays, Miracles, etc, which were rather allegories built on stock characters and stock situations). The seriousness of the church-dominated world would stand no triviality, and comedy had no place in this world. Tragedy was not possible since for a Christian neither suffering was possible nor sacrifice. The Christian never suffered or surrendered his life, but bargained. As preached by the church, a Christian gave up his life in the hope of getting a better life hereafter, since according to his faith life before and after death formed one continuity. Similarly when he suffered he knew that he would be rewarded for that. Suffering and sacrifice were a reality, according to Thomas Browne, to the pagan, who believed that his life was the only life, and that there was no hereafter. Thus, the Dark Ages had no drama worth the name.

We then come to the great age of drama in the Renaissance. Of the many ingredients of the Renaissance the two main factors were freedom and individualism, the freedom of thought and the freedom of action along with a feeling of man's tremendous potentialities. This resulted from corruption in the church, so graphically presented by Chaucer and Spenser, and the material achievements of the adventurers, explorers and scientists. The interest in the vague, remote and uncertain other world, uncertain because, beside other reasons, promised by unreliable priests, was declining and man was becoming this-worldly. Man, who had so long been suppressed and made responsible to the church and to the vague forces that the church represented, suddenly realised that he was not responsible to anything or anyone. Each pursued his own course independent of all shackles, and heterogeneity in society came to be regarded as an ideal, culminating in the romantic slogan that man was born free and that he must cast off chains.

While he gained this new consciousness of his independence and powers, the Renaissance man retained some of the illusions about himself from the medieval ages. Thus, while he knew that he was free to act, he also believed that he was infallible, and having been created in the image of God, the most perfect of creatures, the cream of creation. In short, he believed himself to be omnipotent. This was the basic conflict which formed the subject of Shakespearean tragedy—the conflict between limited capacity and boundless ambition. His aspirations were sky high and his ability to realize them was extremely limited. On the ladder of Being man put himself on the highest rung while in his capacity, that is, in his scientific control of the universe he was still on practically the lowest rung. As Bradley remarked of Hamlet, his problem was ‘the sense of the soul’s infinity, and the sense of the doom which not only circumscribes that infinity, but appears to be its offspring.’ Consequently, we come across two types of heroes in Shakespeare: unrestrained, relentless egotists, and confused and incapacitated intellectuals. There are those who are conscious of their power and do not care for anything else. They are the villains, like Iago, Richard III, Edmund, and to some extent, Macbeth and Lear. The other type is symbolised in *Hamlet*, where egotism is checked by vague fears. The Renaissance emancipated man, and the power so released frightened him. He looked at his own freedom with horror. Shakespeare saw this destructive power in his villains. The horror caused by the release of this tremendous energy may be compared with the horror of the modern man in the face of nuclear explosion, which so much dominates Japanese fiction and films, they being the only people directly subjected to its ruthlessness. Such was the dilemma of the Renaissance man, what should he do with his freedom? Sell it to the devil, like Doctor Faustus, or let it rest in inaction, for lack of direction, for want of a goal, like Hamlet? This meaningless freedom creates either unbridled, irresponsible egotism, or doubt, confusion, inaction and isolation. It creates a world of weariness and pessimism. This is the dilemma of the modern man also. It creates Draculas and desperados or the tramps and the morbidly sick. Carlyle called the society of his age the society of unrelatedness in which doubt and confusion had incapacitated man and dried up in him all sources of action. Alienated man has come to be an accepted definition of modern man. The same situation exists now and modern drama reflects the same problems. There are desperados, like the fire raisers in Frisch, or the lost men, as the tramps in Beckett. Drama, since Shakespeare, has done one thing, and

that it did superbly, on it depends its success. It concentrated on exposure. It exposed the fantasy which man had created around him. It exposed his illusions. Such is the stuff of the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg, and this is the subject of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. A significant feature of modern man's psychology is that he has not only inherited certain illusions from the past, not only is he deluded by the brisk pace of modern life, he somehow has come to believe that illusions are essential for him and he must acquire them if he can. He builds his ivory tower, or regresses into the past or dreams of the future, mixing memory and desire. He believes with Conrad's Marlow that life cannot be sustained except on illusions. Regression and fantasy are symptomatic of his alienation from reality. And this confused man seeks, if at all, a reconciliation in the world of fantasy, like Shakespeare's Prospero, who seeks reconciliation in a strange island, somewhere in the unknown, and through the agency of magic. *The Tempest* is a romance, since the world it conjures up never existed and could not be realised, simply because it was conceived in the fancy and had no roots in reality. Shakespeare was a disappointed man, wishing for reconciliation in an unsympathetic world and dreaming of an earthly paradise. He could translate his wishful thinking only into a romance. Similarly George and Martha in *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* try to construct a private world of their own and create an imaginary son, even whose birth Martha feels gave her great pains, and Albee in this play tries to bring her out of that illusion, as George claims to have achieved in the end. But what happens after such a reconciliation, the author does not say. Like a fairy-play, it comes to a happy ending. So does *The Tempest* end, and Shakespeare finds no use for a reconciled Prospero, whose every third thought, when back in Milan, shall be his grave. For the same reason King Lear has to die when everything is finally settled. What Lear, for example, reconciles to is his realisation that he is not everything, that he has his limitations, and that he misjudged others. Suppose now when he knows his capacities precisely and he makes a correct self assessment, what would he become. What is the guarantee that he will not become a Richard III or an Iago, who have no flattering ideas of themselves, but within their limits, their egotism is terrific. They are the people reconciled to themselves but not to their worlds with which they are at strife. The point may be brought home in relation to Greek drama, where beyond a personal reconciliation there is also a social reconciliation, which does not happen in Shakespeare. That is why Lear dies, but Orestes lives on, so does Oedipus, and they live in

bliss. That a more sensible and practical Lear would have become a Richard III is not a mere cynical conjecture. This is an important theme in modern drama. The master and the servant change places in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, while the match seller in Pinter's *A slight Ache* becomes the master of the house and Edward takes the place of the match seller. Similarly in Frederik Knott's *Wait until Dark* the helpless blind woman becomes as ruthless as the man assaulting her when he too is blinded by the darkness. The woman who can freely move in her apartment without the help of sight has now the advantage over the man who is a stranger to the place and is obstructed by darkness. She now turns fierce and murders the man. The point is that the present oppressive system has so much debased man that when the oppressed get a chance they prove even more ruthless than their oppressors. The man who defeats oppression does not stop at that. He himself becomes an agent of oppression, and considers his spirit of vengeance as natural. Self-awareness does not necessarily make a man socially aware. Personal freedom is not necessarily responsible freedom, and there is more likelihood of a free man turning into a monster, or exposing himself to a new snare, as Nora, in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in the end, after abandoning her home, her husband and children, takes refuge with the disillusioned Mrs. Linde, and is most probably going to meet a fate not much different from hers. There are again the same two possibilities; doubt and confusion or villainy and ruthlessness. There is no possibility of sympathy and reconciliation. There is more likelihood of an unchecked ego turning into a monster rather than an angel, since the modern man has only known the former and has had no experience of the latter. This is where modern drama lags behind classical drama, since it brings man out of his illusions but does not tell him how to behave as a responsible person. Modern drama shows that we are wrong, but does not tell us how to act correctly. It tells us that we are confused, but gives us no direction. The modern dramatist's approach is non-committal. For centuries now any commitment on the part of the artist has been considered unartistic. It makes him partisan while art professes to be impersonal. This misplaced concept of objectivity, this artistic unconcern gave birth to the idea of art for the sake of art. All activity is a choice, and an artist has a point of view, and this point of view is there in his art, whether he confesses it or not. What he actually avoids is the responsibility of adherence to a point of view. But he definitely wants the reader to derive that point of view himself. Here Dr. Johnson's objection to Shakespeare is to the point.

From Shakespeare's plays, according to him, a system of precepts can be derived, but the writer himself takes no clearly stated moral stand. This amoral approach has been considered as the genuine approach for the artist in a chaotic world of divided aims and confused values. But a growing sense of anarchy and consequent threat to western civilisation have given some anxious moments to western thinkers, and people, like T.S. Eliot, Sartre, etc., talk of a definite role of the artist and of his specific responsibility to the society. There has been a sharp reaction against the individualistic irresponsible attitude of the artist who is now called upon to be firmly committed.

The artist in the classical age reflected life, and also suggested the right course for it. The modern artist, since the Renaissance, has absolved himself of this responsibility. Now he is only a detached observer of the drama of life. His work is limited to exposure only. The drama, which originated on the altar, has now come to the stage, where the spectacle of life, presented with no obvious bias, is watched by the spectators from a distance, for purely aesthetic pleasure, except that in some cases it has been turned into a platform giving personal or coterie slogans. The most important social function of drama, that of social catharsis has now ceased. Thus the charge that drama is not possible in an irreligious society. Eliot said as much when, writing of religion and literature, he remarked that art must be aesthetically judged for its artistic merit, but it must also be morally judged from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.

Religion was no more the regulating force after the Renaissance; another regulating force was replacing it, and this was the new science. It was this new science which was playing the role of the classical artist, the role of giving a definite direction to human activity. The artist, however, by and large, had not yet acknowledged this new force, and was still living in the world of medieval values. Euripides had visualised such a situation in *The Bacchae* where young Pentheus refuses to acknowledge the new god Dionysus, who is wisely accepted by the seer Teiresias and the seasoned Cadmus. The consequence is very horrible to Pentheus who is torn limb to limb by his own mother in frenzy. Modern art too spells horror and destruction. The direction, since the Renaissance, has come not from the artists but from the pioneers of science. One of the earliest among them was Bacon.

What we get from Bacon, in his essays and philosophical dissertations, is mainly a delimitation of the boundaries of knowledge

and action. His discussion of the *Idola* was aimed at bringing man out of the various illusions which caused self-aggrandisement and deluded him. Bacon advised man to be watchful against various prejudices, misconceptions, and fantasies and confine himself to the objective world and his scientific experience of it. *The Essays* debunked vague fears and false ideals. His views on death, truth, honesty, and friendship shocked his readers, and he was dubbed as 'the meanest of mankind'. But he simply exposed what people tacitly accepted. He saw that with the greatest presumptions to morality, honesty and faithfulness, people were generally immoral, dishonest, and selfish. His aim was not to defend these depravities, and he was not a conventional moralist. He took a scientific view of the moral problem. He studied the rules that regulated morality in his society, and, on the basis of this data, suggested laws of moral conduct, which he termed as 'dispersed meditations', 'set down rather significantly than curiously.' He wanted people to realise that this life allows no absolutes, and that each man's virtue corresponded to his capacities. It is not possible to be honest absolutely, and in all situations. Therefore man must know where he can be honest and where not. If he cannot afford to be honest, then he must be able to decide to what extent and to what end he may safely deviate from the truth. That is to say, Bacon advocated the scientific attitude that all progress is relative, and man moves towards perfection very slowly, from stage to stage, and that he goes on rectifying his errors as he proceeds. It is no use to set before one ideals which one cannot achieve and consequently fall a prey to lack of confidence, dejection, and worst of all, a guilty conscience. Bacon suggested that within a very small, limited range of his capacity man can achieve a lot. Science has demonstrated how from a speed of a few miles an hour, of the first locomotive, a progress can be made to the fabulous speed of 25,000 miles an hour, the speed of a space rocket. Science taught humility and patience and practically demonstrated the reward these virtues brought. Bacon was the pioneer of this science, not Shakespeare. This one point, incidentally, is enough to refute 'the Baconian theory', which credits Bacon with the authorship of Shakespeare's work. While Shakespeare saw only confusion in his age, Bacon saw great possibilities for science in it. Shakespeare's heroes are either devils or sceptics. He lacks Bacon's vision of a progressive man strengthened with the powers released by science. Shakespeare sought fantasies instead of scientific clarity.

Beside this scientific resolution of the conflict between desire and action, there was also an idealistic attempt. This was the dialectical approach of Hegel. He saw human dilemma as a conflict between 'the substantive and sound, the fundamental stratum of realised divine nature and the personal conscious life, simply as such unhampered in its self-determination and freedom. Substantive and the personal come into clash and cause tragedy. According to him, the conflict in Sophocles' *Antigone* is between Creon, who sees only state responsibility, and Antigone, who recognises only the filial bond. The king has no concern with filial duty, and Antigone does not care about the larger interest of state security. This is what Hegel calls 'the one-sided particularity of the complementaries', since the two stands are not mutually exclusive, and though they may be justified in their respective places, from a higher consideration both are at fault. Thus, Hegel sees tragedy as a conflict between the substantive and the personal, and he considers classical tragedy to be substantive, and the modern personal. He too emphasises the social role of tragedy. But Hegel took an idealistic philosophical view of dialectics and did not see it as a vital active progressive force. That life moves forward through contradictions, that there is a unity of the opposites, is the fundamental law of scientific dialectics. Thus unity of the opposites does not exist in any higher realm, but is a concrete fact of everyday activity of life.

Shakespearean fantasy does not help us at all, since it is independent of the practice of daily life. Shakespeare's plays, for instance, give us a picture of chaos and confusion, and from their study we conclude that a man of action in the Renaissance could either be a villain or a sceptic or a dreamer. But Shakespeare himself was none of these. At least on the evidence of his work we discover that he was a practical man, very active and very successful. He was neither vile nor given to despondency and inaction. He loved, made friends, and wrote one successful play after another. This means that Shakespeare did have a point of view about life and his life had a direction and followed a definite course. But Shakespeare's plays give us no such direction, and Dr. Johnson was justified to question the lack of a clear moral purpose in his plays. This was perhaps due to the aesthetic approach that the artist should not take a definite stand, that his job was only to paint life, and let people judge for themselves. But this was a misconceived sense of objectivity. Commitment was confused with dogmatism. If one has objectively arrived at a definite conclusion, then he must objectively state it. There is no such thing as

objectivity in the sense of having no opinion to offer. Every artist has a point of view, since all choice involves a point of view, and the artist chooses to create, picks up a specific subject, and deals with it in a specific manner. Secondly, his work does convey a point of view to the reader, but the artist will not commit to it. The reader has to get his own meaning out of it. This, on the part of the artist, amounts to escape and irresponsibility, which may escape observation in a great artist, like Shakespeare, but becomes too obvious in an inferior genius, say Tennyson. Tennyson, in *The Palace of Art*, to take a specific case, tries to pay homage to all philosophies, mythologies, and religions, a very interesting example of what is termed as Victorian Compromise.

There was naturally a reaction against this artistic unconcern, and the twentieth century writers demanded commitment from the artist. Two very prominent figures are those of Eliot and Sartre. Eliot has a religious point of view. He believes that no art can be great art on aesthetic standards alone. This is its ethical theological value that makes great art. That is why he wants the artist to be a responsible person, since, according to him, the artist who is conscious of tradition is conscious of great responsibilities. But this kind of drama pre-supposes a religious society, which does not exist in Eliot's wasteland of Europe. As for Sartre, his existentialism demands commitment from the artist. But this commitment in an absurd world will only end in personal tragedy, which shows the desperation of the modern man and only adds to disillusion.

To sum up, this analysis leads to the conclusion that since the Renaissance the role of the dramatist in a disintegrating society has been only the role of a debunker, or of an analyst who exposes the flaws of man and society, and tries to criticise their illusions and false pretences. Modern drama has been solely a drama of exposure. But this is not enough, because after this analysis, which has been very scientific, very correct, it has failed to reach a new synthesis.

(1974)

❧ Chapter 32 ❧

Method in Madness



All idealistic thinkers through the ages both creative and speculative-have seen the world as a madness and all their efforts have been directed to discovering or formulating a method in order to deal with this madness. There has been in fact an effort to ignore the reality of existence, or at least, to minimise its significance. That is why poet after poet and philosopher after philosopher have been emphasising the meaninglessness or confusion of life. This has been so right from the idealists of antiquity down to the absurdists of our own day.

The idea of 'method in madness' has been suggested from a line in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Here Hamlet is ragging the old wise fool, Polonius. Hamlet has assumed an antic disposition and is pretending to have gone mad. But his attack on Polonius is so much to the point that the poor old man is baffled and exclaims: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't." In fact, Hamlet had adopted madness as a method. He had deliberately taken on this disposition believing that in this way he would be able to resolve the mysteries of life. But it is interesting to note that this same device which Hamlet pretends to have deliberately adopted to realise a plan, adopted as a policy, is very earnestly presented as an excuse to prove his innocence to Laertes when he tells him:

*If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not' Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness.*

He creates, enjoys and even exploits confusion, and so deludes others as well as himself. This has been a very typical reaction. For those who took life seriously there were only two ways to react to its madness. Either they rejected it or they succumbed to it. And those who did not take it seriously do not matter, as according to Conrad

(in *Lord Jim*), 'those who do not feel do not count'. In this supercilious manner one may either reject the world as a Timon, or assume its madness as a Hamlet. One may be clever and give his escape some sophisticated name like Plato and reject the actual world as a mere shadow of the real world which is 'the world of ideas', or one may be a Heraclitus, who was known as the weeping philosopher because of his melancholy view of the changing and fleeting character of life, or again, one could be a Democritus, who was called the laughing philosopher, since he had always been laughing at the follies of mankind. Heraclitus, Democritus and Plato, or Hamlet and Timon, as also the Cynics, along with all other philosophers of the kind, are the most typical examples of persons who were too philosophical to bother about the realities of life and who tried to philosophise them by reducing them to certain ideas abstracted from life. They suffered because they escaped. Perhaps Thomas Hardy tried to say as much, though perhaps he never intended it, when he showed his rustics the happiest of his characters and his idealists the most miserable among them.

When these intellectuals failed to master life, failed to understand its ways, when like T.S. Eliot they found:

*History has many cunning passages, contrived
corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities....
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusion
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or is still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon.
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.*

(*Gerontion*)

and when like Eliot they sought heroic solutions, they felt frustrated, and regressed into the past, seeking refuge in myth and ritual. Thus Sophocles opened his play *Trachiniae* with the words, "There is a saying among men, put forth of old, that thou canst not rightly judge

whether a mortal's lot is good or evil, ere he die," and he closed *Oedipus Rex* on a similar note, "And none can be called happy until that day when he carries his happiness down to the grave in peace.' Such was the fate of Oedipus as depicted by Sophocles. Oedipus was a popular and honoured king till the day of his doom. Neither he himself nor anyone else ever suspected that he carried the seeds of his destruction in his own character. Oedipus insisted to unravel the mystery, and Tiresias, who knew, kept warning him. Determined to know the truth Oedipus ignored Tiresias only to discover to his own great misery that he had been living in sin, having married his own mother. The revelation is too much for him and in great torture he gouges his eyes. The fate of Oedipus was a warning to all explorers who wanted to unravel the mystery of life, because it was a mad affair and would strike the beholder mad. This madness was seen by Macbeth as:

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more"; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing*

All these seers were extremely scared of life and kept warning others to keep clear of it, as did Shelley while lamenting his own lot, who

*Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
Actaeon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey*

So did Arnold warn his Scholar Gipsy against the destructive influence of this 'naked loveliness' when he called out to him to fly the sick fatigue and divided aims of this life.

But all was not despair. There were some who claimed to know the method, to possess the formula which will tame this mad force. They knew how to exorcise the demon. These were the priests. A whole system of ritual and incantatory songs was devised to please the propitious gods and keep away the ominous powers. Thus the idealistic philosophic view of life, through its abstract speculations, invited the magician and the priest, who were identical figures in all such societies, to dominate the scene, and the seer and the fortune-teller got the place of honour. In the whole Theban world only the

blind Tiresias could see. Reality was thus rejected and priest's fiction was given credence.

Beside the occult approach, there was a rational approach too. This may be seen in Aristotle. He distinguished the world of art from the world of everyday happenings by propounding that art concerned only with the Probable in life. The Probable was defined as a convincing possibility. Life, thus, according to Aristotle, was full of strange possibilities. Practically anything was possible. In short, it meant, as Sophocles and others saw it, that life was a chaos. According to Aristotle, the poet attempted to create order out of chaos. Aristotle saw art as an attempt by the artist to straighten out the confusion of life, in order to give a pattern to it, and in this way to gain some insight into its mysteries and acquire some wisdom into its affairs.

More to the point was, however, Aristotle's diagnosis and his suggested remedy of human anxiety with reference to the contemporary medical term of Catharsis. Tragedy, according to him, consisted of 'incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.' The implication here is that there is an inner chaos in man and for a healthy psychic life, essential to a healthy social life, this must be regulated. This goes to the extent of saying that not only there is chaos around and inside man, it is rather essential to human psychic health, and if need be such chaos should be artificially created by the poet in the form of Tragedy. This was Aristotle's justification of Tragedy and its utility, and this is what, according to him, created Tragic Pleasure. We come to the conclusion that there is a madness raging outside man and one inside him. Tragedy regulates both; one by observing the rules of probability, the other through catharsis. Aristotle, in short, proposed that order came through disorder, sanity through madness and wisdom through suffering. Thus insanity, madness and suffering were not only accepted in the fabric of life, these were rather made the very conditions for its stability.

The poet's job, his noble job, was thus to create order and balance in man's life, both external and internal. This presumed a lack of balance in life. Another name for balance in Greek terminology was justice. The very notion of poetic justice suggests that no justice exists in the world, but the poet must show it in his representations of life, and so it was called *poetic justice*.

Leaving the Greek antiquity, if we come down to the Renaissance, we see that Shakespeare wrote one mad play after another reflecting the horrors of a capricious and unpredictable life. In his earlier days he wrote comedies, which ranged from light and gay stories to intricate dramas of disguises and complexities. But then, with his growing years, followed a series of disturbing studies of human character and its environs. Then came *Timon*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, among other tragedies. Here human madness was depicted variously as misanthropy, ambition, jealousy, scepticism and egotism. These, beside the theme of vengeance in *Titus Andronicus*, completed the list of almost all mental aberrations to which man can fall a prey. The problem with all these characters was that they saw life as a pattern, a pattern which they assumed for it, and saw it from their individual points of view, and when the world refused to fall into their pattern they succumbed to it. This madness, moreover, is widespread in these plays rather than being a mere individual aberration. For instance, in *Hamlet*, we are presented with different kinds of madness: one pretends madness, the other goes mad, while a third one talks mad. *King Lear* is the extreme example of it where almost all the main characters are mad. Lear himself goes mad, Edgar and Kent disguise their sanity, believing it to be a serious handicap, while there is a regular professional fool in the play. Besides, Goneril and Regan are the furies themselves, not mad, but the very personifications of madness. And Cordelia! Well, whatever one may say of her angelic innocence, is no less egotistical and obstinate in abandoning her old father to the wicked sisters about whose insincerity and evil designs she has no doubt. Perhaps a saner course would have been to humour a senile autocrat who had once been good and a kind father. None of them in fact behaves as a sane person. A modern psychiatrist would have sent them to the hospital.

We see this human madness, on the other hand, reflected in the world of nature. There is a howling storm raging in the forest which is echoed in the rage that is rising in Lear's heart. Madness in *King Lear* is neither simply human nor natural, it is elemental, as if the very fabric of life carries within it a strong current of violence which can erupt any time. There are further suggestions of an ominous and capricious force working against the wisdom of man, summed up in the age-old saying, 'man proposes and God disposes'. As if God's ways are contrary to those of man. Thus speaks Gloucester in *King Lear*.

*As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport.*

This sounds very Sophoclean and is echoed by Hardy also when he sums up the story of *Tess* by remarking that the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with her. At another place in the play Gloucester describes how human life is at the mercy of heavenly powers:

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treasons; and the bond cracked between son and father.

Such ominous happenings are mentioned in *Julius Caesar* and *Troilus and Cressida* where lionesses whelp in the streets and the graves yawn, yielding their dead. (This brings to mind T.S. Eliot's epigraph of *Burnt Norton*, which is a quotation from Heraclitus: "Although the law of Reason is common, the majority of people live as though they have an understanding of their own." Life, therefore, appears at best as a mad affair, and at its worst as absolutely inimical to man.

Then, again, we find in Shakespeare an attempt at a wider perspective of the issues of life. This has been found by Shakespearean scholars in what they call the Problem Plays, which include, beside *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. These are so called because in them the issues are not clear. The moral situation is extremely confused, and it is very difficult to pass a judgement. The good and the evil have been so mixed up that one cannot be distinguished from the other. These plays reflect the height of scepticism reached by Shakespeare. The world appears to him as a hopeless affair, so baffling that the individual loses his identity. The wavering state of the mind and the loss of confidence which accompany this bewilderment have been expressed by Shakespeare in the Sonnet: "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes." Here he expresses how extreme inferiority complex makes man chase illusions, wishing himself hopeful like one and featured like the other. This is the situation of loss of faith, of a complete breakdown of values. And this is what happened to Shakespeare. He could not resolve the confusing situation. Finally he had to resort to the world of fantasy, and it is in plays like the *Tempest*

that he finds some consolation. This is exactly like the reaction of all other idealistic thinkers, not unlike Plato, who ultimately seek refuge in Utopias.

The same encounter with madness goes on until we come to Byron and confront his Byronic Hero, a disillusioned, desperate, egotistical and vigorous man who believes that he has suffered at the hands of both fate and man. He has various faces; Cain, Werner, Childe Harold, Don Juan, Beppo, etc. A hypocritical society disappoints him. He sees merchants turned into pirates, like Beppo, who are considered respectable and noble for the wealth they have accumulated through ignoble means. Then, responsibility falls on man from strange quarters. If a Cain suffers for the sin of the parents, a Werner suffers for the sin of a son. This theme of ancestral curse projects life as a dismal affair. This was also the theme of tragedies by Ibsen and Strindberg. Again, Satan informs Cain that what is lawful for him will become a sin for the generations to come. He tells him that both Cain and Abel have been living with their sisters as their wives. For his progeny it will be the worst of the sins. Byron's own scandal of incest is to the point here. He does not see much in himself to blame, and stands up in revolt against the state of things. But he also believes that this is a futile revolt. Satan tells Cain of the events to follow. Misery is inevitable. Cain knows that everything is preordained. Still he rebels, convincing himself that to rebel and to suffer is his doom.

The sense of futility, of meaninglessness of life, is very much the theme of a large part, rather the most representative part, of modern literature. Conrad's *Lord Jim* is always aware of some phantom lurking under the smooth surface of the sea which may any time strike the ship and sink it. Beckett's tramps are fighting against the unknown, the meaningless. Eliot talks of the living dead, the hollow men, and vacant shuttles weaving the wind. On top of all this follows the modern school of the *Absurd*, which sees nothing but chaos and madness in life; and this madness is like an unappeasable mythical demon that demands no less than human sacrifice. This is best exemplified in Sartre's *Les Mouches*, in which the evil of this world is actually presented in the form of Furies, which are the agents of madness, and had been so in Greek mythology. These Furies will not release humanity from their curse until an Orestes offers his life to satisfy their bloody hunger—an individualistic heroism popularised by the egotists.

Then, again in the modern age, since the nineteenth century, a new concept has found vogue. This is given by psychology. According to Freud the Unconscious is the seat of the evil. The instinctual energy, *ID*, the development of which is stimulated by frustration and discomfort, if not properly regulated, will corrode human life and bring destruction upon man. According to Jung the unconscious is a very large portion of the mind of man, the conscious being only a small fraction of it. This means that only a fraction of the human mind is at all reasonable and can be regulated. The rest is occult business and can be tamed only through myth, ritual and some kind of mystical formulae. Psychology has in fact sought to provide a scientific basis to what was only a sarcastic fiction to Samuel Butler, who in *Erewhon* described crime as disease, or madness, which could be medically, or now more properly, psychologically treated.

Man has thus been thrown back to a stage where he must become a savage once again, since all attempts to bring reason and order to life have failed. This has in fact been caused by a misdirection given to human effort in dealing with the facts of life. As has been suggested earlier, the root of this lies in the idealistic approach which abstracts thought from life and tries to seek the solution of real problems in an ideal world, in a world of illusions, which, with the slightest loosening of the grip of the tricks of the metaphysics, relapses into pure fantasy. Man tried to bring the world up to the pictures created by his fantasy, and when reality failed to submit to his dreams, he either rejected the world or surrendered himself completely to illusions.

This tragedy of man is the result of his refusal to accept the objective conditions of existence as the reality. He always considered himself much bigger than what he is. He convinced himself that he was created in the image of God, and he always saw himself in that image. He scorned the smallness of the mundane world. He deluded himself with the flattering thought that he possessed divine attributes, and refused to come down from the Elysium which he believed to be his real abode. He refused to pace the world of every day reality. Literature of the east and the west is full of such stuff. A.C. Bradley summed up the situation of Hamlet as "the sense of the soul's infinity and the sense of the doom which not only circumscribes that infinity but appears to be its off-spring". This is the trouble – finite man living under the illusion of infinity. This state of the mind is very beautifully analysed by Euripides in the *Bacchae*, a really mad play. The arrival of

Bacchus, the god of wine, throws the people into ecstasy. Particularly the women become his ardent devotees. Bacchic revels transport them into divine frenzy. The old show prudence and expediently accept the new god, whom they find powerful and irresistible. The priest justifies the new god, and starts preparing to pay homage to him. But young Pentheus tries to check the frenzy of the women, which he considers mad, irresponsible and immoral. But when he goes to them, Agave, his mother, in the divine frenzy, tears her own son from limb to limb. But as she comes back to her senses and realises what she had done, her lament precisely sums up her situation, which is the point of the play. She says: "I had abandoned the shuttle and the loom and thought of higher things". A similar fate befalls Hercules in another play by Euripides, *Hercules Furens* or *The Madness of Hercules*. Hercules was the son of Amphytrion and Alcmene, but he believed that his father was not Amphytrion but Zeus, who had come to Alcmene in one of his traditional amours. Thus Hercules thought himself to be anthropomorphic, imbued with divine attributes. Once in a fit of frenzy he butchers his own children. But when the fit is passed he comes out of the delusive sense of self-aggrandizement. He apologizes to Amphytrion saying to him that he was his father, not Zeus, which was a fiction.

To conclude, then, we see that man invites miseries upon himself when he forgets about the immediate reality and tries to soar too high. Like Icarus, he flies too near the sun and burns his wings, hurling himself to death down on the earth – the same earth which he so disdainfully tries to reject. He over-reaches himself and thus brings about his own doom. Unless man realises that he is a mortal, with all the limitations of a human being, and that he is the inhabitant of this earth, however small and mean, and that all his comforts and miseries arise from this very earth; unless he starts facing the facts, he will only pile misery upon misery and curse upon curse, not only on himself, but on everyone around him. To believe, in short, that we in this world are outcasts of a higher world, to believe that this world is only a shadow or an illusion which we must give up as soon as possible, in order to seek entry into the ideal world, to believe that we can impose a pattern on this life which does not grow out of this life, to believe in all such things is madness, and any attempt to impose an order of ideal dreams, or idle fantasies, which is the same thing, will only be another madness. Aldous Huxley once said of Freud that the tragedy with him was that he never met a sane person. The same is true of our idealists that in the excitement of their idealism they never see the

actual life around them, and are thus given to all sorts of illusions and utopian aspirations. A balanced man, as a balanced society, is outside our experience. We live in a world of horrible miseries and aspirations, seeing only dismal gloom in the future. Thus our literature is full of stories of horror, violence and frustration. We live in the world of Draculas, sex maniacs and detectives. No wonder then that we cannot appreciate the post-revolutionary literature of the socialist countries. It does not look like literature to us, with no excitement, no heroism and no personal tragedy, because to us the function of literature is catharsis in Aristotelian terms and sublimation in Freudian terms. But, at the same time, we cannot pass a judgement on Chinese or other such literature, since we do not share their experience. Our world is radically different from theirs, and our sense of social reality has no relevance to their level of social awareness. But one thing seems quite imminent: a world in which tragedy provides pleasure and reinforces the pride of man is soon going to be a thing of the past. More positive values will attract man henceforth. Madness cannot be eradicated by putting a gloss on it. No amount of method will turn frenzy into sanity. Instead of imposing method on madness, it is becoming now very obvious that madness will have to be properly diagnosed and eliminated.

(1976)



❧ Chapter 33 ❧

Reception of Philosophy in Literature



It may sound paradoxical that philosophy which has shown the way to literature, which has provided the world-view on which the writer bases his attitude, has been ruthlessly treated by literature. The literary writers have even gone to the extent of confessing that the poet does not think. He only derives from thought given by the philosopher. Still the philosopher has only been laughed at in literature. He has been a favourite butt of ridicule to the literary writer. This simultaneous acceptance and rejection of philosophy by literature has been due to the nature and role of philosophy through the ages.

I

The primary reason is that howsoever the poet may be indebted to the philosopher, literature and philosophy are two distinct disciplines. Though pursuit of truth is the objective of both, they fundamentally differ in their method and scope. Hamlet's comment is to the point here:

There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Literature has considered philosophy's approach very limited and insufficient for the following reasons:

1. Philosophy seeks truth through abstracting intellect, since senses are not reliable, and emotions and feelings obscure the truth. It seeks to reach its destination by breaking various idols which impede mind's direct experience of reality. Thus the philosopher abstracts from reality, and builds his world-view on these abstractions. Literature on the other hand, is a comprehensive approach. Not only reason, but the whole of man is involved in it. It draws upon the totality of experience, call it sensibility, or awareness. "One must look into the cerebral cortex, the

nervous system, and the digestive tracts.' It is a wholeness of approach.

2. Objectivity is the ideal of philosophy, which in this case means elimination of the subjective. But to a literary writer, feelings, emotions, superstitions and dogmas are as important as reason, or even more. Objectivity in literature means coherence of response through maturing experience. It is the relative significance of the various elements of sensibility that the literary writer seeks to establish.
3. Philosophy is interested in the idea, literature in the idea realised in flesh and blood. Philosophy deals in syllogistic formulae, whereas literature is interested in living men and women in meaningful action. It studies the relationships that emanate from this action and are conditioned by it. That is why literature is concrete and philosophy abstract.
4. Both analyse, but whereas philosophy analyses in order to eliminate the fictitious, literature analyses to put the fictitious in a new synthesis, in a proper perspective, so that its relative significance is brought out.
5. Philosophy is a serious business, and demands an austere mental discipline, whereas literature demands a lowering of our criteria of force and consistency in meaning. Precision is the watch word of philosophy; a little ambiguity enriches literature.
6. Looseness of statement and laxity of expression are not only allowed in literature, they are its embellishments, whereas philosophy insists on facts, and nothing but facts.
7. Words and symbols are used with a complex of associations in literature, whereas in philosophy their meanings must be precise and well defined. In poetry we have an un-prose-like use of language.
8. Finally we come to the question of belief. Belief to a philosopher is a statement in the abstract. For a poet it is the whole, the total response. That is why genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood. There is a difference between philosophic belief and poetic assent. Thus the literary theory of the irrelevancy of belief.

It may be said in parenthesis here that the idea of philosopher-Poet is a hybrid, since according to the preceding analysis the two roles are mutually incompatible. Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, for

example, are considered to be philosophic poets and their philosophy is Nature. But they have no consistent or systematic approach to nature, which in Wordsworth is very different from what it is in Keats or Shelley. What makes their utterances pass for philosophy is not a consistent systematic thinking. It is the intensity of emotions and expressions that accompanies them which makes them pass for philosophy. This in philosophical terms is called 'metaphysical pathos'. As a test, paraphrase any philosophic poem and it will not merit the consideration of any philosopher for its resultant looseness of statement.

It was, to revert to our analysis, this basic difference between the two activities that the literary writer found philosophy to be very limited and insufficient. But, then, the philosophers claimed to offer the final and absolute answer to the problems of life. There was such a big gap between the claim and the fact that the literary writer was naturally tickled to have a good laugh at the deluded scholar. A fine example of this ironic treatment of the philosopher is Fielding's Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews*. He believed that he knew everything and was competent to pass judgement on anything. He was clumsy, crude, unpractical, an insignificant country parson, absent-minded and stupid. According to Fielding he was worth £ 23 a year at the age of 50. Similarly Grimwing, the name itself is suggestive, in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, always eats his head. The examples abound and are very familiar. What is important here is to see that the literary writer has considered himself much wiser, and his injunction, to the philosopher also, in the words of Pope was:

*Know then thyself, presume not God to scan
The proper study of mankind is man.*

II

But literature never failed to benefit from philosophy wherever it found this to its purpose. Dante was a great poet because he had the philosophy of St. Thomas behind him. Shakespeare derived his philosophy from Seneca, Montaigne and Machiavelli, the presiding geniuses of the Renaissance (T. S. Eliot). And if there is no apparent unity of thought in Shakespeare, if there is such a confusion in his vision, the reason may be in the confusion that characterised the Renaissance itself. No wonder some saw Seneca in *King Lear*, Montaigne in *Hamlet* and Machiavelli in *Othello*. At the time when Shakespeare was writing, the Renaissance thought had not been synthesised and its philosophy was not yet defined. Its pieces were all

scattered here and there, and Shakespeare responded to them and incorporated them in his work. This is sufficient proof that Shakespeare, whose thought and philosophy have so much impressed some, did no thinking of his own, in the sense of evolving a philosophy. The Renaissance thinker was Bacon. It was he who pronounced the philosophy of the Renaissance, which was a mercantile capitalistic philosophy of material pursuit with exclusively utilitarian motives, full of deceit, self-aggrandisement and cunning, or, what may be called, practical considerations. Another proof of it is that in Shakespeare we find two types of heroes; the bravados like Richard III, Macbeth, Iago, Edmund, unscrupulously pursuing their selfish goals and those confused and incapacitated by this confusion, such as, Hamlet. Shakespeare is, however, not lacking in the awareness of the Renaissance situation. This is borne out by his disgust for the feudal conflicts and the monarchy supported by them. Also there is a kind of vague synthesis in him in his vision of a hero in the form of Prospero, who wields his powers to the service of good because there is something mysteriously good in his nature. But this was a poetic statement, his poetic vision. The philosopher's statement, his philosophy, had to wait for Bacon. It was Bacon who gave the Renaissance world-picture. That which to the confused mind appeared as confusion, ambition, deceit, to a philosopher appeared as a new force, and this new force was the force of science and technical knowledge on which new forms of social life could be developed. In Bacon we find the belief that reason can give the strength and the ability to possess this new power. Here, incidentally, we see how lack of philosophic guidance may handicap the poet and lead him astray though he may have vague intimations of reality.

Another important philosophic thought that influenced literature was Descartes'. His dual approach of thought and extension has paradoxical consequences. Clear and distinct ideas demolished the vague generalisation of scholasticism and encouraged a mechanistic view of the world in which only mathematically established entities were real. This idea was reinforced by Newtonian mechanics which to the Eighteenth century was almost as sacrosanct as the word of God, as expressed by Pope:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night:
God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light!

Reason became the slogan of the Augustans, and a general distaste for metaphysics is a distinct mark of the age. Literature in this age became subservient to society which produced poems like the *Essay*

on *Man* and new social genres like the novel. What happened to English Poetry between Donne and Dryden was this departure from scholasticism towards the Cartesian concept of clear and distinct ideas. This was the practical application of Descartes' idea of extension.

His concept of thought produced just the opposite result. Thought rooted in the consciousness, in I, and further in God, encouraged highly subjective and idealistic thought which permeated, through Rousseau, the Romantic movement and helped in the creation of Wordsworth's egotistical sublime. The world-picture constructed from *cogito ergo sum*, rejected the past and the appeal to authority, and promoted man's sense of his own dignity and importance.

Another significant influence of philosophy upon literature has been the dialectics of Marx, in which consciousness and existence have been placed in a dialectical relationship. This is represented and echoed in most of contemporary writings one way or the other.

III

Though literature and philosophy are two distinct disciplines, we have seen how philosophy has been the torch bearer to literature. Why did, then, literature reject philosophy? One reason has already been discussed; that of philosophy's pretension to absolute knowledge and the limitations of its method. A second reason is that apart from method, literature claimed a much wider interest and scope than philosophy on another ground. Literature is universal, whereas there is no philosophy as such. Rather, there are philosophies, distinguished by their national or class interests. Philosophy, as against literature, has been parochial and high brow, while literature is universal and talks of man and his problems in the concrete. Sidney, for example, considered the poet to be superior to both the philosopher and the historian, and this is what he says of the philosopher: "the philosopher, setting down with thorny argument the bare rule, is so hard of utterance and so misty to be conceived, that one that hath no other guide but him shall wade in him till he be old, before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest; for his knowledge standeth so upon the abstract and general, that happy is the man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he does understand." This statement from a literary figure of some significance points out two major draw-backs of philosophy: thorny argument and misty conception. These provided ample

material for ridicule to the literary writer. A very interesting and typical example of it is a familiar passage from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It is from the Graveyard scene, in which the gravediggers, who appear as the two clowns in the play, are discussing the suicide of Ophelia.

First Clown. Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?

Sec. Clown. I tell thee she is; and therefore, make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial.

Sec. Clown. Why, 'tis found so.

First Clown. It must be *se offendendo*; it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly it argues an act, and an act hath three branches; it is to act, to do, and to perform; Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.

Sec. Clown. Nay, but hear you, good man delver--

First Clown. Give me leave. Here lies the water, good: here stands the man; good: if the man go to this water, and drown himself; it is will he, nil he, he goes; mark you that? but if the water come to him, and drown him, he drowns not himself; argal, he that is not guilty of his own death, shortens not his life.

Such examples abound, and not only in Shakespeare. After this 'thorny argument' let us have an example of 'misty' expression again from Shakespeare. This time from *Love's Labour Lost*. Here is Holofernes, the schoolmaster. He has pretension of writing poetry and is here describing the creative process: 'forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions, these are begot in the ventricle of memory, nourished in the womb of pia mater, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion.' Not only that, a whole school of poetry was derogatorily called Metaphysical. And what was metaphysical about them? They talked of heaven and earth in the same breath. Donne wrote an intricate poem describing 'Nothingness.' Moreover, outlandish metaphor, far-fetched conceits and abstract speculation were their favourite exercises. The philosophers developed a jargon of their own, which became more and more incomprehensible with every new philosopher. To revert to

Hamlet once more, we see that when the ghost of Hamlet's father appears, an officer present there, who is frightened by the spectacle, shouts to Haratio, 'Thou art a scholar, speak.' It is not surprising that the common Elizabethan believed that the philosophers spoke a language that ghosts understood. And this may be any layman's reaction today. When reading a book of philosophy one finds that one is reading a strange language, though the grammar and, at least, some of the vocabulary may be familiar to him; like Sidney, he can hardly make out anything. It is interesting, in this context to be reminded that all Shakespeare's philosophers are fools, or conversely, his fools are philosophers, and Shakespeare's audience highly enjoyed this picture of the philosopher.

Philosopher's language has become a coterie language, and its meaning is available only to the highly skilled. Philosophical writings are for exclusive readers. Though to the common man this free-masonry of expression is very irritating, the philosopher is least worried about it, simply because communication is no concern of him. Same is true of his misty concepts. Ideas of Plato, Monads of Leibniz even the Superman of Nietzsche are not concepts in which one not trained in philosophy can feel comfortable. Pythagoras has been a favourite victim for sarcastic remarks in literature. Nano in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* introduces himself as the soul of Pythagoras 'That Juggler divine', with reference to his own tricks. Literature, on the other hand, remained a companion and friend to man. It continued to talk to man of men and their problems. It is interesting to note that a very significant revolution in literature was brought in the name of return to common speech. Whether Dryden, or Wordsworth, or Eliot, all of them found the existing idiom too stylised and thus out-dated. They endeavoured to bring the language of poetry back to the language of everyday speech in order to describe the actual thoughts and feelings of the common man. Thus, while philosophy drifted further and further away from man, literature stayed close to him.

This retreat of the philosopher, to which literature reacted so sharply, had very serious implications, and was, to be very blunt, politically motivated. We shall have to go back to Socrates for a proof. Socrates tried to put philosophy into the service of society, to serve the common man. He attempted to inculcate analytical habits of the mind in the young. This could not in any way suit the vested interests, and ruling class saw a serious threat in it. Rulers encourage credulity and complacency in the people. Curiosity and challenge always unsettle them. Socrates was charged of corrupting the youth

and had to accept the cup of poison for the crime. His intelligent disciple did not miss the lesson. Plato gave a philosophy, the philosophy of Ideas, which so baffled everyone that people even today debate its meaning. But it offered all the comforts, all the luxury and all security to the rulers. The philosopher was caught in his own trap. He professed to speak nothing but the truth. And the price of speaking the truth has always been death in this world of vested interests. But the philosopher took the cue from Plato. Now he decided to speak and go on speaking, but made it sure that he was not understood at all.

Another significant attempt of telling the truth was made by Bacon in the age of mercantile exploitation and court intrigues. Bacon pointed out that the motives of men were not as noble as professed, but were based on pure and simple self-interest. Bacon, however, escaped death. There may be two reasons for this. Bacon wrote with the traditional detachment of a philosopher and made no attempt to see his philosophy applied in practice. Also literacy ratio being very low at that time, such writings could not influence many and, moreover, those who could read them were expected to be wise enough not to take them seriously. The other reason may be that the world had made some advance in the 2000 years between Socrates and Bacon, and there were now available sophisticated and harmless ways of killing a philosophy without putting the philosopher to death. Bacon was condemned on moral grounds. The prejudice still persists. Pope called him 'wisest, brightest and meanest of mankind'. Moreover, the official academic opinion refused to accept him as philosopher. He was thus killed not through poison, but through indifference. No wonder Bacon's secretary was not far behind Socrates' disciple, and Hobbes so forcefully asserted in favour of the divine rights of the kings.

Thus a tradition was set that any philosopher who was a threat to the establishment was either killed or ignored. A remark of Bertrand Russell is to the point here: when *Liberty* appeared in 1959, J.S. Mill was hailed as the Philosopher of the century; *Das Kapital* appeared in 1967, and Marx was totally ignored. Thus, while philosophy betrayed the cause of humanity, literature kept up the struggle. It was however, not only the courage of the writer which kept him in the field, it was, in the main, his method. In the first place, literature never claimed to tell the whole truth; secondly, literature could always veil the truth in so many colourful devices. It was this sugar-coating of truth by literature that secured its existence. It may,

IV

(1976)



❧ Chapter 34 ❧

Writing a History of Urdu Literature



There are dozens of *Tazkeras* and histories of Urdu Literature, but these do not come up to the standard expected of such a work of scholarship and interpretation. Their objectives and parameters are not clearly defined. It appears that these accounts have been written without any plan. A history of literature is not like a history of states or governments. It is not a social history either. A history of literature is different from a research work as well as a critical treatise. It is a study which is neither biography nor a simple narrative of facts. The histories of Urdu literature so far written are almost a continuation of the tradition of *Tazkeras* which are a kind of personal homage to favourite authors or biographical panegyrics where a writer's literary achievements and personal virtues are extolled or a few events and circumstances which have impressed the writer are described with great devotion but least discrimination. Comments are also very personal and superficial, while a history should emphasise collective response and verdict.

The most important thing to note is that a history of literature is basically a history of the sensibility which is revealed in the literature of a community. It has two main aspects: one is the intellectual development and progress of the community to which the literature belongs and secondly, its achievements in the field of craft and technique. Literature is man's aesthetic and emotional response to life, and as such charlatanism and misinformation find little scope here. A historian, for example, may rewrite a history of the Mughal rule in such a manner that it extols the virtues of its kings, such as their emphasis on justice, their patronage of the arts, their refined taste in music, architecture and literature, but totally ignore their cruelties and excesses, make no mention of the murders committed with their connivance and be quiet on the intrigues in which they were involved. On the other hand, there may also be such historians who concern themselves only with the evils of the rule and totally ignore its good points. But literature can never be so misleading. The

works of Mir, Sauda, Nazir Akbarabadi, Anis and Ghalib reveal a clear picture of the emotional contours of their times. A history of literature must study, analyse and elaborate this emotional pattern and explore its background.

Life and its changing realities make the subject of literature. These are never abstract, static and isolated facts; they emanate from certain active forces which operate in a society in accordance with specific laws. A history of literature tries to discover these basic laws and put them in some intelligible order.

Literary genres are major indicators of literary sensibility. *Mathnavi*, *qasida*, *marsia*, *Ghazal*, free verse, prose-poem, *dastan*, novel and short story are not simply forms. More than that these are trends of feelings and modes of expression specific to a period. Their close study and analysis may suggest literary and social attitudes operating behind them. These attitudes are also reflected in other arts such as architecture, painting and music. All of these carry the stamp of their times. These same attitudes are reflected in a different way in religious beliefs and popular customs. Only a comprehensive study of all these factors can give a true picture of the sensibility of an age. Another dimension has been added to this study now with the introduction of the film and TV. We can now have audio-visual reproductions of men and manners of the past. For example, a young man of today has a concept of Ghalib which was not available to an earlier generation. A literary history may also profit from these modern facilities while at the same time critically examine their truth.

What kind of literature flourishes in a period is also worth considering. How it is that *marsia* and *rekhti* are both popular in the same society at the same time? Why does humour become the dominant literary interest at a particular time? Through what stages has the literature of humour fluctuated from Sauda to Patras and what is its place in our literature today and which factors are responsible for changes in taste? All this can be properly appreciated through a study of literature in its historical context.

Some aspects of our sensibility have a permanent value. One of them is suffering. The tragedy of Karbala, the sacking of Baghdad, the fall of Grenada, the war of 1857, the upheaval of Partition and the oppressive feelings generated by the Martial Law in the country, all carry an undercurrent of suffering which has neither ever abated nor changed. On the contrary, we have glamorised suffering. Anis used suffering as an antidote to the miseries of life. Iqbal enjoyed scratching the wounds with a sharp scalpel, but this is not the whole

story. Our literature presents the beloved as a ruthless tyrant, thus making tyranny adorable. Why did that happen? This is for a history of literature to explore, since political and social tyranny has been experienced by all societies and in all periods, but it is only our literature that pays such a homage to tyranny and finds such pleasure in suffering.

It is also a fact that Urdu literature mainly developed during the time of imperial domination. This brought diffidence, artificiality and formalism into Urdu literature. Instead of a direct straight-forward speech, a style couched in innuendo, indirect suggestion and circumlocution prevailed. Paranthetic phrases, apologetic gestures and a strained modesty came to be considered as signs of high culture. Symbols, metaphors, allusions and conceits became the fashion. Obscurity was admired as a mark of genius. Some of these factors were no doubt rooted in our tradition, but others were forced upon it by prevailing circumstances. All this needs to be thoroughly sifted, and a good history of literature must do that.

Our intellectual and emotional modes are also peculiar to us. Scholasticism and a philosophy of nihilism are the undercurrents of our literature. From these springs a morality based on degree and respect for authority which is further reinforced by the oriental habit of subduing reason to emotion. These attitudes are not specific to Muslims. Hindu writers of Urdu also subscribe to them. If Anis writes *Marsia*, Daya Shankar Nasim also writes one. If Hadi Ruswa draws a picture of his society, Sarshar too presents a similar picture. Genesis and implication of these attitudes fall within the purview of a history of Urdu literature.

From the days of *Dastans* to the present day miracles and the transcendental have circumscribed our literature. There must be a psychological reason for that. A history of literature studies the mind of the reader along with a study of the writer. Histories of Urdu literature have ignored the reader altogether. It is essential to know the reading public in order to appreciate the work of a writer. The preferences, prejudices and tastes of the readers, the target public of any writer, may very much constrict his art. We must know for whom a particular piece of literature was written and what its end objective was. Much of the Urdu criticism of Anis, for example, has resulted from ignoring these important factors. It is also necessary to know the class background of the readers, their feelings and reactions to the facts of existence, as well as the relationship in which the writer stood to them.

Some literary historians have made comparative studies of Urdu literature. They have tried to evaluate it by placing it beside Arabic, Persian, French and English literatures. It must be borne in mind here that though we have spiritual and emotional affinities with the Arabs and the Iranians, a long stay in India has introduced an Indian element in our sensibility. French and English worlds are entirely different from our world. It looks very odd to compare Dard with Shelley or Akbar Allahabadi with Dickens. The mysticism of Dard is very different from that of Shelley and there is hardly any relevance between the humour of Akbar and that of Dickens.

One distinctive characteristic of Urdu literature is its rebellious stance, the roots of which may be traced to the antagonism between the *Mulla* and the *Soofi*. Two things have been considered the greatest sins in our society; wine and love. Our poets have openly extolled both. Neither wine nor love is a sin in any other society. Our literary histories do not help us in understanding why our writers have resorted to these forbidden subjects time and again. Only in our literature is love the symbol of revolt and resistance.

A history must also have a point of view, a point of emphasis, which is central to the study. A history is not just a catalogue of persons and events. It weaves a pattern of facts round a central idea. Histories of Urdu literature reveal no such point of view. Even where some consideration is given to it, diverse ideas have been hopelessly mixed up. When the historian's approach is not clear, the reader will hardly draw any conclusions. This is specially a drawback of the histories compiled by a number of contributors, rather than by a single author.

As every literature has a tone of its own, so is each period of it distinguished by its specific approach to life and letters. These trends can be studied only with reference to the present. It is therefore essential to be aware of the sensibility of our own age and see how the attitudes of the past appear in its light. On the one hand, a history views the past from the perspective of the past. On the other hand, it also assesses the past according to its own canons. It must see how, for example, Insha's work was received by his contemporaries. To judge Dr. Johnson on the critical assumptions of T.S. Eliot will be a fallacy. Critical judgements are never absolute and final. Every age makes its own evaluations. That is why sometimes Nazir Akbarabadi is acknowledged as a major writer and, at others, he is simply set aside with a frown. Fortunes of the masters keep fluctuating. Some admire Ghalib and some hail Zauq. Some become pro-Anis and some

pro-Dabir. A history of literature also sifts politics of literature from the canons of literary evaluation.

We have not yet reached the stage of mature independent thinking where matters of faith and belief can be put to scrutiny. It will take some time to acquire that courage and that profundity of thought. We cannot even criticise social customs and taboos yet. Fairs, festivals and the ceremonies associated with marriage and death are based on the same attitudes which are revealed in our literature. These have not been closely studied. In fact the social sciences have not yet been developed enough to help us in the understanding of these phenomena. That is the reason that histories of Urdu literature lack philosophical depth and psychological acumen.

Climate also affects sensibility. It is generally said that the English temperament is very much the product of the climate of their island. There are no formidable rivers like the Ganges or the mighty Indus. There are no awe-inspiring mountains like the Himalayas. Nature poetry like that of Wordsworth cannot therefore be written in this part of the world. It has become proverbial to say that it is not so much the fog of England that makes the temperament of the English as it is the temperament of the English which creates the fog.

Here there is extreme cold and extreme heat, and a rainy season that is so pleasant and at the same time brings so much misery with it. These diversities are in the genesis of Urdu literature which has so many shades. No history of aesthetics can ignore these facts.

A history of literature studies these complexities and traces the main trends running through them. It tries to discover the literary tradition and indicate its line of development. A pattern thus emerges that leads from the past through the present to the future. Such a pattern of history does exist. That is how we are bound to the past. But it is not necessary that the pattern appears the same to everyone. Like a pattern on the floor it may appear different from different angles.

In short, historical consciousness is essential for the growth and progress of literature. A history of literature defines this consciousness. This is yet to be done in Urdu literature.

(1989)

❧ Chapter 35 ❧

Contemporary Urdu Literature



Search for identity has been the dominant theme of our literature and distinguishes it from Urdu literature being produced elsewhere. Like many contemporary writers in the world, the Pakistani writer is primarily concerned with the problem of identity. But, beyond personal identity, he is also concerned with the problem of national identity. Pakistan was created through a well-defined and deliberate effort and its genesis lay in the assertion of a distinct identity in the vast complex of Indian cultures. The basis was the two-nation theory. After political separation from India the question that naturally perplexes our writers is whether they have created a national literature which can be distinguished as Pakistan literature.

In the three decades of its existence, Pakistan has produced a rich variety of sizable literature of some merit. Creative genius has found expression through regional as well as Urdu literatures. The very experience of independence, including the effort that went into the struggle for achieving it and the consequent excitements and disillusiones, seem to have released energies expressing the national spirit that lay apparently dormant for centuries. Not that the national spirit had disappeared from the sensibility of the people, but that it moved only a few exceptionally creative minds and was not a national phenomenon till modern times. Now the entire nation seems to be involved in the national drama. Our writers are exploring this sensibility and trying to define it. A lot has been written in Pakistan about it, directly and indirectly, from religious, cultural and aesthetic points of view, and it is still a live issue in Pakistan.

