

A HISTORY OF URDU LITERATURE

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by

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IN MEMORIAM
ZAFAR IQBĀL

1924-1944

Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

PREFACE

THE present volume, intended both for students and the cultivated layman, attempts to give a critical survey of Urdu literature from its inception in the Deccan, towards the beginning of the seventeenth century, to Iqbāl and Hafīz, the last representatives, as it appears today, of a school of thought that started with the Aligarh movement and held undisputed sway over the Muslims in India till the early forties. Then there was a rift in the lute, and the Progressive school gathering together the disgruntled of the land under its banner delivered a powerful blow to the reigning ideology. The beginnings of this radical movement and its subsequent history constitute a most interesting chapter in our literary history; but as I have discussed the subject at some length in my *Twentieth Century Urdu Literature* I have decided to exclude a consideration of it from this book.

In preparing this volume I have drawn on some old material—papers and essays written by me as far back as the late thirties; but, in the main, it has grown out of a decade of teaching and study, first, at the Government College, Lahore, and later on at the University Oriental College. This enabled me to benefit by the criticism and suggestions of my students, and I have not only amplified some sections of the book to meet their requirements, but have also included subjects which did not form part of my original plan.

My main object in preparing this book has been to offer an interpretation of the works of the leading writers in intimate association with their careers and the conditions and influences that acted as formative factors in the development of their minds. From this viewpoint all that has been said about the lives of the writers and the times in which they lived is strictly ancillary to my plan. But it is not for that reason any the less deserving of attention. Criticism, as someone has said, is the adventures of a soul among masterpieces—the response of a cultured mind to the impact of a work of art. But it is true, nevertheless, that the significance of a work of art is more thoroughly grasped and the experience thereof enriched by linking it with history and biography. In addition to the biographical and historical methods I have made a cautious use of the psychological method and it has proved sufficiently revealing in a number of cases.

The main emphasis being on general movements and insight into the minds of the writers, I have left minor tendencies and figures out of consideration or mentioned them only incidentally. Mere lists of names of authors and their works and dates no doubt have their value, but these belong rather to bibliography than literary history, and as such they have not been given a prominent place in the book.

Another concept steadily kept in view is that of the continuity of life and literature. The past never dies; it is ever an integral part of the present. In the words of Professor Fleure: ‘. . . it has been realized increasingly that if “All the world’s a stage”, it is a stage, as Fairgrieve has said, that is never cleared for the next act. The actors have their décor and for that matter the debris of the past round about them, and they have its momentum and no less its inhibitions helping to determine their conduct.’ Of this principle the second part of the book is one long illustration. With the advent of the British our life entered on a new stage of development, but the flood-tide of British civilization did not obliterate the old landmarks. As I have attempted to show, modern Urdu literature offers a composite in which much that is new is crossed and recrossed by motives and values derived from the past.

In writing this book I have held fast to the view that literature is to be judged by purely literary considerations, and that the intrusion of such extra-literary considerations as the love of one’s country or religion seriously impair the quality of criticism. I hold with Matthew Arnold that criticism is the free play of the mind on all subjects; that its function is to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespective of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought without the intrusion of any other consideration. This insistence on literary values and on detachment does not preclude sympathy and I have striven all along to bring to light the good points of the writers discussed in the book.

Criticism, unless it is amply supported by illustrative passages, fails to make a deep impression on the reader. Even if he is favourably inclined, he gives no more than a languid assent to what is presented to him. In the event of a difference of opinion, he refuses to take the critic’s word for law, and in so doing is perfectly within his rights. A sufficient body of quotations not only provides a rational basis for the acceptance of the critic’s views, it also brings the reader’s faculties into play, so that he can see and judge things for himself. On account of the exigencies of space at my disposal, I have resorted to the use of quotations only in those cases where I have been eager

to make a point, or where I have parted company with popular estimates. However, to enable the reader to turn the study of this book to greater advantage I am planning to bring out a volume of extracts from Urdu literature to serve as a 'companion' to this book.

The information in regard to the 'sources' of Muhammad Husain Āzād's *Nairang-e-Khayāl*, Nazīr Ahmad's *Mirat-ul-Urūs* and *Taubat-un-Nasūb*, as well as the beginnings of modern Urdu poetry in the Punjāb under instructions from the Government, is of my own finding. For want of space I have set down my conclusions only in the book. For full information on these points, the reader is directed to my articles mentioned in the References and Notes at the end of the book.

In conclusion I most sincerely thank those friends and colleagues whose criticism and guidance have been at my disposal. Among these, special mention should be made of Dr. Shaikh Ināyat Ullah, Professor of Arabic, University of the Panjab, who revised the entire manuscript and gave me valuable advice on numerous points. Mr. B. A. Khān and Mr. A. I. Massey, my colleagues at the Dyal Singh College, have been exceptionally helpful with the revision of the typed manuscript, and I am deeply indebted to them. I should also like to thank Mr. Muhammad Nazīr Mehal, Mr. 'Āshiq Muhammad Ghaurī, and Sūfī A. Q. Niāz, who helped translate the quoted passages from Urdu and Persian.

The chapters on Valī and Sarshār appeared originally in the *Iqbal*, Lahore, the chapter on Akbar in the *West Pakistan*, Lahore, and abbreviated versions of Mīr Asar, Ghālib, Sayyid Ahmad, Prem Chand, and the chapters on Drama and Journalism appeared in *The Civil and Military Gazette*, Lahore. I am indebted to the editors of those publications for permission to include the above-mentioned studies in the book.

I am indebted also to the staff of the Oxford University Press for their assistance in bringing the labour of many years to a most satisfactory conclusion.

M. S.

Lahore, September 1957

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PART I

I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

ACCORDING to Muhammad Husain Āzād, our first authentic literary historian, it was Valī Dakkanī who first put Urdu poetry on the literary map. Then the frontiers began to be pushed back, and gradually a whole sub-continent of literature came into sight—the literature of Golkonda and Bījapur, which rose with the ascendancy of these kingdoms and ended with their decline and extinction. If we accept the traditional view that Urdu literature began with Valī, then its rise and growth synchronize with the period when the Middle Ages had already entered on their final stage and were about to merge into modern times. If, however, the second theory is correct, and Urdu poetry started, as it really did, with the rise of the Muslim dynasties in the Deccan, then it falls well within the later half of the Middle Ages. But for the purpose of this study, whether we accept the first view or the second, it will be advisable not only to study the immediate background of Urdu literature, but the entire Middle Ages. Our life has its roots deep in the past; and so has literature which grows out of it. In the past, this sense of continuity was much more pronounced than in our present-day world of rapid and bewildering changes. The Middle Ages were extraordinarily homogeneous. The economic system under which the people then lived, their religious ideas, their educational system—all were traditional, a legacy from the past, often a remote past. In this stable world the only variable factor was provided by political upheavals, and even this factor was more apparent than real. The rise and fall of dynasties skimmed but the surface of life, leaving the political system substantially the same. If it meant anything, it meant a change of rulers, and this affected the life and prosperity of a negligible minority only. The Middle Ages were static and the general sociological aspects of

any one part of them did not differ, except superficially, from those of another.

Accordingly, in dealing with the background of medieval Urdu poetry, I shall not confine myself to the period of Mughal decadence, as almost all writers on the subject have done, but review the entire Middle Ages. I believe that this will ensure a better understanding of the literature under review than a study of its immediate background.

It is customary with some sentimental historians to deplore the later Mughal period as the wreck of a golden age; but, barring political decline and the consequent insecurity and chaos that followed the loss of power, there is, intellectually, no difference between the periods of Mughal ascendancy and its decline. In politics, in religion, in social life, in its economic order and educational system, the earlier and the later periods of Islamic rule in India present an unbroken continuity of tradition.

In addition to this, the student of Urdu literature should be prepared to explore Persian and Arabic literatures as well as their backgrounds, because of our extensive borrowings from those literatures. Thus alone will he be able to learn how some forms originated in Arabia; how and with what changes they passed into Persia, and how and when and with what modifications they entered our literature. Medieval Urdu poetry, as our pre-Mutiny poetry is often called, is not an indigenous growth. The beginnings of the *qasida* and the *ghazal*, and the modifications in their form and content, as they adapted themselves to the changed conditions outside their birth-place, can be rightly understood by studying the history of these forms in Arabia and Persia. These topics are being reserved for the next chapter. In what follows, an attempt will be made to study some of the major medieval institutions and modes of thought, to ascertain what influence they had on the life and literature of the period.

The Middle Ages in India, despite their surface simplicity, are far too complex to be reduced to a convenient formula. They have, however, two salient features—the static character of their civilization and their other-worldliness. The peculiar paradox of Islam in India is that while it acted as a liberalizing force, so far as non-Muslims were concerned,¹ yet within its own framework it remained severely repressive, most of the time. Except for Akbar's abortive attempt to effect a synthesis of Islam and Hinduism, there was no active or

progressive manifestation of thought during the period of Muslim ascendancy in India.

Brought up generation after generation in a close and repressive atmosphere, the typical medieval man, we are inclined to surmise, must have been discontented, and eager to break away from the chains of custom and tradition. This was far from being the case, at any rate at the conscious level. In an unprogressive society the eyes of the people are ever fixed on the past; it is there that perfection lies. The medieval man had his limitations, but he was seldom bothered with them because he had no consciousness of them. In this respect the difference between the modern man and the man of yesterday is immense. The former may well dream of a millennium which science is likely to bring about, but he knows only too well that it lies in the unrealized future, and in the meantime we have to wage war against the stubbornness of matter and the still greater evil that is inside man himself. Such reflections tend more to depress than to fill one with hope. The medieval man was happy because others had worked, and he was reaping the benefit of their labour. The world had been perfected long long ago: this was the accepted view. In art, in literature, in religion, in family life, the ancients were believed to have left infallible rules for guidance, and the subsequent generations had only to follow them and then to pass that splendid heritage to the future in exactly the same form in which it had reached them. The natural results of this attitude were two: an unquestioning submission to authority and an extraordinary self-complacency which offered, and is still offering, a stubborn resistance to all reformist movements.

In the realm of the spirit, other-worldliness completely overshadowed medieval thought. According to the accepted thought the world was unreal or an illusion, and the goal of life was achieved then only when the seeker after truth realized this and passed beyond the show of things to the spiritual core that lay beyond the material rind. Cognate with the above was the probationary character of man's life on earth, the view, namely, that the world was merely a preparation ground for a better and fuller life to come, and that it was vain to set one's heart on its hopes and joys and problems. Now I am far from suggesting that this belief would inevitably lead to inaction or renunciation. As a matter of fact, as originally formulated, it was meant to act as an incentive to a life of active usefulness and beneficence; but it inevitably took the form of asceticism. The man in the past wanted to be an onlooker on life not a participant, believing that his abstinence here was a pledge for plenty in the hereafter.

This led to passivity, inaction, renunciation, asceticism, a belief in the vanity of life, and other similar concepts that formed so large a part of the life of the period.

3

Let us now study some of the major institutions which were responsible for the peculiar physiognomy of the Middle Ages in India.

The static character of medieval society and its extreme immobility have been due, in no small degree, to the despotic character of its government. Despotism is by its very nature self-centred. It is the inversion of an equitable order of things where millions exist to support a few, and where the weight of government falls heaviest on the lowest strata without reciprocal benefits. Under despotism the governed have no rights except those which the rulers recognize. The weakness of the governed, their ignorance and poverty, are the very conditions of its success, as their strength and enlightenment are the foundations of a strong representative government. The great civic virtues of courage, independence, initiative, love of justice and truth find little scope or encouragement under despotism. Hence its existence implies an absence of these virtues, and its continuance from age to age is a true index of the moral degeneration of a people.

In the second place despotism is unprogressive. It is wedded to the past. Its history shows nothing but a close and careful reproduction of old forms. It believes in usage, form, and tradition, and fears nothing so much as change. For despotism has its sanction in usage and tradition only; and to attack tradition, in any form, is to weaken the moral force behind it. Any liberal tendency in any department of life is likely to react with dangerous force on its existence. Accordingly, it allies itself with the past and believes in formalism and conservatism. The Romans were tolerant of the popular religious cults of the day and readily offered their gods a place in the Pantheon; but when Christianity raised its head among the masses, a most systematic attempt was made to stamp it out. It was believed that the new ethics would react harmfully on Roman imperialism. For a similar reason, kings have always supported religious orthodoxy against new manifestations of thought and philosophy. Religion and despotism have always stood together in their distrust of intellectual expansion.

A few words about pessimism which so largely colours medieval

thought. This, too, is traceable to the prevalent form of government. Fear and insecurity are feelings which despotism most strongly engenders. Where the will of one person, or a set of persons, is law; where disgrace, death or honour are dispensed by the whims of a mortal, what feelings can there be of personal security? The mandates of a king backed by the might of an empire come to have the force of an inexorable fate. The unalterable routine of court life; its pomp and show; its awful and impressive atmosphere; its palaces and armies—all overpower the imagination, invest the ruler with super-human attributes and bring home their impotence to the governed.

The evils of the political system were aggravated by the tyranny of an ecclesiastical system which grew more and more hard and empty as time passed. It would be idle to deny the part played by religion in the evolution of human society. Not only has it been a source of consolation to people through the ages; it has been one of the chief promoters of culture and civilization. Yet it cannot be gainsaid that religion is essentially a conservative force. The Muslims in India attained a fairly high degree of civilization so far as the arts of life were concerned, but the ecclesiastical history presents nothing but an unbroken record of rivalries and persecutions over petty differences of doctrine or ritual. 'When the codification and application of religion was in such hands,' writes Mr. Ikrām, 'we need hardly wonder that during the eight centuries of Muslim rule in India, there has not been one original jurist in the country.'² 'The commentaries of these latter-day theologians,' writes Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī, 'rang the death-knell of original work. The theological works of the period mostly comprise verbal discussions, refutations, and controversies. With the exception of imitative works and controversial writing, not a single word has been added to Islamic literature in this period.'³

5

There was no popular system of education in India during the Muslim period. The main educational institutions were two: *maktabs* and *madrasas*. The former were schools attached to mosques where an elementary sort of education, consisting mostly of reading and writing, was imparted. Here also the students learned orally parts of the Koran for devotional purposes. The higher education imparted

in *madrasas* included mathematics, astronomy, theology, medicine, logic, literature, and history.

The educational ideals prevalent in the Muslim period were not likely to encourage the emancipation of the student's mind. The teacher looked to the past for his ideals. His duty was to pass on to the student the mass of traditions handed down to him. This, instead of enlarging the mind, cramped it the more; it bred a slavish respect for authority and, in place of scholars and critics, produced pedants.

The following extract from a statement attributed by Bernier to Aurangzeb, embodies, in my view, the soundest criticism of the curriculum of the day. It is supposed to have been delivered by him to his former teacher, who had repeatedly sought an interview with him.

But what was the knowledge I derived under your tuition? You taught me that the whole of Franguistan [i.e. Europe] was no more than some inconsiderable island, of which the most powerful monarch was formerly the King of Portugal, then he of Holland, and afterwards the King of England. In regard to the other sovereigns of Franguistan . . . you told me they resembled our petty Rājās, and that the potentates of Hindoustan eclipsed the glory of all other kings; . . . and that Persia, Usbec, Kachguer, Tartary, and Cathay, Pegu, Siam, and China trembled at the name of the Kings of the Indies. Admirable geographer! Deeply read historian! Was it not incumbent upon my preceptor to make me acquainted with the distinguishing features of every nation of the earth; its resources and strength; its modes of warfare, its manners, religion, form of government . . . and, by a regular course of historical reading, to render me familiar with the origin of states, their progress and decline; the events, accidents or errors, owing to which such great changes and mighty revolutions have been effected? . . . Forgetting how many important subjects ought to be embraced in the education of a Prince, you acted as if it were chiefly necessary that he should possess great skill in grammar, and such knowledge as belongs to a Doctor of Law; and thus did you waste the precious hours of my youth in the dry, unprofitable, and never-ending task of learning words! . . . You gave my father Chah-Jehan to understand that you instructed me in philosophy; and, indeed, I have perfect remembrance of you having, during several years, harassed my brain with idle and foolish propositions that seldom ever enter into the business of life . . . O yes, you caused me to devote the most valuable years of my life to your favourite hypotheses, or systems, and when I left you, I could boast of no greater attainment in the sciences than the use of many obscure and uncouth terms, calculated to discourage, confound, and appal a youth of the most masculine understanding; terms invented to cover the vanity and ignorance of pretenders to philosophy; of men, who, like yourself, would im-

pose the belief that they transcend others of their species in wisdom, and that their dark and ambiguous jargon conceals many profound mysteries known only to themselves. If you had taught me that philosophy which adapts the mind to reason and will not suffer it to rest satisfied with anything short of the most solid arguments; if you had inculcated lessons which elevate the soul and fortify it against the assaults of fortune, tending to produce that enviable equanimity which is neither insolently elated by prosperity nor basely depressed by adversity; if you had made me acquainted with the nature of man; accustomed me always to refer to first principles, and given me a sublime and adequate conception of the universe, and of the order and regular motion of its parts; if such, I say, had been the nature of the philosophy imbibed under your tuition, I should be more indebted to you than Alexander was to Aristotle. . . .⁴

Lastly, a large part of the unprogressive character of the Middle Ages must be ascribed to economic factors. India did not then possess, as she possesses today, any effective means for the diffusion of ideas; they remained confined to areas where they took birth, or, at best, travelled very slowly. Today, thanks to the speedy means of travel and communication, distances have been almost annihilated, and thoughts are flashed across continents in the twinkling of an eye. The printing press has revolutionized education by bringing it within the means and reach of all. Railways, post offices, telegraphs, and wireless, are some of the forces that are fast changing the world. The darkness of the Middle Ages in Europe and Asia was not so much caused by political or ecclesiastical pressure as by the almost insurmountable barriers in the way of the spread of ideas. The Renaissance in Europe owes as much to the discovery of Greek learning as to the invention of paper and the printing press which placed the new learning within the reach of all. Had there been no printing press in Germany when Luther unfurled the flag of rebellion against the ecclesiastical system of his day, so that the reformers could publish more books than were officially burned by the hangman, the great movement he initiated would, in all likelihood, have been numbered among the world's lost causes like the Albigensian heresy in France. The Middle Ages in India came to an end when the isolation of the country was broken and she came into political contact with a civilization equipped with a more efficient economic and technological order to promote the march of ideas.

Two other institutions which had an important bearing on life and

literature in the past are *tasavvuf* and patronage, and it is necessary to look into them a little more closely.

Tasavvuf was one of the cardinal forms of thought in Islam during the period. The modern view is that it is not an integral part of Islam, but was gradually absorbed into it on account of contact with Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Be this as it may, what popularized it as a system of thought was the pervasive gloom and defeatism which followed the destruction of the Abbasids by the Tartar invasion. The devastation and ruin which followed the fall of Baghdad brought home to the Arabs the unreality of worldly splendour and greatness, and the impotence of man. *Tasavvuf* now overshadowed life and thought, and its ethical part, namely, the unreality of life and vanity of power and greatness, became a part and parcel of the life of the Muslims.

Tasavvuf, in the most general terms, may be defined as an emotional approach to the reality of life. It is held by the materialists (those who believe that matter is the ultimate reality in life) that all knowledge is due to the activity of the intellect, and that the senses provide the only infallible avenue to a knowledge of the world. The *sūfīs*, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the intellect can only deal with the world of the senses. Beyond the material world, there is a spiritual world to which reason has no access, and which can only be approached through feelings. It is, therefore, a part of the discipline of a *sūfī* to develop the latter at the expense of the former. He believes that it is only with freedom from the tyranny of reason that the real nature of the universe is apprehended.

To the *sūfī* the whole universe and everything in it is permeated with a divine essence which is the life of the universe, the only reality in a world of shadows. In a higher stage of mystical insight, the perception of the divine becomes so strong and clear that the material world through which the divine truth is perceived, is not felt at all, and the *sūfī* feels that nothing exists but God. He is the only reality; the rest is an illusion, the snare of the senses, which it is the business of a mystic to escape. To attain this goal one must be unspotted by the world. A person whose mind is engrossed in material things is unfit for the spiritual life of the mystic.

From this it follows that contentment, distrust of the world and contempt for riches and rank are an integral part of the ethics of

tasavvuf. As a result, when it became the accepted form of thought, its ethical content overflowed the system itself and became a necessary part of the general philosophy of the period.

Tasavvuf, today, is in a slough of disrepute. It is being attacked for its belief in the unreality of the world and for its advocacy of inaction. And yet, as the lives of the great mystics show, the genuine *sūfī* was anything but a brain-sick and languid dreamer. The evils associated with *tasavvuf* by its modern critics were more than counterbalanced by its great services. To begin with, *tasavvuf* was one of the strongest forces making for active benevolence and service to mankind in the past. Its leading exponents, e.g. Rūmī, Hāfīz, ‘Attār, and Jāmī were the master spirits of their times. The ethical system they preached is the highest we can conceive. They believed that virtue is its own reward, and condemned the calculating goodness of the selfish clergy whose piety and devotion were motivated by the desire of reward in the hereafter. More important still, *tasavvuf* gave self-respect to mankind. During the Middle Ages, when man had been reduced to the position of an abject slave by despotism, it was mysticism alone that glorified him as divine in origin, and gave him hope and confidence. The greatest service of *tasavvuf* was that it was the only tolerant system in a world from which tolerance had been ruthlessly outlawed. The *sūfīs* taught that all systems contained an element of truth and were divine in origin. Hence mysticism strove to bring man close to man, when theologians were doing all that was possible to breed intolerance and hatred. ‘It had a good effect on ethics,’ writes Shibli. ‘The enmity which was spread by jurists and theologians on the basis of difference of opinion, and which had led to a perpetual war between Muslims and non-Muslims, nay, between the different sects of the Muslims themselves, was removed, and thoughts of universal love and sympathy began to grow apace.’⁵

It is also possible to put up a similar defence for the philosophy of the period which is curtly dismissed as defeatist today. The cult of other-worldliness and retirement from life which colours the philosophy of the period, derives its sanction from two causes. It was, to some extent, fostered by the religious idea that the life here below was a preparation for the life to come. Hence, the less one encumbered oneself with it the better. More important still, it was an idealistic reaction against the materialistic trend of the age, a sensitive withdrawal from the life of intrigue, flattery, and selfishness in courts. There can be only two attitudes towards evil on the part of a good citizen: either to extirpate it by active opposition, or to condemn it

and withdraw from it. The mystics had no power to fight evil in high places. But they could turn away from it contemptuously and condemn greed and self-seeking. And such, indeed, was the attitude of the major thinkers of the day. Besides, as Shibli points out:

It should be carefully remembered that the high praise lavished on contentment and resignation by the mystics does not mean, as is wrongly concluded, that people should not earn their livelihood, and should subsist on charity and alms. By contentment they meant that the service of kings, nobles, and officials should be avoided and a living should be made by trade, commerce, and manual labour. And as in those days business was considered neither honourable nor very lucrative as compared with royal service, so to remain satisfied with the meagre emoluments of a handicraft or trade was regarded as contentment.⁶

The question before the thinkers of the age was: would you rather have money, rank, and position, or self-respect and a clear conscience? And intent as they were on the integrity of their soul, they strove to choose and recommend the latter to their compatriots.

I have tried to set out above the bright side of *tasawwuf*, ignored today by unsympathetic and one-sided criticism. There is no doubt that once it lost its ideal character, its love of contentment degenerated into inaction and a demoralizing dependence on charity; while the discipline it recommended for oneness with God through the worship of human beauty became an open incentive to sensuality. Just as decadent religion came to mean empty formalism and pharisaism, similarly decadent mysticism came to mean an unabashed repudiation of all civic and moral responsibility and the glorification of poverty, indigence, and even loose living.

The development of art and poetry in the Middle Ages was intimately connected with patronage. The poets and artists had to attach themselves either to kings or noblemen, for whom they worked and by whom they were maintained and rewarded. The growth of the middle class and the spread of literacy are among the forces that have destroyed the institution and given a measure of freedom to the artist.

As in the case of most other things in life, it is possible to say a great deal both for and against patronage. Today, we are more conscious of its defects. To begin with, and confining ourselves to poetry alone, it stirred bad blood among the poets. Where all strive to be-

come the favourites of one person, rivalries and jealousies are bound to set in; hence the lampoons and satires in which the poets eased their overwrought feelings against their rivals. It also led to much flattery and demoralizing obligation. The war between Mus-hafī and Insha is an example of the length to which rival poets could go. As regards its influence on art, it is clear that patronage compelled the poet to give what the patron wanted. He did not write what pleased him, but what was calculated to please the patron. Consequently, at its worst, the poet sank into a sycophant, ever willing to adapt himself to his master's taste or whims. Insha and Mus-hafī were playthings in the hands of their patrons; and the latter's pathetic expostulation with his patron on being reduced in the face of a successful rival, or the disabilities imposed on Insha himself by his offended patron, indicate the evils of patronage.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that the development of poetry in Persia and India in the past was intimately connected with the munificence and liberality of patrons and their sound taste. It is the *nouveau riche*, or the representatives of the old aristocracy out of touch with their traditions, who glory in their want of culture today. The old aristocracy had an impeccable taste and their influence on their poetical clients was more salutary than otherwise.

Be this as it may, it is a well-known fact that the growth of fine arts all the world over in the past was indissolubly connected with patronage. The great works of Classical antiquity and of the Renaissance in Europe were due to the influence of persons like Pericles, Scipio, Charlemagne and the Medicis. Above all, by placing the artist above the pressure of material requirements, patronage enabled him to devote himself whole-heartedly to his art.

I am not sure that the spread of literacy by freeing the writer has done much good to literature.

It would be rash to assert [writes Prof. Walker] that this increase in the number of readers has been an unmixed benefit to literature. The proportion of those who have neither the culture nor the time and inclination to study serious books is probably greater now than at any former period. The taste of such persons is gratified by the mass of fiction and of periodicals which has grown and is still growing year by year, . . . and it cannot be considered satisfactory that growth is most vigorous just in those forms of literature which are least able to stand the test of time.⁷

It is fashionable, today, to run down court patronage. It is held that the comparatively high standard of poetry in Delhi was due to the absence of court influence, while its decline in Lucknow resulted

from its presence. In my opinion, the view that court influence is always harmful to an artist is too hasty and too unwarrantable a generalization. Much will depend on the nature and tone of the court itself, and much again, on the character and predispositions of the poet himself. For example, Insha's levity and want of restraint found a congenial atmosphere in Lucknow. Would he have been any better if he had continued to live in Delhi? A brief reference to *Āb-e-Hayāt* will dissipate the illusion. He was too wild, too volatile, to be steady anywhere, as his short sojourn in Delhi shows. Court influence has been salutary or otherwise according to the nature of the people composing the court, the patrons as well as the clients; and if Lucknow falls short of the poetry of Delhi, as I believe it does, the fault is not exclusively that of the court. It cannot be argued that court influence in literature is always *bad* because the Lucknow court which was inherently *bad* exerted a *bad* influence on a set of *bad* poets. It may as well be asked: why did not this vicious court influence manifest itself in the case of Mīr and Sauda, who had migrated to Lucknow like Insha and others, and had enjoyed more aristocratic and royal patronage than anyone else? The reply generally given is that they were strong enough to withstand the contagion. Exactly. You have to consider the person as well as his environment. I regret to say that by far the greatest part of the adverse criticism of Lucknow shows either an ignorant bias, or is inspired by an urge, conscious or unconscious, to traduce and vilify Lucknow which had welcomed and supported Delhi poets in their hour of need, and does not show a detached study of the subject. The thesis that poetry flourishes in cloistered seclusion,⁸ and that it languishes as soon as it enters courts, is an entirely untenable statement which finds little or no support from the history of this or any other country. Art and literature in the past grew and flourished almost entirely under some sort of patronage.

As the subsequent chapters will show, all these factors, political, religious, and economic, have entered into Urdu poetry and determined its peculiar physiognomy. To begin with, being the product of a static age there is no real development in its forms and themes. The poets look back to the past, and originality is frowned upon and treated as eccentricity. Again, as there is no advance in ideas, there is no real advance in the language, too, although, as time passed, it gained in smoothness and flexibility. In regard to its tone and temper, the influence of religion, no doubt, made itself felt in the form of a vague and tepid optimism, and it figures pretty constantly in most

poets. But beneath this surface optimism there are unplumbed depths of disappointment and frustration which well up in the form of the quietist ethics of the age. In Urdu poetry there is very little of a genuine affirmation of life: its themes are resignation, passivity, self-pity, and the tyranny of fate. This poetry with its wistfulness and pathos made a deep appeal to the readers and listeners because it was an image of their own thwarted lives. Strange as it may sound, this love of the pathetic and sentimental for its own sake is as strong as ever today, and poets are admired because they are tearful. Is this because old habits die hard? No, the explanation rather seems to be that beneath a thin veneer of Western attitudes and institutions, which we have formally accepted, life with us is still running in medieval grooves; the old tyrannies are not dead, and we like painful themes because they bring an agreeable feeling of relief.

II

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIEVAL URDU POETRY

MEDIEVAL Urdu poetry grew under the aegis of Persian poetry. Some of the best of the earlier Urdu poets were either of Persian extraction, or were thoroughly conversant with Persian literature. Hence, with the decline of Persian in India, when they went over from Persian to Urdu, they transplanted into it practically all the features of Persian poetry. The themes of Urdu poetry, its forms, its metrical system, its imagery and figures of speech are all Persian. Urdu poetry is therefore an exotic. With the country of its birth it has very slender links—a few metres, a handful of Hindī words, and occasional references to Indian life and background which the purists, ever hostile to the native element, were to discard as improper and vulgar. Urdu poetry, as such, is a continuation of Persian poetry in a new language and a new setting. Nor did Urdu poets ever fail to look up to Persian poets as their guides and models. Whatever changes Persian poetry will henceforth undergo in Persia and India, will be only too faithfully reflected in the themes and styles of the subsequent Urdu poets. In other fine arts, such as painting, architecture, and music, there has been a partial synthesis of Indian and Persian ideals; in poetry Persian genius successfully held its own.

Thus was Urdu poetry cut off from its native land in infancy and fed from a foreign source. Urdu is honeycombed with Persian words, expressions, sayings, phrases, imagery, allusions—geographical, mythological, historical—the names of Persian trees, birds, and flowers. And yet this unnatural process was entirely natural from the viewpoint of the poets; for they wrote of things which had become interwoven in their lives by intimate literary and personal associations. What we call *natural* is only another name for the *familiar*.

It is equally important to know that Urdu poetry came under the influence of Persian poetry at a time when the latter had fallen into decadence. The result was that our poetry was tainted with narrowness and artificiality at the very outset of its career.

But this free importation of foreignisms, taken by itself alone, is not such a serious defect as it appears at first sight. Is English poetry any the worse for its extensive borrowings from Greek mythology? Does it not owe some of its most haunting effects to it? Imagine a Milton, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, or Tennyson without it!

But, then, classical references do not usurp the place of observation, and form only a small fraction of the storehouse on which English poets draw for their imagery. Urdu poetry lacks freshness because, among other things presently to be discussed, it leaves out observation and borrows its imagery wholesale from Persia. From this it naturally follows that our medieval poetry, especially the *ghazal*, has no local colour. In this respect, the contrast between Urdu poetry and Hindī and Punjābī and Sanskrit poetry is striking. The latter have grown out of the soil and absorbed its natural wealth and social background. And for this reason they make a deeper appeal to us than Urdu poetry. One of the most unfailing sources of aesthetic enjoyment in poetry lies in the idealization and recognition in it of things we see and love in life. It is not only that the sights and scenes we are familiar with come crowding to the mind when described in poetry and make the poetic experience richer and more significant. By far the greatest function of poetry, as I take it, is to send us back to life with an increased zest for it: it is a training for a fuller and more significant life. Your heart will not dance with the daffodils unless you have seen them disporting in the air, like Wordsworth; and if you have seen them under the lead of the poet's imagination, then your observation of them in future will acquire associations which it did not have before. In this respect the poverty of Urdu poetry is too palpable to require further comment.

All this is true. But carried to its logical conclusion, would it not mean that our responses in literature are strictly conditioned by the sensible?—which would be wrong, because we react quite as strongly to the life and natural background of the places we have never seen. The fact is that poetry draws on all possible sources for its effects; not only on observation and memory but imagination as well. We have no personal experience of Olympus, Delphi, the Parthenon, or the Phoenix; and yet so closely have they wound themselves around our imagination that they arouse feelings of grandeur or mystery as readily as the familiar sights and scenes evoke images of beauty. And for those of us who have saturated themselves in things Persian, *Alvand*, *Alburz*, *Dajla*, *Subrūb*, *Rustam*, evoke grandiose images quite as vividly as do the rivers, mountains, and heroes of our own country.

Words and names, give us back what, by a long and unconscious process, we have been taught to put into them.

This contention, however, only proves that poetry has more than one string to its bow so far as its imagery is concerned; that it relies as much on the imagination as on observation, and that Urdu poetry is the poorer for the absence of local colour in it.

Lest this be construed as a wholesale condemnation of the *ghazal*, it is only fair to point out that it is almost wholly erotic, and, as we shall see, is also the most restricted form in the world. It is by its nature selective and compact, and imagery can enter into it, if at all, as ornament only for purposes of comparison and contrast.

Again, with a few exceptions, the natural objects from which the imagery of the *ghazal* is drawn are mostly common to India and Persia. It is only those objects that are peculiar to India, and are either not found in Persia or are outside its poetic traditions, that have not been interwoven in its texture.

So far the *ghazal*. In other forms of poetry there is no dearth of local colour. Mir Hasan's *Masnavī-c-Sibr-ul-Bayān*, as we shall see, is soaked with Indian imagery, although the story it tells does not belong to India. The landscape of Anīs in his *marsiyas* is again Indian, although they pertain to an event in Arabian history. Local colour is also found in Mir Taqī's *masnavīs*, celebrating his master's marriage and his hunting expeditions.

Artificial diction, borrowed imagery, grave setbacks as they are, will not spell ruin for poetry if it has the saving grace of truthfulness. Does it square with sincerity?—this is the first question we ask ourselves when we read poetry. Other things are also necessary; but this is the primary thing. The diction and imagery of Iqbāl are excessively conventional, yet his poetry is alive because it is the expression of his temperament. The themes of medieval Urdu poetry are all stock themes borrowed from Persia. It is the absence of this personal note, the *sine qua non* of poetry, that has made the greater part of the Urdu *ghazal* into a museum piece.

The imagery employed in the *ghazal* is fixed and stereotyped. It is drawn largely from the natural objects with which the Persians were excessively familiar—gardens, convivial gatherings at night, deserts (associated with the wanderings of disconsolate lovers), heavenly bodies, and weapons of medieval warfare. They are too well known

to require detailed exemplification. There are set images for the different parts of the beloved's body; cypress and box-tree for her tall and erect stature; tulip, rose, moon, sun, for her face; narcissus, almonds, deer, for her eyes; ambergris, musk, hyacinth, night, snare, chain, noose, snakes, for her locks; arrows and sword, for her eyelashes; bow for her eyebrows; pearls for her teeth; rose-leaf, sugar, ruby, for her lips; rose-bud for her mouth, and so on.

Judged by the obvious standard that an image is alive only as long as it can vividly call up a picture of the thing or things referred to, all these images are dead. This, however, does not preclude the possibility of their coming to life by appropriate use.

Living in a storm-centre of passions, with his whole life concentrated on one object, it is no wonder that the *ghazal* writer is incapable of showing any feeling for nature for itself, at any rate, as a poet. He peoples the world of nature with feelings and thoughts akin to his own, and sees in it but a copy of human life. To take a few examples.¹ The *nightingale* is the lover of the *rose* and its song is the cry of pain at its unrequited love. The *flask* with its fine tapering neck is a damsel who bends herself gracefully and laughs and sobs as the liquor is poured out of it. The *cup* beams with laughter as it spreads its skirt before the *flask*. And what a cluster of images is there around the *candle*! It is a beautiful damsel crowned with gold, distilling its charm for beholders through the *veil* of its shade. In a different mood, it is a heartless coquette, indifferent to the love of the *moth* that whirls around it and is consumed in its fire. Others feel that it sheds tears because it is touched by the fate of its lover, the *moth*. With others still, it is the symbol of waning life, or of tears shed at life's brief tenure. The *breeze* (messenger) whispers something into the ear of the full-blown *rose*; this tickles it so much that it rolls on the ground with laughter (full-blown flowers are spoken of as laughing). When autumn comes, the *flower* and the *bud* take up their *cup* and *flask* and retire mournfully from the place of their merriment. In spring when the winds blow hard, the *trees* embrace each other and young *branches* stretch themselves to shake off their drowsiness. The *river* tells the story of the inexorable flux of life, and the *dew* weeps because life is so short. These instances may be multiplied almost endlessly. They are enough to show how the *ghazal* writer finds a perpetual image of himself in the forms of nature. Some of these images are no more than playful elaborations. Others are steeped in deep feeling. The Urdu poet may be no more than following a fashion in writing his erotic verse; he may be untrue to himself and conventional; but once

he is face to face with the evanescence of life and its joys, or the short tenure of beauty, his conventions drop from him and his utterances acquire an unusual poignancy.

3

The chief forms of medieval Urdu poetry are the *ghazal*, the *qasida*, and the *marsiya*. The first is the popular form of literature; the second, aristocratic and chiefly associated with court life; the third, elegiac and quasi-religious, is associated with the brief flowering time of the Shī'ah aristocracy in Lucknow, after the decline of Delhi.

Of these the most popular as well as the most voluminous is the *ghazal*. In its origin, it is traceable to early Arabic poetry, and is said to have developed from the *nasīb* or the erotic prelude to the *qasida*. Separated from its context in the *qasida*, it grew as an independent organism and came to have a life and character of its own. Its only link with the parent form is a formal one --the use of the monorhyme.

The word *ghazal* means conversation with women, and the form was originally reserved for erotic themes only. But in the course of time the rules governing its subject-matter came to be relaxed. It is a very hospitable form; nothing seems to be alien to its genius, and it has readily accommodated ethics, metaphysics, philosophy, mysticism, satire, politics, side by side with love, which still continues to be its favourite theme. In fact, we still think of love poetry when we speak of it.

The feature most peculiar to the *ghazal*—the feature that distinguishes it at once from poetry all over the world—is its fragmentariness. In the *ghazal* there is no consecutive treatment or unity of subject-matter. Each line stands by itself—a self-contained unit. It is a patchwork of disconnected and often contradictory thoughts and feelings, and the reader is switched from one line to another in a kind of emotional see-saw. We are to the manner born and do not feel this oddity; but for foreigners it is not easy to get used to the *ghazal*, and only a long acquaintance will familiarize them with it.

The only unity it possesses is that of form—the unity given to it by the metre and rhyme employed in it. Another well-known feature of the *ghazal* is the use of the *radīf* in addition to the *qāfiya*. No doubt the former is very pleasing to the ear, but this delight in sound is

gained sometimes at the cost of meaning. Its musical value, however, is indisputable, and one would not wish it otherwise. This shows that in the theory of the *ghazal*, as understood in the past, sense was subservient to sound.

One of the causes of the popularity of the *ghazal* in the past, apart from its erotic interest, lay in the fact that there was no unity of subject-matter in it. Those who had larger or loftier themes had other forms ready at hand. The *ghazal* required no elaborate unction from its practitioners. It has, besides, the advantage of suiting all minds. Everyone and anyone who was poetically inclined could turn to it to work off his feelings; and even those who had larger themes could turn to it for their fugitive though no less urgent moods.

The *ghazal* stands very low in the hierarchy of literary forms; but it is not without strong assets. The narrow limit of the distich to which each thought or feeling must confine itself makes for restraint and concentration. One thing the *ghazal* can never be—loose or labby. These are ruled out by the iron necessity of confining a thought to a single line. And yet the *ghazal* writer does not fret at its narrow confines. The great *ghazal* writers are like Hamlet; they bind themselves in a nutshell and still count themselves the kings of infinite space. Sometimes one word, very often the position of a word in a certain context, flashes trains of association and meaning so vivid that it is impossible to miss them. The words are just inevitable and one is surprised how so much has been compressed in such a small space. Some of the lines of Mīr, Dard, Ghālib, and Zauq are marvels of condensation. The fact is that the limitations of a medium, unless they are insurmountable, serve only to stimulate the powers of a good poet; they are, in fact, the necessary conditions of his triumph, and of this the achievement of the *ghazal* is a good example.

This excessive condensation has often led to obscurity. But not in the best poetry. Ghālib and Momin are often difficult when they are aboured and subtle. In their higher moment they look straight at the subject and are seldom obscure or involved.

To come back to its history, the *ghazal* originally consisted of ten lines or so. Nor was the poet expected to maintain his level throughout. It was thought none the worse for containing two or three good lines to half a dozen or so of padding. When it began to decline, it became fashionable to write long *ghazals* either in the same metre, *qāfiya*, and *radif*, or with slight variations in them. This display of skill in formal control marks its decadence in Lucknow, of which more hereafter.

It is generally believed that the *ghazal* is the least poetic of all forms, because it least admits of inspiration. It is maintained that in the *ghazal* the thoughts and feelings of the poet are governed by the *qāfiya*; he cannot say what he wishes to say; he says only what the *qāfiya* permits him to say.

I concede that there is a large element of truth in the argument. In the *ghazal* the idea is suggested by the rhyme, which has the pivotal position in the line. But this disability, if a disability it may be called, is not peculiar to the *ghazal*.

That rhyme should suggest to the poet any of his thoughts [writes Sutherland in *The Medium of Poetry*], is felt by many readers to be an infallible sign of poetical inferiority: an attitude of mind that may perhaps be traced to their own struggles with poetic composition in the years of adolescence. I hope to show, however, that rhyme is—and for hundreds of years has been—a perfectly legitimate source of suggestion to the poet.²

Later on he adds that poets

like Dryden confess gladly that rhyme has often 'helped them to a thought'. What this phrase means will differ with different poets. It may simply mean that a rhyme has suddenly made clear to the poet the idea towards which he was groping his way; or it may mean that an idea has come into his mind unawares, an idea that would never have got there at all but for the rhyme and the resulting suggestion which it provoked.³

The fact is that the *ghazal* writer is no more impeded or thwarted by the *qāfiya* than workers in other forms. As I see it, there is something infantile about the determinism thus foisted on the *ghazal*. It should be remembered that *ghazal* writers do not go to work in cold blood, working their way laboriously from one word or image to another until they are suddenly face to face with an idea. It is an admitted fact that every poet worth the name is in a state of intense imaginative excitement during the act of composition, and, immediately with the suggestion of a rhyme, all its rich and multitudinous associations—all that the poet has felt, read, seen, all his experiences and thoughts relative to it, come thronging to his conscious mind. The suggestion of ideas is largely accidental and fortuitous in all poetry, not in the *ghazal* alone; and, secondly, in the *ghazal* as in other forms, this suggestion is immediate, intuitive, consisting of flashes of insight and sudden revelation. The great poets do not build their ideas piecemeal; they are flashed in all their entirety on them by the *qāfiya*.

Sutherland has divided poets into two classes; poets like Wordsworth who wish to communicate a definite experience or an idea already completely realized, and poets like Keats who are full of poetry at some moment, and only require a favourable opportunity to release the pent-up energy that was in them.

The poem with Keats is not the objective shadow cast by an experience already present in the poet's consciousness, but a thing created almost wholly out of the immediate excitement of composition. With him, in fact, poetry is far less *communication*, and far more *making*; and often the thing to be made was only dimly realized by him before he began to write.⁴

The *ghazal* writers are more or less akin to the class of poets to which Keats belonged. They have a capacity for intense and general excitement. They write in a state of heightened sensibility in which, with the help of the rhyme, they suddenly find their way to the emotion or idea to be embodied in a line.

5

The word '*ishq* (love) is used in Urdu, as in Persian and Arabic, to denote the natural attraction of one sex for the other. Even in the strictly physical sense of sexual attraction, love is a noble and elevating passion, calling into play some of the finest feelings that man is capable of, such as tenderness, self-sacrifice, and devotion to the object of love. According to Lafcadio Hearn,

The moral and the ethical sentiments of a being thus aroused call into sudden action all the finer energies of man. . . . There is for the time being a new sense of power. . . . In that period, the evil qualities, the ungenerous side, are usually kept out of sight as much as possible. . . . It is essentially the period of idealism, of imagining better things and conditions than are possible in the world.⁵

Now these noble feelings are not the prerogative of the East or the West, the more or the less civilized. Given a normal human society, they will inevitably follow. The difference, if at all, will lie in the forms into which the impulse towards heroism, self-sacrifice, or tenderness will embody itself, and this will naturally be determined by local conventions and traditions. The troubadours had their own peculiar conventions, as the Arab lover in pre-Islamic days had his own. If, however, the natural flow of love is impeded or thwarted, or by the accident of circumstances is canalized into an unusual

direction, then the moral idealism spoken of above as the natural concomitant of love, will shrivel or die; it may even be changed into its opposite—into cynicism, jealousy, anger, resentment, despair. Love will now be felt as a torture, a disease; and the beloved will come to be regarded as cold, fickle, treacherous, cruel, inhuman, immoral. And the zest for life called into action by love, finding no worthy outlet, like a stagnant pool, may lead to apathy, ill-health, listlessness, nay, even madness and longing for death. The dangers enumerated above have been realized in their entirety in Persian and Urdu erotic poetry.

The themes of the *ghazal* are the sorrows and pains of love; and love is presented as a morbid and perverse passion. The lover in Urdu poetry lives in an inferno; it is a world of infinite yearnings and infinite pain. There is very little in our poetry that may be called ideal. It is customary to represent the beloved as treacherous, callous, mercenary, while the lover, though steadfast and loyal, is preternaturally jealous, arraigning the beloved for deceit and open preference for his unworthy rivals.

The peculiar conception of love embodied in our poetry is, like many other things, a legacy from Persia, and is ultimately traceable to homosexual love which had taken a deep root among the Persians and Persianized Arabs of the second century of the Islamic era. The factors which helped its growth have been discussed at length by Shibli and 'Abdul Halim Sharar, and I cannot do better than quote from them at some length.

Abū Hilāl 'Askarī writes in his *Kitāb-ul-Avā'il* that the Arabs were entirely unacquainted with homosexuality. But in the first century A.H. when the tide of Islamic conquest spread as far as Khurasān, and the soldiers remained cut off from their homes and families for long, and when, moreover, good-looking youths, brought as captives, began to officiate as slaves in private and public assemblies—then the taste for homosexual love was established. The beginnings of Persian poetry synchronize with the time when this taste had taken a deep root in Arabia. What made things worse was that the factors which had created this taste among the Arabs were augmented and made more common in Persia. There was an influx of handsome Turkish slaves, and in convivial assemblies the duties of the cup-bearer were assigned to them. This frequent intercourse stimulated desire, so that, in the course of time, they rose from servants to favourites and objects of love.⁶

Another strong factor that promoted homosexual love in Persia and Arabia was the growing vogue of *tasawwuf* or mysticism. It may

It first seem strange that a system that aimed at developing the spiritual side of man should lead to homosexuality; but a brief explanation will resolve the mystery.

According to mystics, God is the living principal of the universe and has revealed Himself to man in human beauty. Hence, the mystic who sought union with God was taught to use human beauty as a stepping-stone towards the perception of divine beauty. To this effect love was necessary; but as the love of women was likely to sidetrack the seeker after God into sensuality, the mystics preferred to see divine beauty in youths, in order to avoid the sexual complications incident to the love of women. These young men who were deemed to incarnate divine beauty were called *mazhars*, or manifestations of divine beauty. But this caution proved of little avail and led inevitably to homosexuality.⁷ Historical evidence apart, there is enough internal evidence in Persian and Urdu poetry to show that the typical beloved of the *ghazal* is as often a boy as a woman.

With homosexuality once firmly established in the country, adventurous spirits were not wanting who, sated with local types, sought thrills in exotic varieties. The following extract from Sharar throws much light on some of the conventions of Persian poetry:

Towards the commencement of the Abbasid rule, it was the dissolute lives led by the immoral caliph Amīn-ur-Rashīd and the shameless and disgraceful poet Abū Navās that led to the inclusion of handsome boys as beloveds in poetry. It is difficult to say if this disease had come down to the Persians from the Sassanids or had grown spontaneously among the Arabs of the desert who had settled down in *Khurasān* after the Arab conquest, and were consequently away from their wives. But this much is clear that in the middle of the second century of the Islamic era, we are surprised to find that, in place of their wives or the beautiful damsels of the tribe, the beloveds of the Arab poets were young boys.