Perhaps thirty-one years is not a sufficient period of time to develop a visible national identity. Americans, Canadians and Australians, virtually after centuries of independent national existence, are still struggling to assert their distinct identities. We hear

now, sometimes apologetically, that there is an American literature, a Canadian literature and an Australian literature, which is different from English literature. Perhaps it is difficult for them to show the distinctions since their separation was only physical. There was no break of cultural continuity, no break of sensibility. These literatures are mainly distinguished by certain regional idiosyncrasies. But in Pakistan it has been very different. Three basic factors must be taken into account when considering Pakistani literature:-

- 1) Pakistan was not created merely as an economic venture. It was not seen as an affluent colony created by Indian Muslims. It was rather an assertion of a distinct Muslim nationhood within India.
- 2) Once Pakistan was created relations with India became strained, and ultimately the borders with India, political as well as social and cultural, were sealed.
- 3) In Pakistan immigrant Muslims did not obliterate the local cultures, as happened in British colonies where entire local civilisations were wiped out of existence. Here the immigrant culture, which brought a very rich and strong tradition with it, had to live with the local cultures which were almost as rich, strong and deep-rooted.

Another important factor was that the Muslims always considered themselves as aliens in India, a country which they had ruled for over a thousand years. They always looked to Mecca and Medina as their home and their literature sang of the beauties of Persian flora and fauna. They used the metaphors of the Persian *Gul* and *Andaleeb* or of the Arabian *Tigris* and *Euphrates* and the *Lala* of the desert. They had no use for the Indian *Ganges* and *Jamna* or the local beauties of nature. They could not sing in praise of India, or of anything Indian.

But it was different with Pakistan. It was their land, representing their achievements and aspirations. It was their home and they wanted to sing of it. Thus, in Pakistan a sense of national identity was the very essence of its being. Here it was not the problem of transplanting a culture from one land to the other. The challenge which the new nation faced was to build on the foundations of the past traditions a new world based on fresh aspirations and ideals. In

the midst of confusion and controversy, the Pakistani writer continued producing a Pakistani literature.

Urdu literature has always been a literature of protest and it has always sought new adjustments. It may be a protest veiled in metaphors, as in Ghalib and Mir, or it may take the satiric form of Sauda or overt ironies of Nazir Akbarabadi, it always spoke the language of protest. Since 1857 it has been predominantly political, sometimes in the exhortations of Hali and sometimes in the rebukes of Akbar, but always looking for new adjustments. Two movements were officially launched by the British to depoliticise Urdu literature. One of these was started in 1800 in Fort William College, Calcutta. Its object primarily was to train British Civil Servants in Indian languages, law, history and customs. The literature produced there is essentially romantic and the emphasis is throughout on style. Motifs from the old romantic lore have been freely used; and these promote medieval optimism. The stories are written according to a given framework, following the pattern of the *Arabian Nights* and are designed to make us feel that however miserable life may be at present, all will be right in the long run under the guidance of a special Providence.

The other movement was launched under the auspices of *Anjuman-e-Punjab* in 1865 in Lahore. It arranged the famous *Mushaira* of 1874 actively patronised by Col. Halroyed, the Director of Public Instructions, Punjab. It was meant to encourage 'poetry of non-sectarian character, aiming at moral instruction, and presenting a natural picture of feelings and thoughts'. Description of the beauties of nature was defined as the main object of this new poetry. It was obviously another attempt to pursue the aims of Fort William College and to divert Urdu literature into harmless, optimistic and submissive channels. It was an officially imposed literature and could not find its roots. The literature which ultimately emerged was represented by Iqbal who conceived of literature and politics in terms of a spiritual renaissance. The salient features of this literature were the denunciation of the materialism and depravity of the west and the greatness of our ancient cultural heritage. These two aspects, in varying degrees still reverberate in our contemporary literature. Josh and Hafeez continued this tradition in their own, at times in divergent ways.

An off-shoot of this anti-western tradition was the progressive movement which produced literature of protest against the old values and the tyrannies of the dominant classes at the same time. Faiz, Raashid and Manto represent this trend in its various aspects, though Manto later dissociated himself formally from the movement. Protest and new adjustments go side by side in all these writers. Till independence, our literature, dominated by the vociferous progressive writers, not only expressed the pain and consequent anger against the prevailing social injustices, but also brought in a note of optimism about the outcome of a popular struggle against all kinds of oppression. Till that time our literature had some direction and goal before it which gave a positive meaning to the protest and idealism expressed by the writers. The Progressive writers had been brought up in the classical tradition, but they had an acute awareness of the prevalent ills which could not be comprehended or expressed in terms of the old conventional ideas or forms. Some tried to put new ideas into old forms or to use conventional symbols in new meanings. The language, the general poetic structure and the imagery in the poetry of Faiz are conventional but convey new ideas. The motif of his poetry is love. But this is not the mystic idea of love (*Ishq*) any more. Here love (*Ishq*) stands for a commitment to socio-political ideals.

Partition came at a time when the Progressive movement was at its highest pitch. Independence brought in its wake the mad dance of death in the form of communal riots all over India which caused an unprecedented upheaval and resulted in the transfer of population on a mass scale. The misery caused by man to man in all forms of fanaticism, greed and bestial lust became the theme of post-independence literature. The hopes that independence will bring a better life were frustrated. Instead, unrest, selfishness and exploitation reigned every where, and the poet cried out:

*We have been plunged into darkness again,
The morning bells have deceived us.*

Thus, starting with complaints and protests and after going through a concerted and determined effort, a goal was achieved which now seems to have been lost in confusion. Since independence our writer has been trying to find his direction.

This search has taken different forms in different writers. Some have found solace in revivalism. This search takes Intezar Hussain to the old folk-lore and to the local interests and customs of his native province of U.P. in India. He also attempts to revive the purity of the chaste language of his people. Some of our writers have tried to revive old myths and others have gone to the roots of local cultures down to Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. There have been some more serious and systematic studies also, such as the one by Qur'at-ul-Ain Haider in *Aag ka Darya* (The River of Fire) where she has tried to locate herself in the stream of Indian cultures which she explores as far back as the ancient India of a thousand years ago. Jafer Taher, on the other hand, in *Haft Kishwar* (The Seven Lands) attempts to write an epic of his descent from the Middle East origin.

Many others see that in the contemporary world they belong to the contemporary civilisation which, according to them, is precisely the western civilisation. No wonder that we have quite a number of those among us who write only in English. There are many who write in Urdu, but translated into English, they would sound as European or American as ones to the manner born.

Our writers have freely borrowed from Western ideas. Many of them are highly trained in modern Western disciplines. Some of them, like Abdullah Hussain in *Udas Naslain* (The Lost Generations), seek the solution of our problems in Western liberal traditions and their work echoes the great literatures of the West. Russian and French traditions of social realism find expressions in the works of writers like Sa'adat Hasan Manto and Shaukat Siddiquee. On the contemporary horizon of Pakistan may be seen the most popular philosophies, theories, movements and techniques from all over the world. Traditionalism, symbolism, imagism, existentialism, impressionism, progressivism are all here. Pakistanis have attempted everything from the epic to the absurd.

Though the tradition of drama has not flourished here and we have only a few names to mention in this field, like Agha Hashr and Imtiaz Ali Taj (for his famous *Anarkali*), recently some good plays have been written by Ibrahim Jalis and Zia Sarhadi. Some amateur young playwrights have also shown promise on the stage and deserve mention, such as Sarmed Sehbai. Now-a-days, the dramatic talent is drawn by the T.V. where good plays are produced, some of them adaptations from the world classics but most of them original.

Pakistani writers have generally taken up ideological, universal, humanitarian and national themes. But there has also been a reaction against this concern with collective social problems, so much emphasised in the entire stream of our poetry since 1857, and specially asserted by the Progressive movement. The reaction has been from the collective to the individual, from the universal to the particular. This has revived the great tradition of *Ghazal* in our poetry. It will not be an exaggeration to say that *Ghazal* has been considered in our literature as almost synonymous with poetry. This impressionistic poem, composed of mutually independent verses of two lines each, only connected in form, has been a very good vehicle for the communication of all sort of ideas. Verses even in the same *Ghazal* may variously express erotic, mystic, didactic and political ideas. All Urdu poets have written *Ghazals* but the tradition of Mir, our great master of *Ghazal*, has been revived in modern times by Nasir Kazmi.

Though *Ghazal* is still the most popular form of poetry in Urdu, other genres have also developed and flourished. *Geet* was the first of them. Originally written in Hindi, *geet* is a short lyric, expressing erotic ideas and meant to be sung with the accompaniment of music. It has become very popular through light and pop music and the film industry has promoted its rapid growth.

Before proceeding further with the subject, it will be interesting to have some idea of the city of Lahore and its spiritual and social traditions which have played such a vital role in promoting new ideas. After Deccan, Delhi and Lucknow, Lahore has been the new centre of Urdu for the last one century or so. The soil of the Punjab is very fertile, not only in terms of its agriculture, but also spiritually and intellectually. It has received new ideas with open heart and mind. Gandhara art, a beautiful blend of Indian and Greek cultures, and the Buddhist academy at Taxila are some of the features of this liberal acceptance. Lahore can equally boast of the classical Shalimar gardens built on the pattern of geometrical symmetry and the romantic Bagh-e-Jinnah modelled on the concept of wild beauty. Between these extremes, Lahore and its people live in a world which is simultaneously classical and romantic. This is a tradition of ideal flexibility, adaptability, liberalism and creative spontaneity. This is not an accident that the Punjab gave two religions to the world (the Sikh and the Ahmadi religions). Some significant religious and

political movements have chosen this land for the propagation and practice of their doctrines. Maulana Maudoodi and Ghulam Ahmed Pervez have chosen Lahore as the seat of their movements. Two very influential political movements, the Ahrar and the Khaksars, originated here. In the world of literature, Hali and Azad started the movement for new poetry in the last century in this city under the auspices of *Anjuman-e-Punjab*. Chughtai, Allah Bux and Sadequain worked in Lahore and rose to eminence in the world of art. Bare Ghulam Ali Khan, Roshan Ara, Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali and many others enriched the Indian classical music and their melodies can still be heard in this city. Last but not the least, the Pakistan Resolution was passed here and history has recorded it as the Lahore Resolution. It can truly be called the land of God's plenty.

Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq, which virtually led the new trends in Urdu literature for decades, was founded here just before independence.

Another interesting study would be the fact that poetry has always been a prominent feature of our culture. Wherever you go poetry is with you. It is in our bones and is as essential to us as breathing. You will find verses inscribed, sometimes with flowery patterns expressing most intimate feelings, religious philosophical truisms and erotic outbursts, inside and outside rickshaws, taxis, and buses, restaurants, cigarettes kiosks, and commercial advertisements. No function is considered complete without some poetic recitation. Religious ceremonies, social gatherings, gay parties, marriages, and even deaths find some use for poetry. *Mushaira* is the most popular institution of poetic recitation in which the poet and the audience equally and vociferously participate in enjoying poetic niceties. It is not wholly correct that the general addiction to poetry is a remnant of feudal past since our folk tradition also abounds in it, which is very popular to this day down to the lowest classes of our society. Poetry is even more popular than music and connoisseurs can be heard lamenting that our people have no ear for music and that a song is appreciated more for its words than for the notes. Even the modern industrial world is being consumed by poetry and we have now a sizable poetry which has as its subjects the new situations created by industrialisation. There seems to be no threat to our poetry from the modernisation of society, though a significant change in its subject matter, structure and the general tone is already visible.

Ghazal still continues to be the most popular form of poetry. However, new experiments in form are also going on. Free verse, prose-poem, adaptations from the rich folk tradition and from contemporary literature around the globe cover a long field of our writings at present. New trends have become visible since 1965. Attempts are being made to break the conventional linguistic barrier, and the vocabulary as well as the syntax are rudely shaken. This has been made into a school by Iftekhar Jalib and his disciples, but its echoes can be heard for outside the limits of this school and many young poets, consciously or unconsciously, follow this trend, which has seized the imaginations almost as a new fashion. Strange outlandish metaphors, verging on the absurd, and the language rudely shaken out of syntax are salient features of this new mode of writing.

Urdu literature has been rich in humour, travelogue and biography of which we have a long tradition. But the last couple of years or so may more properly be called the period of translations. Virtually hundreds of poets from all corners of the world have been translated into Urdu. But thematically there has been a radical change here. Since 1874, led by the *Anjuman-e-Punjab*, English romantic and Victorian poets were translated and in some cases beautifully assimilated into our classical traditions. This received generous official patronage and encouragement. Independence has broken this special relationship with English. On the other hand, Partition put a barrier against the Indian influence. We have been opened to influence from all over the world, particularly from the Third World. Large-scale translations are now being made from writings from Africa, Palestine, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Indo-China. Chinese and Russian literatures have been freely available in recent years. No wonder that now we see that many literatures exist in the world beside the English and that New York, Moscow and Peking are more accessible and closer to us than Delhi, Lucknow and Bombay. At the same time, translations from local folk traditions and regional literatures are also becoming very popular.

Our literature has covered a big ground. It has left behind the complaints and ironic gibes of Ghalib, the exhortations of Hali, the wild protests of Josh and the revivalism of Hafeez. For a time it has also sought some small consolation in the mild pathos of Mir. Our contemporary literature is a literature of exploration. The young writer is looking for a new world.

Along with experiments in creative literature, explorations are also being incessantly made in criticism. Every new literary work appears with a preface to it. Every writer takes his work as a new movement for which proper climate has to be created. This practice of writing long exhortative prefaces started with Hali. The critical atmosphere is charged with controversy. There are those who, like Hasan Askari, believe that tradition is always rooted in faith and for any sound literature a sound metaphysical tradition is essential. Some critics adhere to the dialectics of Marx, while others, like Wazir Agha, relate literature to the soil and believe that all great literature basically emerges from the land, its physical aspect and its social and cultural traditions. In the larger context we have among our critics religious reformists as well as absurdists and pure aesthetes.

To sum up, there now exists a vast literature of sufficient merit which is visibly Pakistani, smelling of the land and expressing the aspirations and anxieties of its people. It is vital, dynamic and explorative. In our literature, there is a very small amount of dogmatism, if any, and this augurs well for its future.

(1979)



❧ Chapter 36 ❧

Iqbal's Humorous Verse



The one distinctive quality of Iqbal's poetry is its high seriousness. He is a poet with a message and has a set aim of life before him. All his poetry is directed towards a definite goal and he never swerves from it. Burdened with a grave sense of responsibility and with a missionary zeal he pursues his object with all devotion and concentration. In his poetry is perceived an effort to grapple with his own thought to lead him to a clearer perception and precision. Similarly he struggles with the form making various experiments with words and rhythm so as to be able to communicate better.

In all this sombre atmosphere, it is some relief and a pleasant surprise to see, appended to *Bang-e-Dara*, a small section entitled "Humorous". Not that Iqbal lacked humour. Various anecdotes from his life give sufficient evidence of the humorous vein in him. But humour, somehow, did not fit into his scheme of work. He had a serious message to convey, and he was conscious of the fact that his nation already took life too lightly and non-seriously. Perhaps he did not want to encourage much light-heartedness among his people. Moreover he was wedded to an idea, and the idea dominated his thought. He found little time or use for the "trivialities" of life. But real wisdom does not consist in higher thoughts. It is in the small, apparently insignificant things of life that real wisdom is revealed. But to Iqbal, in his given situation, idea was more important than life. Life is a complex of all sorts of experiences and reactions. Iqbal insisted on an exclusive single-mindedness in his readers. Therefore, he could not react to the tragedies of life with a sense of humour like Ghalib. He kept his humour well controlled and in the background.

Iqbal's humorous verse, more than anything else, reveals the amount of self-control that he exercised upon himself. The man with such a sense of humour could so well devote himself to his mission and stifle all that could obstruct or obscure his purpose. He could not

laugh it off, or brush it aside with a sly grin. He felt himself in the midst of a battle and so he fully armed himself for the strife. It is for this reason that we do not find any other humorous section in the poetry of Iqbal.

Iqbal's humour is not integrated with his poetry, as is that of Ghalib or Mir, both of whom could laugh at themselves or seek catharsis in forced pleasantries. Iqbal sought no catharsis. Therefore he kept his humour separate and distinct from his poetry. But the instinct which was so genuine and strong could not be suppressed forever. It found an outlet, though we have a very small specimen of it in his few humorous poems. This is another face of Iqbal, but we see no more than a glimpse of it. Had Iqbal allowed this vein the room it deserved, he might have been another versatile poet like Khusru, who wrote two kinds of poetry, one for the elite and the other for the common man.

The humorous vein in Iqbal works on various levels. It is pure and simple laughter on things that look so obviously stupid and ridiculous. It is also sometimes a bit satirical and sometimes even bitter and revealing impatience. It may also be aimed at whipping lethargy off and attempting to shake the complacent from a stupid unconcern. It is, at least once, very bitterly ironical. The most light hearted and genial humour, however, is in those small unpretentious poems in which the poet sees absurdity of certain things with a childish innocence and an unsuspecting assurance. About the influence of English education on our girls, for example, he expresses his apprehension:

*Yeh drama dikhaye ga kiya scene.
Pardah uthney ki muntazir hai nigah.*

Similarly, about the Sheikh he says that he too is not in favour of 'purdah':

*Waz mein farmadiya kal aap ney yeh sa'f sa'f
Pardah aakhir kis say ho jab mard hi zan ho gaye.*

However, in spite of this humorous comment, he advocates a better deal for women while discussing the Turkish situation in 'The Lectures'. But here Iqbal 'comes down' to the level of the common man.

When a serious poet writes humorous verse, it is somewhat different in intent as well as in content from the verse of a satirist or a

humorist. For the serious poet it is a kind of holiday from the exacting demands of his art. He writes humorous verse as if in a state of retirement. All the restrictions of discipline and sobriety that he has imposed upon himself are relaxed for the moment. There is neither the burden of mystery nor the burden of responsibility. He is like a grown up man fondling with a child, in which state he tries to come as close to the child as possible and behave in a childish way so as to amuse himself. In these verses Iqbal's main aim seems to be the amusement of his readers. These are topical verses and have topical significance. The wisdom here which ridicules the new trends in society is a wisdom derived from habit and convention in which the common man feels so happy and secure. This wisdom is then revealed through the simplest form of punning, by playing the simplest tricks upon certain words. This is very different from the wisdom of a philosopher or a statesman who rises above the moment and feels responsible to generations, the generations that have passed as well as the ones to follow.

At a slightly higher level, but still catering to the same crude sensibility, comes another humorous comment, this time on the craze for political eminence among women. The revival of political activity among Muslims (I shall call it revival since Muslims were always a political community) may be a very serious matter having far-reaching consequences. But Iqbal, sympathising with the common man's view, sees it, among some women, as the introduction of a new fashion, as a fashion in sartorial habits or new trends in cuisine. He sees the woman abandoning her professional responsibility for political aspiration:

*Aata hai ab woh daur keh aulaid ke aiwaz,
Council ki mimberi ke Liye vote chahe gi.*

In the same jovial vein, he comments on the formation of the Council:

*Hum to faqir thay hi hamara to kasb tha.
Seekhain saliqa ab umara bhi sawal ka.*

or

*Suna hai main ne kal yeh guftagu thi karkhane mein,
Purane jhopron mein hai thikana dastkari ka
Magar sarkar ne kiya khoob council hall banewayaya,
Koi is shehr mein takya na tha sarmaya daron ka.*

That is pure humour in the sense that here something has been pointed out which looks rather stupid and ridiculous, but what is

particularly ridiculous in it has been specifically pointed out. Moreover, no constructive criticism has been offered here. It is simply an expression of disapproval, but not to the extent of needing immediate specific reform. The critic's position has not been clearly stated, as if when questioned to the point he may parry the question by simply saying that he was merely joking.

Though these pleasantries look harmless and casual random observations, this humorous way of looking at things sometimes brings an unusual detachment in the approach of the poet and he may start seeing things as they are, while the ideological emphasis forces him to see them as they ought to be. Off his guards and unsuspecting, the serious poet is exposed to a realism that ideological preoccupations may not otherwise permit him, and he starts seeing objective facts in contrast to ideal aspirations. In his earnest effort to have a vision of the goal the poet's view of the path leading to it may be blurred. But humour has the capability of awakening the sense of detached observation. The idealist may not be aware of practical difficulties but the humorist is. So is Iqbal when he humorously exclaims:

*Qanoon-e-waqf ke liye larte thay Sheikh ji,
Poocho to waqf ke Liye hai jaidad bhi?*

The same awareness, which is brought by humour, may also be very forceful and bring to the poet the shocking realisation of the most hopeless state of affairs. When he sees old and cherished values mercilessly trampled under foot, Iqbal's humour becomes rather sour and he bitterly protests:

*Utha ker phaink do bahar gali mein,
Na'ee tehzib ke anday hein ganday.*

But this is a very rare moment of impatience in Iqbal. Generally this awakening, brought about by humour, is instructive. It makes him conscious of the economic pressures and adds to his anxiety. The growing dependence of India on foreign goods disturbs him:

*Inteha bhi is ki hai aakher khariden kab talak,
Chhatriyan, roma'l, muffler, parahan Japan se.
Apni ghaflet ki yehi halat agar qaiyum rahi,
Aain ge ghassal kabul se Kafan Japan se.*

Though aware of the economic pressure, Iqbal, like the average Indian of his time is reluctant to accept that economic change causes a

❧ Chapter 37 ❧

Literature and the 21st Century



What will be, or more precisely are, the demands of the 21st century, since we already are in the twenty first century? Literary epochs do not necessarily coincide with political or historical epochs. For instance, the 20th century did not begin in 1901. Its inception can be dated back to as early as 1880. In England Bernard Shaw, James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence, beside others, were the harbingers of the new age. In the same way in India the 20th century actually began with Sir Syed, Hali and Azad. M.A.O. College was established in Aligarh in 1877; Hali's *Musaddas* appeared in 1879; and Azad's *Manifesto* was published in 1874. Similarly the reign of Queen Victoria was spread over a long period, from 1819 to 1901, but in literature the Victorian age is generally considered to be confined to the years around 1830, when Byron, Shelley and Keats had died, to 1880, marked by Hilton's *Goodbye Mr. Chipps*. Some of the best poems of Byron, Shelley and Keats were actually written during the reign of Queen Victoria, but they are not considered Victorian Poets. Two great romantics Soouthey and Wordsworth, were Queen Victoria's Poet Laureates, but they are not Victorians. The Eighteenth century of English literature started around 1660 with Dryden's satire and didactic poetry. This is strange that literary ages usually preceded historical ages by about a quarter of a century. Literary epochs are not subject to calendar or to any change in the political field. A literary epoch is distinguished by certain ideas and attitudes. So the twenty first century has already started with the new age of literature which has been given the name of Post-modernism. We are here concerned with the parameters of this new age and its relation to literature, how it might influence literature and how it is likely to be influenced by it.

If the idea is to prepare a poetics for the twenty first century, it will be a sheer waste of time and energy. Literature does not have a blueprint. It is not written according to a plan. Hali's *Preface* attempted such a poetics for the twentieth century. It did service in

some ways, but it misled many. Hali's critical assumptions were based on the industrial revolution which had not appeared in India. This phenomenon took place in Europe, and certain ideological and literary attitudes emerged there as a reaction to it. Hali was impressed with their echo and was keen to introduce them here. In the light of those so-called facts of the new age, there appeared two distinct streams in our literature represented by Iqbal and Faiz, respectively. Carried away by his idealism Iqbal exhorted the Indian Muslims, those ignorant lot who had not yet even found their feet, to aspire to the flights of *Shaheen* (the Eagle), and Faiz dreamt of bringing a proletarian revolution under the leadership of the elite. (Something that Sajjad Zaheer confessed in these words, "What else could we do? We were incapable of manual labour. We had not learnt any craft and our minds revolted against serving the imperialist government. What other field was left?" They simply indulged in intellectual luxury).

No poetics can be built on mere conjectures or borrowed ideas. This effort harmed us mostly in two ways: on the one hand, these deliberate efforts broke our ways, as if with a jolt, from our literary and poetic traditions. On the other hand, art was restricted to a certain specific practical expediency. This not only put literature under heavy chains, our cultural stream too suffered a sudden halt.

This is a weakness common to all ideological movements that no ideology, however comprehensive, can circumscribe the whole life. Thus reality is put into a mould, amputated and distorted. Literature is the essence of a whole culture, of the total sensibility of a society. Therefore it is practically impossible to foresee the social and intellectual upheavals of a coming age and their bearing on its literature, though no doubt such an influence will surely be there. The probable influence of the developments can be gauged in two ways: first we shall have to see how such influences worked in the past: and secondly, what new influences are likely to emerge in the future. For this an authentic and comprehensive knowledge of history is indispensable. But at the same time concerted efforts shall have to be made in order to develop a true consciousness of history. Late Prof. Hameed Ahmad Khan foresaw this as far back as the early 60s when as the vice-chancellor of the Punjab University he initiated a number of projects for this purpose. One of these was the compilation of a literary history of Pakistan. Also, instead of merely celebrating anniversaries and centenaries of our literary masters, he devised well planned programmes to use such occasions for serious research work

aimed at the preservation and perpetuation of our rich cultural and literary heritage. Amir Khusro day, Ghalib day and Iqbal day proved very productive in the academic way. It is a sad commentary on the affairs of the Punjab University that the Department of Literary History was closed down after the exit of Prof. Hameed Ahmad Khan, on the pretext that its assignment was completed (as if history can even be complete). And centenaries and anniversaries once again became mere formal get-togethers. Both these projects are so huge that each demands an independent research cell, a task which the Punjab University is absolutely incapable to perform in its present academic and scholastic depleted state. Big projects at the national level with adequate intellectual and financial resources are required for such tasks. It is reassuring to learn that the newly constituted cultural wing has taken such projects in hand. But while it is important to rewrite an authentic history of Pakistan, it is also essential that the work started by the Department of Literary History must also be continued with a rededicated spirit.

So far as the present day situation is concerned it demands an in depth study in both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The greatest need in this respect is that of translations. For us, at least an awareness of the contemporary world is extremely important. And this world is very vast. In the last couple of decades this field has attracted some attention, and literatures from many foreign countries have been rendered into Urdu and other Pakistani languages. But all these efforts have so far been confined to individual enterprises and without any definite programme or plan. Such a project needs an exclusive institution on a permanent basis. Translation enjoys such importance in the advanced countries of the world that a book is translated simultaneously as it is published, and sometimes the translation appears even before the original book is published. We need large scale translations of intellectual and creative works from the world over to enrich our languages and their literatures. In the first place it will greatly add to our store of knowledge and secondly, it will introduce new modes of thought and expression to us. Advanced languages do not only acquaint us with new ideas and attitudes, they also bring the knowledge of a new idiom to us. Such linguistic explorations had already started in the days of Sir Syed, and scientific thought and language had started replacing our age old scholastic habits of thought and expression. But we have not yet achieved that maturity of mind and manner which is indispensable to the growth of a progressive mind. (The Progressive Movement of '36

owed a lot to translations.) National Language Authority is answerable for this failing. It did not deliver the goods and could not serve the purpose it was created for.

The foundations of the Twenty First century have already been laid. Post-modernism indicates certain trends and attitudes which bring their style and medium, their own metaphors with them. Like other ages, Post-modernism is also a revolt against the immediately preceding age, i.e., against modernism, as modernism itself was a revolt against Victorianism. Traditionally our literature owed a lot to Persian influence till a century ago. Our sensibility was built on that. Azad's *Shair ul Ajam* was its last word. But since then, and more particularly since the Aligarh movement, our modes of thought and feeling experienced a visible shift. Now English and, mainly through it, other European languages are playing a significant role in the growth of our aesthetics as well as linguistic habits. We are now directly exposed to movements emerging in the west. Post modernism is a phenomenon which relates to the last couple of decades or so. Historically as well as aesthetically it is a revolt against modernism. Though it is very difficult to assign specific dates to such attitudes or trends, modernism may be considered to begin with the First World War and end with the Vietnam War. This transitional period came to its end with the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. However, it is very important to go to the very roots of Post modernism or, in other words, to modernism against which it is a reaction.

Modernism does not now simply mean all that relates to modern times, for which the term contemporary is used. In the present day criticism modernism does not merely relate to a period, rather it stands for certain ideas and attitudes. Our language and literature have been very much influenced by it. The circumstances which ultimately led to the disastrous Word War I had their roots in a much earlier period. The storm had been gathering, as in England, since the Chartist movement of the mid-nineteen century. The war was followed by economic depression of the early 20s, and the communist revolution in Eastern Europe. Fascism raised its head in Italy and Spain while Nazism gained strength in Germany. All this led to the Second World War which engulfed the entire globe in its flames. This was a time of great turmoil and extreme despair. Europe was given to utter despondency. This was the age of "The Angry Young men". The literary hero of this age was T.S. Eliot, and the

representative poem of the age was *The Wasteland*. The images of the destruction of the Western civilization in this poem were inspired by Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and Hermann Hesse's *A Glimpse into Darkness*. Even Allama Iqbal could not escape the mood of the age and prophesied that the western civilization is approaching its doom brought on by itself, in a suicidal march of progress. Aldous Huxley, on the other hand, totally rejected such an assertion, maintaining that the causes of decline lay elsewhere. Industrial progress, according to him, does not bring disaster. He disagreed with Ruskin and Morris who believed that machines created ugliness. "The old, unindustrialised parts of Cairo or Bombay are worse than fully industrialised London, or New York, or Ruhr." But this was one of the rare notes of optimism in that dismal atmosphere. Generally the mood was that of despair and despondency. How the western influences work on us can be seen by the fact that while there has been no significant industrialisation here, no such "revolution" occurred in this part of the world, we had also started expressing disgust for the industrial life. On the other hand, not only the western civilization survived industrial revolution, it emerged from it with greater confidence and a maturer outlook. Industry put no obstacles to its progress, as some of our intellectuals, perhaps ardently, expected. That civilization flourished and was further reinforced.

This, in short, was the age when the western intellectuals were absolutely disgusted with life. They talked of isolation, alienation, antipathy, confusion, disintegration and the breaking of human bonds. They were impatient of the past and disillusioned with the present and complained of social repression. They were for the condemned of the society and wished for martyrdom. They were tormented with unknown fears and exaggerated the real ones. Some were even masochistic and derived a morbid romantic pleasure from their real or imagined misery. Their metaphors reflected their state of mind. They talked of the cross, the gibbet, the marsh and the storm. Murders, violence and nightmares haunted them. The smoke, the fog and the wasteland were their favourite metaphors, along with mythological symbols. They saw the holocaust of the doomsday all around them. Their approach was clearly personal, subjective and romantic and they were extremely egotistical, regressive and self-centred. Consequently they were generally escapists and lived in the dream worlds, or torture cells, which they themselves created. They had a vision for the future too, but it was lost during the long journey from romanticism to the absurd. Theorising was the most destructive

trade of the age. Some viewed life through art, others saw art through life. It means that there was a miserable lack of awareness about both life and art. T.S.Eliot uses the terms of culture and civilization in this context, and divides life into compartments, although his theory of "unified sensibility" rejected all compartmentalization and insisted that life should be seen as one indivisible unit. But he found that culture and civilization were two different entities, distant and mutually exclusive. He thought that though the Western civilization had definitely progressed materially, yet culturally it remained static, if not deteriorated; meaning thereby that the two had had no interaction, no impact upon each other. This in fact is the "dissociation of sensibility" against which he waged a determined war. His *Wasteland*, like Iqbal's theory of the decline of the west, was the product of a partial awareness of life. This distorted consciousness actually ran in the veins of modernism.

Thus, modernism saw life in fragments and this mutilated consciousness formed the basis of its aesthetics. The age divided men between the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited, the capitalist and the communist, and the democrat and the fascist. It created a world dominated by belligerent groups butchering each other in the name of ideology. No doubt this age created abundant literature of resistance, its poets and writers forgot life and its beauties and loudly protested against cruelty and ugliness, so much so that cruelty and ugliness became the main subjects of their writings. Their literature could not find positive bases and was exclusively raised on negative values. They forgot creation and concentrated on resistance.

Modernism, apart from other things, found life divided between the opposing claims of the subjective and the objective. Material advancement polluted the stream of spirituality and even the most sacred human values fell a victim to it. The rat race for amassing wealth brought frigidity in the emotions of love and sacrifice, and the individual suffered the pangs of alienation. He was not only disillusioned with life; bereft of faith, he was ultimately alienated from his own self. This was a time when ideological frontiers had become realities, and the realities were pushed into the background. A dispersed vision saw only disintegration in society and the world appeared broken into fascist, capitalist, communist and democratic divisions. The ideological soil was so fertile that ideologies grew like mushrooms, to the extent that even Pakistan, which was a fact, was

reduced to an ideology. Every new ideology brought a new division in its wake and caused further disintegration in the society.

This modern era was also directly linked with colonialism. All the wars, all economic depressions, and all ideologies were engaged in defending their colonies and expanding their frontiers. Thus, while the big powers were trying to brow-beat each other, they were at the same time busy in exploiting the backward nations of the world. They were inventing ideologies to justify their exploits. White Man's Burden and Light to the Ignorant were some of the euphemisms coined to cover up their ulterior motives. But when the mind succumbs to such devious stratagems, the deception cannot remain confined to deceiving others. Developed nations were ruthlessly exploiting their own people too. Ibsen, Shaw and others in Europe, and intellectuals like Arthur Miller and Albee in America exposed these exploiters and showed how their own people were being victimised in the name of democracy, truth, justice, family, love and religion. It was necessary to curb all kinds of freedom in order to preserve and strengthen the exploitative system. New ideologies were coined to achieve that purpose. Postmodernism is a reaction against this distorted world view. Now the world is entering a new phase where man will see himself as a citizen of the world and, rising above petty differences, he would try to look at the issues confronting him in a new light in a larger perspective. In the political field its indications are already visible in the form of the expanding role of the UN and in the crisis of Haiti which did not lead to a catastrophe similar to one in the Gulf War. In literature dogmatism is making room for eclecticism. Of still greater importance is the fact that pollution, population, explosion, filth and ugliness are no more seen as only the problems of the poor countries. These have assumed a global significance. A hole in the ionosphere affects the whole world equally. Then, the advancements in the means of communication and transportation have brought the peoples of the world closer to one another and a global perspective is developing everywhere. The progressively liberating atmosphere demands a greater maturity and promotion of universal values for literature also.

Twentieth century was a century of division, repression and clash of colonial interests. It was an age of polarisation and growing contradictions. Thus the resistance literature flourished. In the new atmosphere the literature of compromise will find a more favourable soil to grow. One problem which post-modernism will face is that

now when the east and the west are drawing closer, when thousands are daily moving from one side to the other and some misunderstandings about one another are being gradually removed, in some quarters new prejudices may also be growing. The emigrants from the east no more see the west only as an exploiter, thoroughly materialistic and drunk with power. They are now realising the positive side of the picture also. They see that human beings inhabit that part of the world. One can see even beggars and the destitute people on the roads in London and New York. They no more hate the westerners as grabbers and robbers, but find them sympathetic and honest. Similarly the west no more sees the east as a land of the savages. They realise that the people living in the backward countries are also human beings like themselves. Human sympathies and mutual understanding are steadily growing. There is an ever-increasing interest in the literature of the Third World all over the west. No doubt ethnic and linguistic conflicts are also appearing. But the indications are that these too will not last long. Literature has an important role to perform in this respect. The task of bringing people closer, of removing the gaps, and setting at rest various misunderstandings and apprehensions must be a serious task for the writer. Already people have stopped seeing men as the ruler and the ruled. Imperialism and colonialism have been left behind. Besides, many writers are now writing in foreign languages, and this surely will be a great help towards mutual understanding. Translations have become a common feature the world over.

Individual culture is being very much emphasised these days. Contemporary literature lays more emphasis upon self-realisation. It is becoming more explorative than dogmatic. It is progressively becoming more and more parodic and does not insist on "originality". Love for novelty has given way to introspection and imitation. There is no hesitation in learning from others. Literature today does not bother about "subjects". It is more concerned with issues, and instead of propagating a specific point of view, it tends to be more pluralistic, more accommodating. Rather than being distinctive, it tends to be collective. There seems to have emerged almost a consensus that there is no philosophy of life, rather there are philosophies of life all of which deserve respect. The philosophy of life is in fact the sum total of all the prevalent philosophies.

People are fed up with all kinds of dictatorship and repression. Literature is also playing its role, and that it must, and in future there

will be a still greater role for it to play. Not only political, but intellectual and cultural domains and hierarchies will also be demolished. As in politics we see a growing reaction against centrism and in favour of regional autonomy, similarly literature will also not be able to resist a shift from collectivism to individualism. Spontaneity rather than regimentation is likely to be the intellectual preference. As it appears, in the 21st century collectivity will no more be the basis of individuality, rather individuality will form the basis of collectivity. Nation-states are already facing the threat.

Twentieth century was the century of bourgeois values; its own ideals were bourgeois. Its institutions were bourgeois too. It was an age of promoting bourgeois values in the proletariat and of turning the common people into elite supporting such institutions as family, nation, religion, and conventional morality. 21st century will be the century of the middle class.

21st century will promote middle class values. Etiquette, formalism, sophistication and refinement will no more be the signs of culture. It will be an age of working classes. Old values have already been outdated. All relationships are now business relationships. Blood, and even ethnicity, will be thrown into the background.

Culturally we are entering an epoch-making stage in the evolutionary process of creating a new value system. It is a rather precarious situation. Literature can play a positive role in it. Specially, the status of women and the standards of “good” need to be redefined. The old concepts of good and bad are no more relevant. Then, this is also the age of the multi nationals which are of necessity bringing nations closer in their bid to secure new markets and extend their monopolies. Literature cannot remain indifferent to this cementing of the ties. Central Asia has suddenly become the focus of the whole world. This is particularly significant for Pakistan, since not only with respect to economic compulsions, but otherwise too, Pakistan’s development and progress is in the interest of the whole world. Improving the communication system here is an urgent international need. Means of communication as well as the media are facing unprecedented pressures. They must rise upto the challenge. On the cultural front the most interesting thing is that so far we have been very much subjected to the influence of the west, particularly since the sealing of our eastern borders cutting us off from the large part of the subcontinent. Through the English Language in particular our culture was practically inundated by the western modes of

thought and feeling as well as of expression. Now Persian is likely to re-emerge as the language of the region. Iqbal's dream may also come true, in some more tangible way as he chose to address the whole world, at least the Muslim world, through the medium of Persian. It may ultimately emerge as the link language between a number of Muslim countries. Our language, literature and culture may once again discover their roots. This development must attract the serious attention of our intellectuals. As the British Raj had made Urdu the language of the whole of the subcontinent, primarily because it suited them in the running of the day to day affairs of the colony. Similarly the dominant interests of the present world, mostly relating to trade, may induce to make Persian the working language of this region.

When people draw closer, they also try to enhance mutual understanding. They try to be better acquainted with each other. Instead of differences they try to seek common grounds. People in Pakistan will most likely try to study the psychological and cultural traits of the central Asian people. They will try to know more of their interests and their social relationships. Literature is the best vehicle for such communication. The story is the most effective literary medium. Interest in central Asian stories is already visible and is growing. Bulkh, Bukhara, Smarkand, etc., have been the treasures of our golden dreams. Now intellectuals like Rasul Hamzatov and Mizrza Trusanzadey, beside many others, are no more unfamiliar to us.

21st century augurs well for literature. Now the story will become more important, since it is rooted in life, not in any abstract notion of it. The mind reconstructs life in the form of history and philosophy, and denudes it of its reality. It becomes rather a figment of the writer's own mind and reflects its range, depth and presumptions. History and philosophy are also influenced by the preferences of the readers and their reservations. Meta-story is always subjected to circumstances, to the idiosyncrasies of the story-teller, to the wishes of the readers and also to certain avowed ideological ends, whereas a story is only a story and attempts a realistic picture of life. The story had been almost eliminated from fiction in the second half of the 20th century. It will again become important in the 21st century. The story was the first form that human speculation took. Man created mythologies, the stories of gods and goddesses and other supernatural beings in order to interpret the mysteries of life. In the words of Francis Bacon, mythology is the philosophy of the

unsophisticated mind. Philosophies and theories, which are the product of intellectual ingenuity, confuse the vision of life. The story gives a closer and clearer view of life. Story is the soul of all classical literature. But the narrative is no more popular with the writer. He feels more at home in speculation and reflection. Narrative was also the forte of Persian literature, which is a source and the spring of all our creative streams. The story may take the form of an epic like *Rustam and Sohrab* or it may take the form of the fables and anecdotes of Sa'adi, or our own *Dastans*, we are bound to return to it. Postmodernism also emphasizes the story against the meta-story. Literature will play a significant role in this context, since, as J.S Mill wrote in the previous century, truth does not assert itself; only as much truth prevails as is made to prevail. Literature does not bring revolution. But it strengthens the forces of revolution, advances their cause and lends legitimacy to them. Meta-story, or ideology, is always individual and analytical. Story is synthetic and reflects the collective psyche. Advancement in the media will further strengthen the story. Synthesis will be an important value in the 21st century. It will not formulate movements into patterns; in it each movement will itself be a pattern, embodying a total vision. Ideologies create split-consciousnesses and encourage confrontations. The story talks of man. It does not mean that ideas should be discarded. Ideas have their own importance. It is ideas that build and carry civilization forward. But they also create differences and distinctions. It therefore becomes still more important to promote the story so that consciousness can be secured against the harmful effects of ideas. Moreover, to reject an ideology is also an ideology. Therefore not ideas about man, but man himself must be the subject of literature.

Post-modernism emphasizes concrete reality against the idea. Now the demand is to tell a story, not to formulate an idea. This shift from idea to story has been given the name of "narrative turn" in the terminology of Postmodernism. Literature is forced to present life instead of creating its paradigms. It must show real life in its daily activity and view the world in a detached, unprejudiced, unself-conscious and spontaneous light with an eye fired with its primal innocence. Literature must show life in its naked reality without attempting to embellish it or glossing over its ugliness. All political, ideological, or even aesthetic barriers will have to be crossed to achieve this aim. Even the worst enemies will not only be endured, but embraced. It is a task stupendous but not impossible. Now when political and economic compulsions are weaving humanity into some

form, literature must promote this growing sense of association and provide sound foundations to love and mutual trust more than anything else. Quite visibly, grounds are being prepared in contemporary literature for the emergence of a new subjectivity, a new ego; a subjectivity which can accommodate other subjectivities. Literature will no more look for a hero, will not seek or create one, since the need of a hero reflects some inadequacy, some lack of confidence, in an individual or a community. The entrepreneur has now taken the place of the hero. Now man's war is not against the supernatural or, as Sophocles would say, against more than man. He has now to fight against the forces created by man himself. Instead of passion and sentimental fervour, cool-headed thinking is required to deal with the problems confronted by humanity. Man is no more a creature of sentiments. He takes his decisions after thoroughly considering his profit and loss. To-day's man does not need a vision (in the abstract); he needs understanding: an understanding of social and economic relationships. Idealism is beside the point, since man has realised that he creates his own ideal and no more pursues a ready made one. He no more needs to nurse his wounds, the wounds of ego in the main. Perhaps for the first time he has now understood the meaning of age-old saying that life means living.

We are also faced with the crisis of history. The entire history written so far has been the history of ideals and ideologies. Thus some people now believe in the death of history. Perhaps history needs to be looked at from a new angle. Perhaps life may appear to be flat and colourless, since so far we have been weaving the fabric of a beautiful life with the threads of our wishes and dreams. Can life be lived simply as life? That is the question. This surely is a very difficult question to answer which will be faced by the 21st century.

Perhaps great masterpieces of art may no more be possible. According to Aldous Huxley, the advancement in technology has created a network of great factories and huge machines which are far beyond the reach of the common man. This has tremendously increased the cost of labour. The wages of the specialised worker have risen to a point where the common man cannot even think of hiring his services. The repair of a car may sometimes cost almost as much as the purchase of a new one. Therefore people have now started doing small repairs themselves. The demand for small mechanical kits and tool boxes has suddenly increased. As compared to professionalism, amateurism is also on the rise. The amateur worker

can perform small tasks, but he is not capable of achieving any feats in production which demand technical expertise and creative ingenuity. The artists of the old spent years, even generations, mastering an art. They created master-pieces which can no more be expected from the present day amateurs. Now there will surely be a lot of commercial art, but the real art which is a beautiful blend of vision and craft may no more be possible. Now we will have the architecture of the kind of the New Campus of the Punjab University at Lahore. The grandeur of the building of the Old Campus may not be recaptured. There will be no more Taj Mahals and Badshahi Mosques. There is neither time nor space for such monuments which are the products of an age of idleness. Indications of growing amateurism are already visible in literature also. The advancement in the modes of communication is narrowing the gap between literature and journalism. The writer is under great pressure. Literature has been commercialised. The writer must write fast and under instructions. T.V. plays reflect these limitations. Then, beside the writer, the reader is also short of time. He has no leisure to read voluminous novels spread over thousands of pages. Will literature be able to maintain standards under these conditions? This too will be an important question before the 21st century.

Pursuit of pleasure has been relegated to a secondary significance or place in the present day world. Success has become the primary concern. Will the 21st century poet try to be a successful poet or will he write for self-satisfaction and pleasure, deriving strength from his writings?

The last, but not the least, is the question whether literature which is an exercise in reading and writing, will strive to enhance the literacy rate in our country. Since the *Urdu* Primer of Maulana Muhammad Husain Azad, there has been no such Primer in this language which the children may read with interest and, beside learning the language, enjoy the beauties of their rich culture at the same time. We miserably lack in the literature for children. Children are the future. They symbolise trust and progress in life. Children's literature must be encouraged and developed also in order to get better results in the campaign towards the enhancement of literacy rate in the country.

A still greater problem is to get literature its due status in a world of fast advancing technology. It is now being universally acknowledged that the main cause of ever increasing anxiety, social

imbalance and growing violence is the disparity between the attention paid to the development of the sciences and that given to humanities. Though man has vastly extended his control over the external world, he seems to have lost control over himself. He has not achieved maturity corresponding to the power he has acquired. Literature must get due attention in order to restore balance in personality as well as in society.

One thing, however, is definite: life is invincible. It cannot be conquered. Life perpetuates and preserves itself. Even today large scale migrations are creating whole communities of displaced persons, of the 'aliens' in every society. They will work as agents of harmony between various communities. This is also a guarantee of the preservation of the human race that its different fragments are assimilated into one another. Urdu literature, for instance, has now spread to almost all the corners of the globe. America, Canada, Europe, Australia, wherever Urdu literature is produced, it is influenced by the literature of the respective region. A global literary culture is being nourished, and soon along with the Lahore, Lucknow and Delhi schools of Urdu we will have the American and European schools too.

The above discussion has attempted to study the possible considerations likely to draw the attention of the 21st century writer. Some of the possibilities are very dangerous, very alarming. Some are reassuring too. But all these possibilities are quite visible. To step into the 21st century with our traditions and values is a great challenge. These are apprehensions as well as expectations. Some are positive, some negative. Now this is the burden of literature and of the intellectual to decide which trends are to be encouraged and which discouraged.

(1996)

❧ Chapter 38 ❧

Out of the 5th Dimension



Aage Samander Hai is Intezar Hussain's fifth novel, if we include the novelette *Din* too. Since the writing of *Chand Gehn*, which was his first novel upto *Basti*, Intezar Hussain has been exploring the 5th dimension, beyond the world of space and time. He plunges into the unknown, though it added a romantic fascination to his narrative, has brought upon him the charges of nostalgia and escapism. After *Din*, which was the most realistic of his work, very down-to-earth, *Aage Samandar Hai* is just another attempt at grappling with reality without taking recourse to fantasies. Though here too he takes a plunge into the unknown, the overall attempt is to understand and analyse the problems of day to day living. Here he deals with the reality as it exists and tortures and even perplexes the mind. But he keeps the mysteries of life at a distance, as is evident from the very title of the novel—*Ahead is the Sea*— which may mean the end of hope, or the opening of unbounded new possibilities. It may also mean eternity or it may symbolise a destructive force, and the nation is supposed to be at the verge of it. The title also recalls the taunt of an important national leader reminding the Mahajirs of their limitations. While the symbol may suggest despair, it may also lead to a new resolve. It is a paradoxical symbol.

Intezar Hussain's feet are firmly planted in the earth here, though as a sheer matter of habit he keeps looking back to Andulus, Baghdad or Dehli. This is the first clearly conceived work since *Din*. As in that earlier attempt, here too, stark realities of life are the subject of the novel and these are rooted in concrete direct personal experience. In between *Basti*, *Tazkera* and *Chand Gehn*, it is not life itself, but apprehensions about it, real or imagined, which mark the subject of his fiction. Calamity in itself is not so frightening as apprehension about it. A knock at the door in fact releases the tension caused to a scared person apprehending and expecting the visit of a

policeman. Such is the experience of a South African coloured man who lived under perpetual threat of the white man's police. The coming of actual calamity may in fact be a relief.

Din reflected the world of real concrete experience. It was the world of the native town of the author. Lahore was a different world. Adjustment here was not easy, and so there were many real as well as imagined fears that haunted the mind in the form of ghosts and weird spectacles. This world of the middle period novels is largely a world of ghouls and spectres which haunt a frightened mind that ultimately seeks refuge in a past that appears to be secure—secure at least in its superstitions and unself-conscious complacency.

But Lahore was not very different from Vyaspur. Karachi is just the opposite. So fact and fiction got mixed up in Lahore. Karachi is shockingly such a contrast to a U.P. town that it is impossible to confuse the one with the other. Here the earth of the streams presents a direct contrast to the grains of sand on a beach. This shocking contrast forces the mind to think—to analyse and understand this contrast between a cohesive and a disintegrating world. Now the past seems to be somewhat out of focus. The earlier novels are repeatedly asking questions about the identity and history of Pakistan. Here for the first time comes the retort:

Pakistan's history? Dear, let it first be created.

This is an awareness which the earlier books do not show. As against this awareness, Intezar Husain evinced a mystic superciliousness. But unfortunately, it was a mystic disgust without the mystic vision. Such an “elevated” view is no more in evidence here. A new consciousness, very objective and very profound, is now developing:

Every epoch – its own weird silence, its own terror – and it brings its own violence with it.

This is a concrete fear, not an abstract apprehension. Though one may sometimes lose patience and cry out:

Stop thinking if you want to live in this city.

Yet there is an aversion to lethargic apprehension. Though regressive tendencies persist, these are no more than fleeting glimpses. The mind is not so bogged down, and wriggles out of them.

Bitterness, impatience and irritation that once found outlet in sarcastic outbursts ultimately give birth to a sombre, sympathetic and practical approach to the real issues:

Why worry if you can't help?

Past too is no more nostalgia. It simply provides an ironic contrast with the miserable present:

Jhuggis were Pakistan's golden period. No Kalashnikovs, no dacoities, no hooded figures, no car-lifters.

Detached from his own world, partly blurred in Lahore, Karachi brings a new consciousness. A new awareness dawns. Now for the first time a new realisation emerges:

Those who can't forget, can't be happy

For the first time too, there is a desire to change the landscape—from Karbala, Andulus etc. Though there is very little of superstition left here, nightmares persist. Superstitions and nightmares haunt MarqueeZ also. But to him these are defences. To Intezar these are only threats, very frightening. The reason perhaps is that Intezar Husain feels uprooted here. He could not transplant the superstitions of Uttar Pardesh in Karachi. His mind perceives only a gossamer reality. And wherever it is vague, superstitions fill the gaps.

In many ways the latest novel is an advance in the fictional progress of Intezar. In place of nostalgia, a strange fear about the past raises its head here:

If you remember the last Janam, you can't help but relate it to others. But revealing the past to others leads to inevitable death.

Strange new fears are cropping up in the mind. The past is inalienable, but at the same time going into the past is going into the valley of death, into the world of ghosts—which itself means the past. Thus we can easily see a connection between nostalgia, ghosts and death. The world of the unknown has now come to the surface. The vague fears that created the feelings of terror, lead to regressive tendencies. But symptoms are not the disease. Symptoms demand diagnosis. *Aage Samandar Hai* analyses and diagnoses. There is now an active desire to know, and if possible, to cure the disease. A figure emerges from the ruins of Gharnata, the figure of Abdullah baking breads. Abdullah observes:

*There is a time to burn the boats;
there is a time to build them.
Gone are the times when we had
turned our backs to the sea and
burnt all the boats. Now the
frothing sea is not behind us;
it is in front of us, and we
have built no boat*

It is a new vision, a transformation in the sensibility that earlier saw only destruction everywhere. There is a sense of urgency now. The spectacle demands action. But the task is overwhelming. A very true picture of the chaos in a riot-torn Karachi is faithfully drawn and with the minutest detail. There is the ethnic problem, the law and order problem as well as the problems created by the political and vested interests. The problems are real but formidable and de-capacitating. Here it is reality that benumbs the senses. It is a hard pressing reality that leads to a delirious mind which opens the way to nightmares. It is not the situation of *Chand Gehn* which opens with nightmares and comes to reality, infected with that morbidity. Intezar Husain is coming out of the habitual morbidity. The 5th dimension is receding and the world of time and space is taking a new significance. The conscious and the unconscious seem to have struck some balance and are moving towards a proportionate harmony, though fantasy still seems to inundate reality at places. However, the grip on reality might have been loosened, it does not totally slip out of hand.

Intezar Husain has also succeeded in bringing out the emotional strain caused by the Partition in the form of an underlying love story which apparently runs below the surface, but causes big ripples. Apparently there is no hindrance in love between Jawwad and Memona being consummated. But there seems to be the hand of destiny pulling them apart, exactly as migration pulls Jawwad from the lap of his native land. He realises that one must not abandon the land. The earth curses the deserter, as also, in Hardy's novels. But Jawwad must leave, though he also knows that Memona too will never forgive him.

As in Intezar's earlier books, destiny, myth and superstition still play their role, and the narration is marred by undue repetitions, but in this latest novel reality is not obscured, not for a moment. This novel marks a new stage in the aesthetic development of Intezar.

One beauty of Intezar's prose is that it is colloquial and classical at the same time. His idiom grows from common speech, such as "the kababs peppered with ants" for a wealthy house but with too many responsibilities and relatives where one is looking for a good match for a girl. Similarly a mind flooded with memories is like "a cotton thrasher sitting in the midst of flakes of cotton flying round him and converting him into a flake"—a good image of "wool gatherer". Another beautiful symbol is "the date-palm", that's all Rafiq Saheb could dig out of the history of Pakistan, as he says so sarcastically.

Intizar's Urdu makes a bridge between the classical and the modern language. His diction carries the tone and rhythm of *Dastans* on the one hand, and an undercurrent of journalistic prose that reports the situation in simple objective description on the other. It will be no exaggeration to say that Intezar Hussain is the last of our classics.

(1998)



❧ Chapter 39 ❧

A Committed Teacher



Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan was perhaps the last of a glorious tradition of teachers who behind their stiff-collared exterior carried a compassionate heart. Diligence and single-hearted devotion to an ideal fired his soul, and he did his best to impart this spirit to his students. He had to struggle hard to work his way up, and was fully alive to the hardships of students, but he always maintained a magnanimous silence on the mundane issues of life, though he was always eager to mitigate the sufferings of others. At times one saw in him the head master of Rugby Chapel who was remembered by his most worthy son Matthew Arnold in these words:

*Stones might have wounded thy feet,
Toil or dejection have tried
Thy spirit, of that we saw
Nothing! To us thou wert still
Cheerful, helpful, and firm.*

He always maintained a reserve and at the same time a personal contact with his students. This personal contact was, more than anything else, a part of his code---the code of a teacher. He considered teacher-student relationship as sacred and gave it top priority. He never liked to ignore an invitation from his old students. Particularly he made it a point to attend the marriage ceremonies of his students and would postpone any important engagement for the happy occasion. This was a sort of commitment for him and he took it as a duty. This meticulous sense of duty had already started looking somewhat overstrained in a world of changing values.

He was extremely particular about punctuality. He was never late, never missing where he was expected, and he did not have the sense of importance which makes some careless of the time and engagements of others. He did not even have any presumption to the professorial unconcern and always took the roll call even if there was

only one student in the class. When I was his student he was the Professor of English and also the Principal of Islamia College. Once I went for a seminar in his office. I was the only student present in that period. The Professor called the peon and instructed him not to allow anyone in the office as he was taking a class. Then he rose from the principal's chair, went into the retiring room, and was soon back with the gown on his shoulders and the attendance register in his hand. He then invited me to sit with him on the chairs around a side table, opened the register, marked me present and started checking my essay.

The taking of roll call was almost a ritual with him. He called out every boy's name, but marked the girls by looking at their faces. Their names were never called. And it gave us a strange feeling to watch him remove his glasses, look pointedly, and replace them as each girl's attendance was being marked. This incidentally reminds me of a story he told us in the class. Of the very bold initiatives that he took one was his decision to admit girls to the postgraduate classes in the college---something very unusual for Islamia College. The General Body of the Anjuman did not know of the policy for quite some time. One day the General Body was shocked to hear a demand by the Principal of Islamia College for boys. The demand was for a ladies' room with a female attendant. This naturally caused an uproar. Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan stood up in his chair and pleaded that there was a great rush of girls seeking admission to co-educational institutions for higher education. With a persuasive use of wit, which he never lacked, the Professor queried, would it therefore not be proper for Islamia College to attract them and save them from going to the non-Muslim colleges? This sentimental appeal roused the expected response and Professor Hamid Ahmad Khan's policy was approved.

It was characteristic of his theory and practice of teaching that he thought education to be of a much wider significance than teaching prescribed texts. That is why his lectures were punctuated with general observations on life and with instructive anecdotes.

Once he told us that he was invited to give his views in a case of nude pictures. He said that he had a high esteem for works of art, and as a mark of appreciation, he would welcome a beautiful statue to be placed in his private room, but he would not allow the same for the man in the street whose sensibility was not cultivated enough to appreciate its merits and who would therefore find only sensual

gratification in it. Prof. Hamid Ahmed Khan believed that education formed man, not simply informed him. In this connexion I may relate here one more incident. Whenever he came across a student on the road he would hasten to wish him before he did so. I have been a habitual Mall stroller. Once he saw me walking on the road and the next morning he reprimanded me for that, though as politely as he could. He thought that purposeless wandering on the roads was not a decent thing and no educated young man should find any pleasure in it. This, to my mind, was enough to put him safely in the tradition of educators like Maulvi Nazir Ahmed. I believe that if I had said that to him he would have accepted it in good spirit and as a compliment.

Another instance of his comprehensive view of education was the stress he laid upon extracurricular activities. Societies sprouted like mushrooms in Islamia College during his Principal ship. Each afternoon had a number of functions of various societies going on in the college. There was hardly a man of distinction, a person of some eminence in Pakistan, who was not invited to Islamia College, and Professor Hamid Ahmad Kahn was personally there each afternoon giving life and meaning to all these activities. I believe that we were the pioneers of the stage in Islamia College since dramatic activity was for the first time undertaken seriously under his patronage.

With his universal concept of education he combined a sense of the immediate. In his lectures he would always try to relate the subject to the student's experience of their own world. He studied Donne in the light of the oriental tradition of poetry and ransacked Urdu and Persian literatures to bring home to the class his readings of the Metaphysical Poets. Before teaching Wordsworth he showed a numbers of pictures on the subject of nature to make vivid to the students the concept of nature in Wordsworth. He suggested that the Neoclassical concept of nature was marked with a sense of symmetry and balance and could be compared with the Shalimar Gardens, while the romantic concept of nature was characterised with freedom and wildness which may be compared with the Lawrence Gardens. Similarly in a paper he established with scholarly evidence that the garden of Paradise in Milton's celebrated epic was built on the same pattern as the Shalimar Gardens. His sense of reality was even deeper than these examples would suggest. Those who, perhaps mistakenly, saw only an idealist in him were surprised to hear him on education in a meeting of the Educators' Club, held at the Educational Auditorium, where he discussed the role of education in a feudal

society, in the capitalistic system, under colonialism, and in a developing state under the impact of industrialization.

These are some of the reminiscences of the late Professor as a humble student recollects them as a debt and valuable inheritance. But I had also the good luck of working under him when he was the vice-chancellor of the Punjab University. He had already made his mark as an administrator and a disciplinarian when he headed the Islamia College. But these qualities found better expression when he came to head the university. Of the various qualities I may mention only a few: exploring and encouraging talent, making a decision and taking a fearless stand on it, a humility and self-confidence which feared no rivals, and keen desire and well-considered policy of raising the prestige of the Punjab University by encouraging research and scholarship. I shall not elaborate upon these few remarks, believing that others will write on these topics in detail. But I must say one thing. He always took decisions, never postponed them, never evaded his responsibility. Decisions are pleasant and unpleasant, and no one is infallible. Whatever the evaluation of ones actions, commitment is better than escape. And so far as intentions are concerned, even his worst opponents respected him.

(1976)



❧ Chapter 40 ❧

The Man who was a Legend



Professor Eric Cyprian is no more. He was an institution in himself. It is no cliché to say that he will be greatly missed. He left his imprints practically on all walks of life, may it be teaching, trade unionism, journalism or party commitments. He was the one who could be resorted to in any difficulty. And he was always available, rather keen to advise.

We badly missed him for almost two decades, since he left Lahore and settled in Islamabad. I always sought opportunities to pay a visit to him. And every visit was fruitful in one way or another. Talking to him was always education. He always dropped a hint or two which set the mind working on some new lines.

Last time that I met him was about a month before his death. I called at his house. He was basking in the sun and called me to where he was sitting in the small courtyard. He was suffering from acute asthma. He was somewhat out of breath. He told me that his asthma worsened since he joined *The News* at Rawalpindi. The offices of The News are situated in the most congested and polluted part of the city. He used to practically collapse when he returned home. Though he gave up *The News* and returned to *The Muslim*, his asthma did not ease.

I realized that it was not easy for him to speak. Still he was speaking with the same gusto. No disease could deter him. He was known for the gift of the gab. But I believe that it was much more than that. His head was so full of ideas, and these came out with such a force, that the speech could not keep pace with the volley of ideas. Even in the class we sometimes felt that he was forcing his throat beyond its capacity, realizing that speaking was not good for him and he could not be restrained from it, I left after ten minutes, asking him to rest and promising to come back soon.

His students can never forget him. I feel that he did not just teach us, he created us. He lives in us. If I have any creative talent, any commitment as a teacher, any sense of purpose in my life, it was largely due to him.

It was generally known that Cyprian had been a member of the central committee of the Communist Party. This is his greatness as a teacher that even such serious credentials could not deter an institution like the Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam to entrust young boys and girls to him at Islamia College. The credit for it is no less shared by the great teacher, Professor Hameed Ahmad Khan.

Cyprian was every inch a teacher when he was in the classroom. When I joined the M.A. English class in Islamia College, Civil Lines, Lahore in `1957, I was a very conventional, simple young man like any other young man of that age and did not know much of life. But when I left the college after two years, I was quite a different man. Cyprian taught us literature. He never mentioned communism or socialism in the class. But he transferred the sensibility. He did not teach literature. He taught life. He gave us awareness. He served his ideal better than many crusaders.

Some of his admirers say that he had a multi-dimensional personality. I think he had only one, a comprehensive personality. Everyone saw his own reflection in the late professor's personality. To us he was a teacher. To the party workers he was a comrade. To the media people he was a journalist. In fact he was a complete man; he had talent, talent in the abstract. No particular talent. But a talent that responded to every single situation and every occupation.

It was not easy to follow his lectures; he spoke so fast. Then the thought was profound. Moreover, he had a nasal twang which made comprehension still more difficult. But I must confess the real reason was that our own resources of language and literature were too meagre to comprehend his lectures at that level.

But the interest in the lectures was sustained by his sense of humour. His speech was punctuated with anecdotes and spontaneous remarks which sparked off laughter. Sometimes he would use a word or two of Urdu. And his Urdu was as outlandish as his English was unintelligible to us. But while lack of proficiency in English embarrassed us, his unorthodox Urdu amused us. Whether we understood or not, we surely learnt a lot. We got the passion, though

we missed the matter. There was so much passion, such a sincerity and tremendous confidence that we felt possessed and transformed.

He was the same man inside and outside the classroom. Once Professor Sajjad Baqar Rizvi came to the college with a swollen thumb. When asked, he said that it had an infection. Cyprian at once retorted, "I hope it hasn't reached the pen". The same relaxed atmosphere prevailed in the tea club also, where Cyprian lorded as the very Dr. Johnson of the club.

Thus we laughed and learned. He taught us life through literature. He saw no difference between the two. Literature to him was a life seen from another angle.

Professor Cyprian was an incorrigible optimist. He inspired hope. We never felt the least hesitation in sharing his faith in the future.

He did not seem to realise the power he had on us. He was so unselfconscious. That was also the reason that he never sought any personal gain. Money had no value for him. And for positions and titles he cared still less. In all his humility, his entire concern was the job assigned to him. He sought no advancements and wished no rewards. He worked hard without caring for an acknowledgment. He was, at least in this sense, a recluse, or even something beyond that.

He has left us, but he has also left behind him sunshine for us to wallow in.

(26th January, 1996)



❧ Chapter 41 ❧

Jean Anouilh



As reported in the press Anouilh died at his Swiss residence in Lausanne on Saturday, 3rd October, 1987 at the age of 78. He was one of the most popular playwrights of this greatest age of drama, equally the favourite of the commercial theatres in Paris, London and New York and in the universities throughout the world. He is deeply rooted in the French tradition and his criticism of the French way of life is as sharp and challenging as Albee's criticism of the American society. Like Lorca, he was involved in drama from his very childhood and is reported to have written One-Act verse plays at the age of 10. He wrote his first full length play when he was 16. He was a master of the craft, much of which he learnt from Moliere, Pirandello and Shaw. He builds his plays, like Moliere, around a domestic crisis following his tradition of *Commedia dell' arte*, with its free and easy improvisation of comic extravaganza. He beautifully utilizes Moliere's technique of disguise and mistaken identity, which he cleverly uses to portray the social chaos and confused motives of his own age.

He was the man of the theatre, and he wrote exclusively for the stage. He was a prolific writer, having written 30 Plays before he was 50. But success came to him rather late in life. It was in 1935 when a play of his that had failed on the stage was bought for a film that he suddenly rose to prominence, and all those plays which had been rejected earlier were presented with great success and acclaim.

The success of his plays owes largely to his grasp of the human predicament in this world, at times rising to metaphysical level, and talking of the misery prevailing around him. It was no less due to his ability of manoeuvring his plots and using the stage to exploit all available devices or inventing some new ones. Farce, masquerade, horseplay along with the use of allegory and mythology, juxtaposed on the sordid reality of the time make a bizarre world which is very

amusing and at the same time very horrible. His expositions are further embellished by the use of a pungent satire which he learnt from Shaw, who also suggested to him how history can be best used to understand and interpret the modern world.

Anouilh was born in Bordeaux in 1910. His father was a tailor and his mother a violinist in an orchestra at a casino. It is perhaps for this reason that actors and musicians frequently appear in his plays, but they generally lead miserable lives with no glamour about them. Poverty and class-consciousness have always been his concern, particularly portraying the life of the rich as seen by the poor.

Anouilh wrote at a time when European writers were much concerned with the misery and sordidness of modern life. He wrote in an atmosphere infused with the spirit of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* and Hermann Hesse's *A Glimpse into Darkness*. He wanted to stir the dull roots of the modern western wasteland. Though it is difficult to put a label on him and he cannot easily fall into any 'school' or 'movement', Anouilh seems to be largely in sympathy with the absurdists of his day, sharing their disillusion and despair and concern about the loss of purity and purpose of life. He acclaimed *Waiting for Godot* and defended *The Chairs* of Ionesco, which he called a masterpiece. He asserted, 'I believe this to be better than Strindberg, because it has its "black" humour, a la Moliere, in a manner that is at times terribly funny because it is horrifying and laughable, poignant and always true, and because with the exception of a bit of rather old-fashioned *avant-garde* at the end that I do not like, it is classical'. This is Anouilh's Poetics horrifying, laughable, poignant and true – that is his drama.

But he was no *absurdist*. He believed that the chaos and sordidness of modern life were quite understandable. He never abandoned his faith in the rational faculty of man. Though some critics have found him old-fashioned, he fully realised the complexity of contemporary life and never fell into over-simplifications. About the theatre, he declared in 1936, "I discovered that a subject did not necessarily have to be treated in a rigid form, in the natural simplicity or even crudity it has at first. I realised that the dramatist could and should *play* with his characters, with their passions and their actions". To *play* with a subject is to create a new world of conventions and surround it with spells and magic all our own'. Gorky had also asserted that exaggeration was the privilege of the artist, since mere photographic imitation of life is not art. The artist should not only

show what life is; he should also explore and reveal its potential and possibilities. For this he must use his imagination with sufficient freedom. Absurdist were not the only ones to take liberties with the hard-fact-realism of the day. Other writers too, like Brecht and Lorca, were trying to create freer conventions of the theatre. Thus fantasy and disguise came to be regarded as genuine theatrical devices. *Thieves' Carnival* is one of the successful plays of Anouilh where these devices, along with pantomime, have been so skilfully used that it becomes difficult to distinguish between real thieves and dupes, between characters and marionettes. The worlds of reality and make-believe have been artistically woven into an aesthetic vision. His plays, like those of his eminent contemporaries, attempt to blur the boundaries of pretence and reality.

Anouilh also resorted to history and myth for a better grasp of his own world. *Becket* and *Antigone* make such attempts. This too has become a convention of the modern stage. O'Neil's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Sartre's *Les Mouches* and Pirandello's *Henry IV* belong to this category. They show the contrast between past and present and between history and reality as also the affinity between them. In *Antigone* Anouilh reworks the play of Sophocles according to his own situation of the post-war French Resistance. The question of the time was: is there a choice? To Anouilh's Creon there is no choice:

We could argue whether I ought or ought not to follow any trade; but once I take on the job, I must do it properly.

This is also Creon's concept of *commitment*. But in the days of state oppression, the individual seeks for any chance for his own happiness. Antigone protests:

Why do you tell me to be quiet when all I want to know is what I have to do to be happy. This minute, since it is this very minute that I must take my choice.

But Creon has his own problems:

I admit what I am doing is childish. But if the feather-headed rabble I govern are to understand what's what, that stench has got to fill the town for a month.

Here he is referring to the dead body of Antigone's brother who had rebelled and whose funeral is not allowed by the state. The use of antique myth, besides being a device to hood-wink the censorship, also serves a more profound purpose, that of taking the problem

beyond the immediate situation to a philosophical quest for man's estate in the world. Also, in an age of chaos, a generally accepted myth provides a common ground between persons of varied inclinations and attitudes, and facilitates communication. Besides, these myths prove a great help for success on the stage by bringing in a dramatic appeal and an added useful theatricality to the situations of every day life. Here, in *Antigone*, Anouilh makes a successful use of the Sophoclean play to discuss the current issues of accommodation and resistance that were so much the concern of the writers in the days of occupation. Antigone becomes a symbol of heroism and self-sacrifice in the face of oppression. At another level *Poor Bitos* reveals the merciless cruelty of absolute principle, especially so in a world threatened with fascism.

Anouilh's plays, farcical and serious, are at the same time very challenging also. He fully devoted himself to the theatre, presenting the stark reality around him, with the full force of his art and without any overt affiliations and partisan reservations. He was the poet of man and of the dignity of mankind. He has left an impact on modern drama.

(1987)



❧ Chapter 42 ❧

Literature as an Instrument of Change



Does literature have any role to play in the process of change? This question has bothered many people and caused heated debates which still go on. In fact the question is usually made complicated by confounding it with another question, should literature be written with a purpose? Since writing with a purpose may turn it into propaganda or a sermon, it is quite natural to be suspicious of such literature. But, purpose or no purpose, the persuasive power of literature cannot be denied. It will, therefore, be more appropriate to ask how literature is related to the society. According to some, literature mirrors life. Some think it is a criticism of life. There are those too who believe that literature has nothing to do with life and enjoys an independent autonomous life of its own. This point of view relates to the theory of art for art's sake which is not much in favour these days. It will, however, suffice to say that literature carries the stamp of its time and place. This is the characteristic that distinguishes one literature from another. The world of a *Thousand and one Nights* reflects an age, a particular society, which is very different from the world of Chaucer, Cervantes or Dickens.

Whether as a mirror of life or as its criticism, or even written according to the theory of art for art's sake, literature is influenced by the environment. In the first place it uses language as its medium, and language is not only a function of society, it is its most conservative component. Whatever the pace of life, the change in language is always very slow. For example, the diction of Urdu poetry, and to some extent of the other genres as well, is hardly any different from the one that was in vogue fifty years ago. It still sings of *Andleeb*, *Lala* and *Shaheen* with which few will be familiar in this part of the world. As against this, buses, railways, aeroplanes, the telephone and the radio are still considered unpoetic. In such a situation, literature can really retard the process of change by arresting the sensibility of the age and confining it to the bondage of the past. Our responses are

very much tied to our linguistic habits. Word is no abstraction. Every word has a context and a life of its own. It has a history behind it. It is rooted in conventions and traditions. It is the cultural overtones of the linguistic medium that make the task of literary translation so formidable. Certain words in a language are so specific to its culture that it becomes extremely difficult to find their equivalents in other languages. For example, there are no Urdu equivalents of words like 'the absurd' or 'boredom'. History also affirms that a literature reflects its times, rather it is their product. This is the reason that history also uses literature as a source of authentic information that helps it in its investigations.

As life influences literature so does literature influence life. Fabian Society played a significant role in turning England into a welfare state. H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, among others, effectively used literature in arousing the social consciousness to the needs of the miserable conditions of common man's life. Shaw's plays in particular focussed attention on the creation of the National Health Policy and other social reforms. These writers succeeded in creating social awareness and paved the way for social change.

In our own society, Sir Syed launched a great movement for social reform which had a strong literary component. Hali's poetry complemented the efforts of Sir Syed and provided an emotional force to the argument of his essays and the objectives of his Scientific Society. The Progressive Writers' Movement of 1936 shook the people out of age-old apathy and ignorance. This literature exposed the abject condition of the masses and forced the people to accept the reality. Instead of sugar-coating the facts or harping on the 'glory' of the East, these writers carried out relentless operations upon a conceited and complacent ego. Iqbal's poetry at the same time echoed and reinforced national aspirations for independence.

Apart from ideology or philosophy, literature is otherwise too very much linked with society. When in the wake of the fall of the Muslim rule in India, particularly in Oudh, Anis wrote elegies, he painted Husain as a victim of oppression and cruelty. But when in the din of the movements of national liberation, Josh wrote elegies, he presented the picture of Husain as a revolutionary and as a champion of the downtrodden. The Husain of Josh is different from the Husain of Anis and this reflects the difference between their respective times. Both created the literature that their age, their society inspired, and

working in given conditions, they participated in the task of easing psychological pressure.

Literature creates awareness for change, shows the direction of change, and describes, rather defines, the nature of change. It prepares grounds for an intellectual and emotional acceptance of the change. Every change has an external as well as an internal dimension. Emotional and intellectual responses must correspond to the changing social reality. Azeem Beg Chughtai led a literary movement against outworn social norms and protested against the exploitation of women, particularly against the custom of Purdah. His writings created the climate that made such reforms possible and acceptable. Prem Chand's stories highlighted the miseries of the lower castes and aroused sympathy for their cause.

In the developing countries, literature is also one of the fronts against the forces of oppression and exploitation. A correct and matured mind is as important as other resources in bringing about a revolution. A war of liberation is, before anything else, a war for the liberation of consciousness. It is the right consciousness which arouses the right sentiment. Literature helps this sentiment in many ways. It reveals the individual and national potential that inspires confidence. The following lines addressed to a young child are a source of great strength to a Palestinian fighter:

*Your fingers should be counting on an abacus board,
But you learn your numbers by counting the shells.*

(Anese Majid)

Similarly this beautiful image by a Chinese poet is so inspiring:

*....through the caresses and promptings of severe cold
Even water, soft and weak
Can stand up firmly.*

(Li Qi, *Ice Sculptures*)

Literature has the power and the art to give expression to highly complex questions in the simplest and the most beautiful language. It removes doubts and apprehensions, inspires confidence and reinforces determination to fight for a clearly perceived goal. It sharpens the insight, provides the vision and makes the struggle appear easy and meaningful. In Brecht's *The Good Woman Of Setzuan*, three gods descend from the heavens to seek goodness on the earth

which they discover in a prostitute. But then these gods depart without setting anything right and without solving the problems of the people. The *Epilogue* comments:

*You'r thinking, aren't you, that this is no right
Conclusion to the play you've seen tonight?
After a tale, exotic, fabulous,
A nasty ending was slipped up on us.
We feel deflated too. We too are nettled
To see the curtain down and nothing settled.
How could a better ending be arranged?
Could one change people? Can the world be changed?
Would new gods do the trick? Will atheism?
Moral rearmament? Materialism?
It is for you to find a way, my friends,
To help good men arrive at happy ends.
You write the happy ending to the play!
There must, there must, there's got to be a way!*

Literature does not bring revolution. It participates in this process and, through this participation, tries to define the direction of the change. It encourages the people by singing eulogies for their achievements and assures the fighter on the battle front that he is not alone in his fight. The entire nation is with him. Everyone is fighting on his front with his own weapons. The resistance literature of the Third World is very effectively and beautifully performing this function. It is at the same time exposing the exploiters and convincing the world of the genuineness of the resistance.

In a way it is correct that literature does not bring revolution. In that sense no one brings revolution. Social change is a collective process. All the intellectual, emotional and material forces have to make a concerted effort to bring the change. This is wrong to say that ideology brings change. Even political action brings no change. Every force of life by itself may surely create hurdles in the process of change; it can, on its own, bring no change. Political action, even as ruthless as a Martial Law, is incapable of bringing any change. It can only stall one, that too only temporarily. Similarly a reactionary literature may cripple the minds for some time, like our sentimental and conventional poetry which refuses to accept the reality and indulges in the nostalgic fairy-lands of an imaginary past or in the fantasies of an unrealisable future. But literature alone can bring no change. Change comes only when ideology, action, armed struggle,

politics, economics, science, literature and the arts make a collective effort to bring it about. It does not mean that one should sit still till other sections of society become active. Everyone should do his job with the conviction that if he stands up for change others will join him. If one believes in change, he must strive for it. He must seek those who will stand by him. The movement of '36 fizzled out simply because the writer believed that literature will bring revolution. No movement for the liberation of consciousness or for national freedom can succeed unless all the institutions in a society join hands in the struggle. If economic, social or political system is in the grip of the forces of exploitation, literature alone will make no impression. Literature, however, has an edge over other activities in this endeavour. It is better equipped to bring all the forces to a platform. In this sense the writer may lead a revolution.

(1989)



❧ Chapter 43 ❧

Democracy and Literature



The pace of history has been rather fast in Pakistan. We have crossed far too many milestones in the small span of 40- years which other nations took centuries to cross. The pangs of creation, the anguish of dismemberment, the excitement of triumph, the shame of defeat, martial law, democracy, martial law and democracy once again, all followed each other in such quick succession that the nation was left in complete bewilderment. As freedom left many guessing what they had been freed from, the end of dictatorship also baffles some as to what kind liberation has been achieved. The Independence was no doubt real, so is the liberation from a totalitarian rule. Response to change has been as much uncertain in literature. The literary atmosphere is one of suspended animation. Why is it that freedom always eludes us and the real freedom never comes? Perhaps the fact is that the state coercion is nothing as compared to the pressure of the stifling atmosphere that has held us in its iron grip. There was a time when Iqbal could openly talk of reconstruction of religious thought in Islam and when he could openly debunk the mulla. We have been put in the stocks by bigotry, intolerance and obscurantism. The fear of the unknown and the unpredictable is so great that the oppression of a martial law pales into insignificance before it. Any ignorant bigot may stand up and charge you with blasphemy and you have had it.

Under a totalitarian state a literature of protest is created because the writer finds the government on the wrong side. He becomes the champion of a morality that challenges it. Also, he feels that restrictions are denying him the full use of his talents. But when the restriction are removed he does not know where his talents are. Under oppression he feels handicapped and finds himself unable to think. But himself unaware of it he thinks all the same and when the oppression is removed he starts analysing and understanding, giving an impression that he has not been influenced by the change at all.

The change definitely is there—in the atmosphere as well as in the sensibility nurtured by that atmosphere. The mood as well as the

tone has changed. There is no jingoism—no swearing, no threatening posture, no desperate resolves. There is sobriety in speech and restraint in manners. This is not immediately visible in literature produced during the short phases of democracy in the country. But a revolution in consciousness has definitely taken place, though still imperceptible. Yet there are visible manifestations of it too.

The democratic order emerging in 1972 did two significant things. Firstly, it opened up new vistas and widened the national awareness of the world beyond the geographical boundaries. Mr. Bhutto himself undertook a whirlwind tour of some Asian and African countries not a few of which had no existence for an average Pakistani. Chad, Senegal and Niger, for example, were quite new names for a vast majority. Then there was the Islamic Summit in Lahore. This brought a concrete realization and a direct experience of the outer world to the people here. Not only foreign celebrities were given wide publicity, the customs, tradition and economic and educational systems of their respective countries were also for the first time brought to the knowledge of the common man in Pakistan.

This aroused an interest in the literature of the third world. It was also a national need of the time, since our own problems had become so entangled. Third World literature gave us some idea of how others have identified their problems and sought to tackle them. Not only were there translations from the literatures of other countries, our writers also tried to use in their writings the feelings and modes of expression of those people. Free translations of poetry from other literatures created and promoted the idea of the prose-poem which has become very popular with the younger generation of poets during the last two decades. Many commentaries on the third world literature and critical analyses of it have invaluablely enriched our own literature. This also inspired interest in the revolutionary literatures coming from Western Europe and Americas.

Secondly, interest in regional literatures was reawakened. Writers and readers alike took to this new found land of folk literature. Particularly in Punjabi and Sindhi, Dullah Bhatti and Shah Latif emerged as representatives of their regional cultures respectively. With the third-world in the background, and the direct inspiration coming from the indigenous regional sources, a new literature marked with a revolutionary spirit emerged. Its best manifestation is the Sindhi literature produced in the 80s.

The liberation of the mass media, particularly of the press and the T.V. also helped in encouraging these new trends. The youth have greater representation on the media now, and so have the women.

❧ Chapter 44 ❧

A Year of Democracy



Democracy has completed one year in Pakistan (December, 1989). This is too short a period to assess its performance particularly when the people have not been used to it for a long time. They have yet to learn to live with democracy, to accept the other point of view, to have patience, tolerance and respect for the sentiments of others. Still, the very induction of a democratic system in the society, after a long period of dictatorship, has definitely brought a qualitative change in the atmosphere, and this is one area where some assessment can be made. To a large extent the suffocation has gone and we are breathing in a freer climate. Not only that there are some visible changes in the media, the administrative grip has been relaxed. A large number of journals and magazines of all kinds have started appearing and the post is almost every day flooded with literary weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies of all sizes and colours. Everyone has the freedom to say whatever one wants to say, or express his sentiments in whatever manner he likes, in public meetings, seminars, processions or rallies.

There is the rub. When people have suddenly found themselves free, they do not know what to do with their freedom. In the days of oppression, at least there was a clear target of contempt and protest and everyone expressed his anger or disgust as best as he could, within the given conditions. During the long spell of the most abject dictatorship known to us, people knew how to react to injustice and intolerance. But they have had no idea of how to utilise their energies and talents when an opportunity has been provided to them to participate in the task of national reconstruction.

Now when there is freedom to speak nobody is actually speaking. The creative channels seem to have been blocked, one hopes, temporarily. The academics have not responded to the change. The educational institutions do not seem to breathe in any freer

atmosphere. The literary and cultural scene, too, has not been very encouraging. There had been much creative and cultural activity till recently which has suddenly dampened. The so-called rightist flank, the “legitimate” progeny of the old system, are closing their ranks. They are busy making strategies. The fallen angels have concentrated all their energies in planning to overthrow the new order. But the so-called left or liberal camp is almost dumbfounded. In bad days they had some ‘vision’ which in good days appears to have been completely lost in the glare of liberty. The intellectuals have suddenly retreated into their ivory towers. There is no sign of even an attempt to prepare ground for collective thinking, for arriving at some consensus, even on intellectual and aesthetic issues.

No revolution ever comes from outside, or from the top. But nobody seems to be working for it now when there is some freedom to work, simply because our intellectuals have been trained to criticise and reject, not to appreciate and accept. A revolution in consciousness is due, and our intellectuals have big responsibility on their shoulders. One hopes that national mind will soon come out of this state of stupor and will start seeing things clearly.

A year of democracy has exposed many of our weaknesses. There are no excuses now. The creative channels must be revitalised. Democracy must be given a chance. And of all the people, the writers must not deny it that chance

(1989)



❧ Chapter 45 ❧

Kali Shalwar (*The Black Baggy Trousers*) *Sa'adat Hassan Manto*



Before moving to Delhi she lived in Ambala cantonment where many whites were her clients. Through her contact with these whites she had picked up some English phrases and these she used in her ordinary conversation. But when she came to Delhi and got no business, she one day said to her neighbour, "Tamancha Jan, 'Dis laif - very bad. (This life - very bad) Here you get nothing to feed yourself with".

She had good business in Ambala cantonment. The cantonment whites came to her drunk, and she made 20 to 30 rupees by disposing of half a score of them in three or four hours. These whites were better than the natives. No doubt, they spoke a language which Sultana didn't get easily. But this ignorance of their language proved to be an advantage to her. If they asked for any concession, she shook her head saying, 'Saheb, I don't get what you mean. 'And if they took undue liberties with her she used to abuse them in her own tongue. Caught in surprise when they looked at her, she burst out, 'Saheb, you are just *Ullu ka pattha, haramzada*.'. She used to say this without any expression of harshness on her face, rather with a look of fondness. The whites laughed, and while laughing they looked quite stupid to Sultana.

But here in Delhi not a single white had visited her since she came. She had been three months in this Indian city where she was told the *Laat Saheb* ('Lord' - the viceroy) lived, who shifted to Shimla in the summer. Only six men had come to her. Only six: that means an average of two in a month. And from these six clients she actually received a bare eighteen rupees and a half. None agreed for more than three rupees. To five of them she had given her rate at Rs.10. But strangely each of them said the same thing, 'We won't pay a farthing

more than 3'. She wondered why each of them thought her worth was only three rupees. So when the sixth one came she herself said to him, "Look I shall charge three rupees *tame* (time). Now it is for you to agree or be off." The sixth man did no haggling and stayed. When she bolted the door in the next room and started taking off his jacket, "Come, a rupee here for the milk". He did not give the rupee but took a glittering half rupee with the figure of the new king on it and gave it to her. She quickly accepted it since something is better than nothing.

Eighteen and a half rupees in three months? -----twenty rupees per month was only the rent of the bed-sitter which the landlord called FLAT in his English. This flat had a latrine which had a chain. By pulling this chain the whole filth would flush out with a big noise. In the beginning she was terribly frightened with that but when on the first day she went in to relieve herself when she was feeling severe pain in the back she observed this chain and thought that it was specially meant for people like her, so that they may rest on it when in pain, But as soon as she tried to hold the chain there was a tick, tick, above and then suddenly the water gushed forth so loudly that she screamed out in fright.

Khuda Bux, who was arranging his photographic equipment in the next room, and was pouring Hydroquinone in a clean bottle, heard this scream. He hurriedly ran out of the room and asked Sultana, 'What's the matter Did you scream?'

Sultana's heart was beating fast. She said, 'what a latrine: A chain hanging in the middle as in a Railway carriage: I had a backache. I thought, I should take the support of the chain. But as soon as I pulled it there was such a blast. I am off my wits.'

Khuda Bux gave a big laugh. He explained to her all about this latrine, which was of the new fashion, and which washed away all the dirt with a push of the chain.

How Khuda Bux and Sultana came together is a long story. Khuda Bux belonged to Rawalpindi. He learnt driving after passing the Entrance Examination. So, for four years he had been a lorry driver between Rawalpindi and Kashmir. Then he made friends with a woman in Kashmir. He made her elope with him. Since he got no work in Lahore, he set the woman in the market. This worked for two or three years. Then she eloped with another. Khuda Bux came to know that she was in Ambala. He followed her there, where he ran into Sultana. Sultana liked him. Thus they were brought together.

Sultana's business flourished with the arrival of Khuda Bux. As she was very credulous, she thought that Khuda Bux was a blessing whose arrival was so propitious. Her credulity enhanced the worth of Khuda Bux in her eyes.

Khuda Bux was energetic. He did not like sitting idle the whole day. He, therefore, developed friendship with a photographer who used to make pictures with a 'minute' camera outside the Railway Station. He learnt photography from him. Then he got sixty rupees from Sultana and bought a camera also. In due course he made a screen, bought two chairs, and after procuring the processing material, started his independent business.

The enterprise succeeded. He soon established himself in Ambala cantonment. He photographed the Englishman here. Within a month he got acquainted with a number of whites. Therefore, he took Sultana there. Here in cantonment many whites became sultana's permanent clients through Khuda Bux.

Sultana purchased pendants for the ears, got eight Kangans of gold (bangles) weighing five and a half tolas. She also acquired ten to fifteen nice sarees. Some furniture was also put in the house. In short, he was quite well off in Ambala Cantonment. But suddenly in a mysterious way something seized the fancy of Khuda Bux and he determined to go to Delhi. How could Sultana refuse him since she considered him a sign of good luck. She happily agreed to go to Delhi. Rather she thought that in such a big city where the Lat Sahib resided, her trade would flourish. She had heard of the glamour of Delhi from her friends. Then, there was the Shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia to whom she was much devoted. Thus after hurriedly disposing of the household effects she came to Delhi with Khuda Bux. Here Khuda Bux rented a flat at rupees twenty per month where both lived together.

A long monotonous row of new houses ran along the road. The Municipal Committee had earmarked the area for the prostitutes so that they may not set up their dens all over the city. There were shops on the ground floor, with two storey flats above them. Since all the buildings were of the same design, Sultana found it very difficult to find her flat. But when the launderer put up his sign board on the front of the house, she got a sure sign 'Dirty linen washed here'. She located her flat by this board. She had similarly fixed many other signs. For instance, above the big letters of 'Coal Depot' lived her friend Hera Bai who sometimes went to the Radio Station for singing. The place with the words 'Eating House for the Noble' was the

residence of her other friend, Mukhtar. Anwari lived above the weaving factory and was employed by its proprietor and lived with him, since the Seth had to supervise the factory during the night.

You don't get customers soon as you start a shop. Thus Sultana consoled herself during the first month which brought her no business. But when two months passed and no customer turned up she became anxious. She said to Khuda Bux, 'How is it, Khuda Bux, full two months have gone by since we arrived here and no one has taken any notice of us'. I know there is a decline in business these days, but not so acute either that not one turns up in a whole month'. This had been worrying Khuda Bux also for some time. But he kept quiet. Now when Sultana herself touched upon it, he said, 'I have been thinking about it for some days. I see one thing, that due to war people have been occupied in other things, and have forgotten to come this way. Or else, may be ...'. He was going to say something when steps sounded on the stairs. Both Khuda Bux and Sultana became attentive. Soon there was a knock. Khuda Bux immediately opened the door. A man entered. This was the first customer who agreed on three rupees. Five more followed. That makes six in three months, of whom Sultana made eighteen rupees.

Twenty rupees was the rent of the flat water and electricity over and above it. Besides, other household expenses—food, clothing, medicine, and no income. Eighteen rupees and a half in three months cannot be called income. Sultana was worried. Eight bangles of 5 tola which she got made in Ambala were disposed of one after the other. When the last bracelet was to go, she said to Khuda Bux, 'Take my advice and return to Ambala. There is nothing here...may be there is; but the city doesn't suit us. You had good business there. Let's go back. Let's take this loss as an offering for the good business we had there. Let's go back. (to ward off the evil). Sell this bangle. I manage the luggage. We will leave by the night train'.

Khuda Bux took the bangle from Sultana and said, 'No dear. We do not go to Ambala. We shall earn our living here in Delhi. All your bangles will come back right here. Have faith in God. He sets everything right. He will provide us with some means here'.

Sultana acquiesced. So the last bangle too was gone. It pained her to look at her bare hands. But she couldn't help. She had to appease the hunger, one way or the other.

When five months passed and the income was reduced to less than one fourth of the expenditure, Sultana became more worried.

Now Khuda Bux also stayed out most of the time. Sultana felt this too. No doubt, she had a few acquaintances in the neighbourhood with whom she could pass her time. But she disliked to go and sit there for hours. Thus she gradually avoided seeing her friends. She sat in the lonely house all the day long, cutting betel nuts, mending old clothes, or at times she used to stand on the balcony, vacantly watching stationary and moving engines in the Railway shed opposite.

There was a godown on the other side of the road, spread out from end to end. Huge bales lay under the steel roof to the right hand side. On the left was an open space with innumerable rails spread over it. When the rails glittered under the sun, Sultana looked at her hands on which blue veins rose like those rails. Engines and carriages rain over this long vast space. They went this way and that. The *chhak chhak*, *phak phak* of these engines and carriages resounded all the time. Early in the morning, when she came to the balcony, it presented a strange scene. In the haze the engines omitted thick smoke and it looked like bulky men rising towards the dull sky. Big clouds of steam also rose from the rails with a noise and instantly dissolved in the air. And when at times she saw a carriage pushed by the engine to roll on the rails, she thought that she too was pushed by someone on the rails of life on which she was drifting involuntarily. Others are at the changing points, and she is just going on—on to some place unknown. Then there will come a day when the impact of the push will slowly die out, and she will stop somewhere, at a place never seen or known by her.

She vacantly gazed at these tangled and obliquely running rails for hours but she was always occupied with strange thoughts. When she lived in Ambala cantonment her house was near the railway Station. There she had not taken this view of these things. Now, at times, she even thought that this network of rails in front of her, and this steam and smoke rising from different places formed a huge brothel—lots of carriages tossed about in all directions by a few big clumsy engines. To Sultana these engines sometimes looked like the Seths (business magnates), who used to come to her place in Ambala. When at times she saw some engine slowly moving along a row of carriages, she thought as if some man was walking through the street of the brothel constantly staring up at the flats.

Sultana knew it was a hallucination. So when she was surrounded by such thoughts she avoided the balcony. She repeatedly appealed to Khuda Bux, 'Please, be considerate to me. Stay

home. I keep lying here all day like sick'. But Khuda Bux every time consoled her, saying, 'Dear, I am after some means to sustain us. God willing, all will be set right in a few days'.

It had been full five months, but neither Sultana nor Khuda Bux was out of trouble yet. The month of Moharram was approaching. But Sultana had nothing to buy a black dress with. Mukhtar had got a black shirt of *Lady Hamilton* made in a new design, the sleeves of which were of black georgette. To match with it she had a black satin shalwar. Anwari had bought a very fancy georgette sari. She had told Sultana that she would wear a white bosky petticoat under it, as it was the new fashion. Anwari had brought a pair of black velvet shoes to match with this sari, which was very fine and delicate. When Sultana saw all these preparations she was pained with the thought that she could not afford to buy such dress to observe Muharram.

When she came home after seeing these dresses she was very sad. She felt as if a sore had developed inside her. No one was home. Khuda Bux was away as usual. She lay a long time with the big rolled pillow under her head. But when her neck started aching due to the high pillow she went out on the balcony to wards off these painful thoughts.

Right in front of her carriages were standing on the rails. But there was no engine. It was the evening. The roads were being watered, and as a result the dust had settled. In the bazaar one could now see people who would throw a glance here and there, then sneakily make for their homes. Such a one looked up to Sultana. Sultana smiled and then forgot about him, since now an engine had appeared on the rails opposite. Sultana fixed her gaze at it, and slowly it seemed to her that the engine too was dressed in black. To get rid of the thought when she turned her gaze to the road, she saw the same man standing by the bullock cart, covetously looking at her. She waved to him. He looked around and slowly made signs for the way up. Sultana directed him. He didn't move for some time. But then swiftly came up.

Sultana offered him a seat on the mat. When he was seated, to start the conversation, she said, "Why were you hesitating in coming up?" He smiled at it, "How did you know? what was there to be scared of?"

"I said so since you kept standing there, and then, as if prompted by some thought, you came here", returned sultana. He smiled again, "you were mistaken. I was looking towards the flat

above you. There a woman was showing her thumb to a man. I liked the scene. Then a green lamp shone in the balcony, and I paused for some time. I like green light.” After saying this he started examining the room. Then he rose. Sultana asked, “Are you going”? He replied, “No I want to see your house. Come, show me all the rooms.”

Sultana showed him the three rooms in turn. He quietly examined them. When they were back in the room where they had been sitting earlier, he said, “My name is Shankar”.

Sultana observed him closely for the first time. He was an ordinary looking man of average height, but his eyes had an unusual lustre in them and occasionally brightened up in a strange way. He was solid and well built. The hair at the temples were greying. He wore khaki woollen trousers. The white shirt had its collar turned up at the back.

Shankar was sitting in such a way that not he but a Sultana looked to be the customer. The thought embarrassed Sultana. So she addressed Shankar, “Well....”

Shankar, who had sat up now, replied, ‘What can I say? You better speak. It’s you who invited me’. As Sultana kept quiet, he rose, ‘I see. Well, listen to me. You took me wrong. I am not one of those who give. Like the doctors I charge my fee. I must be paid when called.’

Sultana was flabbergasted; even then she could not help laughing. ‘What is your occupation’ she asked.

‘Same as yours’, returned Shankar

‘What?’

‘I... ! I... ! I have none.’

So hav’nt I.’

‘That makes no sense’. Sultana was irritated,

‘You must be doing something’,

‘You too must be doing something’, replied Shankar quietly.

‘I make a fool of myself’

‘So do I’

‘Well, let’s both make fools of ourselves’

'Your pleasure. But I never pay for making a fool of myself'.

'Be sensible. It's no poor house'.

'And I am no volunteer'.

Sultana paused and asked, 'Who are "volunteers"?'.

'Stupid fools', returned Shankar.

'I am no stupid fool'.

With you is definitely a stupid fool'.

'Why?'

'But that man, Khuda Bux, who lives here

'Because for some days, that his fortune may smile upon him, he has been visiting a saintly person whose own fate is tangled like a rusty lock'. Shankar laughed as he said that.

Sultana replied, 'You are a Hindu, that is why you make fun of our holy men'.

Shankar smiled, 'Hindu-Muslim controversy is irrelevant here. Even big maulvis and pundits would improve into good men if they visit here'.

'What nonsense you are talking? Come, would you stay?'

'On the condition already mentioned.'

'Well, then get going', Sultana stood up. Shankar quietly rose, and thrusting his hands in the pockets of his trousers, he said, 'I sometimes pass through this bazaar. Call me whenever you may need me. I am a very useful man'.

Shankar left, and Sultana, now unmindful of her black dress kept thinking about him. His speech was soothing. Had he come in Ambala, where she was well off, she would have taken quite a different view of the man. Most probably she would have thrown him out. But since she had been unhappy here, she liked Shankar speaking to her.

When Khuda Bux came home on the evening, Sultana asked him, 'Where have you been all the day-to-day?'

Khuda Bux, who was now dead tired, said, 'I am coming from a place near the Old Fort. A holy man has been staying there for some days. I visit him daily. It may bring us a good turn,

'Did he speak to you?'

‘No, he hasn’t favoured us yet. But, Sultana, the service I am doing him will not go waste. God willing, fortune will smile on us’.

Sultana was preoccupied with the thought of observing Muharram. Half crying she said to Khuda Bux, ‘You are out all of the day. I live here as in a prison. I cannot go anywhere. Muharram is fast approaching. Have you ever bothered that I need black clothes? We don’t have a penny in the house. The bangles have all gone one by one. You should know what is going to happen now. You can’t go on running after these ‘holy’ men. I feel as if here in Delhi even God has turned away from us. If I were you I should start your business. It would be some help.’

Khuda Bux lay on the mat, and said, ‘But to start a business you need some capital. For God’s sake, don’t talk of sad things. I can endure no more. I really made a big mistake in leaving Ambala. But it is God’s will, and he wishes us good! Who knows after some ordeal we may...’

‘For God’s sake, do something,’ Sultana interrupted, ‘Steal or rob, but bring me a shalwar piece. I have a white bosky shirt. I shall get it dyed. I also have a white linen dupatta, the one you brought for me on Devali. This will also be dyed with the shirt. Only a shalwar is wanting, which you must provide somehow or the other. On my life, do manage it. You will lay a curse on me if you don’t.

Khuda Bux sat up, ‘You are foolishly insisting. How can I manage it? I hav’nt a penny for opium even’.

‘Do what you can, but bring me 4 or 5 yards of black satin’.

‘Pray that God may provide two or three men tonight’.

‘But you won’t do anything. You can surely arrange the money if you try. Satin was 12 to 14 annas a yard before the war. Now it is a rupee and four annas. How much will it be for 4 or 5 yards?

‘Now since you insist, I shall do something’. With this Khuda Bux rose, ‘Now forget these worries. I bring food from the hotel’.

The food was brought from the hotel, which was devoured by both and they went to sleep. The day dawned. Khuda Bux went to the holy man at the Old Fort and Sultana was left alone. For some time she lay in the bed and then slept for a while. She aimlessly moved about in the rooms. After having her lunch she took out her white linen dupatta and white bosky shirt and took it down to the laundry

for dyeing. Dyeing was also done there beside washing. When back home she read film books which contained the stories and songs of the films she had seen. While reading these books she went to sleep. It was four when she woke up. Since the sun had shrunk from the open court to the side of the drain, after taking the bath she took her warm shawl and came on the balcony. She kept standing there for about an hour. It was getting dark now. The lamps were being lighted. Some life could now be seen down on the road. The cold had grown a bit sharp now. But it was not unpleasant to Sultana. She watched for some time the motors and tongas moving on the road. Suddenly her eyes fell on Shankar. As he came near he looked up and gave a smile to Sultana. Sultana involuntarily waved to him and called him up.

When Shankar came up Sultana could not decide what to say to him. Actually she had unconsciously invited him upstairs. Shankar was quite at his ease as if it was his own home. So without any ceremony he lay down with the big pillow under his head. When Sultana did not speak for some time, he said, 'You may invite me a hundred times, and throw me out as many times. I never mind such things'.

This further confused Sultana, and she said, 'Sit down. Who asks you to leave?'

Shankar smiled, 'So you accept my condition.'

'What condition', said Sultana smiling, 'is it a marriage contract?'

'What's this talk of marriage! Neither you shall ever marry nor I. These niceties are not for us. Leave out this nonsense. Say something practical.'

'Well, What should I say?'

'You are a woman. Start something which may brighten up the life for a couple of hours. Business is not everything in life. There is something else too.'

Sultana had by now mentally reconciled to Shankar. She said, 'Come, be straight. What do you want from me?'

'Same as others do', Shankar said as he sat up.

'How would you then be different from others?'

'There is no difference between me and you. But I and they are poles apart. There are things which ought not to be asked. These must be sensed.'

Sultana took some time to get what Shankar meant and then said, 'I see'.

'What do you say to it then.'

'I give in. But I must say, no one would have ever agreed to such a thing.'

'You are wrong. In this very bazaar there must be some women who would never believe that any woman could ever accept such a degradation which you have been accepting without feeling. But in spite of their never feeling it you are there in thousands— isn't your name sultana?

'Yes, it is Sultana.'

And mine is Shankar', he said laughing, 'how ridiculous these names are! Come, let's go in.'

When Shankar and Sultana came back to the matted room they were both laughing God knows why. When Shankar made to leave, Sultana said, 'Shankar, will you do me a favour?

'First let me know what kind of favour it is, said Shankar.

Sultana felt embarrassed, 'You would think I am demanding the price, but...'

'Come on, don't hesitate.'

Sultana picked up some courage. 'The thing is that Muharram is at hand and I have no money for a black shalwar. You have listened to all our misery here. I had a shirt and a dupatta which I have today given for dyeing.'

Shankar replied, 'You mean that I should give you some money so that you may get a shalwar prepared.'

Sultana returned, 'No. I mean, if possible, get me a black shalwar.'

Shankar smiled, 'It is only by chance that I ever have anything in my pocket. Anyway, I shall try. You will get the shalwar on the first of Muharram. You are pleased now.' Then after looking at Sultana's ear-rings, he asked, 'Would you give me these ear-rings?'

Sultana said smiling, 'What would you do with them? These are plain silver rings, hardly worth five rupees.'

Shankar replied, 'I have asked for the rings. I have not asked their price. Would you give me these?'

‘Well, have them.’ Sultana took the rings off and gave these to Shankar. She was sorry afterwards, but then Shankar had gone.

Sultana was not sure that Shankar would keep his word. But after eight days, on the first of Muharram early at nine in the morning there was a knock at the door. Sultana opened the door, and Shankar was there. He handed to Sultana a newspaper wrapper and said, 'It is a black satin shalwar. Better check up. It may be a bit too long for you. I leave now.'

And he left without waiting for another word from Sultana. His trouser was all crumpled. His hair was dishevelled. It seemed that he had just got up and had come straight there.

Sultana opened the wrapper. There was the black satin shalwar, very much like the one she had seen with Mukhtar. Sultana felt much pleased. The remorse she was feeling for the rings and for this bargain had now gone with the shalwar and with Shanker's keeping his word.

In the afternoon she brought her dyed shirt and dupatta from the laundry. When she had dressed herself up in the three black things there was a knock at the door. As Sultana opened the door Mukhtar entered. She looked at Sultana's three pieces and said, 'The shirt and the dupatta seem to have been dyed, but this shalwar is new. When did you get this?'

‘The tailor has brought it just to-day’, sultana said, and as her eyes caught Mukhtar’s ear-rings, she asked, “Where did you get these rings?’

'Got to-day', replied Mukhtar.

After that both were obliged to be quiet for some time.

(1980)

❧ Chapter 46 ❧

Khareed Lo (*The Sale*) *Ismat Chughtai*



'Cathy, Cathy, listen' I called after her many times. But she hurried, spattering her orange mules, shooting straight to the Tube Station.

Cathy was hardly fifteen. She had not yet learnt the quiet possessive seriousness of her race. She prated like a mechanical doll. Sometimes she even supplied answers to her own questions. Mercurial, fair complexioned, sweet as a cherry, restive, brisk, she hardly walks; she actually runs—poised like a bird ready to fly. Sweet innocent face, like a bird's, with a small protruding nose, round green eyes, smooth spotless 'getta parcha' skin. Below my room she lives in a two-room stuffy flat with her mother. Mrs. Ross works in a blouse factory. Cathy goes to school.

My landlady is not at all pleased with her. She is always sick of Cathy. And since my arrival her visits have become more frequent. One reason is the full size mirror which belongs to the landlady. On one excuse or another, she rushes straight to the mirror, and usually, oblivious of work in hand, she starts examining her figure in the mirror. My landlady earns handsomely from a biscuit factory where she puts in a lot of over-time—from right in the morning till late in the evening. Cathy knows that she does not like her. That is why she rushes up as soon as the landlady is out for work.

'The witch: She left? Thank God', she always exclaimed before assaulting the mirror. In the time she can spare from the school, through baby-sitting or helping house-wives, she makes a few shillings and then spends all her earnings in buying cosmetics. Very cheap, worthless stuff she bought on half the price from discarded boxes in the stores. She has such a humdrum of things which is

enough to set up a shop in Bombay. She puts on such quantities of make-up that she looks a very clown. She curses and shouts and cleans it off. Washes her face and applies lotions and creams, puts on some rouge and then layers upon layers of powder, lotions and creams; and then concentrates upon the eyes;—lots of eye-shadows, various lotions on the eyes-pencils, artificial eye-lashes, very cheap and thin, which usually stick at most awkward angles. When this doesn't satisfy her, she applies wax to her eye-lids and sprinkles them with diamantes. Tired and stiffened in the process, she takes heavy exercise. A little composed, she turns to the lip-stick. This is real torture to Cathy. When coatings of various shades of lip-sticks do not satisfy her, she opens a new packet of tissue paper and starts painting afresh. Laboriously applied layers of powders and creams give her a horrible look. She curses the powers that be, and starts crying. The whole make-up gets mixed up. She washes again and writhes amidst short frequent sighs. I feel very strange at such moments. When she is in this misery, I pray involuntarily, 'O God, it won't disturb your cosmic order if she once gets satisfied with her make-up!' My pulse is fast. My nerves are tense. If her efforts fail again and the whole thing crumbles, I shan't be able to endure it any more.

I do not know why she needs a full size mirror to apply the make-up. Perhaps she wants to see how the artificial eye-lashes go with her figure. She examined her reflection in the mirror in various attitudes and from different angles, presses her belly in with the blows of the fist, projects her breasts, and then in a very devastating pose bends her head sideways and assault her imaginary victim. But she never feels quite sure of her talents.

Sometime I felt an irresistible desire of throwing her make-up box in the dust bin and giving a straight box to the wretched thing, to force her to behave and to keep her from the mirror under the threat of violence.

But her mother took no notice of her. Her father had disappeared when she was about two. The mother laboured five days in a week and had good time on the week-ends. On Mondays, cursing and grumbling, she returned to her work. She adored Cathy. Never even rebuked her without calling Cathy her darling, and when Cathy got it into her head to slim herself by dieting, Mrs. Ross desperately rebuked and cursed her. But she would eat nothing, though she did not spare the landlady's biscuits, corn-flakes, and

even raw vegetables. As a result she put on more flesh while dieting and, so scared, she soon gave up the idea.

A very small favour brought her close to me. One day she came to examine herself in the mirror as she was preparing to go out on a date. She turned and twisted and posed so violently that her eye-lashes fell on the brown carpet.

In spite of her nylon wig and padded bras, she burst out weeping like a baby. I felt sorry. I swept the carpet with a wet hand and by chance the lashes stuck to it. I pinched a little of my landlady's lotion and fixed the lashes. It proved so firm that it stood the roughing of the party. That lotion is supplied with only six-guinea lashes, which Cathy could not afford. She, therefore, persuaded me to commit this theft.

And today when I called after her she took no notice of me and entered the Tube Station. 'The witch. I won't let her in next time!' At least the landlady will be pleased with a check on Cathy's entry, and she was already scared of her.

Then I noticed, far and near, all around me, scores of Cathys moving about the place. Not the slightest difference – similar silvery hair, of the same size, blackened eyes, orange mules, orange miniskirts and foam white blouses.

'Oh, so she was not Cathy!' It was the last week's fashion which had swept away the girls of Cathy's age. And also on the T.V. it was not Cathy but Lulu – how exactly like Cathy!

That is why for a couple of days Cathy was so anxious to get it. It was a matter of life and death for her. She pestered her mother with the demand of an orange miniskirt. Her anxiety was irritating. It is miserable not to afford the new fashion as soon as it is introduced. I am sure Cathy would die if she could not get orange shirt and mules by Saturday evening. It was true. Cathy was dressed up like Lulu, waiting on the bus-stop. I was impressed by her persistence. She dyed the white shirt in the evening, dried it with the hair-dryer and stitched it inside to make it short. She coloured her brown shoes deep orange with polish, and got her mother's blouse. On coming out of the Marble Arch Tube Station I said to myself that this was the advanced publicity of the advanced nation which raided the people like a bombardment. Its aim is so perfect; it never misses.

With the introduction of a new fashion a sort of military action sets in. Quietly the things are prepared in millions and sent to every branch of every store. They appear on every shop window, and then the onslaught. 'Buy, buy at once or you will be ruined, finished. You will repent and rue for the rest of your life.' 'Time is running out. The stocks will soon be out.' 'If you do not buy now, at once, it will be a catastrophe. Lovers will abandon you, husbands will divorce you, bosses will turn you out. You will waste the whole life as an old maid or a divorced one'. 'Buy cash, buy on instalments—all right, have it on credit. Or solve this cross-word and get it free. If you pay in cash you will get a packet of biscuits free.' If you buy two at a time, two soap-cakes free.'