In those days there were numerous cathedrals of the Christians in Syria, Asia Minor, Irāq, and Armenia, with large monasteries attached to them. Here lived, along with the monks, handsome youths who dressed in the simple clothes of hermits, received spiritual education. . . . Good-looking and attractive, their beauty was set off by their simplicity. The gay and dissolute became enamoured of them, and it was generally thought that for a cluster of beauties there was nothing to compare with a cathedral or a monastery. . . . Before long these youths began to figure as the beloveds of the poets. . . .

It was at this time that Persian poetry began. Hence the beloved of Persian poets came to be this monastic youth. And since the Muslims had got into the habit of visiting the temples of the infidels for their poetic

preoccupations, in Persia, instead of monasteries, they resorted to the temples of the fire-worshippers. . . . What attracted the Muslims to the temples of the Zoroastrians was that wine, which in Syria and Baghdad could be had from the Christians, was available from the Zoroastrians, in Persia. Consequently, after waiting on the 'old man of the tavern', they affirmed that their beloved was in the temple of the Zoroastrians.⁸

The above not only illustrates the homosexual tendencies in Persian and Arab poetry; it also explains how words like *kalīsa* (ecclesia), *dair* (monastery), *pīr-e-mughān* (the old man of the tavern), and *mugh bacha* (the Magian boy) entered Persian poetic tradition, and were later on imported into Urdu.

The identification of the beloved with the *but* (idol), was facilitated by the acquaintance of the Muslims with the temples of the Chinese and Indians. The identification was not so much based on the beauty of the idol—although the Persians admired the genius of the Chinese in painting and statuary—as on the fact that the poet loved his beloved as ardently as the Indians or the Chinese loved the idols of their gods and goddesses.

The prevailing conventions of Urdu poetry can now be easily understood. We can, with the help of this analysis, understand the rivalries and jealousies of the lovers, their distraught condition and madness. We can understand why the beloved is described as promenading the streets and gardens with a host of admirers, or presented as holding or attending festive assemblies from which the lover is excluded, or admitted only to be insulted. Under the strict *purdah* system which obtained in the past in Persia and India among Muslims, love poetry, if allowed to run its natural course, would have been somewhat akin to the erotic poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia which describes the stolen meetings of the lovers in the wilderness, deserted camping-grounds, or the habitation of the beloved; and in which the word *raqīb* or 'guardian' was used for the relatives of the girl anxious to guard her chastity. On the other hand, let the beloved be a boy or a professional beauty instead of a respectable lady, and all the major conventions of our poetry fall into place and are satisfactorily explained.

The factors which favoured the gradual absorption of philosophy, ethics, and, at a later stage, of mysticism into the *ghazal* were two: its excessive popularity and its fragmentariness. Since most of the

poets were *ghazal* writers, it was but natural that they should have made it the vehicle of their religious, moral, or philosophical ideas also. And they could do this without any sense of incongruity. The *ghazal* has no unity of subject-matter, each line in it standing by itself as a unit of expression, unrelated either to what had preceded it or was to follow it. If it could be employed to express the miscellaneous reflections and states of mind arising out of love, it could also be used to embody the poet's concept of the universe or the problems of human conduct. But apart from such sporadic assimilations there was no possibility of a further development in the *ghazal*. Literature reflects life, and when a society ceases to grow, there is no growth in literature either. But the urge for novelty works as unerringly in an unprogressive as in a progressive society, and the *ghazal* went on putting out new shoots and leaves. This process lay in the use of what had been previously a metaphor as a piece of literalism. Once this convention was firmly established the *ghazal* entered on a new line of development, although it lay wholly in the direction of fantasy and unreality. So interesting is this process that I shall deal with it at some length.

Quite early in Persian poetry, the cruel or seductive beloved of the earlier tradition came to be called a murderer (*qātil*). This was a metaphor pure and simple to render concretely the overwhelming effect wrought on the lover, say, by the killing looks of the beloved, spoken of as *tīr-e-nigāh*, or the arch looks, described as an arrow. Soon after, what was merely a metaphor came to be taken literally, and forthwith the beloved came to be invested with all the features of a murderer. Scimitar in hand, he⁹ promenades the streets, doing execution on his admirers who vie with one another in their masochistic frenzy to pay love's debt with their lives. Others who would take no chances—for the beloved may relent or excuse himself—present themselves arrayed in winding sheets and swords. Presently we hear of large execution grounds where lovers await eagerly for mass execution amidst a throng of sightseers. Not infrequently the overworked beloved delegates his function to a paid executioner. The above leaves us in no doubt that the metaphorical idea of dying or being killed has been either thickly overlaid with fantasy or completely forgotten.

Or take another instance. *To fall in love*, a faded metaphor, yields place to a fresh one, *to give one's heart away*. Very often the lover feels that he has *made a bad bargain by giving his heart away*. The implied sense of transaction in the expression becomes more and more pronounced, so that it is no longer felt to be a metaphor. And now we actually find

the lover hawking his heart, the beloved inspecting the article like a prospective customer, haggling over it, striking a bargain, and then going back on it, or overreaching the lover. The lover who has *given his heart away* is now obviously *without a heart*. This leads to a search for the missing heart, like any other thing lost, and the disconsolate lover wanders from pillar to post in search of it. Sometimes messengers are employed to coax it back, and the task is assigned to the *morning breeze*, the proverbial messenger of lovers. But the heart is either in durance, or has plighted troth to the beloved, and in either case, cannot or will not come back.

To take another example. The beloved has *entrapped* the heart of the lover—a natural metaphor once more. What is the next step? The beloved is now actually a bird-fancier equipped with all the paraphernalia of the trade—snare, bird-lime, scissors (for clipping the wings), cord, etc. And the lover? He is actually a *bird*, eating out its heart in captivity, wistfully recalling its days of freedom, its nest and fellow birds.

Or the lover is *mad with love*. The metaphor forgotten, the lover is actually mad, tears his clothes, is chained and shut up in a cell, but he breaks through all restraints and wanders in the wilderness, bare-footed and torn by thorns and brambles. Ever and anon, he enters some town, haggard and bleeding, to be pelted by unfeeling urchins. The laws of the imagination are inexorable. Once the lover is identified with a mad person, all the customary adjuncts of the life of the latter will be inevitably transferred to him, and the metaphor will become a fact.

Much of the heterodoxy and flouting of religious conventions that has found its way into poetry is again largely traceable to this very process. If the beloved is an idol (*but*), the lover is by a natural process an idol-worshipper, who prostrates himself before the idol, forswears the mosque, frequents the temple, rails at theologians, wears the sacred thread, applies the *qashbqa* to the forehead—in short, openly professes himself to be an infidel.

This is not to deny that lovers may sometimes have sickened or died or lost their mind. Shiblī tells us how some self-respecting young men slew their over-impertunate lovers. The poetic imagination will fasten on these. One beloved having killed a lover or a messenger, what more easy than to generalize the incident, to dub the lover a murderer and the lover a victim! The stream of poetry, like the stream of life, is fed by several tributaries, some big, others small. The analysis given above is not exhaustive. But it explains, or

at least tries to explain, some of the major conventions of the *ghazal* in its downward career.¹⁰

An attempt has been made above to show how, in the course of time, facts give way to fancies, when poetry has to deal with stereotyped themes in a static period. Denied a legitimate line of development, the imagination will explore curious byways. Good or bad, it must create something; it cannot simply mark time or confine itself to mechanical repetition. From this it follows that however fantastic some of the branches of the tree of poetry may be, they have grown out of the tree itself; and the intelligent reader will have no difficulty in tracing back what strikes him as bizarre and false to some real experience out of which it has grown.

Besides the lover and the beloved, the central figures in our love-drama, there are a few other characters that deserve a passing mention. With fixed roles, like figures in a puppet show, they are not a little amusing in their perpetual woodenness. There is, for example, that necessary evil, the messenger (*paighām-bar*) who ends by falling in love with the beloved, and who is therefore rightly suspected by the lover. His is a difficult role, requiring courage as well as tact and finesse; for he has not only to bear the lover's messages and letters, but to plead his cause also. In the *ghazal* he is the predestined victim of the beloved's ire and is generally killed by him (or her). Others are the thankless adviser (*nāsib*), cold, unemotional, and impervious to the charms of the beloved, whose advice to the lover falls on deaf ears; the confidant (*rāzdān*), into whose ears the lover pours all his longings, doubts, and fears; the rival (*raqīb*), successful but mercenary, who makes hay while the sun shines—a perfect antithesis to the lover, and by far the best abused character in the *ghazal*; the redoubtable porter (*darbān*), who jealously guards the beloved's door against intruders and has a summary way of dealing with them. So much for erotic poetry.

The bacchic poetry gives us the master of the tavern (*pir-e-mughān*), indulgent, generous, and of aspect benign; the ruby-faced cup-bearer (*sāqī*); the tumultuous clientèle; the much-dreaded and ubiquitous *muhtasib* (the superintendent of police); the *shaiḵh* (doctor of religion); and *zāhid* (recluse)—rabid, hypocritical, and sour-faced, whose sly visits to the tavern are a constant source of merriment and horseplay for toppers.

Of course, the boundaries of the two kinds of verse overlap, as Bacchus and Eros are the twin deities that preside over the *ghazal*.

In tracing the influence of the Persian *ghazal* on Urdu poetry, it is necessary to keep in mind that the former falls into two broad divisions. The old school which culminated in the naturalism of Sa'dī (1184-1292) and Hāfiz (d. 1388) came to an end with Jāmī (1414-1492), after a protracted career of nearly three centuries. The period that followed it was one of excessive sophistication and artificiality. The earlier school is direct and simple in style and sentiment. The new poetry which came into its own with poets like Nazīrī, Sā'ib, 'Urfī, and Tālib is aristocratic. It is often very difficult, and this, not because it presents states of mind more than usually complex or unfamiliar, but because it is excessively self-conscious and has come to hold that simplicity and directness are the index of an uncultivated mind. It is addressed to the sophisticated intelligence and is full of recondite scholarship. Another pervasive feature of it is its obscurity, the source of which is its passion for over-refinement and subtlety. This is no less due to over-compression forced on the poet by the necessity of confining his complex thoughts to one line only. Furthermore, it is excessively given to word-play. So great, indeed, is its predilection for it that Shiblī goes so far as to call it the age of *ihām* (word-play). 'Eliminate *ihām* from it,' he writes, 'and the greater part of its poetry will cease to exist.'¹¹ According to him, *maxmūn āfrīnī*, at which the new school aims, has three main characteristics: (1) novelty of similes and metaphors (by which is meant forced and strained similes and metaphors), (2) fantastic exaggeration, and (3) 'the presentation of some poetical (fanciful) sentiment which is not true to experience, but which the poet invents, substantiating it by an equally poetic (fanciful) reasoning.'¹²

Shiblī ascribes the growing vogue of the school to the increasing refinement of the age in which it flourished. Sophisticated to the highest degree, it was but natural that its literature should be over-refined and artificial. A better explanation, however, seems to be that with three centuries of assiduous cultivation the old themes had been worn threadbare, and the bolder and more adventurous spirits were striving to discover new paths in poetry. But new ideas always come in the wake of a new life, and Persian life was fast-rooted in the past. Hence the desire for originality degenerated into a love of novelty

for its own sake. The themes of these poets are the stock themes of old poetry. What they have gained in wit, polish, brilliance, and scholarship, they have lost in intensity and directness. In its subtlety, its love of the recondite in thought and feeling, its allusiveness, its far-fetched imagery, it comes close to the poetry of Donne and his school. The difference, apparently, is this: the Persians and their Urdu followers have the wit of the English Metaphysicals with very little of their emotional intensity. The different epithets they use to characterize their attitude—*kbayāl āfrīnī* (originating a fanciful theme), *maẓmūn bandī* (originating a fancy), or *nāẓuk kbayālī* (conceit-writing)—all show that their poetry was conceived in the intellect, and its function was not to represent or interpret life.

The first impression of the reader would be that given these two schools so opposite in their method and outlook, Urdu poets would align themselves either with one or the other of these, according to their temperament. But this has not been the case. In his poetic loyalties the Urdu poet is hardly a monotheist and wishes to worship in many chapels. Hence it is not at all necessary that a poet subscribing to the style and conventions of one of these two schools should base his practice on it in all its aspects. This is not true of the Persian poets themselves. For example, Sauda is highly conceited, but he is not difficult or compressed. Nor does it mean that Sauda will always write in an artificial style, any more than a writer subscribing to the old school will be always simple and straightforward. The themes and styles of Persian poetry were a common property. Anyone could stretch his hand and strike a few notes on an instrument which was not his own to show his deftness at it. Again, in an age in which it was thought clever to ape the styles of great masters, few could withstand the temptation of trying their hand at different styles to establish a reputation for versatility. Mood, temperament, public taste, all played their part, conscious or unconscious, in determining the style in which a poet would go to work at a particular time. Whether he would be assigned to one school or another is a question of statistics.

Two other styles which did not rise above a half tide, but which had an appreciable influence on Lucknow poets, are *vaqū' nigāri* which may be called 'factual poetry' and *tamsīliya shā'irī*, or 'illustrative poetry'. The former was realistic in intent and aimed at reporting the talk between lovers. One inference is clear from the above, namely, that the proverbial inaccessibility of the beloved, the cornerstone of the *ghazal*, has been surmounted. It was popular enough with poets of a bohemian type, and though innocuous enough and

tasteless enough with poets in general, it had often the interest of the risky attached to it. *Rekhti*, of which more hereafter, may be treated as an offshoot of this style.

Gnomic poetry took the form of *tamsīliya* verse. Its object is to give the charm of the imagination to ethical or philosophical truths stated in the first hemistich and illustrated by an apt simile in the second. The expression of a conventional age, *tamsīliya* verse has the interest of familiarity, not of originality, and seldom rises above versifying platitudes. It was popular with Sauda, *Nāsikh*, and Zauq.

The *qasīda* derived from Arabia through Persia, is an ode or poem to gain a rich reward by praise or flattery. The following analysis of the *qasīda* of the classical period of Arabic literature given by Ibn Qutayba, and quoted by R. A. Nicholson, will give an idea of the form as originally practised:

. . . the composer of Odes began by mentioning the deserted dwelling places and the relics and traces of habitation. Then he wept and complained and addressed the desolate encampment, and begged his companion to make a halt, in order that he might have occasion to speak of those who had once lived there and afterwards departed; . . . Then to this he linked the erotic prelude (*nasīb*), and bewailed the violence of his love and the anguish of separation from his mistress and the extremity of his passion and desire, so as to win the hearts of his hearers and divert their eyes toward him and invite their ears to listen to him, since the song of love touches men's souls and takes hold of their hearts. . . . Now, when the poet had assured himself of an attentive hearing, he followed up his advantage and set forth his claim: thus he went on to complain of fatigue and want of sleep and travelling by night and of the noonday heat, and how his camel had been reduced to leanness. And when, after representing all the discomfort and danger of his journey, he knew that he had fully justified his hope and expectation of receiving his due meed from the person to whom the poem was addressed, he entered upon the panegyric (*madīh*), and incited him to reward, and kindled his generosity by exalting him above his peers and pronouncing the greatest dignity, in comparison with his, to be little.¹³

The *qasīda* in Urdu does not follow the Arabic model. In Persia and India, the picture of the desolate encampment gave place to natural descriptions, generally of an artificial kind, leading up to the panegyric, the erotic prelude being excluded.

Even more than the *ghazal*, the *qasīda* is tainted with the reigning

taste for exaggeration and unreality. Most of the *qasīdas* have no connexion with the character and achievements of the persons praised, and are a string of the most hyperbolic compliments which fancy could devise, so that a typical *qasīda* could apply to everybody and nobody in the world.

Unlike the *ghazal* which strives to be simple and pathetic, the *qasīda* aims at the most flamboyant effects possible. This is done by using stately metres, sonorous words, and high-sounding epithets. Urdu *qasīdas* are the best examples of sound and fury signifying nothing. The virtuosity that dominates the latter-day *ghazal* was considered the *sine qua non* of the *qasīda* from the beginning. The *qasīda* with its end-line rhymes is one of the most difficult and barren of literary forms, and does not easily lend itself to naturalism and spontaneity. Discussing the difficulties of the Arabic *qasīda* Nicholson writes: 'To surmount the difficulties of the monorhyme demands great technical skill even in a language of which the peculiar formation renders the supply of rhymes extraordinarily abundant. The longest of the *Mu'allaqāt*, the so-called "Long Poem", is considerably shorter than Gray's *Elegy*.'¹⁴

The *qasīda* has been considered by some critics as a sign of the moral decline of the poet as well as the patron. They contend that it turned the poet into an abject flatterer and gave an utterly wrong idea of his importance to the patron. Hālī is very hard on the genre and its practitioners. On the other hand, Shiblī has come forward with an ingenious apology that reminds one of Lamb's whimsical defence of the Restoration comedy in England. He writes:

Right use has not been made of the panegyric, but it is incorrect to conclude that the institution of the *qasīda* has engendered flattery and servility in the national character. The praiser as well as the praised knew that the ideas expressed in the panegyric were mere exaggeration and high-sounding words. It is a general custom in Europe today for the most respectable person to subscribe himself in his letters as the most humble servant of the addressee. But since it is a mere literary convention, it does not make for subservience or flattery in the national character; and when the person praised was extolled as even higher than the sky or nature, all knew that it was mere fancy and had nothing to do with facts.¹⁵

Shiblī's argument suffers from a wrong analogy. Condescension is no doubt the privilege of the great, and they are never so great as when they practise it to keep their inferiors in countenance. But the client who extols his master with a view to partaking of his bounty is not so happily situated as the former. What is condescension in one

case is adulation in the other. With this reservation there is much to be said in favour of Shibli's argument. The moral disapproval of the *qasida* today shows how very difficult it is for our present democratic age to understand, much less appreciate, the ideals of the aristocratic age immediately preceding it. What strikes us as base flattery today did not appear so in the past. The conception of life in the past was strictly hierarchical, and it was thought good form on the part of those who stood on a lower rung of the social ladder to look up to those whom God had placed above them. No age has ever been able to do justice to the one immediately preceding it, so diametrically opposite are their standards, and unless we judge the Middle Ages by their own standards we will not be able to understand them.

IO

The elegy in the special form of the *marsiya* (mourning over the tragedy of Karbalā) arose and developed in Lucknow. The *marsiyas* are not organic wholes. They are like strings of beads, the poet exhausting all his strength on a single episode at a time without treating the subject as a whole. They suffer, besides, from a conscious tendency to overdo the pathetic. Most of them are marred by cheap sentimental effects and seldom, if ever, rise to the austere heights of tragic sentiments.

II

According to Nicholson,

The powers of the *shā'ir* [in Arabic poetry] . . . were chiefly exhibited in satire (*bija*), which in the oldest known form 'introduces and accompanies the tribal feud, and is an element of war just as important as the actual fighting'. The menaces which he hurled against the foe were believed to be inevitably fatal. His rhymes, often compared to arrows, had all the effect of a solemn curse spoken by a divinely inspired prophet or priest.¹⁶

But the satire declined with the times in Arabia, and instead of expressing virtuous indignation against evil, degenerated into mere spite and ill-will. Most of the satires in Urdu are coarse and vulgar lampoons, and are traceable to their Persian prototypes. The only exceptions are some of the satires of Sauda.

The literature of a country or a period is said to be conventional when, in preference to the aims, ideals, and practice of that specific country or age, it presents, as its own, the aims, ideals, and modes of thought of an age that has ceased to exist, or of a civilization other than its own. Medieval Urdu poetry is conventional because it describes life not as it was lived in the age in which it was composed, but as it was portrayed in Persian erotic poetry. It is conventional once again, because it describes that life in the diction and imagery peculiar to Persian poetry. It is well to remember that the Persian poetry so copied by Urdu poets, was not conventional at one stage. When the early Persian poet declaims against the *mubtasib*, or unmasks the straight-laced, hypocritical theologian, or describes his mystical yearnings, or his rapture over the wine-cup, he is true to himself as well as his age. But to take an extreme example, when an Urdu poet today describes his encounter with the *mubtasib*, he is not true either to himself or his age. From this it naturally follows that great care should be taken in deducing a poet's habits, views, or ideas from his compositions. Much of the riot and rebellion in our poetry is merely a make-believe, or an academic exercise, and should not be taken as a transcript of experience, unless there is strong internal and external evidence to support the conclusion. And the same is true of the mystical and moral yearnings. Quite as often as not, the poet affects them because they belong to the accepted stock-in-trade of the poetry of the day.

On the other hand, though the greater part of medieval Urdu poetry is conventional, it is not entirely so. Given a man with strong feelings and convictions and an original outlook on life, it is impossible that the voice of nature in him should be altogether smothered by artificiality and convention. Feelings, like murder, will out, and we hear them with sufficient frequency in all important poets to know for certain how they felt and thought. These are the high moments of medieval Urdu poetry and, if we cherish it today, it is for these authentic utterances.

Urdu poetry has also been characterized as decadent. It is not possible here to go into all the implications of this difficult word. Some use it in a moral sense with reference to the unhealthy erotic tone of Urdu poetry, discussed above. All that is incompatible with, or

disruptive of, a healthy state of society will be termed as decadent from this viewpoint. But there is another aspect of decadence which lies in putting form above inspiration; and from this angle much of medieval Urdu poetry is decadent. In its healthy state poetry deals with feelings, emotions, states of mind. But when, in the course of time, these topics are exhausted, when life is cramped with conventions, and imagination is pent up within a narrow sphere, then attention is more and more given to form. Subject-matter being fixed, and there being no possibility of shining by its greatness, permanence, or beauty, poets turn their attention to the way in which the staple themes of poetry may be dressed up for poetic consumption.

The process is fully exemplified in the poetry under review. Urdu poets had started almost bankrupt, and before long there was nothing left for them except to seek distinction by subtlety and refinement of expression. They became clever manipulators of words and tried to excel by using difficult metres and obdurate *qāfias* and *radifs*. Their skill was thought to lie in subjugating this apparently intractable material. Some of the latter-day poets are born tamers of words, but hardly more. Words, words, words, this is the best commentary on their works. The poetry thus written is utterly lacking in warmth. It has a hard, frosty glitter which may startle or surprise, but seldom, if ever, spells a message to the heart.

Another infallible sign of decadence, and closely connected with virtuosity, is the passion for ingenuity and conceits. There always comes a stage in the decline of a movement when things as they are satisfy no longer, and the desire to excel takes the form of ingenuity and distortion. The watchword of the poets now is: since nature is not interesting enough, let us improve upon it. Thus the emotions of love, jealousy, disappointment are ingeniously magnified and twisted. The poets take leave of facts and disport in the world of fancy, and their greatness is measured by just how much they can indulge in ingenious invention. Whereas the earlier poets bemoan their jealousy of their successful rivals in a simple and straightforward manner, the latter-day poets known as *mazmūn āfrīn* or *khayāl āfrīn*, imagine the most fantastic and impossible situations, as in the following:

اپنی گلی میں دفن نہ کر مجھ کو بعدِ قتل میرے پتے سے غیر کو کیوں تیرا گھر ملے

Bury me not in your street after killing me;
Why should others come to know of your abode through me!

پھوڑانہ رشک نے کہ ترے گھر کا نام لوں ہر اک سے پوچھتا ہوں کہ جاؤں کہہ کر کوئی

Jealousy did not permit me to name your house,
I ask all I meet to let me know where I should go.

14

The *ghazal*, which reigned supreme in the hearts of the lovers of poetry for over two centuries in India, received its first serious setback when puritanism raised its head in our midst with the ascendancy of the Aligarh and other revivalistic movements. Of this arraignment of the *ghazal* on moral grounds, the writings of Hālī and Nazīr Ahmad provide classical examples. Himself a distinguished poet and a great lover of poetry, as his *Muqaddama* shows, Hālī was capable of such devastating criticism as the following, when he had donned his prophetic mantle:

وہ شعر اور قصائد کا ناپاک دفتر عفوئت میں سنا اس سے جو ہے بدتر
زمین جس سے ہے زلزلہ میں برابر ملک جس سے شرتانے ہیں آسماں پر
ہوا علم و دین جس سے تاراج سارا
وہ علموں میں علم ادب ہے ہمارا

بڑا شعر ہنے کی لہر پچھ سزا ہے عبث جھوٹ بکنا الر ناروا۔
تو وہ حکمہ جس کا قاضی خدا ہے مقرر جہاں نیک و بد کی سزا ہے
گنگارواں پھوٹ جائینگے سارے
جہنم کو بھرویں گے شاعر ہمارے

That obscene collection of poems and panegyrics,
Which is more noisome than a dunghill,
Which shocks the denizens of the earth,
Of which the angels in heaven are ashamed,
Which has ruined both learning and religion—
That is the sort of literature we have.

If there is some penalty for writing bad poems,
 If needless lying is objectionable,
 Then in that court over which God Himself presides,
 And where rewards and punishments for good and evil are prescribed,
 All sinners will be freely pardoned,
 And our poets alone will fill the hell.

Even more perversely hostile is Nazīr Ahmad. In his *Fasāna-e-Mubtalā* there is a long discussion in which one of his favourite characters categorically denies the reality of aesthetic experience, treating it as a fashionable vice.¹⁷ 'What is there in our poetry,' asks Nazīr Ahmad, 'except love-making and bad manners?' He goes on to remark that 'it is in this school [of poetry] that our young men of good families learn their first lessons in evil ways'; and is shocked to find that 'those things the very mention of which acts like a deadly poison on the young . . . and those thoughts the merest hint of which would ruin us both spiritually and materially are so constantly dinned into the ears of students that they become their second nature'.¹⁸

Thoughts such as these touch a responsive chord in many a heart; and there is no doubt that they contain an element of truth. But do they sum up the whole truth about life? The fact is that the problem of conduct, in the accepted sense of the word, embraces at best only a section of life; beyond it there are realms of experience quite as urgent and legitimate in their own way as that of morals, which poetry, if it is true to itself, must portray and satisfy. The passages cited above are examples of the eternal feud between the fine arts and morality; of that recurrent indictment of the senses and joy in life which has invariably come in the wake of puritanism. To the puritan who believes in restrictive virtues and what are called the higher ends of life, all that pertains to the creation and enjoyment of beauty is nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. What he fails to see is that the free play of the human spirit in poetry and art satisfies some of our deepest cravings. Sexual attraction, the exhilaration we feel at the sight of beauty, the desire to possess it, the pain of unrequited love or joy at its success, the self-effacement and self-sacrifice which love calls forth—all these impart colour and warmth to life and have been in all ages among the eternal and most coveted themes of poetry. But between the morality which aims at regulating, controlling, and restricting human behaviour, and the fine arts which bring into play the instincts which the former strives

to subjugate and crush, no *rapprochement* is possible; and there the matter should end.

To this central problem of morals in literature there is an interesting side-issue which deserves consideration. When the Aligarh movement was in the ascendant, it was held that literature and arts were not bad in themselves. It was our literature that was bad, and it was bad because of its bohemian spirit. The accepted opinion then was that European literature was moral, and therefore, in that respect, a complete foil to Urdu poetry. For example, Hālī wrote: 'Shakespeare's plays, from which Europe has derived political, social, moral, and numerous other benefits, have been put on a par with the Bible in this respect, and those who are free from the shackles of religion consider them to be even more beneficial and useful than the Bible itself.'¹⁹ The object of such flattering references to the literature of the West was to enforce the thesis that it was the duty of the poet to moralize his song.

But, except for the accident of some of its conventions, is European love poetry really different from our love poetry? Even a superficial examination of European literature will show that this is far from being the case. Love is essentially a lawless passion, a primitive power of nature which has seldom run in the grooves prescribed for it by religion; and in this respect there is no essential difference between European and Persian and Urdu love poetry. I have already explained the homosexual tendencies of the early Greeks (see note 7 on pages 409-10). With regard to European poetry, medieval and modern, it is enough to quote a passage from Daiches to prove that the love-poetry of Europe is also essentially romantic in spirit.

The tradition of courtly love arose in Provence and spread over Europe in the course of the Middle Ages, penetrating both lyrical and narrative literature from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, wherever the 'Latin spirit' travelled. Not only did this tradition have a profound effect on medieval literature, but it also had important effects on western thought which are still with us. With it, 'romantic' love first comes on the scene. . . . In the poetry of the troubadours a completely new conception appears. Love is service, as that of a slave to his master except that it is not based on outside compulsion. The knight serves the lady of his choice, suffers any and every kind of indignity for her sake, . . . and in referring to her uses language that is scarcely if at all distinguishable from that used in religious poems with reference to the Virgin Mary. The slightest favour she chooses to bestow upon him is sufficient reward for

the greatest hardship he may undergo for her sake. . . . He must be loyal to her for life, however she may treat him. However desperate he is, however hopeless of winning his lady's favour, however he may sigh and moan because of unrequited love, he must never think of ceasing to be the servant of her whom he has originally chosen. . . . Love is, as it were, its own reward, and though a more concrete reward is desired and sometimes obtained the lover must not swerve in his allegiance if it does not come. *This is not a relation between husband and wife: indeed, throughout most of this literature it is taken as a matter of course that a husband cannot be the lover of his own wife. That is a task for someone else. The courtly love tradition implies, in fact, an idealisation of adultery.* When a poet offers love to a lady he does not bother himself about her husband at all: his real rival is anyone who seeks to be a lover of the lady in the same way as himself. . . . The courtly love tradition is an absolutely new development. Originating with the troubadours in Provence it spread first over France. . . . And it comes into English literature in the fourteenth century. . . . The tradition is strong in Chaucer, and lasts as a dominant *motif* up to Spenser, while, altered but still recognisable, it continued in European literature and thought through the following three centuries *and is the basis of the modern conception of romantic love which is still the view of the relation between the sexes most widely held.*²⁰

With its self-effacing lover, ardent but jealous, and its cold, haughty, and proverbially inaccessible beloved, what a host of resemblances between the poetry of the troubadours and the *ghazal*, in tone, subject-matter, and sentiment. Here is rich material for a comparative study of literature.

Nor are some other important features of Urdu poetry without their counterpart in medieval European poetry. We are all accustomed to the long-drawn-out catalogues of the lady's physical charms known as *sarāpa*, or a detailed description of the various parts of her body, in *masnavīs*. This has its parallel in European literature. ' . . . it was accepted poetic good form,' writes Lowes, 'that the lover, writing of his lady, should inventory her charms from top to toe in good set terms, and with an anatomical exhaustiveness that extenuated nothing. There is the right and meet phrase for every feature; they occur with desolating unanimity in the pages of a hundred poets.'²¹ Such descriptions are a recurring feature of *blasons* and *strambatti* in fifteenth-century Italian poetry.

The tears, cries, swoons, and the general desolate condition of lovers in the *ghazal* have an exact parallel in medieval European literature. Love was a malady, and its symptoms, according to Lowes, were

a lean cheek, a blue eye and sunken, an unquestionable spirit, a beard neglected, and everything about one demonstrating a careless desolation. . . . Sleeplessness, loss of appetite, emaciation, pallor, weeping, swooning, restlessness, taciturnity, aversion to society, were not merely the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual state; they were, for one in love, good form, to be assumed as such, if one were so unfortunate as not to be afflicted with them in due course of nature.²²

Writing of the swooning propensities of heroines and heroes, the same critic remarks: 'I have counted, in a rapid running over of the "Roman de Troie", thirty swoons of heroes and heroines; in the "Thèbes", twenty-two; and to swoon four or five times hand running during a single trying situation is no novelty.'²³

If there is no reference to madness, the crown and summit of unrequited love, in the above citation, we have to turn to Orlando, the hero of *Orlando Furioso*, who, finding that the woman he loved (Angelica) had married another hero (Medoro), goes violently mad. He tears up the trees, breaks the rocks with his sword, chokes the streams, and having thus devastated the whole scene, tears off his clothes, and lives as a wild man, feeding on roots and raw flesh and offering violence to all who approach him.

15

Before this chapter is concluded it appears necessary to clear another misunderstanding with regard to the literature under review. It is almost axiomatic with some of our best writers on the subject to ascribe the decadence of Urdu poetry, by which they mean its low morality, its defeatist ethics, its pessimism and resignation, its fatalism and conventionality, directly and exclusively, to the influence of the age in which it was composed. Now there is no doubt that the hundred years or so that lie between the death of Aurangzeb and the ascendancy of the British in the north were full of unrest, rapine, bloodshed, and the evils that come inevitably in the wake of political decline. Are we therefore justified in correlating the themes of our medieval poetry as well as its style and general tone with its dismal background and conclude that the poetry is decadent because it is the product of a decadent age? This would appear to be an entirely reasonable deduction at first. What more reasonable than that our major responses to life should be determined by the times in which we live! And yet the argument is fallacious in two important respects.

It is misleading in the first instance, because it is based on the assumption that in literature and other fine arts the only vital factor is the life of the day. What this theory fails to take into account is that there is a continuity in life and literature, that we draw our strength as well as our weakness from the past as well as the present; and further, that this uninterrupted flow of the past into the present was much more pronounced in the Middle Ages than in the present-day world. It has already been pointed out that medieval Urdu poetry is largely a matter of inherited themes, inherited forms, and inherited diction and imagery. Hence its decadence is also an inherited one and is not the exclusive product of the age in which it was composed. Viewed as such, the decline of the Mughal empire does not provide the only or even the chief cause for the special features of medieval Urdu poetry. If these pages have been written to any purpose, it should be clear that the Mughal empire even at the climax of its greatness was one of political and ecclesiastical tyranny, and consequently there was little scope for the growth of individuality or independence of thought in it. At its very best, it was a time of efficient despotism, a period when the country was rich and prosperous. In all other respects, there was little or no difference between the time of Mughal ascendancy and its decline. Between physical efficiency and moral and intellectual qualities there is no necessary connexion. Very aptly has Grierson remarked:

Physical courage and moral cowardice are usually found as twins. When France was 'la grande nation militaire' no one dared to speak his mind. . . . On the other hand, Spain has remained a physical-force nation, as is shown by her bull-rings. The bull-fighters face death voluntarily every day; and yet the Spaniards remain as putty in the hands of the priests.²⁴

What I contend is that the period covered by Mughal decadence, during which Urdu poetry came to life, presents, in all respects except political stability and material prosperity, an unbroken continuity of tradition from an earlier period. The forms of Urdu poetry and its themes are the same as those of Persian poetry. Study the Persian poetry written either in the Mughal or the pre-Mughal period in India, note carefully the values and assumptions that lie behind it, observe its form, and subject-matter, and they will be found to be identical with those of medieval Urdu poetry. Urdu poetry is of its age in the sense that it was composed in it. In all other respects it belongs to the past. This is not to deny that each

successive period did make some minor changes inside the traditional framework and, to that extent, left its mark on the tradition it had inherited. For example, in the elegiac tenderness of Mīr, or in the sense of time's sad decay so clearly marked in both Mīr and Sauda, the sense of insecurity and the general pessimism peculiar to the poetry of the East acquire an added poignancy. In this peculiar sense both Mīr and Sauda may rightly be said to reflect their age. Similarly, the gaiety that marks the carefree poets of Lucknow in the period following the decline of Delhi, bespeaks an environment that is entirely different from that of Delhi after its decline. But these are no more than small embroideries on the main pattern which remained substantially the same from the beginning of medieval Urdu poetry with Valī to its end with Zauq, Ghālib, and Dāgh.

III

URDU LITERATURE IN GOLKONDA AND BIJAPUR

BETWEEN the emergence of Urdu as a distinctly recognizable idiom in the north and its elevation to the position of a literary language, there is a gap of at least two centuries. Throughout this long period, Persian remained the literary language of the country. It was only with the decline of the Mughals that Urdu, so long held in check, began to make headway as a literary language; and even then its rehabilitation was slow and grudging. The first impulse towards this, as we shall study in a subsequent chapter, came from the south where, little noticed by the north, Urdu (known as Dakkanī or Hindī) had had a flourishing literary career for a century and a half (1590-1730).

The transplantation of Urdu to the Deccan had resulted, it is believed, from two important political events; first, the vast imperialistic designs of 'Alā-ud-Dīn Khiljī whose famous general, Malik Kāfūr, had annexed Mahārāshtra, Andhra, and the Karnātak to the Khiljī empire; and, second, the quixotic and disastrous experiment of Sultān Muhammad Tughlaq in transferring his capital from Delhi to Daulatābād, in 1326-7.

Whether the new Dakkanī literature sprang up in the language of the conquerors which, it is believed, had been successfully imposed on the south, or whether it was composed in a language which had resulted from the fusion of the spoken language of the north, afterwards called Urdu, and old Dakkanī, is a moot question, on which it is not yet possible to say anything definite. Had there been a contemporary Urdu literature in Delhi at that time, the question could have been easily solved by a comparative study of the two languages. In its absence it is not safe to dogmatize one way or the other. The Urdu lines traditionally ascribed to Amīr Khusrau, besides being all too few, have been unconsciously modified through generations of oral transmission; and obviously it is dangerous to build too far on them. Suffice it to say that, for reasons to be presently discussed, Dakkanī had been recognized and cultivated as a national language

in Golkonda and Bijapur, two of the five Muslim states which had arisen on the ruins of the Bahmanī dynasty, a century and a half before Urdu received any literary cultivation in the north.

Let us now pause to study the chief features of Dakkanī Urdu, as it is called.

To begin with, odd as it may sound, there appears to be a recognizable element of Punjābī words and grammatical peculiarities in it; so much so that, on the whole, it is easier for a Punjābī, after a brief apprenticeship, to read and scan Dakkanī poetry than for those whose mother tongue is Urdu.

The key to this puzzle is provided by Professor Shīrānī's theory.¹ According to him, the spoken language of Delhi freely absorbed elements from Punjābī when the Ghaurīs, with their army recruited from the Punjāb, entered that city as conquerors. The Punjābī words thus imported into the spoken language of Delhi travelled south with the conquering Khiljīs and Tughlaqs, and were absorbed into the spoken as well as the literary language of the people there. Hence the similarity between Punjābī and Dakkanī referred to above. The theory sounds like a fairy tale, though, in strict justice, it would be unfair to deny it a certain amount of plausibility. On the other hand, the similarity between Punjābī and Dakkanī may be no more than the resemblance between cognate languages (descended from Sanskrit) in a state of incipient differentiation. Presumably, these Punjābī words were eliminated from Urdu in the north by the latter-day purists; in Dakkanī they were allowed to stay.

Whether we accept the theory that Dakkanī was Urdu transplanted in the Deccan, or that it was a new language born of the impact of Urdu on old Dakkanī, it is arguable that once left to itself it must have undergone a process of independent development. It must have dug its roots into the native soil and borrowed freely from Marāthī, Tāmil, Telugū, and the other local languages. In fact the cultural and geographical contacts with the neighbouring countries must have made such importations inevitable.

It is the presence of this purely southern element which makes the study of Dakkanī literature more than ever the province of the specialist. It is so excessively archaic that a layman can neither understand nor appreciate it. For the student of Urdu literature it can at best be an acquired taste and no more.

The Bahmanī kingdom, the first independent Muslim state in the south (1347–1526), continued to flourish for nearly two centuries; but its contribution to Dakkanī literature, as far as we know, is negligible. Its history, however, is interesting, as it throws much light on a pervasive factor in local politics which explains why the south, unlike the north, adopted Dakkanī for literary cultivation in preference to Persian. All important historians, old or modern, have referred to the excessive insularity of the southerners, their suspicion of foreigners, and their passion for maintaining the integrity of their own culture and institutions. It may be surmised that when they broke away from the tutelage of the north, the Bahmanids discarded, like all newly emancipated people, the forms and conventions of the north, and remained intent on developing their own culture; and although they had strong affiliations with Persian, the cultural language of the Mussalmans in India, they decided, nevertheless, to cultivate their own language in preference to it. This conclusion is supported, among other things, by the names of their gardens, palaces, and cities, which are mostly Dakkanī. This general dislike of foreigners was fanned into a flame by another factor of which the *Cambridge Shorter History of India* makes special mention.

Ahmad's preference for foreign troops was a cause of bitter strife in his kingdom. Foreigners had been employed from the earliest days of the rule of the Bahmanids in the Deccan, but, with the growth of the foreign legion, they became numerous enough to form a political party. The natives of the Deccan were less energetic . . . than those of more northern latitudes, . . . and . . . were obliged to give place to them at court as well as in camp. The feud was complicated by religious differences. The Deccanis were Sunnis, and, though all the Foreigners were not Shiahs, a sufficient number of them belonged to that sect to brand the party with heterodoxy. But one class of foreigners, . . . stood apart from the rest. These were the Africans, whom attachment to the Sunni faith, and the contemptuous attitude adopted towards them by other foreigners, threw into the arms of the Deccanis. Thus, in this disastrous strife, the Foreign party consisted of Turks, Arabs, Mughals and Persians, and the Deccani party of natives of the Deccan and negroes . . . and the feud thus begun was not confined to intrigues for place and power, but frequently found expression in pitched battles and bloody massacres, of which last the Foreigners were usually the victims. Thenceforward the history of the domestic affairs of the Deccan is mainly a record of this strife, which con-

tributed in no small measure to the disintegration of the kingdom, and afterwards to the weakness of the states which rose on its ruins.²

This dislike of foreigners and things foreign must have acted as a strong incentive to the cultivation of their own language.

It was partly due to this sense of national solidarity that the rulers in the south had strong affiliations with their Hindu subjects. The popular tradition that the founder of the Bahmanī dynasty was the disciple of a Brahman named Gangoo is unhistorical. The Bahmanī kingdom was so called because its founder traced his lineage to Bāhman Isfandiyār. But the tradition that on ascending the throne he made Gangoo his minister and henceforth it almost became a custom in the south to entrust a Brahman with the duties of a minister, is not at all unlikely. There is strong evidence to support the view that friendly relations subsisted between the Mussalmans and Hindus in Golkonda and Bijapur, and that the court language in these countries was Dakkanī and not Persian. Historians are of the opinion that during the three hundred years of the independence of Golkonda and Bijapur there was a far closer intercourse between the two races than existed elsewhere in India. There was not only toleration but strong affection between Hindu subjects and their Mussalman rulers. Instances of Mussalman princes in the Deccan marrying Hindu wives was common. 'Yūsuf 'Ādil Shāh . . . defeated a Marātha chieftain . . . whose sister he espoused. She took the Musalmān name of Būbūjī Khānam, and became the mother of the second Sultan. . . . Yūsuf 'Ādil Shāh freely admitted Hindus to offices of trust. The Marāthī language was ordinarily used for purposes of accounts and business.'³ In the reign of Ibrahīm 'Ādil Shāh 'Hindus not only suffered no persecution at his hands, but many of his chief civil and military officers were Brahmans and Marāthas'.⁴ His 'partiality for Hindus led his Muslim subjects to give him the mocking title of *Jagad-gurū*, or World Preceptor'.⁵

Nevertheless, Dakkanī literature was written under the direct inspiration of Persian. The kings of Golkonda and Bijapur were fine scholars, and their generosity attracted scholars from far and near. Consequently, we find that Dakkanī literature is largely modelled on Persian literature, the only exception being the *ghazal* which, for some unknown reasons, did not feel the full impact of the Persian prototype, and in which, in conformity with Hindī tradition, love is professed by woman and not man. As for the other forms, namely, *qasīda* and *masnavī*, they were bodily taken over from Persian with

the diction, imagery, and metres peculiar to them. But despite these excessive and even wholesale borrowings, Dakkanī literature remained in close touch with its culture and natural background.

The chief literary forms in the vogue are the *masnavī*, the *qasīda*, and the *ghazal*. Of these the most popular is the *masnavī*. There is hardly a poet of note who has not left some work in the line. Most of these are translations from Persian and are either romantic or historical. Unlike the north, the *ghazal* did not take deep root and was sparsely cultivated.

The language is in a fluid state, drawing quite as freely on the indigenous element as on Persian and Arabic. Not only are Hindī phrases and expressions retained, there are Hindī and Persian and Hindī and Arabic compounds also. In the transcript of Persian and Arabic words the original spelling is often discarded in favour of a more phonetic spelling. In other words, the poets wrote as they spoke. Here are a few instances from *Qutb-o-Mushtarī*:

صفحه - صفة - عقل - اخل - ملّع - ملّما - وضع - وضّا
 نفع - نفا - نقش - نخش - منع - منا - وقت - وخت - ملاخط - ملاذا

It will be observed that in adjusting the language to metrical requirements, Dakkanī poets sometimes resort to word-mutilation, accent-substitution, and vowel-length modification. All these notwithstanding, there are lines which do not scan, presumably because the poet did not care if a letter or syllable was too many or too few.

Out of the dozen or so Bījapur poets only two, Kamāl Khān Rustumī and Nusratī, deserve more than a passing mention. Rustumī was the son of Ismāīl Khān who held the hereditary title of Khattāt Khān and was secretary to the royal court of Bījapur. He is known today by his *masnavī* named *Khāvar Nāma*, composed in 1649. It was formerly held to deal with the wars of 'Alī, the last orthodox caliph, with his political adversaries, but Maulvī Nasīr-ud-dīn Hāshmī, in a series of articles published in the *Ma'ārif*,⁶ has conclusively refuted the idea. *Khāvar Nāma* is a *romance d'aventure* on the

pattern of *Dāstān-e-Amīr Hamza* and is entirely fictitious in character. It tells how Abul Mu'jam, a young Arab warrior, took umbrage at the praise lavished on another soldier, Sa'd Vaqqās, and challenged him to a personal combat. They thought better of it, however, and set out in search of adventures as knights-errant. Later on, 'Alī is despatched by the Prophet to aid them, and the three champions return laden with honour. Like *Dāstān-e-Amīr Hamza* it is characterized by a complete absence of historical sense, and not only do heroes like Jamshed and Bahman Isfandiyār from the classical antiquity of Persia rub shoulders with imaginary characters and historical personages, but entirely imaginary events are invented and presented as sober history. One of these is the invasion of Medina by an infidel named Khammār and his defeat by the Prophet. Shāhpāl, the magician, who figures so conspicuously in *Dāstān-e-Amīr Hamza*, appears no less in *Khāvar Nāma*, a fact which conclusively establishes that its writer was acquainted with the former work.

Khāvar Nāma is not an original work. It is a free rendering of a Persian poem of the same name, composed by Ibn-e-Husām in 1470. The Persian poem is modelled on Firdausī's *Shāh Nāma*, and recalls its style. It was translated into Urdu at the instance of the princess Khadīja, the wife of Muhammad 'Ādil Shāh of Bījapur. It consists of nearly 24,000 lines and is the longest *masnavī* in Dakkanī. The poem is in manuscript, two of the three extant copies being in the India Office Library, and the third in the British Museum, London.

Nusratī flourished in the reign of 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh and was poet laureate. Originally resident in the Karnātak, he came over to Bījapur where he was given a high position and gradually rose to be the king's favourite companion. He is the author of *Gulshan-e-'Ishq*, '*Alī Nāma*, and *Tārīkh-e-Sikandarī*, besides *ghazals* and *qasīdas*. *Gulshan-e-'Ishq* is a long-drawn-out romantic tale of the conventional type. The Raja of Kanak Nagar who is without a male issue is blessed with a son through the guidance of a hermit. When fourteen years old, the Prince (Manohar) is transported to the Raja of Mahāras Nagar's palace by some fairies, where he falls in love with Madhmāltī, the Raja's daughter. Finding himself alone in the palace the next morning (the fairies having brought him back to his own palace), he sets out in search of the Princess. During his wanderings, he rescues a princess of the name of Champavatī from the toils of her demon lover and restores her to her parents. Champavatī's

mother brings the lovers together, but they are surprised by Madhmālī's mother, who in a fit of anger changes her daughter into a bird. Meanwhile, another prince, named Chandar Sen, who is out hunting captures the bird, and learning her history repairs to her parents. The spell is removed and Manohar and Madhmālī and Champavatī and Chandar Sen are married amidst great rejoicing.

'*Alī Nāma* is a long historical poem dealing with the wars of 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh with the Mughals and the Marāthas. Historical though the poem is, the narrative is vivid, forceful, and permeated with imagination. Its intensity is due to two converging causes, the poet's religious zeal and his patriotic pride. According to the poet, 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh is a defender of the faith as well as a patriotic prince who holds his own against the Mughals and chastises the Marāthas. The narrative is animated, free, and copious, and there is an epic ring in the account of the battles and campaigns.

Tarīkh-e-Sikandari is a comparatively brief work dealing with the reign of 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh's successor, when Bījapur had lost its military greatness, and the poem is largely in a minor key.