The stores are packed with all sorts of things. Shop windows on the roadside are exhorting you to buy. The T.V. announcements make you mad: 'Buy this broom and win him back.' 'Buy this new stove and make the boss your slave.' 'Your man is divorcing you, and running after another, only because she uses our deodorant and tooth paste which kills smell and gives you fresh breath. Save your home. You too buy it and get him back.' This is accompanied with the picture of an annoyed husband who is preparing to leave. 'You buy a ticket of this and many will adore you.' The picture of the true lover, smiling children and flowers all round falling in a shower.' Looking for a good job! Buy these bras; they make the curves prominent.' 'Wishing for a date! Buy our company's nickel set.' You get used to these slogans; and when the experiments fail, more alluring snares are laid for you. 'Share this bath with him. He will never abandon you.' 'This blanket—for sweet dreams.' This bed (with its picture), lie like this (another picture) and feel in heaven.' Seat your beloved in this chair and enjoy'. (A picture ... the beloved, practically nude, moving voluptuously)'Use this flour for cake. He will draw you in his arms.' (A picture—a beauty dangling her legs in the lap of the hero.)'Look! How the husband of the neighbour kisses her madly—Because she uses the new electric iron manufactured by us. Why should you feel neglected?'

The time is running at jet speed. Shapes of things are changing every moment. The last year's Mercedes is a junk beside the new model. The old iron is a mere scrap before the new. Buy today. It is outdated tomorrow. Just go on buying, go on grumbling. Feel frustrated. Buy again. Feel sorry again. Feel sorry once again. Every

thing boring. Everything is there, but the same feeling of deprivation as ever – frustration and inferiority complex.

After some days I left my hostess and came to London. One day, casually strolling in Piccadilly, I once again thought I had an illusion. Under the statue of Eros, the God of love, there she was, in a heap of dirty clothes. Winters or summers, at night or in the day, these steps are never empty. All sorts of vagabonds, drunkards, addicts keep glued to them, lying, sitting, rambling or stumbling – they are always there.

If she was really Cathy, then how greatly changed she looked within a month and a half – her clothes were very dirty, and in shreds. There was no powder, no rouge on her face. It was extremely difficult to distinguish between boys and girls in this heap of rubbish, except for the bearded boys. All had long tresses. They were clad in tight jeans and loose sweaters. Majority had no shoes.

Yes, she was Cathy – although her sweet freshness had gone. The blonde wig was no more. Her own orange hair was full of tons of dust. Sometimes she gave a long kiss to the boy on the right, then paused for breath, and grappled the boy on the left. She was thoroughly occupied. But her face showed no feelings – lustreless eyes. Another girl, a Negro, was making ripples on her belly on the step above Cathy. A skeleton of a boy, sitting beside her, wetting his hand from the water of the fountain, was throwing it drop by drop on her dark belly. With every drop the girl would emit a 'Quai..n'-like noise from her throat and become still and again started to move her belly. For how long had this stupid activity been going on? None except me took any note of it.

On one side a heap of dirt was asleep. Beside her a boy with long golden tresses sitting on haunches was playing on a flute as fine as a pencil. He was wearing trousers of a very strange shade, the rest of the body was covered in layers of dirt.

On his feet he had brand new golden thread sandals from Kolhapur. A shred of a girl was drowsing with her head on his shoulder. Occasionally she took out her red tongue, licked at his shoulder and fell into sleep.

As I drew near I saw that beside the boy was lying in a coil, measuring a span, a snake. Another girl, resting on his knees was playing with the snake. She wound it round her fingers or took it on

her palm and tried to wake him up. But the snake was in deep slumber, exactly like those boys and girls, completely detached and lost in reveries.

This drama was being staged right in the centre of the square, while the life around was running at jet speed. Double-decked buses, huge motor cars and scooters were zooming all around. In the Wimpy bar hilarious youth were coming and going. The queue outside the cinema box office was swelling. Mothers were hurrying with babies in the prams. A boy was playing same Irish song on the guitar. His companion, a huge man of around 50, in tight trousers and a meticulously white shirt, was performing the Tap dance. The girls standing in the queue were shaking, beating to the tune, and were casting voluptuous glances at the boy. The boy was extremely handsome and his face shone with an angelic innocence. Opposite to them was a cop musing like a philosopher with his hands behind his back. No one looked up to that heap of rubbish as if it was not there at all, as if only I had a charmed vision.

Cathy?—No doubt it was Cathy, since after a little while she focused her abstracted eyes and recognized me. The wire on her teeth glittered. Then oblivious of everything she grappled the boy on her left, since the fury beside the boy on her right had awakened and was furiously pouncing upon him. The Negro girl was making ripples on her belly as before. She became still as a drop of water fell on her.

For a moment Cathy shifted her attention from the boy to me. She signed to me to sit on the steps. She thought that I might take it ill. But I at once squatted there. The boy protested on this intrusion. But Cathy pushed him away and sat by me. I told her that I had temporarily shifted to London and would be leaving soon.

‘When you go home, tell Halima that I shall call on her before leaving.’

‘Home?-- no home.’ she sprawled on the floor.

‘Why? Have you picked up some quarrel with Mamma?’

‘No. I am no child now.’

‘Who says you are a child? but ... ?’

‘I have found myself.’ She said in a saintly manner.

‘When?’ I tried to take it as a joke.

‘Two weeks ago. After leaving the jail ... I met Vicky she pointed, not to a particular person, but to the whole heap.

‘Jail? ... jail?’ I stammered.

It was not for the first time that she was arrested for shop-lifting. She had told me with a sense of pride. In the beginning she felt ashamed of it. But all her friends were masters of the art, and considered it rather romantic. Perhaps Marilyn Monroe and Sophia Loren were also shop-lifters. It was shown on the T.V. Shop-lifting is rather common. Old women are more involved in it than young people. Apparently no one seems to watch the stalls. You can pick anything and put it in your bag. People make purchases on their own and then make payments at the counter. But there are some very sharp eyes lurking around somewhere. When they catch anyone, there is always a big scene. Once Cathy had picked a few underwears and was caught red-handed. She was sent to the reformatory for two weeks. She really had it. It was there that she became addicted to drugs and tobacco. When released, she abandoned the home. She roamed with different gangs. Dress was of no consequence, and as for food, that too was somehow managed. Some one would provide that. It’s all peace, all love, enjoy making love. Escape from the school was a pleasure in addition.

‘Have I slimmed a bit? She asked, stroking her belly.

‘Yes ---- Quite’. I reassured her. ‘But there must have been no loss of weight. Such layers of dirt ...’ She took no notice.

‘This is my own dirt.’ She said very much in the tone of Mahesh Yogi.

All her smartness, agility and careering had gone. Absolutely serious, soft-spoken, no childishness any more.

So Cathy had found herself. How old and sober she had grown in just two weeks? How soon had she found the key to her paradise? She had learnt that for boy hunt neither electric cleaners are needed, nor the electric iron of the latest design. Neither the utensils of the stainless steel bring love, nor the nectar of life oozes from the mine of the new design. All advertisements tell lies, cheat. Whether shoes are on sale, or political gimmicks; beds that bring sweet dreams, or the chairs of authority, all are rotten. You are all thieves, all swindlers; we will not listen to you. We shall dance naked in the schools built

by you. If you will ask us to work, we shall beg. We shall drown your world in drugs. We shall have honeymoons on thoroughfares.

And Cathy embraced the boy next to her. I was flabbergasted. ‘Where am I? Why am I sitting here? Which gift should I pick up from here to present to my children?’

The child is wallowing in the dirt. The mother is sore at heart. These dirty, filthy children are deliberately acting this drama right in the middle of the square. They are fully aware that the passers-by who seem to be so indifferent are not so unconcerned. They are very sore about it; they are burning inside. Someone must have secretly photographed them. These pictures will be published. Some journalists must be taking notes hurriedly. Some writer must be collecting material for his new novel. Now the statesmen of the world will cry hoarse in the name of national honour. Psychologists will pass verdicts. Departments will be established for their reformation, committees will be formed. Their names will appear in histories.

Walking towards the bus stand I saw: 'If you are seeking salvation, buy this image of Christ. Only six shillings; Eleven shillings for two.'

An old woman was gazing at the row of the images in despair. Then her eyes caught the 'Grand Sale' advertisements of Marx and Spencer. She hesitated long whether to worry about her salvation or take care of her withering youthful bloom.

She had decided before my bus arrived—and walked towards the glittering make-up of Marx and Spencer.

(1980)



❧ Chapter 47 ❧

In Memoriam *The Culture of Voices*



We are living in the world of noises created by meaningless hurry and a confusion of discordant voices. Though there is hardly any industrialization worth speaking of, the din and clatter of the modern industrialized world is heard all around. It was perhaps not so bad a decade or two ago. No doubt some voices sounded like “singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells”, there were many sweet and comforting voices to elevate the spirit. Chote Ghulam Ali Khan, Nazakat Ali Khan and Amanat Ali Khan, with a whole galaxy of them, have already become legends. There is no Roshan Ara Begum to enthrall the lovers of music. Today’s youth can hardly conceive of the sweet cadences that flow no more.

Prof. Asrar Ahmed has left us mourning (on 24th January, 2001). It has been a great loss to his admirers and a great number of devotees and no less to music. A philanthropist, a compassionate teacher and a champion of the down-trodden, Prof. Asrar was better known in Lahore as a composer. He had to his credit such popular compositions as *Ham Dekhain Gai* and *Dile Mera Musafir*, sung by Iqbal Bano and Tina Sani, besides others. He composed music for Radio and TV documentaries, features and plays and was actively associated with the Arts Councils. He was a true artist who neither cared for name nor for money. Just to give a glimpse of his love for music and the high intellectual level from which he viewed it, I take this opportunity of reproducing an English rendering of a paper that he read at a seminar organized by the National Council of the Arts at Lahore in 1975. Asrar Ahmed was a connoisseur of music and a hard campaigner for good taste. He maintained that the quality of a culture is best reflected in its voices. From the original ‘Kun’ (let there be) that resounded in the great Explosion marking the creation of the world, resolving the nascent ‘whole’ into its various forms, the sky,

the earth, the sun and the stars, etc., to the last peal of the Day of Judgement, described in the Holy Quran as the Day of Noise and Clamour, which may be explained in scientific terms as a collision of the stars with a horrible explosion that will bring the world to its end, the whole phenomenon of existence is in fact a progression of sounds. According to Asrar Ahmed, man is the lord of creation in this also and his voice can produce all sounds. The act of creation was the striking of a cord, the SAM (the end of the beat cycle). Thus, life is rhythm, and its basis is the 'note'. To dislocate the note from rhythm will be to negate the beauty of nature's scheme of creation. To see the soul as distinct from the body may be a metaphysical way of seeing things, it is surely not scientific.

Asrar's treatment of the subject is so original and so shocking that much of its brilliance may be lost in a commentary. An English rendering of his paper is therefore attempted in the following lines, keeping as close to spirit as is possible in a translation.

The world begins on a note and ends on a note, and its whole course is a succession of notes. Discordant notes reflect chaos, melodious notes echo the harmony of life. Life is movement, and every moving object causes vibrations, which form into waves and are preserved as sound. Asrar insists that the study of the state of society at particular time can best be made with reference to the state of its music. A historian can conceal, distort or concoct facts and to obscure the reality and cover up men's misdeeds. But music is the inner voice of man. It performs the sacred function of preserving the truth and honestly portraying it. Music is reflective of the psychology of men.

Man first encountered the variations of seasons, fought against wild beasts and struggled to procure food for the vegetables or the flesh of the animals. Challenge of self-preservation and encounter with common adversaries gave man a sense of community at a very early stage of his evolution. It greatly helped his creative instinct which found expression in the artistic activity of the celebration of a successful hunting in the din and noise of festivity accompanied with capering and howling. This rowdyism was gradually brought into some discipline and thus emerged the chorus and the community song. African traditions of dance and music still carry the heritage.

Wooden weapons were used for hunting. Different sounds were also created in the chase. Cries were uttered to drive the quarry.

As the weapons developed so also were the instruments of sound improved. The skin of the hunted animals was mounted on a hollow drum, and the 'dhol' was invented. The precedence that Iqbal gave to the weapons over the instruments of music can be applied to the life of the jungle.

It was in that stage of human society (society in the present day sense, since even today greater part of the globe is ruled by law of the jungle---survival of the fittest) that man became familiar with different sounds, like howling of the winds, the noise of the rain and the storm, the thundering of the clouds and the lashing of the lightning. Even today the concepts of 'Gummak' (thundering of clouds) and Ta'n (lightening) are derived from these sounds. Imitating and enjoying the chirping of the birds and the cries of the animals is embedded in the human unconscious. Thus a melodious voice is likened to the singing of the Keel, and repulsive discordant voice compared to the braying of the ass. The great maestro, Feroze Nizami, has in an article thrown light on the derivation of musical notes from the songs of birds and the cries of the animals.

Perhaps the more significant cue that man got from the songs of the birds is the way a bird attracts the opposite sex by uttering specific sounds. This perhaps is the origin of the Solo sung by man, which even today is used for more or less the same purpose. Human race owes a lot to music for the procreation and progress as well as refinement.

Some legends related to the legends of Ta'n Sain lend support to these observations. Mian Ta'n Sain had the special gift of producing unique sounds right from his early childhood. He had perfect command on imitating the cries of animals. He also happened to be very naughty. Frightening the people with the lion's roar forcing them to lock themselves in or creating the atmosphere of the dawn at midnight by imitating the chirping of the birds drawing people out of their homes, were his favourite pastimes. He had become so notorious for these activities that some elders induce him to learn the art of music and he was put under the tutelage of Swami Hari Das. Another story is related about him that after he had mastered the art he once collected deers round him by singing the ra'g Todi. He might have mastered the notes of the sounds uttered by the deer and working on these notes lured them to his song. This is only a legend, but then Orpheus had a similar legend too. David's harp also encourages such speculations. However, the fact remains that man

has the capability to reproduce the sounds that he hears. This is so because human voice has the capability of producing infinite variety of notes. It is for this reason that music of a place at a particular time reflects the richness or poverty of its culture at that time.

From the pastoral to the agricultural, from the nomadic to the settled life is a long story. From the stone age to her present day man has not only struggled for life, but also for the quality of living. He worked hard for sustenance as well as for pleasure. The auditory taste developed and refined. Balochistan's Bhandar Party and Punjab's Chhitta still remind of the early developments in music.

Storing of food led to the idea of possession. This was the beginning of the class system, which led to feudalism, kingship, and ultimately, imperialism.

'First the sword and the spear, and then the harp and the lyre.' To-day we find two classes of music in society. One may be called the music of 'the haves', and the other that of 'the have-nots'. History of the subcontinent illustrates this division. We feel proud to claim that the Muslims have greatly contributed to the music of this region. This reputation is actually associated with our 1,000 year rule of India which history could not ignore. It gives no credit to the accomplishments of the slave nations. (The Hindu contribution has therefore not been duly recognized). The mention of Muslim musicians too is confined to those who were either Kings themselves or were attached to the courts. But the irony of the circumstances always turns social contradictions to the advantage of the common people. Consequently, one way or the other, their helplessness, their truth and their struggle continued to figure in arts of the downtrodden and the pattern of their development.

These observations are in no way meant to compile the history of music. Instead the object is to draw certain conclusions. Firstly, the art does not find roots in the hearts of people is doomed, as is the case with classical music in our society. The kings and the aristocracy had appropriated all human beauties and monopolized these to grace their own palaces. Sweet odours and melodious notes became their exclusive privilege. As a result the panders of music were continuously drawn to the courts and were thus alienated from their own class. They even concealed art from the people and made it into something of the occult. But music is a mood, a breath of life. It cannot be manipulated, as stated earlier, it is the contradiction in

society that in fact preserves the treasure of art. People's music could be sought in the houses of the masters and the humble abodes of the 'faqirs' and the 'dervishes' which are the haunts of the devotees of music.

Whatever music we know have is the legacy of the masters. Under the British rule the enslaved people harboured contempt for the foreign masters. Particularly after the unsuccessful war of independence the hearts of the Muslims craved for the ouster of the invaders. The wish gained momentum and along with the politicians, the poets, writers and the intellectuals also came onto the arena. The musicians did not lag behind. Ustad Alladiya Khan of Kolhapur, the 'Karnail' and 'Jarnail' of Patiala, Ustad Abdul Kareem Khan, Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan, Ustad Fayyaz Khan and Ustad Bare Ghulam Ali Khan are the pride of the tribe.

History also reveals that music and society influence each other. In a corrupt society the innocent man tarnishes his innocence as well as corrupts his melody, and in the end becomes an instrument of further corruption. Melody stands for truth: its absence represents hypocrisy and the man lacking this awareness represents falsehood. The number and status of such musicians in the society are determined according to these qualities.

As real history read only between the lines. Similarly a psychological analysis of music also reveals the political, social, moral, economic and professional values of a society. Music is no abstraction and it does not exist in a vacuum.

Soon after the establishment of Pakistan, the affairs of culture came into the hands of westernized bureaucracy. Taking advantage of the backwardness of the people this class conspired with the feudal lords and the upstarts to introduce a new culture --- the culture of drawing room. The media bosses came to their help and the music that they now broadcast is totally dependent upon their pleasure. They propagated the ideas of art for art's sake and the art for the sake of entertainment. Deprived of the patronage of the nawabs and the rajahs, classical music sought refuge in officially sponsored institutions. Taste gave way to class prejudice. Bare Ghulam Ali Khan's exit was the first cultural assassination. Music lovers recognize the assassin, but there is no court of culture, where justice can be sought.

Even today the media are haunted by the demon. But Moses was brought up in the house of the Pharaoh. Thus in this uncongenial atmosphere the musicians of the new generation, Nazakat Ali --- Salamat Ali and Amanat Ali --- Fateh Ali emerged as the honour and prestige of music.

The common people fed their taste on 'qawwali', 'soz khawani', songs at fairs and festivals, cheap theatres and cinema houses. They also found entertainment on ceremonial occasions. Popular musicians and artistes emerged from these very institutions. Gradually film songs found place in the hearts of the people, and now, to quite some extent, the film music can be called the music of the people.

The history of Pakistani society can be divided into two periods. The music and the voice of each period reflect the political background of that period and the people's reaction to it.

The Ayub era was a period of coercion. Media were gagged. The situation was extremely discouraging and full of frustration. In this period a voice of truth appeared on the horizon of music which enthralled the people: Mehdi Hassan, a voice of lament and elegy. His style represents a rebellion against restrictions on free expression. People heard the echoes of their hearts in his music.

But the powerful exploiter class often beats the common people with their own weapons. Thus in the mass media and even in the films a formula was devised which popularized small and muffled, though sweet voices that threw the people into deeper gloom.

On the other hand, the period of Yahya Khan was extremely ugly, deceitful and unpatriotic. It needed loud unmusical voices to perpetuate its rule. These voices could be easily procured through the bureaucracy and the panderers of art. An analysis of the war songs or the patriotic songs broadcast on radio and TV in 1971 reveals the horror of introducing unmelodious voices. As a consequence of this war, the radio, in order to restore the lost confidence, at once withdrew the bold voices of the news readers (like Shakeel Ahmed and Anwar Behzad) in order to give an impression of sobriety and restraint. Thus impressive voices became the victim of the policies of the bureaucracy.

At present also, two voices are heard in Pakistan. The voice of truth, sweet and melodious, but weak, narrow and handicapped.

This voice is devoid of all glitter, and is miserable and sad. It represents a large section of the society. The other voice is loud, strong and vast but lacks melody. This voice encourages crime and glamorises rowdyism.

The next stage, that is, the voice of struggle may yet be premature to talk about, since this tone is unacceptable to the establishment. So far as the orchestral composition is concerned, this too, barring a few exceptions, is lagging much behind the sensibility of the poet and the singer. In short, the business of music is in the hands of those who wield power but lack taste. They have authority but are devoid of feelings. This is the situation of the misfits in all the departments of society.

Television's record is no different from that of the radio, since this institution is promoting drawing room culture and perpetuating the luxurious norms of a particular class. It is quite possible that this Pharaoh's house of music may still bring up a Moses.



❧ Chapter 48 ❧

Modern Trends in Literature



Let us start with modernism. Literature has been divided into three ages: classical, medieval and modern. The classical age extends roughly from 800 BC to 300 AD. The Medieval Age spreads over 300 AD to around 1400 AD. From 1400 AD onward it is the modern age. But the modern age is further divided in English literature into the Renaissance, the age of science, the civil war, Restoration, Neo-classicism, Romanticism, Victorian age and, after an interim period, the modern age, which is generally called modernism. This extends from W.W.I to the Vietnam War, that is, from 1914 to 1974. The age we live in is the Post-Modern age.

Modernism is characterized by certain attitudes and techniques. This is the age of confusion, conflicts, wars, colonialism and capitalism. This is the age that reeks of the impacts of the Industrial Revolution. This is the age of capitalism, of class conflicts and exploitation. This is an age of confusion, doubt and disintegration of the society, the family and the individual.

Before the Industrial Revolution, people lived a settled life with old conventions and universally accepted values. It was a complete world, a stable world. Industrial Revolution brought the concepts of innovation and progress.

The problem of the west has been survival. The earth was hard. It was covered with snow for a large part of the year. The climate was harsh. Agriculture was not possible. There was not even much manpower. The people turned to science and technology to discover new energy and new power that could sustain their life. Thus technology developed. Technology was the extended muscle of man. This no doubt brought change and, in a sense, some progress. But it had two great disadvantages. It created a big class gap, that created acute poverty for the majority of the people. The other was that technology created more needs than comforts. And the comforts that

it provided were beyond the reach of the common man. It raised the cost of living tremendously.

Industrialization gave rise to capitalism. The problem with capitalism is that here production is based on profit, not on need. And there is no limit to profit. This enhanced in man the lust for wealth and power. This reduced man to a money-minting machine. He was much engrossed in acquiring the new gadgets that caused the loss of all sense of the other demands of life. He was all the time engaged in earning money. He had no time for his family, society or friends. He had no time even to enjoy what he had earned. He had no time to stand and stare. He became a machine.

It was different in the East where survival was not a problem. The climate was moderate, the land was fertile and the cycle of seasons was almost regular and pleasant. The East was also abundant in manpower. Survival was not the problem. The West, therefore, sought to get power from nature through science and technology. A power stronger than man was created. Man was thrown into the background. He lost value and machine got value. It was easy and cheap to replace a man, but very difficult and costly to replace a machine.

In the east survival was not the problem. Here the problem was not how to live but why to live. They sought the purpose and meaning of life. It was for this reason, as rightly observed, that all the philosophers came in the West and all the prophets came in the East. The West tried to subdue nature by the power of the mind. The east sought some centre of devotion for the satisfaction of the soul. There is a story that clearly brings out this difference. Akbar the great was presented a printing press. It was said that this was already working in Turkey. It brought efficiency and speed in the dissemination of knowledge. Akbar declined the advice and said that efficiency was all right, but that would render hundreds of calligraphers jobless. Man was important not progress. Confucius also thought the same way. To him stability was more important than progress. The west sacrificed stability to progress, and finds itself in the doldrums today. It has achieved all that could be achieved physically. Technology has reached its optimum. Hardly anything is left to be achieved – speed, efficiency, power, control on seasons - all now can be manipulated by man. There is no way ahead. The west seems to have lost its way.

The writers of the west now think that the themes have been exhausted. They keep repeating old stories over and over again.

Classics are being rewritten, like *Mourning Becomes Electra* or the writers have resorted to new techniques to compensate for lack of themes.

Upto Jane Austen, themes were no problem. Man lived in the world of customs and traditions. He had before him only the past to look to. The only concept of the future he had was that of the doomsday. This forced the writers to explore new trends of looking at life. They went to fantasies or to the world of subconscious and unconscious. There appeared many theories of art. One of these was naturalism. Man was seen as a creature of nature. He was conceived as a special kind of animal, as perhaps the romantics thought. He was like flowers, plants, birds and animals. But the world of nature was cyclic that contradicted the idea of a progressive world as science and technology conceived. Man lived in the cycle of day and night, in the cycle of seasons. These two concepts could not be synchronized. The idea is beautifully presented by Edward Bond in his play, *The Sea*. A couple of progressives leave the conservative world to move ahead into a new world. But the story ends on an anti-climax. Perhaps, the world is destroyed by a nuclear war. No sign of life is left on the earth. Suddenly, in this ruin, a rat creeps out of a hole. The process of evolution starts all over again. Bond also sees a cyclic process in the world, despite all his desire to see a progressive world.

The same conclusion is reached by Intezar Hussain. He also wrote *Aagay Samundar Hai*. The sea here, as in Bond, is a symbol of death as well as of opportunities lying beyond. But the sound of gunfire is also heard from the other side.

The idea of technology is progress. But the process of nature is cyclic. This is where the West is stuck. So too, got the artists and the intellectual of the west stuck. Strindberg states it in his preface to *Miss Julie*:

In this play I have not tried to do anything new, for this cannot be done, only modernize the form to meet the demands which may, I think, be made on this art today.

TS Eliot thought so. To him, all progress was statistical.

Nature on the earth is cyclic. In the stellar world it may be progressive, as scientists suggest by the theory of the expanding universe. But technology is progressive. The two could not be reconciled.

This confusion led to the negation of reality. Thus emerged the theories of Anti-hero (Prufrock of T.S. Eliot, Willy Loman of Arthur

Miller's *Death of a Salesman*). Anti-novel (negation of the conventions of plot, character and narration), stream of consciousness (Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (spontaneous expressions of memory, sense perceptions, feelings, thoughts, intuitions simultaneously), telegraphic style (Sylvia Plath), Multiple Stage, 3D (Picasso), Dadaism (disturbing the natural order (Moustaches in the armpit), epic theatre and Alienation Effect (breaking the spell of action by songs, summaries, personal comments, author's intrusion, even cloning). These techniques also include fantasy, dreams, hallucination), autonomy of artefact (truth of life, truth of art - art not an imitation but a creation), symbolism, expressionism (distorted or abnormal states of the mind, as Strindberg's *Dream Play*), impressionism (various perceptions blended together Conrad, Virginia Woolf, *Ice Age* of Margaret Drabble, (Problems of women will never be solved since man has not yet acknowledged the identity of woman whom he considers, as perhaps Aristotle somewhere said, an incomplete man, and the *Absurd*).

Then there is new criticism, expressive realism, Marxist criticism, deconstruction, and so many linguistic theories and structural criticism (Derrida).

In short, there is no way forward. Only theories are being devised and all these are simply further complicating the confusion.

After all this discussion, it seems appropriate here to add a short note on Intezar Hussain, our renowned novelist and short story writer.

Intezar was blamed of being nostalgic and charged of being a reactionary. He was neither. If at all, he may be called, according to one of the literary theories of his time, a naturalist, who saw man as a creature of nature, like flowers, birds and plants. References to these are scattered throughout his writings. He considered man a special kind of animal. The main criticism against him came from the progressives. They found him all the time engrossed in scriptures, *Kathas* and mythologies. He lacked any vision of the future and was always backward looking.

Intezar's problem was that he belonged to a very old, a very rich tradition. He was taught to respect the conventions and traditions of the family, and he always looked towards them when trying to find a way out of the confusion his age faced. In *Aage Samandar Hai* (Ahead is the sea), he saw his age confronted with the problems, the solutions of which it saw in the future. It was the heyday of the progressive

writers. They thought that their “positive” struggle would push them ahead. But what was ahead? The whole age was lost in these contradictions. The conservatives of his time resorted to superstitions or looked for a redeemer or a saviour. The progressives had only dreams and fantasies before them. Then, the progressive ideas were also imported. They were devotees of Marx and were highly impressed with the Russian revolution. Industrialization had shown that change was possible. But the change was not taking them ahead. It had created a new kind of savage world where the poor were becoming poorer and the rich richer. A terrible reign of exploitation was the end result. Capitalism was eating into the soul of man. The realization came soon that it was change but not progress. It was thought by the revolutionists to empower the common man who was already somewhat emancipated culturally as well as economically. The artisans were literate and had, to some extent, learnt to sustain their life. They were more independent than the serfs. The socialists tried to inspire them to struggle for social and economic justice.

The people in India wanted to bring that revolution here where feudalism ran, and still runs, in the veins of the people and is almost a religion to them. It is a mindset here. Even the poorest man is a feudal lord in his home. The common man lived in a small confined world. He was neither educated nor aware of the modern market practices. These people lived a simple complacent life, running small tea-shops. They sat on the sills of the houses in the streets and played cards, told stories and enjoyed small jokes. They also talked of politics as they heard about it. They had no concept of the vast nature of social problems. They lacked confidence and waited for some redeemer or saviour to come to lead them.

An industrial worker has to be literate because he works on machines and has to learn something about their working. But he does not read only technical books. He reads newspapers, novels, stories and poetry. This broadens his mind, and he becomes aware of his rights and responsibilities. Also, he does not sell himself to the master, like the serf. He sells his skill and is in a position to bargain. Such a man can be motivated to bring a revolution.

Any revolutionist who wants to bring change must prepare the ground for revolution. Our revolutionists did not bother about that. Those ambitious for change should have first done something for their idealism by creating awareness in the people and by providing them jobs. They found a shortcut in slogans borrowed from the west. But they were mistaken. They never thought how the ideas of

Not to speak of an industrial revolution, there was not even an industry worth the name here. Literacy rate was around 5 to 10 per cent, whereas in the west it had risen to almost 100 per cent when the winds of change began to rise. Even in Russia, the Czar had promulgated an ordinance abolishing serfdom in 1868.

Intezar saw this situation. He watched both the conservatives and the progressives. Neither had an answer to the problems faced by the modern man.

Intezar Hussain is neither a progressive nor a reactionary. He is explorative, and a naturalist.

Feb 10, 2017

❧ Chapter 49 ❧

The Absurd



The dictionary meaning of absurd is irrational, meaningless. As a particular world view, absurd does not mean stupid or ridiculous. It simply means something beyond understanding. It is a very old concept which has been discovered by the West only very recently. It is a confession that life cannot be understood and therefore nothing can be predicted about it. The obvious reason is that the processes of life are incomprehensible to the human mind. Human reason works in a scientific manner. And science is based on experience, and human experience is limited. Human reason is limited while reality is vast. Lenin said that reality is the limit of our knowledge, and it keeps expanding. Aeroplanes and computers were not a reality a hundred years ago. Those who believe only in scientific truth do not accept anything which is not supported by evidence. Thus agnostics, like Bertrand Russell, say that the existence of God cannot be affirmed or denied scientifically. But, then, there is the occult. But the occult is unreliable and only special people can reach it through very special means. Faith does not depend upon reason. But it accepts a reality which is higher than the reality recognized by reason. The Western mind has been trained scientifically. Therefore, it does not accept anything which cannot be scientifically verified. Thus, all that is not scientifically affirmed is relegated to the domain of the absurd. This gave rise in the middle of the 20th century both in Europe and America, to the theatre of the absurd.

The absurd has not been revealed to the West. Rather it has come to them through bitter experiences of life in which they felt that they had been betrayed by reason. The immediate cause of this realization was the unending bloodshed and extreme misery of man. The two world wars and their aftermath not only shook the very bases of their culture and civilization, they shook their minds also. They saw that the Western civilization and perhaps the whole world was on the way to total annihilation. They could not deny the truth of reason. It was reason that took them to the heights of progress. It is

also through reason and experience that they have come to know of the inadequacy of reason, and the validity of reason also cannot be denied. The horrible experiences of the 20th century, particularly those of the two world wars, convinced everyone that man has been miserably wrong. All progress had been counter progress. Man has become more savage than ever. All his efforts to make life secure and more comfortable, have resulted in making life precarious. It leads only to two conclusions: either human reason has blundered or the processes of life are beyond the reach of reason, that is, absurd. Human reason cannot be blamed in view of such wonderful achievements in the field of science and technology. There, then, remain only the other proposition, that life is absurd.

Also it is through reason that man discovered the inadequacy of reason. This can be seen in many ways.

1. Life cannot be known because in order to know something the whole of it must be known. A fraction cannot give the idea of the whole. One cannot know from a piece of broken glass whether it was a part of a cup or a glass pan. We know only a fraction of life. There is an eternity before us and an eternity after us. A span of about a 100 years of one individual or of 5000 years of the human race are not enough to see the reality of life. It means that the whole reality of life can never be known.
2. In order to know something, one must be out of it. One in a crowd does not see the crowd. So far as we are in life we cannot know life. Bacon called this delusion *Idola Tribus*.
3. We know everything through our consciousness. But consciousness cannot know itself. We see things when their images are formed on our retina. But our retina makes images by itself also, as in a dream, or in meditation. We leave our imagination free and then we can see anything we like, whether it exists or not. There is no instrument to tell us which images are reflections of reality and which are the creation of retina. This puts in doubt the belief whether anything exists and this leads to solipsism, that the only thing that can be known is just self. It means that nothing exists or is real but self. There are two Urdu verses which express similar ideas.

We have heard the tale of life in the middle
Neither do we know the beginning nor the end

But that is not enough. The next stage is:

Neither beginning nor end is known
And as for existence, that too is doubtful

The East has always believed in the absurd.

It's a riddle that can neither be known nor explained
It's no life; it's a mad man's dream

In the words of Shakespeare, it is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Beckett, in his most successful play, *Waiting for Godot*, has shown that life goes in cycles. It is the same thing that goes on and on for ever. Children are born, sent to school, grow old and die. Men have been coming and going in the same way. Nothing is new under the sun. Ghalib had expressed the same thought much earlier;

What new ways have the wise discovered?
There is the same old rut.

The absurdists believe that there is nothing before and after; life is only the present moment and the moments are not connected together in any logical sequence. It is only a spectacle. This concept has not been expressed so beautifully and comprehensively by any Western absurdists as the following verse puts it.

We are being drifted away the current of without any
aim
What a spectacle! the air has tied a knot in the water

The logic we see is only an illusion. There is no cause and effect relationship between events, while the mind works only on the basis of cause and effect. Even our faith teaches us that everything in life is uncertain. So we should say Insha Allah before doing anything and seek God's forgiveness all the time, for anything can happen any time. Preparedness is all. The rest is not our business. Man proposes God disposes.

Going back to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, its theme is waiting, just and simple waiting, waiting for nothing particular or specific. Every evening one goes hoping that something will turn up the next morning. And he does not know what will turn up. The greatest irony of man is that he has got faculties but he does not know how to use them. He has the power of speech but he does not know what to say. He has power to think but does not know what to think. TS Eliot gives man an advice:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
 For hope would be hope for wrong thing; wait
 without love
 For love would be love of wrong thing; there is yet faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in
 waiting
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought

So man should neither wish, nor hope because he does not know what to wish, what to think, what to hope. Gautam Budh worked in this theory and got Nirvain. But a Hindi poet comments that this theory suits only a prince. If he, the poet, decides to give up everything and sits under a Banyan tree, his children will go to an orphanage and his wife to a brothel. Hence man is caught in the conflict of resignation and responsibility. But again the question remains, man's responsibility means and what he resigns from.

This problem could be resolved by religion. But religions are divided. There is no consensus on the metaphysical question. Religious beliefs clash and lead to sectarianism which end in dogmatism or in agnosticism. Agnosticism is again an absurd situation.

The only conclusion thus reached is that the absurd is the sanest attitude in the sense that one acknowledges that he knows nothing and he understands nothing. Only God knows:

Millions of sages and as many wise men grope in the
 dark

In the end they all come to conclude that only God knows the mysteries of God

But the absurd as it is conceived in the west is negative and a defeatist attitude. Instead of humility, instead of confessing his limitations, man -----the whole scheme of existence absurd. We know that the sphere of knowledge has been expanding. May be some day man comes to know better.

Sept 11, 2005



❧ Chapter 50 ❧

Our Legendary Intellectuals



“Our Legendary Intellectuals” is a commendable effort made by Sajjad Sheikh to acquaint the younger generation with the great treasure of Punjabi Literature. It is an introduction to seven most renowned Punjabi saints and poets covering almost 8 centuries (from 13th to 20th). Baba Farid, Shah Hussain, Sultan Bahu, Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, Khawaja Ghulam Farid and Muhammad Bakhsh are the great intellectuals any nation can be proud of. One thing that is common between them is their message of love, peace and tolerance.

These poets writing in the folk tradition are at the same time great scholars with a feel of the earth. They write poetry in the language of the folk and their serious intellectual work is in Persian, the language of scholars. Even in the highest flights of intellect, they never abandoned the people. They have a religiously oriented sensibility. They are well-versed in Arabic. They deal with the basic questions of man’s relationship with man, his relationship with other creatures, with nature and, finally, with God. They deal with the questions of life and death and of life after death. They are particularly concerned with questions of vice and virtue and of sin and redemption. They are all great travellers on the surface of the earth as well as in the maze of the spiritual paths. They acquired rich experience in both the realms. They were rooted to the earth and at the same time associated with the court. They lived under the shadow of the court but were never influenced by the courts, though some of them also held positions of authority in the kingdom. They were actually aware of the plight of the poor and reprimanded the rich for their excesses and warned them of the great retribution awaiting them. They were liberal and humane – above caste, colour and creed and spoke the language of the people in their own idiom. They never had any prejudice against anyone. Baba Farid called his verses “Ashloke.” Their diction included *Mathha* (forehead), Tilak, Ram, Ba’andi (maid servant), Bindrabhan, Rokri (rich), Guru, Kamni,

Keeriyān etc. They loved sports and music threw them into ecstasy. Their imagery, instead of Gul-o-Bulbul, consisted of crow, kite, vulture, monkey, fox, cur, wolf, viper, *chambe di booti*, etc.

There was nothing of the recluse about them. Though they always sought a peaceful environment, looking for an abode beyond the din of great urban centres, they never abandoned their people. Despite their states of ecstasy they never forgot their social obligations and religious duties. They were always concerned with the plight of poor folk. They made no distinction between divine love and profane love. Love was love, whether of God or man. Love was indivisible. They were fearless rebels. Bulleh Shah was not allowed burial in his family graveyard by bigoted mullahs. Bulleh Shah remained defiant:

تینوں کافر کافر آکھدے

توں آہو آہو آکھ

Like the folk poets, they lived in the world of sensations but were equally at home in the world of intellect. Man is an amphibian. He is a creature of senses and at the same time has reason to guide him. I do not think there is any intellectual in Europe who is equally at home in the world of feelings and the world of reason with the same vigour and intensity. They are the poets of the folk. There has been a sharp division in the west between the romantics and the neo-classics. That division disappears here. In our world there is only one person who comes to the mind in this context. And that is Amir Khusro. He wrote from the spontaneous folk to the most sophisticated and profound poetry. Folk writers are even looked down upon with contempt and are called *Bhand* and *Mirasis*, though in Europe they were respectfully called Bards and Minstrels. A great poet like Nazir Akbarabadi, is not given much respect since, as they say, his poetry lacks in grace, both in content and diction. However, these Punjabi intellectuals are sublime, whether they write in the tradition of the folk or they pen down a scholarly treatise. No doubt there are poets who have used the folk, like Chaucer and Shakespeare, but they did not write folk. Even Wordsworth could not follow his own theory. He insisted in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*:

The principle object proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe theses throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men.

But the content as well as the language of *The Prelude* and *The Intimation Ode*, for example are beyond a rustic's approach. The only exception that we may find in English literature is, perhaps, Burns, who faithfully stuck to Scottish folk tradition. Same is true of some Urdu and Punjabi writers. It remains a unique achievement of these legendary intellectuals that they were equally good at both the ends of the scale. They are an invaluable treasure, since folk is the basics of all art and culture. We are luck in having them. The west has developed a new science in the name of anthropology to discover their missing links.

Such too is their concept of knowledge. It is a blend of thinking and feeling. But feeling is the basis and object of living while intellect is only a disciplining overseer, and creativity is more important than over-seeing. Here the heart and the mind are in perfect harmony. Their objective is the same, only the idiom differs. They practically help each other. The one is the source of knowledge, the other is the management of knowledge. These intellectuals are very much in line with the classical thinkers for whom epistemology was not wisdom. Knowledge was not philosophy. It was only the vestibule of philosophy. Knowledge itself is not wisdom: -----, says Bulleh Shah. Knowledge becomes wisdom only when tinged with love or Ishq, the love for humanity which, to these saints, is synonymous with the love of God. It was pride in knowledge that damned Satan.

July 05, 2008



❧ Chapter 51 ❧

Democracy and Literature



Literature is all about man and so is democracy - the government of the people. All oral and written literature, whatever of it has reached us, deals with the problems and dreams of men. Fairy tales represent man's dream of a peaceful world where everyone is friendly to everyone else. There is peace, goodwill and tranquillity everywhere and all share in the bounties and beauties of nature. No doubt, there is the darkness of evil, but this is outside the human world, in the realm of ghosts and witches. All the stories of the earliest periods of civilization reflect this desire of man for a trouble-free universe.

Philosophers and men of religions did show the vision of such an ideal world. But this could not be translated into reality. The gap between fiction and fact was so wide.

People found that might ruled the world. To be weak was a misfortune. Everybody realized that power rarely did any good to anyone. But they could not see how to get rid of this curse. How to empower man so that he was able to challenge the powerful who tried to enslave the weak.

It has been like that since times immemorial and men came to be reconciled to the belief that some were born to rule and others to serve them. They also used the authority of religion to support the principle of might is right and created the concept of the divine rights of kings. The priests convinced the people that to be weak and poor was the destiny of the majority. They asserted that the poor and the rich were created by God and some went to the extent of asserting that to try to alleviate the misery of the poor was a challenge to providence. It has been reported that when high rise structures were raised in America and antennae for security from lightening were fixed on them, some priests protested that it was an interference in

the scheme of God who hit the sinners with lightening. People were in this way by and large, reconciled to their destiny.

But then came the industrial revolution which gave a new power to man. But this power was not freely bestowed on him. He had to strive for it.

Before the industrial revolution, man was seen as a social animal. But technology made him the creator of power. Now he wanted a share in power. Earlier, he had been made to believe that power was the concern of the rulers. Power politics was not for the common man. But technology had now given power to him. Science and technology overruled the royal prerogative. The creators of power now wanted power. And so democracy emerged. Now man became a political being.

Even today some people very strongly raise the slogan of art for the sake of art, as if art is something different from life. Art is only a picture of life. Art is life, though only in form. How can art be detached from life? The artist is a member of the society and he must be a responsible member of it, an active member. If the sewerage of your street leaks, you do not say that it is your bad luck. You go to the member of the union council you have elected to look after your interest and to repair the sewerage. You have a right on him. He acts on your behalf. But the capitalist exploiter cannot afford such an active public. In *Cherry Orchard*, a play, Chekhov showed the decline of feudalism. But an American critic asserts that the subject of the play was sexual frustration. This is individualism stretched too far. Capitalists see every social problem as an individual problem. They are scared of public awareness. It is for this reason that psychiatrists flourish in the US. See your problem as a personal problem. Take a medicine or an expert advice and forget that you are worried. To hell with the society. Keep yourself cool. How callous! Individual problems are rooted in social problems and call for a collective action. This leads to revolution, which is unacceptable to the capitalists.

Modern literature cannot remain indifferent to the misery of man. It tries to create awareness in the people. Brecht said that art should look over an incident, not through it. This means that the artist should avoid sentimentalism and see the incident critically. Albee sees the American society as a zoo in his *Zoo Story*. He says that the American society is a zoo in which all the animals live safely in their own cages. Remove the walls of the cages and all will devour each

other. This is a very scathing criticism of individualism. Everyone is caught in his own ego, in his own prison. In fact, art is an instrument of change, as Brecht emphasized. He disagreed with Aristotle that art was meant to project suffering and to come to terms with it. He believes that art can change the destiny of man if it brings awareness to the masses that their collective effort can change it.

According to Brecht, a play is like a well argued case in a court of law, and it should be as convincing as a legal argument.

According to Gorky, art is no mere copy of life. It is a mirror: "Mirrors are things kept in houses to enable people to comb their hair to suit their faces, scrutinize pimples or wrinkles on noses or cheeks, or preen themselves." It should tell people of their faults and weaknesses so that they may remove them. It is a weapon in the hands of the worker to comprehend and change life. The purpose of art is to move life ahead. This is the purpose of democracy.

Even Intizar Hussain's stories are basically political.

These stories deal with the socio-economic problems of man. The very title of *Aage Samandar Hai* is political. He would write elegies on the misery of man. That is genuine literature. But any attempt on the part of a writer to try to alleviate the plight of man and any active effort to fight evil is immediately condemned as art for the sake of life as if the writer is only an elegist. He can only write elegies on the misery of man. He is only a passive or a selfish actor. He is not allowed to make an effort to mitigate man's sufferings. In the words of Ghalib:

He is charming, but cannot see my plight
He has no cure for my sufferings

Modern poet does not want to be a mere spectator or only a comforter. He wants to do something to help man. No doubt, art must not become propaganda. It must not serve any purpose except aesthetic purpose. No doubt, the poet is the poet of beauty. But when he finds beauty missing from life, he tries to know the factors that have tarnished the face of beauty, and makes efforts to restore that beauty; he enters the field of politics. Those who raise the slogan of art for art's sake have not yet accepted the simple fact that the individual in the modern democratic world is no more a social animal. He is a political animal. He is the ruler. He elects the right people as his representatives to run the government.

It is in this sense that all modern writers are political writers. It may be *Reluctant fundamentalist* of Mohsin Hamid, *A Hundred years of Solitude* by Marquez, or *Under the Pomegranate Tree* by Tariq Ali, all of these are political novels. Gone are the days of fairy tales and romances.

The reality of life, in its growing complexity and mystery, has become much more fascinating than fiction. And democracy is the reality of life.

Thus literature and democracy have become inalienably close to each other. If democracy is the fact of life, fiction is its mirror image. Democracy is politics of life. Art is the aesthetics of life. Democracy deals with the possible. Art deals with the ideal, and the two can be seen as the two sides of a coin.

December 21, 2012



❧ Chapter 52 ❧

Nabar Kahani (*The Rebel Story*)



Nabar Kahani (The Rebel story) is another of brilliant research work of Dr. Saeed Bhutta. Dr. Bhutta's special field is folklore. He has explored folk stories from many areas of India and particularly from the Punjab. He has collected folk stories from the traditional story tellers, the bards and the minstrels who roam from village to village reciting and singing the stories of their ancestors to the people who cherish these stories narrating the feats of their elders in the social area or in the battle field.

History records only events, the empty capsules. It does not tell the story of people. It does not tell who became an orphan, who lost a father. It does not talk of the widowed young girls and the desolate helpless fathers. It does not tell why these young brave people laid down their lives, what to them was more important than their comforts, even their precious lives. It only tells of the number of the injured and the dead.

History tells us that the Jutt tribes had degenerated into cattle stealers. They were plunderers. They were fanatics and cowardly people. On the other hand, folk stories tell of the devotion, dedication and commitment of these people. History is the narrative of the ruler; folk tales are the narratives of the suppressed and the exploited. Folk lore is the record of the archetypes that live in the collective unconscious of the people, which include their dreams and the myths woven around them. It is the whole psyche of the race that is preserved in the collective unconscious. This is a beautiful gallery of the pictures preserved in the memory. Legends are woven around them and heroic stories are written about them. These belie the record presented by history. The historians wrote for their masters. They distorted facts. They told the stories not according to the facts but according to a script dictated to them.

For example, there is a great event that history records. This relates to Alexander's excursions into India. History celebrates the feats of Alexander as Alexander the great, while Porus is rarely admired for his courage and valour. Dr. Bhutta, being the son of the soil, is more interested in the tales passed on from generation to generation by local bards than in the history composed on the whim of the rulers.

In 1991, Dr. Bhutta recorded a story of a bard, Mian Kamal Din. It was published in *The Ravi*, a magazine of the Government College, Lahore. It was published in 1993. As the minstrel told him, there was nothing left of the stories, told by his father and grandfather, but his uncle remembered them. He learnt these stories from him and then he learnt other stories of Akbar the king, of Rajpoots, of Raja Porus and Raja Karnal. These stories resemble the stories found in Greek, Latin, Arabic and Negro traditions as well as in Persian history.

According to these accounts, Raja Umbhe of Taxila surrendered to Alexander without least resistance. Porus checked him on the River Jhelum. He lost his son in the skirmishes. Alexander himself was wounded and his favourite horse Bucephalus was killed. Punjabi folk stories tell that Porus had killed two horses of Alexander. A Negro legend also tells the same story, though it attributes the killing of horses to Magic. The bards have presented Porus as a great warrior and a hero. According to Dr. Bhutta, these stories reflect Punjabi psyche. It is a highly scholarly work.

It reminds me of a very early impression that my raw mind got of Alexander and Porus when I was perhaps in seventh or eighth class in school. *Sohrab Modi* had made a great film called *Sikander*. I still remember a few scene from that film which have been quoted by Dr. Bhutta also, though the story is a little different. It shows that when in Iran Alexander fell in love with a princess Noshaba. Aristotle warned Alexander to beware of woman if he wanted to conquer the world. Alexander was deep in love and he told Noshaba about the advice of his mentor. Noshaba invited Aristotle to her palace and told Alexander to wait outside and come into the room when she clapped. Noshaba flirted with Aristotle. Then she invited Aristotle to play with her. During the play, she asked Aristotle to become a horse and she rode on his back. Noshaba clapped and Alexander entered the room. He was shocked to see his great mentor in that ridiculous situation. He laughed. Aristotle was least embarrassed. He remained fully composed. He stood up and said to Alexander, "My boy, if a woman

can do this to Aristotle, imagine what she would do to a young man like you”.

Another incident in the same film should that after Porus was defeated and brought to Alexander's court, Alexander asked him, “How do you expect to be treated?” Porus said, “As kings treat kings.” Another episode of the film that Dr. Bhutta also quotes is that Noshaba had tied a Knot, *Rakhi*, around the arm of Porus, thus declaring him her brother. When in the battlefield, Alexander was under his sword, Porus eyes fell on Rakhi and he spared Alexander as he was his brother-in-law. The story tellers saw this episode as the triumph of Porus. Alexander came into the court of Porus disguised as an emissary. Porus recognized and pardoned him, saying that he did not punish an emissary.

One thing that comes out of this story is the high respect that those people had for their sisters. Similarly, a recurring remark in the story tells us that the Punjabi fighters surrendered before the British. But the tales tell us that they surrendered when the British threatened to arrest their women. Women are held in great regard - more precious than their lives - by Punjabis. History only shows them as weak and cowardly.

Here, I cannot resist the temptation to relate a personal experience. When Ayub Khan announced election in the country, it must have been in 1964, as far as I remember. Miss Fatima Jinnah announced a public meeting in Lahore. The same day Ayub Khan decided to visit Lahore. He arranged the meeting at the new campus, Auditorium, the same evening. All the teachers were ordered to attend the meeting. Special buses were arranged for them at the old campus. There were the most senior teachers in the bus. All of them felt highly humiliated on this dictatorial treatment. One of them remarked that Punjab had produced only two heroes, Porus and Ranjeet Singh. They also wanted to defy but, they were no heroes.

In short, these tales inspire confidence in the Punjabis who are generally underrated. It is commonly said that once an adventurer crossed the Khyber Pass, he stopped at Panipat, suggesting that Punjabis never offered any resistance to foreign invaders. The tales belie this.

The other story in this book relates to Rai Ahmad Khan Kharral. In Sandal bar, Bhatti, Virk and Kharral had prolonged conflicts between them. Baba Nanak (1469-1539) played an important role in

reconciling these warring tribes to some extent by preaching humanism to them. But his teachings had only a temporary influence. Later, Ahmad Khan Kharral (b. around 1778) came on the scene. He wielded a strong influence in the rule of Ranjit Singh.

When these tribes quarrelled, it was always a personal fight, not a tribal feud. Kharal chiefs also had cordial relations with Sikhs. Kharral chief and the father of Amar Singh, Sahi Singh, were proclaimed brothers by the exchange of their turbans. Sahi Singh was the chief of a Sikh tribe. Ranjit Singh's wife Rajkor held Rai Ahmad Khan in great respect. Raja Ranjit Singh signed a treaty with the East India Company in 1809, though the company hardly ever honoured the agreement. But the company dared not confront the Sikhs in the battle field till 1839, the death of Ranjit Singh. At last the internal feuds among the Sikhs and the great ambition of the English paved the way for their entry into Punjab. Sikhs, no doubt made great sacrifices but the English succeeded in occupying the Punjab in 1849, as a result of betrayal by traitors like Lal Singh, Taj Singh and Gulab Singh. Thus, all the Punjabis confronted the English. The English changed the very face of India by introducing language, their education system, their laws and their technology. These distorted practically everything.

There were big skirmishes in Nili Bar and Ganji Bar. The English told lies to the people and hatched conspiracies. All the accounts of the war of Independence, 1857 have come from the English but the truth is also leaked out. Their own records show that Punjabis attacked them in great numbers - 3000 to 5000 - at a time with beating drums. All the tribes between Lahore and Multan had risen. Their number went up to 125 thousand. Nizam Lohar and Jabro Nai are still remembered with respect in the Punjab. They fought with locally forged weapons. The English had big guns. It was the greatest threat to them that the people of Punjab never surrendered to the invaders and could gather over a lac of people for the defence of their land.

Ahmad Kharral was killed fighting bravely and his head was severed from his body. The family kept showing resistance for generations. These are no doubt very reassuring accounts of Punjabi valour and sense of honour.

Dr Bhutta has done tremendous service to the homeland by this research based on primary sources. The whole account is so

impressive that one does not even mind the lapses of language. However, it is, least to say, ironic that a Punjabi account - the campaign of Punjabis had to be translated into Urdu. This, beside other things, shows how Punjabi is devalued in the Punjab.

I think that the effort would have been more impressive and popular if the English quotes had been translated in Urdu also, since it is a fact that most Punjabis do not find it easy to read Punjabi. But they would get it with the help of Urdu version.

Another thing that could have greatly enhanced the value of the book is that it could be more exciting if the Punjabi songs and poems had been printed in their original words, and not merely translated into Urdu. Translations can never convey the spirit, the passion that create the original words.



❧ Chapter 53 ❧

Road to Haram

By A. Muslim



Road to Haram by Mr. Muslim is a commendable effort. Modern Urdu poetry terribly lacks in long poem. I am give to believe that the poem under review is a translation from Urdu. Even in this age of reverse, no such effort has borne fruit. The latest effect in his response has been Jaffer Tahir's *Haft Kishawar*, which he calls an epic. But it failed to set a trend, some other attempts have also been made. The voluminousness of the poem is a merit in itself and, as they say, quantity leads to quality. But his will be decided by the coming generations.

Long poems are no more in vogue, even in the west. Perhaps *The Ring and the Book* of Browning that appeared in 1869, was the last venture. Once considered to his masterpiece, is not read only by experts. In America, Walt Whitman's long poem, *Leaves of Grass* had appeared in 1855. The latest successful attempt in this respect is Pablo Neruda's.....

In, Urdu, however, the tradition of long poems has not totally ceased. Josh Malihabadi used it very impressively. It came to him from Anis, through Hali and Iqbal. Not only the long poem but also the stanzaic form came down from Anis who took the genre to sublimity. Anis perfect the Musaddas, the six line stanza, with the first four lines rhyming together, reaching the climax in a couplet with a different rhyme scheme called the Teep. It was the climax of the poem. The genre brought glory to the most eminent poets of Urdu. Mr Muslim, however, modified and made it an eight line stanza, with six unrhymed lines culminating into a couplet. As Spenserian stanza was a modified for of Ottava rima and rime royal, similarly the stanzaic form of *Road to Haram* is a modification of the

conventional Musaddas. The first six lines are unrhymed and the final couplet of the stanza marks the climax in the same way Alexandrian does in the Spenserian stanza.

Since it is a translation, it cannot be said with surety that the same poetic scheme has been used in Urdu too. This form, any way, has been a guarantee of success to beat poets of Urdu. One observation is, however, interesting: right from Anis to Josh, this stanzaic form has been used for poems inspired by a religious zeal.

Mr Muslim is a prolific writer and has lived a long time in the west. He, therefore, must not have any problems with medium. There is almost a natural spontaneous flow in his composition, though at times first language interference is also inescapable.

So far as the context is concerned, it is devotedly religious, a poetry steeped in contrition, complaint and prayer:

Forgive me clean and clear as Thy light
That my heart is light, pure and bright

His religion is pure and simple submission, near to the mystical that the clerical religion:

It sayer of the World Himself Creates irons
How could my mind away from Thee be torn?

He makes fervent, even desperate, prayers to the Almighty for the forgiveness of his sins, even like Donne:

Probe not thy Roll of the crimes and transgressions
Free us O Lord from eternal Damnation

Donne wrote:

O thinke me worth they anger, Punish me
Burn my rusts, and my deformity

There is also another parallel with Donne, who says:

That they may knowest mee, and I'll turn my face

Mr Muslim says:

Pray enlighten me, that I may know thee

Muslim's prayers, however, lack passion of Donne. His poetry is most impersonal and the charge on Donne that he wrote with the head not with the heart, can be applied to Muslim also. But his may be said in his favour that his poetry is not entirely devoid of feeling or is bereft of all personal devotion. There are homages like this:

Splendor of the Garden of his illustrious house;
The crown of the women of Paradise, "Batool"

The most interesting, the most impassioned and the most impressive parts of the poem relate to an elaboration of its title theme, *Road to Haram*. It is the symbol of journey. He has speculated on various aspects of journey, as Iqbal did on *Ishq*.

Journey in fields of Hudaibiya, Taif and Hunain
Journey is the eternity of life of Hussain

But I may be wrong. It is a translation and the passion that might have been in the original could easily be lost in transliteration. Moreover, the English language does not allow much passion. The English temperament is otherwise too cool, though once again one may turn to Donne, who is emotionally shaken at the imagined spectacle of the crucifixion of Christ:

..... durst I
Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
Who was God's partner here, and furnished thee
Half the Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?

However, as it is, whether unimpassioned and impersonal, the poem, *Road to Haram*, is an accomplishment

One thing which is most unusual and unique in all poetry is that practically every verse of it has been duly authenticated. Every line has a footnote to it; even more than one footnote. The references are from the holy Quran, Hadeeth and Seerat or from history and literature, as well from various invocations. This makes the book a reading for scholars only. Obviously, the author has problem here. The poem is steeped in tradition, history and faith. A Muslim will easily read the allusion behind every word and will emotionally respond to it. But to the initiated, the non-Muslim reader all of it will be unintelligible or at least uninspiring. He has to be provided the

necessary information. That's why there are so many references, 908 to be exact, in a poem of over 2000 verses. The poem covers 145 pages, while the references are spread over 121 pages of close writing in a smaller font. A 35-page introduction is beside this.

When we read the Greek literature, for example, it cannot be appreciated without some knowledge of the myths and legends woven into fabric its tales. Thus while reading Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, we are given a short not on the Theban legend. The same device could be used here in one comprehensive and concise statement of beliefs and authorities instead of giving line to line references.

However, the effort still has its value. It can quench the thirst, of our new generation, born and brought up in the west, aesthetic as well as religious.

August 4, 2007



❧ Chapter 54 ❧

Wandering Falcon *By Jamil Ahmad*



Here is a beautiful collection of fascinating stories. The publishers insist to call it a novel, but it is not a novel. These are separate stories, each with a beginning, a middle and an end, and carrying in it some sort of message or moral. Though there is a unity of atmosphere, all dealing the life along our northern border in Baluchistan and FATA, though there are many similarities in their background, these do not have what is called the unity of action. This is a new genre that has not yet given a name. Such stories are quite in fashion these days. I have had the opportunities of reading such fiction relating to South Asian countries by Abbas Zaidi, now living in Brunei. These are something between the travelogue and the tales or between the biography and the reportage.

We may leave the technicalities aside for the time as these are not the specialty of these stories. What is important about these is their spontaneity. The author has not tried to embellish his stories with any linguistic tricks or symbolic adventurism. He has been open and straight. He has not been obsessed with the idea of writing a novel or a short story. He is being simply communicating. The remarkable thing about these stories is not any speculative adventurism. Nor are these ventures into the valley of imaginative. What we have before us is actually a record of authentic experiences and observations. These are like the essays of Francis Bacon, a chapter from the author's personal life. These are neither theoretical nor ideological. The author himself has been a bureaucrat. He served an important administrative post in the areas which the stories survey. As the magistrate in the story *A Point of Honour*, he must have taken decisions like him when in the office. He must have exploited the ignorance, rather innocence, of the tribal people. At least such cases

must have come to his notice. The most remarkable thing about these stories is that these are confessionals, and this is the bitter truth. It is not the love of telling stories, that motivated him, rather it is the burden of the conscious as in Conrad. He himself writes:

Conscience is like a poor relative living in a rich man's house. It has to remain cheerful at all times. It has to remain cheerful at all times for fear of being thrown out.

(Reminds of Charles Lamb's *Poor Relations*)

But this is all in retrospect. Had the stories been published when these were matter, these would have been carried a different meaning.

These stories reveal that these tribal people are not ignorant savages. They belong to a cultural tradition which perhaps is as old as history itself. They have their values, their sense of honour, their code of conduct. And, above, all they know the value of community life. Their world is the world of ironies. They are free and they are not free. They belong to Pakistan and they do not belong to Pakistan. Peshawar is their and Peshawar is a foreign city.

Then there is the role of women, as brought out in these stories, which is very bold, assertive, responsible and cooperative. They are no passive beings, or non-entities, or practically non-existent, as is generally conceived by the rest of the world. In the first story, *The Sins of the Mother*, the woman not only shares her fate with the man, but gives him strength and courage to meet the critical moment. In *The Guide*, we meet women who bring water after walking for miles and collect timber. They are important part of the economic life of the tribe. There are women, like the mother in law of Tor Baz, who looks after the house in the absence of men, defends the house like soldiers and receives and entertains guests. In *The Mullah*, it is the women who wake men up from there sleep and prepare them to fight for the tribe. In *A Kidnapping*, we see women having a full life though confined to the houses. In the same story, the Bhattani tribal elder tells a story to the Assistant Commissioner about a boy and a girl who had eloped. They were waylaid by ruffians who raped the girl and sodomized the boy. The boy charges the girl for having lost her chastity. The girl defends herself by claiming that the wrong done to her was in a natural way, but she was unnaturally dishonoured. This

shows the confidence and the courage of the woman. How different from the way the world thinks of the tribal women as passive and spineless!

The major problem of these people is economic. They cannot afford education. They have no skills. Their survival rests on kidnapping and spying. They are professional informers. Now they serve our government, now the enemy of the same government. They are equally useful to the Germans, the Russians or the Afghans. No body has tried to understand their problem. Everybody is to blame them and to discredit them.

The stories amply bring out the fact that these people of whom we are scared are actually our victims. They are very energetic and hard working people. There is nothing wrong with them. Only we have to define our attitude towards them.



❧ Chapter 55 ❧

Why Nations go to War? *By John G. Stoessinger*



Note: There is neither a print line nor any information about the nationality of the author. These facts are very important since the thesis of the author is that personality plays the main part in the formulation of responses to crises.

The thesis of Stoessinger is that wars are caused not so much by “nationalism, militarism, alliance systems economic factors or by the some bloodless abstraction than by an eradicable part of human nature” (P 1). He takes the view of the Aristotelians concept of Hamartia; Most of the statesmen who made the crucial decisions behaved like actors in Greek tragedy .The terrible denouement was foreseen, but somehow it could not be prevented .Laying too much emphasis on ‘psychological and personality consideration is an oversimplification. Beside, the author seems to be terribly confused and contradicts himself. There abound in the book such observations as, “while this is difficult to prove, it is likely.”P 6. This kind of comment is inevitable when you are looking for motives rather than symptoms. Another strange comment appears on P.15; ‘As emperors and statesmen on all sides gradually lost control over the deepening crisis, generally military staff began to dominate the scene. Here collectivity has been emphasized. On P.20 it is stated that Germans had been contemplating attack on France, which was revised every year till it was shifted to attack on Russia in 1913. (P.19). Similarly it is wrong to put all the blame of world war II on Hitler. Give a dog a bad name and hang him. Hitler was not a mad man; he was the product of Versaille. On P.32 there is an excerpt from Hitler, “if Russia is smashed, Britain’s last hope will be shattered.”

This shows that attack on Russia was strategy not personal hatred. Even Lenin had much earlier predicted that the war was imminent, since the circumstances were heading that way.

"Ideological blunders" were not responsible for Stalin's tilt towards Hitler (P.46). One must consider his hatred of Britain after the Versailles armistice and his distrust of British warnings. To blame Hitler's childlike single minded determinations' for all the catastrophe is not only an oversimplification, but also an attempt to make Hitler a scapegoat and push the real causes of the war into background. This kind of pride in superior wisdom is common to all aggressors. Did not JS Mill say in *Liberty*, that the principle of liberty cannot be applied to nations in their nonentity. Similarly Conrad wrote in *The Heart of Darkness* that the westerners had assumed the status of demi gods in the eyes of natives. To blame everything on individual psychology and complexes, and to national characteristics, like the German Father image (P 49) is nothing but an attempt to find abstract causes for concrete facts. 'The young Nazi was taught that he was destined by providence to bring a new order to the world.' Is it not the claim of Americans now about waging war for democracy? The conventional distinction of hero and anti-hero (Hitler hated Germans, Stalin loved Russians) is too childish. These cannot be the causes of victory and defeat in war. Modern war is fought with weapons and strategies not on whims.

This thesis becomes really monstrous when we come to the treatment of Indo-Pak wars. The assertion that Hindu-Muslim conflict remained dormant under the British rule is a misstatement. Actually it was the British that drew a wedge between the two communities that had been living in peace along with one another. It is now a known fact that the Partition massacre was manoeuvred by Mountbatten. Muslims and Hindus had lived a thousand years in very friendly environment, no doubt respecting the differences between them.

The three Indo-Pak wars were no more religious wars than the campaign of Bush against terrorism is a crusade. The main cause of all the three wars was Kashmir, which is not a religious issue. Kashmir is vital to Pakistan's very existence, and this problem too was created by injustice done to Pakistan at the time of Partition by the British. It was British policy that created communalism in India. Stoessinger is prejudiced and ill-informed about the two communities. His statement that Muslims believe in actively making converts whereas Hindus tend to be more passive and absorptive is contradicted by the facts. Had Muslims been interested in conversion they would have not been a minority after a thousand year rule in

India. He has also not heard about the Hindu movement of Shudhi (forced conversion to Hinduism).

No doubt there were differences, but there was no antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims. Modern history is quite clear about that. The same ignorance, or perhaps prejudice, is reflected in the assertion that “they destroyed all the Hindu temples and sculptures,” (P 118). Stoessinger himself states that the British employed a strategy of “divide and conquer,” whereas the most maligned Muslim Emperor, Aurangzeb, donated generously to temples. Stoessinger also, and quite rightly blames Gandhi for creating communalism in India (P 121).

About East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Stoessinger says that these two parts of Pakistan had nothing but their religion in common, not even language. About 1965 war he says that Russia decided to be the peace-maker at Tashkent - a communist state successfully fashioning a truce between two bourgeois nations. Obviously it was neither personal prejudice nor whim. It was policy and strategy. After giving all the long history of differences between the two wings of Pakistan, Stoessinger claims that the two weeks delay in the President's visit to the flood affected East wing shows West Pakistan's callousness and indifference to the calamity that enraged East Pakistan. After all that objective analysis, the author concludes that it was Yahya Khan's masculinity and ego which was hurt by Indra Gandhi's challenge that led to the war. He is obsessed with the idea of personal whim as the motive of war. Seneca perhaps was more to the point when 2000 years ago he had remarked that if Cleopatra's nose had been an inch shorter, the history of the world would have been different. Cleopatra's nose perhaps is bigger than the strategies of Caesar and the manoeuvring of Antony.

It is absolutely wrong and a travesty of history to say that the most basic conflict was religious in nature. Not doubt religion was used as rhetoric; the conflict had definite strategic and political dimensions.

In Arab-Palestine conflict even Stoessinger has not pointed to any personality cult of individual complexes. He himself calls it a clash of nationalisms. (P 185)

Contrary to his basic thesis, Stoessinger tries to put Iran-Iraq war in a historical perspective. He observes that when Christianity was torn apart by these internal struggles it was fifteen hundred years

old, which is the age of Islam today. (P 195). Thus he attributes this conflict to a kind of historical determinism. He also relates the conflict to Arab nationalism: "Although more than half of Iraq's population was Shiite, the Iranians were unable to incite them against the Sunni leadership of Saddam Hussein." (P 195). Still he sticks to his thesis even against himself: 'But these fundamental causes do not precipitate a war unless personalities and misconceptions come into play.' And then he concludes that despite objective causes the decisive role is played by individuals. And the following comments are sheer prejudice and venom: "Equipped with nuclear device, fanatics like Qaddafi or Khomeni would be mere dangerous than either "superpower" and "Muslim terrorists". (P 223). This is nothing but a complex.

Stoessinger frequently talks of the ineradicable parts of human nature. But he asserts that human nature can change (P 206). It is ineradicable and it changes! This is sheer obstinacy, an assertion of a thesis, right or wrong.

But the real demolition of his thesis comes in the concluding suggestions and advices that he offers to avoid future wars. He asserts, "no nation that began a major war in this century emerged a winner", and all the emphasis was put on individuals! There will be no decisive war in the nuclear age. Then where have "fanatics" and "terrorist" gone? Then, he also says, negotiations are better than wars (P 208). Still he emphasizes the importance of personalities. Is it not a travesty of history to put all the blame of Indo-Pak war of 1971 on Yahya Khan, while Ayub Khan had seen it much earlier and decided to step down.

Actually there is a deeper complex running through such unreasonable and prejudiced views. The conservative minds try to underplay the role of objective factors and historical compulsions in making their thesis, because if the causes rest on historical forces, obviously the emphasis would fall on revolution, a change of historical process. But revolution is something that frightens the present superpowers as they want no change in the status quo. It is better to put the blame on the individuals. Make persons scapegoats and save the exploitative system. Chekhov wrote a beautiful play, *The Cherry Orchard*, in which he depicted the decay and decline of feudalism. An American critic puts the entire blame on sexual frustration of the characters in the play. It is an attempt to exonerate the policy makers and to blame the whim and morbidity of a few

individuals for all wrongs and injustices perpetrated on the weak by the powerful. A similar process is going on at present in the US where the real intention behind the Iraq war is attributed to misinformation by the intelligence agencies and surrender of Bush to them. While everyone knows the reasons are quite different. Is it not a fact that if the US had the least suspicion of Iraq having WMDs, would it have still attacked Iraq? US attacked Iraq when the agencies gave a signal of no risk.

Actually the whole thesis is highly prejudiced and ill-informed and is based on personal hatred. The thesis has tried to put all the emphasis on ideology and individuals while underplaying the material considerations prompting a war.

It is an oversimplification to attribute the creation of Bangladesh to individuals. Maulana Azad had predicted it much before Yahya, Mujib or Indra Gandhi came on the stage. Everyone could see the coming storm at least by 1965.

The whole thesis is nothing but a personal venom and racial prejudice. Personalities are only one small factor in the panoramic drama of wars between nations. Khomeni is no more but the revolution lives. Hitler is dead, Nazism still exists.



❧ Chapter 56 ❧

All is not Quiet on the Front Progressive Writers' Association



The Progressive Writers' Movement changed the entire sensibility of the people and gave a new direction to literature. It came up with an entirely new concept of reality and an awareness of social mobility, demolishing the old concept of destiny. According to Aziz Ahmad, the progressive writers aimed at two things simultaneously, reality and revolution. He found the two mutually incompatible, or, perhaps, the former was a matter of style and the latter referred to the content. But this distinction is not very clear. Even otherwise, form cannot be separated from content¹. But he is right in saying that the progressive and revolutionary contents were so blended at the time that their convergence in Progressivism had become inevitable. In fact what happened during the last two or three centuries has radically changed the concept of reality. Before the French Revolution, reality was seen as something fixed and stable and even pre-ordained. It was seen almost as destiny, and the occasional changes and upheavals that happened in various phases of history were taken just as ripples on the waters of time or the work of some sinister force beyond the control and apprehension of man. Such was the devastation caused by Huns and Mongols, the east-ward migration of the Aryans or the massacre ordered by Nadir Shah in Delhi. This was seen as the retribution of our sins, or the expression of divine wrath against the intransigence of man.

Political changes were attributed to the whims of the kings (even today John G Stoessinger supports this theory in *Why Nations go to War*², and holds Hitler and Stalin personally responsible for the

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1. Ahmad Aziz, Taraqqi Pasand Adab, Chaman Book Depot, Delhi P.5)
 2. Stoessinger, John G., *Why Nations Go To War?*, Reproduced Saleem Book Club, 2003 Lahore

World War though Lenin had much earlier predicted the war. So had E.M. Forster predicted the independence of India if there was a second world war). The common man felt helpless before the caprice of time, seen as a formidable force, of which Shakespeare sang in *The Winter's Tale*,

it is in my power
To o'r throw laws, and in a self-born hour
To plant and o'rwhelm custom³

Thus, necessity ruled the world. But the industrial revolution that gave man power over nature, and coming in its wake, the French Revolution, brought into existence a new reality and a new consciousness of life to man. It was around 3rd century A. D. that Longinus, in his book, *On the Sublime*, identified five principal sources of sublimity: two natural; thoughts and passions, and three artificial; figures, diction and composition. Wordsworth added a sixth one, social awareness:

Time, place and manners, these I seek⁴

This was the fruit of the French Revolution. It changed the entire concept of reality in two ways: one, as Lenin said, reality is the limit of our knowledge and, the other, character and destiny are revealed in action, as the classical Greeks also believed. It was man who made his destiny. It is action that reveals character as well as destiny. Destiny does not dictate action and character. The most important discovery of the modern world is that reality can be changed. Here comes the artist. He portrays beauty, and when he finds beauty missing or its face distorted, he looks for the forces that are distorting its face. He tries to discover those ugly forces and struggles to demolish them. This is how politics finds its way into his aesthetic pursuit. This changed the sensibility, not only its content but the form too. Old ornate style gave way to a simple scientific style of expression. Urdu started moving towards the language of the people, beginning with Ghalib. Shibli, Hali, Muhammad Hussain Azad etc took over the movement and carried it forward. Thus, when Sajjad Zaheer came to India with his progressive ideas, the soil was ready to accept them.

3. Shakespeare, W., *The Winter's Tale* Act IV Prologue

4. Wordsworth, W., *The Prelude*, Book I. L.169

Progressivism was reverberating in the atmosphere. It only needed a platform which the progressive writers movement provided. It was not a literary club. It was a movement which stirred the dormant souls of not only those who read and wrote Hindi and Urdu, but influenced the regional literatures also. Beside Prem Chand, Hasrat Mohani and, even Maulvi Abdul Haq and Allama Iqbal, appreciated it and Tagore was drawn towards it, who sent his inaugural address to the conference in Calcutta in 1938⁵. The progressive writers ran no propaganda campaign which shows that the response to the movement was spontaneous, as if automatically, by its inherent energy, the idea grew into a movement. In the year 2000, Hameed Akhtar published the record of the reports of weekly meetings of Progressive Writers' Association held in Bombay during 1946-47, in a book called *Roodad-e-Anjuman*. It also includes the reports of the meetings of the Association in Aligarh, Hyderabad and Mohan Nagar. During this period, the Anjuman was active in Lahore also. Thus, the Anjuman had been very active both in India and Pakistan around the event of Partition.

Progressive Writers' Association included the writers, beside Urdu, from Bangla, Hindi, Marathi, Gujrati, Telagu, Tamil, Malyalam, Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto, practically from all the languages⁶.

It was a movement more active and vital than any other movement. It cannot be called an extended literary club.

In Lahore, as a reaction to Progressive Writers' Association, a literary circle was created by the name of *Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq*. As against the progressives' art for the sake of life, the *Halqa* stood for art for the sake of art. But soon the distinction between the two was reduced to the minimum and, as Hameed Akhtar noted, there was a general agreement between the two groups on major literary issues. Their members had also cordial relations with each other on the individual level and, Miraji was one of those who regularly participated in the meetings of the Association and presented his poems and articles for discussion. He was acknowledged as the pioneer of modern trends in poetry⁷.

5. Zaheer, Sajjad, Roshnai, Maktaba Daniyal, 1986, Ch.9. P 23

6. Hasan, Sibte, Preface to Rohnai. ibid

7. Akhtar, Hameed, Roodade Anjuman, Bright Book, Lahore 2000. P. 18.

The ideas of independence and revolution had been floating in India for over a century when the Progressive Writers' Association was created. There were other movements too, like Fort William College and Anjuman-e-Punjab, but their main purpose was to popularize British rule among the Indians. Sir Sayyid's basic objective was national revival. He launched his movement for vitalizing the spirit of Indian Muslims and showing them the way to progress. He had realized that the English rule had come to stay. He saw positive points in it too. The British rule had brought peace, prosperity and progress to India. It could no more be resisted and overthrown. So, Sir Sayyid did, what perhaps President Musharraf did in the recent years: make a deal if you cannot resist.

Efforts for Muslim resistance had started just after 1857. Sir Sayyid came on the scene to pull Muslims out of the state of despondency and to regain the confidence of the English, who held the Muslims solely responsible for the 1857 mutiny. The saving virtue of Sir Sayyid Ahmad was that he had the convictions of a conservative who was inspired by progressive ideas. His conservatism was strongly challenged by Ghalib whose scathing criticism of *Ain-e-Akbari* reflects the new sensibility that was fast growing among Indian Muslims. Their prejudice was now giving way to an admiration for European advance in science and technology. Ghalib castigated Sir Sayyid for being so nostalgic and regressive. He wrote:

Such a work is an insult to such a powerful intellect:

It is nothing but self-indulgence

After paying due tribute to the English for their administration and rule of law, he continues his disparaging commentary on Sir Sayyid's nostalgia and ends by enumerating the achievements of the English:

They work a magic on the water that in the form of
steam pulls the ships

They ignite the air and it glows like burning coal
See the glowing garden in London which glitters in the
night without lamps

The Indian Muslims renaissance was already on. This was the feeling of a rising middle class which had already taken the new generation after 1857 into its grip and is represented in Asghar, the young son of

Mir Nihal, in Ahmad Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, who insists on wearing English shirts and shoes so hated by his father⁸. The change gripped the minds very fast and is reflected in the proceedings of *Anjuman-e-Punjab*. This gave rise to a political culture which introduced politics into aesthetics and because of which now one sees instead of a juxtaposition of image as the only merit in poetry, a growing sense of social reality, as in Ghalib:

The hungry mountain cutter is forced to serve his rich
rival,
While Shireen is as indifferent as the mountain *Be*
Sutoon.

Or, the total lack of awareness for the coming disaster, again, in Ghalib:

You are busy in straightening out the curls of your
tresses;
I am beset by the long looming shadows of calamity.

Progressive Writers' Association was launched in London in 1935 as a movement. But in India it was not transplanted as such. It found the Indian climate ready to receive its ideology. The atmosphere was already buzzing with new ideas. Its concrete shape was the Aligarh movement. "Sir Sayyed was a genius who had the capacity for originating ideas and of making them acceptable to his co-religionists."⁹ The dismal state of affairs and the disillusionment of Indian Muslims has been graphically presented by Ahmad Ali in *Twilight in Delhi*. The most pinching expression of this affront to national pride, however, is best expressed in Akbar Allahbadi's poem *Delhi Darbar*,

They are favoured with rising fortune;
The seven-fold heavens belong to them.
Theirs is the cup and theirs the wine;
Only the eyes are mines; the rest belongs to them

Delhi Darbar was the climax of British rule in India and this also marked the beginning of its end. There were bomb blasts in Delhi on

8. Ali, Ahmad, *Twilight in Delhi*, Oxford University Press 1984. P. 11.

9. Sadiq, Muhammad, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Oxford University Press.

the occasion that marked the beginning of the struggle for independence. Two days before the coronation, the pavilion built for the function was burnt down when a mysterious fire broke out. Other fires also broke out and the petrol depot was blown up. Mir Nihal and Habibullah felt secretly happy¹⁰.

Dr Humayun Khizar Ansari has written a brilliant dissertation on *The Emergence of Socialist thoughts among the North Indian Muslims (197-47)*¹¹. He showed how Indian Muslims were irritated by Western Imperialism, particularly the British Imperialism. On the international level, there were the assault of Italy on Libya (1911-12) and European support of Bulkan Christians (1913). At home, there was the annulment of the division of Bengal (1911), government's rejection of the proposal of the Muslim University at Aligarh (1912) and the Cawnpur Mosque incident (1913). Earlier, Hasrat Mohani was imprisoned in 1908 for writing an article criticizing British education policy in Egypt. Pan-Islamism was in full swing. Kabul, Constantinople, Berlin and London had become the centres of activity. Turkish and German support was sought against Britain. On the other hand, Soviet gestures of goodwill towards the world of Islam impressed the Indian Muslims who after the disillusionment created by the failure of pan-Islamism, turned towards Russia. The new Soviet Government returned to Iran the areas occupied by the Czar government. The ideology and more than that, the policies of the Soviet Union towards Muslim countries and their support of liberation movements throughout the world inspired confidence in Indian Muslims that Russia could release them from British slavery. At the same time there also developed a movement of Islamic socialism which found much common between Islam and Communism.

The atmosphere was conducive to progressive ideas. The progressive writers movement was thus an indigenous phenomenon and not a mere transplantation. What Sajjad Zaheer and his associates did was to provide a focus to the ideas already floating in the air.

However, this is also true that the inspiration for starting a progressive literary movement initially came from the freedom and

10. Ali, Ahmad, *Twilight in Delhi*, Oxford University Press 1984. P. 141

11. Ansari, Dr Humayun Khizar, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims*, Book Traders Lahore

peace movements going on throughout Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As mentioned earlier, a new concept of reality had emerged with the French Revolution. It brought to the downtrodden man the awareness of his power. Movements for emancipation from slavery and exploitation started throughout the world. The tide had started turning. Up till that time only imperialists, colonialists and capitalists were making alliances. Now the workers of the world had started coming, together. First International was held in 1864 in London, second in 1889 in Paris, and the third in 1919, which came to be known as Comintern. Thus while the colonial powers of the world were preparing for war to get the maximum share from the colonial exploits, strong movements of the people were also going on throughout the world advocating peace and demanding justice.

This is authentically summed up by Ahmad Saleem in his two books on *Quest of Peace in the Twilight*, one in English and the other in Urdu. In his address to the *Congress in Defence of Culture, 1935*, Gorki remarked that "fascism regards humanism as an idea inimical to its basic aims" and suggests:

Our efforts, therefore, should be directed, not to reconcile irreconcilables, not to reform bourgeois society, which by its very structure, cannot live, is incapable of living, without enmity, without oppressing the majority of mankind - our efforts should be dedicated to the work of releasing the inexhaustible reserves of the intellectual energy latent in the hundreds of millions of working people¹².

And this can be best accomplished by literature. The class division of society has paralyzed humanity. The poor have no opportunity to develop and polish their intellectual calibre and the rich have no need for it. This is what led to the formation of the Peace Brigade in 1936 in which majority of the writers of the age rose to defend liberty against Fascism in Spain. All this forms the background to the establishment of Progressive Writers Association in London in 1936.

The struggle still goes on throughout the world. *New Left Review*, 1982, published thirteen essays contributed by the leading

12. Saleem, Ahmad, *Quest of Peace in Twilight*, Classic, Lahore 2005 P. 17

thinkers of the time as a direct response to the threat of extremism created by “the deadly logic of the weapons system”. In the US 1981 budget \$16.5 billion was allocated to research development, test and evaluation (RDTE) of weaponry. Of this less than 10% (a mere 1.5 billion) was allocated to MX (missile) research. But this is more than the combined RD budget of the Department of Labour, the Department of Education, the Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Drug Administration, and the Centre for Disease Control¹³.

The US defence budget for 1985/86 was projected at \$1 trillion¹⁴.

This large scale expenditure on armament is itself a threat to the survival of life on the globe; the immediate cause of World War II was the preparation for it¹⁵.

One more quotation from Edward Thompson:

Militarism and imperialism are founded upon actual institutional bases (the military, the navy, the chartered trading companies and slavers, the arms manufacturers, etc.) from which they extend influence into the other areas of life. In mature forms they appear as a whole configuration (institutional, political, economic, ideological) and each portion reflects and reinforces the other. Exterminism is a configuration of this order, whose institutional base is the weapons system, and the entire economic, scientific, political and ideological support system to that weapon system, the social system which researches it, chooses it, produces it, policies it, justifies it and maintains it in being¹⁶.

Writing after 9/11, Craig Unger, in *House of Bush House of Saud, 2003*¹⁷, brings documentary evidence to show how the economic interests of a few families are pushing the whole humanity to extermination. From feudalism and imperialism, the greed of a few

13. Extremism and Cold War, ed. New left Review

14. Ibid, P. 14

15. Ibid, P. 20

16. Ibid, P. 20

17. Unger, Craig, *House of Bush House of Saud*, Scribner, Newyork, 2004

has brought the world to the stage of total and absolute disaster. In this way a war culture is being imposed upon the world, which must be resisted.

And the resistance is on. All is not quiet on the front. Just after Golden Jubilee conferences of the Progressive Writers Association in London, and then in Lahore in 1986, the World Punjabi Congress came on the scene to carry forward the Progressive Writers Movement. The World Punjabi Congress held its twelfth conference in Lahore in 2005. Punjabi is also now an international language and does not lag much behind Urdu or Hindi, though it got recognition rather too late. First second, fifth and twelfth conferences were held in Lahore in 1986, 1992, 2001 and 2005. The fourth conference was held in Chandigarh (2000), sixth in London (2002), seventh in Delhi (2003), eighth in Vancouver (2003), ninth in Chicago (2004), tenth in Chandigarh (2004) and eleventh in Patiala in 2004. Fakhar Zaman, Chairman, World Punjabi Congress, summed up the objectives and gave the manifesto of the congress in two words, peace and culture.

Whatever were the titles of previous conferences, they were based on the movement of culture and peace. What we have to say in the outstretching devil of globalization economy passes just the two words, peace and culture¹⁸.

This is also in line with the world peace movements. Thus, we see that the same oppressive state of affairs still prevails in the world that drew the intellectuals of the world to champion the cause of peace in 1930s. Rather the situation is much more threatening now, more than ever. But at the same time protests are being held all over the world, and in the United States itself, against the atrocities and cruelties committed on the innocent people. But this is the age of propaganda and propaganda can turn white into black and black into white. Majority of the people are not aware of the tactics of modern propaganda. They need to be told about that¹⁹. In the past, it was only the exploitation of a class by another class and writers like Prem Chand made people aware of the intricacies of the situation. But the

18. Saleem, Ahmad, *Quest of Peace.....*, P. 12

19. While protests were going on against Iraq war all over the world, and in the USA itself, the issue of desecration of Holy Quran was created and all the protests then turned against this issue, pushing American war mania into the background.

situation is now much more intricate and the oppressors are presented as the victims. The big powers are even adamant on not defining the term Terrorism, and distinguishing it from state terrorism.

We are perhaps in the last stage of our struggle for peace. The national lines are being erased. It will no more be possible to convince people for a war in the name of nation or even civilizations. The world is becoming a global village. There is provision for free movement of capital and goods. But free movement of labour is not allowed. The exploiters of the world are uniting, and thus paving way for the unity of labour. The dream of an international unity of workers seems to be becoming a reality now. The next war will not be a war of nations or civilizations, it will be a class war.

Advocates of capitalism are rejoicing on the death of the proletariat:

In the most technologically sophisticated countries, service industries have displaced manufacturing as the hub of the market economy, meaning that unskilled manual workers, the proletariat in its original guise, are less and less of a factor²⁰.

The Draculas of the technological age will devour the common people. How callous! The advice of Kurtz to deal with natives, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, 'exterminate the brutes', this is the ideal of capitalism.

There is a greater need for the intellectuals now than ever before to unite and fight. We are entering the final stage of war against injustice. History is a witness that justice always prevailed.

Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-western native, there was always some form of active resistance and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out²¹.

(The resistance won in Algeria, Indonesia, Vietnam, almost everywhere).

20. Tucker, Robert C., ed., *The Lenin Anthology*, Newyork: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975

21. Said, Edward W., *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage P. Xii

Capitalist, like terrorist, is not deterred even if his own life is threatened. No moral or humanitarian appeals can work. O'Neill in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Sartre in *The Condemned of Altona*, show that capitalism isolates and creates stagnation. In both, the symbol of incest is used to define the corruption brought by capitalism. They are totally alienated. The world means nothing to them. They would not mind annihilating it.

It is again the writers' job to propagate humanistic values and counter the propaganda machinery of the Champions of War and violence. People must be shown the cancer that is eating into life. Using the metaphor of Bacon, it is like worms in putrid flesh which look so active but actually are the agents of death. Luckily the people are aware of it and the movement is on, here as elsewhere.



❧ Chapter 57 ❧

Faiz Ahmed Faiz



Commenting on Mumtaz Hussain's book on Hali's ideas on poetry, Sajjad Haider Malik observed that Hali's poetics did good service to Urdu literature during the last one hundred years. He, however, finds that poetics is out-dated now and calls for a new poetic theory that may lead the intellectual current in the next one hundred years. Perhaps the concern is not well founded, since poetic theory does not follow the calendar. Poetic ideas follow a logic that is conditioned by life. When a change occurs in life, its demands also change. And a poetic theory is one of these demands.

It is the advent of the 21st century that inspires such questions. But the pertinent point to ask is what does the 21st century mean to us. Have we really lived through the 2-th century? It has actually been the century of the west. Only some ripples of that commotion have reached us. Otherwise we are still living in the Middle Ages, emotionally as well as intellectually. This can be very well appreciated if we critically follow the thesis of Mumtaz Hussain.

Mumtaz Hussain has referred to technology, metaphor and rational discourse. A discussion of these will show the difference of our world view from that of the west. Technology has brought significant change in the mode of thinking in the west. This change has been brought about by science which has not only extended man's control over nature, it has radically transformed the mind. We have been somewhat affected by the technology but very little by the science behind it. Our relationship with the 20th century has been only superficial. Liked young child who has been made to learn a few axioms of philosophy without having any ideas of them, we have been exposed to technology but not really influenced by it. It has affected our lives but not our sensibility. We still live in the world of chivalry, of the romance of caravans, not yet initiated into the world

of aeroplanes, even that of motor-bikes. How un-poetic do these new names sound to us!

A survey of critical theories from the time of Plato to the present age reveals that the poetics of an age is formulated towards the end of that age. For example, Aristotle's Poetics appeared at the time when the classical age had already produced its crowning achievements in arts and literature, and Greek literature had lost its lustre. Similarly Wordsworth's poetic theory followed the industrial revolution in Europe when Rousseau's theory and already made its mark. It did not proceed that revolution as a theory of the industrial age. Rather it came at a time when the world was poised to have a new proletarian revolution. After the revolution in Russia a new poetics based on the ideas of scientific realism is being evolved, though its final statement is yet to be made, since communism itself is still in the experimental stage. Also poetics is built on some model, which for Aristotle was Sophocles, and for Wordsworth his own and Coleridge's poetry.

In short, the poetics of an age can be formulated only by a mind which belongs to that age and, moreover, it can be derived from the most representative master-pieces of that age. It means that poetic norms can be extracted only from poetic creations, they cannot forestall them. Thus to prescribe a poetics for the 21st century is mere romantic idealism. We may, however, attempt a poetics of the 20th century. But this, unfortunately, has not been possible, since a poetics is based neither on borrowed ideas nor on fancy slogans. And that is exactly what our critics have been doing.

If we try to design a poetics for the 20th century, we shall inevitably start with Syed and Hali. Dr. Ibadat Bareilvi's doctoral thesis, Urdu Tanqeed ka Irteqa (Development of Urdu criticism) has been perhaps the only scientific study of the subject to date. Unfortunately the book is not available, but, generally speaking, it identifies three distinct streams in critical approach in Urdu literature. These refer to the theories of Shibli, Azad and Hali. Shibli's Sher-ul-ajam adheres to the Persian tradition and is elitist in approach. Obviously its scope is very limited and writers like Nazir Akbar Abadi can find no place here. Hali had attempted a blue print for the poetics of the future, while Azad tried to mediate between the past and the future. Hali was influenced by certain ideas which were rooted in the west. The main factor operating behind them was the

industrial revolution. Wordsworth's theory of poetry and poetic diction was the aesthetic response to the new situation. We never has an industrial revolution. But the poetics that we created by this revolution fascinated us and we adopted it. That is precisely the reason that Hali now appears to be so unsatisfactory.

This brings us to the question of vital importance in poetry – metaphor. Hali felt, and quite rightly, that the world had gone far beyond the swords and the arrows, the rose and the bulbul, and the moth and the candle. Thus the old metaphors have become obsolete. But the metaphors of the new world, electric bulbs, motor cars and railway trains have failed to find favour with our poetry. The reason is that though these new machines have very much entered our lives, these have not yet penetrated our sensibility. Hali realised that our poetic approach has been antiquated, but he could not appreciate that it is so only with respect to western society, not with reference to the mode of life prevalent here, since the Indian Muslim culture of the 20th Century was hardly different from that which the first Muslim conquerors had created here in the 11th. Hassan Askari rightly objected that Hali was revolting from the metaphor which was rooted in life. And there was no room yet for the new metaphor, since there was hardly anything new in our response to life.

Coming to rational discourse, the fact is that the emotional hold was so strong that it was practically impossible to transcend it or even ignore it. Life had not yet gathered the momentum that could overcome inane. Sentimentalism could be countered only with rationalism. Sir Syed rightly concluded that only the analytical method of scientific thinking could rescue life from sentimentalism.

Hali fixed his eye on realism, beyond obsolete metaphor and inane emotionalism. But his theory was rooted in the revolution that took place in the west. The social change brought about by this industrial revolution resulted in two diverse streams in Urdu literature. One culminated in Iqbal and the other in Faiz. Hali tried to create a theory based on borrowed ideas. Iqbal and Faiz tried to support it with slogans. Iqbal was exhorting the Muslims who had yet to find their feet to imbibe the spirit of Shaheen (Eagle) and Faiz was propagating for a revolution of the proliferate under the leadership of the elite. These are the facts which stand in the way of the formulation

of a poetics of Urdu literature for the 20th century. A poetics is based neither on borrowed ideas nor on slogans.

Hali, however, tried to introduce new techniques in Urdu literature. But form alone cannot make the basis of a poetic theory. Although Aristotle's Poetics is basically a formal treatise, it was based on the values that sustained his age. The poetics that Hali recommended was superficial, and the literature created under its norms was as much wishful thinking – it may be the ecstatic call of Iqbal or the rebellious note of the Progressives. Neither the one nor the other succeeded in suggesting the ways of bringing about the revolution. This has been the tragedy of both the right and the left with us. Both want to bring about a change only in theory whereas the fact is that life is action and any theory which is not rooted in its realities is no more than a pleasant dream. New poetics will be created by new realities. Let us strive for them.



❧ Chapter 58 ❧

The Egotistical Sublime



Translations have become rather common these days, something which is good for our poetry as well as our poets. Some of our classics have been translated into foreign languages, and though from among the moderns too. Iqbal and Faiz have been translated into various tongues, these are exceptions rather than the rule. Suddenly, a new trend has emerged and translations are becoming en vogue.

The Academy of Letters has also initiated a programme in which works of Pakistani creative writers are being translated on a large scale. While, on the one hand. It will provide opportunities for new and much wider reading public, the exercise is also likely to bring a healthy change in the attitude of our writers. On the other hand, it will give them an opportunity to see their creative effusion in a relatively more objective perspective since seeing one's work in another language is like giving your voice to someone else's tongue. A change of medium and the prospect of a different kind of audience will also force the writers to take into consideration the other medium while composing their verses. The whole emphasis may then be on the linguistic niceties of the native language, its rhythms, intricate verbal patterns and the associational value off conventional images. It will create a new idiom. This opportunity was not available to senior writers; Iqbal and Faiz perhaps never thought that their works would be translated and Ghalib probably never dreamt of it either.

The poems which are included in 'Winds of fire', one can feel, do not seem to belong to any particular pace or time. This kind of universality is very likely to characterise the poetry of the future written with the prospect of the whole universe as its target audience.

The poems are even otherwise too personal and too abstract and the experiences attempted to be captured in verse lie on the fringe of the occult; incomprehensible and incommunicable in a logical

statement. Its language is purely a language of images and any criterion can, at the most, attempt no more than an imagistic analysis.

Muzaffar A. Ghaffaar has made the best of this most elusive task of translating the work of Wazir Agha. He has also very cleverly shifted the entire responsibility of the genuineness of the translation on the shoulders of the poet himself by claiming that "Dr. Agha's hand has fully been operative in the translation." He has, it seems, caught the author unawares. Three cheers for the translator. Since everything seems to be authenticated by the author, no comments on the merit of translation are in place here.

As far as the poems are concerned, the images, in the first place, are mostly drawn from nature, but nature "red in tooth and claw" such as

 speak to the wind
 tell her not to wing so hard
 that nascent leaves
 from willowy branches
 snap off
 and fall to earth
 speak; speak to the wind
 wounds by the wind
 I have borne....
 (Speak to the wind)

The poet protests against the wounds of nakedness which bring "the wrath of God upon the innocent inmates of the earth". Such images of destruction and doom abound almost everywhere in all these poems. The poet is tortured by a world where the sea of writhes

 ... like a whale
 and feel the lashing of blazing sand on its body
 ... a body riddled with harpoons and starts
 (It within me the ocean falls)

The main symbols are fleeting, abstract and elusive, such as the wind, freedom, being nothingness, non-existence. But the most pervading subject is the self in an excruciating struggle with the non-self:

 I, a low heir of the creeper horde
 holding fast to my age-old frame
 with long, thin, snake-like limbs,
 keep crawling and creeping on the walls

entwining the doors
 touching the soundless sea of darkness,
 I ascend to the veils within veils of the unknown and then, a
 little further knock against the solemn door of the non-
 existent
 (At the solemn door of the non-existent)

Another similar note of a sort of a dirge is heard in 'Eternity
 to eternity':

I am destined for ever
 to enter, like breath,
 each and every frame
 only to get leave
 to impart warmth
 of fresh blood to ages
 to rescue being
 from dissolving into non being
 but never; even once,
 demand a body for my being
 never, for a moment
 Stop!

The self aspires to achieve divinity, to absorb and be absorbed in everything from being to non-being, but still not surrendering its identity. The ego does not want to be confined, wants to spread to the whole universe – the egotistical sublime! Ego estranged from itself but desiring to dominate the whole life, including all that is beyond life, this in a few words, is the eternal bane of woe for man and forms the poetic ethos or Wazir Agha.

The images of isolation, loneliness, darkness, storming and chaos are the idioms of a phase of poetry which is now known by the name of 'modernism.' Best represented by T S Elliot's 'Wasteland' echoing the cries of Job and curses of the prophets of the Old Testament. This note found rather belated in the poems of 'Winds of Fire.'



❧ Chapter 59 ❧

Evaluating the Self



Translations have become rather common now and this is very good for our poetry as well as poets. Though some of our classics have found their way into foreign languages, and though from among the moderns too Iqbal and Faiz have been translated into various tongues, these were rather exceptions. Now translations are becoming a vogue. Academy of letters has also embarked on a programme of large scale translation of Pakistani creative writings. While, on the one hand, it will provide new and much wider reading public, the exercise is also likely to bring a healthy change in the attitude of our writers. On the other hand, it will give them an opportunity to see their creative effusion in a relatively more objective perspective, since seeing one's work in another language is like giving your voice to some one else's tongue. Change of medium and a prospect of a different kind of audience will also free the writers to take into consideration the other medium also while composing their verses. The whole emphasis may then be no more on the linguistic niceties of the native language, its rhythms, intricate verbal patterns or associational value of conventional images. It will create a new idiom. This opportunity was not available to the senior writers. Iqbal and Faiz perhaps did not think that they will be translated; Ghalib definitely did not.

Already, in the poems in hand, the poems of 'Winds of Fire', one can feel that they do not seem to belong to a particular place or time. This kind of universality is very likely to characterise the poetry of the future written with the prospect of the whole universe as the target audience.

The poems are even otherwise too personal and too abstract, the experiences attempted to be captured in verse lie on the fringe of the occult, incomprehensible, and incommunicable in a logical statement. This is purely a language of images, and any criticism can at the most attempt no more than an imagistic analysis.

Muzaffar A. Ghaffar has made the best of the most elusive task. He has also very cleverly shifted the entire responsibility for the genuineness of the translation on the shoulders of the poet by claiming that 'Dr Agha's hand has been fully operative in the translations.' He has, it seems, caught the author unaware. Three cheers for the translator. Since everything seems to be authenticated by the author, no comments on the merit of translation are found here.

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Speak to the wind
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 from willowy branches
 snap off
 and fall to earth
 Speak; speak to the wind.
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 I have borne.....
 (Speak to the Wind)

The poet protests against the wound of nakedness which bring 'the wrath of God upon the innocent inmates of the earth.' Such images of destruction and doom abound almost everywhere in all these poems. The poet is tortured by a world when the sea writhes.

Like a whole
 and feel the lashing
 of blazing sand on its body
 -- A body riddled with harpoons and staves.
 (If within me the ocean falls)

The main symbols are fleeting, abstract and elusive, such as, wind, freedom, being, nothingness, non-existence. But the most pervading subject is 'self', in an excruciating struggle with the non-selves:

I, a lone heir of the creeper horde holding fast to my age-old
 frame with long, thin, snake-like limbs, keep crawling and
 creeping on the walls entwining the doors touching the
 soundless sea of darkness

I ascend to the veils within veils of the unknown

❧ Chapter 60 ❧

Pakistan's Changing Social Scenario



Mustansar Husain Tarar has been exploring the psyche of the people of Pakistan through his novels. His latest Raakh is a sequel to his last Bahau. The short history of Pakistan is full of traumatic experiences such as nations usually suffer in centuries. There have been the political and judicial confusion, constitutional crisis, ideological impasse, rampant corruption, the debacle of East Pakistan, the politics of the Generals, the autocratic attitude of the politicians, the Kalashnikov and heroin culture, triumphant involvement in Afghanistan and Kashmir, total breakdown of law and order at home, sectarian and ethnic violence, vociferous claims about Islamic system of polity and code of conduct ending up in just the contrary results, cruelties perpetrated on minorities, women and other weaker sections of the society; these are the ingredients of Pakistan's culture to-day. Mustansar has been candid, and precariously so.

The situation has been further confounded by the clash of cultures. On the one hand, there is the culture of Pre-Partition Muslim India largely represented by the areas not included in Pakistan, and, on the other, the culture of the areas constituting Pakistan. It has been rightly pointed out by the author of the novel under review that when we talk of the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent, we invariably refer to the Muslims of Lucknow, Delhi and Aligarh. The Mohajir or Tilyar culture still persists as a historical anomaly. Influxes from America, Europe and the Middle East adds quite another dimension to the existing complexity.

It is this complex sensibility that Mustansar has been trying to capture and if possible, define through his fiction. There are three very prominent figures in the novel which highlight the ever confusing and changing social scenario. These are Bargita, the daughter of a sweeper brought up in Sweden and now a Begum, ambivalently drawn towards her roots; Shobha, a war baby having no idea of her

parenthood, living as an alien in her own country; Fatima, converted a Hindu, now Usha, married to Babu Rao Patel, going blind and widowed in the end, abandoned by her Hindu sons who join Shiv Sena in the demolishing of Babri Mosque, now seeking consolation in Pakistan, terribly disillusioned planning to return to England. All these characters have been convincingly drawn. There are also some minor characters who have been projected only in glimpses but leave a full life size impression, like the court dancers Daru and Nooran, Ranjeet Singh's grand daughter Princess Bamba Sutherland, and the natural daughter of Mushahid, from Sweden, who comes as a tourist and leaves a token, a memento in the form of a paper bird from her mother to Mushahid.

All these impressions are beautifully blended in the pictures of old and new Lahore with its kite flying in Basant, its Pehalwans and classical singers, Manto in Luxmi Mansion, decaying Havelis, workshops in dilapidated historical buildings, such as the shoe factory in a decaying old house, and the narrow dark winding streets of Lahore. There are references to child labour and bonded labour as well as the application of anti-Qadiani and Blaspheme laws. It is a very comprehensive and a very living picture of Lahore.

Mustansar has evoked fantastic feelings through the use of certain effective symbols. Some of them are directly picked up from Bahau. These are the shrinking waters of the Ravi and the newing of the shrinking waters of the Ravi and the newing of the peacock. Both are ominous symbols. In Ra'kh, on the other hand, there now emerges an awareness that fall and decline are part of the rhythm of life, not as such disconcerting at all. The major symbol in Ra'kh is the ash that rises from the burning debris of Shah Almi. There is a mystical overtone too. While the images from East Pakistan are macabre, both sides committing heinous crimes, those emerging from the memory are morbid. Nostalgia, nightmares, and a rambling mind define the sensibility Mustansar has been trying to delineate.

He has picked up the most appropriate mechanism to portray this intricate reality in Ra'kh. It is a blend of travelogue, reportage and impressionism. It has been beautifully concretised by apt use of the technique of stream of consciousness.

In Bahau, there was an impression that Mustansar was trying hard to steer clear of Qura't-ul-Ain Haider. In Ra'kh too she makes an appearance. But Mustansar rightly remarks that while Qura't-ul-Ain's

Lucknow is dead, Lahore still lives. He has found his feet. She delved deep into Indian history, Pakistan's history has no such depth, or at least no deeper than Mohammad bin Qasim.

He is on quite a different track. Everything is on the card. There is no occult, no myth to explore. He no more pales under her light, as some critics thought Keats did, who failed at drama because of Shakespeare, and at epic because of Milton. Mustansar has mastered both content and technique. But his task is not light. Pakistan's history may not have depth, its problems are not superficial. These cannot be summed up in some magic formula: happiness does not depend on four things. Mustansar Hussain Tarar has found his path in Ra'kh.



❧ Chapter 61 ❧

The Playwright & His Drama in Search of a Shakespeare



Gunter Grass is the latest writer whose play. The 'Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising', has been adapted for the Lahore stage. The Urdu adaptation is titled 'Jag Uthay Jab Khak Nashin'.

This writer and spring has been a productive season for drama. There was a drama festival in Lahore, and another, sponsored by the Pakistan National Council of the Arts, at Islamabad, and there are over a dozen amateur theatre groups active today in Pakistan. Foreign troupes also keep visiting and out actors also perform in other countries.

Today, we have experimental theatre and street theatre as well as ideologically committed theatre. Often, such theatre companies concentrate on social issues such as cruelty to women and their exploitation. Beside these, there are dramatic societies in various educational institutions. The Government College Dramatic Club and Kinnaird College's Najmuddin Dramatics Society have a long and respectable record in this field. Other schools and colleges also stage plays regularly, and thought most of them are adaptations and translations of western plays, some are original too.

The tradition of serious drama in the sub-continent is at least a hundred years old, and most of our prominent writers have tried their hand at drama. Among them are eminent literary figures like Zafar Ali Khand, Abdul Majid Daryabadi and Maulana Mohammad Hussain Azad. Then there follows a whole host of playwrights, such as Imtiaz Ali Taj Hakim Ahmad Shuja, Abid Ali Abid and Mirza Adeeb. The interest in drama was passed on to the next generation and we had Ibrahim Jalees, Khawaja Moinuddin and Sarmad Sehbai.

The Parsi Theatre and the plays of Agha Haashr are a different story. The list of playwrights would have continued to grow had most of them not been allured away from the stage by TV. TV plays are a

genre apart. They are hardly comparable to stage plays, and require a quite different blend of ingredients from those required by stage plays, to make them a success. Great reputations may also be put at stake. A TV play largely owes its success to the cameraman, the costumes and sets.

To return to the subject, we can see that in spite of many handicaps, there has been a growth in dramatic activity in Pakistan. But the producers of the Gunter Grass play complain: "Theatre has failed to take roots here as a living instrument of the intellectual and cultural genius of the people... the dream of a democratic and civilised milieu in this country calls for a strengthening and promotion of theatre in an institutional way".

The complaint in fact is that we have no regular theatre activity. There is no national theatre; there is no permanent institution for theatre and there is no theatre hall in the country to stage a real play.

Many reasons can be assigned to the lack of a sound tradition of drama in our society. One reason, clearly, is the lack of patronage. Neither the government nor the rulers of the states in pre-Partition India encouraged drama. The stage, at the lower level of society, continued in an undisciplined and disorderly way, following folk tradition without any guidance or sophisticated aids. Even now, no village Mela goes without one (or even more than one) play staged for the common folk.

The British too did not encourage theatre though they established the Fort-William College in Calcutta and Anjuman-e-Punjab in Lahore for the promotion of fiction and poetry. Theatre was a living institution in England in the 19th and the 20th centuries, but the English did not bother to introduce it here.

Religion could not have been a hindrance, as some believe, for the rulers of the Indian states actively patronised music, specially classical music, and art. These two art forms too, in the traditional sense, were considered un-Islamic by many, but still prospered.

Still more interesting is the fact that India, which can boast of a rich and ancient tradition of drama, made no headway in this field. Hardly anyone has achieved the reputation of Gresh Karnad. The reason seems to be that drama demands a free atmosphere and cannot flourish in a slave society. The long period of foreign rule in India therefore seems to have made drama impossible.

Given the presence of the Muslims rulers there was, however, perhaps another and more cogent reason for this failure. The Muslim societies of the Middle Ages were not in direct contact with Greek civilisation. Though they learnt a lot from Greek philosophy, rhetoric, geometry and other sciences and even translated Aristotle's 'Politics', they were not interested in the plays discussed by Aristotle in his treatise. Between the Greeks and the Arabs there intervened another brilliant civilisation, that of Byzantine. Arts and literature flourished in the Byzantine civilisation; there were paintings and sculpture of a high merit. But there was no drama. Drama did not exist in the Arab world, nor in Persia. Thus the Muslims inherited a glorious tradition *sans* drama. So, it was not religion, but an irony of history which deprived us of the art of the stage.

Today, however, there is a fertile basis for drama in our country. There is no dearth of talent. We have promising playwrights, talented actors and adept masters of stagecraft. What we need is a stage; a regular national stage. Drama is a costly affair and needs sponsors. And serious drama cannot be a financial proposition. In our country, the stage cannot be adopted as a full time occupation, for with mounting inflation, the stage cannot support a man. He must therefore be a part-timer. But if the government comes forward and provides the infrastructure for drama, a lot of theatrics activity can be generated.

Here again, the problem of bureaucratic control must be confronted. The Alhamra halls are permanently booked for the staging of highly farcical plays. A serious play has hardly any chance of finding a place for itself. Also, there are political considerations attached to the staging of plays. The rulers never like dialogue, specially a dialogue in which the masses can be involved.

But then, the playwrights themselves may be held responsible for the lack of theatric activity and the miserable state of the stage, due to the lack of talent in blending fun with art. Why can't they make a play that is commercially as well as thematically and artistically viable? Obviously, the artist cannot earn much. And he is not prepared to become a mere entertainer – a *bhand*. The difference between the two is that the artist throws a challenge to the spectator to make an attempt to rise up to his level. The entertainer, on the other hand, stoops down to the level of the spectator, playing to the gallery, in order to please him and extract money from him. Why can't he be serious and still entertaining? 'Public taste' must not be a

bar to the creation of good art. One has to start with the public taste as it is and, while entertaining spectators, also attempt to raise their level of discourse.

Theatre has tremendous potential for education; it can cultivate taste. When the public demanded a play full of revenge, a play of violence, Shakespeare gave them 'Hamlet', with nine murders, four in a single scene. He gave then ghosts, horror, mystery and intrigue. But he had the talent and art to raise it above a mere revenge play. He entertained the people; enhanced their awareness and humoured their taste to bring it up to the level where they could appreciate a Shakespeare play.

One more cause of the lack of interest in the development of the stage is that though plays are prescribed in the syllabi of literature in various languages, drama is taught only as literature, not as stagecraft. Unless drama becomes a part of the curriculum and stagecraft a subject, taught both theoretically as well as practically, there are remote chances of its developing into an institution enjoying respect and status in society.