In his '*Alī Nāma*, Nusratī claims to have invented a new poetic form for Urdu by harmoniously blending elements borrowed from Persian and Indian epics. This is no idle claim. Great as is his indebtedness to Hindī and Persian diction, imagery, and general treatment, his poem has an accent of its own, and is the only thing of its kind in Urdu. His narrative gift is at its best when he looks straight at his subject. When he makes a conscious effort to embellish his theme with conceits and similes, as in his descriptive passages, he is extremely artificial. Nusratī sees nature through a cluster of personal associations derived mainly from drinking and revelry, and his nature-pieces are lifeless and frigid. Moreover his poems are freely interspersed with conceits and hyperbole. Such parts leave the modern reader cold; but they were thought to make fine poetry in his day, and he gives them with a prodigal hand. He is at his best in his narrative passages which are direct and forceful, or in summing up complex situations and ideas in a few pregnant words, as in the following:

دماے کریں بادلاں کو ندا جواہاں میں اُترے فلک دھڑدا

The kettle-drums shout to the sky,
And reverberations come from the remote sky by way of reply.

لیا ٹوٹ یوں پل میں بندر کوں باک کہ جوں آگ لگتیں نہ ہے باج راگھ

Just as a conflagration leaves nothing behind except ashes,
Even so completely did he sack the entire seaport in no time.

5

At the head of the Qutb Shāhī poets stands Muhammad Qulī Qutb Shāh, the greatest of the Golkonda kings, who reigned for thirty-one years (1580-1611). In some respects he is a landmark in the history of Urdu poetry, for he is the first to introduce a secular note in a poetry which had been so far mainly religious. He does not confine himself to the praise of God and the Prophet, but writes about nature, love, and the social life of his day: quite a large number of his poems being about flowers, fruits, vegetables, gardens, or the popular customs and festivals of the time. Their literary merit is not high; but here was a poet who tried to widen the sphere of poetry by introducing themes unrepresented in Persian poetry.

Vajhī is the author of *Qutb-o-Mushtarī*, a *masnavī* written in 1609. It is a romantic tale relating the adventures of a prince who falls in love with an unknown princess in a dream, and after facing great dangers and hardships succeeds in winning her love.

It is generally held that the poem tells indirectly the story of the love of Sultān Muhammad Shāh, the poet's patron, for Bāghmatī, a famous courtesan of the day. Of this there is no internal evidence. There is no resemblance between the life of the king and the events narrated; and yet it is possible to treat the poem as an ingenious compliment to the king. By identifying his hero-prince with his own king, the poet has adroitly transferred to him all the courage, heroism, and manly beauty of the former. Fantastic though the story be, it must have flattered the king's vanity that all that was admirable in the hero was the reflex of his own personality. The killing of the dragon, or the fainting away of Mushtarī, the heroine, at the sight of the hero's picture—all this the king could appropriate to himself; and when the heroine justifies her love for the hero by saying that she had fallen in love with him not only for his graceful form but also for the beauty of his character and mind, he could well imagine that he himself was the happy recipient of the homage.

Poems like *Qutb-o-Mushtarī*, in which the subject-matter is conventional, can be judged by treatment alone. Here Vajhī compares

favourably with his compeers. He has narrative skill; his versification is smooth and fluent, and his style fresh. The chief quality of his verse is speed. Despite the comparative unfamiliarity of his diction he is seldom flat. His poetic creed is well expressed in the section named 'On the Nature of Poetry' and 'In Praise of his own Poetry'.

Vajhī's *Sab Ras* or *The Story of Beauty and Heart* (1635), which has the distinction of being the first prose work in Urdu, is, according to Dr. 'Abdul Haq, an unacknowledged translation, with a few omissions and additions, of a Persian *masnavī* by Muhammad Yahya ibn Sabek Fattāhī (d. 1448). It is an allegory of love and bears a remarkable resemblance to the *Roman de la Rose*. The latter sums up in the form of an allegory the conventions of love in the age of chivalry in Europe. *Sab Ras* is an epitome in a similar style of the conception and practice of love as embodied in Persian and Urdu poetry. The central characters are: *Husn* (Beauty) and *Dil* (Heart), and 'Ishq (Love) and 'Aql (Intellect). Round these central characters there is a cluster of subsidiary figures, both male and female, who, according to their affiliations, support the designs of their masters or try to thwart the plans of their opponents. The action takes place in the kingdom of *Tan* (Body) of which *Dil* (Heart) is the ruler. The characters are mostly members of the human body, e.g. *Rukhsār* (Cheek), *Lat* (Ringlet); senses, e.g. *Nazar* (Sight); intellectual and moral concepts, e.g. *Tauba* (Repentance), *Khayāl* (Thought), *Sabr* (Patience), *Himmat* (Courage), *Nāẓ* (Blandishment), etc. Others are represented as cities, forts, and mountains, e.g. 'Āfiat (the City of Security), *Zubd* (the Mountain of Asceticism), *Hijr* (the Castle of Separation), or *Visāl* (the House of Union).

The theme is the natural attraction of Heart and Beauty, the difficulties they have to encounter, and the means they have to employ to come together.

The story ends on a note of compromise. Intellect and Love, the eternal enemies, are reconciled, the former consenting to act as the minister of the latter. Vajhī accords primacy to love, but he believes at the same time that love is essentially a lawless and unregulated impulse, and it is in the interest of human happiness that it be controlled by the intellect.

There are a few episodes which do not lend themselves to an allegorical interpretation. For example, in making *Lat* (Ringlet) give a few locks of her hair to *Nazar*, the exposing of which to fire would bring her to his rescue, the author is drawing on a motif

from the repertory of the old romance. However, it is not at all necessary that all the incidents and characters in an allegory should be capable of an allegorical interpretation. Realistic characters mingle freely with allegorical figures in Western allegories.

The chief defect of the story, as I see it, is that the Quest for the Water of Immortality (*Āb-e-Hayāt*) which provides the starting point of the story, and to which so much importance is attached at first, not only lapses into the background, giving place to the adventures of *Heart* and *Beauty*, but its nature remains unexplained.

The book is in rhyming prose and full of archaisms, but these are neither so excessive nor so difficult as to be prohibitive, and with a little perseverance it is possible to master the writer's grammatical peculiarities and tricks of style.

Ghāvāsī is the writer of two poems, *Qissa-e-Saif-ul-Mulūk-o-Badī'-ul-Jamāl* and *Tūtī Nāma*. The first, 14,000 lines long, tells of the love of the Egyptian prince Saif-ul-Mulūk for a Chinese princess, and is traceable to a story in the *Arabian Nights*. *Tūtī Nāma* ('The Tales of a Parrot'), a poetical rendering of Ziyā-ud-Dīn's Persian work of the same name, and derived from a Sanskrit original, was composed in 1639.

Ibn-e-Nishātī wrote *Phūl Ban*, a romance 3,500 lines long, in 1655. It is a translation of a Persian work, *Basātīn*, written by Ahmad Zubairī in the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq, in the early part of the fourteenth century. Another writer who deserves mention is Tab'ī whose romance named *Qissa-e-Bahrām-o-Gul Andām* (1670) is derived from Nizāmī's *Haft Paikar*.

With the single exception of Dr. 'Abdul Haq, who has an informative volume on Nusratī and has also brought out an edition of Vajhī's *Sab Ras*, I do not know of any other research scholar who has devoted time and attention to a systematic study of Dakkanī literature or tried to make it available to the reader in a suitable form; and consequently its true assessment remains to be made. There are some who see no more than the enthusiasm of the research scholar reinforced by local patriotism in the furore with which these 'old treasures', so widely acclaimed and so little read, were greeted. But this may be no more than a reaction from the ecstasies of critics in the south. What is really needed is a systematic study of these works by experts. Of this, unfortunately, there is no

immediate prospect. The exhumation of these works and the publicity given to them was intimately associated with the patronage accorded to Urdu by the Nizām and his government. Since that state no longer exists, the incentive that lay behind the study of this literature no longer exists, and it is unlikely that there should be a recrudescence of interest in it in the near future.

IV

VALI

THE second half of the seventeenth century, which roughly covers the poetic activity of Valī, was a time of political unrest and disintegration in the history of the Deccan. The age-long struggle between the north and the south had now entered on a decisive stage, and the Muslim states of the south had either been absorbed into the Mughal dominion or were in the process of dissolution. Notwithstanding Chānd Bibī's heroic defence, Ahmadnagar had been stormed by Akbar in 1600. The same year had seen the extinction of the kingdom of Khāndesh, and within Akbar's reign the Mughal frontiers had been pushed to the upper course of the Krishna.

The forward policy inaugurated by Akbar was vigorously resumed by his grandson, Shāhjahān, whose imperialist designs had been intensified by a pious desire to exterminate the Shiite states of Bijapur and Golkonda. His first objective was Daulatābād in Ahmadnagar, the fall of which in 1633 brought the kingdom of the Nizām Shāhīs to an end. This accomplished, he was in a position to resume seriously his plans for the reduction of the Deccan states. The ruler of Golkonda acknowledged his suzerainty and agreed to pay tribute. The King of Bijapur was less complaisant and decided to resist the imperial aggression. For some time the capital was saved by the desperate expedient of flooding the surrounding country; but the king, finding it impossible to defend his kingdom against the invader, was forced to make peace on terms similar to those imposed on Golkonda.

In 1653, Aurangzeb, appointed Subedār of the Deccan, made his headquarters at Daulatābād and in the neighbouring town of Aurangābād, and conducted his operations against the doomed cities with the utmost vigour. But the end was not yet. For one thing, the constant intrigues carried on against him by his brother, Dāra Shakoh, impeded and thwarted his designs. But what really stayed his hand and gave a breathing time to the sultanates was the prolonged illness of Shāhjahān and the War of Succession. With his

accession to the throne, Aurangzeb resolved to proceed in person to the Deccan to secure the long-deferred conquest of the states. Bījapur was invested and stormed in 1686, and the kingdom was finally annexed to the Mughal empire. Abul Hasan, the ruler of Golkonda, made amends for a life of ease and luxury by a gallant defence, but treachery succeeded where force had failed. Golkonda fell in 1687, betrayed by a traitor, and with its fall the Qutb Shāhī dynasty came to an end.

We have already discussed how the evacuation of Delhi under Muhammad Tughlaq's orders had given Urdu a foothold in the Deccan. The large and renewed emigrations into the south, especially during the viceroyalty of Aurangzeb, brought these cities still more within the orbit of the cultural and linguistic influence of the north. Of the general influence of the north on the south nothing need be said here. Our immediate concern is an estimate of the linguistic influence on the south, especially on the offshoot of Dakkanī known as Aurangābādī. There is ample evidence to prove that this dialect had borne the impress of the north so repeatedly and so deeply that, barring a few differences of idiom, phraseology, and pronunciation, it had become virtually identical with Urdu, the spoken language of Delhi. This Aurangābādī, as we shall see, was the mother-tongue of Valī. The late Dr. Chānd, who made a special study of the question, says:

During this period not only did the civilization and literature of the Deccan undergo a revolution, but in all the countries south of the Narbada, and in Gujrāt, the victories of the Mughals disseminated the culture and civilization of the north. Even a casual glance at the histories of the leading cities of the south is enough to support the view that they were colonies of northern India. Even today this influence is patent in Ahmadābād, Ahmadnagar, and Sūrat. A comparative study of the literature of the period in the south and north will show that, so far as grammar and general usage are concerned, there is no difference between the language of these two parts. Nor was the change confined to language alone. It profoundly affected all aspects of life and civilization there: so much so that it was difficult to say that Ahmadnagar was a city in the Deccan; so much had it come to look like a colony of the north.¹

This view of the virtual identity of Aurangābādī with Urdu receives further support from *Tafsīr-e-Charāgh-e-Abadī*, a commentary

of the last chapter of the Koran, by 'Azīzullah Hamrang of Aurang-ābād, written in 1806 (1221 A.H.). In his Introduction the commentator remarks:

اگرچہ بعض عزیزوں نے زبانِ دکنی ہندی آمیز میں تفسیر جزوِ آخر کی لکھی ہے لیکن بہ سبب الفاظ
دکنی لطفِ زبانِ ہندی کا پورا نہیں پاتا اور دل یاروں کا واسطے مطالعہ اس کے رغبت
کم لاتا۔ اس واسطے خاطر قاصر میں اس فقیر کی آیا کہ تفسیر جزوِ آخر کی زبانِ ہندی میں کہ بفعل
اوزنگ آباد کے لوگوں کا محاورہ ہے لکھتے)

Although some friends have written a commentary of the last section of the Koran in Hindiized Dakkanī, yet on account of the admixture of Dakkanī words in it, it does not have the full flavour of Hindī, and therefore the reader does not feel sufficiently inclined to read it. I, therefore, decided to write a commentary of the last part in Hindī, which is at present spoken in Aurangābād.²

The style of the passage as well as the argument involved, fully reinforce the view of the virtual identity of Aurangābādī and Urdu, then called Hindī, and their difference from Dakkanī proper. It is instructive to read Dr. 'Abdul Haq's note on this passage:

It should be noted that the author treats Aurangābādī as a separate language, unconnected with Dakkanī. The fact is that as far back as the reign of Shāhjahān and the viceroyalty of Aurangzeb, the former (Aurangābādī) had been in touch with the language of the north. The language used by the poets and writers of Aurangābād is totally different from the language of Bijapur, Haiderābād, and the Madras Presidency. The former largely used the language of northern India.³

To sum up, under Mughal influence, Urdu had acquired a firm footing in those parts of southern India which had been longest and most intimately in touch with the north. In other words, there were two languages current in the Deccan, the languages of the outlying provinces of the Deccan where Mughal influence had not fully penetrated, and Aurangābādī, spoken in Aurangābād and its neighbourhood, which had been in long and direct contact with the language of the north.

The most authentic thing about the life of Valī is his poetry which has come down to us in its entirety. The rest is a matter of conjecture. It is stated that he was born in 1667. Of his life and family very little that is definite is known, and even his name remained, until quite recently, a matter of controversy. Muhammad Valī according to the oldest authority, his name underwent such fanciful inversions and elaborations as Valī Muhammad, Shāh Valīullah, Shams Valīullah, and Shams-ud-Dīn. Thanks to the painstaking research of recent scholars, we are now in a position to fill some important gaps in his life story. The discovery of a rare manuscript of his poems in the India Office Library, London (No. 155), transcribed by the son of Valī's trusted friend, Sayyid Abul Ma'ālī, furnishes full evidence with regard to his name and birth-place. It is prefaced with: *Dīvān-e-Valī*, copied out in 1156 A.H. (A.D. 1743) by Sayyid Muhammad Taqī, son of Sayyid Abul Ma'ālī, and bears on its last page the following remark: 'Poetical works of Mian Valī Muhammad, inhabitant of the Deccan.'⁴ This information, which is considered by some to close the controversy with regard to his country, is not considered conclusive by those who claim him for Gujrāt on the strength of his long stay there, and his deep love for it, substantiated by the internal evidence of his verse. They contend, moreover, that the word Deccan was then loosely used in the north as well as the south, for any one country, or all the countries in the south, including Gujrāt. This general use of the word, though supported by old documents, does not, in the opinion of the other group, invalidate the Deccan theory of Valī's birth. Dr. Zor maintains that no poet of Gujrāt has ever called himself a Dakkanī, all of them having used the more specific term Gujrātī for themselves.⁵ If this line of argument is sound, then Valī's affiliation with the Deccan receives conclusive support from his line:

ولی ایران و توران میں ہے مشہور اگرچہ شاعر ملکِ دکن ہے

Valī is well known in Irān and Transoxonia,
Although he is a poet of the Deccan.

As regards *tazkiras*, the oldest of them assigns him to Aurangābād: and there is some *prima facie* presumption in favour of this being correct, as its author was nearest in time to Valī.⁶ The tradition



which assigns him to Gujrāt began with Qā'im Chāndpurī⁷ who, the supporters of the Deccan theory of Valī's origin explain, was misled by several affectionate references to Gujrāt in his poems. The later writers who assign him to Gujrāt all seem to follow Qā'im Chāndpurī's authority.

Be this as it may, his birth apart, Valī spent the most fruitful part of his life in Gujrāt, and he was a Gujrātī by choice and residence, if not by the accident of birth. We will, therefore, say: if to the Deccan belongs the honour of being the birth-place of Valī, Gujrāt, his adopted home, may claim the still greater credit of having nursed his genius and of bringing out all that was best in him.

Valī is said to have left for Gujrāt at the age of twenty. He completed his education in the seminary attached to the mausoleum of Shāh Vajīh-ud-Dīn,⁸ in Ahmadābād. Why he left Aurangābād for Gujrāt and, except for a short visit or two, never went back to his native place, is a matter of conjecture. The view that the cold, austere, and warlike atmosphere of Aurangābād was unfavourable to poetry and arts, goes some way to explain it, but not far enough; and in the absence of any substantial data, it is much better to confess our ignorance than to cheat ourselves with rhetorical descriptions of Valī's aesthetic temperament.⁹

In Ahmadābād, Valī contracted many strong social ties, the most enduring of them being his attachment to a graceful young man named Abul Ma'ālī, which, to quote the euphemistic language of the day, 'rose to an unusual degree of love and admiration'.¹⁰ In his company, Valī left for Delhi in 1700 (1112 A.H.). Here he met some of the literary and spiritual celebrities of the day, including Shāh Sa'dullah Gulshan of Delhi,¹¹ poet, saint, and scholar, who, according to a well-known tradition, was Valī's poetical preceptor.

That Delhi owed its first impulse to Urdu poetry to Valī's example is incontestable. How far Valī, in turn, was stimulated by Delhi is a moot question. It is alleged that before his visit to Delhi, Valī had written in Dakkanī: it was under the influence of Shāh Sa'dullah Gulshan that he gave up Dakkanī for Urdu, the spoken language of Delhi.

This tradition has been accepted by all authorities, although there is some difference in the tradition itself as reported by Qudratullah and Mīr, the two writers who make a special mention of it. According to the former, the Delhi saint is reported to have advised him to discard the Dakkanī idiom and model his speech on the Urdū-e-Mu'alla of Delhi. Mīr, on the other hand, records that he was advised

to embody Persian themes and sentiments in his *Rekhta*. Valī, it is said, accepted the advice, discarded Dakkanī in favour of Urdu, and absorbed more and more of Persian sentiments in his *ghazals*, in preference to the themes peculiar to his earlier poetry.

These views, even if they have a substratum of truth, are very much exaggerated, and appear to me to be inventions of the Delhi school of criticism to exalt their city at the expense of the Deccan, and appropriate the literary importance of Valī to themselves by ascribing it to the influence of Delhi.¹² Persian influence on Dakkanī literature, as already discussed, is synchronous with the dawn of Dakkanī literature under the Muslims. Dakkanī poetry, or, at any rate, the most considerable part of it, is modelled on Persian forms and sentiments; and though not without some leaven of Hindī its affiliation with Persian literature cannot be denied.

The question, it is clear, is historical as well as literary, and the last word on it can only be said by a careful consideration of Valī's literary background and the internal evidence supplied by his sentiments and style. The literary and historical background has already been discussed at some length. As regards the internal evidence supplied by his verse, I find that, barring a few minor exceptions, it shows a unity of tone both in regard to matter and style; and he would be a very daring person indeed who would undertake to draw a line between the alleged earlier poetry, Dakkanī in form and sentiment, and the so-called later poetry written in Urdu. Valī's sentiments, as far as I have been able to judge, are Persian. So far the internal evidence. On the speculative side, it does not at all commend itself to reason that Valī should have suddenly discarded his own mother-tongue for a language very different from it, and, what is more, mastered it during his brief sojourn in Delhi; and yet this is exactly what the theory implies.

The theories discussed above, I need hardly labour the point, are based on a complete ignorance of the linguistic development in the Deccan. The fact is that by the time Valī became vocal, the spoken language of the north had practically supplanted Dakkanī. This view is further strengthened by the fundamental oneness of Valī's language with that of his contemporaries and immediate successors in the Deccan, most of whom, it can be historically established, had received no inspiration from Delhi, and naturally wrote in the current idiom of the day.¹³ Again, let us not forget that, after his return from Delhi, Valī wrote not for Delhi audiences but for his own countrymen. His poems were written for circulation

among his friends or recitation in *mushā'aras*. Hence they must have been written in the language with which those people were familiar. Look at it as you like, the tradition does not commend itself to reason and facts. There are only two possible alternatives: either the Dakkanī of Valī's day was so different from Urdu as to constitute a different dialect, or it was so akin to the latter as to be practically indistinguishable from it. Suppose the first alternative to be true; then the advice of the Delhi saint is about as practicable as asking a Bengālī or a Gujrātī poet, on a holiday in the Punjāb, to write henceforth in Punjābī or Urdu. In the second case, supposing the two languages to be identical, the advice is gratuitous.

Let us, however, take it for granted that Valī did actually change over from Dakkanī to Urdu. Then the evidence for this must be discovered in his verse. To substantiate this theory, there must be a fairly considerable Dakkanī element in his works. But such a conclusion is not at all supported by his *divān*. To come back, Valī's language is Urdu. It is Urdu because in Valī's day it was the spoken language of Aurangābād. Indeed, this alone accounts for the warm reception accorded to him in Delhi. The people of Delhi were struck with admiration, because here was a poet, they must have said, who was using their own language for the high purposes of art. Imperialists to the backbone, and proud of their own language and culture, what more unlikely than that they should have saluted the bard of a despised foreign dialect as their teacher!

Nor should it be forgotten that Valī visited Delhi once only, and that, *seven years before his death*. The theory espoused by the Delhi school leaves us with the very inconvenient conclusion that by far the greatest part of his *divān*, for there is very little purely Dakkanī poetry in it, is the product of the last seven years of his life.¹⁴

My object is not to deny that Shāh Sa'dullah Gulshan pressed the views mentioned above on Valī; it would have been really odd if he had not done so, indefatigable propagandist of Urdu that he was. What I wish to point out is that, quite unknown to Shāh Sa'dullah Gulshan, Valī had been following his advice years before it was given to him.

4

The tradition that Valī revisited Delhi twenty years later in 1720 (1133 A.H.) is unhistorical, and the misunderstanding sprang from a

statement made by Mus-hafī in his *taxkīra*. What the latter wrote, on the authority of poet Hātim, was that Valī's *divān* was received in Delhi in the second year of the reign of Muhammad Shāh. This was taken to mean, by oversight, that Valī himself had paid a visit to Delhi in that year. The tradition of the second visit to Delhi¹⁵ also derived support from the ascription of the following line to Valī:

دل وکی کالے لیا دلی نے چھین جا کہو کوئی محمد شاہ سون

Valī's heart has been captured by Delhi,
Let someone go and tell Muhammad Shāh of it.

Dr. 'Abdul Haq, however, maintains that this line does not occur in any of the thirteen *divāns* of Valī in his possession. He has further substantiated that it is a line by Mazmūn, and is given in the following form in *Tazkīra-e-Gulshan-e-Guftār* and *Chamanistān-e-Shu'arā*:

اس گدا کا دل لیا دلی نے چھین جا کہو کوئی محمد شاہ سون

The heart of this poor person has been captured by Delhi,
Let someone go and tell Muhammad Shāh of it.

It was believed until recently that Valī died at a ripe old age in 1741 (1154 A.H.). But Dr. 'Abdul Haq has discovered a manuscript *divān* of Valī in the Jāmi' Masjid Library, Bombay, which bears the following *qita'* at the end:

مطلع دیوان عشق سیدارباب دل والی ملک سخن صاحب عرفان وکی
سال وفاتِ خودش از سرالهام گفت بادیناہ ولی ساتی کوثر علیؑ

Exordium of the book of love, leader of the pious,
The ruler of the land of poetry and possessed of spiritual insight, i.e. Valī;
In a moment of inspiration he wrote this chronogram about the year of
his death—

May 'Alī, the guardian of the reservoir of *Kausar*, be his protector!

From this it is clear that Valī died a young man in 1707.

5

It is believed that Valī's visit to Delhi, and the subsequent arrival of his *divān* there, took the literary world by surprise and created a sensation. This is not without some truth. Although Urdu was then in general use as the spoken language of the country, yet for literary purposes Persian was still the sole medium, and the new dialect was considered unworthy of the dignity of poetry. The arrival of his *divān* must have strengthened the hands of the advocates of Urdu. We may also accept Āzād's view that Valī's poems were recited in streets and musical assemblies, and that the poets began to envisage possibilities of compiling *divāns* in Urdu. It should, however, be remembered that this literary excitement, though it marks the beginning of a literary revolution, bore no immediate fruit. Revolutions do not take place overnight. Nor should it be forgotten that in a conventional society deeply rooted in the past, the response to something new would naturally be slow and cautious. It is significant that not one of the dozen or so Persian poets of that day showed any marked enthusiasm for Urdu poetry. And no wonder. Urdu had none of the attractions or prestige of Persian, and the new movement had to wait patiently and recruit adherents from the rising generation, untrammelled by loyalty to a time-honoured tradition.

Valī's historical importance in Urdu literature is, therefore, immense. He revealed to the poets in Delhi the possibilities of their mother-tongue as a medium for poetry. He dealt a heavy blow to the prestige of Persian, and though it lingered as the language of poetry with some conservatives, it gradually lost its hold on the masses as well as on the elect. The stage was now set for the ascendancy of Urdu.

Mainly erotic, Valī's poetry is in the form of *ghazals*. It reveals an essentially adolescent mind, eager for amatory experience in a gay, light-hearted fashion, anywhere and everywhere, unimpeded by former loyalties or emotional commitments. He is the Anacreon of Urdu, and like him his Eros is impartial to either sex. Love is to him an exhilarating pastime, not a purgatory, as to a poet like Mīr, to whom he offers a complete contrast. Ardent without being deep, his lyrics consist of well-turned compliments to those he loves, or who have merely touched his fancy—his friends, professional beauties, casual acquaintances, even passers-by. In his gaiety, there is almost a touch of the Lucknow poets for whom, also, love was no more

than amorous dalliance. Valī has their familiarity, though not their brilliance and flippancy.

What Valī lacks as a poet is depth, strength, and variety. His assets are fluency and youthful naivety. He lives constantly at the sensuous level and scarcely shows any consciousness of the large tracts of thought and feeling lying beyond it. Evidently, he enjoyed life so whole-heartedly and fully that he had no time to think about it. Genial and carefree, he reminds one of those plants that turn instinctively towards the sun to bask in its warmth and glow. Instinctively, he eschews dark spots and shadows. This imparts a certain degree of thinness to his verse, for no poet of outstanding merit has ever lived for long at the sensuous level alone.

To Valī the physical is divine not in any transcendental sense, but because it is the most moving thing known to him. It is not a little surprising, therefore, to find him dubbed as a mystic. What can be the reasons for this mistake? To begin with, Valī's name has something to do with it, which proves that there is much more in a name than is generally recognized. But probably it was the confusion of his name with Valī Vellorī¹⁶ and the ascription to him of the latter's *Ranqat-ush-Shubadā* that were chiefly responsible for this view. Again, his descent from Vajīh-ud-Dīn, a reputed saint, and his discipleship of Hazrat Shāh Nasīr-ud-Dīn Siddiqī Suhravardī are other contributory factors. Nor is it at all unlikely that Valī himself had given currency to the idea. He was, as we have seen, a hearty, free-and-easy, pleasure-loving man, who found it hard to square his conduct with the strait-laced ideals of the orthodox, and must have been tempted to use mysticism as a screen to enjoy exemption from the strict religious routine. Valī's mysticism was no more than a sop to the Philistines.

Valī is sometimes spoken of as one of the primitives: one who warbled his native wood-notes wild before art was born. Such a view has nothing but ignorance to recommend it. If some odd lines in him do not seem to scan today, it is not because he was deficient in art and learning; it is because of the change in pronunciation that some words have since undergone. Pronounce them as they were pronounced in his day and they would scan perfectly. Again, if he departs from the accepted Persian spelling of some words, preferring to write

دوانہ - جگل - نسبی as دیوانہ - جگل - تسبیح

it is because these words were so pronounced or spelt in his day. Valī was born before the advent of purists and precisionists—people who believe that a language is something fixed and static, and insist that words both in their meaning and sound must conform to the standards of a bygone age. In all living languages the standard of correctness is usage, usage now, in the present, and, moreover, not the usage of the language from which certain words have been borrowed, but the usage of the language into which they have been imported. The realist uses a language as he finds it; the purist goes to origins, denying change and development to it. To read Valī aright, you ought to read his lines as he himself or his contemporaries read them.

It is also well to remember that he makes frequent use of a large number of the figures of speech known as *sanāi'* and *badāi'*, a further proof, if one is required, of the fact that he belonged to a sophisticated tradition and was well versed in Persian literary traditions.

As a poet Valī is the inheritor of two opposite traditions, the one gradually falling into obsolescence, the other fast coming into its own. Or to put it differently, he stands at the parting of the ways, and wrote when the native element in the Deccan was being gradually pushed out by the steady progress of Persian sentiments and Persian diction. On the whole, the indigenous element in him is much less marked than the foreign. A few *ghazals* in which we hear the familiar plaint of the loving wife awaiting her absent or erratic lord; references to Indian seasons, festivals, animals, birds, rivers, mountains, heroes, and mythological figures; the occasional use of Hindī metres—these are some of his tenuous and fast-disappearing affiliations with the past. They arrest us today not so much by their frequency as their quaintness and victorious beauty in the orthodox Persian setting. The time is not far off when the Persian influence will drive out the indigenous element altogether. In Valī it is still there and marks a gradually receding tradition.

It is evident, therefore, that it is futile to look for a large or predominant Dakkanī element in Valī. Archaisms there are in him, but you will find them no less in the poets of the age of Muhammad Shāh, and even later. Some of his poems are mere exercises in an outmoded style. As it is not the practice to arrange *ghazals* in a chronological order, it is not safe to make hasty generalizations about a poet's early or late period, unless such a classification is fully supported by ample and convincing testimony. All that can safely be said about Valī's poetry is that its development must have

been marked by an increasing mastery of Urdu idiom. To contend that some of his *ghazals* mark an earlier stage in his poetic career because of the presence of a few archaisms, may not be altogether correct, in spite of appearances being in their favour. They may be earlier works; but quite as legitimately they may be playful exercises in the older style. On the whole, the theory that divides his poetry into two sections: the first written before he came to Delhi, the other written after his departure from it; the first Dakkanī in language and sentiment, the other in Urdu and modelled on Persian themes, must be given up as tendentious and unhistorical.

There is a rare antique flavour about some of his *ghazals* as in this:

لکھی تم مکھ ستی کھو لو نقاب آہستہ آہستہ
 کہ جوں گل سوں نکستا ہے گلاب آہستہ آہستہ
 ہزاراں لاکھ نُوہاں میں سخن میرا چلے یوں کر
 ستاروں میں چلے جیوں ماہتاب آہستہ آہستہ
 سلونی سانوری پیتم ترے موتی کی لڑیاں لے
 کیا عفتِ شریا کو خراب آہستہ آہستہ

Lift the veil from thy face, softly and gently,
 As the rose-water is distilled from the rose softly and gently.

In the midst of a thousand beauties my sweetheart walks as gracefully
 As the moon glides among the stars, softly and gently.

My nut-brown beloved, the radiance of thy pearl string
 Has eclipsed the glory of the Pleiades, softly and gently.

In the following he is almost modern in his diction:

اسکو چاہل جگ میں ہو کیونکہ سراغِ زندگی
 گروشنِ افلاک ہے جس کو ایامِ زندگی
 بے عزیزیاں سیرِ گلشن ہے گلِ داغِ الم
 جنتِ اجاب ہے معنی میں باغِ زندگی
 آسماں میری نظر میں کلبہ تاریک ہے
 گر نہ دیکھوں تجھ کوں آسچیم و چراغِ زندگی
 لالہ خونیں کفن کے حال سوں ظاہر ہوا
 بستگی ہے خال سوں خواہاں کے داغِ زندگی

کیوں نہ ہو دے اے وئی روشن شبِ قدسیات
 ہے نگاہ گرم گلِ رویاں چراغِ زندگی

How can he ever find his way to peace of mind and serenity,
The cup of whose life is always revolving like the skies.

Without friends a stroll in a garden is cheerless and dreary;
With friends, the garden of life is a paradise of joy.

If I see thee not, thou vision and light of my life!
The very heaven looks like a darksome bower.

I have learnt this truth from the life of the blood-stained tulip,
That attachment to the mole of the beloved is the bane of life.

O Valī! why should not the night of thy life be radiant,
When the love gleams of the beautiful are the lamp of thy life.

Valī was followed by a long line of poets in the Deccan, but their works have not come down to us; the only exception being Sirāj-ud-Dīn of Aurangābād (1715–1763), an anthology of whose verse, entitled *Sirāj-e-Sukhan*, was published in Haidarābād (Deccan) in 1936. He is acclaimed to be a great poet by some, including Bailey, who considers him the ‘greatest of the poets who clustered round Valī’, but as I see it, there is nothing remarkable either in his sentiments or his style, and he strikes me as an over-rated poet. Mirza Dāūd, another Aurangābādī poet, who has come in for much notice in *taḥkiras*, likewise lacks distinction, but is quite on a par with Sirāj-ud-Dīn.

V

REACTION IN FAVOUR OF URDU IN DELHI

THE rise and development of Urdu poetry in the north coincides with the decline and fall of the Mughal empire. Valī paid his visit to Delhi in 1700, seven years before the death of Aurangzeb. Twenty years later, when his *divān* arrived in Delhi in Muhammad Shāh's reign, the Mughal empire had practically come to an end.

For this rapid decline, Aurangzeb's successors were only in part responsible. The forces of disintegration held in check by the emperor's almost unlimited resources and firm character grew irresistible when his strong hand was removed; and before long there was nothing left of the empire except the name.

The death of Aurangzeb was followed by the inevitable War of Succession. Bahādur Shāh relinquished his father's far-flung programme and decided to pursue a pacificatory policy. To this end, he released Sāhū, Sivajī's son, and sent him back to his country. This, however, did not give him the breathing time he required. In 1710, he received the news that the Sikhs had sacked the town of Sirhind and committed innumerable atrocities under Banda Bahādur, a man of uncertain origin who had taken over the military command after Gurū Govind Singh. Bahādur Shāh succeeded in defeating the Sikhs, but failed to get at their leader.

Bahādur Shāh died in 1712 and was succeeded by Jahāndār Shāh, a worthless profligate. A year after, he was killed by the order of Farrukh-siyar, who succeeded to the throne in 1713. During his scandalous reign the power of the government was in the hands of two brothers, known as the Sayyid Brothers, who deposed him in 1719 and put him to death in a horrible way. The King-makers, as the Sayyid Brothers were called, now placed on the throne several phantom emperors. They quickly disappeared and were replaced by the effeminate voluptuary, Muhammad Shāh, who succeeded in getting rid of the King-makers and ruled till 1748.

Muhammad Shāh's long reign witnessed the complete break-up of the empire. Āsaf Jāh, who had become the Minister in 1722, retired to his fief in the Deccan the following year, where he became an in-

dependent ruler of that province. Similarly Allah Vardī Khān, the Governor of Bengal, ceased to pay tribute (1740). The Rohillas, a warlike clan of the Afghāns, set up an independent principality to the north of the Ganges which became known as Rohilkhand. 'The empire', writes Elphinstone, 'was again reduced to the same state of decay which had on former occasions invited the invasions of Tamerlane and Bābar; and a train of events in Persia led to a similar attack from that country.'¹

Of this series of invasions the first was that of Nādir Shāh. Advancing in 1739 through Ghaznī, Kābul, and Lahore, he met with no real obstruction till he had reached Karnāl, where he routed the Mughal army. Both the kings entered Delhi together and good order was preserved until a false report of Nādir Shāh's death gave occasion to a rising of the people, in the course of which a large number of the invaders were killed. Nādir Shāh took terrible vengeance. Seated in a mosque, he ordered a general massacre of the inhabitants. It lasted for nine hours during which 30,000 lives are reported to have been lost. Nādir Shāh then proceeded systematically and remorselessly to collect from all classes of the population the wealth of Delhi, the accumulation of nearly three centuries. When he departed for his country, he was laden with incalculable riches, including the famous Peacock Throne of Shāhjahān.

Nādir Shāh left the Mughal empire prostrate and bleeding. Ahmad Shāh Durrānī, who succeeded him, invaded India three times, capturing Delhi, which again suffered the horrors of pillage and massacre.

By far the greatest menace, however, was the growing power of the Marāthas, who had been gaining uninterrupted power since the rise of Sivajī. They had made themselves masters of Gujrāt, Mālva, and Bundelkhand, and in 1737 suddenly appeared in the suburbs of Delhi. In 1758, the brother of the ruling Peshvā took possession of Lahore and occupied the whole of the Punjāb. It appeared as if the Marāthas were destined to succeed the Mughals in the sovereignty of India.

This prospect seriously alarmed the Muslim rulers. A coalition was formed between Shujā'-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Oudh, the Rohilla chieftain Najīb-ud-Daula, and Ahmad Shāh Durrānī who returned to India in 1759 and occupied the Punjāb. The Marāthas took up the challenge, renewed their attack of northern India in 1760, and took possession of Delhi. But they were hemmed in from all sides, and under pressure of starvation were forced to give battle. This led to the

most desperately fought of the three battles of Pānīpat in which nearly 200,000 soldiers perished. The battle of Pānīpat destroyed the Marātha confederacy, and all hopes of a Marātha empire came to an end.

The battle of Pānīpat, however, did nothing to restore the prestige of the Mughals. The Marāthas were still a power to be reckoned with. In 1771 Mahādajī Sindhia, having manœuvred the return of Shāh ‘Ālam from Allahābād, installed himself as his guardian. In 1788, when he was harassed by the Rohillas, a ruffian named Ghulām Qādir seized Delhi and plundered the palace. He even flogged the princesses and brutally blinded the titular Emperor, Shāh ‘Ālam. In 1803, after the Second Marātha War, Delhi was taken over by the English and the Emperor passed from Marātha to British custody. Bahādur Shāh, the last of the Mughals, ruling till 1857, was deported to Rangoon after the Indian Mutiny, where he lived in exile till his death in 1862.

What were the repercussions of these events on the course of Urdu literature?

It has already been pointed out that the decadence and conventionality of Urdu poetry from 1720 to 1857 is not the direct result of the decline and fall of the Mughals. The direct impact of this political decay and the evils that came in its wake are, however, clearly perceptible in the increased gloom, depression, and fatalism that mark the poetry of the period. Sometimes, as in the case of Sauda, the poets will use the lash of the satire to castigate the decadence of the age; but this is rare. Much more pervasive are defeatism, morbidity, and a sense of the vanity and futility of life, which figure so conspicuously in the poetry of Mīr and Dard. On the whole, during all this turmoil and chaos, poetry followed its placid course as if nothing untoward had happened. And this is not surprising. To the Indian people, accustomed to the rise and fall of dynasties, the decline of the Mughals was only one more example of the fearful text—How are the mighty fallen! There was no national or communal feeling among the people; and if any resentment was felt against the English who had despoiled them, it did not find expression in poetry.

3

The casual appearance of Valī in Delhi, and the arrival of his *divān* there, twenty years later, were destined to have a profound effect on

the literary atmosphere of the metropolis. They led, in fact, to a literary revolution with far-reaching consequences, although Valī himself was not even remotely conscious of their explosive nature. The fact is that Valī and his *divān* arrived in Delhi at a time when that city was ripe for change. The nascent hostility of the people towards Persian had so far failed to find a suitable direction. The immense significance of Valī's visit and the appearance of his poems, lies in the fact that he not only helped crystallize this opposition to a foreign tongue, but also showed the people the way by revealing to them the potentialities of their own language as a vehicle for poetry.

Until this aspect of the matter is grasped, it would be difficult to understand the spell cast by Valī on Delhi. The question may be asked: Why do we in the Punjāb not thrill to new works in Punjābī, although it is our mother tongue? And why did Valī's contemporaries in Delhi greet him as a pioneer? The answer is that we have a prejudice against Punjābī as a literary language. On the other hand, the native Persian scholars in Delhi were at last coming to realize that Persian was not their mother tongue, and they were eagerly exploring the possibilities of cultivating their own tongue. The causes of this reaction in favour of Urdu are so important that they require some elucidation.

The first thing to know in this connexion is that the prestige of Persian was bound up with the supremacy of the Mughals; when the power of the latter declined, the revolutionary tendencies in favour of Urdu began gradually to take shape and became self-conscious. History was repeating itself once more in the Islamic world. Seven centuries ago, the decline of the Caliphate had led to the decline of Arabic, as witness the extraordinary cultivation of Persian under Sultān Mahmūd. And now in exactly the same way, the decline of the Mughals was paving the way for the growth of Urdu.

This silent revolt against the pretensions and supremacy of Persian goes back, in fact, to the time of Aurangzeb, whose long reign may fitly be called the period of revolt against Persian. Cold and austere by temperament, Aurangzeb was not interested in poetry and other fine arts, and his indifference was reflected no less in the apathy of his courtiers. Again, his protracted campaign in the south against the Marāthas and the Muslim states required all the resources and attention of the Emperor and the nobility. This was another reason for the neglect of poetry. With the political decline of the Mughals, this neglect of Persian gained a new momentum, and changed into

a conscious hostility. The movement in favour of Urdu was also fed by the sneering attitude of Persian scholars towards the native poets and scholars. The latter had devoted their lives to the cultivation of Persian and produced scholars and lexicographers of merit, but they never received their due meed of praise. With the decline of the Mughals the study of Persian lost much of its interest. Persian poetry, which may be said to have marked time in the reign of Aurangzeb, flickered in the time of his successors, and went out finally with the death of Bedil.

4

The cause of Urdu found a redoubtable champion in Sirāj-ud-Dīn 'Alī Khān, surnamed Ārzū,² one of the greatest Persian scholars of the day. Of his life nothing is known, except that he was born in Akbarābād (1689), saw some service in Gwalior, migrated to Lucknow from Delhi, and died there in 1756. To the layman, unacquainted with his untiring efforts for the rehabilitation of Urdu, and judging him by his Urdu verse only, the highly eulogistic references to him in *taxkīras* seem not a little surprising and exaggerated. In his own day he was esteemed so highly because he was foremost among those who espoused the cause of Urdu and led it to victory.

Here is the homage paid to him by Qudratullah Qādirī, surnamed Qāsim, in his *Majmū'a-e-Naghz*:

Just as all theologians are the lineal descendants of Abū Hanīfa, similarly it would be quite appropriate to consider all Hindī (Urdu) poets as having descended from him.³

Āzād's encomium is obviously a variation of the above:

Khān-e-Ārzū has done for Urdu what Aristotle did for logic. As long as all logicians are called the descendants of Aristotle, all Urdu scholars will also be called the descendants of Khān-e-Ārzū. As his great Persian works left him no time for the composition of a *divān* in Urdu, it is enough to say here that it was Khān-e-Ārzū who educated those promising pupils who came to be called the reformers of Urdu.⁴

Ārzū's services to Urdu are threefold. He was, first, the guide, instructor, and friend of a number of the rising poets of the day. Ābrū, Mazmūn, Yakrang, and Tek Chand Bahār⁵ learnt the art of poetry from him. Mīr, in his *Nikāt-ush-Shu'arā*, calls him his teacher. Sauda

was not his pupil, but it was under his advice that he went over from Persian to Urdu. His first service to Urdu, therefore, was that he championed its cause, and succeeded in consolidating a strong public opinion in its favour.

In the second place, he set himself, with a few others, to the task of enriching and purifying the Urdu language. It was then in a fluid state and the term was equally applicable to several dialects spoken in Delhi and its neighbourhood. From amongst these, *Khān-e-Ārzū* and his colleagues selected the dialect known as *Urdū-e-Mu'alla* for special literary cultivation. It was then in use among the royal family, nobles, courtiers, attendants, as well as the soldiers who lived in the neighbourhood of the Royal Fort; and being the language of the most advanced and polished section of the population of Delhi, it possessed special potentialities for literary development.

This dialect was then in an undeveloped state. Its boundaries had not been demarcated, and words from neighbouring dialects had been pouring into it. Henceforth it became the systematic policy of the poets and scholars to weed out these vulgar words, as they were called. The winnowing process thus started was carried on right through the century in Delhi, and later in Lucknow. This weeding out, as I shall try to explain, meant in fact the elimination, along with some rough and unmusical plebeian words, of a large number of Hindī words, for the reason that to the people brought up in Persian traditions they appeared unfamiliar and vulgar. Hence the paradox that this crusade against Persian tyranny, instead of bringing Urdu closer to the indigenous element, meant, in reality, a wider gulf between it and the popular speech.

But what differentiated Urdu still more from the local dialects, was a process of ceaseless importation from Persian. It may seem strange that Urdu writers in rebellion against Persian should decide to draw heavily on Persian vocabulary, idiom, forms, and sentiments, yet this was natural in a way, and analogous cases are not wanting in history. A notable example is that of English literature during the Hundred Years War, when the increasing hostility to the French resulted in an increased assimilation of French influences.

As English gradually replaced French in 'polite' life it became more and more used for 'polite' literature, and we find throughout the fourteenth century the style of the English romances approximating more closely to that of the French from which they were taken. . . . The beginning of the Hundred Years War provoked a certain self-consciousness among people of all classes. . . . Men began to realize that the French were different from

the English: they were different people, with different traditions and different tongues—they were, in fact, national enemies . . . Yet the new national consciousness had this effect on literature: it changed the nature of literary influence, so that writers sought to copy accurately in their own tongue the foreign works they admired rather than to read those works in the original and be content with vulgarized rehashes for their own literature. That is how, paradoxically enough, the new sense of difference between French and English helped to make English literature more like French. . . . While the more homely and popular romances were still produced for those whose station in life did not permit them to appreciate the subtleties and refinements of the courtly writers, the better instructed and more sophisticated readers were provided with stories in their own tongue which possessed all the qualities they had so admired in the poetry of France.⁶

Here is an exact parallel to what was happening in Urdu. The promoters of Urdu, smarting under a sense of inferiority to the Persians and eager to equal them, decided to enrich and refine their own language; and saturated as they were with Persian culture, they decided to do this by purifying their language of its clumsy and commonplace element, and by absorbing into it as much as possible of Persian vocabulary, sentiments, imagery, etc. Thus in the period under review, and for a long time to come, the cultivation of the Urdu language became, if not the better part, at least, a very important part of the art of poetry. Unless this sense of rivalry is well kept in mind, it becomes difficult to understand why their contemporaries placed Mazhar, *Khān-e-Ārzū*, Sauda, Mīr, and Dard on such a dizzy eminence, or why their estimates in *tazkiras* are so sharp-edged and triumphant. This is because they were champions no less than poets, and in exalting themselves had exalted their language and literature. Again, it is this sense of achievement that explains and justifies the praise which these poets frequently appropriate to themselves. There is no doubt that in praising themselves the poets are following an old tradition, but there is something more than a common human failing in the pride which Sauda, Mīr, and others take in having reformed the Urdu language, and in having raised Urdu poetry to the level of Persian poetry.⁷

It appears that at one time these importations from Persian were becoming excessive and indiscriminate, and it was thought necessary to cry a halt. The following skit on Mazhar by Sauda indicates that at one stage in his career as a poet the former may have allowed his zeal for Urdu to outrun his discretion.

منظہر کا شعر فارسی اور ریختہ کے بیچ
سودا یقین جان کہ روڑا ہے باط کا
آگاہ فارسی تو کہیں اس کو ریختہ
واقف جو ریختہ کے ذرا ہوئے رٹھاٹھ کا
من کہ وہ یہ کہے کہ نہیں ریختہ ہے یہ
اور ریختہ بھی ہے تو فیروز شاہ کی لاٹھ کا
القصہ اسکا حال ہی ہے جو سچ کہوں
گتا ہے دھوبی کا کہ نہ گھر کا نہ گھاٹ کا

Mazhar's mongrel verse, half Persian and half Urdu,
Is, I assure you, O Sauda! rubbish, pure and simple.
Those who are well versed in Persian call it *Rekhta*;
But those who are acquainted with the form and shape of Urdu,
Exclaim on hearing it: it is not *Rekhta*,
And if at all it is *Rekhta*,
It is the *Rekhta* of Firoz Shah's Lāth [pillar].
In short, this adage applies truly to it:
The washerman's dog nor of the house nor of the ghat.

In fairness to Mazhar, it is necessary to point out here that these strictures are not supported by any excessive Persian element in his available poetry.

Another scholarly gentleman who took a hand in promoting the cause of Urdu was Saikh Sa'dullah Gulshan, otherwise known as Shāh Gulshan Sāhib Mujaddad Naqshbandī, who had a large following in Delhi. He was the teacher of *Khvāja* Muhammad Nāsir, father of Mīr Dard, and it is he who, according to the tradition discussed above, is said to have persuaded Valī to compose in Urdu in preference to Dakkanī, and to model his poetry on Persian.

The greatest names, however, in this rehabilitation of Urdu are those of Mīr, Sauda, and Dard. It was a life-long passion with them to exalt the Urdu language and to encourage the composition of poetry in it. We are told how after each *mushā'ara* they would review the state of Urdu, weed out from it words, expressions, and grammatical constructions that were out-moded, and import into it beauties of thought and expression from Persian.

The object of this discussion is to bring home to the reader at the commencement of this study the following important facts. First, that the rise of Urdu poetry in the north was a natural reaction against the supremacy of Persian. Second, that the movement in favour of Urdu was sponsored chiefly by Indian Muslim scholars steeped in Persian culture, language, and literature; and therefore,

odd as it may seem, this advocacy of Urdu took the form of large importations from Persian into the Urdu language and Urdu poetry. It also meant the gradual elimination of words that smacked too much of the soil, or were felt to be excessively plebeian by these aristocratic writers. Had it been a popular and not an aristocratic movement, the result would have been otherwise. It would have meant the rejection of Persian, and the development of Urdu on indigenous lines. But this was not to be under the circumstances, and it is useless today to regret it. But one thing is certain: Urdu has gone the way of least resistance. It is predisposed to draw on Persian and Arabic, and sometimes excessively, nay even needlessly. What is worse, Urdu, suckled by its foster-mother Persian, has forgotten its birthright, and we are accustomed to find dignity and grandeur and sublimity in words of Persian and Arabic extraction.⁸ How prosaic, commonplace, and homely sound most Hindī words today! This is the direct result of the idealization of Persian and Arabic, and a corresponding degradation of the Hindī element in Urdu. The Englishman, despite the innumerable borrowings into his language from Latin, Greek, and French, can draw, when he likes, on the Anglo-Saxon element in his speech for the highest emotional effects, as witness—Alfred the Great, or the Great Commoner; but in Urdu we must say *Akbar-e-‘Āzam* or *Qāid-e-‘Āzam* to represent our feelings adequately.

VI

THE DELHI SCHOOL OF URDU POETRY

PART I — THE AGE OF HĀTIM

THE earliest practitioners of Urdu poetry in Delhi are doubly unfortunate. Their first great misfortune is that their works were lost during the Indian Mutiny, and for this reason, for the most part, they will remain no more than mere names to the students of Urdu literature. Their second misfortune is that they were addicted to some irritating mannerisms of style which, though popular in their own day, were severely censured by their successors, so that instead of being honoured as the pioneers of poetry in the north, their names have become indissolubly associated with the defects which their successors enjoy the reputation of having extirpated. They may have had their good points also; but they will never be known. Well may one apply to them the dictum of Anthony:

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.

Most of them wrote under the influence of Valī whom they are proud to call their teacher. This is proved by several eulogistic references to him in their extant poems.

On account of their excessive partiality for the figure of speech called *ihām*, they have been dumped together as *ihāmists* or poets of the *ihām* school. *Īhām* is a well-known figure in Persian poetry and depends 'on the employment in a verse of two or more ambiguous terms, which, from their juxtaposition, appear to be used in one sense, while they are really intended in the other. . . . The reader, misled by the juxtaposition of these words, imagines at first sight that the former meaning of each is intended, while in reality it is the latter.'¹ Mīr's definition is slightly different. He writes: 'In *ihām*, the word on which the sense of the line turns should be capable of a double meaning; one, the obvious meaning, and the other, the remote one; the real meaning of the line being based on the remote and not on the obvious meaning.'² The following verses selected from the poets of this school illustrate the point:

انا الحق بولنے لگتا ہے اُسکے زخم کا سہل کٹاری آبدار اُس شوخ کی منصور خانی ہے
 کرے ہے دار کو کامل بھی ستاراج ہوا منصور سے نکتہ یہ سل آج
 تجھ زلف کا یہ دل ہے گرفتار بال بال یک رنگ کے سخن میں خلاف ایک مومنیں

The popularity of *ihām* in this period has not been satisfactorily accounted for. Āzād ascribes it to the influence of Hindī poetry, especially Hindī *dobās*, of which it is said to be a regular feature. But *ihām* is no less a recognized figure of speech (*san'at*) in Persian poetry, and its vogue may as well have been due to the influence of Persian. 'The poets of this period' (Persian poets of Muhammad Shāh's reign), writes the compiler of *Javābir-e-Sukhan*, 'were so much in love with *ihām* that they willingly sacrificed thought, expression, and purity of language to it.'³ It is also a marked feature of Aurangābādī poets like Mīr 'Abdul Hayy Sārim, Nūr-ul-'Ain Vāqif, 'Azīz-ullah, Mīr 'Ashiq Burhānpurī, Muhammad Murtaẓā Mehdī, and Shāh Fazlullah Fazlī. Valī himself, though not excessively addicted to it, was not above occasional indulgence in it. It appears that *ihām* was in the air in the north as well as the Deccan during this period. The most unsparing crusade conducted against it by the reformers of the next generation, Sauda, Qā'im, and Mīr Dard, who tried to banish it lock, stock, and barrel, lends colour to the view that it was, or was considered to be, a legacy from Hindī poetry. On the other hand, the hostility to it may have been no more than a natural reaction against a fad that had been carried too far. The latter appears to me to be a more feasible explanation than the somewhat far-fetched one given by Āzād.

Nothing but a most tentative review of these poets is possible in the absence of their works. If it be taken for granted that their chief claim to recognition was the use of *ihām* and a few other figures of speech, their poetry could not have possessed much literary merit. It is evident that when all the resources of a poet are deployed to secure a dexterous manipulation of words, inspiration must either be starved or relegated to the background. Hence this type of poetry is excessively strained and artificial. It does not mean, however, that pun-

ning was the sole object of their poetry. This view is probably incorrect and is due to the fact that *tazkira* writers, with a view to illustrating the special predilection of these poets for *ihām*, selected mostly, or largely, those lines only which exemplified their use of it. A dispassionate study of the material available shows that despite their partiality for *ihām*, they are not without genuine emotion, and that their poetry is marked with simplicity and charm, when they are not intent on word-play.

The stock-in-trade of these poets are the favourite and well-worn themes of Persian poetry. The poetry is mainly amatory, and conforms to the original sense of the word *ghazal*. There is also a mild leaven of mysticism and morality, but this is largely conventional, having no more than a decorative value. Satire, except for a few personal hits, does not exist, and the *qasīda* does not exist at all.

The language is still in a state of nature. The precisionist is not yet born, and grammar and spelling therefore do not obey hard and fast rules. In the language there is a mild admixture of Hindī words which the next generation of poets and scholars will discard and replace with words of Persian extraction. Nor are Persian and Arabic words always used in conformity with their prescribed usage, spelling, or pronunciation in those languages. The popular use is the sole guide. There is also much laxity about the stringent rules of *qāfiya* and *radīf* as they obtained in Persian: very often the latter is dispensed with, and only the former retained. In rhymemore attention is paid to sound than to spelling, and rhymes like *سر - دھڑ، وسواس - اخلاص*، are common.

Led by these considerations 'Abdus-Salām Nadvī writes: 'Urdu poetry with these poets was a combination of inappropriate, vulgar, and undignified words; and as such their poetry was hardly better than the poetry of Dakkanī poets.'⁴ Such a generalization is manifestly unfair and misleading. Faults of taste there are in them, as in the latter-day poets; but it is obviously unfair to judge them by canons of taste and rules which did not then exist, and were formulated by a subsequent generation. The words and expressions that jarred on the taste of subsequent poets had nothing inherently false or incorrect about them. Correctness is merely a matter of usage as beauty is a matter of taste: and these poets were neither ignorant nor wanting in taste, but wrote in the idiom of the day, subscribing to its rules and prescription, as far as they had been codified. It was the latter-day purists who voted them as vulgar or obsolete; but as long

as they were current coin, it is a misuse of language to call them wrong or vulgar. Āzād must have heard some such arguments when he wrote: 'Most of our contemporaries sneer at their language; but it is no occasion for sneering. Today, we laugh at their language; you will have people tomorrow who will laugh at your language.'⁵

The new school is represented by less than a dozen poets of whom the following have received mention in most textbooks:

Najm-ud-dīn (Shāh Mubārak) Ābrū (1692-1747), descended from Shāh Muhammad Ghaus of Gwalior and a relative and pupil of Khān-e-Ārzū, was one of the earliest poets who wrote under the influence of Valī. He came to Delhi when quite young and spent the rest of his life there. To him belongs the dubious honour of being the leader of the *ībāmists*; yet it is worthy of note that a fastidious critic like Mīr calls him a 'unique poet of *Rekhta*'.⁶ However, this view does not receive much support from his extant poems.

Sharf-ud-Dīn Mazmūn (b. before 1689, d. about 1745) was descended from Shaikh Shakar Ganj. Originally a soldier, he came to Delhi for education, and settled down there as a dervish in a mosque. He wrote sparingly and his style is excessively artificial.

Sayyid Muhammad Shākir Nājī was a promising poet who died at an early age in 1754. He was irritable, censorious, quarrelsome, and sarcastic. In a *mukhammas* (not extant) he is said to have given an account of Nādir Shāh's invasion of India, 'the effeminacy and indolence of the courtiers, their drunkenness and debauchery, the decline of the great, and the rise of upstarts'.⁷ The three stanzas extant are marred by word-play and love of ingenuity for its own sake which mark the style of the period. Mīr gives him short shrift. 'He was pre-disposed to jesting,' he writes; 'I met him once or twice. He read meaningless verses to amuse people.'⁸

Another poet of the school is Mustafā Khān Yakrang, whose *dīvān* is said to have escaped the ravages of the Mutiny.

Ashraf 'Alī Fighān (d. 1772), a foster-brother of Emperor Ahmad Shāh, and a poet of note, did not subscribe to the taste for *ībām*. His style is smooth and direct, and his poetry is not without a touch of pathos.

Hātim, the leading poet of the age of Muhammad Shāh, was born in 1699 and died in 1781, according to one account, and in 1792, according to another.

Hātim's life spanned nearly the entire eighteenth century, and therefore represents the rise and fall of the *ībām* ideal. He became vocal under the influence of Valī, and his early poetry has the general

characteristics of the poetry of Muhammad Shāh's age. He then fell under the influence of the reformers, and late at the age of fifty-eight he made a selection from his larger *divān*, which, in regard to its size, he named *Dīvānẓāda*.

That Hātim excised a large number of old poems from his *divān* as unsuitable to the new taste may lend colour to the view that he was one of the leaders of revolt against *ihām*, but such a conclusion would not be correct. *Ihām* had been in great vogue for about four decades (1720-58), and then it began to show signs of decline. Nājī, the last surviving poet of the school, had died in 1754; Ābrū, the protagonist of the movement, in 1747; and Hātim's memorable selection from his complete *divān* had been made in 1757. It is clear from the above that *ihām* had been already in disrepute for some time past, and Hātim was a belated convert rather than a leader of the new movement. It was only when the old style was no longer in favour that he eliminated whatever was old-fashioned from his *divān*.

The foreword to *Dīvānẓāda* is the only authentic pronouncement we possess in regard to the changes that were taking place in Urdu poetry towards the middle of the eighteenth century. Whatever else we can say about the literary practice of the period is inferential, derived from the practice rather than from the pronouncements of the poets. In brief, Hātim's practice points to a meticulous spelling and pronunciation of Persian loan-words. For a long time Urdu had been borrowing words from Persian and, in conformity with the general practice, subordinating them in sound and meaning to its own genius or usage. There was now a scholarly reaction in favour of Persian, and spellings like *دوانہ ، بگانہ ، صحی ، تسبی* etc., were discarded as incorrect, and the original Persian spelling restored. Again, when Hātim says that he refrained from using *sākin* as *mutaharrik* and vice versa, as in the popular pronunciation of *marz* *مرض* for *maraz*

مرض, he is emphasizing his reversion to the original Persian pronunciation of the words borrowed from that language. All these are learned changes introduced by academicians who ruled that correctness in Urdu would henceforth be determined not by current usage, as in all languages, but by a strict conformity to the usage obtaining in Persian. A similar academic reaction is evident in the substitution

of *اُدھر* for *اودھر* and *کدھر* for *کیدھر*, as well as the disuse of

نت، جگ، نین etc., which, purely Hindī in origin, must have sounded odd to ears accustomed to Persian. A strict observance of the rules of rhyme also came into force, and imperfect rhymes like گھوڑا and پورا and دھڑ and سر were no longer admissible.

It should be remembered that Hātim made these changes in conformity with the ruling taste of the day. The changes introduced by him are an index of the practice of the day in learned circles. What do these changes amount to? Briefly this. First, the Hindī element in disfavour, is receding before the growing authority of Persian and *Urdū-e-Mu'alla*: and second, the language of the *élite* is replacing the popular speech of the day. The insistence on correctness before everything else which meant conformity to Persian usage of loan-words from that language was a piece of extreme pedantry, which is a sign of the growing subservience of Urdu to Persian.

VII

THE DELHI SCHOOL OF URDU POETRY

PART 2—THE AGE OF SAUDA AND MĪR

STRICTLY speaking there is no evolution in literature. The quality of the literature available at a certain period is determined by the availability of genius in it. The above remark has a particular relevancy in regard to the volume and quality of poetry in the period on which we are now entering. The triumph of poetry in it is not due to the momentum given to it by the scholars whose work in connexion with the popularization of the Urdu language has already been assessed in a previous chapter. All that they could do was to prepare the ground for the poets by creating a climate of mind favourable to the reception of Urdu poetry. For nearly a generation, Urdu poetry made no headway because there was no one competent or enterprising enough to give it a start. The *ibāmīst* may almost be said to have given a wrong direction to it. The importance of Sauda, Mīr, and Mīr Dard lies in the fact that they were the first to establish the prestige of poetry on such a firm ground that there was no fear of a relapse or retrogression. With them we enter on a stage in the development of poetry when it has not only ceased to be experimental, but has so far widened its scope, and risen so high according to the standards of the age, as to challenge comparison with the best Persian poetry in some respects; and in one or two points to have even excelled it. Intimately associated with them in this work was another poet—Jān Jānān Mazhar, the four constituting the Four Pillars of Urdu poetry, according to the older critics.

With Mirza Jān Jānān Mazhar, we are at the parting of the ways: one being the highway that points forward to Sauda, Mīr, and Dard; the other, the narrow path that looks back to the Age of Muhammad Shāh, which is fast falling into obsolescence and disfavour.

The son of Mirza Jān, a courtier of Aurangzeb's, Jān Jānān

Mazhar was born in Kālabāgh on 20th February 1700. After his father's death, which occurred when he was only sixteen, he devoted himself to the study of religion and theology and, leading the life of a dervish, came to enjoy an extraordinary reputation as a mystic and saint. Handsome himself in his youth, he is said to have developed an unusual sensitiveness to beauty, and took a great fancy to one Tābān, a poet and handsome young man of the day. There is a strong tendency today to slur over these amatory episodes in his life; and Āzād gave much offence to Mazhar's admirers by a graphic account of some of them in his *Āb-e-Hayāt*.

Jān Jānān Mazhar came to a tragic end in A.D. 1781, when a Shī'ite zealot, who had been provoked by his unguarded criticism of Muharram, shot at him at midnight. He lingered in great pain for two days, and passed away without disclosing the identity of the assassin.

As a poet, he has been accorded a very high place in *tazkiras*; but this view is supported neither by the quality nor the quantity of his verse. He was, in fact, a Persian poet who wrote very little in Urdu, the greater part of which is not extant. The exaggerated view of his poetry may be ascribed to two convergent reasons. In the first place, he was held in high esteem as a mystic, and the reverence paid to him as a saint probably lent an importance to his poetry which it cannot fully support. In the second place, he was extolled so highly because he was the first, as the *tazkira* writers tell us, to advocate the use of Urdū-e-Mu'alla in poetry and to raise his voice against the artificialities of the *ihām* school. 'He is said to be the first poet who made a departure from the practice of *ihām*, and gave currency to *Urdū-e-Mu'alla* which is now the favourite of all,' writes Qudratullah in *Tabaqāt-us-Shu'arā*.¹ The same view is repeated by Mus-hafī who writes: 'When Mīr and Sauda had not yet come into their own, and it was the age of *ihām*, the first poet who wrote verses in Urdu modelled on Persian was Mazhar. He was the first writer of Urdu in my opinion.'² His reputation is, therefore, primarily historical. He has come in for so much notice because, like Khān-e-Ārzū, he was a pioneer. His pell-mell importations from Persian, the natural excesses of an enthusiast, for which he was arraigned by Sauda, have been referred to already.³

3

Mirza Muhammad Rafī', surnamed Sauda, was the son of a prosperous merchant who had migrated from Kābul to Delhi, and settled

there permanently. The date of Sauda's birth has not been recorded; but it is authoritatively stated that he was born in 1713.⁴ After his father's death, the boy Sauda got into questionable society, ran through his large patrimony, and was reduced to destitution. For some time he dallied with the ancestral calling of soldiering, and then decided to seek the patronage of the aristocracy for which he was specially qualified by his courtly manners and his gift of poetry. He learnt the poetic art successively from Sulaimān ulī Khān Vidād, and from Hātim. The latter was much impressed with his talent, and has made a special mention of him in the list of his pupils appended to his *divān*. Like several other contemporary poets, he came within the orbit of Khān-e-Ārzū's influence, and we have it on good authority that it was on his advice that he decided to go over from Persian to Urdu—a momentous decision which had a far-reaching effect on his poetic career and the development of Urdu poetry.

Sauda made his mark early. His reputation spread apace, and he came to enjoy an extensive and liberal patronage. But he was ill at ease in Delhi. The atmosphere was surcharged with intrigue and disruption, and in 1754 he left Delhi for Farrukhābād. Here he entered the service of Mihrbān Khān, *divān* to Nawab Ahmad Khān Bangash. Some seventeen years after, he left for Faizābād to join the court of Nawab Shujā'ud-Daula. He was received with great honour, and in 1774, on the latter's death, he accompanied Nawab Āsaf-ud-Daula to his new capital, Lucknow. He was a great favourite with the Nawab and, according to Āzād, was granted an annual stipend of Rs 6,000.

His death occurred on 26th June 1780, in Lucknow.

Despite the manifold attractions of Lucknow and Faizābād, and the magnificent patronage he enjoyed there, Sauda keenly yearned for Delhi and its associations. This nostalgic reversion to the place, consecrated and romanticized by his early associations, is a characteristic he shares with Mir and, in fact, with practically all other poets who had sought refuge in Lucknow.

Unlike Mir, Sauda was temperamentally hearty, jovial, sociable, full of exuberant spirits, and intensely avid for life. He had witnessed and experienced, no less than other contemporary poets, the insecurity and instability of the day; but his cheerfulness was never for long eclipsed by them. At the same time, he was hasty and quick to take offence. His religious prejudice (he was a Shī'ite) usually got the better of his sense of propriety, and in such moods he was violent, coarse, and rushed into an orgy of abuse, as anyone who reads his

satires can know for himself. Nor is it possible to agree with Āzād that his outbursts were born of temporary dislike. Sauda was a good hater, and pursued his victims with an ineradicable hatred and malignity. This was especially so where his religious feelings were involved.

Any estimate of the poetry of Sauda that does not take into consideration his historical position in the evolution of Urdu poetry would of necessity be inadequate and misleading. In what follows, I shall consider, first, his share in the growth and development of Urdu poetry, and then assess his absolute merit as a source of aesthetic enjoyment.

With regard to his historical position it is hardly possible to have two opinions. He probably did more than any other single writer of the day towards raising Urdu to the status of a literary language. This he did by accelerating the process set on foot by his predecessors and contemporaries. The taste for *ihām* was still strong, and even a man like Mīr was partial to it. Sauda may be said to have killed it. This was, however, a minor point. Historically, his greatest service was to raise the status of Urdu poetry. Despite the zeal of his predecessors, the attitude towards Urdu in high literary circles was at best one of amused tolerance. Urdu poetry was then just struggling into existence, and some of the earlier poets had only toyed with it in moments of relaxation. Sauda—and he shared the honour with Mīr and Dard—was the first to raise it to the dignity of Persian, so that what had been at best a tiny stream swelled into a river. Sauda's predecessors had been merely *ghazal* writers. It was reserved for him to annex the satire, the *qasīda*, the *masnavī*, the *vāsokht*, and other lesser forms from Persian: and he did so well in some of them, especially in the satire and the *qasīda*, that he is considered by some to have equalled, and by others to have excelled, the greatest masters of those forms in Persian.

The view of literature that has been steadily gaining ground with us since the publication of Hālī's *Muqaddama* is not very favourable to Sauda's poetic achievement. Despite his massiveness, force, and copiousness—merits recognized by all—his attitude towards poetry comes out to be that of a decadent. Sauda was instinctively in sympathy with the literary ideals of the Persian decadents, and his mission as a poet was to import them into Urdu and to popularize them. This

s especially so in his *ghazals*, which indicate a decided bias for the deals of the poets referred to above.

In Urdu poetry, there is no one who offers a greater antithesis to Sauda than Mir. And first with regard to their temperaments. Sauda, as already remarked, is full to overflowing with zest for life. Hence here is very little of the subjective gloom of Mir in him. He is quite conscious of the political decay and disintegration at work in the world about him as Mir, but these glimpses of a world out of joint do not crowd out his natural gaiety and cheerfulness. If he sees the clouds, he sees no less the silver lining. It is contended by Mir's apologists that he is sad and gloomy because his tribulations were exceptional. Sauda was cheerful, they argue, because he never had to endure the troubles Mir experienced. With this theory it is not possible to agree. The fact is that Mir's tribulations have been much exaggerated by himself and his sentimental admirers, who try to seek in vain in the poet's *milieu* what can only be supplied by his temperament. As far as I can see, the difference between their environments, if at all, is one of degree only. Sauda suffered no less than Mir from want and insecurity. He had to change his patrons quite as frequently as the latter. Only he knew how to make friends and keep them. And Mir? He was apt to lose those who befriended him by his supersensitiveness, inordinate vanity, and bluntness which he and his admirers or apologists miscall independence. Sauda is a good example of the triumph of a cheerful mind over a depressing environment. Mir is like a dour planet which carries its atmosphere wherever it goes.

Even more fundamental is another difference between them; and now come back to the decadence that appears to me to be a major element in Sauda's artistic make-up. Mir, as I shall discuss at some length later on, was what we call a realist. In his poetry, and by it I mean the best of it, he is intent on using the material supplied by his feelings, emotions, and experience. Sauda, on the other hand, prefers to dwell in the world of fancy. He has nowhere adumbrated his theory of poetry, but his practice leaves us in no doubt that he did not set much store by the actual. He believed that for the highest purpose of art reality is not enough, or that mere *representation* does not call forth the highest faculties in a poet. Sauda and the Persian poets whom he followed do not cut themselves adrift from reality. No one can do so. What they really do is to invest the data of the senses with an arabesque of fanciful and unreal reasons and explanations. These reasons and explanations startle and surprise the reader

by their ingenuity for some time at least. But they are not lasting wares in poetry. They do not give the pleasure that is born of holding to the real. Sauda, and the like of him, think that the actual is commonplace and much too obvious to be of any worth. Poetry is therefore a feigning, an elaborate make-believe; and a poet is great according as he makes his own fanciful substitutes for the facts and laws of nature and life. It is up to any man, they say, to describe things as they are; it takes a high imagination to indulge in such pretty fancies, or write conceits, as they do. This is one aspect of the mind of Sauda. Another is his passion for the most extravagant type of hyperbole known in Persian as *ghuluv* (assertions which are absolutely impossible). In the examples given below, 1, 2, and 3 are examples of conceits, 4, 5, 6, 7 those of hyperbole, and 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 of combined conceit and hyperbole. In these last, he is exaggerating in a merry mood and the effect is not unpleasing.

ہنوز آئینہ گرد اس غم سے اپنے منہ پہ ملتا ہے
خدا جانے کہ کیا کیا صورتیں اس خاک میں گرٹیاں (1)

1—The mirror is grief-stricken and rubs its face with dust
To think what beautiful forms have sunk into the dusty grave.

ناوک نے تیرے صید نہ چھوڑا زمانے میں
ترپے بہ مرغ قبلہ نما آشیانے میں (2)

2—Thy beauty's dart has not spared even a single prey in the world,
So much so that even the weathercock writhes with pain in its nest.

شبم کرے ہے دامن گل شست و شو ہنوز
بلبل کے خون کا نہ گیا رنگ و بو ہنوز (3)

3—The morning dew is busy washing bloodstains from the skirt of the
rose,
But the marks of the nightingale's blood are still visible on it.

خدا ایام کہ پیش از مدد نامیہ سے
بچہ مرغ چمن تخم سے آتا ہے نکل (4)

4—Mark the miracle of this season that even without the aid of the
power of growth,
The young one of the bird is hatched out of the egg.

(5) ٹوٹے تری نگہ سے اگر دل جباکجا پانی بھی پھر بھی پتیں تو مزا ہو شرابکا

5—If the heart of a bubble were to break on account of your intoxicating glance,
Then even plain water would taste like wine.

(6) جوش روئیدگی خاک سے کچھ دُور نہیں تنخ میں گا وز میں کے ہے جو ٹھوٹے کوئل

6—So fertile has the earth grown that it is no wonder,
If flowers were to burst out of the branch [horn] of the cow supporting the earth.

(7) سامنے بڑکے یہ کیا دخل کہ نکلے آواز گرگ کے پوست کو منڈھوا کے بجائیں دہل

7—If a drum made out of a wolf's skin were beaten in front of a sheep,
It would give forth no sound, for fear of thee.

(8) آنکھ تو کس بشر کی لاگے ہے چوروں کے ڈر سے نقتہ جاگے سے

8—How can anyone close his eyes in sleep these days;
For fear of thieves even mischief keeps awake during the night.

(9) آسماں پر بھی منعدم ہے خواب کھلا رہتا ہے دیدہ متاب

9—Sleep has vanished even from the sky;
The moon keeps its eye wide open.

(10) صبح شبنم ہو گل پہ ہوتی ہے بغیچہ کو غنچہ کے وہ روتی ہے

10—When the dew visits the rose in the morning,
It bewails the loss of the bundle of the bud.

(11) دیکھئے گربستاں کو بھی بخندا ہاتھ میں ہے اٹھوں کے دُور دھنا

11—In sooth, if you cast a glance at the beauties,
You find the thief of the henna on their hands [*durzd-e-binā* means the white spots left on hands and feet after the application of henna].

رتبہ مزدومی کا اس قدر ہے بلند چرخ کے گھر پہ کہکشاں کی کند (12)

12—Burglary has become so universal today

That the Milky Way has cast its noose on the house of the sky.

The evolution of this attitude towards poetry is easy to understand. The themes in Persian poetry were limited, as they are limited in all poetry. Before long they were all exhausted. It remained now for the poets either to repeat what their predecessors had said, or to discover a new field for poetic exercise. Of course, the better type of poets felt that reality was inexhaustible. No doubt, life repeats itself endlessly, yet it is ever new, ever exciting, perennially fresh. Our loves, pains, quarrels, disappointments, fears, aspirations are to the full as exciting today as they were yesterday: and the fact that people felt, suffered, and enjoyed themselves before us, does not take the bloom off our experience, and make it stale and commonplace. Not thus did the decadents argue. They were subconsciously haunted by the fear of repetition. They felt that reality was not enough, or that it had been exhausted, and there was nothing left for them to do but to leave the highway for tortuous and ingenious bypaths. Hence their poetry is a network of conceits, pathetic fallacies, and personifications. These figures of speech have a place in poetry. In moments of great emotional excitement it is natural to ascribe our emotions to things inanimate, or to interpret nature in the light of our own feelings. But then, there is all the difference in the world between these images palpitating with life and the cold and bloodless elaborations we so often get in Sauda.

Another feature he shares with the Persian decadents is their love of virtuosity. By virtuosity I mean mere skill, or attention to the technical or mechanical part of an art. In Urdu poetry virtuosity means the dexterous manipulation of language, e.g. the use of difficult rhymes, or the composition of long *ghazals* and *qasidas*, as a proof of one's skill. This disproportionate attention to mere form is a species of decadence, and has been accounted for and discussed already in an earlier chapter. Sauda's technical skill is remarkable, but it is not merely that. In him, it is impregnated with great vitality. In his best *qasidas*, there is no sign of exhaustion, straining or repetition. His energy seems wellnigh inexhaustible.

5

The *ghazal* was not Sauda's forte. This was the verdict of his contemporaries, and most people today endorse it. What is generally sought for in a *ghazal* is soft and tender sentiments, inspired by self-effacing love and expressed in simple and melodious language. Sauda is, on the whole, deficient in gentle emotions. Is it because he is too hearty, too boisterous, too masculine for the sweet plaintiveness required in the *ghazal*?—as is generally explained. This may be partially true, although I fail to see why a strong and sturdy nature should be a bar to the gentle emotions inspired by love. Sauda's love-poetry is savourless for two convergent reasons. In the first place, it is due to the absence of real amatory experience in his life, and in the second, it is due to his passion for exaggeration and unreality, already discussed. For Sauda simple emotions are not enough. They must be exaggerated to the point of unreality to be fit themes for poetry.

The themes of his *ghazals* are the commonplaces of Persian poetry—amatory experiences conventionally treated, reflections on the vanity and futility of life, and a few mystical ideas, the last almost always conventional.

It appears that nettled by the lukewarm tone of contemporary appreciation, Sauda often strove to rise above himself, as it were, in the *ghazal*. But the result was seldom satisfactory.

But this excess of the merely fanciful in Sauda's *ghazals* should not be taken to mean that he was incapable of deep feeling. He had as deep a sense of the tribulations of his contemporaries in Delhi as Mir, and his utterances in this respect are as poignant as those of the latter. To take one example only, this is Mir's verdict on life as he knew it:

مٹک گورِ غریباں کی کر سیر کہ دُنیا میں اِن نُظلم رسیدوں پر کیا کیا نہ ہوا ہوگا
اس کہنہ خرابی میں آبادی نہ کر منعم اک شہر نہیں یاں جو صحرانہ ہوا ہوگا

Turn a thoughtful eye on the graves of the poor,
What misfortunes are there in the world which it has not been their lot
to suffer!

In this old, decayed world do not lay the foundation of a new habitation,
There is not a city here but was once turned into a wilderness.

And this is Sauda's:

دیکھ لے دُنیا میں مُشتِ خاک سے کیا کیا ہوا
دیکھ سو داگر دُشِ افلاک سے کیا کیا ہوا
بوشِ طُوفانِ دیدہٴ نَمک سے کیا کیا ہوا
دورِ ساغر تھا ابھی یا ہے ابھی سِتمِ پُر آب

What torrents of tears has not the weeping eye shed!

Behold! how grievously this handful of dust has suffered at the hands of fate.

A moment ago, the wine cup went round merrily, and now the eye is overflowing with tears,

Behold, O Sauda! how much man has suffered on account of the revolution of the skies.

In the treatment of love also he is sometimes as moving as Mīr. On the whole, the present generation of critics, in their enthusiasm for Mīr, have failed to do justice to Sauda as a *ghazal* writer, and it is time that this aspect of his poetry were studied with an open mind.

Sauda has introduced into Urdu a special kind of poetry known as *tamsīliya shā'irī*. His model was Sā'ib. As already explained, it is an intellectual type of poetry with a mild infusion of imagination, in which the first hemistich embodies some thought or truth, supported by a simile real or imaginary, in the second. For examples of this type of verse the reader is directed to his famous *qasīdas* in praise of the Prophet and of Mūsa Riza, beginning with

ہوا جب کفر ثابت ہے وہ تمغےِ مسلمانی
نہ ٹوٹی شیخ سے زنا رتبہٴ سلیمانی

and

اگر عدم سے نہ ہو ساتھ فکرِ روزی کا
تو آب و دانہ کو لیکر گھر نہ ہو پیدا

respectively, or the *ghazal* with the following *matla'* (opening verse):

طبیعت سے سرومایہ کی شعر تر نہیں ہوتا
جو آبِ چاہ کا قطرہ ہے وہ گوہر نہیں ہوتا

Sauda is rightly considered to be the greatest name in the Urdu

qasīda. In their flamboyance, majesty, and richness his panegyrics rival the works of the greatest *qasīda* writers in Persian. They have something of the monumental dignity and massiveness of the pre-Mughal Islamic architecture in their rugged strength and power.

Satire shares with the *qasīda* the distinction of being Sauda's *métier*. They are the twin stars on the firmament of his fame. Sauda's satires are both social and personal. In the first he castigates the vices and defects of his age, political, social, and moral; in the second, he gives expression to his personal resentment. To the first category belong *Qasīda-e-Shabr-Īshob* and *Mukhhammas-e-Shabr-Īshob*. Their tone is elegiac rather than satiric. They lack the sprightliness, vivacity, and exaggeration which we associate with him; but for that very reason, they are important social documents. All the evils that came in the wake of political decline in Delhi—want, unemployment, insecurity—are presented here vividly and powerfully. Of a different kind altogether is his *Qasīdu-e-Taṣḥīk-e-Roṣṣū*. It purports to be a merry skit on an impoverished nobleman and his horse; but it is no less full of sidelights on the political decline of the age. The keynote has been clearly struck in the exordium, and what is true of the nobleman in question is true of his decadent brotherhood also. The others are all personal. Sauda figures in them not as the censor of the age; he only gives expression to his personal dislike of the persons involved. There is, however, an increasing tendency today to interpret some of them as if they were social in purpose. For example, it is maintained that his *Masnawī dar Hajv-e-Shedī Fūlād Khān, Kotvāl, Shāh-jahānābād*, is not so much a satire on a definite individual as a picture of the corrupt officials of the day. This appears to me to be an untenable generalization. The fact that there are realistic traits of the corrupt officials of the day in the poem does not prove that it is not a personal satire. Are they not indispensable to make the satire effective? The satirist cannot hit in the air. He must have something positive to show up; and what more natural than professional failings deftly put together! Let us take an instance. Suppose a modern writer were to write a personal satire on a police officer or a schoolmaster. Will he not naturally accuse them of failings peculiar to their class or profession?—make the policeman self-seeking, corrupt, hand-in-glove with thieves: the schoolmaster lazy, ignorant, incompetent? Professional traits needs must come in, if the picture is to be made interesting and convincing. After all, the poet has to arraign the persons he attacks for some failings and vices, and what more effective than the failings traditionally or professionally associated with them!

As regards the satire on Fūlād Khān, the following lines leave us in no doubt that the satire is personal:

کیا ہوا یارو وہ نسق ہیبات	لیمون کے چور کاٹے تھا ہات
شہر میں کیا رہے تھا امنِ اماں	کیسی کرتی تھی خلق خوش گذراں
تھانہ رشوت سے کوتوال کو کام	شہر میں تھا نہ چوٹے کا نام
اب جہاں دیکھو واں جھمکا ہے	چور بے ٹھگ بے اور اچکا ہے

O my friends, where are those days
When the hand of a person stealing a lemon was cut off!

What peace and tranquillity reigned in the city,
And how happily the people lived!

The police officer was above corruption,
And not a single thief was to be found in the city.

But alas! corruption is rampant everywhere now,
And the city is full of thieves, loafers and cut-purses.

Let us therefore accept the very human point of view that Sauda was at loggerheads with some persons for reasons which were personal; and being a satirist he gave expression to his sense of disapproval by satirizing them.

Dr. Chānd in his informative study of Sauda has taken strong exception to his gratuitous attack on Shāh Valīullah Muhaddis Dehlvi, the flower of Muslim theology in India, in his *Qasida dar Hajv-e-Shakhse kib Muta'assib būd*.⁵ The attack is extremely regrettable. But if Sauda had been expostulated with on the point, he would have defended himself by saying that he was attacking a bigot, who had done violence to his religious feelings by treating Mu'āviya as the fifth orthodox caliph in one of his books; and according to his own lights he would be right. That he had done nothing of the sort, as Dr. Chānd contends, does not alter the case. Sauda really thought, when he satirized him, that such indeed had been the case. Personally, I would concede Sauda a full right to express his resentment. But, then, I would judge him as a satirist not by what he satirizes, but how he satirizes. Sauda's satire in question, like several others, is unpardonably vulgar and is for that reason a failure. Satire is not

afraid of those who are in high places or sit enthroned in our hearts. Only it remembers that anger is no excuse for indecency; nor is indecency a sure way to success in a satirical work.

It has been contended by Sauda's apologists that he did not deliver the first blow: but that he retaliated, often with devastating effect. This may be true and, if established, would exonerate Sauda, morally, to some extent. Our business, however, is not to apportion the amount of blame between him and his adversaries; we are studying his method of warfare; and here we must regretfully admit that he did not care what weapons he used.

To put it as briefly as possible, Sauda followed three methods in his satires. His greatest weapon is exaggeration. He magnifies the defects of his victims past all bounds—and things when exaggerated with point and wit become humorous, as in a caricature. In poems of this class the touch with reality is never lost. With Sauda often an insignificant bacillus of truth grows and grows until it acquires portentous dimensions. His attitude here is humorous and playful, and his satire is at its best. When he loses his temper, or is at the mercy of his feelings, especially religious feelings, he becomes abusive. Here he is at his worst. In the third he rushes into the fanciful. He is now very ingenious but not very amusing. These categories are not mutually exclusive. The first and the third moods run into each other generally. The second stands by itself and includes most of his failures.

In *Qasīda-e-Shabr Āshob* and *Mukhammas-e-Shabr Āshob* there is no exaggeration. In the former, laughter is balanced by pathos, as in all true humour, and the reader does not know whether to laugh or cry; in the latter pathos is uppermost, and towards the end we feel nothing but the pity of it.

In the end it remains to point out that Sauda was not a painstaking artist. Satire is more akin to prose than poetry in that it implies judgement, and is, therefore, intellectual. It takes its stand by the ideal in human conduct, measuring thereby our shortcomings and derelictions. Hence the satirist cannot be too careful about his art. He must excel in polish, brilliance, and smoothness to drive his satire home. Sauda often wrote carelessly. He has, at best, a rough strength, gusto, and an infectious humour. But he is not sufficiently selective. The great satirists have been most assiduous with the file. Sauda appears to have written his satires anyhow, and it may be presumed that having dashed them off in the first heat, he did not so much as look at them again.

Mīr (Mohammad Taqī Mīr) has left a full-length account of all but the last thirty years of his life in his *Zikr-e-Mīr*. It does not give the date of his birth, and it is only recently that the discovery of a manuscript of his poems, in the library of the Rāja of Mahmūdābād, has enabled us to establish conclusively that he was born in 1722, in Allahābād, and died at an advanced age in Lucknow, on 20th September 1810.⁶ His father, Mīr ‘Alī Muttaqī, a religious man with a considerable following, died when Mīr was still a boy, and he was brought up by Sayyid Amānullah, one of his father’s intimate friends and disciples. Some three years after his death, Mīr left for Delhi at the age of seventeen or so. Here he was granted a stipend of one rupee per day by Amīr-ul-Umarā Samsām-ud-Daula; but on his death during Nādir Shāh’s invasion (1739), Mīr was forced to go back to Allahābād to his family.

The treatment accorded to him by his relatives greatly disappointed him. ‘Those who had treated him as the collyrium of their eyes’⁷ now cold-shouldered and neglected him, and when he left for Delhi the following year, to stay with his foster-uncle Khān-e-Ārzū, his foster-brother carried his enmity so far as to write to the latter ‘never to countenance a mischief-monger like Mīr’.⁸ In his autobiography, Mīr brings out to the full the pathos of the situation, but is discreetly silent about the cause of this estrangement and hostility. It is believed that what had precipitated his departure from Allahābād and ranged his family against him was a clandestine love-affair with one of his near relatives. Whatever the reason or reasons, Mīr suffered much during this period. Poverty, disappointment in love, indignities, all worked on his hypersensitive mind, and the result was a temporary madness.

Khān-e-Ārzū was far too generous to disown Mīr, but he is said to have bitterly rebuked him, and their relations were far from happy. In *Āb-e-Hayāt*, Āzād ascribes their growing estrangement to their religious views. Ārzū, he says, was a Hanafite, and Mīr a Shiite. But the real cause was probably the family scandal, although the bitterness caused by it may have been accentuated by their religious differences.

In the ‘Introduction’ to *Kulliyāt-e-Mīr*, M. ‘Abdul Bārī Āsī has pointed out the disparity in the account of Khān-e-Ārzū as given by Mīr in his *Nikāt-ush-Shu‘arā* (1751) and *Zikr-e-Mīr*.⁹ In the former he lauds his uncle as a man and scholar, and is proud to call him his teacher. In the latter, written after Ārzū’s death (1756), he rakes up

the old grievances against him and disowning Khān-e-Ārzū as his teacher, speaks of having 'read a few books with some persons in the city'.¹⁰ I agree with Āsī that Mīr's reticence in the earlier volume was dictated by considerations of mere prudence. He had much to fear Khān-e-Ārzū alive, for he could any time justify his severity to him by disclosing the true cause of their estrangement. He had nothing to fear from Khān-e-Ārzū dead. He, therefore, chose to expatiate on his good points and his indebtedness to him in the earlier volume, giving full vent to his grievances in the second.

Like other poets of the day, Mīr's first choice was Persian; but he was persuaded to take up Urdu instead. His rise into prominence was rapid. After his estrangement from his uncle, he experienced a quick change of patrons either on account of the extreme political instability of the day or his own egotism and vanity. His troubles culminated after the sack of Delhi at Nādir Shāh's order. When he returned to Delhi after the defeat of the Marāthas, he was profoundly grieved at the desolation of the city, and has given a poignant expression to it in some of his *ghazals*.

Mīr's life enters on its second phase with his invitation to Lucknow by Āsaf-ud-Daula. He was held in high esteem, and must have been a constant companion of the Nawab, as is supported by his several realistic *masnavīs* on the latter's marriage and his hunting expeditions. These poems prove that Mīr was much more of a court poet than is generally conceded.

But Mīr was never quite happy in Lucknow, despite his complete freedom from financial worries and the high honour in which he was held. The reason was an excessive nostalgia for Delhi, endeared by his early memories. He despised Lucknow—the haven where at long last he had found peace, security, and honour. The real reason for his dissatisfaction lay more in his temperament than in his home yearnings. Mīr was a man who could not be perfectly happy anywhere. Egotistical to a fault, he found it increasingly difficult to get on with his patrons. He imagined insults or slights where none were intended, and was rude and brusque. It must be said to the credit of his patrons that they treated him with uniform courtesy, and put up with his vagaries with good humour and forbearance. But much of this was lost on him. Once, in a fit of sulks, he went so far as to withdraw from the court of Āsaf-ud-Daula; but he was recalled and provided for by his successor.

As a man, Mīr was anti-social and cynical. A confirmed egoist, he was incapable of seeing merit in others, and frequently resorted to a

bluntness which lost him his friends and admirers, and gave a handle to his enemies. His irritability was not due to the fact that his talent had not been duly recognized, or that he had not been properly rewarded. In Delhi and Lucknow, he had actually lived in a blaze of reputation. Financially he was far from secure in Delhi, and was throughout dogged by insecurity on the death or downfall of his patrons. Yet the fact remains that he was, for the most part, well looked after. He was proffered help by the King, which he rejected on account of his vanity. He rated himself so high that all that was done for him in Lucknow seemed to him to be altogether inadequate to his extraordinary merit. Hence his sullen broodings, his pathetic complaints, and his boorish manners.

Mīr's vanity is not a figment of Āzād's fancy, as his admirers generally think: it is an indubitable fact. Let us, for the time being, ignore the anecdotes related about him by Āzād, and confine ourselves to the evidence provided by his works. Of the right to self-praise which Persian and Urdu poets have arrogated to themselves, there are very few who have made a more lavish use than Mīr. This self-complacency is only equalled by his attacks on others. Poet after poet he has pilloried in his *Nikāt-ush-Shu'arā*, and he must be a fortunate man, indeed, who succeeds in getting a good word from him. He is the hanging judge with the black cap on, sentencing his victims to summary execution, and with no possibility of reprieve.¹¹ In a fit of egregious vanity, he compared himself to a dragon in his *Ajgar Nāma*, and the contemporary poets to reptiles and vermin who are scorched to death by the poisonous breath of the dragon. For once, this was more than they could bear. There was a furore when the poem was read out, and a rising poet bearded him with an impromptu composition containing the line:

حیدر کڑا رنے وہ زور مختابہ نثار
ایک دم میں دو کروں اژدر کے گلے پیر کر

O Nisār! Haidar the mighty, has endowed me with such prowess
That I can rend asunder the jaws of a dragon.

Nor was Mīr unconscious of this weakness, for he refers to it himself in his poetry occasionally:

اتنی بھی بد تمیزی ہر لحظہ میر تم کو
الجھاؤ ہے زمیں سے جھگڑا ہے آسمان سے

Fie upon you Mīr! that you should carry your bad manners so far
As to be at loggerheads with the sky and the earth.

حالت تو یہ کہ مجھ کو غموں سے نہیں فراغ دل سوزشِ درونی سے جلتا ہے بھوں چراغ
 سینہ تمام چاک ہے سارا جگر ہے داغ ہے نام مجلسوں میں مرا میرے بے داغ
 از بس کہ کم دماغی نے پایا ہے اشتہار

The fact is that I am not free from worries for a single moment;
 My heart burns with inward sorrow like a lamp.
 My bosom is torn with pain and my heart is seared with grief;
 In public assemblies I am known as Mīr the Ill-tempered—
 Such is the evil reputation I have acquired for my short temper.

The chief quality of Mīr's mind is his realism. Instinctively, he follows the counsel—look into your heart and write. This quality is temperamental and marks him off from his contemporary Sauda, for whom the real is merged into the exaggerated and fanciful. The mirror he holds up to life is not a normal one; it is predisposed to reflect whatever is sad and distressing; but, with this reservation, he is usually a true chronicler of his moods, feelings, and susceptibilities. Of course, he is not free from the false taste of the age, there being much in his *ghazals* that is a concession to the reigning taste. Nevertheless, the best of Mīr is a true picture of the states of his mind.

This meticulous care for the exact representation of his inner life in his *ghazals* has its objective counterpart in his *masnavīs* describing Āsaf-ud-Daula's hunting expeditions, his marriage and in the *masnavī* entitled *Masnavī dar Bayān-e-Mirgh Bāzan*. They are mostly unequal; but they show that Mīr generally writes with his eye on the subject, and despite occasional departures from strict realism, the general impression is one of truthfulness, not of fanciful invention or distortion.

As regards the emotional experiences which form the warp and woof of his poetry, they are pre-eminently and predominantly of a sad, gloomy, depressing and pathetic nature. He is the best representative in Urdu literature of that pessimism, passivity, or wistfulness we associate with the East—an attitude which is considered the fittest theme for lyric poetry by some and voted as morbid by others. Mīr was frail, nervous, resigned, and reacted with extraordinary force to the accidents and vicissitudes of life. For him the course of life and true love never ran smooth, and his love lyrics are an expression of the grief and disappointments and pathetic yearnings incident to it.

The expression of a sad and diffident temperament, his poetry is, as it should be, quiet and subdued. There is nothing loud in it; it seldom rises above an undertone. But it is moving and powerful. His poetry, at its best, comes from the heart and goes to the heart.

A necessary result of this passivity is that there is nothing tragic or heroic in his experiences. There is no other Urdu poet, unless it be Akbar, who has such a deep sense of the futility and frustration of life. Hence, his insistence on contentment and resignation. This gloom is not all personal; it also reflects the time's sad decay. His poetry is, therefore, an unusually sad man's commentary on his own defeated life and the decay and extinction of what was most dear to him in the life and associations of the Imperial City.

The secret of Mir's extreme popularity—he is considered by general consensus as the greatest *ghazal* writer—lies in the pathetic and tearful element in him. For reasons given in an earlier chapter, we are predisposed to love and admire whatever is sad and pathetic. As a people we have little or no aptitude for the affirmation of life in art. It is mostly this national trait that accounts for his great popularity. Personally I do not react so favourably to his poetry. It strikes me as morbid, unhealthy, even pathological. At any rate, it does not appear to me to represent a normal and healthy man's reaction to life.