So, the prevailing political atmosphere, lack of patronage, the writers' apathy and academic neglect are all equally responsible for the stunted growth of drama in our society. A national theatre is very much the need of the time – for only this can rescue theatre from the stagnation which inflicts it today.



❧ Chapter 62 ❧

Looking for New Horizons



Ever since the early days of colonization, people have explored foreign lands for better livelihood. Finding an escape from miseries and horrors at home, these people, fascinated by the richness of other countries, have often opted for better incentives in far off places. This massive exodus, whenever it took place, has been followed by popular travelogues, though there have been few which were authentic and acclaimed. The beginning of the present century gave 'migrations' a new dimension. Migrations that had now become more purposeful. It saw people from the backward, or so called dark regions of the world migrating to various lands of fortunes.

But the whole concept of migration and the stories associated with it has been masterfully elaborated in Sushma Bedi's novel *Hawan*. The novel describes the awesome plight of Indian emigrants to the United States.

In recent decades, a steady flow of people from the backward regions of the world towards advanced countries has been noticed. America has been considered 'paradise on earth' for the Third World's youth. For the majority of these young people their dream centres around the acquisition of a green card. But this paradise is unfortunately not without its serpent.

In *Hawan* - the ritual of purification through fire—Sushma describes the hardships that follow migrations. Originally published in Hindi, it has been rendered into Urdu by Zaheda Iqbal and Sibte-Hasan who have done a commendable job at translation, making the novel a smooth reading.

Sushma Bedi is a professor of Hindi literature at the University of Columbia. She has been living in the USA for quite some time and shows a keen insight into the state of South Asians in contemporary American society. She completed her education in Delhi and

Chandigarh and is deeply rooted in the Indian culture. She is a witness to the changing trends in the world especially hollowness created among various countries after the emergence of First and the Third World.

Many contemporary writers have written on the subject which is one of the major themes of the stories of Abdullah Hussain as well. Though this clash has affected both sides, Sushma, like Abdullah, has concentrated only on the eastern side of the experience. Her description of the sufferings of Indian and their miserable dilemma reflects the situation of all the oriented emigrants living in the United States.

The Indians who migrate to America have an altogether different dream to fulfil than Europeans who had migrated to the USA earlier. Forced by clergy and at times by other socioeconomic reasons, those Europeans had a less hostile atmosphere to live in. The case with the immigrants from Indian and Pakistan is very different. They don't desperately need money. They are not looked down upon in their own countries. Rather, many are comparatively better off than the majority. They come here to find a more respectable place in the society or to cut a figure still cherishing their homeland. But the problem starts as they try to adopt America as their home. In this way these immigrants end up hanging in the air. Most of them disown their own culture while at the same time don't fully settle down in the new environment thus creating cultural islands by bringing along their customs, festivals and cultural activities into the new world.

On one hand, life in America revolves round the money nexus. The only object of life is to earn, and earn more. "I can't go on earning money for the sake of money," protests young Raju. It was for money that they had come to America. But their concept of getting money was very different. It was a mean to get more respect in society. In America, money is the only value. It is the object.

Aspiring to get more respect one loses the little that he already has. Thus encounters with visitors from home are avoided. A taxi-driver gives out that he is the proprietor of a brain spoliation company. This hypocrisy enhances his marriage prospects in Indian but proportionately demeans him in his own eyes. He has to be contented with a porter's or even a sweeper's job. And the living is no better either. A small apartment, no company, no friends, no relatives or guests. A totally alienated life. Quite different from home where

the world throbs with life; unexpected guests, hustle and bustle all the time. In their endeavour to raise the standard of living, the immigrants miss all the fun at home. Though dismal economic condition at home poses certain threats even then the cries of the street vendors are worth while. Things move at slower, a more acceptable pace at home.

Sushma Bedi has drawn a graphic picture of the traumatic experiences of sufficiently advanced family from India finding it almost impossible to adjust in the American society. It is a fact, a fact of the modern world, which heats all fiction. Sushma has narrated it with an artistic ease, though sometimes it reads more like a diary than a novel.



❧ Chapter 63 ❧

Sex, Violence & Cellotape



A problem with a critic is that before formulating his ideas about a piece of literature, he has to discover some pattern or at least impose one, that may define a story's form. No such pattern seems to emerge from Tabassum Kashmiri's *Qasba Kahani*. No story appears to come into shape. It is a collection of episodes that refuse to merge into a story.

Characters fail to emerge on the page. They simply do not stay long enough. No character lives with the story. Each character appears for a short period and then disappears. It is also not clear why certain characters appear and disappear from the scene, and to what purpose or under what scheme this take place.

The *Town* itself does not emerge as even the atmosphere of a 'town' has not been properly created. Most of the descriptions are rather universal and generalised.

But why this concern for a pattern? Why to impose one? This too is the "limitation" of the critic. Life has no apparent pattern, but one has to be created in order to understand it – a paradigm, for example – some idea, some order. Lack of pattern is also a pattern. This too is not the case here. However, as the story proceeds, some unified vision seems to take shape through the use of the technique of *Dastans*. But the stories are largely realistic, not surrealistic. Real incidents have been forced into dream like visions.

The two *motifs* of *Qasba Kahani* are sex and violence. These are two sides of the same coin. Here the problem with Tabassum Kashmiri is that he is not interested in telling any story, nor does he want to draw any character. He actually wants to draw underlying sinister forces which are corrupting life and distorting faces. But there are two serious difficulties in the way of bringing this reality and fantasy together and these must have been realised by the author too.

Tabassum has been told by his Pakistani readers living abroad that *Qasba Kahani* has been a traumatic experience to them. But it may not create the same reaction here in Pakistan. The reason is that our experiences of the recent past have been so violent that the mind has not yet taken them in. It has been dazed, almost paralysed. The reality far exceeds the fiction. Pakistanis living abroad, and Tabassum has been away from most of that oppressive period, can recreate an imaginative picture of the horrors perpetrated here. And this is no doubt a nightmare. But to those who have gone through these horrors, such imaginative accounts appear too short of the reality. Abductions, rapes, murders, dacoities and torture cells are not news to them. To a Pakistani, these are experiences. The difference between a news and an experience is the difference between *Qasba Kahani* and the reality that was, in Pakistan. The result in that the book fails to create that unified emotional response which the author attempted to create. It rather shows the reaction of a mind that has been stunned at the description of horrors.

The other hindrance has been created by the adoption of the technique of *Dastans*. These pictures of horror and violence have been so masterly drawn by Intizar Hussain that they assume freakish and diabolic shapes. This is not possible for Tabassum, since Intizar has succumbed to the cruelties of life and has lost all hope in the redemption or salvation of man. It has become a reality for him. But Tabassum Kashmiri is not prepared to give in. He believes in the final triumph of man and the freaks that are now distorting life will be subdued. The writer is optimistic. He has a clear pleasant vision. The story closes on this note.

He is intently looking at the flowers blossoming on the hill top. There is heavy wind on the peak and the flowers dancing with it are becoming deep red. The reflection of the flowers falls on his body and he is moment by moment drowning in the haze of the deepening red.

Intizar Hussain uses *Dastans* differently. Intizar has very artistically and “beautifully” drawn a negative meaning from *Dastans* which he has effectively used in his stories to give expression to his disillusion and despair. Tabassum wants to exploit the positive meanings imbedded in the *Dastan*. This needs first of all the creation of a psychological climate which should obliterate this negative impression, and then attempt to put a positive impression upon them.

This experiment by Tabassum Kashmiri is a courageous one, although he does not pull it off altogether. The Dastans all end in the appearance of Maula Ali Mustakil Kusha a miracle for which Intizar has no use. Also, Tabassum must realise that here reality has transcended fiction.

Qasba Kahani is, despite all defects a good book, since it is gripping. He must continue his effort. He seems to have a vision, as well as a way with tales; though the two have yet to be reconciled.



❧ Chapter 64 ❧

Poetry as a Guiding Light



Javed Shaheen, already author of five collections of poetry, has now published all his work in one single volume, entitled *Ishq Tamam*. In one way it is good that an author can make such a collection in his lifetime.

In another way such an attempt may not seem very auspicious, because usually a collection of this kind marks the end of one's career. The title of the *Kuliyat* itself suggests either the end of love, or the consummation of it.

I hope this volume of Javed Shaheen's work does not mean that. He is a good poet, even without the fanfare that props up both great and popular writers. This optimism is also rooted in another paradox – in the title of this grand collection of poems.

Ishq Tamam is a verbal constructions neither Urdu nor Persian. In Persian, and in recognised Urdu, it should have been *Ishq-e-Tmam*. This sounds more like a Punjabi construction. And it is here that hope lies. Javed Shaheen is an adventurer, not only in the realm of imagination – he is an iconoclast in form and diction also. An Urdu title for an Urdu collection of poetry is such an adventure. Javed Shaheen is perhaps trying to acclimatise Urdu and bring a local flair and an indigenous tone to a “foreign” idiom.

So much for the title in *Ishq Tama*. Spread over 656 pages, the lifelong aesthetic journey of one of our most consistent and serious poets is covered. Serious in the sense that he takes poetry as a genuine instrument of dissecting the soul and exploring the world.

His poetic adventure starts in 1952 with the publication of a few ghazals. Then follow *Zakhm-e-Musalsal Kit Hari Sha'kh, Subh se Mulaquat* – prefaced by Munnu Bhai, *Mehrab Mein Aankhen, Naikiyon se Khali Shehr and Jagta Lamha*.

He tries to write in the common man's language. His Urdu is deliberately and expressly devoid of Persianised diction, which in

fact, guarantees success even to a mediocre work Javed Shaheen does not fall back upon tried methods and age-old conventions to attract the reader. It is the straight forward, stark realism and unselfconsciousness that lend force to his poetry, by removing hindrances in communication otherwise created by a highly formalised diction. This results in such matter of fact statements as this one from *Gum Ho Jane Wala Mausam*.

*I am suspected
because the footsteps of unemployment
reach my house.
The birds know
who the thief is
but are afraid to be the witness*

It is not the diction, but the force of emotion that makes poetry, not only in the prose poem but even in the ghazal – such as this one:

*The current was so strong that I could not even see
when the bank gave way
which way he turned is not sure
though I had seen him going some distance.*

It is the prose-poem that really benefits from such an approach to language. It appears that it was not so much Javed Shaheen who looked for a new idiom, but it was in fact the prose-poem which sought him. It lends such spontaneity to his poetic effusions, which appear to fall in a regular torrent. For example, the poem *Mujhe Zamin Mein Utar Do* (Lower me down into the Earth), which begins:

*Lower me down into the earth;
The earth needs me
The earth needs good seed*

And it ends on this note;

*I will not die
The good seed never dies.*

Javed Shaheen wrote most of his poetry at a time when it was very difficult to utter a word. Pens were confiscated and the tongue was sealed. Hypocrisy ruled everywhere and the spectres of falsehood paraded the streets as the prophets of truth.

Javed Shaheen never flinched, and this poem, which refers to the most highly sanctified slogan *Chadar* and *Chardwari* speaks daggers. It is entitled *Adalat Ko Kaise Samjhaon* (How should I explain to the court?)

*Early in the morning
 As I opened the gate of the house
 On the threshold
 There was the corpse of the dawning day.
 Unclaimed corpse,
 Wrapped in a dirty sheet.
 I wonder who
 In the dead of the night
 Had thrown it in front of my house.
 I am a respectable citizen;
 I have no quarrel with anyone in the locality.
 I do not even speak with a loud voice.
 Then to pester me
 Who did such a mischief?
 The police suspects me.
 Leaving the corpse naked it has taken it in possession. It insists
 This is the same sheet
 Which my wife
 Wrapped round her body
 When she had appeared in the court
 And was absolved
 Of the charge of vulgarity.
 I confess
 The police are right
 But I am also not to blame.
 I had in fact made of this sheet
 The boundary of my house
 Then the same sheet an extremely destitute person borrowed from
 me.
 In the name of God,
 How then should I explain to the court
 That what big treachery
 Has been done to me
 In the name of God.*

Javed Shaheen's poetry is the anguished voice of a tortured soul. He has no care for formality or decorum. He wants to register his protest, against things both temporal and eternal. He believes that poetry is no more an outburst; it is a guiding light. And so, perhaps in spite of himself, his poetry carries a didactic note.



❧ Chapter 65 ❧

Lost for Words



Pakistani Literature has, or should, come of age by now, after 45 years of the creation of Pakistan. It is genuinely expected that this literature must have developed a visibly distinct identity by this time and that an introduction of it to world outside was already overdue.

The Pakistan Academy of Letters has done well to think of such an introductory anthology and finally bring out a fair sample of some of our literature, 'multi-facet (ed) and multilingual' as it is. The rather small volume of 214 pages in all, representing literary writings from Urdu, major regional language (Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Balochi), and English, it introduces 13 Urdu writers (Iqbal, Faiz, Rashid, Meeraji, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, with a poem and a story, Majid Amjad, Aziz Hamid Madani, Munir Niazi, Sa'adat Hassan Manto, Ghulam Abbas, Intezar Hussain, Khaleda Hussain and a feature on Abdullah Hussain, which is a sort of critical commentary), two writers from Pashto (Fazle Haq Shaida and Mohammad Nawaz Tahir), three from Sindh (Shaikh Ayaz, Jamal ud Din Abro and Abdul Qadir Junejo), two from Baluchistan (Murad Sahir and Maimatullah Giehki), while Punjabi is represented only by Bulleh Shah. Four poets have been selected from among those who write in English (Daud Kamal, Taufiq Rafat, Maki Kureishi and Kaleem Omar); 25 writers in all, with an introduction and a feature by the Guest Editor.

Genre-wise, the break up is, 14 poets, with 36 poetical pieces, 5 short stories, commentary on one novel, an interview with Faiz and excerpts from the essays of Iqbal. This is obviously an extremely insufficient representation of Pakistani literature, particularly in the light of the Editor's claim that "Pakistani Literature preceded the emergence of the state by many centuries." The collection gives not the slightest idea of those, perhaps "lost centuries" of Pakistani literature.

The selection is more or less arbitrary and preferences are generally subjective. Still, some evaluations beat the imagination. Majeed Amjad, for example has been represented with 11 poems while Meeraji's there with only one. On the other hand, Josh and Hafeez Jallundhri are conspicuous by their absence, particularly the latter who has been virtually the only Poet Laureate of Pakistan and the author of the national anthem. One wonders that Iqbal is there, but neither Hali nor Syed find a berth, neither do any of the masters, including Mir and Ghalib. Abdullah Hussain has been singled out for a special feature but Qura'at ul Ain Haider finds not even a passing reference, though *Aag Ka Darya* at least is a Pakistani novel. That she migrated back to India should not matter, since migrations are quite common, and a man like T. S. Eliot who migrated to England is still found in American anthologies.

There are certain literary genres which distinguish Pakistani literature, specially Urdu literature, from other literatures. These include Ghazal, Qasida and Rubai which though mentioned in the introductory note, *Raison d etre*, find no room in the selection. Besides, no specimens have been given from humorous writings (and Pakistani literature abounds in them, both in its prose and poetry), while the discipline of criticism has been totally ignored. Similar indifference has been shown towards travelogues, which have been so popular of late. There is no mention even of the Progressive Writers Association which has had such a tremendous impact on the whole of Pakistani literature in all the languages of Pakistan. On the other hand, excerpts from the essays of Iqbal have been included, though neither are they rated as literature nor have they had any impact upon it. Also the Persian writings from Pakistan have been totally ignored. While the anthology finds only Bulleh Shah (an eighteenth century sage) to represent Punjabi literature, Shah Abdullah Latif Bhitai and Khushal Khan have not been considered at all. On the English side the absence of Bapsi Sidhwa is surprising. There is also a passing reference to "the ideological basis of the state." It would have been appropriate to explain what that means, since the anthology has been basically compiled for foreign readers who may not be aware of our slogans.

The anthology in fact seems to have been written solely with the western reader in mind and only that poetry and fiction has been included here which bears a stamp of western literature in content as well as in form. Perhaps the approach is not wholly unjustified. But

the anthology should have mentioned the basis of determining its priorities. Instead of a long discussion on literature's relation to life in general it would have been more worthwhile to point out the factors which concern Pakistani literature directly.

The situation in Pakistani is that its culture, as well as its literature have even been a part of what is generally known as Indo-Iranian tradition. After Partition in 1947 borders with India were sealed. This resulted in the sudden break of the Indo-Iranian tradition. The two seem to have been so closely linked that though our relations with Iran remained strong, and even improved, with the loss of the Indian dimension, the Persian element also suffered. Consequently, writers in Pakistan found an easier access to western literature as London and New York became more easily approachable than Delhi and Lucknow. While literary links with India suffered, the *flow* of literature from the west gathered momentum. Pakistani literature has been radically influenced by western literature. At least the first issue of "Pakistani literature" should have highlighted the main features of this literature.

Another aspect of our literature has been the ever growing interest in the liberation struggles of the Third World, whose literature has been very popular here and has been translated on a large scale. The third major influence on our literature has been the impact of repeated Martial Laws on our sensibility. This is reflected strongly in our writings.

These observations, however, are not meant to find fault with this anthology. It is actually this anthology which has diverted attention to these omissions. The first issue of 'Pakistani Literature' has succeeded in its aim of introducing Pakistani writing to a wider audience and suggesting what is still left to be introduced. The Pakistan Academy of Letters deserves a hand for opening up new avenue for our critics and researchers that may lead to a healthy literary debate, instead of literary sectarianism, with which we suffer so much.

❧ Chapter 66 ❧

No Buyers?



We have not yet succeeded in developing a tradition of the theatre, though stage performances have been quite popular here. The commercial theatre never rose above cheap repartee and inane phraseology. Horseplay has been the main feature of the theatre that flourishes at places like Lahore's Alhamra which, ironically came into existence to promote the performing arts under the auspices of the National Council of the Arts. It always seeks a non-issue to create a boisterous humour providing some entertainment to a public grown affluent over the years but having no taste for good entertainment.

The problem with the theatre is that it cannot avoid confrontation with the establishment, since it always concerns itself with real issues. It may be the tragedy of Sophocles or the comedy of Pristophanes, the dramatist has always taken up the real problems that worry his public. He may seek reconciliation like Aeschylus, or advocate total rejection of the existing order, like Euripides, the artist never avoids the issues. Even when he claims no insight and has no presumption to convey a message, the dramatist, like Shakespeare, never finches from exploring the confounding reality.

In classical drama we have very little that may be called a farce, though farce has been used by the playwrights as an effective technique of exposing the oddities of life. In a climate of heavy censorship, which may be official or social (imposed by the bigoted custodians of morality and faith), farce and buffoonery may be presented effectively.

Sometimes acute sense of insecurity also becomes an instrument of censorship. Such a situation prevailed in England after the Civil War.

English society had crossed a watershed in the mid-seventeenth century. Religious and political strife had plunged the nation into the Civil War. After that there was a great scare of talking about issues. The Restoration theatre thus became non-serious, frivolous and unintelligent, reducing itself to mere amusement rather than a form of art.

It heavily banked upon songs, epigrams and satires verging on bawdiness. There were too many “counter-attractions” heaped with vice and absurdity, marked with thoughtlessness and buffoonery. But there was one redeeming factor; the people still cared about the country. They avoided controversy not so much for fear of retaliation but for the stability and integrity of the country. Dissent in fact provoked a wish for harmony. The Civil War disaster led to political understanding. This unfortunately did not happen here, not even after the debacle of Dhaka.

It was under such circumstances that Brecht and Lorca, who had exploited the convention of the folk to reveal the bitter truth, came to the rescue of our young intellectuals. But Brecht and Lorca had the good fortune of inheriting folk traditions of the theatre. No such tradition existed here. Therefore, at times, it becomes extremely difficult to create the delicate balance between buffoonery and serious business, since too much of buffoonery may injure the art and too much of seriousness may expose the creators of the play of the wrath of the censor.

A *mirasi* is surely less threatened than a satirist belonging to the middleclass. Street theatre has, to some extent, succeeded in creating and maintaining this delicate balance. *Ajoka* has already acquired a reputation and has secured a place for itself in “The New Wave Theatre” during the last decade or so.

Shahid Mahmood Nadeem has done a good job by publishing the plays performed by *Ajoka* in a book form. It is a very significant publication primarily because there hardly exists any tradition of publishing plays in our country, and secondarily, the book is in Punjabi, the language in which the plays were performed.

The author means business and wants to see these plays performed in streets and villages throughout the country. These are, as he emphasises, ideological plays, their purpose being social rather than literary.

These have already been successfully presented at various places, including halls and improvised stages at street corners. The plays included in this book, *Khasman Khaniyan are*, *Baree*, *Chulha*, *Jhalli Kithe Jaway*, *Lappar and Sharm Di Gal and Dhi Rani*; plays which have already received general applause.

All these plays relate only to one issue: that of oppression against women who, according to the author, have reached the state of acute misery as a result of various policies and practices initiated and supported by General Zia’s martial law.

These plays give a comprehensive account, imaginatively recreated, of the various aspects of exploitation of women in Pakistan.

The subjects treated include the Hudood Ordinances, the Law of Evidence, Dowry, Family Laws Ordinance, burning of women through the device of exploding stoves and the unwanted girl child.

Woman in our society is the most exploited of all the exploited classes. She suffers two-fold misery, at the hands of the exploiting classes as well as the victims of this exploitation. The man who suffers humiliation and frustration at the hand of others, finds woman the most convenient object of contempt and means of catharsis. Woman is thus reduced to personified misery.

She thus symbolises the downtrodden. These plays debunk the age-odd cliché of women being the honour of man, of the paradise lying under the feet of the mother, and the rest.

The object of the publication of the book is to launch a street theatre movement for which the author has given practical tips, specially about the ways to deal with the problems of actors, stage, censor and financing, so that any small group of motivated people may perform these plays.

Khasman Khaniyan is not simply a book of plays on a topical subject. It is a landmark in the development of people's theatre in Pakistan and a significant contribution to Punjabi literature.

The presentation of these plays on the stage has, however, raised some doubts about their popularity with the masses. The plays heavily draw upon the western drama, particularly the absurd drama of Ionesco where the pantomime, the puppet show, the farce and sometimes the ballet, have been mixed in such a way that a stylised Western type of play is created which our people may not relish.

The Brechtian technique of removing the barrier between the stage and the audience, the actors and the spectators is also used to secure a greater and more active participation of the spectators.

The device also needs to be adapted to the local taste. The need is to bring these plays close to our own folk tradition of puppet and village theatre effecting a kind of synthesis that Brecht and Lorca achieved so successfully.

Surely there is no dearth of talent and our playwrights are quite capable of delivering the goods. *Ajoka* have shown that such an activity can be least expensive and the only requirement is the motivation and the will to do that.

❧ Chapter 67 ❧

Night Like The Sun



Ram Lal is a senior fiction writer but he is comparatively less known in Pakistan. He already has to his credit about a dozen of short story collections and half a dozen novels, besides two travelogues related to Pakistan and Europe. He was born on March 3, 1923 at Mianwali. Like other writers of the sub-continent he suffered the traumatic experience of partition, and like them too he made this experience and its aftermath the subject of his fiction. One does not simply lose a piece of land in the process of migration, a whole way of life, a whole culture is lost.

This change of residence or cultural change is not due only to migration alone. Rather, culture itself is a dynamic process and is in a state of perpetual flux. But in normal circumstances this change is not perceptible since the process is slow. Migration shocks with an abrupt change of old traditions and established social order seem to disappear in no time. Man feels thrown into an absurd situation where all those values, the system of rights and duties which formed his being and which he cherished all his life, lose significance. Modern scientific age also creates such abrupt situation. The quality of living changes and the whole mode of life alters under inevitable compulsions. Man finds himself suspended between two worlds. Held light by the bounds of the old world, he is forced ahead by the now demands of life. He at times loses all sense of direction.

A night like the sun deals with this state of transition and the problems created by it. This is an aesthetic study of the changing role in shifts and the erosion of values. Though this is a very common subject and almost every writer of our age has dealt with it in one way or the other, Ram Lal has made a good story out of it and has given it a good treatment.

A night like the sun is the story of a girl who assumes the responsibilities of the house, of her brothers and sisters. She is over thirty years of age, but her responsibilities do not allow her even to think of her own marriage. She is more concerned about getting her

younger sisters married and see her brothers settled in life. But when she ultimately marries, she finds it almost impossible to live like an ordinary housewife. The marriage thus proves a tragic failure.

Symbolically, the subject of this novelette is the status of woman in a fast changing social order. It is no more that old traditional society where her position was already determined and which could not be questioned or challenged. She had only one well-defined position and one attitude to life which she carried from her parents' house to her husband's house, and this never changed. But Sushma has three different attitudes towards Vimal Kalra. She tries to come closer to him when alone. But in the presence of her office colleagues she would put on business like airs, while in the presence of her bosses she would pretend to be totally indifferent. The woman is no more the mere "grace" of the house. Now she is a pretty face and a pair of beautiful eyes. She is an intelligent and efficient partner in life as well as a sharer in the responsibilities of her husband's life, has now developed new dimensions which allow no simple fixed response.

On entering practical life the woman has lost much of her womanliness. She has acquired a self-confidence that even gives her domination over men. In this story this superiority of the woman has been presented with reference to age-difference. Sushma is older than her frustrated lover by five years and her husband by three years. She is thus a senior partner in both the situations. Even otherwise, too, a woman is more sensible and mature than a man of her own age. Modern woman not only dominates man, she is also rebellious, as Sushma, who demands:

"A change both in the law and in custom is inevitable. The woman can more reconcile to the traditional slavish life."

On the other hand, man still looks at the woman only as an object of pleasure, as shown in the novel by the experiences of Sushma's sister, Vadana, that she comes across as a sales girl. She has to go from door to door and encounters men who are almost invariable lustful. She relates these experiences in a long letter to her sister.

Then there is Menher Thakur who comes from a village but has become an IAS officer, and is a typical bureaucrat—egotistical, high-brow and authoritative. He has pulled himself out of the old world to the extent of abandoning his village, his parents, and even his wife, to whom he was betrothed in childhood, but he has not yet become so enlightened as to accept a professional, educated, pretty and emancipated woman as his wife. He is a completely alienated man who is cut off from both the old and the new worlds. He has also

“Not yet”, that is important. The world is changing and change it is must. The title of the novelette, *A night like the sun*, refers to this optimism.

❧ Chapter 68 ❧

The Grand Old Dame of Urdu Literature



Qur'at-ul-Ain Haider is an eminent Urdu novelist. She has earned this distinction mainly because her novels are directly concerned with the most important contemporary issues particularly a thorough examination of the predicament of the Muslims of the subcontinent. Vast and profound study, coupled with direct personal experience and observation, lend an authenticity and to her comments that is a distinctive mark of her fiction. She is not only fully conversant with the latest trends and techniques in literature, she has perfect command of the medium. Problems of the Indian Muslims, authenticity of observation and a board perspective, and command of the medium are the three pillars of her art.

In her earlier novels, due to a specific atmosphere and a restricted background, her approach appears to be constricted and it is not possible to share her emotional reaction beyond a certain point, but even in these earliest exercises she makes the novel an instrument of understanding life. In these novels attitude to life is basically idealistic, and as a consequence, pessimistic. She considers suffering to be an essential condition of human existence. It is an eternal and unalterable fact. Suffering to her, is almost of the order of the first cause. Like George Eliot she believes that suffering is inevitable and man is utterly helpless before it. Thus, *Kare Jehan Daraz Hai* begins on this note:

The virtuous servants of God spent their lives in singing hymns and offering prayers, worship and social service. Neither the world changed nor the sequence of cause and effect. And the Angles go on recording imputing uncalled for charges. They never turn to the poor earthly creature to ask him whether he was 'Ashria or Mautazala, La Adri, Jabria or Qadria, a believer of a sceptic, because nothing makes any difference. Up there is a moving finger which writes and moves on.

It means that man is absolutely helpless. Still she insists to understand why it is so. All evidence is against man being a free agent. Her ancestors wandered the earth dictated by a historical determinism:

The progeny of Zaid Shahid scattered up to Georgia in order to escape further persecution. It was just a historical accident. It was quite likely that a few of the elders would have joined the establishment and then after 750 A.D. they would have to escape to Spain along with other members of the Omayyad party to avoid persecution by the Abassides... and thus today we would have been Roman Catholic Spaniards.

There was another party which consisted of the Tartars:

These Tartars had set out for a nightly ambush of Moscow. On the way the Amir thought that the expedition to Moscow was full of hazards, and so reached Bijnaur.

A third party decided for Turkey:

Had we not turned to India from Turkey, today we would have been the communist subjects of Russia.

But all is not so compulsive. Certain things are in man's control also. While narrating the miseries of her ancestors, she notes:

The risk of permanently associating with the party in opposition is obvious.

The great grand ancestor rebelled, and lost his life.

In spite of all this evidence, she adheres to this theory also:

How history repeats itself with this uniformity!

These contradictory positions about men's estate can be explained in two ways: One is that when man sees himself in a cosmic prospective, he finds himself weak and insignificant in this unsympathetic, rather cruel world. He is always at the mercy of circumstances, buffeted by storms, threatened by the wild beasts, seeking livelihood from the hard stony land.

But seen, not as an individual, but as the whole race, man appears to be an indomitable force. His collective strength moves mountains, harnesses big storms and subjugates fierce beasts. Thus, collectively man wields unlimited power. There seems to be no limit to his capabilities and the might of the universe pales into insignificance before his will.

As an individual man is no more than a 'quintessence of dust', a mean forked animal, absolutely helpless and miserable. It is healthy to worry about collective issues, such as to think of the menacingly growing over-population on the earth or to be concerned about large scale unemployment or the weaknesses of the education system. To be always worried about personal problems may be morbid. Persecutions have been common in the world and one must be genuinely concerned about them. But persecution mania is a disease and must be guarded against.

The other reason behind this confused thinking is perhaps the despicable state of the Muslim society itself. For almost a thousand years we have hardly made an advance in any field. In spite of all hollow slogans and flattering compliments that we pay to ourselves and our ways, we have hardly maintained the progressive stance that we created some eight to nine hundred years ago. Qur'at-ul-Ain brings home this point with the help of the following illustration:

The author toured Khurasan in the company of Shahinshah Mohammad Reza Shah and Farah Pehlvi Shahbano of Iran in 1970 by a helicopter. Caravans still pass through the barren plains and rocks of this region. Cities with all the modern comforts and amenities have emerged. But the gowned scholars of the schools and mosques of Meshad, Toos and Neshapur and the green turbaned old and the young telling their beads and the Khanams wrapped in sheets still remind that there is hardly a moment's space between the twelfth and the twentieth centuries... a line of mules is going through a pass and men wearing shalwars and turbans are riding on them.

In the advances countries of the world the travellers do not see time arrested in this way. Here the old and the new stay absolutely apart. There is no continuity, no progress. The past and the present appear equally readymade or perhaps translated.

Reference to *Kare Jehan Daraz Hai* is necessary in any study of Qur'at-ul-Ain Haider since this book marks a turning point in her literary career and is a landmark in her study of the march of history. The egotistical complex in which she had been caught during the formative years of her creative endeavour, from 12947 to 1978, now appears to have been largely controlled after this autobiographical novel. Her latest, *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman* is a different novel. She has come a long way from *Mere Bhi Sanam Khane*. There is a better and

clear understanding of the issues now. About *Kare Jehan Daraz Hai* (1978) she observed:

In England and America autobiographical literature collective novel, writer's notebook and the family Saga are being printed on a large scale nowadays.

Whereas:

These genres have received little attention from us. Specially family Saga is a very popular in England now because the family no more exist there.

In fact we become conscious of things when they cease to exist. Family sagas are becoming popular as the family is on the way out. In the same way tradition had become a passion with the writers when it was seen disappearing. Similarly *Qur'at-ul-Ain* takes on status and blood now when these are losing significance. She cannot be blamed for that. *Qur'at-ul-Ain* belongs to an old stock and enjoys a status. She can claim distinction and is rightly proud of it. But that social order is now falling apart. This makes her at times nostalgic and at times sad. She cannot bear to see the old grandeur die out so suddenly. That is why the earlier novels have been reduced to a longing for the past and a deep sense of loss. She remembers the advice of Ralph Russell that she should write something like *Life and Times*. Thus interrupting her fictional career she embarked on a true story. The autobiographical novel, *Kare Jehan Daraz Hai*, is the last attempt at self expression and ego satisfaction. After this she seems to have overcome her emotional complexes. *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman* marks the acceptance of the new state of affairs. Here the concern is not personal or racial. Rather she is motivated by national compulsions.

This change in attitude has not come abruptly. Right from the beginning her fiction carried the seeds of this inner conflict. Personal confusions and a close circle of friends cannot conceal the excruciating anxiety that emerges from a larger human concern. Right from the beginning *Qur'at-ul-Ain* has evinced an ambivalent attitude towards India. On the one hand she is fascinated with ancient India. On the other, she feels strongly about the misery of modern India. From *Mere Bhi Sanam Khane* to *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman* her novels portray a _____ of India that is marked with an atmosphere of extreme tolerance and pleasant liberalism. The class that these novels deal with is above the distinction of caste and creed. There are no Hindus, Muslims or Christians here. Even Indian, Angle-Indian and

English nationalities seem to merge into one another. This is in fact the India of the upper class whose very class is its religion as well as its culture. Hindus celebrate *Muharam*, Muslims participate in *Holi* and *Dewali* and all join in the festivities of Christmas. At times one can see the glimpses of ancient India, Mughal grandeur and the charms of the kingdom of Oudh in the world of this pre-independence elitist generation. Qur'at-ul-Ain seeks herself in this chaos of civilisations. This lands her into the cobweb of blood and pedigree. Even here a contradiction is quite visible. The ancestral tradition was that of no compromise with those in power and they consistently remained in the opposite camp. But the recent generation have been the agents of the establishment. I.C.S. and P.C.S. members of the family are mentioned with a note of pride in their status. Even those in or Accounts services are mentioned as C.S.Ps.

Kare Jehan Daraz Hai carries the picture of a small rather insignificant road with the name-plate of Sajjad Haider Yeldram big name. Qur'at-ul-Ain does not protest. This is enough to satisfy her sense of ancestral honour. But she is flabbergasted when talking of the communist members of the family. This conflict makes the subject of her fourth novel, *A'kher-e-Shab ke Hamsafar* which is chemically as well as technically the weakest of her novels. It is rather shallow, and its shallowness in fact tells upon its _____.



❧ Chapter 69 ❧

The Way of Modern Urdu Poetry



Had the strength of our social texture and its organisation been of the same order as that in the west, poetry and literature would have also attained a higher level in the minds, and the comprehensive awareness that literature has provide would have been easy to appreciate. This would also be realised level of the poetry of an age does not fully represent the totality of life unless universal contemporary influences are assimilated into the frame-work of our own civilisation.

This is how Aziz Hamid Madani, the veteran poet and critic, sums up his survey of our literary attitudes after a detailed analysis of local and foreign influences on literature in his book, Modern Urdu Poetry which in fact is the revised version of his 1988 Baba-e-Urdu Memorial lecture. The survey, which rightly starts with Sir Syed and Hali, mainly concentrates on the poets who matured and rose to eminence between 1930 and 1950 (roughly).

Mr. Madani, born in 1922, himself matured during this period as a writer, poet, critic and translator. Moreover, his masters in English literature justly qualifies him to lake stock of the progress of Urdu poetry, first during the colonial rule and then under western influences which came through the writers who had either studied in the west or gleaned from western literatures, more specifically from English literature. Such a study is already due and it is appropriate to make it now, after a century of propagation and practice of modern trends in Urdu literature when Syed and Hali sounded the new note late in the nineteenth century.

Also, such a study, in its historical context, will help in indicating the lines that our literature may take in the 21st century. Mr. Madani has himself been in the main stream of modern Urdu poetry which he is now evaluating. His evaluation is both authentic and objective as he is making this comment now when almost half a

century has passed since these trends dominated the Urdu literary scene. In this survey he aims at "Making an assessment whether Urdu poetry has made any progress as a medium of expression in unifying the sphere of feelings, elements of thought and the internal and external life and putting these into a unity". He starts the belief that poetry is nothing except a record of the ways in which an age attempts to explore life and which shows its commitment to the good and evil of civilisation and history.

The professed aim and the title of the book, unfortunately, prove deceptive and misleading. In fact the book is neither about modern Urdu poetry nor succeeds in showing how various influences have been assimilated into a comprehensive world view. It may be more a survey of the background of Urdu literature. Even here it will be more correct to see it as a study of the background of western poetry.

Madani has surveyed the history of western thought from Plato to Croce. He displays a sound knowledge of philosophy and very effectively and meaningfully relates it to the changing sensibility from age to age. But so far as Urdu poetry is concerned, he has concentrated only on one dimension of the nature of influence, that coming from the west, at the cost of the other, the indigenous and thus the more relevant, the oriental tradition which is largely scholastic and finds its best expression in Ghalib. Even the mystic influences on modern Urdu poetry have been laid at the door of western thinkers, such as Kant, Hegel and Schelling. The study thus becomes lopsided and leaves much to be desired.

A lot of space has been given to Iqbal. No doubt Iqbal is a towering figure in Urdu poetry. But he hardly fits in any tradition. His is a case that can be seen as an exception to the rule. Apart from the tradition of social commitment coming down from Hali and Akbar, he does not seem to belong to any defined tradition. His approach is eclectic. Neither does he subscribe to a specific tradition nor leave one behind him. He has no mentors and no followers. He is a long figure, like Milton, who stands alone in his grandeur. But the comparison, however, cannot be taken very far. It will be very difficult to derive a coherent system of philosophy from his poetry. Rather, the very idea that any poetry can yield a system of philosophy is extremely doubtful. F.R. leaves asserted not if paraphrased the poetry of Wordsworth will be reduced to an ordinary statement which no one will ever consider as anything philosophic.

Madani has brought out the western ideas reflected in modern Urdu Poetry as well as general desire to adapt western poetic techniques, linguistic habits and the use of myth and symbol with the help of illustrations. But these illustrations are no more than echoes of such trends in isolated verses. There has been no attempt to trace out how our psyche, or our sensibility has been modified by these influences and how this affected the change of expression in modern Urdu poetry.

It is quite natural to assume that some universal contemporary influences must have been assimilated into our poetic tradition. There is a definite need to explore them. Perhaps our greatest failure so far has been the failure to define the philosophy, the complex of ideas, which underlies our national, and even private, responses. No such philosophy has yet been identified. Modern Urdu Poetry is the first party of Madani's exhaustive paper, and so is naturally inconclusive. Let us hope that the second party will throw some light on the complexion of modern Urdu poetry and its relationship to our own heritage as well as our debt to modern western civilisation.



❧ Chapter 70 ❧

The Big Drop: Qur'at-ul-Ain Haider's Anti Climax



Chandni Begum, Qura't-ul-Ain's latest novel, is a total disappointment and an utter failure. As one starts, there seems to be a suggestion in the initial pages that for the first time she has decided to write about the downtrodden classes. But soon the people from the lower ranks of society assume an elitist context. Bela marries a decadent romantic revolutionary of the upper class. Chandni Begum is discovered to have descended from an old stock and is about to be absorbed into the old order once again. The ordinary people still loom in the background, in the outhouses and around the holy shrines. But in this novel they have been placed much further away than in the earlier novels. Their faces are almost blurred by the distance and their voices are more than whispers.

The themes as well as the techniques utilised in the latest novel are only an echo of the earlier fiction of Qur'at-ul-Ain Haider. But here it is not at all clear what she is driving at. There are fake Rishis and 'genuine' Pirs; there are entrepreneurs like Bahar Sahab and shrewd businessmen like the Elephant dealer. These characters come from such diverse, rather antagonistic, backgrounds that it becomes impossible to put them in a context and build a well-knit story on them. As a consequence the characters and situations do not create a complete whole, a cogent plot, an integrated structure, which has been a distinct merit of her earlier novels. Though the same stream of consciousness technique of narration is used here once again, the result is more rhapsodic than unitary. For instance, Bahar Sahib has nothing to do with Bela, while Bela herself becomes irrelevant, as far as her parents are concerned, once she leaves them to marry and shift to Red Rose, her new home. Similarly, it is very difficult for Dhondi to adjust in the pattern of the fiction. Qur'at-ul-Ain had previously attempted to write the tragedy of man beset with misery and

misfortune. She greatly succeeded in *Aag ka Darya*. But there the transmigration of souls came to her rescue. This was further helped by the relationship between Gotham and Champa who stood for the primal Man/Woman. This lent an impressive unity to the structure of the novel. In *Chandni Begum* there is no such saving device. No such situation develops. So far as the social map of India is concerned, she had already written so much about the shrines, the saints and their miracles that no addition to it was possible without the risk of falling into meaningless repetition. As a consequence, these descriptions appear out of place and even clumsy in this novel. In *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman*, the shrines exist in their own right and have a significance of their own apart from the exotic atmosphere they invoke. These shrines, with their fake or genuine Pirs, represent man's urge for and his fascination with the unknown, the other. It is no mere superstition for quite a large number of devotees, as many of the saints do answer some of the most sincere and deep rooted needs of the folks who are not always illiterate or stupid. The world of the shrines in the earlier novel comes before us in fact as a miniature society.

At the same time this world reflects the conflicts and compromises of the world of science and superstition, projecting and analysing various dimensions of human psyche which pose questions that are so close to man's heart. There are the same shrines and the same Ba'le Mian in *Chandni Begum* also, but here they appear to be rather out of place.

The latest novel is chaos. Every character, every story stands out Independent of the rest. Their mutual relevance, if any, is mere coincidence, without any logic or probability. They make no coherent picture. Gulab Mogra, Chambeli, Bela and Bahar Saheb do not fit in the pattern. Even if critical ingenuity succeeds in discovering a design, many episodes will have to be ignored. Many of the characters and incidents seem to prop up from nowhere. Bahar Saheb suddenly achieves international status and the elephant dealer Taher Ali appears like the *Deus ex-Machina*. Then, one wonders what the Jewish and Parsi families of Bombay are doing here. The whole story is built on chance and accident. As soon as she finalises his engagement, the mother of Qambar Ali meets a sudden death. Similarly *Chandni Begum* is suddenly engulfed in the flames sparked off by a accidental fire. All this appears like the scenario of some cheap vulgar film. It is very difficult to seek rhyme and reason for these events.

Usual formula stuff has been introduced to gratify popular taste, for example, a common singing girl (domni) is married to a decadent aristocrat and that too in the manner of cheap films; a half-mad noble marries an English woman, flogs her, and then she runs away with a band of eunuchs; a family of poor bards has hopes of inheriting a big fortune which is dashed down by the sudden appearance of a claimant not mentioned before. Then, an attempt is made to capitalise upon burning topical issues like Ram Janam Bhoomi/Babri Mosque. This does not come off at all well, for it lacks scientific analysis.

This novel can at best be described as a personal diary recording impressions about certain incidents and individuals close to the author's heart, to recall in moments of loneliness and frustration in order to soften their bitterness-or, perhaps, it is only nostalgia.

Some of the characters in *Chandni Begum* have been directly picked up from the previous novels. Qur'at-ul-Ain has thus drawn upon her past achievements, complimenting herself upon her triumph like an aged actor who unable to invent any more, repeats the old gimmicks that have previously been assured applause.

This novel, *Chandni Begum*, is going to have an adverse effect on its author's reputation as fiction writer of the first order.

She has brought together everything here that has clicked in her earlier writing. She is not thinking any more. Only ruminating.

So far as the title, *Chandni Begum*, is concerned, *Chandni Begum* first makes her appearance on page 16 of the novel and makes her exit at page 164 when she meets death in a big fire. The chief character thus remains on the scene for only 148 pages of the total 424 pages of the novel, and that too intermittently, at times no more than in glimpses. If at all, the entire function of this character seems to show the misery of poor relations in a class ridden society, and that with economic disparity even blood loses value, and mere belonging to an ancient stock, even if equipped with high education, is hardly a passport to the elitist world. This character cannot be assigned a symbolic function either, since, in the first place, its role is so limited that if it did not form the title of the book, it would have been considered a minor character. Similarly, it cannot be seen as a catalytic agent since it has no significance either for technique or for its contribution to the plot. It is remembered no more than as an old

acquaintance. *Chandni Begum* comes to the minds of those who have known her as a casual visitor.

It appears that Qur'at-ul-Ain is left with nothing to say. The problems that had been worrying her were, for her, ultimately stated in *Gardish-e-Rang-Chaman*. *Aag ka Darya* saw her through an excruciating urge for identity. But in the close section of that novel a chap sentimentality marred the beauty of an otherwise brilliant attempt. Deep rooted prejudices and some of her apprehensions and reservations had found their catharsis in *Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar*, and the problems of ego were satisfactorily identified in *Kare Jahan Daraz Hai*. *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman* reflected a mature and clear mind. After that it appears that neither has she been bothered with any fresh issues, nor has she had any new insight about the old ones.

The novel, however, can be assured of success on two counts: one is the narrative skill of Qur'at-ul-Ain and her firm grasp of language and technique which show no sign of decline. She is a great teller of tales and a craftswoman par excellence. She uses the language actually spoken by the upper class in India which consists of words from Urdu, Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit, English and even French. The words and the sentences flow with a charm that is the art of her writing, though here too a falling from excellence does not escape notice since her style had attained sublimity in *Gardish-e-Rang-e-Chaman*.

The other positive element in the novel is the character of Safia Sultana which has been deliberately pushed into the background. Chandni Begum, as the title of the novel, obscures the significance of this character. Safia Sultana is the only consistent character in the novel. She enters the stage from the very first chapter and her exit, when she dies, brings the novel to its end. It is also a symbolic character and at the same time serves as the chorus in the novel. Her tragedy, which is ignored by everyone, haunts the novel. Both Chandni Begum and Bela come before us as foils of Safia Begum, one after the other. Bela is sprightly and full of vigour that is denied to Safia because of her disability, while Chandni wins everybody's sympathy which Safia's misfortune fails to arouse. Chandni and Bela act as reflectors. In fact the three lives are one, and all of them are associated with Qambar Ali. One is ignored by him, the other pesters him while the third brings death upon him. We encounter Safia Sultana at every significant turn of the novel.

Why has this character been pushed into the background and why has the author tried to underplay her role? There may be many reasons for that. But the most plausible reason appears to be the fact that perhaps the author saw her own image reflected in this silently suffering and self effacing though heroic woman (she runs a school). In order to conceal this identity and guard against unwitting sentimentalism, the character was introduced in a low key. The masochism of Safia also contains an element of self pity which may be a source of catharsis to the writer.

Artistically the novel has suffered. At the time of her death, the attention of the reader is not focused on the tragedy of Safia. This weakens the tragic effect. It happened so with Dickens and George Eliot too. Realism of art clashed with the realism of life. An attempt to be impersonal while writing about personal emotion is bound to interfere with aesthetic norms. Such a 'psychological reservation' seems to be the cause of the failure of *Chandni Begum*.



❧ Chapter 71 ❧

Urdu Novel Since Independence



The book under review is the PhD thesis of the author. This survey of the Urdu novel since Independence is a welcome addition to the rather meagre stock of research and critical work in Urdu. Criticism has been really meagre and researches much more so in Pakistan. Novel particularly has been the most neglected form in this respect. Only five critical books. Both from India and Pakistan have been mentioned in the bibliography appended to the book. This paucity of attention to novel created an impression that perhaps novel is not a very popular genre in Urdu. As pointed by Jamil-ud-Din Aali, the paucity of critical literature is mainly due to lack of interest on the part of the publishers who do not find the job lucrative enough to tempt them. The reason is a very Limited readership. A comparison with an 18th century classic is very much to the point here. Swifts Gulliver's Travels appeared in 1727. Ten thousand copies were sold out within a fortnight. Which great authors here can even dream of selling one thousand copies in a whole year. No doubt the literacy rate is very low. Even beyond that, reading taste has not been cultivated. The fault mainly lies with schools, colleges and universities. Though there is lack of interest in academies at the government level and there is little allocation of funds for education, the main responsibility ultimately lies on the educational institutions. It is a shame and must be confessed.

This latest book by Dr Khan is no less than a Lenten fare. It gives a much more reassuring picture of the state of Urdu novel than one apprehended. The book mentions over 50 novelists of Urdu with their more than hundred novels. The author feels quite satisfied with the pace of novel writing in Urdu, some of which, according to him, can be put beside the best fiction produced in the world. Moreover, Urdu novel has already made a place for itself in the international market. Urdu novels have been translated into foreign language and many Urdu novelists are based in foreign countries.

The book is, however, neither research nor criticism as such. It has been written with a pedagogical intent. A large section is devoted to the definition and elaboration of certain critical terminology, such as, plot, character, style, vision, trend, etc. Rather than a history of the Urdu novel, it can be rightly called a student's hand book, quite useful nevertheless. It provides an almost comprehensive information on the Urdu novel up to date, including apt references to the pre-Independence Urdu novel.

Similarly in evaluation, the book is not very discriminatory. One cannot question a critic's evaluation, but one expects a judicious scale of appreciation from him. It is not fair to bracket authors like Quratul Ain Haider and Abdullah Husain who are so far apart from each other in contemporaries and near contemporaries. One has to be, to say the least 'courteous', and even compromising.

Though many aspects of the novel have been mentioned, they seem to be only casually touched upon. For example, the problem of the significance of the story in the novel has not been given the importance that it merited, albeit Aristotle's contention that a writer is primarily the writer of his stories. The fact of story disappearance from the novel and its reappearance in it has been virtually bypassed, although it had been the subject of heated debates, and perhaps still is, in the literary circles.

Jamilud Din Aali's foreword to the book, though apparently not directly related to the subject of the book, is nevertheless an implied comment on its content. Aali has given the story in some detail of the political and social hurdles in the way of a writer. Not only code censor, even personal whim and political compromises created serious difficulties and frustrations to the writers. Though Aali's account cannot be verified and we have to accept him on his word, his revelations throw sufficient light on the pressures and prejudices that nettled the authors and that became the subjects of their stories.

Though a section is devoted to "vision", its relationship to the novel has not been properly discussed. It appears that the author has taken the novel to be an autonomous activity not much related to life. For the same reason Progressive Writers Movement has not been considered important enough by the author.

Similarly a section deals with the environment. But environment is not the subject of fiction. Its subject is the sensibility created by the environment. The author emphasises in his introductory remarks that

“a genre which finds its direction shows that it is on the path of progress and this augurs well for it”. But this direction has not been indicated in the book nor have we been told that Urdu novel has yet to find its direction. The psycho-social fact has been mentioned in the most generalised terms. No attempt has been made to discuss it with reference to a specific novel. For instance, *Aag Ka Darya* has been described as a trend-setter. It is analytical and explorative. But what it analyses and what it explores has not been discussed. Obviously Quratul Ain Haider is concerned with the question of identity, particularly the Muslim identity. This issue was raised by the consciousness of a separate national identity fast growing in the minds of the Indian Muslims at that time. In the same way it has been remarked that style keeps changing. But no effort has been made to relate the stylistic change to the changes in social setup ultimately creating a change in social consciousness. The history of literature in fact is the history of the progress of sensibility which has been totally ignored by the author.

With all its drawbacks, however, the book can be very useful for the students of Urdu novel and more so for any would be researcher.



❧ Chapter 72 ❧

Growing Demand For Urdu Fiction in the West



Urdu short story has already made a rich for itself in the international monuments of literature. Almost every passing day sees an anthology of Urdu short either published or in the process of publication in various languages of the east and the west. There is a growing interest in Urdu literature not only that coming from Pakistan and India, but also the literature now being produced outside the sub-continent. There can be many reasons for that.

One reason for the demand of Urdu literature in foreign countries is the large scale immigration of Urdu speaking people into these countries. Urdu, whether written in Arabic or Deonagri script, is the languages of the sub-continent and best reflects the culture and character of the people of this area. Not very long ago people in the west had fantastic ideas about the people living in this part of the world as if they were some aborigine living in the hollow trunks of the trees and covering their bodies with fig leaves. To be more serious, what interested the west particularly was the supposedly erotic character of the east. This lead has been a treasure house of many esoteric traditions, now so captivating for the west Besides, joint family system, ethic ties, rituals and rites, the subjugation of woman and her devotion to man as a demi-god, and the authoritative attitude of a strongly patriarchal society have been specially attractive to the bewildered and inquisitive modern man.

Since people from this area are settling in large numbers in the western countries, there is a great interest and need of knowing the habits and conventions of these people. Moreover, many universities in foreign countries have introduced Urdu programmes in their curricula.

Apart from this cross-cultural interest. Urdu short story has drawn the attention of readers and critics in its own right. Though it started under the influence of western tradition, Urdu short story has out a distinct path for itself. Sartre has been reported to remark that all the themes are in the east and all the techniques in the west. This can be only a half truth. East too has its techniques. Intezar Husain extensively draws upon the tradition of Dastans and Jataks which opens up a whole new world of the art of story telling rich in symbolism and suggestiveness offering most effective instruments of psychological investigation and delving deep into the realms of the unknown. Qurat-ul-Ain Haider beautifully presents how the west and the east mingle to create a new rich and complex culture.

The title of this collection has been aptly chosen as *The colour of nothingness*. This is one aspect of the east that fascinates the west. Derrida pointed to the “Metaphysics of Presence” in the west. The oriental “Metaphysics of Nothingness” especially allures the western mind. It is only now that the west has discovered absurdism, nihilism and occultism. These have long influenced us here. This has been in our bones.

The east has always kept the world of art separate from and independent of the world of reality. It has always been a firm belief here that the truth of art is different from the truth of life. The very name ‘Afsana’ means fantasy. Art as an autonomous activity, as presentation not representation is a mark of oriental literature and is here in this collection reflected in the story of Srendar Parkash. Jippizan is the story of a man who does exist and is still non-existent. Anwar Khan’s story Artistic Finesse beautifully shows the clever gimmicks of the exploiters who even cash on the misery of their victims. Poverty, exploitation, protest and violence, everything is on sale, as Peecham, in Brecht’s Three Penny Opera claims that he has made beggary into an art. He trades in human misery.

Thus, for its content as well as for the devices used by it, Urdu short story has succeeded in attracting the attention of the serious critics and readers of literature throughout the world. It has a bright future before it.

❧ Chapter 73 ❧

A Feat of Courage and Commitment



Words are the means of conveying ideas and meanings. An idea or a thought assumes a concrete form in words which can be communicated to others. Words thus become a store house of meanings which can be transmitted from one person to another person and from one generation to the generations that follow. Language becomes the repository of knowledge and helps in the progress of civilisation.

Without language every individual and every generation will have to learn about life afresh. It is language which makes it possible to pass the accumulated wisdom of the past to the present, which the present enriches with its own effort and understanding and leaves it for the future to replenish and develop. By thus transmitting experience and knowledge from generation to generation, language becomes the main vehicle of station. But it is not an unmarred blessing.

The word which was only a means came to be considered as reality itself. Thus people's relationship with life was severed or at least weakened. They became slaves to the word. The word became sacred. Wisdom and understanding were reduced to a mere game of the words. Word become the reality, and the reality an illusion. Humans were no more human. They become the enemy, and see how easy it becomes to torture them, even to kill them, since they remain human no more and are reduced to a name. Give a dog a bad name and hang him. Detached from reality, a word creates obscurantism.

As civilisation grew increasingly complex, the hold of words became tighter on humans. Knowledge and experience were capsuled in the word. Marquez, in his novel, 'One Hundred Years Of Solitude', has described the spread of an epidemic in the city of Macondo in which people start losing their memory. They have to fall back upon

words in order to secure a link with the external world as well as with their own past. They put name plates on everything, such as Chair, Table, Cow and House.

But words are only signs, only names of things that exist in reality. Words are not experiences. The inhabitants of Macondo are confronted with the prospect that if they continued to live like that, one day everything in life will be reduced to names only. Meanings will be thrown out of life. This revelation was the consequence of the same scientific awareness which strongly challenged the age-old worn out concepts of the Mediaeval thought. This was the new consciousness which gave importance to meaning over word. It was under this new awareness that Roget started working on a new kind of 'dictionary' in which, instead of looking for meanings of the given word, the appropriate word was sought for a meaning already present in the mind.