For the last fifty years or so it has been customary with critics to approach Mir with bated breath and on tiptoe. He gets nothing but praise, pressed down and brimming over. His historical position apart, it is doubtful if Mir as a poetic genius deserves this unctuous flattery, miscalled criticism. There are several methods of estimating that rarest of all qualities—genius. According to one standard, the greatness of a poet can be measured by the lines of supreme beauty in him. This is pre-eminently a sound test, for it is only a really great poet who can give you lines of outstanding beauty. Judged by this standard, Mir does not fare badly. We hear of his seventy-two *lancets*, or poignant lines, selected by his contemporaries. We do not know, today, which they are. But it is possible to select probably a larger number of lines which will be accepted even by fastidious critics to merit distinction.

But these lines of supreme beauty are few and far between in his unusually voluminous works. We expect to meet in great poets not only supreme moments of poetry; we expect them to be fairly frequent also. At any rate, we expect all notable poets to keep a certain level, or at least not to fall as low as the very lowest. An earlier critic had more courage than we have, who said: 'His high is very high,

and his low is very low.' This dictum needs this necessary emendation that he is very rarely at his best.

The style of Mir is simple and bare, even to nakedness. There are some minds that cannot contemplate a thing without trailing a cloud of images. Mir shows little of this imaginative fertility. He is neither allusive, nor subtle, nor close-packed with thought. He has the gift of transparent utterance. Whatever the nature of his thought, he can be expected to be straightforward. This limpidity or clarity of expression, this contemplation of a thing without a host of associative images, is the chief feature of his mind and distinguishes him from a poet like Ghālib. He is remembered today for such lines as the following:

کہا میں نے کتنا ہے گل کا ثبات کلی نے یہ سن کر تبسم کیا

I inquired how long is the life course of a flower;
The bud heard it and broke into a smile.

شام سے کچھ بچھا سا رہتا ہے دل ہوا ہے چسراغِ مفلس کا

It feels cheerless and depressed with the coming of the evening:
My heart is like the dimly-burning lamp of a pauper.

داغِ فراق و حسرت وصل آرزوئے شوق میں ساتھ زیرِ خاک بھی ہنگامہ لے گیا

Pangs of separation, yearnings for union, intense passion—
Behold! what a tumult I took with me into the grave.

یہ تو ہم کا کارخانہ ہے یاں وہی ہے جو اعتبار کیا

The world is full of illusions;
We behold here what we imagine.

دل مجھے اس گلی میں لیجا کر اوڑ بھی خاک میں ملا لایا

By luring me into the street of the beloved,
My heart has made me even more miserable than before.

اگ تھے ابتدائے عشق میں ہم اب نہوئے خاکِ انتہا یہ ہے

In the earlier stages of love I was all afire;
I am now all dust and ashes—such is the end of love.

دلی کے نہ تھے کوچے اوراق مصورتھے جو شکل نظر آئی تصویر نظر آئی

The streets of Delhi are not mere streets, they are like the album of a painter;

Every figure I saw there was a model of perfection.

میرے تغیر حال پر مت جا اتفاقات ہیں زمانہ کے

Do not wonder at the depth of my misery,
Such are the ups and downs of life!

تے فراق میں جیسے خیال مفلس کا گئی ہے فکر پریشاں کہاں کہاں مہربی

Like the vain musings of a pauper, how far and wide have my thoughts
wandered in the loneliness of separation from you!

بوتے گل یا نوائے بلبل تھی عمر افسوس کیا نشتاب گئی

Was it the fragrance of a flower or the song of a nightingale?
How quickly have the days of my life passed!

Mir finds his best medium in the *ghazal*, especially those in shorter metres. Satire is not his forte, although he can be to the full as censorious and vulgar as Sauda. His erotic *masnavis*, commonplace both in form and substance, are failures. Their themes are crudely tragic, and show his penchant for morbid and unhealthy themes, and for homosexuality.

Of a much higher order, and unique in their own way, are *Ghar kā Hāl* and the *Masnavī-e-Narsang Nāma* beginning with—

پاؤ تو فنیق ٹمک تو سر کو دھنو یہ بھی اک سانحہ ہے میسر سُنو

They stand in a class apart in Urdu poetry, and as the taste for what is true, natural, and really pathetic develops, they will come more and more into prominence. They are both autobiographical, the first describing the discomforts of his humble dwelling and the second giving a vivid account of a sojourn in a dismal and bleak country in the company of a nobleman, and reveal a carefully observant mind, intent on facts. Here for once Mir is an amused

spectator of his own mishaps and discomforts. In their blend of laughter and tears and realism, they represent the high-watermark of humour in the classical age of poetry. His *Shahr Āshob*, another realistic poem, sheds much light on the deplorable contemporary scene, and should be studied side by side with Sauda's poems on the same subject.

The last of the famous quartette, *Khvāja* Mīr Dard was born in 1719, in Delhi, and died on the 7th January 1785. Mysticism ran in the family; for he was descended on the father's side from *Khvāja* Bahā-ud-Dīn Naqshbandī, and on the mother's side from Hazrat *Ghaus-e-Ā'zam*. His father *Khvāja* Nāsir 'Andalīb, a poet and the writer of *Nāla-e-'Andalīb* (a voluminous work on mysticism and theology in Persian), had held a high position at court, but had retired from service to devote himself to a life of meditation. Dard studied theology with his father, and learnt the art of poetry from *Khān-e-Ārzū*. For some time he was in the army; but he gave it up to lead a life of retirement and study and, at thirty-nine, on his father's death, succeeded him as the head of the sanctuary.

The *ziyarat* in which he resided was outside the rampart, west of Pahār Ganj, later on known as Baraf *Khāna*. During Nādir Shāh's invasion, he received an invitation from a member of the royal family to move into the city, but he stuck to his place. Later on, he moved into the house specially constructed for his reception in Kūcha Chelan. Dard was well versed in music, and is said to have composed *khayāls*, *thumrīs*, and *dhurpads*. This tradition is supported by the following line in his younger brother, Mīr Asar's *Masnāvī-e-Khvāb-o-Khayāl*:

حضرت درد کے بنائے خیال کیا کہوں کیا کریں ہیں دل کا حال

The beautiful *khayāls* composed by Dard—

How can I tell you how profoundly moving they are!

and the following of his own verses:

بلند و سبت سب ہوا رہیں اپنی نگاہوں میں برابر ساز میں ہوتا ہے جوں سُریر اور ہم کا

The high and low are equal in my eyes,

Just as the high and low notes are equal in a musical instrument.

خلق میں ہیں پر جدا سب خلق سے رہتے ہیں تم تال کی گنتی سے باہر جس طرح رُپاک میں سم

I am of the world, yet live apart from others,
Very much as the *sam* [final beat] in the measure called *Rūpak* is outside
the musical time.

Music being forbidden in Islam, Dard has appended the following
apologia for his weakness:

I do not put music so high as do other mystics, nor do I rate it so low
as the theologians concerned with the externals of Islam. . . . How can I
sanction what is forbidden in our religion, and from which we are re-
quired to abstain by our school? In this respect, I consider myself a sinner.
I am ever thinking of forswearing it . . . and I hope God will give me
strength to overcome this weakness.¹²

Meanwhile he did one thing to salve his conscience: he never sent
for any musician. They came of their own accord, and their per-
formances were optional.

Over and above his poetry, his great service to the cause of Urdu
was the famous *mushā'ara* held in his Bāra-Darī. This was held once
and sometimes twice a month. Here assembled all the poets of
Delhi, including Sauda, Mīr, and Soz. After the *mushā'ara*, these
masters of Urdu held discussions on how to improve the language,
what words and expressions to import into it, and what to avoid as
archaic or vulgar.

Fortunately for us, Dard has left a few scattered dicta about the
art of poetry as conceived by him. He writes in the *Nāla-e-Dard*:

Poetry is not one of those arts which one could follow as a profession
and feel proud of it. It is one of human accomplishments, provided it is
not made a means of begging from door to door; and provided, further,
that it is not used for purposes of satire or of praise to make a living. If
it is so used, it is a species of begging, and a proof of the poet's greed
or ill nature . . .¹³

With regard to his own practice, he writes in '*Ilm-ul-Kitāb*:

My poems are not the result of professionalism or effort. I have never
written poetry without a spontaneous inner urge; never written it by a
deliberate effort or out of an unwilling heart. I have never satirized or
praised anyone. Nor have I ever written by way of compliance with a
request, or in response to a challenge.

'*Isbq-e-majāzī* is not the same thing as carnal passion. This kind of
majāz does not lead to the apprehension of reality. The only right type of

'*ishq-e-majāzī* is the love of one's *pīr* [spiritual guide] which leads one to God.

I have never loved in the ordinary way of the world, but I do possess a true and loving heart. I have had no dealings with beautiful women, but I have enjoyed myself wholeheartedly in the company of my friends.¹⁴

10

Poetry was only an avocation with Dard not a vocation, and his output, despite his long life, is contained within the covers of a slim volume. He is the first and last poet, in Urdu poetry before the Indian Mutiny, to strike an authentic mystic note. The others only amused themselves by versifying mystical thoughts. The vanity and unreality of life and its joys and sorrows, unity of existence, the greatness of man in the hierarchy of life, the mirage of the intellect, praise of intuition, the extinction of self and suspicion of worldly life, pietism, contentment, resignation—these are some of the important topics of his mystical verse. Nearly one-third of his poetry is devoted to these ideas.

The other two-thirds is erotic. There is much in it that is merely conventional. But like Mīr he has the saving grace of sincerity, and is more intent on expressing his feelings than on mere fanciful elaborations. There are some who read a mystical meaning in his amatory verses, but the result is seldom convincing. Dard was not a sour-faced theologian, hostile to earthly love and beauty. The poet and the aesthete in him overcame the theologian, as his love of and proficiency in music shows. His poetry reveals a mind keen-edged and sensuous, delighting in physical beauty for its own sake, and not treating it as a mere stepping-stone to the supersensible. He was a man first and a theologian afterwards, and to refine him away into a spiritual abstraction is to ignore the sensuous side of his mind. I am wondering how his ingenious commentators will fit the following into a scheme of spiritual values:

گل و گلزارِ خوش نہیں آتا باغ بے یارِ خوش نہیں آتا

Flowers and orchards do not interest me;
The garden has no charm for me without the beloved.

سیرِ کر دُنیا کی غافلِ زندگانی پھر کہاں زندگی گر کچھ رہی تو نوجوانی پھر کہاں

Make the best of your time, for life will not come back to you,
If some of your life remains, youth will not come back to you.

نالہ و آہ بجھئے خونِ جگر ہی بیجھئے عہدِ شباب کہتے ہیں موسمِ ناوِ نوش ہے

Go, cry, and sigh and eat out your heart,
It is well said that youth should be given to wine and revelry.

جی کی جی ہی میں رہی بات نہ ہونے پائی حیف ہے اس سے ملاقات نہ ہونے پائی

Alas, all my efforts have come to nothing and my hopes have been
blighted,
What a pity! I never had a chance to meet her.

Dard has his moments as a mystic; but his poetry is never so
charged with emotions or so poignant as when dealing with the
vanity of life and the helplessness and impotence of man. The follow-
ing sums up the general medieval attitude towards life:

جس لئے آئے تھے سو ہم کر چلے	تہمتیں چند اپنے ذمے دھر چلے
ہم تو اس جینے کے ہاتھوں مر چلے	زندگی ہے یا کوئی طوفان ہے
چشمِ تر آئے تھے دامنِ تر چلے	شمع کی مانند ہم اس بزم میں
بارے ہم بھی اپنی باری بھر چلے	جوں شر رہے ہستی بے بودیاں
جب تلک بس چل کے ساغر چلے	ساقیاں لگ رہا ہے چل چلاؤ
کس طرف سے آئے تھے کیدھر چلے	درد کچھ معلوم ہے یہ لوگ سب

What did we do in this world except incur evil opinions!
For this purpose we were sent here and we have fulfilled our destiny.

Is this life or a raging tempest?
We are dying at the hands of this life.

We entered the assembly of this world with tears rolling down our eyes,
like the candle,
We are leaving it with our skirt drenched with sin.

Our unreal life here is brief like that of a spark,
At last we are about to complete our sojourn here.

O cup-bearer! Here is the stir and bustle of departure;
Let us drink and be merry as long as we can.

O Dard, hast thou some idea,
Where all these people came from and whither they are going?

II

Not so well known as Mīr Dard, but a poet of quite as substantial a position, is his younger brother, Mīr Asar, whose *Masnavī-e-Khvāb-o-Khayāl*, published for the first time by *Anjuman-e-Taraqqī-e-Urdū*, holds an important, and in some respects a unique, position in Urdu literature. All that is known of his life is that he was nominated as his successor by Mīr Dard to the *masnad*. No tradition about him has survived; and this is the more surprising as the hagiologist has been busy getting together all sorts of information, real and fantastic, about the family. His father must have died while Asar was yet a child, because, by his own account, he had been brought up and educated by Mīr Dard whom, as his *masnavī* shows, he held in high esteem.

Poetry was an aside with Asar as with Dard, and he appears to have written it in his youth only. His *ghazals* and *masnavīs* betray a youthful mind though not an immature hand. The few *ghazals* in which a mystical note is struck are probably occasional exercises pertaining to a period when he had left behind him the youthful ardour of his earlier verse.

Masnavī-e-Khvāb-o-Khayāl is in some ways one of the most intriguing things in Urdu literature. In one important respect it is altogether different from other *masnavīs* in the language. A *masnavī* generally tells a story and is objective. Asar's *masnavī* is lyrical, subjective, and one of the most revealing documents in Urdu literature. Its psychological importance is as great as its literary interest.

Masnavī-e-Khvāb-o-Khayāl tells no story. It is a long-drawn-out plaint or monologue addressed by the poet to his fickle mistress who has withdrawn her favours from him. As such, the theme of the poem is the same as that of the *ghazal* proper. Here is the poet pouring out his heart to his mistress, living over again in memory their time of intimacy and friendship, deploring his forlorn condition, beseeching a renewal of her favours. Nor is he without moments of cynical disgust, as in the satire on the cunning of women, and the imperturbable mask behind which they hide their true feelings.

There is also an imaginary letter in which his mistress chides him for having ruined her reputation by an indiscreet advertisement of their intimacy. Then there is a conventional *sarāpa*, or a full-length description of his mistress's body, including a frank and detailed description of their physical union. As a piece of pornography it does not fall short of Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Ovid at their most risky.

Naturally a long poem of this kind which has no story to tell, which is all longings, yearnings, appeals, and reminiscences, cannot have much variety, and must get tiring at times. The poet must have been conscious of this. Hence, the inset *ghazals*, some his own, and others by his brother. Yet in spite of their dance and lilt and metrical variety, the poem occasionally drags.

Poetry is the natural garb of Asar's thoughts and he shows all through a mastery of his medium which is remarkable. There is little or no padding: the verse glides naturally and easily, and, as with all genuine poets, the rhyme, instead of side-tracking him, only helps to clinch and crystallize his thoughts. There is no sign of effort, no exaggeration, no straining for effect—all is limpid, natural, and crystal clear.

It now remains to refer briefly to the 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue'. They have a deep autobiographical interest, which, strange to say, has escaped all reviewers and critics. The 'Prologue', as anyone who reads it may find, is an afterthought, and was, like most introductions, composed after the poem had been completed. He is now actually on the defensive, almost apologetic. Having disburdened himself of the perilous stuff which had weighed upon his heart, he is not a little ashamed of the animus with which he developed what he now feels to be a frivolous theme. He is anxious that he should not be identified with the hero, and is at pains to assure the reader that it is a work of imagination. The poem, he tells us, should be thought of as a youthful escapade taken up at the importunity of his friends. The 'Prologue' is actually an *apologia*, in which he arraigns love physical, and dwells on the peace and beauty of spiritual love. But although he waives the poem as an idle exercise, he is none the less conscious of its literary merit; and unworthy though the theme be, as he admits, he is not a little proud of his treatment of it.

The vanity of earthly love has also been strongly emphasized in the 'Epilogue'; and the poet who had staked his all and lost in a reckless throw for the love of a fickle woman, is happy to find consolation and peace in the enduring love of his spiritual guide—Mīr Dard.

This means that he was in the full tide of reaction against earthly love before the poem had been concluded.¹⁵

The more I read this poem, the more convinced I am that, for all its flourishes and declaimers in the 'Prologue', it is an authentic autobiographical document—the story of a spiritual crisis. Asar, as we know, lived and died in the 'odour of sanctity'. Why did this saintly person write this poem? and, further, when did he write it? The first question has already been answered. He wrote it to find relief in expression, to effect catharsis of a painful and disquieting memory. With regard to the second, I take it to be a youthful work embodying an unhappy episode in the writer's own life. The bitterness, disappointment, and frustration resulting from it, developed his interest in religion, and forswearing earthly loves he found peace of mind in his love for his spiritual guide. I need hardly labour the point that the difference between a saint and a sinner is not so great as we are accustomed to think; it is only a question of the re-direction of energy which, impeded or thwarted in one direction, finds a new channel for itself like a river. Some such thing, I am sure, must have happened to Asar also. If this line of reasoning is correct, and there is nothing to question its validity as I see it, the poem is one of the finest instances of what the psychologists call *sublimation*, i.e. the unconscious process by which sexual energy is deflected so as to express itself in a higher channel.

The poem is, therefore, a spiritual watershed or a turning-point in the inner life of the poet. Having composed it, he must have found that he was no longer a thrall to the past; and the once torturing consciousness, its force spent, must have resolved itself into a distant memory.

It only remains to say a word about the title of the poem, which strikes me as rather misleading. It would be palpably wrong to infer that the poem is so called because it dealt with a far-off, unhappy episode which had become a remote memory or dream when the poet sat down to compose it. The poem shows that every detail of it was etched on his memory, and the poignancy which runs through it proves only too conclusively that he was oppressively conscious of it. But once fully articulated, the memory must have gradually detached itself from his mind; and as time passed and he developed new interests, it must have withdrawn itself into the back of his mind and become a part of the dead past.

Mīr Ghulām Hasan (known as Mīr Hasan) born in Delhi in 1727, was the son of Mīr Zāhik, a poetaster satirized by Sauda. He moved with his father to Faizābād, and was attached to the levee of Mirza Navāzish 'Alī Khān, son of Sālār Jang Bahādur. He followed his patron to Lucknow, on the transference of the capital there in 1775, and died in 1786.

The author of half a dozen *masnavīs* of varying length and merit, Mīr Hasan's chief passport to fame is his romance, *Masnavī-e-Sibr-ul-Bayān*, rightly considered by some to be the best metrical romance in Urdu. The story it tells is as old as Indian folklore. The King of Sangaldīp (a place associated by the medieval mind with magic and marvel), who has approached old age without a male issue, is about to retire into private life, when his astrologers bring him the good news that it is not too late for him to beget a son. A son is born and when he is twelve years old, the critical time in his life predicted by the astrologers arrives, and he is spirited away by a fairy who has fallen in love with him. During one of his jaunts on a magic horse—a gift from the adoring fairy—he falls in love with Princess Badr-e-Munīr. Betrayed by a demon, he is thrust into a well in Mount Caucasus from which he is rescued by the good offices of Najm-un-Nisā, the minister's daughter who, having donned the dress of a *jogan*, charms the ear of the king of jinn's son by her music, and through him secures the release of the prince. There is the usual happy ending. The prince and the princess are united in marriage, and Najm-un-Nisā is wedded to Firoz Shāh, the jinnee prince, amidst great rejoicing.

Such are the dry bones of a story told in 4,442 lines. Those who are acquainted with the folklore of the East, especially that of India and Persia, will at once realize that there is hardly anything new about the plot. Invention is not one of Mīr Hasan's strong points. The disappointed king contemplating retirement, the astrologers and their good tidings, the warning of the danger which threatens the prince, the precautions to avert the calamity and their failure—for what is predestined must come to pass—the disappearance of the prince, his incarceration in a well, the wise and resourceful daughter of the vizier—one and all have worn a rut in our folklore. Mīr Hasan's excellence lies solely in his style. He takes up the common-places of the popular romance and weaves them into a living work of art by his treatment. 'What oft was thought but ne'er so well expres't,' was also his ideal, like the English Augustans.

Masnavī-e-Sibr-ul-Bayān is a notable example of the truth that in art novelty and surprise are not lasting wares and seldom survive the first reading. Who reads a detective story with the same engrossing interest a second time? But let a man portray things faithfully and let him add to them the preservative of style, and the chances are that he will not quickly fall into disuse.

In dealing with the supernatural, Mīr Hasan is following the Coleridgean recipe. Discussing the origin of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge explains that his endeavours were directed 'to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith'.

Sibr-ul-Bayān is a good example of this 'willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith'. Mīr Hasan has in this poem *realized* the marvellous. And how has he done this? The answer is, by a strict realism in detail. In the description of the natural background—gardens, flowers, trees, clouds, the earth and sky; the pomp and pageantry of royalty; their costly robes and elaborate toilet; their carefree life of luxurious ease; the description of the attendants, maids, musicians, and astrologers—in all these Mīr Hasan is intent on facts. The poem is a masterpiece of close and loving observation.

Of equal importance with this is the inner realism, the truth to feeling and thought. The king, the minister, the princess, the servants, astrologers, all talk in character, i.e. their words and sentiments are appropriate to the character, mood, or situation of the speaker. Last though not least important, the story is interspersed, very sparingly of course—for would they not otherwise impede the movement of the story?—with moral reflections on life and fate, which arise out of the situation, and reinforce the truth and realism of the narrative. We feel that we are not in a fantastic world, but in the midst of everyday values. The strength of the poem, therefore, lies in its realism, romantic though it be. All art is at bottom realistic. In fact, the greater the improbability, the greater must be the seasoning of realism to make it credible.

As in all romantic stories, characterization is ancillary in the *masnavī* to plot-interest. The author is not intent upon explaining why people do what they do: his art is pictorial, concerned with the surface phenomena of life. Nevertheless, the people in the story are fairly articulated and speak in character. Occasionally, one detects a

false note in the archness, coquetry, and pertness of his aristocratic ladies. This, as I propose to discuss in connexion with Sarshār and Sharar, is the besetting fault of the age. The fact is that the strict seclusion of women obtaining in the past precluded all real knowledge of womankind for men. In their own families, where formality crushed or suppressed self-expression, and where to say or do what one felt was a taboo, especially in the presence of elders, the poets could get no knowledge of womankind. But prostitutes were common. Consequently, in portraying women of a higher order the poets would invariably trick them out in the familiar gestures and accent of the brilliant courtesan. The wish to dazzle and attract is, no doubt, as great in a princess as in a cottage girl, but the following speech by Badr-e-Munīr is obviously in a false key:

بس اب تم ذرا مجھ سے بیٹھو پڑے	مرو تم پیری پر وہ تم پر مرے
یہ شکر ت تو بندی کو بھاتی نہیں	میں اس طرح کا دل لگاتی نہیں
بھلے چنگے دل کو جلاوے کوئی	عبث تم سے کیوں دل لگاؤ کوئی

Go, die for the fairy, and let her die for you,
 And now you had better keep at a distance from me (I'll have none of
 your endearments),
 I don't like to love on these terms,
 I don't like this partnership in love.
 It is no use loving you
 And putting my heart on the rack for nothing.

On the whole, Mīr Hasan's style deserves the praise he claims for it at the conclusion of the poem. There are occasional concessions to the taste of the age in the form of word-play and conceits: but they are exceptions rather than the rule and emphasize his sound judgment and his desire to rise above the popular taste. The treatment of a long poem is seldom equal. But Mīr Hasan has kept his level; and in its higher moments the poem attains a degree of smoothness, forthright directness, and brilliance equalled but not surpassed by anyone in Urdu.

But it is not only by its style that a poem lives. There was never a great poet but was first a lover of life. The law of literature is simple but inexorable: you must live before you can create. *Masnavī-e-Sibr-ul-Bayān* is a clear index to the author's intimate knowledge of nature and humanity, especially in their externals. Take away these

tapestried effects, take away his nature-pictures, the large canvases painting the pageantry of the Middle Ages, take away his insight into human motives, and what is left behind? The story as story is nothing but the quintessence of the commonplace. But in its setting, human and natural, as devised by Mīr Hasan; in its style, at once direct and imaginative; and above all, in the human note struck again and again, bizarre though the story be, it has acquired the charm of a symphony in which many dissimilar elements are blended harmoniously.

13

Nazīr (Valī Muhammad Nazīr) was cold-shouldered by the earlier critics as an eccentric who did not fit into the scheme of traditional poetry. He was an outsider, and suffered the fate of one who did not subscribe to the ruling taste. With the enfranchisement of poetry from the old conventions, his merit has been recognized. In fact, as is natural in such cases, the critical pendulum has swung so much in the direction of praise that we are likely to over-estimate his merit.

Nazīr belonged to the generation that succeeded Mīr and Sauda, and was born in Delhi in 1740. About 1749, driven by the chronic disorders in Delhi, the family migrated to Āgra, where he made a living by schoolmastering. His education, it is said, had been regular and methodical, but he never allowed his scholarship to get the better of him; and though a teacher by profession, he never sank into pedantry. Nazīr was happy-go-lucky and carefree. A bohemian by temperament, he did not take kindly to the tedious etiquette and formalism of courts, and declined to attach himself to the rulers of the day. He died at Āgra on 16th August 1830.

Nazīr is an inspired vagabond and belongs to the same class of poets as Burns and Villon. He is essentially a poet of low life. 'Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh', and it is out of a full and intense life that poetry like Nazīr's springs. Nazīr, it appears, had been an incorrigible bohemian and wanderer, at home in low company, and with a most tenacious memory of the scenes and sights of his early life. The sort of poetry that he has left us cannot be written in a closet; it grows out of the data supplied by a loving and minute observation, by one's pursuits and pastimes, and the company one keeps. Nazīr had no eye for some aspects of the life of his day, but he was as fully observant of others which chimed with his sensuous temperament. All that was rich and gay and intoxicating

in the life of Āgra for a man about town—its sensuousness, its glamour, its romance no less than its fun, frivolity, and vulgarity—are mirrored faithfully in his poetry. Nazīr does not write with his tongue in his cheek; there are no sniggering indecencies here; his is the unabashed vulgarity of one who had led a man's full life and makes no secret of his preferences.

Nazīr is keenly alive to sensuous impressions. His poetry is a picture gallery of the sights and scenes, fairs and festivals, pastimes and amusements of his day; and an intense delight in them gives a lyric intensity to his descriptions. He is perfectly at home in crowds, and loves movement, colour, and sound. His poems on *Holā*, *Dīvālī*, *Ghannaya jī kī Rās*, *Baldev kā Mela*, *Shab-e-Brāt*, 'Id *gab-e-Akbarābād* are soaked and shot through with local colour. Whatever their theme, his poems have a family resemblance. There is one important thread running through them all—the sensuous thread, unmingled with any other strand, intellectual or moral. This, while it imparts a great deal of gusto to his lyrics, makes them, at the same time, thin. His range is limited and he repeats himself excessively.

Nazīr is no less alive to natural effects. Rain, clouds, rivers, gardens, the starry night, all fill him with joy. Born of a first-hand knowledge, his description is accurate. But nature for him is not always the primary thing; it is rather an intensifying medium for the human drama in which he is primarily interested. Very often, it is interpenetrated with humanity, as in the following lines:

دستاریں سُرخ سہیں کیا خوب کھل رہی ہیں	کالی گھٹائیں آکر ہو مست تل رہی ہیں
شبنم کی بوندیں جیسے ہر گل پہ تل رہی ہیں	رُخساروں پر بہاریں ہر اک کے دھل رہی ہیں
جنگلوں چکتے پھرتے جوں آسماں پہ تارے	ساون کی کالی راتیں اور برق کے اشارے
گرتی ہے چھت کسی کی کوئی کھڑا پکارے	پٹے گلے سے سوتے معشوق ماہ پارے

Drunk with joy,
The dark, dense clouds
Are hanging over the horizon.
The faces of the people are gleaming with joy.
Beautiful, indeed, are their red turbans;
And as the rain drops trickle down their faces,
They look like dewdrops on flowers.

The dark nights of the month of Sāvan,
Lit with lightning flashes,
The glow-worms gleaming like stars in the sky,
Beautiful damsels locked in the embraces of their lovers,
A roof falling here,
And someone shouting for help—

The following shows his joy in nature for its own sake:

پہروں کا رنگ چھٹ کر حُسن دکھا رہے	ہر کہیں مزے کی ننھی چھوہا رہے
پھابوں اُمنڈ کے پانی موسل کی دھا رہے ...	ف اولتی کی باہم قطار رہے
بر سے ہے مینہ جھڑا جھڑا پانی بہا ہے جاتا	ہر کوہ کی کمر تک سبزہ ہے لہلہاتا
غونا کریں ہیں مینڈک جھینگر ہے غل مچاتا ...	وحش و طیور ہر اک مل مل کے ہے نہاتا
اور جس میں اڑ رہی ہیں بگلوں کی سو قطاریں	کالی گھٹا سے ہر دم بر سے ہیں مینہ کی دھاریں
اور مور مست ہو کر سوں کو کلا چنگاریں	کوئل پیسے کو کہیں - اور گوک کر پکاریں

Sometimes the rain falls dreamily in the form of a drizzle:

How clear and bright look the faces washed by it!

There is an unbroken fall of eavesdrops from the thatched roof of a cottage,

Right up to the middle of the mountain the verdure is bending and waving.

Steadily the rain falls and runs in small streams;

Birds and animals are all bathing together.

The frogs croak, the cricket sings,

The cranes in thousands line the sky

The koel and the sparrow-hawk break into shrill cries,

And the intoxicated peacock screams with joy.

It is primarily a townsman's poetry of nature: with the wild and remote aspects of nature he has no sympathy.

So far about his youthful poetry, the only poetry of his that matters. When the passion's trance was over, and he was no longer young, he found a quiet anchorage in mysticism, resignation, contentment, vanity of life and renunciation. Though sincere, these

poems lack the intensity of his earlier poetry, dedicated to the senses. But despite this changed outlook, he firmly held till the end that life was worth living, and beauty worth having; that youth was the best part of life, and old age but a shadow of it.

Nazir's quick observation and retentive memory were often a snare, and are responsible for his failures. When he describes a rainy day, he must describe the life of all sorts and conditions of men in separate stanzas. In his *Mufisi k̄ Falsafa*, he describes the peculiar lot of all the poor classes of the day. In *Kabūtar Bāzī*, there is a spate of technical terms which would puzzle even the best pigeon-fancier today. All such poems are failures.

Nazir's assets on the technical side are the most considerable. In the variety of stanzaic structure, he excels all his predecessors and contemporaries, and is well abreast of Anis in the use of the *musaddas*. He excels equally in the use of Urdu and Braj Bhāsha, having written a large number of poems in the latter for the delectation of Hindus. His use of language is bold and original, and he moulds it to his own requirements with freedom.

Nazir has an unusual penchant for the onomatopocia. The same desire to make the language echo his thought and feeling is seen in his use of dancing rhythms and bursting gutturals and plosives. The following personification is aptly symbolical in its sound and imagery of the reckless gaiety of *Holi*:

جب آئی ہو لی رنگ بھری سونا زودا سے مٹک مٹک
 اور گھونگٹ کے پٹ کھول دئے وہ روپ کھایا چمک چمک
 کچھ مکھڑا کرتا دمک دمک کچھ ابرن کرتا جھلک جھلک
 جب پاؤں رکھنا خوش وقتی سے تب پائل باجی جھنک جھنک
 کچھ پھلیں سینیں ناز بھری کچھ کو دیں آہیں تھرک تھرک
 یہ روپ دکھا کر ہو لی کے جب نین رسیدے مک مٹکے
 منگوائے تھال گلا لوں کے بھر ڈالے رنگوں سے مٹکے
 پھر سانگ بہت تیار ہوئے اور ٹھاٹھ خوشی کے جھرمٹ کے

غل شور ہوئے نوشمالی کے اور ناپسنے گانے کے کھٹکے
 مردنگیں باجیں تال بجے کچھ کھنک کھنک کچھ دھنک دھنک

When the colourful *Holi*
 Came sailing with a sweet,
 Rapturous motion; when it threw
 Away the veil from its face,
 And put forth before the eye
 The splendour of her face,
 All shimmering with bright ornaments;
 Then merrily
 She put forth her foot,
 And the anklets showered a spray
 Of sweet and charming music;
 From her eyes flashed
 A succession of coquettish winks
 And some passionate sighs
 Vibrated in her breast.

After this charming display,
 When the sweet eyes of *Holi*
 Danced with joy,
 Big trays full of red powder
 Were sent for,
 And huge earthen casks
 Were filled with coloured water.
 Then were formed masquerading parties,
 And groups of merry-makers tripped
 And danced and shouted in glee.
 There was a general rejoicing,
 And from all around
 Came the sound of dancing steps,
 With drums and tambourines
 And cymbals playing—
 Some in a loud resounding sound,
 And some with a clear clink and jingle.

And yet these pleasing effects lose not a little of their freshness by excessive repetition. Nazir moves in a limited sphere of emotion and experience, despite the variety of his subjects. He has no overtones and suggestion. There is nothing above or beyond or below what he says. Moreover, it appears that he took his calling lightly.

Versification came naturally to him, and he just wrote on. Hence his inequality. Except for a few short pieces, he has not been able to maintain his level; and the reader who is struck with the charm and freshness of one line is disappointed by the flatness of the next. It appears he never blotted a line; and it is a pity he did not.

Nazīr is the most unaccountable figure in the poetry of his age. The most striking feature of his poetry is its detachment from the literary ideals of the day. It is born of the impact of life and has an accent of its own, being the expression of a temperament at once buoyant, cheerful, and unconventional.

As I have said above, his poetry is all on the surface; he has plumbed no depths, scaled no heights, but it is intense all the same. His reactions to life are those of an ordinary man, sensitive to his surroundings, but unencumbered with a literary tradition. His poetry is the sublimation of the genius of the ordinary man. If the man in the street were to become poetically vocal by some mysterious transformation, he would write like Nazīr.

VIII

THE LUCKNOW SCHOOL OF URDU POETRY

THE empty mantle of Delhi fell on the shoulders of Lucknow. The arts which had begun to languish in the former for want of adequate patronage found a new lease of life under the magnificent patronage of the Nawabs of Oudh.

Lucknow first emerged into political importance with the appointment of Nawab Burhān-ul-Mulk Sa'ādat Khān as the Subedār of Oudh, by the Imperial Court, in 1732. The real importance of Lucknow, however, began with his grandson, Shujā'-ud-Daula (1753-75), who figured so conspicuously in the tangled history of the period. A warlike ruler, he maintained to the full the military traditions of his ancestors. A reference has already been made to his active participation in the third battle of Pānīpat. Three years later, he joined hands with Mīr Qāsim of Bengal and the Emperor against the English. The defeat of the allies at the battle of Baxar (1764) put an end to his ambitious plans, and he was compelled to enter into a treaty by which he agreed to maintain a British Resident in Oudh, and to defray the expenses of British cantonments in Cawnpore and Farrukhābād. His successor, Āsaf-ud-Daula (1775-97), was a gay young man, given to dissipation and pleasure. After the treaty of 1765, the British had kept a vigilant eye on the military activities in Oudh, but Shujā'-ud-Daula had, nevertheless, maintained his military prestige. Āsaf-ud-Daula had not inherited his father's martial character. He reduced and neglected the army, and plunged into a career of debauchery and pleasure. His ambition was to surpass Sultān Tīpū and the Nizām in splendour, and the immense wealth inherited from his father was laid out in beautifying Lucknow and the construction of buildings. In his reign Shī'ism became the state religion, and the office of the *mujtabid-ul-'Asr* was founded. He sent a sum of seventy-five lacs of rupees to Baghdād for the construction of a canal from the Euphrates to Najf-e-ashraf, and at the cost of twenty lacs built an Imām-Bāra in Lucknow. The latter has none of the massiveness of Mughal buildings, and its delicate beauty is symptomatic of the effeminate taste of the age. However, his

generosity which had passed into a byword covered a multitude of sins. Never had Lucknow been so prosperous outwardly, and yet in spite of all its gaiety, splendour, and beauty, corruption was eating like a canker into the heart of the kingdom.

His successor, Nawab Sa'adat 'Alī Khān (1798-1814), had to part with half his kingdom to the British as the price for his succession. A perfect foil in character to his predecessor, he showed unusual ability in organization and administration. By his frugality and economy he tried to reorganize the finances, but all this made him unpopular with the people who considered him a miser. He did not neglect the arts, however, and was generous in recognizing and rewarding merit.

His successor, Ghāzī-ud-Dīn Haidar (1814-27), was a wastrel and voluptuary, and spent huge sums on animal fights. With a view to humiliating the Emperor, the British gave him the title of King for which he liberally rewarded them. Henceforth the rulers of Oudh were mere puppets in the hands of the British Resident.

The King and the Queen had an absorbing interest in the Shī'ah religion, and were prolific in vulgar and degrading innovations. One of these was the ceremony of *Imām Sāhib-ul-'Asr's Chhatī*, modelled on the Janam Ashtamī of the Hindus. Beautiful girls from Sayyid families, designated *achhūtīan*, were selected to play the part of the wives of the Twelve Imāms; and they went through the form of childbirth with much realistic detail. One of his pious acts was the construction of a replica of Najf-e-Ashraf, or the mausoleum of 'Alī, in Lucknow.

The religious ceremonies initiated by him were further elaborated by his successor, Nasir-ud-Dīn Haidar (1827-37), who, like his predecessor, combined an inordinate love of pleasure with religious enthusiasm. Effeminate by nature, he spent his time in the company of women, and talked and dressed like them. His religious zeal and effeminacy showed themselves in his playing the role of an *achhūtī*, during which he went through all the antecedents and sequels to childbirth, down to the production of a baby.

Muhammad 'Alī Shāh (1837-42), son of Nawab Sa'adat 'Alī Khān, was an old man of sixty-three when he ascended the throne. He was too old to arrest the decline of the kingdom and had to enter into a new treaty with the British, which increased the British army stationed at the capital, and vested them with power to interfere in the internal administration of the country. A devoutly religious man, he built a new Imām-Bāra.

His son, Amjad 'Alī Shāh (1842-47), brought up in an austere fashion by scholars and theologians, inaugurated a reign of saints, and spent money lavishly on theologians, Sayyids, and on acts of charity.

His son and successor, Vājid 'Alī Shāh (1847-56), revived to the full the gay traditions which had suffered a temporary eclipse during his father's reign. Fond of the fine arts and music, he spent his time in the company of courtesans and musicians, and awarded offices to upstarts and musicians. His life was an orgy of sensuality, in which low and vulgar women, prostitutes, maid-servants, and palanquin-bearers figured conspicuously; and his poetry is a frank account of his sexual excesses and vulgar intrigues. In an annual fair held in Qaisar Bāgh, he would play the role of Krishna, his numerous wives acting as *gopīs*, with music, dance, and revelry. Sometimes, again, dressed in saffron robes, he would enact the part of a *īogī*, attended by old rakes who gambolled and frisked like youngsters.

All this riot and madness suddenly came to an end when Lord Wellesley, the Governor General, decided to annex Oudh to British India in 1856.

The exodus of poets, scholars, and artists from Delhi had begun after the sack of that city (1756) in the reign of 'Ālamgīr II. The country was given over to bloodshed, rapine, and intrigue, and the poets having lost all patronage were reduced to extreme poverty. The only course open to them was to migrate to Muslim states, i.e. Murshidābād, Mysore, Haidarābād, Arcot, Rohilkhand, and Oudh. Of these, all except the last two were remote from Delhi. Rohilkhand, still virile, maintained a strict military and religious discipline. What drew the poets to Lucknow was not only its proximity to Delhi but the unexampled generosity of Āsaf-ud-Daula. It acted as a magnet which few could resist, and before long Delhi was denuded of its artists, poets, and scholars.

The migration to Lucknow from Delhi had begun in the reign of Shujā'-ud-Daula. Of the early emigrants, the most notable were Khān-e-Ārzū, Zāhik, and Sauda. Of these, Khān-e-Ārzū had been invited by Shujā'-ud-Daula's uncle, Nawab Sālār Jang, and living in great honour had died three years after the accession of Shujā'-ud-Daula, in 1756. Zāhik, with his son Mīr Hasan, came to Faizābād in the reign of Shujā'-ud-Daula, his son belonging to the entourage

of Sālār Jang's son, Navāzish 'Alī Khān. Sauda came to Lucknow, when Shujā'-ud-Daula's reign was nearing its end, in 1773, and really belongs to the time of Āsaf-ud-Daula.

It was in the time of Shujā'-ud-Daula's successors that Lucknow, then at the meridian of its glory, drew the greatest number of poets from Delhi. Āsaf-ud-Daula combined generosity and love of pleasure with a taste for poetry. Among the most outstanding poets who came in his reign were Mīr, Soz, and Mus-hafī. Of these Mīr came in 1783, and Mus-hafī in 1790. Soz who had originally left Delhi for Murshidābād was installed as the Nawab's teacher, but died a year after his arrival, in 1798. Insha came to Lucknow in the reign of Sa'ādāt 'Alī Khān and was connected with his court. Jur'at left Delhi in his childhood and was brought up in Lucknow.

It is well to remember that not only poets, but some of the princes from Delhi also found asylum in Lucknow. Of these Mirza Javān Bakht, son of Shāh 'Ālam II, came to Lucknow in 1784, and was the boon companion of Nawab Āsaf-ud-Daula till his rupture with the latter, and consequent departure from Lucknow, over a court beauty. His younger brother, Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh, arrived in Lucknow in 1788, and lived there for a long time, leaving it in the reign of Nasīr-ud-Dīn for a similar reason. He was a great patron of poetry and Insha, Mus-hafī, Rangīn, and Jur'at all subsisted on his bounty.

Still another prince who was attracted to Lucknow was Sulaimān Shakoh's younger brother, Sikandar Shakoh Mirza.

3

Two things are writ large on the history of Lucknow—religion and gaiety—and they have left their mark on the literature of the period. The overwhelming interest in the Shī'ite religion which characterized practically the whole period resulted in the development of the genre known as *marsiya*. It rose with the kings of Oudh and disappeared with the fall of the dynasty.

Much has been written about the gaiety and licentiousness of Lucknow during the period under review, but the factors which plunged a very large part of the population into dissipation and pleasure have not received adequate attention. Some have ascribed it to the profusion of courtesans. On this point Sharar writes:

There was such an abundance of courtesans and dancing-girls that no street was free from them. On account of the ruler's generosity, courtesans

sans rolled in wealth and lived in sumptuous *shāmiānas*, guarded by royal soldiery whenever the Nawab went out touring. The nobles imitated the ruler, and wherever they went they were accompanied by dancing-girls.¹

The extraordinary popularity of courtesans in Lucknow at this time is an admitted fact. It was the golden age of the courtesan. But it is obviously begging the question to ascribe the dissipation, luxury, and sensuality of the period to the profusion of courtesans. As a matter of fact, the increase in the number and importance of courtesans is in reality a symptom and not the cause of the change we are trying to account for. I believe that the elegiac tone of the Delhi School of poetry, as well as the pronounced epicurianism which came to dominate life and literature in Lucknow, are the direct and necessary outcome of the peculiar political conditions which followed the decline in power of both. When the Mughal power declined in Delhi, there was no one strong enough to protect the country from internal misrule and foreign aggression. I have already discussed how these left an indelible mark on the literature of the period. From this inevitable fate of political decline, Lucknow was luckily delivered by the British who had by that time emerged as the suzerain power in northern India. After a little restiveness, Lucknow accepted the role of a dependency; and not only its foreign policy but, in a large measure, the internal administration also passed into the hands of the British. Relieved from the duties and responsibilities of government, immune from foreign aggression, and with almost inexhaustible wealth, the ruling classes gave themselves up to pleasure and debauchery.² The infection spread from the nobles to the common people, so that Lucknow became the gayest city in India. In its want of depth, its absence of sentiment, its superficial polish and glitter, its wit, brilliance, persiflage, effeminacy, and dalliance with courtesans, the poetry of Lucknow presents a faithful reflection of the life of the period.

Except for arresting the taste for homosexuality, the effect of the popularity of prostitutes on the morals of the people was deleterious. Broadly speaking, the difference between the poetry of Lucknow and Delhi is this. The former is the plaint of the disappointed lover, steadfast, humble, resigned; the latter, flippant, frivolous and full of banter, or an account of the poet's dare-devilries. It would be manifestly wrong to say that the poetry of Delhi deals with spiritual love. It is an absurd term invented by those who are afraid of the flesh. Love is of the earth earthy. The Delhi poet is not intent on a marriage of souls; he looks forward to a physical union with the

beloved no less than the Lucknow poet. As for the frankly sensual verses for which Lucknow is censured, they are by no means a monopoly of Lucknow. Who among Lucknow poets could beat *Masnavī-e-Khvāb-o-Khayāl* in its frank sensuality? Of course, what is probably an exception with Asar is a rule with several Lucknow poets. Sensuality, as such, is not what distinguishes one school from the other. It is more or less a common feature. The real difference, as far as I can see, is this: the poetry of the one is pathetic because it is born of disappointment; that of the other, witty, sarcastic, light, because the poet is too sophisticated and cultured to believe in feelings. Love in Lucknow has come to be considered as a pastime, or one of the accomplishments of the courtier.

The profusion of prostitutes and the active part they played in the daily life of the city, showed itself in another way also. It became fashionable to describe the physical charm, dress, and ornaments of women. The poet has entered my lady's boudoir, and describes what he sees there. The Delhi poet chiefly gives expression to the emotions aroused by the personal appearance of the beloved; the latter, for the most part leaves out emotions. Hence much of Lucknow poetry lacks the lyric fire born of the effect of beauty on the percipient soul. Here, again, it should be noted that the difference between the two schools is one of degree only.

The increased knowledge of women, especially of the lower order, made possible by the abundance of prostitutes, led to the invention of a new type of poetry by Rangīn, call *rekhtī*. So far Urdu poetry, if we ignore homosexual love, had dealt with the way of a man with a maid. *Rekhtī* is an unconscious return to the Hindī tradition, in that in it a woman is made to relate to a confidante her own side of the story. The segregation of the sexes in force in Muslim circles in India, has considerably differentiated the spoken language of women from that of men. The former is more euphemistic, much less literary, and therefore more racy and sparkling than the speech of men. *Rekhtī* has therefore a flavour of its own. It tickled the palate of the dandies and roués, and in its choicest morsels was treated as a species of literary aphrodisiac.

A characteristic feature of Lucknow is the cultivation of delicacy and refinement at the expense of strength—another sign of a period of excessive sophistication and exhaustion. The music loses its manly strength, and the *dhurpad* and *khayāl* retreat before the rising popularity of the plaintive *thumrī*. Its architecture lacks the massiveness and austerity of the older buildings, and is, at best, pretty. The

heavy dress of the Mughals in use in Delhi is replaced by a dress light, spruce, and smart. This love of refinement is also noticeable in the cultivation of the language. The Lucknow poet is intent on polishing it to the last degree of refinement. He is interested in language for its own sake, and wishes that it should reflect the finished taste and urbanity of its sophisticated inhabitants. This is good as far as it goes. Whatever else Lucknow poetry may lack, its language has point, finish, and smoothness. It is seldom unmusical, heavy, or sprawling. Much of the poetry of Sauda, Mīr, and Dard is rough-hewn. The Lucknow poet is never remiss in the use of language. His poetry moves trippingly on the tongue, and one reads it with relish. It is only on second thoughts that one realizes that it is void of deep emotions and is merely pretty.

Lucknow is not content with being just the continuator of the traditions of Delhi in life and civilization. It wishes to evolve a civilization of its own. All this can be inferred from the remarks made above with regard to music, architecture, and dress. In language also there is a conscious desire to mould a new idiom, and to mark it off from that of Delhi. It has become the arbiter of taste in most things, then why not in language also? Hence the process of the purification of language that had begun in Delhi receives a new impetus in Lucknow. Language is subjected to a searching examination, and all that sounds uncouth, unmusical, and quaint is sedulously weeded out. The rules of grammar are formulated and the learned element in the language is increased.

Last though not least, Lucknow poets are more intent on mere virtuosity or skill in the use of the Urdu language than the poets of Delhi. Their favourite is Sauda, not Mīr. This is seen in their fondness for word-play and wit, in the composition of long *ghazals*, or a large number of *ghazals* either with the same *qāfiya* and *radif*, or with the same *radif*. They are also excessively fond of using difficult *radifs* and *qāfiyas* to show off their technical skill. In some of their *ghazals* as much as half the hemistich constitutes the *radif*. In still others, the poet would use such words for *qāfiya* as do not readily lend themselves to association with one another. Lucknow poetry is full of such difficult feats. For that very reason it is deficient in emotion. So intent is the poet on subjugating language that he either does not think of emotions or cannot think of them. We feel that poetry is increasingly becoming more of an artifice than an art.

Shaikh Ghulām Hamadānī Mus-hafī (1750-1824) belonged originally to Amroha and was educated in Delhi. Later on he migrated to Lucknow, where he was admitted to the patronage of Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh.

Mir remained uninfluenced by the new fashions of poetry in vogue in Lucknow. He had already made his mark. Mus-hafī who enjoyed no such advantage was forced into competition with the younger poets and had to cultivate the popular style of the day. He is, therefore, a mixture of the old and the new—an upholder both by temperament and early training of the staid traditions of Delhi, trying to adapt himself to the smart set with whom he was thrown into competition. That is why his poetry recalls many patterns. He has the sobriety of the poets of Delhi, but there is also in him a distinct cavalier note—the flippancy and swagger peculiar to Jur'at and Insha. When he tries to surmount technical difficulties by using stiff *radifs* and *qāfiyas*, he is evidently taking a leaf out of the book of Insha who had made a speciality of this kind of verse.

His chief failing according to Āzād is his extraordinary fluency. He is of the opinion that, driven by poverty, Mus-hafī sold his *ghazals* to the smart set who wished to cut a figure in literary circles. This meant a steady outpour, and, therefore, in the poems he wrote for himself, he failed to be abreast of his reputation.

Mus-hafī fell on evil days when Insha—that literary gladiator with the fire of battle in his eyes—stormed the fashionable world and drove the elderly poet out of the pittance he was given as Sulaimān Shakoh's preceptor. The expostulatory poem in which he bemoans the reduction of his salary shows how cruel had been the blow, and how deeply he had felt it. Bad enough as this was, it was followed by something worse. The impish genius of Insha made the old poet wince, and the result was an open rupture leading to the most regrettable feud on record in Urdu literature. The fortunes of the war need not hold us. There was a blizzard of lampoons and satires, leading once or twice to actual horseplay and violence, the authorities egging on the belligerents, and siding with the younger and more favoured rival. Insha not only bespattered Mus-hafī with mud; he actually succeeded in poisoning the mind of Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh against him. Mus-hafī's plaint and the *qasida* he wrote to placate his patron, throw a flood of light on the miseries of literary patronage. Here we see the wrong side of the shield. The gaudy and

flaunting world to which our vagrant fancy so often flies from the drabness of the present was, despite its colour and brilliance, but a mournful world.

Every poet worth his salt brings to his writings a personality that distinguishes him from others. In Mus-hafī this personal note is largely missing. He wrote sometimes in the style of Mīr and Asar, sometimes in that of Sauda, with whom he had distinct temperamental affinities, and sometimes he cultivated the dare-devilries of Jur'at and Insha. He did not possess the dash and swagger of the last two, but he came very near copying their accent. By temperament he belonged to the Sauda tradition.

Mus-hafī failed to make his mark because he did not follow the bent of his own mind. Like a plant transplanted from its native soil into an arid place, he could not take root in Lucknow. As a poet he has Mīr's poise and balance without his emotional intensity. His poetry, the best of it, is not without emotion, but it is not strong enough to give it a tone of its own. What he felt or thought, or what life meant to him, weighed far less with him than the idiomatic use of language. He has been praised for the purity of his idiom by several critics, but I wonder if this alone can entitle him to a place among the masters.

Mus-hafī was far from happy in Lucknow. The literary ideals of the day did not go with his temperament. The want of recognition and the humiliations he suffered weighed heavily on his mind, and constitute a really pathetic element in his verse.

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Mus-hafī's pupil and rival, Insha Allāh Khān Insha, was born in Murshidābād between 1756 and 1758. His father, Mīr Māsha Allāh Khān, was a courier of Nawab Sirāj-ud-Daula. When sixteen, Insha left Murshidābād for Lucknow, where for some time he was connected with the court of Shujā'-ud-Daula. On the latter's death he came to Delhi, where he was received kindly by Shāh'Ālam. But the lure of Lucknow proved too strong for his soaring mind, and he followed in the wake of the earlier generation of poets. He was well received by Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh, and through his friendly offices was established in the court of Sa'ādat 'Alī Khān. Here he lived in sumptuous ease and on very intimate terms with the Nawab, till he incurred his displeasure by an indiscreet remark about his parentage. He had now to taste the Nawab's severity as he had

formerly enjoyed his bounty, and died in reduced circumstances. This tradition is being treated as spurious today, but nothing positive has been adduced against it so far.

Insha was handsome, brilliant, witty, sarcastic, pugnacious, self-assertive; and his life in Delhi was a series of quarrels with the poets there. In all these Insha himself was mostly to blame. The following quatrain by Bekas fairly sums up the general opinion about him.

ظاہر میں تو ایسے ہیں کہ ماشار اللہ سب کہتے ہیں ایک ہونگے انشار اللہ
 باطن میں جو دیکھا انھیں تنے ہیں پوچ لا حول ولا قوت الا باللہ

In outward appearance he is most charming,
 And all aver that, God willing, he would be unique in all respects.
 But on watching him closely I found him to be mean and worthless.
 Away with the devil who so deluded me!

In Lucknow he quarrelled with his teacher, Mus-hafī, who had preceded him to Lucknow. Here he adroitly manœuvred himself into the teachership of Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh in place of Mus-hafī, so that the latter's salary was reduced from twenty-five rupees to five. He fell foul of other poets also and was ordered to quit Lucknow by Nawab Āsaf-ud-Daula. He left for Haidarābād, but on the death of the Nawab he was recalled and once more installed in the Court. Sa'ādat 'Alī Khān, as we have seen, was a serious-minded person, intent on the duties and responsibilities of a ruler, and averse to the dissipation and frivolity into which the nobility were sunk. But such a talent for mockery and fun as Insha possessed could not be ignored, and the Nawab enjoyed his sallies of wit in his moments of relaxation.

Insha's far-famed wit was hardly above clowning.

One forgot in his company the worries of life [writes Shaikh Ahmad 'Alī in *Makḥzan-ul-Gharāib*]. He had a quiverful of droll and amusing stories, and would at times invent them on the spur of the moment. His jests would fill a book. He was not above bantering even wayfarers and strangers. If they ignored him, there was nothing to be said for it; but if they remonstrated with him or abused him, he would burst into guffaws to provoke them still further.

And yet he was a talented man and was very much ahead of his contemporaries in his views on grammar and linguistics.

Insha certainly had a versatile mind, but his talent was all but ruined by his incurable frivolity. He was ever at the beck and call

of his wayward fancy, so that his most serious moments are marred by a spirit of irresponsible levity. His was essentially an unregulated mind, and he could never keep himself in hand. In Lucknow a premium was put on his weaknesses by the degenerate taste of the nobility, and he was never given a chance to arrest his fall. Neither in his *ghazals* nor in his *qasidas* is there a soul of seriousness. His impish fancy breaks through all restraints, and you find the most frivolous things cheek by jowl with his all too few serious utterances. No writer of equal merit has been such a slave to such an unbridled fancy.

His remarkable vitality, with which Āzād has allowed himself to be impressed, is altogether illusory. Power makes itself felt through restraint, like a stream running within its course. What you become conscious of in Insha is the dissipation of energy, the entire absence of self-control. His roving fancy and his love of droll effects are too strong for him, and he runs into all kinds of lanes and byways like a horse running away with its master. Well-meaning apologists have tried to condone or explain away his weaknesses and failure as a poet. 'His great scholarship was ruined by his poetry, and his poetry was ruined by the company of Sa'ādat 'Āli Khān,'³ wrote Betāb. Others, anxious to point a moral, have ascribed his degeneration to the evil influence of the court. Such views are obviously too kind to Insha and too unkind to Sa'ādat 'Āli Khān and Lucknow. And they are very vague. Why should poetry be detrimental to scholarship, unless it be the kind of poetry that Insha wrote? In fact, his poetry did not kill his scholarship, for it still shines through his *Daryā-e-Latāfat*, streaked and marred though it be by his invincible frivolity. And what had that serious and sedate monarch to do with lowering the tone of his poetry? He amused him, no doubt, with his wit and fancy; he also wrote a few frivolous poems at his bidding, but how many frivolous poems did he write on his own account? One wonders if Sa'ādat 'Āli Khān could have ruined him, if he had not met his wishes halfway. Insha sank into a jester and buffoon, because he was predisposed to do so.

Nor were his faults venial. He was a man with a load of mischief from the very start. His natural tendency to levity and pugnacity had shown itself unmistakably in Delhi.⁴ It was fed in Lucknow and acquired alarming dimensions. He was a *bon vivant* when he came to Lucknow, and in the congenial atmosphere of that gay city with its wealth, luxury, fast life, and courtesans, his original propensities fully expressed themselves. No one has ever been ruined by another

until he first ruins himself; and Insha's sins must lie on his own shoulders.

The most noticeable feature of his verse is its virtuosity. He wrote the greater part of his *ghazals* and *qasidas* to display his skill. His *divān* is full of *ghazals* written in the most intractable rhymes. Like other poets of the period, he writes a series of *ghazals* in the same *qāfiya* with a change of the *radif*. On the third page of his *divān* is a *ghazal* opening with

کچھ یہ مجھی کو یوں نہیں اسکے بھین نے غش کیا
غنجے بھی چٹ سے فق ہوئے سارے حین نے غش کیا

which, with the change of metre and *qāfiya* runs to ten *ghazals*. Another beginning with

ہوا پیدا یہ دودِ دل سے کوہِ قاف کا جوڑا
کہ واں پر یوں نے اک قصمے اوصاف کا جوڑا

is carried to the length of eighteen *ghazals*.

Some of his *ghazals*, in their realism, recall the earlier Jur'at. Here we have witty remarks, plesantries, and innuendoes which the poet and his sweetheart, both pert and saucy, exchange with each other.

A few of his *ghazals* are in the style of Mīr. These have the form but not the soul of the latter, and we realize how quickly poetry is moving away from the pathos of Mīr to the wit and persiflage of Dāgh. Indeed in some of his moods, he vividly recalls the latter.

Insha is out of court with orthodox critics on account of his literary unconventionality. They complain that in no genre has he followed the practice of his predecessors. On the other hand they are impressed by his virtuosity. The modern reader is left cold by this aspect of his verse, but is occasionally tickled by his gaiety and sprightliness. In their levity the following lines are typical of him:

خیال کیجئے گا آج کام میں نے کیا جب اُس نے دی مجھے گالی سلام میں نے کیا
مزا یہ دیکھئے گا شیخ جی رُکے اُلٹے انکا برہہ میں نے کیا

You must admire the fine thing I did today,
No sooner did she abuse me than I saluted her.

Note the fun of it! the shaikh was unexpectedly embarrassed
When I greeted him in the assembly of the beloved yesterday.

پھیڑنے کا تو مزاج بے کہو اور سُنو بات میں تم تو خفا ہو گئے لو اور سُنو
تم کہو گے جسے کچھ کیوں نہ کہے گا تم کو چھوڑ دیگا وہ بھلا دیکھئے تو اور سُنو

The fun of a joke lies in making as well as taking it:
I said no more than a word and you got offended—How very strange!

If you say hurtful things to someone, he will surely speak back,
Do you think, he will let you go away with it? What a wrong notion!

Insha is also the author of two prose works, a romance named *Rānī Ketakī*, written in 1803, and *Daryā-e-Latāfat*, a work on linguistics. The former is a romantic tale with love, war, and magic as its theme. Rāja Jagat Parkāsh refuses to give his daughter, Ketakī, in marriage to Kanvar Bhān, the hero, because he thinks the latter's father to be a mere upstart. Unable to face an attack on his capital by the hero's father, Jagat Parkāsh seeks the assistance of a hermit gifted with supernatural powers, and the invading king, together with his queen and his son, are changed into deer. Later on, when the king discovers that his daughter is desperately in love with Kanvar Bhān, he has the prince and his parents restored to human shape and the lovers are married. The concluding part of the story is taken up with the description of the magnificence and revelry which characterized royal nuptials in the past.

A special feature of the story is that Insha—ever a virtuoso—has used no Persian or Arabic word in the story. This may be expected to give an artificial air to the narrative; but it is not so. Insha's style is forthright and direct, and his Hindī words impart a delightfully archaic flavour to the narrative.

Daryā-e-Latāfat, a work on linguistics, shows the unusual range of Insha's scholarship and his understanding of linguistic processes. More than a century and a half back, when Urdu was tied to the apron strings of Arabic and Persian, Insha had the insight to proclaim that all languages have a genius of their own, and that loan-words tend to assimilate themselves to the genius of the language into which

they are imported, thereby losing their identity. Loan-words, he explains, cease to be foreigners as soon as they have entered a language, and are, henceforth, subject to all the contingencies peculiar to that language. This should be an eye-opener to the sticklers who would have us go back to the original pronunciation and meanings of Persian and Arabic loan-words in Urdu.

An intimate friend of Insha's, Shaikh Kalandar Bakhsh Jur'at was born in Delhi. He was brought up in Faizābād, and then moved to Lucknow, where he entered the service of Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh. He died in 1810.

Jur'at's poetry bears only too clearly the imprint of the gay life of the day, but beneath its high spirits and levity there is an under-current of seriousness, even melancholy. Jur'at was happy-go-lucky and stood well with the smart set, but he was at heart a sad man. Despite the occasional crumbs of favour from the nobility, his financial position remained precarious, and the gloom resulting from this insecurity was confirmed and intensified by his early blindness. Mus-hafī was right when he wrote: 'He has a predilection for melancholy themes, and disappointment trickles from his poetry'.⁵

The poetry of Jur'at is woven out of a double strand, gay and melancholy. He began life as a man of pleasure, and his gaiety and sparkling wit procured him an easy access to the gay circles in Lucknow. Like Insha, he was a great favourite with the nobility, whom he amused with his wit and anecdotes. This element of his poetry has been summed up by Mīr in his famous retort: 'The fact is you cannot write poetry, but you can well versify your kisses and caresses'.⁶ This section of his poetry reflects his dalliance with the *demi-monde*, and is light, playful, and witty. A typical product of Lucknow, love meant no more to him than a diversion—a thing of compliments, wit, banter, and adroit coaxing, which stimulated his mind but kept his heart untouched. Another thing he shared with the majority of poets at Lucknow was his predilection for long *ghazals* and difficult forms.

Jur'at's melancholy was the direct outcome of his early blindness. Remember that he was a carefree, fashionable young man whose life had been one of unbroken mirth and jollity. Society was his life: to keep up his spirits and to enliven others, had been the goal of his endeavour. But with his blindness his profession was gone.

There was nothing now to soften the bitterness and pain of his tragedy, nothing to fortify him against his misfortune—neither religion nor any intellectual interest; and if he did not fall into utter despair it was probably because of his devotion to music. In the loneliness that now fell upon him, what else could he do but dwell with pain and anguish on the charming world that had so suddenly, so irrevocably disappeared? This conclusion is fully supported by scores of lines full of images betokening helplessness, captivity, isolation, and loss of companionship. The infinite yearnings and pain of the following lines refer, in my opinion, to one thing only—his blindness and the deep-sunken, unquenchable anguish which was to be his lot till the end.

قفص میں ہمہ فیرو کچھ تو مجھ سے بات کر جاؤ بھلا میں بھی کبھی تو رہنے والا تھا گلستاں کا

My fellow birds! Do stop to talk to me in the cage for a while;
There was a time when I, too, was a resident of the garden (like you).

صحرا کے بیچ رہتا کیوں کل رواں سو چھٹ کر اگر آج کوئی ہوتا مجھ سے شکستہ پا کا

Separated from the caravan, I should not have lived away from my fellow birds,
If there had been someone to befriend a stricken person like me.

اے وائے کہ موسم میں ہم آواز ہمارے پرواز میں مصروف ہیں اور ہائے نہیں پر

Alas! in this season, my fellow birds are flying about,
But what a pity! I have no wings.

ہم پاشکستہ کچھ نہ تھے منزل کے کام کے جاتے رہے اب سب یار چھوڑ کر

Broken footed, I was not fit for the destination,
And so, all my friends are gone, leaving me behind.

اے ہمہ فیرو آہ تم آزاد ہو چلے کنج قفس میں مجھ کو گرفتار چھوڑ کر

O fellow birds! you have become free,
But left me a captive in the cage.

ہم اٹح رہے یاران رفتگاں سے دور غریب بچوں کوئی رہ جائے کارواں سے دور

Separated from those who were once my friends,
I feel like a poor traveller, cut off from the caravan.

بسانِ بلبلِ دُور از جمنِ فتادہ اب آہ پڑے تڑپتے ہیں ہم بزمِ گلِ خواں سے دُور

Alas! like the nightingale which is away from the garden,
I am writhing in agony at my separation from the assembly of the beautiful.

صیادِ اسقدر بھی ستم ٹھکِ قفسِ مرا لے جا خُدا کے واسطے ٹھکِ بوستانِ تلک

Be not so cruel, O fowler!
For God's sake, take my cage to the garden for a little while!

خانہ پروردِ قفسِ ہم ہیں اسیراے صیاد تو بتادے ہمیں پرواز کسے کہتے ہیں

I was born and brought up in the cage, O fowler!
Do tell me what is meant by flying!

سحر کو بلیلیں کرتی ہیں نخلِ غنچے چکاتے ہیں قفس کے ہم درو دیوار سے سر کو ٹپکتے ہیں

In the morning when the nightingales sing and the buds open,
I strike my head in vain against the bars and doors of the cage.

ہو کے مجبور اب کیا بے صبر میں نے اختیار ورنہ کیا میری قفس میں طبع گھبراتی نہیں

I have resigned myself to fate from sheer helplessness;
Thinkest thou I do not feel ill at ease in the cage?

اس صیدِ گرفتار کی کیا کہئے کہ صیاد سوچے ہے قفس میں ہے اور توڑے ہے ہر پرچی

How shall I describe the miserable condition of the bird,
Whom the fowler has put in a cage, and broken its wings, too.

There were two Jur'ats then, the sophisticated, pleasure-loving man, and the heart-sick and cheerless person who yearned for a life beyond his reach. Did these two Jur'ats live together, or did the latter follow the former? With our present knowledge of the life and poetry of Jur'at it would not be safe to dogmatize on this point; but the peculiar nature of the pathetic experiences embodied in the verses quoted above appears to lend support to the view that they are the product of the period following his blindness. Parenthetically it may be remarked here that Mir's well-known dictum about Jur'at pertains in all probability to his earlier poetry.

Studied in the present context Jur'at is found to bear an obvious

affinity to Mīr, instead of being an antithesis to him, as is generally thought. No doubt they have their differences. For one thing, so far as style is concerned, Jur'at has added a polish, finish, and grace of his own to the directness and simplicity of Mīr. In the second place, Mīr's melancholy, though largely personal, is coloured with the temper of the age in which he lived; Jur'at's melancholy is wholly personal.

Shaikh Imām Bakhsh Nāsikh (d. 1838), the son of Khuda Bakhsh, a tent-maker, belonged originally to Faizābād. A timely bequest put him above the pressure of financial worries, and he devoted himself to the study of Persian and Urdu, acquiring some proficiency in both. By far the most constructive influence in his life was that of Mirza Hājī, a nobleman of taste whose house was the resort of poets and scholars. Nāsikh had the good fortune to be attached to the court of this nobleman, and it was there that he acquired that taste for the polish and refinement of language which culminated in his being accepted as the literary dictator of the day. Nāsikh's fortunes rose and fell with the rise and fall of his patrons, and his career is a witness to the intrigue and instability of an effete despotic court. He suffered for his connexions and had often to fly into hiding or exile. But these political connexions were not without their advantages. The patronage he could dispense as the favourite of a great nobleman gave him an unusual importance, and he made his mark much earlier than would have been possible otherwise.

Nāsikh will have to be considered under two heads; (1) as the 'Legislator of Parnassus' who formulated the language and laid down hard and fast rules for it, and (2) as a poet. We have pointed out how the poets and scholars of the eighteenth century undertook to stabilize Urdu by purifying it of foreign elements, and by determining its usage and rules of grammar. All these efforts were merely personal and sporadic, and no attempt had been made to codify and formulate the rules. The language remained more or less in a fluid state. With the political decline of Delhi, Lucknow assumed the role of reformer and legislator in language, and laid down definite rules in regard to usage, diction, and grammar. Some of the archaic and foreign words which were still in use were declared obsolete. The difference between the idiom of Delhi and Lucknow was recorded, and the poets were to follow the latter to the exclusion of the former.

The gender of words was fixed and they were to be used as masculine or feminine according to the decision arrived at. Urdu was modelled still more on Persian, and its themes, diction, and imagery were more thoroughly assimilated.

The work begun by Nāsikh was carried on by his pupils and others, until the Lucknow idiom was differentiated from that of Delhi.

As a poet Nāsikh can be affiliated to the school of Sauda. He was a conscious follower of his poetic tradition, and he refers to this in his *ghazals*.

کب ہماری فکر سے ہوتا ہے سودا کا جواب
ہاں تتبع کرتے ہیں ناسخ ہم اُس مغفور کا

How can I ever presume to equal the talent of Sauda,
But, no doubt, I try my best to write in his style.

پہلے اپنے عہد سے افسوس سودا اٹھ گیا
اُس سے مانگیں جا کے ناسخ اس غزل کی داہم

Alas! Sauda passed away before my time,
To whom shall I now turn for an appreciation of this *ghazal*!

Nāsikh is one of those poets who make up in ingenuity for what they lack in inspiration. It has been said in exoneration of the poets who preferred the merely clever and ingenious in style or form to a forthright expression of their emotions, that they do so because of the natural exhaustion of the old themes. The explanation is not altogether wrong. But another and a more reasonable one is also possible. A great poet, dowered with a strong sensibility will not, or does not, despite the weight of an overpowering tradition, run to ingenuity. He simply expresses himself, and as he has an original way of looking at things, his poetry bears the stamp of his personality, singling him out from the rank and file of poets. Nāsikh's excessive interest in conceits and other artificialities of style betokens want of inspiration. Whatever else you may find in him, one thing you will almost always miss—an intense apprehension of any phase of reality. You read him and say: Life never gripped this man. He has no deep roots and holds on to life by aerial feelers. Nāsikh found all things in life pigeon-holed and prearranged, and he accepts them all

with the nonchalance of an incurious mind. It is rarely that you hear the personal note in him; and without it poetry cannot come into existence. This is true not only of his love-poetry; it is also true of his ethical outlook. He writes of humility and renunciation, the insecurity and instability of life and greatness, the omnipotence of fate—immemorial themes of Asiatic poetry—but rarely with the warmth and passion which accompany personal experience or conviction. It is all from the skin outward, and not from the skin inward, as it should be.

Wherein does he resemble Sauda? In several ways. To begin with, in his unusual fondness for *tamsīliya* poetry, the nature and merits of which have already been discussed. Again, he uses the style of the *qasīda* in the *ghazal*, and has ruled out the difference between the two. Like his master Sauda, his *ghazals* have the unreality, exaggeration, verbal grandeur, and fanciful elaboration of the *qasīda*. He is also excessively addicted to unmanageable *qāfiyas* and *radīfs*. How exultantly he says:

جی لڑا دیتا ہے کیسی ہوز میر
خامہ تیشہ ہے تو ناسخ کو بہن سے لم نہیں

Be the form ever so difficult, I never shrink from it,
If the pen is the adze, then Nāsikh is not less enterprising than Koh-kan
[Farhād].

Like all artificial poets he draws heavily on fancy. His poetry is full of conceits and other artificialities from beginning to end. Whereas imagination lies in the instantaneous recognition of similarities or of unity in the sensible world, under the stress of strong feeling, fancy coldly elaborates similarities which do not exist, or magnifies partial resemblances. Nāsikh's poetry is all ingenuity; he builds his entire structure of poetry on conceits, fanciful resemblances unsupported by experience, and exaggeration. What was a metaphor with the earlier poets, he uses as a piece of literalism. Take, for example, the following line:

گرم ہے کیا عکس تیرے رُوئے آتشکاک کا
آئینے کی نسبت کا معدوم پارہ ہو گیا

The earlier poets had compared the face of the beloved with fire
(آتش) and called it hot (گرم) on account of its warmth and

glow. Nāsikh takes it as a hard fact and says to the sweetheart: so great is the heat of your fire-like face that it melts the mercury at the back of the mirror when you look into it.

Others complain of the inordinate length of the night of separation from the beloved. Nāsikh fancifully thinks that it is *eternal*. He is then struck by the idea that the evil is not without its bright side; for if the *night* is eternal, then it follows that there would be no *dawn*, and consequently no dawn of the Day of Resurrection or reckoning. Here is the line in which the idea has been elaborated:

ہے شب ہجر تا ابد نہیں سحر نہ رہا خوف روزِ محشر کا

Accept his premises, and everything he says naturally follows from them. Here is another instance:

گھل گھل کے مر گیا ہوں میں دریائے عشق میں
کافی ہے میرے واسطے گنبدِ جناب کا

Other poets have spoken of falling in love as '*falling in the river of love*'. Now things dissolve in water. Hence the conceit that, having fallen in the river of love, he has become so reduced that, after his death, it would be possible to accommodate him in the dome of a bubble—the dome being a normal feature of a mausoleum in the Muslim world.

Such far-fetched elaborations were then considered as the height of poetry, and Nāsikh gives them with a spendthrift hand. The principle is in full force in his ethical poetry as well.

ہیں جو صاحبِ دُوائے دُور ہے سامانِ عیش بادہ کھینچا ہے کسی نے زخم کے انگور کا

Those who have compassionate hearts never run after luxuries,
Who has ever drawn wine from the grapes [citrice] of the wound?

پاک طینت جو کہ ہیں اُن سے تعلق دُور ہے خار سے کیا ابھجے گوشہ چادرِ مہتاب کا

The pure of heart remain aloof from the contagion of the world;
The skirt of the moon is not caught in the thorns.

مُوئے کمر کو ذوق نہیں ہے نہ حساب کا

To embellish what is naturally beautiful is a waste of time,
The hair of the back of the beloved (slender hair-like back) does not
stand in need of hair dye.

The following are based on observation and stand higher than
those given above:

جو دل ہی ٹوٹ گیا کیا ہوں شعر تر پیدا ہوئے ہیں شاخ شکستہ سے کب تر پیدا

When the heart is broken, how can one write fresh verses!
When has a broken bough yielded fruit?

نشہ عرفاں نہیں جب تک ڈلا ہے قیل و قال تانہ ہو لیریز سا غریبے صدا ہوتا نہیں

O my heart! until you are full of divine knowledge you will continue to
indulge in a war of words;
The full vessel alone gives no sound.

محر فنا میں نہد ہے تعین سے یکدگر پانی جو موج میں ہو وہی ہے جناب میں

In the sea of extinction, no identification is possible;
The waves are made of the same water of which the bubbles are made.

شگفتہ نغنجہ نہ جب تک ہو بو نہیں آتی ہو چاک چاک اگر دل تو ہوا اثر پیدا

As long as the bud does not open, it gives out no smell;
It is only when the heart is riven with sorrow that you touch the hearts
of others.

ہوں جہاں میں پر ہے زرق عالم بالا دیہیان ہے صدف محتاج نیاں اور مسکن آب میں

Although I am in the world yet I draw my sustenance from the world
above;
The mother of pearl is in water, but it is dependent on the rain drop for
its pearl.

جو کوئی بجلا وطن سے نکلے ہو اُس کا جگر بے زہر ہے جب تک کھرے مرجاں کا مسکن آب میں

He who leaves his country, his heart turns to blood;
The coral is green only as long as it is in water.

Khvāja Haidar ‘Alī Ātish was born in Faizābād where his father had migrated during the reign of Nawab Shujā‘-ud-Daula. After his father’s death, which took place while he was yet a boy, he fell into dubious company and was known for wildness and brawling. This brought him to the notice of Nawab Muhammad Taqī who took a fancy to such rare blades, and in his company he came to Lucknow. This proved a turning-point in his life. He was fired to emulation by the fame of Insha and Jur’at, and presented himself to Mus-hafī for initiation into the art of poetry. His progress was rapid, and he was soon acknowledged as a master. He died at an advanced age in 1846.

Ātish was far too independent and carefree to submit himself to the formalism and etiquette of the Court and led the life of a dervish in his poor dwellings, subsisting on the stipend granted by the Nawab.

The poetry of Ātish is like a heap of ashes with a few sparks here and there. It has the appearance of fine poetry, and possesses all that goes to make poetry outwardly attractive—polish, idiomatic flavour, flow, cadence, wit; but it has very little by way of intellectual interest or emotional drive. An occasional touch of quietism, praise of contentment and resignation, these are the only personal touches in his verse; and since they grow out of his own life, he writes of them with conviction. He fancied himself to be a great lover of beauty, and wrote with evident pride:

زباں کو اپنی بس اک سُن کا افسانہ آتا ہے

My tongue can only recount the stories of love.

But as a love poet he can do no better than enumerate the external charms of the beloved in conformity with the usual practice of the day. His interest is in wit and word-play and in metaphor, and they are used to give an air of novelty to the stock sentiments of the *ghazal*. Ātish leaves the modern reader cold, but his popularity in his own day is understandable. Poetry had then come to mean mere craftsmanship, smoothness in versification, and fine language; and he displayed them for their own sake. His language is often learned and, therefore, too heavy for the light texture of the *ghazal*.

Pandit Daya Shankar Kaul Nasīm (1811–1843), a pupil of Ātish, is known by his *Masnavī-e-Gulzār-e-Nasīm*, composed in 1833 and

published in 1844. It narrates the adventures of Prince Tāj-ul-Mulūk in the fairyland in search of Gul-e-Bakāvalī, a flower, the magical touch of which will restore his father's eyesight. During his adventures, he falls in love with Bakāvalī, and having surreptitiously exchanged rings with her, as she lay asleep, returns home with the flower. Disguised as a man, the fairy discovers Tāj-ul-Mulūk. They are surprised by Bakāvalī's mother and separated, but after numerous adventures in the magic forest their paths converge, and they are happily married. Further complications follow. Bakāvalī, summoned to the court of Rāja Indar (the Indian Oberon), betrays her love for Tāj-ul-Mulūk, and is cast into a temple, the lower part of her body turned to stone. Meanwhile, a princess named Chaturvant falls in love with Tāj-ul-Mulūk, and being apprised of his love for Bakāvalī, has the temple pulled down. As ordained by Rāja Indar, she is reborn, now in humble surroundings, and after seventeen years of weary waiting, the prince is united to his wife again. A pendant to the main theme is provided by the marriage of Bahrām, the vizier's son, with Husn Ārā, a fairy rescued by Tāj-ul-Mulūk from demons in the magical forest.

Such, shorn of its many episodes and digressions, is the story of *Gulzār-e-Nasīm*. A comparison and contrast of it with Mīr Hasan's *Sibr-ul-Bayān* is one of the commonplaces of criticism, and a discussion of their relative merits will not be out of place here.

Sibr-ul-Bayān and *Gulzār-e-Nasīm* belong to two different genres. The former is to the latter what *Bāgh-o-Bahār* is to *Fasān-e-'Ajāib*: the one natural and simple, the other a *tour de force* in a highly artificial and self-conscious style. Structurally, too, *Nasīm*'s poem is much inferior to Mīr Hasan's *masnavī*. The latter is nearly three times as long as the former, yet its plot may be summarized in a few words. Mīr Hasan believed that poetry should surprise by a fine excess. His poem is a series of pictures, each distinct and memorable, and elaborated with a pre-Raphaelite love of detail. *Nasīm*'s story is long and rambling. One of its defects is that the central theme is not fully brought into relief on account of the disproportionate attention bestowed on ancillary episodes. The prince's adventures in the magical forest have no human interest; while the gratuitous complications invented in the Rājā-Indar episode, down to Bakāvalī's rebirth, and the falling in love of Chaturvant with the prince, are not organically fitted into the story. Similarly, the marriage of Bahrām with Husn Ārā is a gratuitous tag. The story is not structurally coherent and grows more by accretion than by inward necessity.

For example, how many episodes could be left out of *Gulzār-e-Nasīm* without injuring the story! Can you leave out any of the episodes in *Sibr-ul-Bayān*? None; because they are all carefully integrated.

More important still, the human interest is not kept in the forefront in *Gulzār-e-Nasīm*, as it is kept in Mīr Hasan's poem. In the latter, the marvellous is strictly subordinated to the human. Nasīm revels in the supernatural for its own sake. Mīr Hasan uses it very sparingly and with a view to bringing into relief human feelings and experiences. For example, the disappearance of the prince in a mysterious way gives Mīr Hasan a full occasion to portray the grief of the father and the attendants; his imprisonment by the fairy, to a full-length picture of the distracted princess, her long discussions with the vizier's daughter, and the assurances as well as the remonstrances of the latter. In his use of the admittedly supernatural, Mīr Hasan never loses touch with the real. Nasīm, on the other hand, is interested in the supernatural for its own sake. Important though this difference between the artistic outlook of the two authors is, they offer a still greater contrast in their styles. With Mīr Hasan manner and matter are on a par, and the style only serves to articulate the story. Nasīm, on the contrary, is more interested in the style than the story. Hence his style is the first thing that arrests the attention of the reader. In fact, it is the only thing to arrest his attention. The poem is riddled with word-play. A full analysis of his style, though an interesting topic, is not possible here. Suffice it to say, that his object in writing the poem was to employ to the full the associative value of words both in regard to sound and sense for their surprise value. This makes his style extremely artificial. It is full of sudden surprises; but his tricks of speech soon begin to pall. As long as he can indulge his passion for verbal balance or contrast unobtrusively, and there is no straining, the effect is quite pleasant. But when he strains after effect, the impression is often droll. Here are a few examples of his passion for word-play:

جو نکتہ لکھوں کہیں نہ حرف اے مرکزہ کشش مری پہونچ جائے

مجھوں ہو اگر تو فصد لیجے سایہ ہو تو دُور دھوپ لیجے

پوچھا کہ بن آئی کس بنی کی کس راہ کی زن نے رہزنی کی
 ہر چند کہ تھا وہ دیو کڑوا حلوسے سے کیا منہ اسکا میٹھا
 ہے بے سراسر اچھل لے گیا کون ہے ہے مجھے خار دے گیا کون
 پانے سے چلی نہ جعل سازی او جڑی وہ بسا بسا کے بازی
 کرتی تھی جو بھوک پیاں بس میں آنسو پیتی تھی کما کے قسمیں

When this game of verbal hide-and-seeek is carried too far he becomes vague or obscure. The following are hardly better than puzzles and conundrums:

مہرب شاہ ہوئی خموشی کی نورِ بصر سے چشم پوشی
 دی آنکھ جو شاہ نے رونمائی چشمک سے نہ بھائیوں کو بھائی
 نقشہ ایک اور نے تمسایا پس ماندہ کا پیش خمیہ آیا

It does not mean, however, that the whole poem is in this artificial style. It is no doubt the ideal to which Nasīm is constantly aspiring, but he frequently comes down off his stilts and writes in a straightforward style. Then he is terse, effective, and refreshing. A very remarkable feature of his style is the ease with which he has accommodated idiomatic expressions and sayings within his verse. Such lines have become a permanent part of the texture of the language. Here are a few examples:

آگے ان کے سروغ پانا سوج کو چراغ ہے دکھانا

میٹھا اس دیو کو کھلاؤ گڑے جو مرے تو زہریوں دو
 اس دیونی پاس اک حسین تھی زنبور کے گھر میں انگبیں تھی
 بے وقت کسی کو کچھ بلا ہے پتا کہیں محکم بن بلا ہے
 گھر بار سے کیا فقیر کو کام کیا لیجے چھوڑے گاؤں کا نام
 کانٹوں میں اگر نہ ہو الجھنا تھوڑا لکھا بہت سمجھنا
 سمجھانے سے تھا ہمیں سروکار اب مان نہ مان تو ہے مختار
 غم راہ نہیں کہ ساتھ دیجے دکھ بوجھ نہیں کہ بانٹ لیجے
 درویش رواں رہے تو بہتر آب دریا بے تو بہتر
 واجب ہے ادائے حق مہماں احساں کا عوض نہیں مجز احساں
 بولی وہ جمیلہ کیا بتاؤں تو اپنی ہے تجھ سے کیا چھپاؤں
 دو دل جو ہوں چاہنے پہ رضی یہ جان لے کیا کرے گا قاضی
 کیا نطف جو غیہ پر درہ کھولے جاؤ وہ جو سر پہ پڑھ کے بولے

The chief names in *Rekhti* are those of Rangin, its inventor, and Jān Sāhib.

Sa'ādat Yār Khān Rangin (1756-1834) was the son of Tahmāsap Beg Khān Tūrānī, a Persian nobleman. He was in the service of Mirza Sulaimān Shakoh, and was a great friend of Insha's, from whom he is said to have got the idea of the disreputable genre in which he excelled. A gay, dissolute, and handsome young man, he was at home in low company, and his poetry reflects his amours with courtesans and dancing-girls. His works include four *dīvāns* called *Nau Ratan*, and a *masnavi* called *Ijād-e-Rangin*.

Jān Sāhib is the poetic surname of Mīr Yār 'Alī Khān, son of Mīr Amman. He was born in Farrukhābād in 1818 (?). He came to Lucknow early and after the Indian Mutiny left for Rāmpur where

he was hospitably received by Nawab Kalb 'Alī Khān. He used to dress himself like women and recite verses in the accent and gestures peculiar to them, much to the amusement of his audience. He died in Rāmpur in 1897.

The themes of *Rekhtī* embrace the entire life of the women of the day. According to Sayyid Muhammad Mubīn:

Whatever befalls women of the highest to the lowest rank, whatever they do, say, or think—all has been related by Jān Sāhib. Parental love, affection between brothers and sisters, connubial love and bickerings, the jealousy of the co-wife, the concubine's blandishments, the life of children and their education, household matters and marriage ceremonies, the chit-chat of prostitutes, the treatment of maid-servants and servants, attendance on the sick, mourning the dead, charms, spells, superstitions, clothes, ornaments, knick-knacks, in short, a whole world of things has been drawn upon.⁷

And yet the core of it, its *pièce de résistance*, is sexual intimacy and suggestiveness. It tickled the palates of the dandies and nobles, and was not much to the taste of persons of a serious type. This is proved by the fact that after the annexation of Oudh and the Indian Mutiny, Jān Sāhib fell on evil days. His profession was gone, and he frequently complains of it in his *Rekhtī*. The fact is that the licentiousness of the period was largely confined to court circles, and *Rekhtī* reflects the taste of the aristocracy and their clients and not that of the masses. The view that moral laxity had spread from the upper classes to the masses is not supported by facts, except in the case of Lucknow.

II

Mirza Rajab 'Alī Beg Surūr, author of the once-famous *Fasāna-e-'Ajāib*, the only prose work of the period worth notice, was born in Lucknow in or about 1787. He is said to have incurred the displeasure of Nawab Ghāzī-ud-Dīn Haidar Shāh, and wrote this book in Benares in 1824 to while away the tedium of his exile. On the enthronement of Vājīd 'Alī Shāh, he was recalled to Lucknow and appointed court poet. On the annexation of Oudh, he was successively invited by the Mahārājas of Benares and Patiāla, and treated with great honour. He died in 1867.

Surūr is the author of several books, but he is known today by his *Fasāna-e-'Ajāib*. It tells the story of Prince Jān-e-'Ālam who, moved

by his parrot's praises, falls in love with a charming princess named Anjuman Ārā, and after braving great dangers, and fighting and vanquishing magicians and demons, at last, wins her hand. The story has practically no human interest. We know from the beginning that the prince bears a charmed life and will get out of all scrapes with the help of one impossible *deus ex machina* or another. The story grips us only once, when in an access of confidence the prince lets the vizier's son, the villain of the piece, into his secret, telling him the magic formula by dint of which he could leave his own body and get into a dead body at will. Here was a tense situation for a good writer and Surūr has made good use of it. The chapters dealing with the villainy of the vizier's son and his defeat by the resourceful Mihr Nigār are the cream of the book.

Surūr's characters are all dummies. The only exception is Mihr Nigār who comes near being alive once or twice. The plot is not original. It is a patchwork quilt of the most miscellaneous material. There is hardly anything in the story that does not recall something analogous to it in the romances of his predecessors. It was rather an unlucky idea of his to add a few inset stories to the book. Realistic in content, they fail to harmonize with the fairy atmosphere of the central narrative and detract from the merit of the book instead of adding to it.

This is how the book strikes us today. But it would be unfair to judge it by modern standards or to condemn it for want of originality. Original it was not meant to be. It was meant to be a *tour de force* in the highly prolix, redundant and circumlocutory style, abounding in rhymes, known as *nasr-e-muqaffa*. It is only in the introductory paragraphs of the various chapters, or in the descriptive passages, that Surūr is at his most ornate. Whenever the story interest predominates, or there is some definite information to be imparted, he comes quite close to the spoken language of the day, and is racy and idiomatic. That scholarship was then considered to lie in gratuitous learning and a display of superfluous riches, is shown by the author's unprovoked attack on Mir Amman of Delhi and his *Bā gh-o-Bahār* in the 'Foreword' to his book. It shows that according to the false taste then prevalent, simplicity was considered synonymous with poverty, and directness was a matter of reproach betokening a want of imagination.

IX

THE *MARSIYA*: ANĪS AND DABĪR

A *marsiya* is a lament or threnody at the death of a friend, relative, or patron, especially a nobleman or a king. In Urdu it is used in the specialized sense of an account of the tribulations of al-Husain and his family and followers which culminated in the tragedy of Karbalā. This event is too well known to require a detailed account, but a brief outline may be appended for those who are unacquainted with it.

After the death of al-Hasan, his younger brother, al-Husain, refused to acknowledge Mu'āviya's son and successor, Yazīd. In response to the urgent and repeated appeals of the people of Irāq, who declared him the legitimate Caliph after al-Hasan, al-Husain started at the head of a small escort of relatives, including his harem and devoted followers, to Kūfa, on the 10th of Muharram, A.H. 61 (10th October 680). The Umayyad general in command of 4,000 troops surrounded him with his insignificant band of some two hundred souls at Karbalā, about twenty-five miles north-west of Kūfa, and, upon al-Husain's refusal to surrender, cut him down together with his followers. The grandson of the Prophet fell dead with many wounds and his head was sent to Damascus. In commemoration of al-Husain's martyrdom, the Shī'ite Muslims have established the practice of annually observing the first ten days of Muharram as days of mourning, during which they chant or recite poems bearing on his heroic struggle and sufferings.

It is strange that in Persia, which should have been the home of the *marsiya*, it has been only intermittently cultivated. Even in India, before the great masters, Anīs and Dabīr, rehabilitated it, it was looked at sideways as the special province of the poetaster—a fact supported by the old gibe—*Bigra shā'ir marsiya go* (a bad poet turns a *marsiya* writer).

The *marsiya* had its brief spring-time in the north during the ascendancy of the kingdom of Oudh, several of whose rulers were zealous Shī'ites, and therefore enthusiastic patrons of it. It rose with the dynasty and died with it. In fact, it had exhausted itself with

Anīs and Dabīr, and although it survived them for a time, it offered little scope for original treatment, and ended in mere repetition.

It was the Deccan poets who, as in other forms, broke new ground in the *marsiya*. The earliest *marsiyas* extant, it is estimated, were written round about the time of Valī, in Gujrāt and the Deccan. But there is reason to believe that this genre must have developed in the Deccan much earlier, as the rulers of Bijapur and Golkonda had been Shī'ite from the commencement. The *marsiyas* that have come down to us from the Deccan are those of Sharaf, Imāmī, Rīza, Ghulāmī, Sayyid Qādir, Hāshim 'Alī, and a few others.

The Dakkani *marsiyas* are essentially laments and are distinguished by their naivety, brevity, restraint, and lyricism. To the *marsiyas* of Anīs and Dabīr they are what the paintings of the earlier Renaissance artists like Fra Angelico and Giotto are to the highly sophisticated art of Raphael. The later *marsiya* represents a more self-conscious stage in art: it is richer in decorative effects, passion, and speed, but is by no means more poignant. Again, they are narrative in form (they tell a story), whereas the earlier ones composed in the Deccan are lyrical monologues with refrains, either in monorhyme or in quartets, the rhyme-scheme being generally *aaaa*, *bbba*, *ccca*, as in the following by Hāshim 'Alī, entitled *Asghar kā Mātām*:

آج سوکھا دہن ترا اصر	آج پُر خوں کفن ترا اصر
حیف یو بالین ترا اصر	لال ہے گلبدن ترا اصر
کیوں گلے میں لوہو کے جار می ڈھا	کیوں ہیں زلفاں کے بال تاوتار
حیف یو بالین ترا اصر	تجھ کوں سوتے کبھونہ لگتی بار
نیند آتی تجھے سولاؤں میں	اُدھ گلے کا لوہو دھولاؤں میں
حیف یو بالین ترا اصر	چل ترا پالنا بھولاؤں میں

پھر میں گودی لئے پھروں کسکوں	کیوں جدا مجھ ستیں کئے تجھ کوں
حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر	کیوں نہ لاگی بلا تری مجھ کوں
من میں یوں تھا کرونگی بسم اللہ	اللہ اللہ کیا تجھے پالا
حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر	ہائے تیرا گیا جیا بالا
لولی دے کے کسے سولاؤں گی	کس کا اب پالنا جھولاؤں گی
حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر	کس کوں چھاتی ستیں لگاؤں گی

O woe for this shroud
 Of thine, covered thus
 With thine own blood, O Asghar!
 And for thy throat
 Dry with thirst!
 Thy lovely body bathed in blood!
 Ah, this tragic end of thy childhood, O Asghar!
 Why are thy beautiful locks
 In such dire disorder today?
 Why are streams of blood
 Gushing out of thy throat?
 There never was a time
 When thou wert long
 In falling asleep.
 Ah, this tragic end of thy childhood, O Asghar!
 Listen sweet; now wake up,
 That from thy throat
 I may wash away the blood.
 Then, if still thou feelest drowsy,
 Again I shall put thee to sleep!
 Come, let me rock thy cradle.
 Ah, this tragic end of thy childhood, O Asghar!
 O why have these cruel people
 Snatched thee away
 From my loving embrace!
 Now whom shall I carry
 In these bereaved, unfortunate arms!
 Ah me, why didn't the calamity
 Of this painful death
 Strike me down, instead!

Ah, this tragic end of thy childhood, O Asghar!
 O those fond hopes
 With which I reared thee
 In the days of thy infancy!
 The fond hopes with which
 I used to look forward
 To the day when I shall
 Teach thee to read—
 Starting with 'Bismillah!'
 Ah, this tragic end of thy childhood, O Asghar!
 Whose cradle shall I rock now?
 Whom shall I put to sleep
 With lullabies sweet?
 Whom shall I lovingly
 Clasp to my breast?
 Ah, this tragic end of thy childhood, O Asghar!