Peter Mark Roget was born in 1779. In 1796 he got a degree in medicine from Edinburgh University. He was a successful physician and was a keen seeker of knowledge. In 1815 he became a Fellow of the Royal Society and served as its secretary for 12 years. He played a significant role in the establishment of London University and founded the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. He also invented a calculating machine and designed an inexpensive pocket chessboard. He found solutions to many chess problems.

His thesaurus is a computer of the language which groups words together on the basis of meanings. Roget started working on the thesaurus in 1805 and its first complete edition was brought out in 1852. It was his scientific approach which gave him the idea that meaning has precedence over word. As a doctor he felt the need of seeking release from the bondage of the word in his day-to-day medical practice. But this was no new idea.

It had actually started as a movement as far back as the Renaissance. The whole edifice of Mediaeval thought was erected on the word. Interpretations, demonstrations, and exegetical exercises were the entire domain of scholarship. Science, on the other hand, sought realities directly. Most modern thinkers reached the same conclusion. Aldous Huxley emphasised the need of non-verbal education and T. S. Eliot went to the extent of asserting that the poet must not hesitate 'to dislocate, if necessary, language into his

meaning', rather than to distort or mutilate meaning for the sake of language. T. S. Eliot's own poetry is a good example of deliberately distorting the language.

Science insists on exorcising the spell of words. Words are not the reality in the same way as the doctor's prescription is not the medicine. A word is only a sign, and that too inadequate. This inadequacy created the fine arts. Words are not capable of true communication. Even metaphors fail. What is there in a name, after all?

The thesaurus gives preference to meaning over word. A dictionary tries to reach the meaning with the help of the word. The thesaurus seeks the word appropriate to a specific meaning. You think of something. The word that comes to mind is not an adequate expression for your thought. The thesaurus helps you get the right word.

Roget started to work on the Thesaurus in 1805 and he completed it 48 years. Rafiq Khawar completed the Urdu Thesaurus within six years, and the National Language Authority published it in 1994. It was a very painstaking project But it has immense utility. It is in fact such projects that tuitions like the National Language Authority must take in hand. There is no use of squandering money on translating technical terms, most of which have already acquired international currency. These should be left as such. An attempt to translate them will only result in confusion rather than clarity. A thesaurus is an invaluable book of reference. It can be very helpful to translators as well as creative writers.

The interesting that the work which started in the West in 1805 took over a century and half to reach Pakistan. This is just about the time lag between us and the advanced world. But we do not have to retrace the whole path over again. We can directly benefit from the achievements of the West and what they accomplished in centuries, we can acquire in years. This requires large-scale planning and organisation for translations. Such a work can be undertaken at a national level with adequate resources to support it.

Apart from retaining the title of 'Thesaurus', an acknowledge has also been made to it in the preface. It would have been more appropriate to clearly state that it is a translation of 'Roget's Thesaurus'. No doubt a few adaptations and additions have been

made here and there. One such addition is the use of verses for elaboration and explanation in line with the tradition followed by indigenous dictionaries. It means that we have not yet freed ourselves from the spell of words. All our arguments usually end in verse. We still need a lot of hard work to acquire the scientific bent of mind. We have to bring about a revolution in our thinking habits. In our society scholarship and research even otherwise enjoy no prestige or value. In a society where the study of philosophy is considered redundant and it was proposed that the Government College, Lahore department of philosophy be closed down as it is not financially viable, and where the department of literary history in Punjab University is closed down since it was discovered that it had exhausted history and 'finished' its work, the publication of a thesaurus must be a feat of courage and commitment.

It is rightly expected of the National Language Authority that it seriously undertakes its duty, neglected for just less than half a century, to bring Urdu up to the level of the advanced languages of the world, and release the nation from the intellectual slavery of the West. Slogans alone will not replace English with the national language. A national bureau of translation is urgently needed.



❧ Chapter 74 ❧

Free Your Mind



We have little experience in democracy, and whatever little we know of it is dubious. But what after all is democracy? How do we define it? Obviously the kind~ of democracy we are here concerned with has nothing to do with the holding or not holding of elections, or the existence of assemblies. What we mean by it in the context of creative activity is a climate, an atmosphere, in which one can breathe freely, and where no one is constrained to lower or stifle his voice. Unfortunately, such a democracy is outside our experience.

Dictatorship, however, is something we are thoroughly acquainted with, and there has been a lot of creative activity during the days of oppression. A lot has been written by Faiz to Jalib, and on the principle of quantity bringing quality, there has been good literature too. But literature created in an atmosphere of oppression is based on values which are negative.

Sentimentalism pushes art into the background. Such literature is the product of disgust and irritation. Aesthetics suffer. Even the literature of resistance, strictly speaking, is hardly literature, since it is motivated by protest, not by an aesthetic experience. Violence and oppression by themselves are not the subjects of art. Its subject is beauty.

A lot of resistance literature has been produced the world over during the last few decades. All this is defensive or aggressive literature. Art is never defensive or aggressive. Art takes its origin in the positive values of life. It may be the literature coming out of Africa, South America or Palestine and it has, no doubt, great emotional appeal. But only a very small fraction of it is literature at all. And this small fraction is that which deals not with the oppression, but with the beauty which oppression smears and spoils. The artist with the strength of his art and the magic of his imagination, attempts to recreate that beauty which has been

distorted, and the forces that distorted it. Those destructive forces are not his subject. He tries to regain the lost beauty.

To the artist cruelty, oppression or exploitation are only of a secondary significance. The primary thing is life. This is the real passion for him, and he wants to see life prosper and progress. He is not so much perturbed with what life and society do to him, as he is inspired by a Sassi who takes a plunge into the river on her picher made of unbacked day, Sacrifice, love, devotion, and a pinch for the suffered by others in the soul world of the artist.

Thus, the question arises whether the poets, writers and intellectuals have retained their aesthetic sense under oppression. Has their vision been a source of strength to them in the most telling moments of their lives, or have they been themselves subdued, in Shakespeare's words, "To what it works in, like the dyer's hands", subdued to the oppression they protested against? To oppression they reacted with a resolve for vengeance. Art is motivated by one passion, that is love. The literature of resistance is motivated by the feelings of anger and is steeped in hatred. And when the era of oppression ended, hatred disappeared. The artist now is left without the motivation. He has been left in the lurch. Thus many writers who were prolific during the martial law now suddenly feel deserted by the Muse.

This does not mean that literature today is suffering from a state of stagnation. It may yet be so for many sentimental and inflammable souls, since a quiet flow of literary emotions does not satisfy the spirits that have been used to turmoil and storms. Literature is surely being created today. But it is not so loud, Our media are also creating an impression that perhaps our literature is practically dead.

It is ironic that though liberty and democracy are generally considered to be complementary to each other, there was more freedom in the colonial days than is to be seen now in the period of independence. That was the freedom which prepared the ground for the poetry of Iqbal and which nourished the progressive movement of 36. Real freedom is the freedom of the mind. We have to wage another war of independence, the war for the decolonisation of consciousness. Our writers, by and large, at least in the media, seem to have been so scared that though they are no more under any compulsions, they have developed certain inexcusable inhibitions. Had it not been so, the contemporary writers would have not coasted

their energies on non-issues, if some researcher a hundred years hence will try to reconstruct a picture of our society from our TV programmes and newspaper reports, he will find that we were all heroin addicts wallowing in all sorts of crimes. He will not find any political, social or academic problems worrying our people.

In a democratic society the prime concern of the writer must be to free minds of any fear, particularly unfounded fears. It is fear that creates diffidence and leads to hypocrisies, such hypocrisies as we daily see on our mini-screen, condemning and recommending the smoking of cigarettes in the same breath. People are made to believe that it is they themselves who are to blame and that there is nothing wrong with the system. Our TV is doing out sermons all the time and our newspapers are trading in cheap sensationalism. An instance is a TV ad which shows a man immaculately dressed splashed over with mud by a speeding car. The advertisement shows that it is the driver of the car who is at fault. There is no question why the road is in such a bad shape. This intellectual holocaust is too overwhelming that even some of our most highly esteemed writers have also succumbed to cheap sensationalism and misplaced sermonising.

Our writers need to rededicate themselves to truth and redefine their ideals. If liberty does not teach cleanliness and fails to inculcate a sense of responsibility, art too will be deprived of beauty. Now when we are busy demolishing encroachments from everywhere, the writer must also protest against encroachments, the encroachments which are intellectual as well emotional, since freedom in fact means freedom from pollution, freedom from ugliness.

Today the greatest challenge faced by literature is the challenge to assert positive values, and to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, the challenge to strengthen human bonds. It must encourage confidence and faith rather than parade fear and despair.

Literature not only reflect culture, it creates culture and also preserves it. And in the culture we call democracy shall also be created by literature. There may yet be some democracy in our politics, but from our culture all democracy seems to have vanished.

❧ Chapter 75 ❧

The Culture of Voices



We are living in a world of noises created by meaningless hurry and a confusion of discordant voices. Though there is hardly any industrialisation worth speaking of, the din and clatter of the modern industrialised world is heard all around. It was perhaps not so bad a decade or two ago. No doubt some voices sounded like “singling out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells,” there were many sweet and comforting voices to elevate the spirit. Chote Ghulam Ali Khan, Nazakat Ali Khan and Amanat Ali Khan, with a whole galaxy of them, have already become legends. There is no Roshan Ara Begum to enthrall the lovers of music. Today’s youth can hardly conceive of the sweet cadences that flow no more.

A very challenging thesis was presented in a paper read at a seminar organised by the National Council of the Arts at Lahore in 1975. The writer was Asrar Ahmad, a connoisseur of music and a hard campaigner for good taste. He maintained that the quality of a culture is best reflected in its voices. From the original ‘kun’ (let there be) that resounded in the great Explosion marking the creation of the world, resolving the nascent ‘whole’ into its various forms, the sky, the earth, the sun and the stars, etc., to the last peal of the Day of Judgement, described in the Holy Quran as the Day of Noise and Clamour, which may be explained in scientific terms as a collision of the stars with a horrible explosion will bring the world to its _____ phenomenon of existence is in fact a progression of sounds. According to Asrar Ahmad, man is the lord of creation in this also that his voice can reproduce all sounds. The act of creation was the striking of a cord, the SAM (the beginning of the beat cycle). The end, marking the apocalypse, will also be a SAM (the end of the beat cycle). Thus life is rhythm, and its basis is the ‘note’. To dissociate the note from the rhythm will be to negate the beauty of nature’s scheme of creation. To see the soul as distinct from the body may be a metaphysical way of seeing things, it is surely not scientific.

Asrar's treatment of the subject is so original and so shocking that much of its brilliance may be lost in a commentary. An English rendering of his paper is therefore attempted in the following lines, keeping as close to its spirit as is possible in a translation.

The world begins on a note and ends on a note, and its whole course is a succession of notes. Discordant notes reflect chaos, melodious notes echo the harmony of life. Life is movement, and every moving object cause vibrations which form into waves and are preserved as sound. Asrar insists that the study of the state of a society at a particular time can best be made with reference to the state of its music. A historian can conceal, distort or concert facts and so obscure the reality and cover up _____ sacred function of preserving the truth and honestly portraying it. Music is reflective of the psychology of men.

Man first encountered the variations of seasons, fought against wild beasts and struggled to procure food from the vegetables or the flesh of the animals. Challenge of self-preservation and encounter with common adversaries gave man a sense of community at a very early stage of his evolution. It gently helped his creative instinct which found expression in the artistic activity of the celebration of a successful hunting in the din and noise of festivity accompanied with capering and howling. This rowdyism was gradually brought into some discipline and thus emerged the chorus and the community song. African traditions of dance and music still carry that heritage.

Wooden weapons were used for hunting. Different sounds were also created in the chase. Cries were uttered to drive the quarry. As the weapons developed so also were the instruments of sound improved. The skin of the hunted animal was mounted on a hollow drum, and the 'dhol' was invented. The precedence that Iqbal gave to the weapons over the instruments of music can be applied to the life of the jungle.

It was in that stage of human society (society in the present day sense, since even today greater part of the globe is ruled by the law of the jungle - survival of the fittest) that man became familiar with different sounds, like the howling of the winds, the noise of the rain and the storm, the thundering of the clouds and the lashing of the lightening. Even today the concepts of 'Gummak' (thundering of the clouds) and Ta'n (lightening) are derived from these sounds. Imitating and enjoying the chirping of the birds and the cries of the

animals is embedded in the human unconscious. Thus a melodious voice is likened to the singing of the Keel, and a repulsive discordant voice is compared to the braying of the ass. The great maestro, Feroz Nizami, has in an article thrown light on the derivation of musical notes from the songs of the birds and the cries of the animals.

Perhaps the most significant cue that man got from the songs of the birds is the way a bird attracts the opposite sex by uttering specific sounds. This perhaps is the origin of the Solo sung by man, which even today is used for more or less the same purpose. Human race owes a lot to music for the procreation and progress as well as refinement.

Some legends related to the life of Ta'n Sain lend support to these observations. Mian Ta'n Sain had the special gift of producing unique sounds right from his early childhood. He had perfect command on imitating the cries of animals. He also happened to be very naughty. Frightening the people with the lion's roar forcing them to lock themselves in or creating the atmosphere of the dawn at midnight by imitating the chirping of the birds drawing people out of their homes, were his favourite pastimes. He had become so notorious for these activities that some elders induced him to learn the art of music and he was put under the tutelage of Swami Hari Das. Another story is related about him that after he had mastered the art he once collected deers round him by singing the ra'g Todi. He might have mastered the notes of the sounds uttered by the deer and working on these notes lured them to his song. This is only a legend, but then Orpheus had a similar legend too. David's harp also encourages such speculations. However, the fact remains that man has the capability to reproduce the sounds that he hears. This is so because human voice has the capability of producing infinite variety of notes. It is for this reason that the music of a place at a particular time reflects the richness or poverty of its culture at that time.

❧ Chapter 76 ❧

Waiting for Moses



From the pastoral to the agricultural, from the nomadic to the settled life is a long story. From _____ sent day man has not only struggled for life, but also for the quality of living. He worked hard for sustenance as well as for pleasure. The auditory taste developed and refined. Balochistan's Bhandar Party and Punjab's chimta still remind of the early developments in music.

Storing of food led to the idea of possession. This was the beginning of the class system, which led to feudalism, kingship, and ultimately imperialism.

First the sword and the spear, and then the harp and the lyre. 'To-day we find two classes of music in the society. One may be called one music of 'the haves' and the other that of the have-nots. History of the sub-continent illustrates this division. We feel proud to claim that the Muslims have greatly contributed to the music of this region. This reputation is actually associated with our 1,000 year rule of India which history could not ignore. It gives no credit to the accomplishments of the slave nations. (The Hindu contribution has therefore not been duly recognised). The mention of Muslim musicians too is confined to those who were either kings themselves or were attached to the courts. But the irony of circumstances always turns social contradictions to the advantage of the common people. Consequently, one way or the other, their helplessness, their truth and their struggle continued to figure in the arts of the downtrodden and the pattern of their development.

These observations are in no way meant to compile the history of music. Instead the object is to draw certain conclusions. Firstly, the art that does not find roots in the hearts of the people is doomed, as is the case with the classical music our society. The kings and the aristocracy had appropriated all human beauties and monopolised these to grace their own placed. Sweet odours and melodious notes

became their exclusive privilege. As a result the panders of music were continuously drawn to the courts and were thus alienated from their own class. They even concealed art from the people and made it into something of the occult. But music is a mood, a breath of life. It cannot be manipulated its stated earlier, it is the contradiction in society that in fact preserves the treasure of art. People's music could be sought in the houses of the masters and the humble abodes of the 'faqirs' and 'dervishes' which are the haunts of the devotees of music.

Whatever music we now have is the legacy of the masters. Under the British rule the enslaved people harboured contempt for the foreign masters. Particularly after the unsuccessful war of independence the hearts of the Muslims craved for the ouster of the invaders. The wish gained momentum, and along with the politicians did not lag behind. Ustad Allah Diya Khan of Kolhapur, the 'karnail' and 'Jarnail' of Patiala, Ustan Abdul Karim Khan, Ustan Ashiq Ali Khan, Ustad Fayyaz Khan and Ustad Bare Ghulam Ali Khan are the pride of the tribe.

History also reveals that music and society influence each other. In a corrupt society the innocent man tarnishes his innocence as well as corrupts his melody, and in the end becomes an instrument of further corruption. Melody stands for truth: its absence represents hypocrisy, and the man lacking this sweetness represents falsehood. The number and status of such musicians in _____ to these qualities.

As real history is read only between the lines, similarly a psychological analysis of music also reveals the political, social, moral, economic and professional values of a society. Music is no abstraction and it does not exist in vacuum.

Soon after the establishment of Pakistan, the affairs of culture came into the hands of westernised bureaucracy. Taking advantage of the backwardness of the people this class conspired with the feudal lords and the upstarts to introduce a new culture – the culture of the drawing room. The media bosses came to their help and the music that they now broadcast is totally dependent upon their pleasure. They propagated the ideas of art for art's sake and art for the sake of entertainment. Deprived of the patronage of the nawabs and the rajahs, classical music sought refuge in officially sponsored institutions. Taste gave way to class prejudice. Bare Ghulam Ali Khan's exit was the first cultural assassination. Music lovers recognise

the assassin, but there is no court of culture where justice can be sought.

Even to-day the media are haunted by the demon. But Moses was brought up in the house of the pharaoh. Thus in this uncongenial atmosphere the musicians of the new generation. Nazakat Ali – Salamat Ali and Amanat Ali – Fateh Ali emerged as the honour and prestige of music.

To common people fed their taste on 'qawwali', 'soz khawani', songs at fairs and festivals, cheap theatres and cinema houses. They also found entertainment on ceremonial occasions.

Popular musicians and artistes emerged from these very institutions. Gradually film songs found a place in the hearts of the people and now _____ extent, the film music can be called the music of the people.

The history of the Pakistani society can be divided into periods. The music and the voice of each period reflect the political background of that period and the people's reaction to it.

The Ayub era was a period of coercion. Media were gagged. The situation was extremely discouraging and full of frustration. In this period a voice of truth appeared on the horizon of music which enthralled the people: Mehdi Hassan, a voice of lament and elegy. His style represents a rebellion against restrictions on free expression. People heard the echoes of their hearts in his music.

But the powerful exploiter class often beats the common people with their own weapon. Thus in the mass media and even in the films a formula was devised which popularised _____ and muffled, though sweet voices, that threw the people into deeper gloom.

On the other hand, the period of Yahya Khan was extremely ugly, deceitful and unpatriotic. It needed loud unmusical voices to perpetuate its rule. These voices could be easily procured through the bureaucracy and the panderers of art. An analysis of the war songs or the 'patriotic' songs broadcast on radio and TV in 1971 reveals the horror of introducing unmelodious voices. As a consequence of this war, the radio, in order to restore the lost confidence, at once withdrew the bold voices of the news readers (like Shakil Ahmad and Anwar Behzad) in order to give an impression of sobriety and restraint. Thus impressive voices became the victim of the policies of the bureaucracy.

At present also, two voices are heard in Pakistan. The voice of truth, sweet and melodious, but weak, narrow and handicapped. This voice is devoid of all glitter, and is miserable and sad. It represents a large section of the society. The other voice is loud, strong and vast but lacks melody. This voice encourages crime and glamourizes rowdyism.

The next stage, that is, the voice of struggle may yet be premature to talk about, since this tone is unacceptable to the establishment. So far as the orchestral composition is concerned, this too, barring a few exceptions, is lagging much behind the sensibility of the poet and the singer. In short, the business of music is in the hands of those who wield power but lack taste. They have authority but are devoid of feelings. This is the situation of the 'misfits' in all the departments of society.

Television's record is no different from that of the radio, since this institution is promoting drawing room culture and perpetuating the luxurious norms of a particular class. It is quite possible that this pharaoh's house of music may still bring up a Moses.



❧ Chapter 77 ❧

Bringing Out the Best



So far as the Arts Councils are concerned, there is the same gulf between them and the people as there is between Hilton and the humble roadside teashops of Bhati Gate where people entertain themselves with rotten film songs over a very ordinary cup of tea.

Film music can be called the people's music only to the extent to which it represents the likes and dislikes of the people and becomes popular, since the people own it to that extent and find some little solace in it for their miseries and frustrations.

However, all these institutions pursue the same objective, which is to make people oblivious of their real problems, blunt the edge of their struggle, and through a formula music either lure them to luxury or effect catharsis of their worries. Institutions acquire a special significance with reference to their impact on the society, particularly in the situation where the most frequently played music emanates from these and has a negative influence. Also, the music from the foreign countries creeps in through these very institutions.

Only these modes of foreign music are imported which cater to a particular way of thinking. Let us take a brief view of their influence on society.

Purposeless music promotes purposelessness. Discordant notes encourage falsehood and misdeeds. Diffident voices create lack of confidence in the people. Horrible voices lead to superstition and aversion to action. The low quality products of Western music lead to sexual crimes, provide justification for plagiarism and condone crimes like adulteration and smuggling. Discordant music must reflect as well as cause all these aberrations.

This institutionalised music is not the people's music. It is 'imposed' music, and serves the purpose of perpetuating the status

quo and guarding the vested interests, thus strengthening the class barriers. The people's music can be heard in the silence of the snow-capped peaks, in the flow the rivers, in the thick forests, in the green fields, in the din of the factories, in the cities and their lanes and streets and bazaars. But this music will become audible only when the society will be rid of all exploitation.

This will not happen just by itself. The liberate music, the musicians, singers, instrumentalists, the technicians and the workers will have to wage a concerted and conscious war against all ills of the society and acquire all its economic and political powers. The adversaries are the bureaucracy and the middleman. The artist is not weak or helpless. Only co-ordination is required.

We have with us the artistes of the calibre of Ustad Latafat Hussain Khan, Ustad Salamat Ali Khan, Ustad Fateh Ali Khan and Ghulam Hussain Shaggan who have worked hard and devoted their lives to polish and perfect their voices. Ustad Salamat Ali Khan can be compared with any singer of the world as a representative of the culture of voices.

It is necessary to explore new avenues for the musicians with the help of the intellectual artistes. It is essential to go to each and every village to discover new voices. The singer of Mandi Tandanwala, Muhammad Siddique, whose resonating voice reverberates with the rear of the gushing waters of the Punjab is one such artist who must be encouraged and promoted, and provided with opportunity to improve his art.

So far as the invention of new musical instruments or modification and improvement in the old ones is concerned, it is possible only through organising the education of music on scientific lines. Due to the gulf between the knowledge and the practice of music and for lack of scientific education of music no significant innovation has been made after the Sitar. It is a pity that our education provides for the cultivation of the senses of sight, touch, taste and smell but ignores the sense of hearing. As a result, our highly educated class is only semi-educated. Greek philosophers and demagogues considered mathematics, gymnastics and music as the basic disciplines for the training of mind, body and soul respectively. All schools of thought assign to music the status of the springhead and the mother of all arts. But the mother is denied the respect due to her.

It is only through a scientific education of music that artistes can be familiarised with all the sounds from that of the wheel to that of the Sputnik shooting into the heavens.

For lack of sufficient material on music and its limited practice, I end my submissions on a couplet of Saghar Siddiqui which may be rendered as follows.

I have knocked at the beloved's door with my eye-lashes.

I am the suppliant the has lost his voice.

(It is a good news that Asrar is now working on the voices of the 70s and the Martial Law that followed).



❧ Chapter 78 ❧

Life in a Poem



Diorama' can easily be categorised as a contemporary work, fresh and spontaneous. Though the subject of the poems are rather conventional, not so the experience conveyed through them. This is the second collection of Bushra Naqi's English poetry. Her first, 'Within an Oyster's Shell', was published in 1992 under the name Bushra Shams.

The sensibility expressed in these poems carries a post-modernistic touch, eschewing differences and concentrating on synthesis and assimilation of the individual idiosyncrasies and social complexities, though carrying at times the trace of conventional poetic approaches too.

Quite a number of her poems deal with the idea of forgetting differences and seeing what is common among human beings. She notes that the men filled with hatred and partiality,

*...cease to see the beauty
That lies in another,
Fail to grasp that all men
Complement the other
In the synthesis
Of commercial living*

The title of this poem, 'Building Bridges', itself is significant. She believes in striving to bridge gaps. The poem proceeds:

*Slowly we demolish
The cobwebs
That had entangled us
Smothered our hearts and minds
Shackled our stride
Towards a new vista
Of a creative future*

Emancipation of consciousness is another important theme of Naqí's, and this is what makes her the poet of present day realities. She realises that this emancipation demands,

*Plunging deeper and deeper
Into the core
Of the unfathomable mind
That does not easily unveil
Its secrets to the spirited wind*

– 'A Midsummer's Dream'

Only a free mind will be capable of creativity, not simply integration, but a creative synthesis. The images of absorption, assimilation and consummation are scattered throughout the book, like "earth's conjugal tie with the sky" or lonely man

*Absorbing light from his milieu
Like a bulbous plant
Sucking moisture
From the soil.*

– 'Reflection'

In another poem we come across a still more striking image of such consummation:

*The air is steeped in quietude
That is heavy like pregnant air
Which has absorbed
All the turmoil of the day*

The urge for self-fulfilment is not without a sure sense of social awareness. There is a realisation that though the passion for liberty and desire of harmonious association are by their nature primeval and essential and must be nourished the miserable fact is that

*Having emerged from the jungle
And woven the fabric
Of a genteel society
He sought to discipline his body
And then his mind
Through a code*

– 'Liberty'

But unfortunately his evolution took a wrong direction. The evil aspects of human nature got the upper-hand.

*That evolved into on unrelenting
Coercion of the mind
Mangling the hearts of men*

– ‘Liberty’

Man’s heart became a “broken melody”, torn by the howling winds of ideology, nourishing dogmatism and discord that

*...deviate from the path,
making man prisoner
to rituals and laws
that have barbed wires
that cut into his flesh
making him wince*

– ‘Bigorty’

It is generally said that the oriental mind is not capable of sustained thinking, that it is carried away fly the impulse of the moment and is easily excited by a word, a turn of phrase or a striking imagine. In these poems we find not only deep thought about experiences but also their paradoxical nature. Naqi does not flinch in the face of disturbing contradictions and unsettling conflicts. Though she may feel very strong in the face of odds and cry out

*The sunlight pierced
The thin film of petals,
But could it force
The unwilling flower
To surrender to its beams?*

– ‘Liberty’

She remains conscious of hard facts. The passion of liberty can not be stifled. This is no sentimental outburst. Naqi is a thorough realist. She is no idealist creating her fanciful worlds of ivory towers. She analyses her feelings and sees the complexity that is in them. She accepts the diorama of life. She knows that life is plenitude; it is a fountain throwing up treasures. But she also sees it as a volcano and a hurricane,

*Delivering life and death
From the same vessel
With the same composure*

– ‘Diorama’

Similarly she also knows that love is born and seasoned in a adversity ('The Flow And Ebb').

She does not hesitate to take up the topical themes of the socio-political turmoil that Pakistan has been passing through since its creation and is still struggling against:

*When the dust settled
On the ravaged lands
We ploughed the empty fields
With seeds that turned infertile
In their place flourished
The embryo of chaos*

– 'Trauma of Freedom'

But her optimism remains undaunted. Through this chaos she visualises an emerging hope, a bright future. The internal springs have not yet dried up. There is confidence and determination.

*I wonder alone in my orbit,
With the resolution
Of one who has spanned before
The course laid for him,
Although the path be blurred*

– 'Course of Life'

She feels strong "Like a wave in the river / splashes its rocky bed / Beating against the rugged edges" ('Fighting Against the Wind'), and "growing still more buoyant / with every single ripple / Like a man standing in the wind / His contour bearing a permeance" ('Watercress'). She does not see the revival only at the individual level. She transfers her confidence to the whole nation, to this shipwrecked nation, which many seem to despair of, and see it flounder. The poet has a different vision:

*Now that the dust has settled
The glass of aspirations
Lies shattered'
A nation begins
To pick up its broken pieces
To revive its weakened will*

– 'Trauma of Freedom'

She can see

*Yet a centripetal force,
That pulls in many a directions*

– ‘A Speck’s Vast Infinitude’

Thus she realises that the fault lies within too, since the temptress and the tempter both are human, and that man is the founder and the sinner at the same time.

Thus her work encompasses a vast panorama of life in all its varied shades, though all her poems do not measure upto this heightened vision of life. Some of her poems are didactic in tone and message while some are prosaic, simple statements of certain facts and observations. Some of the poems even carry an obvious cathartic note. However, in spite of some lapses and weaknesses, it is good poetry. It is rich in fresh and striking images, such as in these lines:

*The opaque night
Coasts its dubious reflection
Striking the eye of illusion
To create dreams of fantasy
That dwell in elfin abodes*

– ‘Nightfall’

The influence of Keats is quite visible here as also in the ‘Ode to Spring’ where we see “the heavy trod of chariots / Ascending the skies” and where all mortality springs to life. Shelley’s influence is marked in the poem about the tropical monsoon where the rain “Preserving all life / That swells / From its bounteous bosom / which is the eternal womb / And the sepulchre”, reminding one of ‘The Ode to the West Wing’. ‘Cup of Life’ carries strains of Omer Khayyam:

*Having drunk the cup of life
Till the very dregs
I looked at the empty bowl
Musing at the hollowness
That echoed within*

This, according to T. S. Eliot, is the mark of genuine poetry, that the soul of the masters resounds in its verse.

There are some very beautiful ingenious images in these poems, such as the metaphor of skin-deep beauty. Then there is the image of bees, after hard labour and care, flying away unashamed of their

vagary is quite a natural way, “living/In their habitats, without even being stifled” (‘A Flight into Fantasy’), or of Circle as a symbol of modern society, corrupting and at the same time scorning the corrupt. Saif-ul-Mulk is a rebel hero. Perhaps it is only in the literature of the subcontinent that love becomes a weapon of resistance and rebellion. At least in English literature it is not so. Romeo and Juliet too sacrifice their lives only to restore and sustain the status quo. There are certain conventional images, presented in a new light, like Narcissus as a myth of impatience with the illusion, the woman in mantle as the soul in an ivory prison and passions as bridges between the mind and the heart.

It is good poetry. There is a ring of contemporaneity in whatever she writes, both in the content as well as in the form, even when she makes an imaginative excursion into the past:

*We continue to bask
In the warmth of a past splendour,
Like flower loses its bloom
With the exodus of spring
And stands naked, exposed,
In the fiasco of the present.*

– ‘Lure of the East’

The printing, the paper and the whole get-up is attractive, though marred with some typographical errors. Some grammatical lapses could be removed with closer proofreading.

On the whole, ‘Diorama’ is a pleasant addition to English poetry in Pakistan.



❧ Chapter 79 ❧

When Every Stream Thinks Like an Ocean



Aage Samandar Hai is Intizar Hussain's fifth novel, if we include the novelette *Din* too. Since the *Chand Gehn*, which was his first novel, upto *Basti*, Intizar Hussain has been exploring the 5th dimension beyond the world of space and time. The plunge into the unknown, though it added a romantic fascination to his narrative, has brought upon him the charges of nostalgia and escapism.

After *Din*, which was the most realistic and down-to-earth of all his works, *Aage Samandar Hai* is just another attempt at grappling with reality without taking recourse to fantasies. Though here too he takes a plunge into the unknown, the overall attempt is to understand and analyse the problems of day-to-day living. Here he deals with the reality as it is tortures and even perplexes the mind. But he keeps the mysteries of life at a distance, as is evident from the very title of the novel – “Ahead is the sea” (literal translation of the title) – which may mean the end of hope, or the opening of unbounded new possibilities. It may also mean eternity or it may symbolize a destructive force, and the nation is supposed to be at the verge of it. The title also recalls the taunt of an important national leader, reminding the Mohajirs of their limitations. While the symbol may suggest despair, it may also lead to a new resolve. It is a paradoxical symbol.

Intizar Hussain's feet are firmly planted in the earth here, though as a sheer matter of habit he keeps looking back to Andulus, Baghdad or Delhi. This is his first clearly conceived work since *Din*.

As in the earlier attempt, here too, start realities of life are the subject of the novel and these are rooted in concrete direct personal experience. In between, in *Basti*, *Tazkera* and *Chand Gehn*, it is not life itself, but apprehensions about it, real or imagined which mark the subject of his fiction. Calamity in itself is not so frightening as the apprehension about it. In fact, a knock at the door releases the tension

caused to a scared person apprehending and expecting the visit #of a policeman. Such is the experience of a South African coloured man who lived under perpetual threat of the white police. The weird ghost of some impending calamity keeps haunting the oppressed man. The coming of actual calamity may in fact be a relief.

Lahore was not very different from Vyaspur. Karachi is just the opposite. So, fact and fiction got mixed up in Lahore. Karachi is shockingly such a contrast to a UP town that it is impossible to confuse the one with the other. Here the land of the streams presents a direct contrast to the grains of sand on a beach. This shocking contradiction forces the mind to think – to analyse and understand it between a cohesive and a disintegrating world. Now the past seems to be somewhat out of focus. The earlier novels are repeatedly asking questions about the identity and history of Pakistan. Here for the first time comes the retort: “Pakistan’s history? Dear, let it first be created.”

This is an awareness which the earlier books do not show. As against this awareness, Intizar Hussain evinced a mystic superciliousness. But unfortunately, it was a mystic disgust without the mystic vision. Such an “elevated” view is no more in evidence here. A new consciousness, very objective and very profound is now developing: “Every epoch – its own weird silence, its own terror – and it brings its own violence with it.”

This is a concrete fear, not an abstract apprehension. Though one may sometimes lose patience and cry out: “Stop thinking if you want to live in this city.”

Yet there is an aversion to lethargic apprehension. Though regressive tendencies persist, these are no more than fleeting glimpses. The mind is not so bogged down and wriggles out of them.

Bitterness, impatience and irritation that once found outlet in sarcastic outbursts ultimately give way to a sombre, sympathetic and practical approach to the real issues: “Why pester if you can’t help?”

Past too is no more nostalgia. It simply provides an ironic contrast with the miserable present: “*Jhuggis* were Pakistan’s golden period. No Kalashnikovs, no dacoities, no hooded figures, no car lifters.”

Detached from his own world, partly blurred in Lahore, Karachi brings a new consciousness. A new awareness dawns. Now for the

first time a new realization emerges: “Those who can’t forget, can’t be happy.”

For the first time too, there is a desire to change the landscape – from Karbala, Andulus, etc. Though there is very little superstition left here, nightmares persist. Superstitions and nightmares haunt Marqueeze also, But to him these are defences. To Intizar these are only threats, very frightening. The reason perhaps is that Intizar Hussain feels uprooted here. He could not transplant the superstitions of Uttar Pardesh in Karachi. His mind perceives only a gossamer reality. And wherever it is vague, superstitions fill the gaps.

In many ways the latest novel is an advance in the fictional progress of Intizar. In place of nostalgia, a strange fear about the past raises its head here:

“If you remember the last Janam, you can’t help

But relate it to others. But revealing the past to other leads to inevitable death.”

Strange new fears are cropping up in the mind. The past is inalienable, but at the same time going into the past is going into the valley of death, into the world of ghosts – which itself means the past. Thus we can easily see a connection between nostalgia, ghosts and death. The world of the unknown has now come to the surface. Vague fears that created the feelings of terror, lead to regressive tendencies. But symptoms are not the disease. Symptoms demand diagnosis. *Aage Samandar Hai* analyses and diagnoses. There is now an active desire to know, and if possible, to cure the disease. A figure emerges from the ruins of Gharnata, the figure of Abdullah baking bread. Abdullah observes.

“There is a time to burn the boats;
there is a time to build them.
Gone are the times when we had
turned our backs to the sea and
burnt all the boats. Now the
frothing sea is not behind us;
it is in front of us, and we
have built no boat.”

It is a new vision, a transformation in the sensibility that earlier saw only destruction everywhere. There is a sense of urgency now. The spectacle demands action. But the task is overwhelming. A very true

picture of chaos in a riot-torn Karachi is faithfully drawn, and with very minute detail. There is the ethnic problem, the law and order problem as well as the problems created by political and vested interests. The problems are real but formidable and de-capacitating. Here it is reality that benumbs the senses. It is a hard-pressing reality that leads to a delirious mind which opens the way to nightmares. It is not the situation of *Chand Gehn* which opens with nightmares and comes to reality, infected with that morbidity. Intizar Hussain is coming out of the habitual morbidity. The 5th dimension is receding and the world of time and space is taking a new significance. The conscious and the unconscious seem to have struck some balance and are moving towards a proportionate harmony, though fantasy still seems to inundate reality at places. However, the grip on reality might have been loosened, it does not totally slip out of hand.

Intizar Hussain has also succeeded in bringing out the emotional strain caused by the Partition in the form of an underlying love story which apparently runs below the surface, but causes big ripples. Apparently there is no hindrance in love between Jawwad and Memona being consummated. But there seems to be the hand of destiny pulling them apart, exactly as migration pulls Jawwad from the lap of his native land. He realises that one must not abandon the land. The earth curses the deserter, as in Hardy's novels. But Jawwad must leave, though he also knows that Memona too will never forgive him.

As in Intizar's earlier books, destiny, myth and superstition still play their role, and the narration is marred by undue repetitions, but in this latest novel reality is not obscured, not for a moment. This novel marks a new stage in the aesthetic development of Intizar.



❧ Chapter 80 ❧

Sciamachy



Sciamachy, fighting with shadows, that in fact life is all ideologies, philosophies, aspirations, frustrations, or the pursuit of the impossible – this is the reality that overflows, or leaks out at times. In their simplest form, these appear as dreams. But the difference is that dreams have not been institutionalised as their other forms have been. However, dreams are in their most spontaneous and unadulterated, and, not deliberately twisted, forms. The agility of the mind can give them various forms, starting from mythology to the absurd, from pictures of Elysian bliss to stupid aspirations. Everyone creates in his imagination the picture of the “Ultimate Destiny”, a world not like the given world in which one has to mutilate oneself in order to “fit in”, since fitting in means success and happiness – how ironical! But it is a world which man creates and moulds according to the desire of his heart. In this world he is the Argonaut who sails the ocean of misery in order to get to his golden fleece. He navigates his argosy with full zest, though, whether he knows it or not, he is drifted on the threatening tide led by Charon himself, ferrying the souls of the dead across the _____ to Hades. The Elysian dream turns into a nightmare, and the heroic struggle into an ungracious death.

Such is the plight of those who seek the blessings of the new paradise, the USA, in search of the ideal land of bliss. *Sciamachy* is the story of a young man, Fade. He lives in a world of dreams. The story is a rhapsody. The young man moves on, half asleep half awake, allured by the golden peaks of the ideal city. Ironically, even the ideal world is not free of all troubles. A news has come from the Ultimate Destiny that a super massive black hole has been discovered in the centre of the milky way Galaxy which will swallow all the stars. But there is a good news too, that before the earth is swallowed by the black hole, mankind would have migrated to Sapho’s planet in the Andromeda Galaxy.

❧ Chapter 81 ❧

Lost Found Found Lost



Four main strains run through the poetry of Gulzar Bano, though her range of subjects is quite vast and varied. These four strains are feminism, exploitation, liberty and love. This small collection of poems reveals the maturity of her mind and a command on diction which comes only after a long persistent and serious exercise in thinking and writing. Obviously Gulzar Bano has written much more than what she considered appropriate for publication. Like Ghalib, she gave only a selected collection of her work to the readers. In a way, perhaps, this is all right since people hardly have any time, particularly in these hectic days, or enough patience, to read big volumes. Readers generally go for selections. In that case it is better that authors make their own selections. But, as is generally known authors are not the best critics of their work. Ghalib, again, is a good example. Critics have now discovered quite a number of otherwise good verses that had been left out by Ghalib. It will therefore not be inappropriate to expect that Gulzar Bano will publish the rest of her poetry which must be as vast and profound as the poems in the present selection of the four strains of her poetry the most emphatic one is feminism. Some of the feminist poems have been written for special occasions, for international conferences on gender issue, separately published in a small volume entitled Voice Against Violence. These poems are marked with an excruciating pain, with an underlying pinch of irony:

*Surely heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers...
Even when feet are bleeding
Mothers whose breasts are drying
With children sucking blessed broken nipples
Proclaim paradise blooms beneath the feet of mother*

(Rang Ba Rang)

Still more violent is the passion in these lines:

*Weep for all the women raped during war and peace
By soldiers, priests, paupers and princes alike
Who felt no shame crushing innocents, inflicting pain
Monsters forget their mothers' encircling arms*

(Prisoners of Memories)

There was a time when woman was not even recognised as a human being. She was considered some sub-human creatures. It was only in the 20th century or thereabout that the problems of women were recognised. Women were given a limited franchise in 1918 and they got the right of vote in 1928 in England. Ever since woman has been given recognition at least in literature. Advancement in technology and the preparation of contraceptives have further emancipated women. She is now strong enough to demand her rights. That is why there are so many feminist movements in the world today. In almost all drama in the 20th century woman occupies the central stage. It may be in Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, Brecht, O'Neill or Miller, all drama revolves around woman. In poetry, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich etc have been great feminists. Still women are not given due attention. As Margaret Drabble observed in *Ice Age*, the problems of England may be solved but the problems of woman will not be solved. The reason is that woman has been seen only as a weaker man. Woman's problems have not yet been recognised. The most important among these is her need as a mother which, according to O'Neill in *Long Days Journey into Night*, is the home, since children are not born and reared on streets. This is possible only when there is the family. And the sanctity of the family is directly related so the sanctity of woman. Loss of woman's sanctity is symbolised with incest, as in Sartre's *The Prisoner of Athonia* and O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*; when molesting women:

Monsters forget their mothers' circling arms

The other concern of Gulzar Bano is exploitation and cruelty. For example, the labourers who extract treasures from the womb of the earth are seen by the poet as,

They are not homo sapiens

They are the nation of global ants. (The Labourers)

on the international level the situation is still more grim:

Heroes of Hiroshima Nagasaki

You swallow history with cheese burgers

Laced with dynamite gifts of strawberry jam descend
(Human Rights)

Everyone is living under the threat of a menace, individuals
as well as communities. The guardians have turned hunters,
which

Include a President a Prime Minister all Cabinet ministers

Governors Chief Ministers are very necessary

Also some willing judges serving and retired

The Imams of some mosques and madrassas too

Forget not proud politicians of old and new parties

(Zafran Bibi)

Liberty is the other theme of these poems. The elephant in
chains cries out:

*Do not come close tome
For i am in chains
From the right distance
Look into my eyes dreaming scheming
Freedom without chains*

(Elephant's Lament)

Frustration, humiliation and pain poison nature itself. The
springs of love are polluted by the toxic corruption of vengeance:

*Do not bring children to see me
For I may curse mothers fathers too
Why did mine abandon me to chains (ibid)
And ultimately we come to The Twentieth Century
Options.
The weapon barons think of chemical confusion
The biology engineers plan genetic grandeur
The nuclear neurotics calculate the first strike*

Finally there are strong notes of love in these poems. Here is a
wonderful tribute to a loving father who is no more:

*The tigers beautiful carnivores roar in the forests
The leopards flash golden in the lightening rain
Vanquished by the Conqueror Supreme their noble
hunter
Manzur is born today beloved and lover of life and
death.*

(In Memoriam)

Such is the variety, richness and profundity of these poems. Besides, there are touching reactions to *Shadows of Baghdad*:

Lost murmuring shadows of the dying
Stitch their souls on the mourning minaret
Before the last sleep kiss the soil of their beloved Baghdad

Then there are tributes paid to Fatima Jinnah and to the Quaid-e-Azam and some patriotic poems are also there.

One cannot miss the spontaneous outburst of powerful feelings expressed in these poems with the help of rich images and profound symbolism.



❧ Chapter 82 ❧

Surmae Lakerien



The recent collection of poetry by Eruj Mubarak is experimentation with both content and form. It ranges from personal vicissitudes to national issues, from purely practical to strictly aesthetic problems that disturb the mind of an artist. But the most glaring aspect of these poems is the violence done to the language.

Besides the desire of being modern and the egoistic urge for originality, there is also something else behind this iconoclasm – the fact that the modern poet does not write for catharsis alone. His approach is largely explorative. He does not simply want to express but understand the complexities of life. Language is the most conservative of human conventions. It has created modes of expression based on modes of perception and conception that have evolved through a process of thousands of years. Language, in the last few thousands writing as early as 1936, remarked that in the near future we may see greater emphasis placed on poetry as a means of appealing directly to the sub-conscious mind and less on poetry as a conscious criticism of life.

Beyond the diction, there is also the problem of composition. Words tend to get into a rhythm. The rhythmical flow of words creates an intoxicating effect in which the mind goes into a rhapsodic strain, somewhere between sleeping and waking. The modern poet wants to keep the mind awake and a broken rhythm which is both musical and verbal, keeps the reason in play. Thus, he analyses his feelings while at the same time enjoying them. Beside verbal rhythm, there is also a logical or a grammatical rhythm. This must also be broken. Therefore, accompanied with the verbal violence there is also a grammatical distortion such as this line from E. E. Cummings: “for love are in your am in I are in we.”

The diction, the grammar and the thought are deliberately distorted in order to get a relief from the conventional bondage of

thought and expression. Consider this short composition from the book:

لپک چھپک دوران سورج ناچا
 پھر رات اندر
 چاند نے آنکھ کھولی
 تب میں کورے بستر کی تنہائی پر رویا
 یوں نظم ہوئی
 میں نے نظم کو چاند کیا
 اور کہانی ہوئی

Something else that disturbs the thought – the personal commitment:

*As the line goes
 Whatever new truth is revealed
 Know it
 Accept it
 That which
 Has nothing to do with the present
 Otherwise
 You will live
 As you have been dead
 (Jeevan)
 Ok, on a more cosmic level
 Brain supported
 Made machined pickaxes
 Within a breath
 For one seed
 For a thousand seed
 Squeezed the earth
 But time ran faster
 The idle brain, the body
 To bring the rest
 To bring them rest
 We need
 More machines
 More concoctions.*

(Crazy Waqt Ke Sath Sath)

From the personal and practical cogitations the theme rises to cosmic dimensions:

*The cartoon
Is fully manipulated
That's why
There's no death for a cartoon
Similarly
Now
Tresses
Are composed
Embellished, decorated
Growing form
Everything improved
With dexterity
Ghalib Jee!
Come now
What is left for Eruj*



❧ Chapter 83 ❧

The Grey Lines



The distinctive feature of these poems is experimentation, both in content and form. The content ranges from personal vicissitudes to National issues, and even leading to cosmic speculations, from purely practical to strictly aesthetic problems that disturb the mind of an artist. But let us begin with the violence that the poet does to the language. This is by far the most glaring aspect of these poems. Beside a desire to be modern and beside the egoistic urge for originality and distinction, there is also something else behind this iconoclasm. It is that the modern poet, or one living in these times, does not write for catharsis alone. His approach is largely explorative. He does not simply want to express. He also endeavours to understand the complexities or, if you may, the secrets of life. Language is the most conservative of human conventions. It has created modes of expression based on modes of perception and conception that have evolved through a process of thousands of years. Language in the last few thousands of years has been reduced to cliché. It is language that dictates thought. It is no more a vehicle of thought. Even a new experience has to be moulded in conventional rhetoric. Strictly private and most personal experiences are put in the garb of convention. Even a new revelation of truth must be expressed in terms of the cup and the wine. The poet does not want to be so restricted. This compulsion has been dealt with in some detail in my essay *Search for Medium*. I borrow a couple of excerpts from that: "When attempts were made to turn realities into words, like the idols of mythology, words also took on specific shapes which developed a life of their own, independent of the aspects of life these were supposed to represent." "The editor of the *Faber Book of Modern Verse*, writing as early as 1936, remarked that in the near future we may see greater emphasis placed on poetry as a means of appealing directly to the sub-conscious mind, and less on poetry as a conscious criticism of life."

Beyond the diction, there is also the problem of composition. Words tend to get into a rhythm "The rhythmical flow of words

creates an intoxicating effect in which the mind goes into a rhapsodic strain, somewhere between sleeping” and waking. The modern poet wants to keep the mind awake and a broken rhythm, which is both musical and verbal, keeps the reason in play. Thus, he analyses his feelings while at the same time enjoying them. Beside verbal rhythm, there is also a logical or a grammatical rhythm. This must also be broken. Therefore, accompanied with the verbal violence there is also a grammatical distortion such as this line from E. E. Cummings:

For love are in you am in I are in we

The diction, the grammar and the thought are deliberately distorted in order to get a relief from the conventional bondage of thought and expression. Now consider this short composition from The Grey Lines:

لپک چھپک دوران سورج ناچا
پھر رات اندر
چاند نے آنکھ کھولی
تب میں کورے بستر کی تنہائی پر رویا
یوں نظم ہوئی
میں نے نظم کو چاند کیا
اور کہانی ہوئی

This composition cannot be translated without the risk of paraphrasing it. Usually the conjunctions and preposition are missing and sometime even syntax is tangled.

The painting an extreme form of this dislocation can be seen in the school of *Dadaism*. It is a revolt against conventional rationally. A kind of collage is created with words into meaningless and illogical patterns. El Salvodoe Dali put organs and features of human body into patterns different from the natural order.

But let me make it quite clear here that Eruj never goes to such extremes. Perhaps he cannot, since he is firmly rooted in his culture which cannot be so bizarre. But this is a modernist trend which has surely influenced him.

Beside these linguistic tremors, there is much else; that disturbs the thought also. There is personal commitment:

*As the line goes
Whatever new truth is revealed
Know it
Accept it (Jeevan)
That which
Has nothing to do with the present
Otherwise
You will live
As you have been dead
Ok, on a more cosmic level
Brain supported
Made machined pickaxes
Within a breath
For one seed
For a thousand seed
Squeezed the earth
But time ran faster
The idle brain, the body
To bring the rest
To bring them rest
We need (Crazy Waqt Ke Sath Sath)
More machines
More concoctions.*

From the personal and practical cogitations, the theme rises to cosmic dimensions:

*The cartoon
is fully manipulated
That's why
There's no death for a cartoon
Similarly
Now
Tresses
Are composed
Embellished, decorated
Growing form (Sawal)
Everything improved
With dexterity
Ghalib Jee!
Come now
What is left for Eruj*

❧ Chapter 84 ❧

The Clash of Civilizations



We hear a lot of the clash of civilizations these days. It is also a fact that the two civilizations of the west and the east have very different, and even enthusiastic values. This antagonistic can take a racial form, as in the case of colour division or it may take a religious turn, as how we can see in a clash of the west with the world of Islam. The question to be considered, however, is whether this difference, now so much exaggerated, is essential or accidental.

The difference may be ideological, if ideology is taken as the whole mode of living of a particular community. If so, then we must know that this ideology is not given, but created. The slogans, that west is west and east is east and never shall the twin meet, may be only a geographical proposition doing nothing with caste or creed. Confucius also observed that there was a difference between the people of the north and the people of the south. Also, as someone has noted, all the philosophers have come in the west and all the Prophets (at least the known ones) have come in the east, thereby suggesting that the civilization of the west is rational and that of the east is mystical.

Bernard Russell remarked that all culture, morality and even faith, are geographical. In George Eliot's novel, *Adam Bede*, Dinah Morris, a Methodist preacher, complains that the people living in the hard land of Stony shire are more God-fearing than the people living in the fertile land of Loamshire. George Herbert also noted in a poem. The Pulley that restless souls always seek God while those who find rest in life become oblivious of Him.

In Shakespeare's, *The Merchant of Venice*, three suitors wish to marry a Venetian maiden one of them is black, a Moroccan. Though he is conscious of his colour, Portia assures him that if her destiny had not barred her marriage except through lottery, "the prince of Morocco, renowned prince, thou stood as fair as any comer I have

looked on yet for my affection". In Titus Andronicus, Aaron is a Moor, beloved by Tamora, the queen of the Goths. Colour is again irrelevant. Similarly, we see that Saddam was the favourite of the USA when he was fighting against Iran and the terrorist. Taliban were Mujhaidis when they fought against the USSR. Thus religion is also irrelevant. Thus, we may conclude that the US policy throughout the world and from Munro Doctrine to Bush's division between friends and enemies, has been Machiavellian.

Western Machiavellianism also has a background. Derrida found 'logo-centrism' at the root of his philosophy of life. The metaphysics of presence (ref. my book Search for Medium, Kitab Mahal, 2004) has been the root of all western materialism.

This idea can be elaborated with the help of a theory, rather a short statement of a theory, even too short to carry conviction. However, it may interest some researchers to pursue it more seriously.

The theory is:

The northern hemisphere is mostly mountainous, a very hard terrain where neither agriculture was possible nor industry. Most of the time people had to remain within the doors. Thus they were used to secluded lives except for Sundays when people gathered at the Church. Consequently, their main concern was survival. Their culture is also the culture of survival, with minimum communal activity. The festivities are also likewise limited. There is neither manpower nor the bounty of nature. Their main efforts have I therefore been limited to material pursuits. Their entire endeavour has been to get as much benefit from man and nature as possible. Their merchants and traders had already formed their guilds.

In the east the scenario was quite different. Nature was extremely benevolent. Food and water were in abundance. Nobody could starve. There was wild growth of various kinds of vegetables and fruits. Water was only inches deep. Weather was moderate. Even a loin cloth was enough for a dress round the year. Wood was in abundance to kindle bonfires if the winter" was inclement. Here survival was not the problem. Thus there was generally little concern with advancement in life. It is a world of sages, mystics and prophets and its main concern has been with the aim and object of life, with the meaning and purpose of existence. As the normal yield of the land

was enough, there was no need to rip through the bowels of the earth. With more than sufficient manpower, even the idea of replacing it with machines was too remote to conceive.

It is reported that the printing press was invented in the time of Akbar the great. It was presented to the emperor so that it may be put to use in India. Akbar strongly reacted against the idea by saying that with the printing press in use thousands of calligraphists and script writers will be thrown out of the job. It was the humanistic zeal not the materialistic need that guided the people. Impressed by the west's industrial progress we have now lost that philanthropic attitude. A mechanical sweeper is imported without caring that hundreds of sweepers will be thrown out of employment.

It was when the fruits of industrial revolution was becoming visible that Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times* and Ruskin protested against the growing materialism of the age. While Dickens was alarmed at the dehumanization of civilization, Ruskin remarked that material pursuit had split human personality:

It is not truly speaking, the labour that is divided but the men ---
-- Divided into mere segments of man broken into small fragments and crumbs of life, so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin or nail, but exhausts in making the point of a pin, or the head of the nail.

Even the sense of the pride of performance has been denied to the maker, who now makes only a part, not the whole thing. And sometimes he does not even know in which contraption the components that he is making will be used.

This is the ultimate of industrial civilization which has led the human mind to contemplate on the absurdity of the entire human endeavour. They in the west now realize that all progress has been counter-progress. Science and technology have neither made man's life comfortable nor reduced his labour. Life is more busy, more full of worries, more insecure than it ever was. So far power and wealth have been the object of life. But now a realization is fast growing that power weakens man and wealth impoverishes him. USA now feels weaker than ever and needs more wealth than ever. The western intellectual is forced to think, if progress has brought about two world wars and an ever growing threat of another war, then either "man has been stupid or" he has been pursuing wrong objectives.

Now there is felt a need in the west of redefining the aims and objects of life. What is now needed is not to make life safe for democracy but safe for humanity.

In the west the wheel of fortune seems to have come round full circle. Now when they have somewhat secured survival for life, they are forced to think about the meaning of life. Writers, like Bertrand Russell, thus, have totally been disillusioned, seeing only total annihilation of the next war which must be nuclear, or finding refuge in the absolute dictatorship of a world government or, they have concluded, like Beckett, and even Hemingway, that life is absurd.

There is a saying in Persian that the fool also does the same as the wise, though after a lot of suffering. They too now are seeking alternatives to power and wealth in some other philosophy of life.

The age of colonialism started with the discovery of America. After that all the corners of the earth were rummaged for all sorts of treasures. Donne called his beloved his West Indies and East Indies: gold and silver came from West Indies and spices from East Indies. On the other hand, the explorers in east, the heroes of Dastans, like those of The Arabian Nights, went for the Blue Mountain or sought answers to seven questions or explored other mysteries of life. Their expeditions were spiritual not material.