These forms were discarded by the later *marsiya* writers, presumably, because they did not lend themselves to prolonged treatment. But they have their own charm, and were particularly suited to the purpose of the writers. The recurrence of the initial rhyme at the end of each subsequent stanza gives a formal unity, no less than a musical charm to the whole; while the quiet flow of the verse is in full accord with the mournful theme. In the quartet the poet was at liberty to use any measure, and some of the poems in the shorter measures, especially those mourning the martyrdom of Asghar, are very touching. Perhaps their most remarkable feature is their universal appeal and intense humanity. Some of the best of these detach themselves from their historical context and become symbolical of suffering motherhood, like the Renaissance paintings of the Madonna. The following entitled *Asghar kī Mān* by Sharaf may well be entitled 'A Mother Mourning her Son':

با لے اصغر کوں تب جھولاتی تھی	سیج جھولے کی میں بناتی تھی
دو دپنیے کوں میں جگاتی تھی	جب دولارا وہ نبند بھرتوتا
چاڑسوں جب اُسے اوچاتی تھی	پھوپھیاں صدقے اُسکے جاتیاں تھیاں
پھولے نین آنگ میں ساتی تھی	میں جب اصغر کوں گود میں لیتی
دیکھ اصغر کوں تلملاتی تھی	پانی بن خشک ہو گیا ہے شیر

آج بالک مرا نہیں دستا باس اسکی مجھے بھی آتی تھی
 ظالماں سنگ دلوں نے مارا تیر سخت فولاد اون کی چھاتی تھی
 تیر گڈرا گلے سوں اصغر کے ہائے کس دکھ سوں جان جاتی تھی
 شاہ پھر کر لے آئے اصغر کوں بولے یوکر "ایتی سیاتی تھی"
 آج جنگل میں توں اکیلا ہے رات دن میں تری سنگاتی تھی
 آج کہہ کیا پوکا روں کہہ مجھ کوں تب میں اصغر کی ماں کہلاتی تھی
 شہر بانو کے شور کی آواز
 اے شرف لامکاں کو جاتی تھی

Fondly with flowers, I used to deck
 Little Asghar's bed in the cradle;
 Then gently I would rock it:
 And when my precious darling
 Had had sufficient sleep,
 Caressingly I would wake him,
 To feed him at my breast.
 His aunts would be beside themselves,
 Expressing their love,
 As one after the other
 They lifted him in their arms.
 And, as for myself—
 When I fondled him in my lap,
 I could hardly contain myself
 For the joy that was mine!
 But now, without water, the milk
 In my breast has gone dry:
 I suffered the extremest torture
 When I saw Asghar in this plight.
 Today I do not see my child
 Anywhere—I who could
 Always feel his presence
 When he was anywhere near.
 Those fiends, with hearts of stone,
 Shot him through with an arrow:

That arrow went clean
 Through Asghar's throat,
 Causing a most painful death.
 And then the Shāh
 Carried the stricken Asghar
 Back from the field,
 Saying gently, resignedly:
 'His life, indeed, was only
 This much—no more!
 Alas! today in the wilderness
 Thou art all alone, O Asghar!
 Thou whose days and nights
 I used to decorate
 With such loving care!
 Tell me now, by what name
 Should I be called;
 For, when thou wert alive,
 My name was 'Asghar's Mother'.

And thus the heart-rending wail of Shāh Bāno
 Went mounting to the throne of God.

In its earlier stages in the north, the *marsiya* was written in quartets, a fact pointing to the influence of the south. This form was discarded by Sauda, probably because it did not easily lend itself to narrative treatment. It lacked rapidity and movement, and though charming enough in short lyrics, its rhyme-scheme was felt to be a hindrance in long narrative poems. He used instead the *musaddas* or the six-line stanza (*aaaabb*), which experience has shown to be the most suitable of all forms available in Urdu for sustained and passionate treatment.

3

When a great event like the tragedy of Karbalā takes hold of the religious consciousness of a whole people, it begins to grow like a seed in a congenial soil. In its imaginative development the story of Karbalā runs parallel to the story of King Arthur, Charlemagne, and King Vikramaditya in India. It is with the embroideries, rich and varied, which the popular imagination has woven around the slender historical material, that the *marsiya* deals. Just as Homer gives an imaginative version of a single episode in the Trojan war in the *Iliad*, or just as Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a personal and imagi-

native version of the Fall of Man, exactly in the same way the *marsiya* writers have amplified and elaborated a single incident which has come to have a tremendous moral significance for a large section of the Islamic world.

Structurally, the episodic character of the *marsiya* is its main defect. Our poets do not present the story of K̄arbalā as a whole. They deal with one episode, one incident, real or imaginary, in a poem. One feels that a unified and coherent narrative embracing the entire theme would make the narrative more impressive, more compact, and afford considerably greater opportunities for characterization. As it is, the *marsiyas* are marred by endless repetition. Why the writers chose to be episodic is not clear. Probably the method was dictated by the requirements of the mourning assemblies, the audiences naturally preferring to listen to a whole poem in one sitting than to a fraction of it. The vogue of the short story today offers an analogous case, governed by the same psychological motive. The serially published novel has gone down before the short story for this very reason.

To this want of concentration due to episodic treatment, is also traceable the absence of unity in characterization. Some *marsiyas* emphasize the heroism of the protagonists and are on the epic plane. Others stress the generosity, forbearance, and forgiveness of al-Husain, and are ideal in character; while others still are marred by tearfulness and self-pity. These contradictions are due to the fact that the writer never contemplated the subject as a whole and went to work in different moods. Sometimes his object is to idealize al-Husain and present him and his followers as a noble contrast to the unrelieved darkness of his enemies. He, therefore, invests his hero with all good things; and the figure that emerges is that of a brave and generous person. But more frequently he is made tearful to knead the hearts of the audience; for this, as I purpose to explain, was the primary object of the writer. From the above it is evident that there cannot be much scope for subtlety in characterization in *marsiyas*, although there is an almost unlimited scope for idealization and denunciation. The people are divided into two groups: the one idealized as much as possible, the other painted in the darkest colours.

The *marsiya*s are more ambitious than mere transcripts of action; they grow out of a natural setting. Hence the charming vignettes of dawn, sunset, rivers, trees, birds, with which some of the poems are interspersed or precluded. But as the Indian poet had no first-hand knowledge of the Arabian background, he is content to paint with large, sweeping strokes. We hear of trees, birds, and flowers, but what trees, birds, or flowers, we are not told. There are also vague, savourless, and exaggerated descriptions of the burning heat of the desert. In all these the writers naturally fall back on their knowledge of things Indian. There is no intimacy of personal observation in these descriptive passages, and yet some of them have a fine evocative power. This is because nature is the same all the world over, and its familiar aspects vary but little from country to country.

Intimately connected with the above is the fact that in elaborating his theme the poet falls back on his knowledge of Indian life as he knows it. And so there are long-drawn-out descriptions of customs, forms, and ceremonies which are strictly Indian in origin, and have no counterpart in Arabia. This may not please the stickler or pedant, but it does not jar the common reader; it gives him rather the agreeable sensation that all places are like home. Besides, there is nothing unusual about this substitution of one *milieu* for another. During the Middle Ages in Europe, it was a standing convention to medievalize the classical tales, and even in some modern works this principle is at full work. Morris's *The Life and Death of Jason* is a romanticized version of a classical tale. Tennyson's Arthur and his Knights are not the rough warriors of a rough age, but urbane gentlemen of his own day. And how beautifully do Shakespeare's clowns, serving-men, and petty officials—Dogberry, Verges, Bottom, merge into the Italian, or the fairy atmosphere of *Much Ado About Nothing* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*! Shakespeare had no scruples in transplanting his countrymen into Italy, France, and Athens, and his audience willingly accepted the illusion. There is nothing so natural as a convention, however bizarre, once it has come to be accepted.

As the form developed and grew in popular estimation, it began to annex other motives, principally the heroic; but such attempts,

even at their best, hardly rise above a *tour de force* and the *marsiya* remains, first and last, a lament. The descriptions of chargers, swords, and personal combats—some of the set themes on the strength of which *marsiyas* are made to claim kinship with the epic, are unreal and are no better than verbal fireworks.

Why the *marsiya* writers have failed to achieve the heroic and, with a few exceptions, even the ideal in action and sentiment, is easily explained. With the Shī'ites, mourning the martyrdom of al-Husain and his family is the sacred duty of all true believers. Hence the writers attempt to import the maximum of pathos into their poems, by selecting, inventing, and elaborating the most harrowing episodes. Such being the object of the *marsiya*, obviously it would not do to portray the heroic or the ideal, for these attitudes instead of softening the heart would arouse feelings of admiration and exaltation, thereby nullifying the object for which they were composed. Not that such episodes are altogether missing. Only, the sacramental value attached to mere tearfulness seriously restricts their scope, so far as the introduction of the idealistic element in them is concerned.

By assigning such a large place to pathos the poets as well as their readers and listeners appear to have overlooked a very important fact, namely, that if the characters are made to wallow in distress, they would come perilously close to losing their dignity, and therefore forfeiting the readers respect. After all, how do we assess greatness in life? By studying the deportment of people, the way they conduct themselves in crises or trying situations. Mere labels, such as rank, position, and religious sanctity have no merit as such in the domain of letters. The rules that govern it are logical not sentimental. For example, if a princess were to behave like her maid-servant, in a novel or a poem, or, for that matter, in life, the contrast between the real and ideal would be excessive, and she would no longer be felt to be a princess. To be a princess she must come up to our idea of a princess. Now the impression the study of *marsiyas* has left on my mind is that, except in the few cases in which al-Husain and his family are presented in their ideal aspect, they almost always fail to live up to the greatness which they are said to have possessed in life and with which the homage of centuries has invested them; and while we read these poems or listen to them we are all along conscious of a conflict between how we would like to see them and how they come to life in the hands of the poets. Not great or heroic or ideal, but pathetic—this is how they finally emerge; and this

because the poet is unconsciously made to sacrifice them to the requirements of a religious dogma.

Judging them strictly as works of art, apart from their religious significance or utility, the impression one carries of the *marsiyas* is that they are much too tearful. The same motives are used again and again, and beaten out thin. The heroics are all conventional, but the sufferings painted are real and there is too much of them. It would not do to say that being laments, the *marsiyas* are to be judged by their pathos, and to object to them on the ground of excessive tearfulness is to subvert the value by which they are to be estimated. The reasoning is obviously specious. Literature is a representation of life and is therefore judged by human values. Are we not all agreed on the point that excessive indulgence in grief or an unusual display of sensibility are deleterious and should, therefore, be disapproved and condemned? On the other hand, do we not value manliness, fortitude, and endurance? If so, the *marsiyas* do not live up to the highest human ideals. One feels as one reads them, that every triumph the poet has achieved in distressing his listeners or readers has been gained at the expense of the august personages he is portraying.

Again, by overdoing the pathetic the writers defeat their own end. We are so made that we are incapable of a sustained response to anything. Sooner or later we grow weary of a prolonged stimulus and lapse into apathy. The *marsiyas* may move us to pity or sympathy for a time, but a surfeit of them tends to deaden sensibility.

7

In other respects, there is much to be said for *marsiya* writers. The *marsiyas* are interspersed with passages which show insight into human nature. Their contribution to poetry has also been considerable. Before its modern development, our poetry had been largely confined to themes erotic, and its capacity for themes other than amatory was seriously restricted. In fact, if we exclude Nazīr Akbarābādī, it had no capacity for moving out of the charmed circle of the stereotyped themes of the *ghazal* or *qasida*. The *marsiya* writers have widened the scope of Urdu poetry, and consequently that of the Urdu language. They have not only enriched the language; they have given it polish, vigour, and elasticity. No less have they enriched the style. They are the first to add rhetoric to poetry. Here

they have exerted a deep influence on the course of Urdu poetry. Both in their form and style, Hālī and Chakbast bear witness to the impact of Anīs. The impassioned flow of Hālī's *musaddas* is akin to that of Anīs, though applied to a new theme and addressed to a different audience. No less is Iqbāl a continuator of their rhetorical tradition, though he is much more than that, and has moulded the tradition to his own purpose. It was only yesterday that some of the rising poets broke away from the rhetorical tradition which had dominated poetry since Hālī and which still holds sway over a large number of the poets writing today.

Let us now make a brief survey of the history of the *marsiya*. In the age of Mīr and Sauda, there were some obscure practitioners who composed and recited short poems on the martyrdom of al-Husain in religious assemblies. They were followed by Mīr Khaliq and Mīr Zamir, who were the first to rehabilitate the form. The great masters of the form were Mīr Babar 'Alī Anīs (1802-1874) and his rival Salamat 'Alī Dabīr, who was born a year after the birth of the former and survived him exactly by one year. Mīr Anīs was the great-grandson of Mīr Zāhik (satirized by Sauda), the grandson of Mīr Hasan, and the son of Mīr Khaliq—all poets; while the latter was a pupil of Mīr Zamir, and was descended from Mirza Ghulam Husain.

Shiblī, who in his *Miwāzana* rather lets his enthusiasm for Anīs run away with him, maintains that there are two essentials of narrative poetry—*fasāhat* and *balāghat*. By the former he means *appropriate language*, or the use of the *right word and image in the right place*. The latter he takes to signify *appropriate sentiments*. In other words, people must talk in character and their language must conform to the accepted usage of the people speaking that language. To be briefer still, he insists on correct usage and psychological realism. Judging by this standard, he decides that Anīs is a much greater poet than Dabīr—a conclusion which very few with a modern education would controvert.

All the same, I have a long list of grievances against Anīs, both in regard to his style and sentiments. I find that his style is often flawed and his sentiments false. Very often, these are directly traceable to his desire to achieve pathos; but in several other cases they are due

to his own uncertain taste. Anīs is such an important figure in Urdu poetry because he rises above the limitations of his age, but in a few cases he succumbs to them: and they are the more distressing because we do not expect them from him.

One of the recurring sources of irritation in Anīs is the use of colloquialisms, cheap endearments, and sob-stuff. What sublimity of effect can one expect from words and expressions so utterly banal as the following:

قربان گئی اب تو بہت کم ہے تقاہت
 صدقے گئی حبیب سے بھی کر لو مشورت
 صدقے کئے فرزند چھو بھی سوگ نہیں ہے
 ہے ہے منافقوں کی نظر کھا گئی انہیں
 بھیا ادھر تو آؤ یہ ہے کون سا مقام
 زینب کو دیکھو سر پہ نہ بھائی نہ دونوں لال

In defence of Anīs it would be argued: but do not women use these words in like situations? To which all that need be said is, yes, ordinary women, but not the distinguished ladies we are dealing with. These are plebeian words and expressions. They would suit a bourgeois setting, but they do not seem to fit in with our exalted conception of the persons to whom these sentiments and words are ascribed.

An unrestrained indulgence in grief is a pervasive feature of his *marsiyas*, and marks his men no less than his women. al-Husain, as represented by him, is one of the most tearful characters known. Most of his remarks are precluded with tears.

اے پسر ہزار

Alas! My son so gentle and affectionate.

ہے ہے انہیں میں تھے مرے فرزند کے قدم

Alas! Amongst those, too, were the footprints of my son.

روتے ہوئے وہاں سے بڑھے آپ چند گام

Weeping, he advanced a few steps therefrom.

روکے فرماتے ہیں اعدا سے کہ اے قومِ شہریرہ کیا گناہ ہے مجھے کیوں مارتے ہو بے تقصیر

Weeping, he said to the enemies: O you wicked people!
What is my fault? Why do you kill me who am guiltless?

یوں سزاؤ نہ کہ میں مر گیا آمادہ ہوں رحم لازم ہے کہ سید ہوں نبی زادہ ہوں

Don't torture me thus, for I am ready to die,
Have pity on me because I am a Sayyid, descended from the Prophet.

روکے فرماتے ہیں یہ فرج ستمگار سے شاہ

Thus did the Shāh (al-Husain), *with tears in his eyes*, address the cruel host.

روکے فرماتے ہیں بیٹے سے کہ اے جانِ پد

Weeping, he said to his son: O my dear son.

کہتے ہیں ظالموں سے خشک زبان کھلا کر بہر سقی پانی کا اک جام پلا دو لاکر

Showing his parched tongue to the cruel foes, he said:
For God's sake give me a cup of water to drink.

آزار رسیدہ ہوں گرفتار بلا ہوں گھر چھوڑ کے جلا دوں کی سرحد پہ چلا ہوں

I am afflicted with pain and subject to misfortune,
Leaving my home behind, I am bound for the territory of hangmen.

سرا پنا پیٹتے ہوئے گھر میں حسین آئے

Beating his head, al-Husain entered his house.

شبیر نے رو کر کہا لو جاتے ہیں صغرا

Weeping, Shabbir said: I take my leave of thee, O Sughra.

روئے ہوئے حرم میں گئے قبلہ انام

Weeping, the leader of the Faithful entered the harem.

رو کر امامِ دین نے کہا جائیں کہاں

Weeping, the leader of the Faithful said: Where should I go now?

Equally false is the use of vulgarisms and debased erotic imagery as in the following:

آرام کہیں راہ میں جانی نہیں ملتا

O sweetheart! There is no relief to be had in the way.

نم سے بچھڑوں گی تو واری میں کہہ جاؤں گی

Parted from you, *darling!* Where shall I go!

This clearly shows that Anīs frequently failed to keep clear of the contagion of the popular taste. Here are some of the stock epithets applied by him to the *warriors* in his *battle-pieces*:

سب تھک گئے مگر نہ تھکے تیغزن کے ہاتھ وہ معرکہ رہا اسی گل پیرین کے ہاتھ

All were exhausted, but not the hands of that swordsman,
That action was won by that *delicate person* (one dressed in flowers).

تھا بس کہ شوق جنگ ہر اک شک ماہ کو

As all those *lovely young men* were eager to fight.

غصے سے آفتاب ہوئے مہ وٹوں کے رنگ

On account of anger, their *moon-like faces* shone like the sun.

کہتے تھے نیچے لئے وہ غیرت ستر

Holding the daggers, said those young men *more lovely than the moon*.

یہ سن کے خادموں کو پکارا وہ مہ جبیں

Having said this, that *moon-faced young man* called out for his followers.

دولاکھ سے نظر کسی غازی کی لڑ گئی . بل کھا کے زلفِ مَنح پہ کسی کے بکھر گئی

*The eye of a hero encountered (cast amorous glances on) those of a whole host,
The ringlet twisted and spread itself on the face of another (warrior).*

ہیں گردِ بیا بیاں سے اٹے گیسوئے پر خم

The twisted ringlets are filled with the dust of the desert.

ہنس کے عباسؑ نے فرمایا کہ اے غیرتِ ماہ

Abbas smiled and said: O you more beautiful than the moon!

Nor is his psychology always trustworthy. The whole speech in which the ailing Sughra supplicates her elders to be allowed to accompany the family to Syria is in a false key. With her calculated effects, she is far too clever, far too knowing, for a child. But then the children who lisp the wisdom of their elders and wallow in sentiments, have always been dear to the heart of the groundlings, and how could Anīs present her otherwise than he did? Anīs has a flair for pathos, but in his desire to extract the last drop of tears from his hysterical listeners, he does not know where sentiment ends and sentimentalism begins. Again, if realism is the touchstone of good poetry, it is not easy to see why a loving child should borrow a word from the servant's hall and call herself a *laundi* (slave girl), or make the following sentimental appeal to her infant brother in the cot:

بیچس ہوں کوئی میرا مددگار نہیں ہے تم ہو سوتھیں طاقتِ گفتار نہیں ہے

I am forlorn and helpless,

You do feel for me, but you do not possess the power of speech.

All that we can say in his defence is that he was driven to these and similar devices to achieve pathos. But what of the quality of the pathos thus achieved?

I have said that the function of the *marsiya* is to make an extraordinary demand on the lachrymal glands of the listeners, and Anīs does not care if he has to sacrifice the dignity of his hero to gain that end. All this shows that in a *marsiya* everything must bend to that supreme end—an occasion for tearfulness.

With these reservations, Anīs is capable of rising with his theme.

He has a sound grasp of character, and his style, at its best, is simple, clear, vigorous, and moving. His vocabulary is rich, and he seldom uses it for mere display. His pathos is often genuine, though it lacks austerity. Some of his images have almost a Miltonic ring:

مرحب تھا کفر و شرک میں طاقت میں گویو تھا گھوڑے پہ تھا شقی کہ پہاڑی پہ دیو تھا

Marhab he was in impiety and irreligion, and Gev in might,
On horseback this villain looked like a giant on a hill.

اک گھٹا چھا گئی ڈھالوں سے ریکاروں کی برق ہر صف میں چکنے لگی تلواروں کی

The shields of the wicked darkened the sky,
The lightning of swords began to shine in each battle line.

یوں صُوح کے طائر سرفتن چھوڑ کے بھاگے جیسے کوئی بھونچال میں گھر چھوڑ کے بھاگے

The birds of the soul rushed headlong from their bodies,
Even as one flies from his house in an earthquake.

اڑ کر گرمی زمیں پہ سناں سن تکان سے گرتا ہے جیسے تیر سحاب آسمان سے

The spear flew and struck the earth
With the speed and violence of a meteor from the sky.

آیا گیا فرس جو سمٹ کر ادھر ادھر ڈھالوں کا ابرہ گیا پھٹ کر ادھر ادھر

As the charger cut its way through the ranks of the enemy,
The dark cloud of the shields was rent here and there.

The following show his feeling for nature:

پتے بزرگ چہرہ مدقوق زرد تھے

The leaves were pale like the face of one suffering from a wasting disease.

ہم لوگ زمانے میں سحاب لب بُو ہیں

We, in the world, are like bubbles on the brink of a stream.

کھلتی تھیں اور سبابوں کی آنکھیں جھپکتی تھیں

The eyes of the bubbles opened and twinkled.

تھی دشت کر بلا کی زمیں رشکِ آسماں تھا دُور دُور تک شبِ مہتاب کا سماں
پھینکے ہوئے ستاروں پہ زروں کا تھا گام نہر فرات بیچ میں تھی مثلِ کمکشاں

The wasteland of Karbalā was beautiful like the sky;
Far and wide spread the glory of moonlight;
The bright stars looked like so many shining particles,
And in between them the Euphrates ran like the Milky Way.

The following bears witness to his sympathetic observation:

تھا فرطِ غش سے ننھا سا منکا ڈھلا ہوا بانڈھے ہوئے تھا مٹھیاں اور منہ کھلا ہوا

On account of excessive pain the tiny vertebrae of its neck was bent;
Its fists were clenched, and the mouth was open.

His versification is smooth and swift, and though often impeded by obstinate rhymes, he succeeds in moulding them to his requirements, instead of following their lead carelessly or helplessly. He has an intuitive grasp of the mind and feelings of his characters, and generally avoids what is false or meretricious in diction, character, or sentiment. Anīs falls short of the poetry of a very high order because he was cramped by the taste and requirements of his age. It is instructive to find how easily he succumbs to the reigning taste for word-play and the tasteless figures of speech which were popular in his day. He excels in narrative and description, and here, whatever his theme—irony, pathos, tragedy, landscape, battle-piece—he, at his best, is always adequate.

The battle that has been fought for over half a century now over the relative merits of Anīs and Dabīr, and the reasons adduced on both sides to establish the superiority of one over the other, is not due to personal loyalties to one poet or the other. Rather this loyalty is itself the result of what poetry is, or should be, in the mind of the belligerents. It represents the clash of two rival theories of which Anīs and Dabīr are the best exemplars. In their own day, they were the 'mighty opposites', and loyalty to one meant hostility or a tacit or open disapproval of the other. So extreme was this rivalry that the two masters, it is said, seldom recited verses in the same assembly. Had they done so, the result would have been a pandemonium.

Since Shiblī fired his last shot in his *Muwāzana* on behalf of Anīs,

criticism has been generally veering round to his views. In Shibli's thesis there is no wilful detraction. In tilting at Dabīr, he was tilting at what he rightly considered to be no poetry or very bad poetry, and his expression of opinion, as we know, was inclined to be categorical. This change in the general outlook is not because of Shibli's book. His book is rather a symptom of the ascendancy of a point of view which has been finding an increasing acceptance with us since we have gone to school to Europe for our literary and critical standards. One wishes he had written the book with more balance, but the champion and the advocate in him usually got the better of the judge in him.

And now a few words about Anīs and Dabīr as poets.

Given a certain story capable of poetic treatment, what is the best way of telling it? This, of course, will differ with different poets. But ruling out for the time being personal factors, there is no doubt that the story that is told simply and directly, and in which ornament and scholarship are strictly subordinated to the supreme purpose of communication, will, today, be preferred to a story in which style, as a mere decorative adjunct, usurps the place of the subject-matter. Anīs and Dabīr are representatives of two different schools. With the one, the story to be told, or the emotion to be communicated, is everything; the story must be clearly told, the emotion vividly communicated. With the other, they are only means to an end. He will use the story or the emotion for the fanciful embroideries he can work on it. He believes that the direct expression of emotions or the straightforward narration of a story is merely of secondary importance. The first thing is the dexterous and subtle use of language, the maximum use of its associative values, i.e. word-play, the display of recondite learning, and last, though not least, the most violent type of exaggeration. It may be said that what is an exception with Dabīr is the rule with Anīs, and what is the rule with Anīs is the exception with Dabīr. In his own day Dabīr had a large following, but the changing taste of the day has robbed him of his halo. There are not a few who have tried to rehabilitate his fading reputation by citing passages of straightforward and moving narrative from him; but such passages, it must be admitted, are neither many nor long. On the whole, in the poetry of Dabīr you cannot see the forest for the trees. It sounds very impressive and passionate, but in reality it is neither one nor the other. It is a good example of 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. With Dabīr the style is not a diaphanous drapery as it is with Anīs, revealing the true proportions of the body

of thought beneath. It is rather a cloth of gold, heavy and stiff, which can stand by itself and requires no body to support it. The same is true of his nature poetry. It is a string of conceits and evokes no pictures. He has an agile fancy, but more often than not it is a mere intruder, and a very vexatious one at that.

Even during the lifetime of Anīs and Dabīr, the *marsiya* had grown stereotyped and become exhausted. All that could be said on the theme had been said by them. The poets who followed them found themselves hindered by a powerful tradition, and all they could do was to ring changes on an overworked theme. They could not give it a new orientation, and have therefore suffered the fate of those who grow under the shadow of a dominant and unchanging convention.

X

THE AGE OF GHĀLIB

THE sociological pattern presented by the period on which we are now entering is relatively more complex than that of the periods already studied. When the British entered Delhi as victors in 1802, the Mughal rule, or whatever little of it was left, may, for all practical purposes, be said to have come to an end. Yet, for political reasons, the old framework was allowed to linger for another fifty years. Among the new factors, there was, in the first instance, the influence of British civilization, making itself felt slowly but steadily by dint of its economic and political machinery, and more particularly through its educational system. True, this influence was confined to a very small minority, but it possessed potentialities for expansion and domination. Side by side with this Westernizing influence, there was a strong religious movement, sponsored by the leading Muslim theologians, which aimed at infusing a new life into Islam by purifying it of its excrescences. Both these new values I am reserving for a later discussion.¹ All I need point out here is that the force which lay behind the poetry of the age is exclusively represented by Mughal civilization, and we will be well advised to study the poets of the period with the new values mentioned above completely left out. If it be asked: Is it not a fact that Ghālib saw, as through a glass darkly, the dynamic character of British civilization?² I shall say, yes, in a general way and intermittently; but it is undeniable that he never felt the impact of British civilization, as a poet. He was, and remained till the end, a product of Mughal civilization. As regards Momin, despite his bohemianism, he was interested in the religious movement mentioned above;³ but he too, like Ghālib, was a poet of the old order. Ghālib, Momin, and Zauq, to mention only the leading poets of the period, had no kinship with the new order; they lived and moved and had their being in a perfectly insulated medium, impervious to British civilization, and should be treated as the last representatives of the aristocratic tradition represented by Mughal civilization.

During the whole of this period, Lucknow continued to be the

arbiter of taste in poetry. Ghālib and Momin cut across the reigning taste by modelling their poetry on the latter-day Persian poets, whom I have called the Persian 'metaphysicals'. But the essentially popular muse of Zauq eagerly followed the fashions in vogue at Lucknow. Not that the Lucknow poets of the day in any way excelled Zauq; but either because of his docile temperament, or because, with the political decline of Delhi, the leadership in arts and literature had passed on to Lucknow and the poets there were looked up to as models of excellence, he decided to pay them the compliment of imitating their style.

Shaikh Muhammad Ibrāhīm Zauq was born in 1789, the son of Shaikh Muhammad Ramzān, an ex-soldier in the employment of Nawab Lutf 'Alī Khān. He had his early schooling with Hāfiz Ghulām Rasūl, a nondescript teacher in Delhi. From him he went over to Shāh Nasīr;⁴ but the apprenticeship was cut short by a growing estrangement which developed into open rivalry and hostility. He got his first opening in life when Shāh Nasīr left for the Deccan and he was installed as the poetic teacher of the heir-apparent on Rs. four per mensem. A few years after he was decorated with the title of Khāqānī-e-Hind. He now came to be considered as one of the leading poets in Delhi, but his emoluments were incommensurate with his position or fame as a poet. He had nothing to fall back upon except the pittance from the Fort, which rose by slow degrees to Rs. 100 per mensem towards the end of his life. Zauq, who had seen around him the phenomenal rise of the courtiers and their pride and insolence, was made to feel to the full the neglect into which letters had fallen in his day, and has written feelingly of it, as in the following:

یوں پھر میں اہل کمال آشفقتہ حال افسوس ہے
اے کمال افسوس ہے تجھ پر کمال افسوس ہے

What a pity, that the accomplished should go about distracted in this way!
I pity you O perfection! I perfectly pity you!

When at last there came an opportunity for him to mend his fortune, he did not avail himself of it. This was an invitation to the

Deccan by Dīvān Chaman Lāl, Madār-ul-Mahām, Haidarābād. He seems to have given it careful consideration, but the love of Delhi and his natural contentment prevailed over the alluring prospect of riches in a distant land. The tussle between his ambition and contentment is visualized in some of his verses.

3

Zauq's reputation today is in a parlous state. The dizzy eminence on which he was placed by Āzād in his *Āb-e-Hayāt*, the false glamour of laureateship, and the extraordinary vogue he enjoyed in his own day, were bound, in due course, to provoke a reaction. As it is, these natural and inevitable factors have been very much augmented and accelerated. The almost idolatrous admiration for Ghālib which began in the twenties has taken the form of an equally insane detraction of Zauq. Ghālib's position has been fully vindicated by a host of learned critics, and it would do nobody any harm, perhaps it would clarify matters, if a mild voice were raised on behalf of the dethroned laureate.

The most striking feature of Zauq is the popular nature of his muse. With an instinctive knowledge of the taste and requirements of his contemporaries, he met them halfway, supplying with a prodigal hand what they had come to value as poetry. Zauq sums up all that his age had stood for—its fads and fashions, its love of language for its own sake, its paucity of ideas, its colourless morality, its love of virtuosity. Lucknow was then the arbiter of taste and fashion. After a brief struggle, Delhi had bowed before the logic of facts. With an instinct for popularity, Zauq went the way of least resistance and reproduced in his verse the peculiarities of the Lucknow school. It is not to be understood that he deliberately sacrificed his own ideals to cater for the ordinary man; he was in full sympathy with the popular trends of his day. It did not involve any effort or struggle, adjustment or sacrifice; he was essentially of the people and therefore wrote for them.

Let us study this aspect of his mind with Āzād as our guide.

In the beginning he wrote in Mirza's [Sauda] style. This was the time when he was trying conclusions with Shāh Nasīr, whose style is the same as Sauda's, and he adopted the latter's style. Consequently, you find in him the same difficult forms, graceful constructions, fresh phrases, loftiness of thought and grandeur of language. A little later, he was introduced to the Nawab [Ma'rūf] and also gained access to the heir-apparent's court.

Ma'rūf was an old man, mature in taste and simple and pious in life. To suit his mind he had to cultivate a taste for mysticism and deep feelings. The young heir-apparent, on the other hand, liked the style of Jur'at. The poems of Jur'at, Sayyid Insha, and Mus-hafī kept pouring in from Lucknow, and he had to correct the heir-apparent's *ghazals* in conformity with their style. The result was that his *ghazals* were a bouquet of flowers of different colours . . . He spoke respectfully of Mīr, Mirza, Dard, Mus-hafī, and Jur'at, but those who can judge know that he had a special aptitude for Mirza's style.⁵

This is a very sound account of the influences that were brought to bear on his mind. Zauq's muse was excessively hospitable and made no distinctions between high and low. But though intent on erecting a poetic pantheon in which there should be a niche for each literary god, he had dedicated the temple to one supreme deity—Sauda. Like him his poetry suffers from a paucity of inspiration; like him he excels in a certain magnificence and dexterous manipulation of language; like him he strives to compose long *ghazals* with intractable rhymes; like him, again, his forte is the *qasīda*. So far their resemblances. The differences between them may be summed up as follows: the former is massive and rugged even to harshness, while Zauq is more refined and polished in language. This is because half a century of cultivation had brought the language to a degree of polish and suppleness that was not possible in the age of Mīr and Sauda. Temperamentally, too, no two poets could be more different. Sauda was pugnacious, irritable, and unsparing of his critics and enemies. Zauq was peaceful and forbearing, and never soiled his hands with the satire. This peaceful disposition, morally an asset, was poetically a drawback; for poetry presupposes vitality, energy, and passion, and Zauq was deficient in them. He did not have a poetic temperament. Poetry, therefore, meant to him formal excellence; it meant virtuosity, the skilful versification of the commonplaces of thought and feeling, and word-play; it also meant smoothness and flexibility. Of these graces he is very liberal; yet all these verbal pyrotechnics are generally for their own sake. His thought, seldom very original, is secondary to language. So obvious are these features that the reader can easily verify them for himself.

Quite a large part of his poetry is didactic or homiletic—another concession to the ordinary man. The peculiar form of poetry in which he excels is *tamsīliya* or 'illustrative' poetry. This part of his poetry has been unnecessarily arraigned by cavillers on the ground that it is intellectual and not emotional. No doubt poetry, as we take

it today, is feeling before everything else; but poets are not wanting who have made morality or truth interesting by investing it with metrical charm. Such a poetry is a kind apart; it is to be judged by the rules peculiar to it and not by a captious reference to another type of poetry. His exemplar here is Sauda; and in the neat and meticulous summing up of thought, commonplace though it be, he is not inferior to him or any other poet of the kind. A few examples will suffice.

بُجوں دانہ روئیدہ تہ سنگ ہمارا سرزیرِ گراں بارالم اٹھ نہیں سکتا

Like a grain sown beneath a stone,
I cannot lift my head from under the heavy weight of affliction

بدخصلتوں کو کرتا ہے بالانشین فلک اونچی ہے ایشیانہ زراغ و زغن کی شاخ

It is heaven's wont to elevate the evil-minded,
For behold, how high the boughs are on which the kites and crows perch!

دیکھ چھوٹوں کو ہے اللہ بڑائی دیتا آسماں آنکھ کے تل میں بے دکھائی دیتا

Behold, how God bestoweth greatness on the small,
The tiny pupil of the eye reflects the sky.

ہو پاکدامنوں کو خلیش گر سے کیا خطر کھٹکا نہیں نگاہ کو مزگاں کے خار کا

Why should the pure dread the ill-disposed?
The eyesight apprehends no danger from the thorn-like eyelashes.

کب لباسِ دُنوی میں چھپتے ہیں روشن ضمیر جامہٴ فانوس میں بھی شعلہٴ عُریاں ہی رہا

The luminous-minded do not miss recognition even though they don the
worldly guise,
The flame is visible even though it is behind the curtain of the glass-shade.

پھرتا ہے یلِ حوادث سے کوئی مردوں کا موٹہ شیر سیدھا تیرتا ہے وقتِ رفتن آب میں

When have the valiant ever turned away from the surging waves of
adversity,
The lion swims straight while fording a stream.

Again, what a large number of sayings, maxims, wise saws and modern instances, popular customs, superstitions, he has inter-

woven into the texture of his verse! For this reason as well as for those given above, he is very quotable. Few poets have entered the fabric of the spoken language so much as Zauq. His verses are on the lips of thousands who may never have heard his name.

جھوٹ ہی جانو کلام اُس دشمنِ ایمان کا پہن کر جامہ بھی وہ آئے اگر تیراں کا

'Take but as false the words of that enemy of faith,
Even though he appears arrayed in a garment made of the leaves of the
Koran.

جدا ہوں یا ر سے ہم اور نہوں رقیب جدا بے اپنا اپنا مقدر جدا نصیب جدا

I have been parted from my friend whilst my rivals are not;
Each one of us has his own predestined lot, his predetermined portion.

فراقِ خلد سے گندم ہے سینہ چاک اتیک اٹھی ہونہ وطن سے کوئی غریب جدا

For being exiled from paradise the wheat grain still bears on its bosom the
ancient rent,
O God, may no helpless one be ever parted from his home!

آدمیت اور نشے ہے علم ہے کچھ اور چیز کتنا طوطے کو پڑھایا پر وہ حیوان ہی رہا

Humanity is one thing, and scholarship quite another,
Teach a parrot to thy utmost; it will ever remain a parrot (animal).

”اِس رنگہ کے زخم رسیدوں میں مل گیا یہ بھی لہو لگا کے شہیدوں میں مل گیا

Lo! The rose has joined that fairy's wounded lovers,
Besmearing itself with blood, this impostor, too, has joined the company
of martyrs.

اے ذوقِ تکلف میں ہے تکلیفِ سرسرا آرام میں وہ ہے جو تکلف نہیں کرتا

O Zauq! Verily formalism causeth discomfort;
Happy is he who does not practise formalism.

قسمت ہی سے لاچار ہوں اے ذوقِ گزہ ہر فن میں ہوں میں طاق مجھے کیا نہیں آتا

Luck hath failed me, O Zauq,
Else I am the master of all arts. What is there that I do not know?

زاهد شراب پینے سے کافر ہوا میں کہوں کیا ڈیڑھ چلو پانی میں ایمان بہ گیا

Thou holy man! How can I turn infidel by tipping wine?
Say, hath my faith been swamped by a handful or so of a liquid?

یاں تک عدو زمانہ ہے مردِ دلیر کا بچھے ہیں مونہہ تھکا رکھے پر بھی شیر کا

So hostile is the world to the brave
That they must scorch the face of a lion after he hath been struck dead in
the chase.

Nor is he altogether without genuine emotions. I wonder if the love bird ever sang to him; but this much is certain, that advancing years made him increasingly conscious of the pathos of life. The stock themes of Urdu poetry, old but eternal—passivity, resignation, the wistfulness of our brief sojourn here below—acquire an added pathos and freshness on account of the simplicity and directness of his treatment. Zauq is not without deep feelings, as is generally thought; his gift of expression conceals their depth. There is an idea abroad that all that is deep is also difficult. Of the fallacy of this view the best of Zauq is a standing refutation.

It would be idle to claim anything more than this for him. The greater part of his verse is like an arid landscape without scent or savour. But a traveller, unless he be too disdainful, will find in it, here and there, flowers as grateful to sight as to smell; flowers that breathe the wistful charm of medieval thought; and since ages are but labels and human nature the same in all times, they are as moving today as they were in the past. Here are a few examples:

ہے مقام زندگی زیرِ دمِ شمشیرِ مرگ ہو گیا جس طرح کوئی دم گزارا ہو گیا

Life has its sojourn beneath the edge of the sword of death,
Therefore however this brief span is lived, is well lived.

ذوقِ اس بحرِ فنا میں کھشتی کمرِ رواں جس جگہ پر جا لگی وہ ہی کنارہ ہو گیا

O Zauq! Wherever on the ocean of mortality, this ever-moving bark of Life
will finally touch, that place will become its final shore.

بنگامہ گرم ہستی ناپائیدار کا چشمک ہے برق کی کہ تبسم شرار کا

The feverish activities of this transient world
Are no more enduring than the flash of lightning or the glow of a spark.

وقتِ پیری شباب کی باتیں ایسی ہیں جیسی خواب کی باتیں

The memory of youthful days in old age
Is like the memory of a vanished dream.

لائی حیات آئے قضا لے چلی چلے اپنی خوشی نہ آئے نہ اپنی خوشی چلے

We came here because Life brought us here; we left here because Death
bore us back,
We neither came here nor left of our own accord.

بہتر تو ہے یہی کہ نہ دُنیا سے دل لگے پر کیا کریں جو کام نہ بے دل لگی چلے

Meet it is that the heart be not bound to the world,
But what, if we cannot do without some sort of interest in it!

دُنیا نے کس راہِ فنا میں دیا ہے ساتھ تم بھی چلے چلو یونہی جب تک چلی چلے

On the path of mortality to whom hath the world ever offered comradeship;
Avail thyself, therefore, of its company as long as it chooses to offer it to thee.

جاتے ہوئے شوق میں ہیں سچ من سے ذوق
اپنی بلا سے بادِ صبا اب کبھی سیلے

O Zauq, we are leaving the garden of this world full of passionate longings,
It does not concern us in the least whether or no the morning breeze henceforth bloweth here.

کہانیاں ہیں حکایاتِ خضر و آبِ بہتا بقا کا ذکر ہے کیا اس جہانِ فانی میں

The tales of the Water of Immortality and its discoverer, Khizr, are mere legends;
Why talk of immortality in this mortal world!

نہیں خضاب سے مطلب مگر یہ موتے سفید سیاہ پوش ہوئے ماتم جوانی میں

The hair-dye serves no other purpose except that the grey hair
Hath donned a sable robe in mourning for the departed youth.

Āzād's somewhat eccentric exclusion of Hakīm Muhammad Khān Momin from his literary Parnassus, *Āb-e-Hayāt*, and the subsequent grudging admission of him to it, has ranked him among the martyrs. But in spite of all the alarums and excursions in his favour his reputation has not risen above a half-tide. Is this because he is caviare to the multitude, or, in Milton's words, requires a fit audience though few? His occasional obscurity may lend colour to this view, but it is far from being the sole or even the chief reason. In my opinion, Momin is not appreciated by the reader today because he appeals to a taste that is rapidly on the decline.

Momin's ancestors had migrated to India from Kashmīr. His father, Hakīm Ghulām Nabī, was a physician of note and was connected with the Imperial court. Momin was born in 1800 and was given that name at the instance of his father's spiritual guide, Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz. His education had been thorough-going and systematic, as is proved by the embarrassing profusion of technical terms pertaining to medicine, astronomy, mathematics, music, etc., in his *qasīdas*. In his youth he had been a man of pleasure. He forswore his bohemian ways when he became a disciple of Sayyid Ahmad of Rāe Brelī, but he was far too human to sink into a dour puritan. The fruits of his conversion can be studied in his *Masnavī-e-Jihādīyya* and a few other pieces. His secure financial position, derived from pensions from the Fort and the British, saved him from seeking preferment from the rich or exercising his calling as a physician in a professional capacity, and he lived throughout in great style as a man of means. He died in 1851.

Momin's place in poetry will depend on what we take poetry to mean. Is it the spontaneous and forthright expression of one's feelings and thoughts in appropriate language? or is it merely a name for dressing up conventional feelings in an elaborately fanciful garb? Momin's poetry represents the decadent tradition in poetry which began with 'Urfī, Nazīrī, and Kalīm, and culminated in Bedil. He therefore represents the most sophisticated and artificial stage in the

decline of Urdu poetry. He has all the ingenuity and fanciful exaggeration of Sauda plus a passion for condensation and allusiveness, which conceal rather than reveal his thoughts. A few examples will illustrate his method.

ان نصیبوں پر کیا اختر شناس آسماں بھی کیا ستم ایجاد سے

What an irony of fate, says Momin, that he should be an astrologer; for now he would be able to forecast his misfortunes, and therefore suffer before they actually overtake him!

یہ عذرا امتحانِ جذبِ دل کیسا بکل آیا میں الزامِ اسکو دیتا تھا قصور اپنا بکل آیا

Momin who has accused the beloved of indifference is silenced with the retort that if his love had been true, it would have provoked a response in her heart. Her indifference, therefore, argues his lukewarm love.

ترکِ صنم بھی کم نہیں سوزِ جہیم سے مومنِ عنیمِ مال کا آغناز دکھینا

Momin forswears the love of the beloved for fear of hell in the life to come. But this renunciation is so painful that he is suffering all the tortures of hell here below.

دیکھ اپنا حالِ زار منجم ہوا رقیب تھا سازگار طالعِ ناساز دکھینا

The poet consults an astrologer about his success in love. The astrologer discovering that he was foredoomed to failure, and influenced, moreover, by his praise of the beloved, falls in love with her himself, becoming his rival, thereby. And so Momin's ill-luck paves the way for the good luck of the astrologer!

Two things are obvious from the above examples. First, there are no genuine emotions involved in the verses; the attitude is cold, ironic; it is all wit and no passion. Secondly, each line tells a compressed story. The poet puts together a number of hints which, provided they are rightly pieced together, will guide one to his meaning. If the reader can follow the poet's lead successfully, there will be a certain amount of admiration for his power of suggestion

and compression; for his intellectual powers. But more often than not, the reader, unaccustomed to this literary shorthand, will feel lost. For many readers the greater part of Momin's poetry is like a riddle to which no key is available.

Momin has often been compared by his admirers with Ghālib to the disadvantage of the latter.⁶ Their only common feature, to my mind, is their 'metaphysical' fancy. Ghālib's mind, as I shall explain in a later section, has many facets. He has pathos, wit, irony, humour, and a remarkable capacity for thought. Momin's poetry is wholly erotic. Compared with Ghālib his mind is parochial. It is contended that Momin has deliberately isolated himself from other fields of experience and singled out love as his theme. But what is lauded as renunciation may in reality be a genuine limitation. Confined to the limited space and narrow walls of his temperament, he had probably no vision of the world beyond it. Another difference between them should also be emphasized. Quite early in life, Ghālib broke away from the thralldom to his ingenious fancy and wrote poetry that is as simple as it is deep. Indeed, as time passed, he freed himself more and more. Momin's poetry is with a few exceptions uniformly subtle: it shows no development.

To conclude, Momin's mind is strongly 'metaphysical'. He has a passion for the tortuous, far-fetched, intricate, ingenious, and recondite. Some of his verses are so compressed that they leave one groping in the dark. His *qasidas* are so overlaid with scholarship and are so full of out-of-the-way allusions that one must have something of the scholarship of the poet himself to understand them. But suppose you penetrate through the thicket of his obsolete learning, what do you get? Certainly not what you get in Browning or Donne. There is no fount of feeling behind his subtlety. He writes with the head, not the heart, and behind the impenetrable garb of his scholarship there lurks the skeleton of a conceit. His best points are his ironic wit and vivacity. The following *ghazal* is among his best, and one wishes that he had written more often in this strain:

ہے بواہوسوں پر بھی ستم ناز تو دکھیو	آنکھوں سے جیا ٹپکے ہے انداز تو دکھیو
اس عشقِ نوشِ انجام کا آغاز تو دکھیو	اُس بُت کے لئے میں ہوں عور سے گُزرا
طرزِ نیکِ چشمِ فوسوں ساز تو دکھیو	چشمکِ میری وحشت پہ ہے کیا حضرتِ ناصح

کم طالعی عاشق جانِ باز تو دیکھو اربابِ ہوس ہمارے بھی جان نہ کھیلے
 بدنامی عشاق کا اعزاز تو دیکھو مجلس میں مرے ذکر کے آتے ہی اٹھو وہ
 منظور ہے یہاں نہ ہے راز تو دیکھو محفل میں تم اغیار کو دُورِ دیدہ نظر سے
 شعلہ سا چمک جائے ہے آواز تو دیکھو اُسِ بغیرتِ ناہید کی ہر تان ہے پیک
 اس یوسفِ بے درد کا اعجاز تو دیکھو دیں پاکئی دامن کی گواہی میرے آنسو
 جنت میں بھی مومن نہ ملا ہائے جہنم سے
 جو راجلِ تفرستہ پرداز تو دیکھو

Eyes brimful of modesty—O what grace they shed!
Her cruelty is extended even to her vulgar admirers. O what elegance!

Led by my love for her, I decided to forgo the promised houri in heaven;
Mark the beginning of this happy-ending love affair!

Why do you chide me for my madness, O friend!
Note first the bewitching glance of that magical eye!

The rejected lovers (whose love was selfish) in desperation laid down their
lives,
Look at the misfortune of the true lovers!

At the bare mention of my name she got up (to go),
Mark the honour done me on account of my notoriety as a lover!

By all means cast secret glances at my rivals in the assembly—
If it is your wish that your secret should not remain hidden!

Every *tān* of that Venus-like beauty is like a flash of fire,
It leaps up like a flame—O what a marvellous voice!

My tears bear testimony to her chastity,
Look at the miracle of that heartless Joseph!

Even in paradise Momin was not destined to meet the idols (the beautiful
ones)
Look at the cruelty of the disuniting death!

Mirza Asadullah Khān, surnamed Ghālib, was born on 27 December 1797, in Āgra. His father, Mirza ‘Abdullah, an officer in the Rāmpur army, dying during a punitive expedition, Ghālib, who was then hardly five, became the ward, first, of his uncle Nasrullah Khān, a cavalry officer in the British army, and on his death, four years later, that of his brother-in-law, Nawab Āhmad Bakhsh, recognized by the British Government as the guardian of the former’s family. Though nominally a ward of the Nawab, Ghālib passed his childhood and youth under the roof of his maternal grand-uncle in Āgra, in a state of sumptuous ease. As a result of this early freedom, he plunged into youthful excesses and low company, and had, by his own account, his fill of the fashionable vices of the day. These costly and extravagant habits weighed heavily on him in later life, when, in reduced circumstances, he had to fend for himself as best he could.