Failing in asserting itself through power, as in Vietnam and Afghanistan, now the west has embarked on economic domination. This will also backfire as power did. The scenario is quite clear. Under the guise of globalization, the exploiters have now united. The world has already become a unipolar world. Very soon the exploited of the world will also unite. They are in majority and, more important, they are committed to life, against the exploiters who are committed to death. And there is no doubt that life will triumph again. Colour, caste, creed, nations, all will disappear, only humanity, pure and simple will remain. Let us work for this human world and wait for it, for this globalization.

❧ Chapter 85 ❧

East is East



We are presently very much concerned with two questions. The one question that boggles the minds is that while the West has made tremendous progress, the East has been lagging far behind. The other question is whether the difference between the East and the West is that of capability or mentality. The examples of Japan; China and Korea are evidence enough that the difference is not that of capability, though this is also a fact that all the advancement made by these aforesaid Eastern countries is a borrowed one. It is rather reactive and imitative. Their advancement is not indigenous. They have borrowed technology from the West. But this does show a difference of mentality. Then, it is also a fact that when industrial revolution started in the West, most of the Eastern countries were bound in the chains of slavery. Therefore they could not benefit from this wave of progress. And when these countries got independence, the West had already gone so far ahead that it was not possible for the East to catch up with it. This restricted their freedom to compete.

However, the greatest reason for this difference is that the approach of the West has been wholly materialistic while the East has been very particular about its customs traditions and humanitarian values. Thus, when Akbar the great was presented a printing machine, he rejected it by saying that the introduction of it will throw thousands of calligraphists out of job. A similar example has been cited by Maulana Muhammad Husain Azad about Iran. Some two hundred years ago, a European firm offered to the Shah to start a Railway Project there. The Ulema opposed the project by saying that it would be harmful for their culture. When the foreign company would come there, the families of the workers would also accompany them. They would mix up with their women which would corrupt their way of life. When the Ulema were told that the railway would facilitate their journeys for Hajj and Ziarat, they replied that their forefathers had been doing that on the backs of camels and mules and they would continue doing the same.

Quratul Ain Haider also made similar observation while flying through Iran in a helicopter accompanied with Shah and Shah Bano.

She saw caravans of pilgrims moving on camels and mules with the ladies wrapped up in sheets. Thus, the East did want progress, but not at the cost of its values. Christopher Marlowe had also warned his people as early as 16th century that progress at the cost of values was disastrous. His warning was not heeded.

Unfortunately same 'Muslim clerics thought that since the progress is made by those whose creed and values are opposed to ours they rejected progress itself. Progress is never wrong. It is attitude to progress that may be wrong.

A European scholar has observed that all the prophets have come in the East while all the philosophers have belonged to the West. And this is quite plausible. This difference may be explained in this way. Nature has always been kind to man in the East. Here the land is soft and fertile. Water and food are no problem. Fruit laden trees grow wild everywhere. Water is only a few feet deep in most places. The climate is moderate. A small loin cloth is enough for the dress. Also manpower is not lacking. On the other hand, nature has been very hard on man in the West. The earth is hard. Most of the year, it is covered with snow. Manpower is scanty. There were few working hands. Therefore the West has been largely concerned with struggle for survival. They were mainly concerned with the problems of living. The situation in the East was just the opposite. While the West was concerned with the acquisition of power to control the forces of nature, the East was more concerned with the meaning and purpose of life. Here machine was seen as enemy of man. People feared that machine may replace man. It was because of it that the printing machine and the railway system were rejected. Such a problem appeared in Lahore also a few decades ago, when mechanical sweepers were introduced here. It was feared that many scavengers will be thrown out of job. In the East power was never considered important; the important thing always has been the welfare of man.

The West also realized the dominance of machine in the lives of men who are now reduced only to robots. Dickens novels portray this fear in his *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations* etc. He observed that machine was more important since man was cheap while machine was costly. Similarly we see that in the West even worship was materialistic. All the fine arts in the West found their origin in practical need rather than in aesthetic or devotional urge.

Herbert Reed suggests the origin of art in man's struggle for survival. In the South of France some cave have been discovered which are supposed to date back to 20,000 BC. Sketches of Bisons are found on the walls and roofs of the rocks which are so perfectly

drawn that they show a long association of these artists with the Bison. The conjecture that when the young men of the tribe went out to hunt the Bison, the older people left behind drew the sketches of the Bisons and so arrested their spirits in their bodies. In this way they helped the young hunters in over—powering strong and fierce bisons. Similarly drama had its origin in religious ritual. Music, poetry, sculpture, architecture, songs and dances were meant to appease the gods and to keep the evil spirits away. Thus, struggle for survival was the main concern for the West, and survival was seen in power.

Here, in the East, survival was not the problem. Their concern with livelihood was just the minimum. The problem, from the very beginning, was the meaning and purpose of life. Sauda, an Urdu classic, says that running after the world is absurd, since man's life is too short.

On the other hand, the West did not get any time to think of civilization and culture. While coming out of the primitive world, as' they emerged from primitive life, industrial revolution greeted them. They had no time to create and consolidate the values of civilization. They were directly thrown into a mechanistic civilization. When the kings of India and China slept on beds of silk, the European kings slept on straw beds. Then machine came into their life, and things started changing. A, very good example of this difference can be seen in Shakespeare's Othello. Civilization is a regulation of relationships while the West had little regard for the sanctity of relationships, particularly" of those between father and daughter, and between man and wife. This created lots of misunderstandings, between Othello and Desdemona. In the West man and wife are equal partners in the matrimonial bond while in the East man is the master. As Iago says,

I know our country disposition well,
In Venice they do let God see the pranks

They dare not show their husbands, their best conscience.

Is not to leave undone, but keep unknown (III 205-28) Venetian women do not regard adultery so seriously, as Othello does.

Even today there is no regard for relationships. There is so much emphasis on individual freedom. It has even created a sense of alienation and-isolation in the people- Even the marriage bond has lost all meaning. Individual liberty has gone to unbearable limits. In the big departmental stores you now see notices saying "Shirts and shoes are required." The West is itself fed up with this anarchy and you may hear now people talking of the restoration of the family there. O'Neill in mourning Becomes Electra and after him Sartre in

the Prisoner of Altona used the symbol of incest for this total disregard for the sanctity of relationships. This stagnation has now started “stinking. Materialistic mechanical life creates such stagnation. Thus, Desdemona does not have the concept of the sanctity of the conjugal bond as it works in Othello’s mind. Desdemona’s morality is individualistic. Othello’s morality is conventional and social.

There is another question, whether the progress made by the West is real progress and are those people satisfied with it? Spengler’s *Decline of the West*, Herman Hesse’s *A Glimpse into Darkness* negate this. TS Eliot has called the Western civilization a waste land. Iqbal echoes the same feelings when, he says that the West is in a state of extreme chaos and that this civilization is marching on the way suicide. Sameol Deckett has presented a naked picture of life in waiting for Godot. He showed that in the beginning man was confronted with just four problems: nature, time, action and society. Man was not happy with this situation and he tried to improve it. He developed property which created thieves. He created nations and wars started. He made society that created the police. And as, after Beckett, Pinter showed in *Caretaker*, all progress resulted in reducing man to a few scraps of paper. Shadows became larger than man, now man is not important. Identity card is important. Telecard, passport ration card, roll number are important, Man has lost his identity in a few pieces of paper and his worth, according to Harry Bloom, is not more than scraps. Therefore even in the west, people have started wondering whether all this progress has not been an anti-progress. The West has so far taken power and wealth as the objects of life. But power makes a man weak. The most powerful are the most insecure and cannot step out of their houses without commandos and guards. They become prisoners of power. Similarly wealth makes man poor. A man having 10 rupees in his pocket will give 5 to a needy friend. But one with a million will not part with five for a friend in dire need. No boy is more scared than Bush and no one is poorer than him. Wealth is like that food which, according to some religious traditions, will be given to those condemned to Hell. This will only enhance their appetite instead of satisfying their hunger.

Thus, the West is now trying to come to the understanding which the East always had. Peace movements throughout the world are an evidence that man has realized that the power and wealth cannot be the objects of life; There is now a general feeling everywhere that the aims and objects of life need to be redefined.

❧ Chapter 86 ❧

Our Poetics



In the introduction to my book, *The Tragic Vision*, I wrote that it was a Pakistani view of the western drama. While reviewing the book in *The Pakistan Times*, Mohammad Salim-ur-Rahman wondered where there was anything Pakistani in it. If an erudite scholar and a sharp critic like Salim-ur-Rahman could not find any Pakistani in the book, I think there is something amiss and this invites serious attention. A theory, a principle or an idea is not contained in a word or a sentence. It runs through the whole texture. There is an anecdote related to Manto. When he was being prosecuted for vulgarity, he asked a prosecution witness to point out from the book where anything vulgar was written. Though a seasoned journalist, the witness was trapped by Manto. He nervously turned the pages, and on a page he identified a word, Aashiq (the lover). Manto spontaneously retorted how *Yar* (paramour) would suit there. Such is the case with an anecdote. The narrator does not need to say that it was an anecdote. Therefore, I decided to clarify the confusion.

Our writers and intellectuals have been so much overawed by the western thought and scholarship that they have been bogged down into many pointless debates. One is talking of existentialism and the other of structuralism. Still others have been drawn into the debates about the “absurd”. And in this way already complicated issues have been made still more complex. These are the problems of a chaotic and disintegrating society. But our society has not yet disintegrated to that point, nor has it become as mechanical as western society. We have a sensibility, a history and a tradition that bind us together. If a self-styled intellectual in our society is trying to pour his frustration sitting on a lone table, over a cup of coffee, he is simply escaping his responsibilities to himself, to his family and to the society. He has many worries that hang heavy on his head. He is not bored like a western youth with no emotional disturbance and practically no problem with getting his livelihood. He does not live in

an impersonalised society. He lives in a world where everyone critically watches the way he dresses, the company he keeps and the activities he indulges in, where he goes, what company he has and what hours he keeps. The individual has not been isolated or alienated here. The west is also, after all, coming round to the same realisation. They too are now returning from individualism to socialisation. They too are talking of reviving the family. In the west, there is no concept of family, perhaps there never was, except a very strictly nucleus form of it. Now they are coming to the realisation that it is recognition and respect for relationships that distinguishes man from animals. Now they too are trying to put man in the centre of things - each individual as an individual, not his worldly status or bank balance. They too are now putting a special emphasis on anthropology. They are coming to the realisation, though slowly, that power and wealth cannot be the objective of human life. The objective is the peace of the mind. Our intellectuals have been emphasising the same values for generations. The west has got the awareness now, but at what cost! The aftermath of the two world wars and the Democles sword of a nuclear war have become nightmares. This has turned their life into a hell. The progress brought by science and technology is now seen by them as counter progress.

Semantics is not our problem. All meanings are clear and properly located. We are not much bothered about the meaning of a piece of literature, whether it lies in the mind of the writer or that of the reader; whether it lies in a faith or in an ideology; or whether it is related to purpose or desire. We are never bothered whether action creates meaning or meaning creates action; whether meanings are absolute or relative. These are the problems of a disintegrated society and a brittle culture, where every individual is a world on his own, where individual freedom has become a license to the extent that collective values and collective consciousness have simply lost their meaning, where the greatest value of the society, language, has been paralysed, where social intercourse has become impossible, where T.S. Eliot has reached the conclusion that in that disintegrated society communication has lost all sense. Conventional language has been reduced to a meaningless babble. All talk is mere soliloquy. One man's carrot is another's turnip. There the writer has to dislocate language in order to force his meaning into it. All speech gets lost in confusion. As a result, in the west, new literary and linguistic theories keep emerging every other day. New schools have been appearing in the field of critical theories. Semantics is not such a formidable

problem for us. Alienation is the problem of the individual in the west. T. S. Eliot has himself come out with a solution to this problem that is, strengthening of the society and making the individual subservient to it. He wants collective unconscious to take precedence over personal unconscious and even consciousness. This is his theory of the impersonality of art. Our critics are unnecessarily dragging our minds into this confusion and are trying to incorporate this chaos into our sensibility. But in our world the individual has not been so isolated or alienated. In the west the alienation has reached a level where everything has become impersonal, even love. Everything has become mechanical to the extent that if anyone falls ill, one comes to enquire after his health, though, no doubt, the ambulance will be there. But in our World matters have not deteriorated to this extent.

The application of Western values and ideas has created many complications. As a result, sometimes we talk of stagnation and sometimes of deterioration in our literature, though a lot is being written, and some of it is quite good too. It is not proper to pass judgement on contemporary literature. This will be the task of the coming generations, because priorities change with the passage of time. Similarly the ideas and the prejudices also change. This compels us to review our literary values afresh. The poetics of Urdu stands on four pillars, though these are the various dimensions of the same sensibility. However, by treating them one by one, we may better appreciate the situation. These are the four aspects of Urdu poetics. These may be identified as rebellion, love, reason and tradition (which also includes destiny, sensibility and the concept of honour).

On the world level, before the French Revolution and locally before the Progressive Writers Movement of 1936, man was seen as a social being, and his main concern was compromise or confrontation with the society. The individual was all the time engaged in demolishing social barriers to his freedom. Rebellion was his motto, and love his weapon. Love was the great weapon of resistance and self-assertion with the help of which he jumped into the inferno of oppression. He was not interested in the temple, the mosque or the public opinion. He was madly pursuing and guarding his independence. He believed that ideologies divided the people. Religions and sects were destructive of humanity, according to him. He rejected both temptation and retribution. His slogan was that paradise be consumed in the hell. He was for the emancipation of the heart. He thought that both temptation and threat, tarnished human

soul. It may be a Heer, a Sohni, a Laila or a Shireen – they were the symbols of release from the shackles of slavery.

This influence of the Indian and Iranian streams, which is generally known as Indo-Iranian civilisation, is very different from the western civilisation. Love and reason were not seen opposed to each other in the eastern thought. In fact, love was seen as the glory of reason, while in the west these had been at loggerheads with each other. Thus the periods of love and reason have been alternating there. They have been existing in a dialectical relationship, acting and reacting upon each other all the time. Some of our own great poets also fell into this conflict of love and reason prevailing in the West. The fact is that to our intellectuals, love has been the very soul of life. It is the motive and the main spring of life. Reason only shows the way. The destination is determined by love. It cannot tell where to go, though it can lead the way. It is just a lamp to lighten up the way on which love leads man. The two cannot move without each other. The way as well as the destination, must be both known at the same time to a traveller. The French Revolution and the Progressive Writers Association brought about a great intellectual revolution. It is also true that big emotional and intellectual changes had occurred after the 1857 war of independence. Where people wrote about the devastated cities, new challenges were also faced. Under the influence of the movement launched by Sir Syed, Hali, Akbar, Iqbal, along with many others, tried to shake the minds of the Muslims from lethargy and despondency to which they had fallen. But all efforts were directed towards the reform of the individual, But after the too revolutions, man was no more a social being. He had become a political being. However, this change had not occurred on the sudden. Its glimpses could be seen even earlier. We have direct references to this in Ghalib. For example, he wrote a seething poetical censure of Sir Syed's *Ain-e-Akbari*. He very strongly criticised him for looking backwards and instead advised him to consider the advancements made by the English in the field of science and technology. There was an invitation to look ahead. However, the minds had not yet advanced any further than individual concern.

The French Revolution also revealed on man two other facts. The first was the sense of social mobility. It meant that nothing was pre-determined in life. Man could control and change his destiny by

his effort and intelligence. Instead of wailing on his misfortunes, he could become the master of his destiny. Professions were not castes. Class division was not the law of nature. It was created by the social system devised by the exploiters. In the west, the industrial revolution had established beyond any doubt that poverty and wealth were not any divine order. Man was capable of changing this economic system with his will and determination.

The other awareness that the French Revolution brought with it was that no social system was a part of any divine scheme. None was sacrosanct. Man created the systems. And if man creates a system, he can also change it. Such thinking was not possible earlier. Dr. Johnson went to the extent of asserting that God had created the rich and the poor and any attempt at poverty alleviation would, therefore, be only an interference in God's will. He further elaborated on the point by saying that if all become rich who would do our chores for us, as if class division is a part of the scheme of creation. Similarly when lightening conductors were fitted to the high rise buildings in the USA, the priests warned the people of the wrath of God, since God struck the sinners with lightening, while such devices were coining in the way of God's justice. The French Revolution had convinced man that the social system was not a divine creation and that it could be changed. The same thought ran through the progressive movement. Before that people Wailed and complained and cursed their fate. But now they protest and talk of changing the world. Thus, the role that *Ishq** or love played in our literature is now replaced with liberty and liberty is not begged; it is snatched. Protest springs from confidence, from determination and hope, not from whimpering and pleading.

Debates of art for art's sake and art for the sake of life were the product of the same confusion. Some people, while enjoying the right of vote, still consider themselves as only social beings. They are not prepared to see themselves as political beings. They enjoy the rights and privileges of freedom, but are not at all prepared to accept the duties that freedom enjoins upon them. Dictators and monarchs rule no more now. It is the popular mandate that rules. Earlier, governance was the concern of the rulers alone. Now it is the will of the people that rules, at least in theory. Good governance is now every individual's, responsibility and more especially of the intellectuals. In today's world political obligations are as important as moral obligations.

*The word *Ishq* in the following quatrains from *Bal-e-Jibreel* can be changed with the world liberty.

Kabhi Awara-o-be khaman ishq
 Kabhi Shah-e-Shahan Nausherawan ishq
 Kabhi maidan mein aata hai zira posh
 Kabhi uryan-o-be-tegh-o-sanam ishq
 Kabhi Tanhai-e-koh-daman ishq
 Kabhi soz-o-suroor-e-anjuman ishq
 Kabhi sarmaya-e-mehrab-o-member
 Kabhi maula Ali Khyber shikan ishq

The way *Ishq* or love symbolised individual liberty, in the same way honour symbolised collective or national liberty. But it is a great irony that the very symbols of liberty are now being used to crush liberty. There has been no lack of honour killings in our society. Mirza Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* and Azim Beg Chughtai's *Khanum* are the glaring examples of it.

Manto also debunked this false concept of honour. It is strange that there was a time when people laid down their lives at the altar of honour. Now they kill others in the name of honour. Honour has become an excuse for denying their rights to women and depriving them of their hereditary claims.

We had been so much over awed by the west that we had quite forgotten our own values, and we raised the slogan of the ideology of Pakistan, as if the ideology of Pakistan was something apart from Pakistan. Obviously it was after thought? This was the confused thought that caused a lot of embarrassment to our leaders immediately after the creation of Pakistan. They faced the problem of introducing their new born nation to the world. We started to think that we came into existence only with the creation of Pakistan. As if we had never existed before. Therefore, in order to introduce our culture abroad, we sent our artistes and intellectuals to foreign country. India got the opportunity of telling the world that the culture we were projecting was actually Indian culture and that we had no culture of our own. Even our then foreign minister, Chaudhry Zafar Ullah Khan, responding to a question at the UN reportedly remarked

that we had no culture; we had only agriculture. It is strange because cultural identity was not our problem at all.

The Muslims had ruled India for a thousand years. The Mughal era was the epitome of it. Our culture is still the same Mughal Culture the same cuisine, the same fine arts and the same fashions in dress. That is still a living tradition with us. Our manners, mannerisms and customs are the same. We still observe the same conventions, ceremonies, and courtesies. Mir, Ghalib, Anis and Iqbal belong to us. Taj Mahal is ours as other great monuments scattered throughout India belong to us. We came to Pakistan with this culture. We were not new. India was new. Therefore, cultural identity was actually their problem. A professor of St. Stephens College, Delhi, observed, in an article, that before the partition, Delhi's culture was Muslim. After the Partition now it is Punjabi. Pakistan is the same old Muslim India. It was India that had to create a culture of its own. Beside, the continuity of culture, Pakistan also enjoys a geographical and historical continuity. Our land is known as the Indus Valley, and Indus Valley is Pakistan. Our civilisation is the Indus Civilisation. Our present day town planning, our architecture, our arts and crafts, our toys and jewellery and our sartorial fashions are not much different from what they were in Mohenjo-Daro. The excavations from the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro are not antiques to us. We still live in that world. In short, ideologically, historically as well as culturally we are one of the oldest civilizations of the world. Neither were we born in 1947, nor was Islam revealed then. And this is the sensibility on which our poetics rests, which runs through the whole texture of our culture. It has an ideological historical, geographical and cultural continuity. Pakistan was in fact created to preserve this culture not to create a new one.



❧ Chapter 87 ❧

The Light of the Eye of a Picture



Zamir-ul-Hussain Naqvi is an excellent man. He never hurts anyone, never creates difficulties for anyone. He does his utmost to help and humour others. Above all, he is a good teacher. He teaches a subject that is generally considered dry and boring. But he succeeds in infusing great interest in it. However, his merit is that he is a good administrator. It is rare that a man holds an administrative post, is popular with the students, and at the same time a favourite of the administration, and highly admired by his colleagues. The reason for all this is his positive approach. He tries his utmost to do good to everyone. He takes upon himself all the Wrath of the establishment, the complaints of the students, and the bickering of the colleagues. He never allows any problem to go out of hand.

The Light of the Eye of a Picture is a very comprehensive book. There is a literary flair along with a sense of the fact. It is very instructive and very informative. Diction is lucid but at the same time allusive. It shows that Prof. Zamir is an old master of the trade. His pen has a great strength and a very firm grip that does not come with writing a few articles. This is an evidence of profound thought and a brilliant style.

The very title of the book is significant – *Nigah-e-deeda-e-Tasveer* – the bright vision of the eye of a portrait. This is borrowed from a verse of Ghalib:

My passion leads me into a desert where the path is no more
than the vision of a portrait's eye.

It is a beautiful picture of the world as an illusion, but still very enticing. Some of the pithy sentences of Zamir are almost strokes of genius: the city is like an impulsive woman that cannot easily yield or the reflections of the past that create a sense of wonder and strike consciousness. There is also a sense of humour, which is of its own kind: "God was in a humorous mood when he created ducks." Besides, there are references to history, such as Yusuf Khan Kambal

Posh's account of the London of 1837. There are also references of the great films, *Gone with the Wind* and *To Sir, with Love*. He also refers to the saying, "Carrying coals to Newcastle" with its Urdu parallel, *Ultay bans Bareli*. Then, there are very apt remarks, such as, 'the river changes the course, but so are people inconstant in love.'

There is a very apt use of verses here and there verses of Faiz, Faraz, Nasir and of course, Ghalib. Zamir also shows his taste and knowledge of classical music.

No doubt he talks shop too. But it can be excused because of his deep interest in linguistics such as, *Tok Pisin* of Papua New Guinea and *Pigeon* of China. But his compliments to his teachers save him from pedagogies.

In the foreign universities one meets a hybrid association of different cultures, which is very entertaining in its own way, such as the poem of Ghanaian poet:

I not be like you at all, what?

Zamir Naqvi is master of the craft. Just imagine and enjoy the way he ends a story:

Thus broke in *Done Quixote*,
Sancho dear, you go on killing the story in this Way, the rest
of life may be consumed by it.
Then, Sancho Panza became silent.

There is a flavour of pop songs also:

Someone to care, someone to share
Someone to kiss, someone to miss

Zamir is a man of so many colours. It is difficult to categorise him. By the way, there is a Japanese lay too:

On the Mount Kumochi
Until the maple raw leave get yellow,
I would love to lie beside you
Love you, love by heart, love by soul.

Then there are references to the popular figures of the stage of that time, such as, Ben Kingsley, who also played the role of Gandhi, beside many Shakespearean heroes. London theatre is really an exquisite treat. There is a good repertory in the memories of Zamir Naqvi. In short, he has done full justice to his memory in whatever context he wrote.

One does feel nostalgic. There are references to history also, like the Gun Powder Plot of Guy Fox in 1605. History, cultures, politics and geography have been so poetically conceived and sketched. Curricular and extra-curricular activities go on side by side. Streets, bazaars, parks, gardens and educational institutions all seem to be connected to each other. But one distinguishing feature of all this is the international community here. The British Council has collected people from all the corners of the globe. Africans, Asians, Chinese, Latin and Europeans together make a beautiful community. A blend of the cultures of the whole world enhances the sense of human dignity. There also lives a local tribe of Jardi here. Their English is so peculiar that even English do not understand that.

There are also many Pakistanis and Indians Who have never actually come to England. They have not migrated. They have brought their Pakistan and India with them here. But many of them do not know a Word of English. They do not even feel any need of it. Big shops and Malls have the system of "Help Yourself." All consumer items have price tags on them. Pick up the items you need and take these to the counter. There is no need to speak to anyone. These people have converted streets and localities very much like those back at home – the same confusion, the same dirt and the same sprinkling of beetle leaves spit. SO much so that they have named them Bhati Gate, Mochi Gate etc.

But Zamir considers travelling, beside an adventure a means of learning. During his stay in England, Zamir did not just devote himself to his studies. He thoroughly enjoyed the sights and sounds of England. Then, his style is so scintillating and graphic that the reader feels himself accompanying the author. Extra-curricular activities are the very soul of education. A book-worm especially eats up a book rather than learning anything from it. Zamir has described the cultural and literary activities at New Castle and Manchester with such indulgence that one feels the occasion. Beside factual details, his taste for poetry and his sense of humour enliven the description.

"As dates and apricot are non-existent in the world of Tundra, so are leisure and pleasure absent from the universities of Britain." The following description has its own charm:

The beautiful turrets of Lomely Castle, the tall chimneys of Gateshed, security towers and, at a short distance, the river Tyne, a magnificent bridge over it, all these lead to the city of desire on the Water surface in the evening, as Shelley remarked "Pageantry of mist." There are Water front cranes. One wonders what simple hearted Don Quixote would have

done on a decaying huge ship, a magnificent Cathedral, the Dominican Church, a victim of wrath of philandrous autocrat, Henry VIII, and the violently growing grass.

He knows that one really learns from meeting people more than from reading books. People's life style, their manners, the courtesies are not found in books. Life is fast shrinking. We are every moment reminded of the fact that others also exist here beside us. Superiority or inferiority is not the question. There are simply differences. Survival lies in co-existence.

The intonation pattern of Jardi is rising. Their tone sounds interrogative. Even consent sounds like a question.

I too had such an experience in Turkey. In Istanbul, if you ask for some article, the shopkeeper shakes his head if it is available, and nods if it is not.

Zamir's Urdu too has its own style. There is abundant use of puns and aphorisms along with a sharp wit. There is apt use of idiomatic phrases and a flair for proverbs. There are also fine shades of comparison and contrast.

It was a surprise to find a Roman wall in England. There are also bathrooms built on the springs and geysers by the Romans in the city of Bath. These belong to the period when the Romans had colonized England. Even otherwise, the English have no interests in baths. There are also the ruins of Hadrian Wall, which is 20 feet high and 73 miles long, built by King Philip.

From the recreation sites and museum, we return to the university whose charm strikes hearts like the poems of Munir Niazi and Walter de la Mare. How can one restrain oneself from academics when talking of the educational institutions? But had Zamir diluted some of his linguistic or explained certain terms, even a layman could get something out of it.

However, the ironies of a humorous bent of mind are quite entertaining. In response to a question by the professor, Zamir said:

I have no opinion. In fact I have understood nothing. (By now I had developed some tactics of talking the truth). So I confessed.

Zamir is also good in caricaturing his teachers and class fellows. He could be a good novelist. Beside, there is another interesting thing. The English of Englishmen is very poor. We have already seen a glimpse of it in the BBC programme, Mind Your Language. A Ghanaian poet wrote in the Vein of Imam Din;

❧ Chapter 88 ❧

Simply Communicating



The Wandering Falcon is a beautiful collection of fascinating stories. The publishers insist that The Wandering Falcon is a novel, but it is not a novel. They are separate stories, each with a beginning, a middle and an end, and carrying in it some sort of message or moral, ambiguous to the untrained eye, but still. Though there is a unity of atmosphere, all dealing with the life along our northern border in Baluchistan and FATA, through there are many similarity in their background, these do not have what is called the unity of action. This is a new genre that has not yet been given a name. Such stories are quite in fashion these days. I have had the opportunities of reading such fiction relating to South Asian countries by Abbas Zaidi, now living in Brunei. There are something between travelogue and the tale or between biography and reportage.

We may leave the technicalities aside for the time as these are not the speciality of these stories. What is important about these is their spontaneity. Jamil Ahmad has not tried to embellish his stories with any linguistic tricks or symbolic adventurism. He has been open and straight. He has not been obsessed with the idea of writing a novel or a short story. He is simply communicating.

The remarkable thing about these stories is not any speculative adventurism. Nor are these ventures into the valley of imaginative. What we have before us is actually a record of authentic experiences and observations. These are like the essays of Francis Bacon, a chapter from the author's personal life. These are neither theoretical nor ideological. The author himself has been a bureaucrat. He served an important administrative post in the areas which the stories survey. As the magistrate in the story a point of Honour, Ahmad must have taken decisions like him when in office. He must have exploited the ignorance, rather innocence, of the tribal people. At least such cases must have come to his notice. The most remarkable thing about these stories is that these are confessionals, and in them is the bitter truth. It is not the love of telling stories that motivated him; rather it is the burden of the sins in Conrad. Ahmad writes: "Conscience is like a poor

relative living in a rich man's house. It has to remain cheerful at all times. It has to remain cheerful at all times for fear of being thrown out." But this is all in retrospect. Had the stories been published when they actually mattered, they would have carried a different meaning.

The Wandering Falcon thematically falls in the mould of "outsider/insider" novels basically telling us that tribal people are not ignorant savages. They belong to a cultural tradition which perhaps is as old as history itself. They have their values, their sense of honour, and their code of conduct. Above all they know the value of community life. Their world is the world of ironies. They are free and they are not free. They belong to Pakistan and they do not belong to Pakistan.

Then there is the role of women, as brought out in these stories, which is very bold, assertive, responsible and cooperative. They are not passive beings, or non-entities, or practically non-existent, as is generally conceived by the rest of the world. In the first story, The Sins of the Mother, the woman not only shares her fate with the man, but gives him strength and courage to face a critical moment. In The Guide, we meet women who collect timber and bring water after walking for miles. They are an important part of the economic life of the tribe. There are women, like the mother in law of Tor Baz (the protagonist) who looks after the house in the absence of men, defends the house like a soldier and receives and entertains guests.

In The Mullah, it is the women who wake men up from their sleep and prepare them to fight for the tribe. In A Kidnapping, we see women having a full life though confined to houses. In the same story, the Bhattani tribal elder tells a story to the Assistant Commissioner about a boy and a girl who had eloped. They were waylaid by ruffians who raped the girl and sodomised the boy. The boy charges the girl for having lost her chastity. The girl defends herself by claiming that the wrong done to her was in a natural way, but she was unnaturally dishonoured. This shows the confidence and the courage of the woman. How different from the way the world thinks of the tribal women as passive and spineless!

The major problem of these people is economic. They cannot afford education. They have no skills. Their survival rests on kidnapping and spying. They are professional informers. At one time, they serve our government, and then they become enemies of the same government. Throughout history they are equally useful to the Germans, the Russians or the Afghans. Nobody really tried to understand their problem.

❧ Chapter 89 ❧

Greek Achievement



Greek performance in every field of life has been excellent and, in a way, has not been surpassed till now. They produced great poets like Homer, dramatists like Sophocles and philosophers like Socrates. They explored the origins of life and came out-with some interesting conclusions. To some, life originated in water, to others in air or in earth. They measured the circumferences of the earth with a small pair of dividers. They discovered that life was in a state of flux and that matter was composed of atoms. They produced scientists like Archimedes, geometers like Euclid, mathematicians like Pythagoras, sculptors like Phidias and musicians like Orpheus.

In short, they thought about every aspect of life and did wonders in every field, including politics and morality. They gave serious thought to the problems of living and to the nature and destiny of man. Plato thought about an ideal state and Aristotle wrote a treatise on aesthetics. He thoroughly discussed the nature, function and technicalities of tragedy and epic.

Classical Greeks explored practically every aspect of life and set the basic principles on which future thought could be developed. Though the Greek classical period spread over more than eight centuries, their main work done from 6th to 3rd century B.C., from Thales to Aristotle. But all this was not their achievement. These were the fruit of the achievement. Their achievement was freedom. They cherished freedom at a time when the great empires of Persia and Assyria had no concept of it at all.

The greatest fruit of this achievement, however, was democracy. And democracy was based on the principle that every man had dignity as a man- Caste, creed, class and wealth were irrelevant. This

equality of men presumed that all men were rational and humane. Each man followed reason and was sympathetic towards all men. That is why everyone was free to have any ideas and was free to propagate them. This created a tremendous spirit of cooperation and compromise, and an inconceivable amount of tolerance and accommodation developed which is so important for creating a healthy political community. One can imagine that when a "whole nation thinks, to what heights thought can rise. Classical Greek accomplishments are a clear evidence of it. They achieved that height because they were facilitated for it. They did because they could. That kind of freedom is inconceivable now, where our custodians of morality have their dinners together but offer their prayers separately. Classical Greek society was based on trust, and trust emancipates, creates confidence. No one was suspected to be mean or selfish. Our society, on the contrary, is based upon mutual distrust.

Just imagine a Deobandi, a Bralevi, a Shia and a Sunni preaching their ideologies in the same street and there are no riots. In Greece, on the other hand, everybody had patience towards everyone's beliefs and gave an attentive ear to them. Gojra massacre is possible, Taliban adventure is possible sectarianism is possible. But sanity is not possible in our society. Can that freedom be possible in a society where educational institutions are not seats of learning, but seats of violence, where opponents are ruthlessly beaten because it is a sacred Islamic duty, where even the teachers are not spared violence? Is it possible in a society where a person who honestly professes his beliefs is damned and hypocrites are given all the honour and respect?

It was this spirit of freedom which created democracy. All this was made possible, perhaps, by one fact, that their mythology was not codified. There were no legists to impose their ideology on the people. There was no dogma, no so-called divine authority. Here everyman was free to have his own ideology. Everyone had his own god. Perhaps it was the same in all primitive societies. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, too, each family had its own god, who was called Chi. Ironically; it is not much different from the established religions like ours. When one prays to God for the destruction of his enemy, he actually expresses the belief that his God is only his God, not his

enemy's, or he would have not prayed for his destruction- He makes a party with God. When two servants of a master quarrel, the one never asks for the destruction of the other. He only requests the master to instruct him. Similarly if one believes that God is every body's God, he will only pray for his enemy's instruction and reformation. Practically everyone's God is his private God.

Dogmatism in our society has reached a point that everyone here lives in a state of fear. The minds are caught in fear. And a frightened mind cannot be creative. In a class society God is only the God of the powerful. This has been amply proved by Taliban. There is an attempt to iron out or, more correctly, wipe out individual differences. There is an attempt to turn men to machines, and all the machines running on the same frequency.

Greeks had discovered that knowledge was power. They also knew that all power corrupts. It was for this reason that instead of knowledge, Socrates made ignorance his weapon. He had realised that knowledge enslaved and ignorance emancipated man. He ignorantly questioned the knowledgeable and exposed their ignorance. This, by the way, was one of the reasons that he had to take the cup of hemlock.

He even despised writing. Writing was too formal and stylized. It restricted the spontaneity of expression. Written treatise is not so effective as direct free discussion. That is why he never wrote anything. Speech is a very powerful weapon, the power of which is cushioned by an organised deliberately written treatise. Bookish knowledge is truncated knowledge.

Greeks believed in the philosophy of the possible, though they never lost sight of the ideal. They were practical people. They did not speculate in the abstract like the medieval schoolmen. While speculating about life and its mysteries, they always kept in mind the weaknesses and limitations of man. Therefore, when they talked of freedom, they never lost sight of possible human excesses. Freedom is power and all power entails responsibility. Therefore freedom cannot be without restrictions. It is not a licence, as Iqbal was also led to believe, when he said that the freedom of thought was an invention of Satan. It is wrong to condemn the freedom of thought in this way.

Even religion allows it within prescribed limits. Without limits freedom is not possible. We freely drive on the roads because there are traffic signals. Greeks also believed in responsible freedom. We are free in our homes because we have boundaries around them.

In our society, the media enjoys an enviable freedom. But unfortunately media has been commercialized. Therefore it has been forced towards activism. There seems to be no code of conduct to regulate it. It projects vice, because vice is saleable. There exists no market for virtue. Its debates and discussions have been reduced to talk shows. These are meant more for amusement than for instruction or enlightenment. Only the privileged have access to the media. Like our films the media also isolates a few individuals and, by condemning them, presumes that it has eradicated corruption from the society. The evil, however, is not in the individuals, but in the system. Freedom of one means freedom of all. An individual is free when he concedes freedom to all individuals. It was the great Greek model, which was their achievement; they cherished freedom, each cherishing it and allowing it to everyone else.



❧ Chapter 90 ❧

The Gift of Possession



It is a very comprehensive title for a book of poems, the entire emotional, psychological, physical and historical experience of a man coloured by his idealism. This is what we come across in great poets who try to sum up the whole experience of life and are themselves baffled by it. This is the art of comprehension and the skill of communication. It is a very special gift, fusing together the conscious and the unconscious worlds.

Like many poets, Athar Tahir has tried to grasp and communicate the process of creation. It begins with a stroke, rather a dot, becomes a letter, a word and ultimately a stanza. It all begins with a dot. The dot moving in space makes the line. The line moving in space makes the surface and the surface similarly creates the solid body. The poet conceives of the poetic process as process in the reverse. The poet wants to wrap life us back into the dot and in the words of Ghalib, try to see the sea in the drop and the universe in the particle. Perhaps he is looking for the Big Bang. There is a mystical overtone here, as Hazrat Ali claimed that he was the dot under the *Arabic Bay of Bismillah*. The poet is a traveller through space and time and tries to see where the two merge together. This is the spark of genius he is looking for and which can illuminate the whole for him. This grapple with the word is an attempt to break through the opacity of the medium to the illuminating vision of the ultimate reality.

However, the most remarkable feature of these poems is the spontaneity that seems to sprout into the poetic vision. In the modern world where poetry has more and more resorted to the intricacies of language and thought, it is a relief to come upon a poetry which directly speaks _____.

Modern poets are generally blamed for lack of vision which they compensate with technique. It is said that no excitement is left in life. There is nothing new, nothing inspiring. Relationships have become mechanical and all feelings are materialistic. But in Athar Tahir we see a very strong emotional need. The springs of love have not dried up, not at least in our culture. Altruism is the passion here, as is seen in the poems that deal with the family, and it is generations deep. Man is not alienated from the milieu:

Blessed girl, remember we do not, here
Marry individuals but families.

(August August)

Or

Alive in a house full of relatives
That gathered days in advance to clap, and
Sing with the dholak of how times sieves
One's life, and of such moments as at hand

(Father)

This familial integrity is extended to the spirit of national affiliation. The personal and national blend here. Besides, the patriotic vein, there is also academic association. In a tribute to Benazir:

More honeyed by the Oxford sun. Blessed
Friend, despite public flaws, your personal
Good will not be interred with your bones

(December 27, 2007)

Human relationships are multi-dimensional, but all dimensions meet on one focus, the focus of common humanity, which shares hopes and deprivations.

The patriotic spirit is extended to the common countryman.

For days
I carried her
On my hand like an offering
With others bearing their wounded

Bruised, scarred of broken issues
On string cots cotton-sheet stretchers

(Neelam Valley)

And all the natural calamity becomes too personal at a point where
the past is mingled with the present:

The bazaar is gone
The houses, road, bridge, many people, my school,
gone
My friend's voices gone
Under the rubble like their bodies

(Balakot)

It is this strain, the humane string that binds the poet to the world
around him as well as within him. The ideal and the existential merge
in him. He squeezes the world into himself.

The poet's mind is a comprehensive mind. It comprehends the
whole life. Nothing is left out. It stands at the intersection of the
vertical and horizontal dimensions of life. It is the point where the
past and present, the unconscious and the conscious meet. He is a
product of what he has been through generations and what he carries
forward for the coming generations. It is the poet's mind that brings
the entire past and the entire future to one focus. This is the vertical
dimension. This is revealed in the family poems of this book.

Then, there is the horizontal dimension, the whole
contemporary world. Whatever is happening anywhere in the world
at this moment, affects everyone alive today. If the #towers fall in
New York, the prices of commodities go up in Lahore. Everyone is
affected by everything around him. The common man may ignore it.
But the poet cannot. The poet's mind is a barometer that records the
smallest change in the atmosphere.

Athar Tahir has been a globe trotter and his poems bring the
globe to a focus, Austrians or the Nigerians, the Rastafarians, or the
Andalusians all are related to each _____

The same passion that marks human relations is transferred to
the objects of nature.

Into the soil it sends
Searching roots. The earth sends
Up sails and fins to hold
Its elaborate old
Architecture of height

(Cotton Tree)

Nature and man are one family to the poet. Both have the same
colours and the same rhythm.

When autumn first stepped into the creeper-
Leaves and with the last passion dyed the trees
I thought it was time to live, to release
To this sky a borrowed theme. To so spur
My love for you would naturally occur
In some tropics

(Oxford)



❧ Chapter 91 ❧

Beyond Light & Shade



Sami has called his work “a photographic Odyssey”, and one distinctive feature of these photographs is the element of narration in them. It is very strange that when the narrative is going out of fiction, its natural and original place, giving way to impressionism, in photography the narration is taking the place of impressionism. The reason, perhaps, is that in the modern age, people in general, and the intellectuals in particular, are suffering from “a dissociation of sensibility”. Modern writings tend to be mere “dispersed meditations”, showing that the modern man is losing grip on life. It has become very difficult to have a comprehensive grasp of experience. Photography is an art of the spectacle, of getting the glimpses of reality in snatches. It is an art which sees the running pageant of life in its different images. But Sami has knit the scenes into a pattern.

Each snap in this collection is a story. I would mention only two here, rather at random. The one is *Retired Life*. It narrates a whole story of life, with some achievements to celebrate and some wishes yet to be realised, with a complacent ease and a sort of emptiness in the looks – a beautiful blend of satisfaction and blankness put together. The other is just the opposite of it. It is *Chasing Dreams*. The setting is mesmerising. Wishes going as high as the bambo shoots and all time rising higher and higher. They may be just the bubbles, but these are so beautiful. One cannot at the same time miss the innocence of dreams, so colourful and yet so fast running away from one. These two photographs have not been selected on merit. Those simply came up as I turned the pages. All the other photographs too tell similar stories. These also show the richness of the experience of the artist as well as his sharp aesthetic sense. He is fully justified in saying that he has lived his life. But it is also a fact that life itself pushes man. He thinks he is directing his life, while actually all the time he is being drifted away by it.

Art is an imaginative recreation of life, but with one difference – it gives a coherent picture of 51 chaotic life. The artist's mind, as a Kaleidoscope, keeps making beautiful patterns out of the dispersed images of life. One life-long ambition of an artist is to see the pattern beneath the apparent chaos, and then show it to others. All our efforts are directed to one goal – to say the last word of our lives. Sami is lucky that he has been successful in his endeavour. He has earned the compliment which he pays to himself:

Through the exposition of my pictures I have opened a window to my heart for all and sundry.

The autobiographical note appended to the photographs makes a piece with the visual autobiography. These bind the reader and the viewer together. The story is the same. There is such a continuity that one is hardly aware of the transition. It is only after some time that one feels that the medium has changed. Sami has had his full share of the blessings and cruelties of life. He has had his share of blessing as well as whips and scorns of life, of love and devotion from the near and dear ones. These have shaped him into an artist. It is the story of a young man as an artist. Life has chiselled him into form and his aesthetic sense has added lustre to this life. The title picture is without any doubt his muse, has "life's ultimate truth-beauty". And he has very judiciously placed it again the Taj Mahal.

Sami is very good in giving most suitable captions to his images. The same genius is reflected in the title of the book – *Beyond Lights & Shade*. He aspires to transcend the visible. Even after drawing his soul in his images, Sami feels something still lacking. So he writes the rest of the story. It is not an artistic failure. It is not that some material could not be put into photographs. The fact is that his flair for language is no less than his love for images. It is, perhaps, only conventional humility to say that writing gave him unbridled freedom. Even in his photographs he does not seem to be much restrained. The written word and the images together make a mega-narrative.

❧ Chapter 92 ❧

Love



As man has his physical and intellectual needs, so has her, his emotional needs. Everyone wants to have a healthy body and a clear mind. Similarly he wants to have a loving heart.

Man is a social animal. He cannot live alone. Everyone needs everyone else. I need a carpenter, a mason, a plumber, a teacher and so on. And all of them need me to hire them. But when this need becomes a passion, it is called love. One very important kind of love is amorous love, or love between the sexes male and female. All poetry, all literature sing of this love.

It is in the nature of man that he wants to care as well as to be cared. He wants someone should care for him. This satisfies his ego. He is proud that he is loveable.

Moreover, love gives a focus to life, a meaning to it. Shakespeare's Othello says,

But I love thee! And when I love thee not, chaos come again.

Without love, life is a chaos, it is meaningless.

Man-woman relationship can have four dimensions: economic, conventional, sexual and emotional. In the first place, there is economic interdependence. Man and woman share the burden of life together.

Secondly, marriage is a social convention. It is not possible for a woman to live alone. At least in our society it is impossible. Home is made by family. For a single person, there is no home. It is a hotel or a hostel. Marriage is a socio-economic association. Marriage and love are not mutually related. There can be marriage without love and love without marriage. However, man and woman are complementary to each other.

Consequently love in marriage can be economic, emotional, sexual or cultural.

Thirdly, there is the element of sex, which, combined with emotion, becomes a matter of personal pride, as in Punjabi they say, "She is my Zid."

Then there is the emotional need blended with aesthetic need, which is amorous love. Man loves beauty – beauty of flowers, of pleasant faces, of noble ideas etc. This kind of love is not possessive. One who enjoys the beauty of flowers, does not pluck them. But lets others enjoy their beauty. We love beautiful gardens buildings and picnic spots. We enjoy them; we do not possess them.

Possessiveness turns love into lust, pride and egotism, while true love is sacrifice.

It is not possessive.

We may explain this with the example of Benzene Rings: Six Carbon atoms along with six hydrogen atoms make a closed ring. If one is absent the ring breaks and the substance becomes unstable.

Love is an essential element of human personality structure. If it is missing man becomes unstable.



❧ Chapter 93 ❧

The Poems of Iraj



Thought is supreme,
But expression is accidental.
So I cherish the thought
Your or mine
And shall wait
For miracles
To happen

This gap between thought and expression may be seen as the motif of this new small collection of poems by Iraj. If it is assumed that the poems have been arranged in order in which these were created, and there is ample evidence to support this idea, a strenuous journey can be seen from total chaos to some light at the end of the tunnel.

The earlier poems in this collection show hard struggle, a struggle to think and then to express what the thought may or may not offer. The poet seems in a great turmoil and torture. He sees the creation of a poem as a miracle.

In these earlier poems the poet is practically saying nothing. He is striving to know what he wants to say. The process from perception to conception and then to expression appears rather mysterious to the poet. He seems to agree with Plato that poetry is a revelation, something inspired by the muses. This is the view of many poets, including our own Ghalib, who believed that the verses dawned upon him from some mysterious world, from the unknown. While we think of Ghalib, we also come to know that he too had to go through these difficult stages in his poetic journey. His earlier poetry is almost incomprehensible. While in his mature work he wrote simple verses which seem to come spontaneously to him. Creation is a miracle.

When hands do the writing
Soul does the rhyming,
And mind sways along,
One natural poem is born

(Natural Birth)

But this rhythm has been achieved after great tortures.

There is many a slip twixt the cup and the lip. Art is the last resort of man. Thought deceives him. Feeling betrays him. Logic does not work. He wants to say something which the society does not like to hear, which brings shame to everyone, and which even his conscience does not allow him to say. It violates the social norms. He is not sure what he feels, and what he wants to convey. Art seeks some symbols for the expression of such feelings. One such symbol is that of the clown. The clown has been an important symbol in all literature, from Shakespeare's fools to Sheikh Chilli, and much beyond that. They are called them wise fools. They are very ridiculous but at the same time very respectable. The poet tries to describe:

Insanity lime,
What a fine line.
Free floating and liberating

(Lines)

The most poetic use of this concept is seen in a very meaningful poem – My father My Joker. Neither the father nor the joker has to be taken literally. They are used here metaphorically. They represent a respect on one side, and a stupidity on the other, and life is something in between. This may be a very embarrassing situation. Conventionally fathers are respectable. But as human beings they have the same weaknesses as others. But a son will not even think about these weaknesses. This is revealed in my father my joker. It is a feeling about the father, about the emotion of a father which is beyond reason and logic, but very loving, and leaves a permanent impression on the mind:

Jokers never sleep
And jokers never die.
The emotional strain is inescapable here:

The clown transcends conventions and formalities. He sees through the social taboos. He sees the reality and his assumed insanity saves him from any social wrath. He is an integral part of life, who has the vision beyond the visible, beyond the optic illusion:

The every present supreme clown
 Thus again:
 I am the brave one
 But my friends are braver.
 They talk about
 The fools above our heads
 Their smooth sail
 Forgetting like always
 They are
 The vultures in waiting

(Friends)

And the poet bursts out:
 Daddy, are we allowed
 To paint as we wish
 (A son and a father)

Thus, there are these social and moral reservations that force men to put on the mask of a clown. Thus he deals with the paradoxes of life

I was saying something
 She was knitting something.
 I was breathing heavily,
 She was rolling worry beads.
 I was becoming insanelly insane,
 And she was laughing inside,
 And she was counting them,
 For dooms day.

(Laughableness)

How are laughs and doomsday treated together? It may be knitting wool, or fate knitting the cobwebs of destiny. It can be any off these, or it may mean nothing. This is the world of dreams where everything is visible and still invisible.

Words have their own life these are no robots. These cannot be twisted or manipulated. These have a life that is generations old. These are loaded with traditions and customs. These are inflexible. But the poet is not traditional, neither are his ideas custom ridden. His experiences and responses to them are not of the routine type. But unconventional experiences cannot be expressed in conventional language. Therefore, the poet dislocates the language from its syntax, and words, too are used in strange ways.

Despite this chaos and confusion and all these difficulties with thought and expression the poet's idealism does not dampen:

In history,
Wherever bright
One Buddha stands alone
So stand alone
For the good believe in
And you shall see
In the brightness of night
You are
Never, ever alone,

(Light in the dark)

And this leads to the realisation of greater responsibilities.

That is the timely point
My fellow souls
When we can defy the Royals
By breaking in the moment
Put these clots
Relying on what we know
And let the known
Explore the unknown

(Exploration)

Thus, idealism keeps slipping into didacticism and the poet takes upon himself the burden of the mentor and the leader of the world:

Ring leader
Portrays the ring he leads,

But the world leader shows,
How the world ought to be.....

(World Order)

But, then, idealism leads to scepticism as well, as in Midnight Sutra, the longest of the present poems. The poet here slips from the idealism of Buddha to the scepticism:

I promised all the suns
I will hate to be Pharaoh
And Fall and rise
Like a Socratic should
And there I will not falter
And then I will not sway.

(Midnight Satire)

The poems are a spontaneous exposition of a perturbed mind. There is idealism in them. There is confusion. But there is confidence too. These reflect an awakened soul and a feeling heart.



❧ Chapter 94 ❧

Sajjad Baqar Rizvi *(On His Death Anniversary)*



Sajjad Baqar Rizvi was a short stature and apparently a sick man. But he was a capsule of energy. He spoke with passion and great authority. There was a magnetic power in his speech which at once captured the attention of the audience. I did not have the honour of being his student. But I have learnt a lot from him. He was perhaps the last of the generations of teachers who taught with religious devotion and commitment and loved their students.

At a meeting of literary circle, I saw him for, the first time. Our Principal, Prof. Hamid Ahmed Khan was presiding. As the discussion started, there rose a commanding voice with a passion. This was Sajjad Baqar Rizvi. This voice reflected a great confidence. Rizvi Sahab had just come from Karachi. He was new in Lahore and was a lecturer Islamia College, Lahore. This was the first time that I met him. After that our meetings were frequent and regular. He lived in a flat near the Regal Cinema on The Mall. One of our class fellows. Siddiq Salik also lived with him. He later joined the army and was very close to Zia ul Haq, perhaps some sort of a personal secretary to him. He lost his life in the plane crash with Zia ul Haq. I frequently visited his flat. His colleagues and students have already written on his literary and poetic achievements and will write more. I would emphasize here only on one aspect of his talent. He was equally conversant with both English and Urdu literatures. Like Intizar Hussain, he was also criticized by both right and left. To the progressives, he was a conservative and to the conservatives, a progressive. He lived in the heyday of the progressive movement. He was influenced by this movement and was a forward looking man. At the same he was deeply immersed in tradition and highly regarded its values. Perhaps everyone in his age was greatly impressed by T.S. Eliot. So was Sajjad Baqar Rizvi. T. S. Eliot had himself initiated many

changes in the temper and mood of poetry and made many innovations in its techniques. He is considered the founder of modern poetry. But ideologically he was very traditional and a conservative. He believed that the only remedy for modern man's miseries was in Roman Catholicism. Almost similar was the situation of Sajjad Baqar Rizvi. He was miserably entangled between conservatives and progressives.

However, this is not the point here. The point here is that he was well versed in both English and Urdu literatures. Urdu and English are the mediums of poetry. But literature is the same – a mirror of life. Thus, when I got the chance of heading the department of English in the Punjab University, I found that our students had practically no sense of poetic appreciation. They hardly had any literary taste or developed a literary sensitivity. Their only object is to achieve proficiency in English language. In the syllabus of MA in English, there was an optional paper of comparative study of literatures. This offered four options – Greek, Latin, French and German literatures. I added a fifth option, that was Urdu literature. Many of our students appreciated this. I requested Sajjad Baqar Rizvi to teach Urdu literature to the students of English. He gladly accepted my request. I thought that in this way students of English would develop a taste for literature. My idea bore fruit. Baqar Rizvi taught Urdu literature with a strong commitment. My students told me that after reading that literature they had started appreciating English literature also.

Now they enjoyed reading English literature too. They had read that literature was a mirror of life. But they hardly understood how it was a mirror of life. They could hardly appreciate what was similar and what was different between the reality and its image.

I have always believed that it is practically impossible to appreciate a foreign literature unless one has deeply immersed in his own literature. When one sees the real life around him reflected in his own literature, he sees the relationship between the reality and its picture. This is a great discovery and a great pleasure. He understands life and appreciates literature. He develops a taste for literature. He sees a aesthetic picture of life. This is not developed by reading literature alone. This comes by seeing life and its pictures at the same time.

It is a very sad situation that our students see only the picture of a reality without knowing the reality. Our students hardly had any conception of English life and culture. So they lived only in the world of images.

Unfortunately it did not last long. After the end of my tenure, no head of the department cared about Urdu literature. There was hardly any one among the faculty who had any interest in Urdu. The reason may be colonial mentality. English has actually become a status symbol in our society. It is a complex. People take pride in speaking English, even among themselves. It is a matter of pride.

We ceased to be a colony of the British in 1947. But we have not yet demolished the colonies of the mind. When shall we be really independent!



Notes

Razi Abedi



Razi Abedi, born in Sonapat in the East Punjab, India, had his early schooling in Delhi.

After independence, his family settled in Lahore, where he graduated with science and did MA English from the Punjab University. He also did Tripos from Cambridge.

Razi Abedi has written critical articles on the literatures of the east and the west. His particular interest is the study of Urdu literature in the context of the third world literature and the literature now being produced in the west.

He started his teaching career from cadet college Hassan Abdal and after three years in Government Degree College Rawalpindi he taught for 30 years in the Punjab University. He has been a visiting professor at various institutions in and outside Lahore.

His publications include:

- * The Tragic Vision
- * Search For Medium
- * Educational Chaos
- * Lays and Lyrics
- * Man of the Streets
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- * Bazar ki Raunaq (Urdu)
- * Jeevan Dhara Author Dr. Taha Hussain (Translation)
- * Aik Naujawan Shair kay Naam Khatoot Author: Rilke (Translation)
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