Ghālib’s early escapades have lent colour to the view that his education must have been neglected. But this opinion does not seem to be correct. Poetry was then considered as one of the necessary accomplishments of the gentry, and Ghālib, who is said to have begun writing in the difficult style of Bedil at twelve or so, must have gone through a course of regular training early in life. By his own account, the chief formative influence in his life, so far as education was concerned, was that of Hurmuz (‘Abdus-Samad), a Zoroastrian convert, who stayed with him as his guest for some two years and introduced him to Persian literature, mythology and history. Later on, Ghālib was wont to treat this teacher of his as an imaginary figure, invented to silence the critics who ascribed his literary oddities to the absence of a regular literary training.⁷ This mild expression of vanity has been made into a serious ground for his moral arraignment by Dr. ‘Abdul Latīf.⁸ Without going into the ethical implications of the case, it is enough to point out that Ghālib, as his correspondence shows, continued to revere the memory of his teacher; nor was he far wrong in appropriating some praise for his self-education. It is hard to believe that such competent scholarship as Ghālib’s could have been acquired in a year or two of casual study at a time when, as we learn from his correspondence, he was much more interested in chess, kite-flying, and other boyish sports than books. Ghālib was essentially a self-taught man, and there is no escaping the idea that, at some stage in his youth, he

must have employed himself diligently to the improvement of his mind.

The year 1826 came as a turning-point in his life. He had been for some time in straitened circumstances, and came to believe that the Nawab had all along withheld a part of the pension to which he was entitled as a member of his uncle's family. This led to a prolonged lawsuit, which being decided against him in 1831, left him almost a ruined man. He had acquired expensive habits which his meagre pension of Rs. sixty-two or so per mensem did not enable him to support, and he was involved in serious financial difficulties. The shadow of the debtor's prison hung over him, and his peace of mind was gone for ever. Henceforth, we find him making desperate efforts to add to his emoluments by seeking preferment at court; but the Emperor who had taken a dislike to him for some political reasons (which we need not go into in this brief sketch), continued to look askance at him; and it was only in 1850, when he was already an old man, that he relented so far as to honour him with a title and appoint him as Royal Historiographer on Rs. fifty per mensem. A few years before, in 1847, he had been made to taste the bitterness of life to the dregs by being imprisoned for gambling at the report of a malicious police inspector. He was released before he had served his term, at the intercession of some influential friends, but his heart was broken by the humiliation. In 1854, on Zauq's death, he was appointed poetic preceptor to the Emperor, but these small mercies disappeared with the Mutiny. His troubles now reached their climax. His pension was withdrawn and for some time he lived precariously by selling his household effects. Two years after the Mutiny, the Nawab of Rāmpur bestowed upon him a stipend of Rs. 100 per mensem for life. A year after, his pension was restored, probably at the intercession of Sayyid Ahmad, and he was enabled to pass his last days in comparative ease, dying on 15 February 1869.

The idealistic view of Ghālib the man, curiously enough, thought by some to be the necessary adjunct to his poetic achievement, and based on nothing better than an anecdote or two and a few of his verses, is not supported by facts. His letters to the Nawab of Rāmpur, published in 1937, are typically oriental and courtier-like in their

fulsome adulation and are a bitter pill to swallow for his admirers. Reviewing the book Dr. 'Abdul Haq wrote:

In some of these letters he has implored monetary help to meet his liabilities in such words as are incompatible with the dignity of a great poet, and it is possible that some readers should resent their publication and consider them to be a slur on their beloved poet. But intelligent admiration demands that we should study both sides of his character, good and bad, as truthfully and honestly as possible.⁹

Even a casual study of these letters would convince any disinterested person that the man who wrote:

بندگی میں بھی وہ آزادہ و خود پس میں کہ ہم اُلٹے پھر آئے در کعبہ اگر روانہ ہوا

Even in adoration I am so intent on my self-respect
That I would retrace my footsteps if I did not find the door of the Ka'ba open.

seldom tried to follow this counsel of perfection in the practical affairs of life.

The more carefully Ghālib's correspondence is studied, the more evident it becomes that he was essentially a man of the world. There was very little of the hero or the hero-worshipper in him. An egoist by temperament, like most poets and artists, he was very little endowed either with enthusiasm or loyalty. Of him it may be said that he knew only one hero—Ghālib—and he worshipped him with unremitting assiduity. That he developed a sensitiveness to the wrongs and sufferings of his community after the Mutiny, his letters fully establish. But a few years before the Mutiny he had felt no qualms in transferring his allegiance to the British on learning that the East India Company had decided to terminate the Mughal dynasty on Bahādur Shāh's demise. He had no sooner come to know of this than he decided to cement friendly relations with the British, and composing a *qasīda* in praise of Queen Victoria, forwarded it to Lord Canning with the request that, as a leading poet, he might be honoured with 'title, robe of honour, and pension'.¹⁰ After the Mutiny, when he was a political suspect and his pension had been withdrawn, he plied Lord Canning with a large number of *qasīdas*, and did not desist until he was told in unequivocal terms 'not to send such things to him in future'.¹¹

From the above it is possible to draw one inference only—that Ghālib was an opportunist and was not troubled with feelings and

sentiments. He held that ideals were for men and not men for ideals, and were on the whole a pretty disagreeable thing if your object was to get on in life. The desperate efforts he made for the restoration of his pension, the pertinacity with which he courted the officials, the rebuffs he encountered in his attempts to contact them—all show that he was a practical man with an eye to the main chance. Ghālib had a genius for perseverance. He had set his heart on being admitted to the Imperial court, and undeterred by Bahādur Shāh's coldness, he plied him with *qasīda* after *qasīda*, until he had gained his object. And the motive was self-love. It was not enough for him to know that his genius as a poet had been recognized by the leading men of the day. It must be ratified by the Emperor; he must have his place by the side of his hated rival Zauq, who, he believed, had come between him and preferment at court. Ghālib's self-esteem sometimes bordered on the comic. I wonder if there is any other poet of equal fame or merit who strove so much to be in the lime-light, or took such a childish delight in titles, distinctions, robes of honour, invitations to durbars, or plumed himself so much on his contacts with the official world. He smacks his lips over them in his correspondence and recounts them to his friends with elaborate unction. When he was bespattered with mud by a critic for his attack on the author of *Burhān-e-Qāti'*, what pained him most was that he (the critic) had been wanting in respect to a titled person who stood well with the Government.

All the abusive epithets that exist in the language have been showered by him on me. He should have realized that even if I am not a poet and scholar, I hold, at least, a distinguished position among the gentry and aristocracy. I am an honourable man, nobly descended, and on friendly terms with the Indian gentry, chiefs, and mahārājas. I have been recognized as *Raīs-Zāda* by the Government, awarded the title of *Najm-ud-Daula* by the Emperor, and addressed as *Khān Sāhib* and *Very Dear Friend* by the Government. Did he ever think: Why should I call him *insane, dog, ass*, when he is addressed as *Khān Sāhib* by the Government? In reality this is putting a slight on the Government, nobility, and gentry of India.¹²

We would be tempted to treat Ghālib as the injured party in this controversy, if we did not know that he himself was by no means a model of forbearance as a controversialist. As regards the merits of the controversy, Ghālib's position was quite untenable. His contention was that no one could say the last word on Persian lexicography except Persian scholars. So far he was not far wrong. But being himself a Mughal and, therefore, as much an outsider as any

Indian scholar, what grounds had he, one wonders, for posing as an authority on the Persian language?

Interesting light is thrown on this aspect of his mind by his attitude towards the masses. He disliked the popular taste in poetry both as a scholar and an aristocrat. Yet what really gave point to his contempt for the masses was that they had failed to recognize his genius. His position was illogical. He deliberately cultivated a difficult style to rise above the rank and file of poets; and when the people failed or refused to respond to his style, he was angry with them for not doing him justice. No reprieve was to be given to them because they had injured his ego.

His twin weakness was envy, which often degenerated into a scathing contempt for his successful rival Zauq, whose plebeian taste often provoked him into saying very ungenerous things about him.¹³ Ghālib was what we would call a highbrow today, but I cannot withstand the conclusion that his vehement dislike of the popular element in poetry was enormously strengthened by his dislike of Zauq—the most popular poet of the age.

In stressing the less attractive side of the character of Ghālib my sole desire is to bring to light those subconscious traits which, as we shall see, largely determined his inner life and therefore his poetry. He had his good points no less; he had all the virtues of the aristocracy. His treatment of the poor was full of aristocratic condescension. Generous to a fault, he continued to support his servants and dependants even in his darkest days, with his usual cheerfulness and liberality. His eminence as a poet made him friends, and his wit, generosity, and courtly manners enabled him to retain them. *Noblesse oblige* was not a cultivated attitude with him, it was an instinct. Such was the amiable side of his character; but the other, the less amiable side, too, was no less pronounced. Ghālib could forgive a thousand things, but if you hurt his self-esteem, he pursued you with an ineradicable malignity. His range of vituperation was wide; the old sores continued to fester and were beyond time's healing touch. In his old age he came to contemplate life with some philosophic detachment; but he never forgave Zauq. As regards Qatīl,¹⁴ he completely forgot himself at the barest mention of his name, and then nothing was too strong or too coarse for him. And why? Because he had been cited as an authority against him in a *mushā'ara* in Calcutta.

To conclude: Ghālib was a man of the world, dowered with a genius for poetry. Beyond this, neither in his virtues nor in his vices

is there anything heroic. The only remarkable thing about him is his poetry. He was an accomplished courtier and had the virtues and defects peculiar to that class. As an astute man of the world he believed that he must get on in life and to this end he must stand well with those who could dispense patronage. He was always eager to make new contacts because they were useful.

The conventional character of the greater part of Urdu poetry makes it often difficult to know for certain the strictly personal element contained in it. In this respect, Ghālib is no exception to the general rule. His themes are the usual themes of Urdu poetry; and the fact that he made a deliberate departure from the style of his predecessors and contemporaries does not change the conventional nature of his poetry. At the same time, as in other poets, his *ghazals* are interspersed with intimately personal utterances; and it is in these alone that his inner life is to be sought. The rest is a masquerade; and the reader cannot be warned too often and too seriously against taking the greater part of his verse as a genuine expression of his mind.

It is equally important to remember that judged by the volume of his Persian verse and the just pride he took in it, Ghālib would be classed as a Persian poet. Urdu poetry was merely an accident in his career and forms a very small fraction of his works, having been written (barring his early poetry which terminated in 1821) during 1821-7, and 1847-57. His ripest years (1827-47) were given mainly to Persian. The post-Mutiny period is again one of Persian. He based his hope of poetic immortality on his Persian verse, as witness the gibe at 'Zauq —

فارسی میں تا بہ بینی نقشہائے رنگِ نگ بگذرا ز مجموعہٴ اُردو کہ بے رنگِ من است

Study my Persian poetry so that thou mayst find numerous many-coloured pictures;

Pass over my collection of Urdu verses because they are insipid and colourless.

I am pointing this out because I fear that by confining myself to his Urdu poetry, as I should and must, I shall be seriously delimiting my range of reference. His poetry, as the expression of his personality, is an indivisible whole, and an estimate based on a small

part of it may not only be incomplete but even misleading. And yet on account of the exigencies of this work as well as my ignorance of his Persian poetry, I must perforce make his Urdu poetry my chief guide, supplementing or checking my conclusions, whenever possible, by such pronouncements and citations as have been made available by those who have written on his Persian poetry.

Ghālib's outlook on life was essentially and overwhelmingly pagan. Salāh-ud-Dīn Khuda Bakhsh was right in comparing him with the German poet, Heine.¹⁵ He, too, would have said with the latter:

The fairer and happier generations . . . that will rise up and bloom in the atmosphere of a religion of pleasure, will smile sadly when they think of their poor ancestors, whose life was passed in melancholy abstinence from the joys of this beautiful earth, and who faded away into spectres, from the mortal compression which they put upon the warm and glowing emotions of the sense.¹⁶

Ghālib had no conscious theory of life to offer: he was more intent on living his life than on theorizing about it; but if there is one thing more than another that his life and poetry substantiate, and to which ample testimony is borne by those who knew him personally, it is that he yearned to have more and more of life and explore its possibilities for personal enjoyment. His attitude towards the hereafter, as is well known, was sceptical; and even if, occasionally, he was led to think of the rewards promised to the righteous, a class to which he emphatically did not belong, he decided to have the cash and let the credit go.

Yet the word 'pagan' as defined by Matthew Arnold (the ideal, cheerful, sensuous life¹⁷) is applicable to him only in a general way. The difference between a pagan strictly so called, and a modern pagan is this: the former led a life of the senses because he lived at a physical level; because neither by training nor by experience did he know of an attitude above or beyond it. He followed the senses, but there was nothing militant or revolutionary about his sense-worship; nor did it imply a conscious selection of an ideal from a tangle of conflicting motives. But between us and the old pagan world there lies, historically, the wide gulf of religious puritanism with its inhibitions and repressions, and a new set of values, ascetic or semi-ascetic. Paganism is in our blood; it is the voice of our deepest

nature, but during the last two thousand years or so the native sensuous impulse has been overlaid with successive layers of a restrictive morality. Consequently, today, paganism implies a revolt or a conscious repudiation of religious ideals. And this revolt is quite evident in Ghālib. Not only was he uncomfortable in the religious framework; he broke through it proclaiming aloud that he owed no allegiance to it. Nor was there a particle of mysticism in his temperament. It implies, among other things, a disbelief in the reality and, very often, the goodness of the world; and Ghālib knew no other reality and no other good. The world was in perfect accord with his deepest impulses. The note of revolt is struck quite stridently in these Persian verses:

خوئے آدم دارم آدم زاده ام آشکارا دم ز عصیاں مے نرم

I have inherited the nature of Adam and am descended from him,
I openly declare that I indulge in sins.

مگسہ خوردہ از اں فرقام کہ مبداند سوادِ خالِ مُخ یار داغِ عصیاں را

Do not upbraid me, because I belong to the sect
Which considers the stain of sin to be the beautiful mole on the cheek of
the beloved.

خوشا زندی و جوش زنده و دوشتر غلبش بہ لب خشکی چہ میری دسر ابستان مذہبا

Take delight in revelry, riotous passions, and luxurious living;
Why dost thou die of thirst in the mirage of religion?

شباب و زہد چہ ناقدر دانی ہستی است بلا بہ جان جوانانِ پارِ ریزد

Youth and piety—what a disparagement of the gift of life!
It is a calamity for the youthful pious.

اگر بہ بادہ بودمیل شاعر م نہ فقیہہ سخن چہ ننگ ز آلودہ دامنی دارو

If I am inclined towards wine I should not be censured; I am not a theologian but a poet;
Why should poetry be afraid of moral defilement?

رموزِ دین نشناسم دُرست و معذوم تہاد من عجبی و طریق من عربی است

I do not know the ways of religion, and I should be held excusable,
I am Persian by nature although my religion is that of the Arabs.

And if, occasionally, he is found girding at life and proclaiming its vanity, it is because he feels that there was so much in life that remained beyond his reach.

دُمِ عیشِ بجز رقصِ بمل نہ بُود بہ اندازہٴ خواہشِ دل نہ بُود

The period of joy was all too brief like the dance (writhing in agony) of a slaughtered bird;

It was not commensurate with the extent of my desires.

Ghālib had his tribulations, his moments of gloom and despondency, but it will be obvious to anyone who reads him with an open and critical mind that he never proclaimed life to be a vanity. He nowhere says that life cannot give us anything that is worth having. He holds that life is good and believes in making the best of it. A healthy, all-round responsiveness to life—such seems to be his general attitude towards life.

نخستے ہے جلوہٴ گلِ ذوقِ تماشا غالب چشم کو چاہئے ہر رنگ میں وا ہونا

O Ghālib, the beauty of the flower sharpens the power of perception in the beholder;

It is meet, therefore, that the eye remain open under all circumstances.

Not only this. He believes that life is worth living even at its poorest. The very act of existence, shorn of all adventitious considerations, is a great privilege. Even in the fever and fret of life, in pain and sorrow, there is an excitement that is life. The worst is death, the darkness of the grave.

نغمےٴ غم کو بھی آئے دلِ غنیمتِ جانے بے صدا ہو جائیگا یہ سازِ ہستی ایک دن

O my heart! Make the best even of the strains of sorrow;
It is not long before the harp of life will be silenced for ever.

ایک ہنگامہ یہ پو تو ف سے گھر کی رونق نوحہٴ غم ہی سہی نغمہٴ شادی نہ سہی

The life of my house depends on some sort of commotion;
If it is not a song of joy then let it be a dirge of sorrow.

اسدیہ درد و الم بھی تو مغتلم ہے کہ آخر نہ گریہِ سحری ہے نہ آہِ نیم شبی ہے

O Asad, we should be grateful for this sorrow and pain, because at the end
There are neither the morning tears nor the midnight sighs.

He knew the pain of love, its heartaches and sorrow, but he held
that

رونقِ ہستی ہے عشقِ خانہ ویراں سازے انجمنِ بے شمع ہے گر برقِ خرمین میں نہیں

The stir of life is owing to the all-consuming passion of love,
When the lightning does not fall on the harvest of life, the assembly is
without a candle.

And is there not behind the self-commiseration of the following a
devouring passion for life?

جاتا ہوں داغِ حسرتِ تہی لئے ہونے ہوں شمعِ کشتہ درخورِ محفل نہیں رہا

I am bearing on my mind the scar of longing for life,
I am like the extinguished candle which is no longer fit for the assembly.

اتما ہے داغِ حسرتِ دل کا شمار یاد مجھ سے مئے گنہ کا حسابِ خدا نہ مانگ

I am reminded of numerous unsatisfied yearnings in the world,
O God! Do not ask me to furnish an account of my transgressions!

میتا ہے فوتِ فرصتِ ہستی کا غم کوئی عمرِ عزیزِ صرفِ عبادت ہی کیوں نہ ہو

It is not possible to get over the regret at the lost opportunities of life,
Even if we have devoted the best part of life to the worship of God.

ہزاروں خواہشیں ایسی کہ ہر خواہش پر دم نکلے بہت نکلے مئے ارمانِ لیکن بھر بھی کم نکلے

A thousand desires, each most ardently pursued;
No doubt, a large number of them were satisfied, yet I feel that they were
not enough.

ناکردہ گناہوں کی بھی حسرت کی طے داو یارب اگر ان کردہ گناہوں کی سزا ہے

O God! If there be punishment for the sins committed by me,
There should be compensation too, for those that I planned, but failed
to commit.

If this view of the mind of Ghālib is accepted, and a study of his works leaves one no alternative, it is not a little surprising to find him dubbed a pessimist. For a pessimist is one who believes that life is not worth living even at its best; and Ghālib was a confirmed believer in the goodness and beauty of life. The pessimism theory of Ghālib, so far as his poetry is concerned is, in my opinion, based exclusively on his self-commiseration, generally misunderstood. Hālī, who knew him personally, denies that he was temperamentally or habitually gloomy, and ascribes his moodiness and self-pity to the conventional tendency of our poets to exaggerate their woes.¹¹ Ghālib, like most people, obtained relief by airing his grievances but considering his general responses to life as revealed in his prose and poetry, and taking into account, further, the unequivocal views expressed about his heartiness by some of his contemporaries, it looks like wilful misrepresentation to take the following as his real or final verdict on life. In all these I see self-pity and no more.

رنج سے شوگر ہوا انسان تو مٹجاتا ہے رنج مُشکلیں مجھ پر پڑیں تنی کہ آساں ہو گئیں

Sorrow ceases to be felt when one gets used to it;
So numerous have been my trials that I can now meet them with equanimity.

زندگی اپنی جو اس طرح سے گذری غالب ہم بھی کیا یاد کریں گے کہ خدا رکھتے تھے

When such is the sort of life I have been fated to live,
How painful would it be, then, to cherish the thought that I had a benevolent God to look after me!

غم ہستی کا آسہ کس سے ہو جز مرگ و علاج شمع ہر رنگ میں جلتی ہے سحر ہونے تک

There is no cure for the sorrow of life except death;
The lamp must continue burning till the arrival of the dawn.

قیدیات و بندِ غم صل میں دونوں ایک ہیں موت سے پہلے آدمی غم سے نجات پائے کیوں

The imprisonment that is life and the chain of sorrows are, in reality, one and the same thing.
How can one be free from the sorrows of life before the arrival of death?

تیزاں کیا فصلِ گل کہتے ہیں کسکو کوئی موسم ہو
وہی ہم ہیں تفس ہے اور ماتم بال و پر کا ہے

It may be autumn, springtide or any other season;
I am the same in all the seasons, mourning my captivity and the loss of
wings and feathers.

10

The financial worries in which he was involved on account of his prolonged lawsuit, came as a watershed or dividing line in his life; on the one side, memories of joy, wine, women, music, and good-fellowship, on the other, carking cares, poverty, and thwarted passions and desires. He now lingers wistfully on the past and yearns for the golden period of his life, the paradise from which he has been driven out.

فلک سے ہم کو عیشِ زلفہ کا کیا کیا تقاضا ہے متاعِ بردہ کو سمجھے ہوئے ہیں قرضِ رہزن پر
ہے تازمغساں زراز دستِ زلفہ پر ہوں گل فروش شوخیِ داغ کہن ہنوز
مخلیں برہم کرے ہے گنجہ باز خیال ہیں ورق گردانیِ نیرنگ یک مُتجانہ ہم
یاد تھیں ہم کو بھی رنگارنگ بزمِ آریاں لیکن اب نقشِ نگارِ طاقِ نسیاں ہو گئیں
وہ بادۂ شبانہ کی مستیاں کہاں اُٹھے بس اب کہ لذتِ خوابِ سحر گئی
مارا زمانہ نے اسدا اللہ خاں تمھیں وہ ولولے کہاں وہ جوانی کہ ہر گئی

How importunately we ask the sky to restore our lost pleasures to us,
We think this lost property to be a debt due from a highwayman (sky).

Those reduced to poverty love to linger in imagination on the wealth they
have lost,
I am the flower vendor of the forwardness of the scars of my old love.

The artful Fancy is given to shifting the scenes:
I am, thus, the turner of the leaves of a fascinating picture-book.

I, too, knew how to arrange colourful festive assemblies,
But they have become now the decoration of the shelf of forgetfulness.

Gone is the intoxication of last night's carousal,
Wake up now, for the sweet sleep of the early hours of the dawn is gone.

You have been brought low by the hand of time, O Asadullah Khān,
Whither have gone the early longings of your heart and the youthful
ardour of your soul?

The above are all from *ghazals* composed after 1830 and embodying memories of his youth, when not only was his ardour for life at its highest, but he possessed also the wherewithal to make the best of it. In this respect, the following, composed in 1831 when he was thirty-four years old, has a special autobiographical significance:

وہ شب و روز و ماہ و سال کہاں	وہ فراق اور وہ وصال کہاں
ذوقِ نظرِ جمال کہاں	فرصتِ کار و بارِ شوق کبھی
شورِ سودائے خط و خال کہاں	دل تو دلِ وہ دماغ بھی نہ رہا
اب وہ رعنائیِ خیال کہاں	تھی وہ اک شخص کے تصور سے
دل میں طاقتِ جگر میں حال کہاں	ایسا آساں نہیں لہو رونا
واں جو جائیں گہرہ میں مال کہاں	ہم سے چھوٹا تم رخانہٴ عشق
میں کہاں اور یہ وبال کہاں	منکرِ دنیا میں سر کھپاتا ہوں
وہ عناصر میں امتداد کہاں	مضمحل ہو گئے تو مئی غالب

Whither are gone those days of union and separation!
Those nights and days, those months and years!

No leisure have I now for the affairs of the heart,
Whither is gone that keen desire for looking at beauty!

Not only my heart but the entire temper of my mind is changed,
Whither is fled that rapturous joy in the loveliness of form and figure!

It was all due to the inspiration I received from the love of a certain lady,
Where are those rare thoughts that once visited me!

It is not easy to shed tears of blood,
My heart has lost its strength, my spirits their buoyancy.

Reluctantly, I have retired from the gambling house of love,
And even if I go there, there is no cash in my pocket.

Vexed by the worries of life I eat out my heart in grief -
I who am least fit to bear these vexations.

My faculties have fallen into a state of decay, O Ghālib!
And gone is the balance of the elements that composed my nature.

For the comfortable life to which Ghālib had been accustomed and which he longed to lead, three things were essential—youthful ardour, means, and leisure, i.e. freedom from worries. With his changed circumstances the last two had disappeared. The note of depression in the poem quoted above appears to have been deepened by the emotional crisis referred to in the fourth line, but the poem offers on the whole a true picture of the general state of his mind at the time, and of his temperament in general. The worries of life (فکرِ دُنیا) left him no leisure (فرصت), and he must perforce re-live in memory the days that were no more. It is significant that when this youthful mood revives in the *ghazal* beginning with the line

مُدّت ہوئی ہے بار کو مہماں کئے ہوئے ہوشِ قلع سے بزمِ چراغاں کئے ہوئے

It is long since I had my love as my guest,
And lit the festive assembly with the shining cup of wine.

it is on this absence of leisure that he dwells:

جی ڈھونڈتا ہے پھر وہی فرصتِ کبھی راتِ دین بیٹھے رہیں تصورِ جاناں کئے ہوئے

My heart is once more seeking those carefree days,
So that I should sit lost in thoughts of the sweet countenance of my beloved.

II

Ghālib's view of life, then, is that of a pagan. It is an extreme view, like that of the puritans, and leaves out so much that makes life significant and heroic. To quote Matthew Arnold:

[Paganism] by the very intensity and unremittingness of its appeal to the senses and the understanding, by its stimulating a single side of us too absolutely, ends by fatiguing and revolting us; ends by leaving us with a sense of tightness, of oppression,—with a desire for an utter change, for clouds, storms, effusion, and relief.¹⁹

Ghālib escaped this narrowness, because in him the life of the senses, vigorous and full-blooded as it was, had been reinforced and supplemented by an equally keen intellect. So important, so apparent, is this aspect of his mind that there is an almost universal tendency to regard him as a philosopher. And yet a moment's reflection will show that this view is based on a misunderstanding of the word 'philosopher'. If by a philosopher we mean, as we should, one who presents a systematic and abstract system of thought or a consistent theory of life, as did, for example, Iqbāl, then Ghālib would be found to be anything but a philosopher, the distinguishing quality of his mind being a keen intellectual awareness, a tendency to interrogate things, and offering fresh and often profound comments on them, or re-discovering old truths anew for himself. It is this objectivity, this capacity for being influenced by things as they are, without seeing them through the distorting medium of pre-conceived views and theories that has led to his being called a pessimist, optimist, believer, agnostic, mystic, sceptic, etc. In an open mind there is scope for all these moods or attitudes; but it is uncritical to regard these momentary reactions, even if they repeat themselves occasionally, as settled convictions.

The fact is that Ghālib had an open mind and did not permit any one aspect of life, however important, to blind him to its other sides. The world is too vast, too complex, too contradictory, to fit into any one scheme of things. Hence, a philosophy of life necessarily implies selection, omission, or at least, a belittlement, conscious or unconscious, of experiences not in accord with one's bias. All philosophies of life are based on experience and truth, but not on the whole truth, the totality of experience. Consequently, a predisposition towards any philosophy implies a certain amount of

narrowness, if not blindness. The distinguishing trait of Ghālib's mind is a wide receptivity and not a predisposition towards any one theory of life.

Ghālib had an inquiring mind: as he lived his life, he no less thought about it. Hence, all his impressions are of the nature of a personal discovery, his vision of life as it appeared to him at a given moment. Some of these impressions tend to recur. Probably they have a greater relevancy to the cast of his mind or the nature of his experience. But he does not surrender himself to them; they do not constitute his final verdict on life. Note, for example, the following:

میری تعمیر میں مُضمَر ہے اک صورتِ خرابی کی ہیولی برقِ خرمن کا ہے خونِ گرم و تھاں کا

Even in my plans of construction there is implicit an element of disintegration;
The warm blood in the veins of a farmer is itself the bolt that is hurled on the harvest of his life.

ہوس کو ہے نشاطِ کار کیا کیا نہ ہو مرنا تو جینے کا مزا کیا

How eagerly we plan ever new activities!
Take away death and there would be left no zest in life.

غافل بہ وہمِ ناز خود آرا ہے ورنہ یاں بے شانہ رصبِ نہیں طرہ گیاه کا

The heedless person ascribes his achievements to his own unaided efforts,
As a matter of fact, there is not a blade of grass but owes its gloss to the comb of the morning breeze.

رواقِ ہستی ہے عشقِ خانہ ویراں ساں سے انجمنِ بے شمع ہے گر برقِ خرمن میں نہیں

The stir and bustle of life is all due to the ravages of love,
Without this lightning falling on the harvest of life, the assembly remains immersed in darkness.

ہیں زوالِ آمادہ اجزا آفرینش کے تمام مہرِ گردوں ہے چہرِ اِغِ رگزارِ بادِ ایماں

All the elements of creation are tending towards decay,
The sun of heaven is like a lamp exposed to a strong wind.

عالمِ غبار و حشتِ مجنوں ہے سربِ کبر کب تک خیالِ طرۃ لیلہ کرے کوئی

The world is full of the dust raised by the madness of Majnun;
How long can we beguile ourselves with the loveliness of the crest of
Laila?

حسد سے دل اگر افسردہ ہے گرم تماشا ہو کہ چشمِ تنگ شاید کثرتِ نظار سے وا ہو

If your envy does not permit you to enjoy life, go out of yourself and
study life in general,
It is quite likely that your narrow outlook may widen by a fuller knowledge
of life.

دل لگی کی آرزو بیچین رکھتی ہے ہمیں ورنہ یاں بے رونقی سو د چراغِ کشتہ ہے

We are made restless by our eagerness to satisfy our desires,
Otherwise the absence of light is good for the extinguished lamp.

یک نظرِ بیش نہیں فرصتِ ہستی غافل گرمیِ بزم ہے اک رقصِ شریر مہزے تک

Life's leisure is no longer than a single glance,
The ardour of the festive assembly is momentary like the dance of a spark.

These lines are not cold intellectual diagrams or platitudes; they are charged with emotion. The truths they embody may be as old as man himself; some of them actually are, but under the stress of emotions they come as revelations to us. Then we see them for the first time in a new light; and they are not a second-hand or tenth-hand reproduction of other people's experiences, but a palpitating and vital discovery as personal as Newton's or Galileo's.

It has been held by Hālī, and after him by Mr. Ikrām, that Ghālīb has enriched poetry with certain ideas unknown before. It is difficult to say how far this is true. But it would be generally conceded that a capacity for originating thought or discovering phases of experience unknown before, however praiseworthy, does not constitute poetic greatness. There is in the reasoning of these critics a confusion between scientific truth and poetic truth. The former lies in discovering some tendency in nature or man unknown before. But poetic truths are very old truths, and we feel them so intensely because they are so old.

It would not be out of place to point out that they have not been

able to produce much evidence for this type of originality. Mr. Ikrām quotes:

نہ کرتا کاش نامہ مجھ کو کیا معلوم تھا ہدم کہ ہوگا باعثِ افزائشِ دردِ درونِ مہ بھی

I am not sure that it is a new idea, or being new it is true also. Besides, poetry is judged primarily by the beautiful work it makes with ideas, and the line quoted above is too unmusical and heavy-footed to be even tolerable poetry.

12

The high esteem in which Ghālib is held is mostly due to his excellence as a poet. His personality is much less attractive. One must admit, however reluctantly, that a careful study of his writings leaves one in no doubt that though there is much that is admirable in his temperament, there is also a great deal which, if not positively ugly, at least fails to inspire much love or enthusiasm.

Probably the least attractive side of his character comes out in his conception of love. 'Love in the highest type of poetry,' writes Priestley, 'is always a facing outward, and not a facing inward, a mere emotional barter; it is a life to be lived together by two in a divine companionship.'²⁰ For the most part, love with Ghālib is an appetite, not a sentiment: it is a commodity that can be bought and sold. Ghālib, as I have pointed out in his character-sketch, was essentially possessive, egoistical, and there is no instance in his life, and there is none in his verse, to show that love was ever felt by him as an ideal passion calling forth self-surrender and self-sacrifice. His attitude towards it was that of a voluptuary.

نیند اُس کی ہے دماغ اُس کا ہے رہیں سکی ہیں
تیری زلفیں جس کے بازو پر پریشاں ہو گئیں

He alone enjoys a good sleep, mental composure and joyous nights,
Whose arm carries over it thy dishevelled locks.

With his usual frankness, he wrote to one of his friends on the death of his mistress:

I am sixty-five now. I have tasted life for fifty years. In my early youth a perfect guide advised me thus: I do not approve of piety and righteousness,

nor do I disapprove of a life of pleasure. Eat, drink, and be merry; but remember that in your pursuit of pleasure you must be a fly not a bee. One who is himself a mortal should not deplore the death of another mortal. Why shed tears and raise a hue and cry? Be thankful for your freedom. And if you have set your heart on bondage, then one mistress is as good as another. . . . Come to your senses and give your heart to someone else.²¹

Harmless banter! says the admiring critic, thrown on the defensive by the cynicism of the confession. I shall let it go at that, for once. But what is there to say in defence of a poet who dismisses domestic life, after fifty years of companionship, with such shocking cynicism, as in the passage below:

I pity Umrāo Singh and at the same time envy his lot. O, my God! There are some who have been freed twice from matrimonial bondage: and yet, so far as I am concerned, it is now over fifty years since this noose of death was cast around my neck, yet neither the noose breaks nor do I die.²²

Obviously this does not read like badinage. But Ghālib has taken the question out of the sphere of controversy by another utterance, still more outspoken, on his pet grievance.

Married life is my death. I have never been happy in this imprisonment. There was disgrace and humiliation in going to Patiāla, but it would have brought me, at any rate, the wealth of *singleness*. But, alas, what is the good of this *temporary singleness*, this borrowed celibacy!²³

In his straitened circumstances when his pension had been withdrawn, he did not think of his wife's privations and sufferings, but harping as usual on the strings of self, wrote:

Had I been single, I could have lived a happy and carefree life on this small allowance. Heaven knows whether my pension will be granted or not. In my present circumstances however, the prospect of leading a comfortable life on my pension, as a single man, seems extremely remote.²⁴

Ghālib's egoism is distressing. Nature had been bountiful to him in several ways, but she had not sown the seed of the ideal in him; and we cannot escape the conclusion that when he speaks of his unsatisfied desires and uncommitted sins, he is thinking of some unsuccessful intrigue like the one with the 'tantalizing *dūmnī*',²⁵ over which he used to smack his lips even in old age. I feel almost certain that it is the absence of devotion to a great ideal that explains the recurrent note of discontent and fidgetiness in his writings. His life

lacked serenity. If he had been capable of true love he would have found in it a recompense for the comparative poverty and want of recognition of which he so often complained. Love, which is nature's greatest gift to man in this imperfect world, had been denied to him. What really makes life worth living is some ideal passion, a devotion to something outside us, be it the love of one's country, religion, humanity, a woman; or of nature, as with Wordsworth, who writes:

... if in this time of dereliction,
 Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
 Despair not of our nature, but retain
 A more than Roman confidence, a faith
 That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
 The blessing of my life, the gift is yours
 Ye winds and sounding cataracts! 'tis yours,
 Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
 My lofty speculations: and in thee,
 For this uneasy heart of ours I find
 A never-failing principle of joy
 And purest passion.

13

Ghālib's end was pathetic. In his youth he had defied the gods. But when the shadow of old age dimmed his intellect and weakened his body, he made a pathetic surrender to the powers he had all along challenged. His correspondence is full of quictistic utterances—now that he has lost the energy that had fed his revolt. The horrors of the Mutiny and his personal sufferings and bereavements shook his life to the foundations. He was a broken man, with little or no hold on life, and it was now, for the first time, that he came really to subscribe to the unreality of life and sought refuge in a weak and enervating mysticism. There is a similar change too in his strident faith in the goodness of life. All that he had admired, all that he had lived for, is now like dust and ashes in the mouth. The great achievements of man in poetry, philosophy, religion, what are they, he writes, but the quintessence of dust!

You are cultivating the art of poetry and I am cultivating the art of immersion in the divine spirit. I consider the scholarship of Avicenna and the poetry of Nizāmī to be useless, unprofitable, and unreal. To live we require a little happiness: as for philosophy, kingship, poetry, magic—they

are all absurd. If someone was an avatar among the Hindus, what then? If you make a name in the world, what then? or if you are unknown, what then? Some means of livelihood, a little health—these matter: all else is vain. No doubt, these also may be felt as vain, but I have not yet attained this stage. Who knows that in a little while the curtain may be rung up, and I may ignore the means of livelihood, health and comfort also. I may enter on the stage of non-existence. There is no sign of the world or both the worlds in the great silence on which I have now entered. . . . I consider all to be unreal. It is not a river but a mirage; it is not existence but an illusion. We are good poets, and may be as famous as Sa'dī and Hāfīz. What did they gain by their renown, and what shall we?²⁶

And again:

What did 'Urfī gain by the fame of his panegyrics that I should look forward to some good by the publication of my *qasīdas*? What did Sa'dī gain by his *Bostān*? Everything besides God is unreal and non-existent. There is neither poetry nor poets, nor *qasīda*, nor will. Nothing exists but God.²⁷

This apathetic self-surrender and sense of futility, this disbelief in the greatness and achievement of man, in poetry, religion, and philosophy, this negation of life, of strenuousness and effort—here is the grim spectre of pessimism under whose shadow Ghālib appears to have passed his last days.

14

In one important respect the life of Ghālib was a tragedy. It was the tragedy of a highly original person, born in a conventional age, which gave him little or no scope for rising to the highest possibilities of his mind. At almost every point he was at odds with his society, and although he strove hard to find an outlet for his energies and rise above the pressure of the age, he was never completely successful. He was wont to speak of authority with a certain amount of irritability and vehemence, even braggadocio. In an age when the ancients were held in extreme veneration, he could say: 'Do not think that whatever the ancients have written is true. Were not foolish men born in those days?'²⁸ And criticizing a line of Hazīn, he wrote: 'Hazīn was a man. If this opening line were archangel Gabriel's I should refuse to take it as an authority and follow it.'²⁹

And yet, despite this tilting at authority, Ghālib could not find his way to a constructive vision. His revolt against puritanism and conventional morality came very near bohemianism, while his passion for originality resulted in eccentricity and a feverish desire to

be unlike others. The fact remains that he could not transcend his age.

The reason for his failure was that his age was too mediocre, too commonplace, and too incurious to supply the necessary stimulus for high original work. With this view not a few will disagree. In fact, those who maintain that Ghālib really fulfilled himself—and there are many who do—hold that he was a great poet because he was born in a creative period. On this point I have already expressed my views. I maintain that although there was a revival of peace and learning during the period—thanks to the advent of the British—and the old interests in literature and scholarship had to some extent been revived, yet of really active or living thought there was little or nothing in the age; and unless we allow our enthusiasm to blind us to facts, we shall see in the closing years of the Mughal rule in Delhi, the after-glow of a sunset rather than the promise of a sunrise. So far with regard to the revival of the old Muslim learning. As regards the religious revival of the period already hinted at, it did not even remotely touch him. His friends and contemporaries of whom we hear so much—Shāh Nasīr, Momin, Zauq, Maulvī Fazal Haq, Nawab Mustafā Khān Shefta—were intellectually commonplace, though models of good breeding and courtesy. Ghālib stood outside the ferment which gave us the Earlier Renaissance. He belonged to the past and had no affiliations with the forces, religious, educational, and scientific, which heralded the modern age.

Given a man with a passion for originality, born in a narrow and insular society, how will he react to his environment? He will affect singularity and contemn the ideal he cannot break through or demolish. Ghālib's attitude towards his contemporaries was superior and aristocratic. His vanity, which, as we have seen, was terribly hurt by the refusal of his age to take his oddities for genius, decided him that he would have no truck with it and eschew whatever was popular. He decided that he must be different from the masses in every way—'not only in poetry, but in his personal appearance, his dress, his food, his mode of life; nay, even in life and death'.³⁰ This contempt amounted to an obsession, and he studiously avoided in life and literature anything that could be traced to the vulgar herd. So far as poetry was concerned, he strove to be new in imagery, diction, thought, feeling, at all costs. Hence his conceits, his 'metaphysical' fancy, his love of the recondite, and his highly Persianized diction. All these had their root in an intense desire to be unlike others, especially the popular writers of the day, adored by the

multitude. In all this, he forgot the great truth that great men are unlike others, not because they strive to be different from them but simply because they are. Again, although a great writer's genius may tower over the populace, yet the warp and woof of his art are the very thoughts and feelings he shares with them. A great writer has simply to be himself and go the way his genius leads, to rise above the rank and file. Let this become a conscious craze and he will become affected and precious. Ghālib's failures as a poet are principally due to a passion for originality at all costs which often degenerated into a desire to be unlike other people. Priestley's analysis of Meredith's failure as a writer is so true of Ghālib that I cannot do better than quote him at some length.

This is in part due to the fact that his pride forbade him to take any interest in the commonplaces, in what any Tom, Dick, or Harry could do fairly well. He was always too self-conscious on this score to be a really great artist, for the really great artist, forgetful of everything but the work in hand, does not wonder whether he is being original or merely commonplace and platitudinous, does not try to be different from other people, but merely does the work as well as it possibly can be done.

A great many of his defects proceed from this self-consciousness. His later novels are almost ruined by the writer's obvious desire to avoid the commonplace. As he grew older he coddled himself and frankly abandoned himself to his pet mannerisms. His pride would not allow him to state a plain fact in a plain way. In much of his work he was compelled to appear somewhat obscure simply because he was trying to express really subtle and difficult impressions and states of mind. But by the time he came to write *One of Our Conquerors* . . . he had to give an appearance of subtlety and difficulty whether there happened to be anything subtle and difficult to express or not. His style had mastered him, and the reason why it was allowed to master him was that his genuine artistic impulse was by this time weak, whereas his pride, his self-consciousness, his desire not merely to be 'different' but to be increasingly more 'different', to be more and more the Meredith whom the public had neglected and his friends had adored, were stronger than ever. It is generally supposed that these later novels of his are more subtle and complicated than the earlier ones, but actually they are nothing of the kind. . . . Either he was by this time the slave of his own mannerisms, or he deliberately covered up this interior simplicity with a surface complexity, determined that it should not be said that George Meredith was at last coming to terms with his hostile critics and the public.⁸¹

Similar as Ghālib's mind was to that of Meredith, we find at work in him a reverse process. He began where Meredith ended. His

earliest poetry is hopelessly riddled with the defects associated with him. But as time passed, his good sense prevailed, though not without a sharp reminder from the public. And he is the poet that he is, because he grew less self-centred as time passed, and came to feel that originality was not the same thing as singularity.

Ghālib owed his salvation partly to his critics and friends and partly to his own common sense. He began by imitating Bedil, one of the most obscure and mannered of Persian poets. With this ideal before him, he wrote a poetry which is the most arid and impenetrable of its kind. In his old age, reviewing his youthful vagaries, he wrote: 'From the beginning my nature had been seeking rare and lofty thoughts, yet on account of my unconventionality, I mostly followed those poets who are unacquainted with the right path.'³²

How long he would have continued to sow these literary wild oats, it is difficult to say; but it is clear that he set much store by his early poetry, and left to himself he would have stuck to it much longer than he did.

Out of these self-complacent dreams, Ghālib was rudely shaken by contemporary criticism, sharp, stinging, but just. For some time he stood his ground, replying to attacks like—

اگر اپنا کہا تم آپ ہی سمجھے تو کیا سمجھے مزا کہنے کا جب سے اک کہے اور دوسرا سمجھے
کلام میر سمجھے اور زبان میر سزا سمجھے مگر ان کا کہا یہ آپ سمجھیں یا خدا سمجھے

If you alone understand your verses and no one else, you have not achieved much;

What is really praiseworthy is that others understand what you say.

We have understood the poetry of Mīr and Mirza,
But what you write can be understood by you or by God.

with—

نہ ستائش کی تمنا نہ صلہ کی پروا گر نہیں ہیں مرے اشعار میں معنی نہ سہی

I am neither hankering after praise, nor am I solicitous of reward,
If there is no meaning in my verses, it does not matter much.

But this was no more than bravado. The laughter of his contemporaries made him think, and, when to the animadversions of his critics was added the persuasion of his friends, he decided to hold out no longer. He handed over his *divān* to his friends whose drastic

excisions reduced it to nearly one-third of the original. Henceforth, as he tells us, his guides were to be 'Urfī, Nazīrī, and Tālib Āmulī—poets who without being extremists, represented the same ideal as Bedil.

From the above it would be evident that, even after this compromise, Ghālib's literary sympathies were predominantly with the Persian 'metaphysicals'. From first to last, excepting the brief interval when he wrote in the style of Mīr, Ghālib did not try to fall in line with the tradition of the Urdu *ghazal*. In his poetry one is struck more by the line of departure from this tradition than by the points of contact with it. A brief study of his diction, imagery, and obscurity will confirm this viewpoint.

15

Ghālib maintained that the language of poetry should not be the same as the spoken language of the day. Here was a radical departure from the practice of his predecessors and contemporaries. The poets before him had cultivated, especially in the *ghazal* (the reader will remember that *ghazal* means conversation with women), what has been called the neutral style; a style which differs from the best spoken language, as the language of feeling will naturally differ from the language of less exalted moods. Ghālib is in favour of a highly Persianized, learned, and elegant diction. 'Even now', writes Hālī, criticizing his excised *divān*, 'nearly one-third of his *divān* consists of verses to which the word Urdu can be applied with difficulty.'³³ Later on he adds: 'The thoughts are as strange as the language is unfamiliar. He made free use of the characteristic Persian infinitives, conjunctions, and adverbs . . . in his Urdu writings. Many of his Urdu verses could be easily converted into Persian by altering a single word.'³⁴

This excessive predilection for Persianized diction may rightly be ascribed to his becoming immersed in Persian; but it is quite as much, and sometimes exclusively, due to his horror of the commonplace in expression, corresponding to his horror of the obvious in thought. This is also Hālī's view. 'He avoided the common modes of expression as far as possible and refused to negotiate the beaten path. Consequently, he preferred novelty and originality in thought and expression to simplicity.'³⁵ This partiality for Persian, whatever its cause, is proved by the nonchalance with which he uses Persian idioms and expressions in Urdu. No doubt, in importing Persian

vocabulary and idioms into Urdu he was following an old precedent; but what had been done with moderation by his predecessors was often carried to licence and abandon by him, as in the following:

ہوائے سیرِ گلِ آئینہ بے مہرئی قاتل کہ اندازِ بخوں غلطیدن بسبل پسند آیا
 نظرِ کرمِ تحفہ ہے شرمِ نارسانی کا بخوں غلطیدنِ صدرِ رنگِ عومیِ پارسائی کا
 شبِ خمارِ شوقِ ساقیِ رستخیزِ اندازہ تھا تا محیطِ بادہِ صورتِ خانہِ خمبازہ تھا
 یکِ قدمِ وحشت سے درسِ فقرِ امکانِ کھلا بجادہ اجزائے دو عالمِ وحشت کا شیرازہ تھا
 بزرگِ کاغذِ آتشِ زدہ نیرنگِ بے تابی ہزارِ آئینہِ دلِ بانہے ہے بالِ کیپیدینِ بچہ

Ghālib's obscurity is an indubitable fact, and during the past fifty years or so has provided the most extensive scope for guesswork and critical ingenuity. That he is difficult on account of fundamental brain work is one of those fictions by which the hagiologist has always tried to cover up the failures of his hero all over the world. As far as I can see, Ghālib's obscurity may be ascribed to three convergent causes: (1) his learned diction, far-fetched imagery, and allusive style; (2) vagaries with regard to the use of Persian idioms and expressions; and (3) by and large, his compression, involving omission, sometimes, of vital links in the chain of thought. Take the following:

آہ کو چاہئے اکِ عمرِ اثرِ ہونے تک کون جیتا ہے ترمی زلف کے سر ہونے تک
 قمری کفِ خاکستر و بلبلِ قفسِ رنگ اے مالہ نشانِ جگرِ سوختہ کیا ہے
 ملنا ترا اگر نہیں آساں تو سہل ہے دُشوار تو یہی ہے کہ دُشوار بھی نہیں

The first is obscure because the reader does not know what to make of the second hemistich; the second because of the use of *اے* for *بجز*, for which there is no precedent in Urdu; and the third,

because he is trying to put into a verse a great deal more than it can reasonably hold. Ghālib is very often difficult because he wants to pour a quart into a pint bottle.

The avoidance of the familiar, or the instinctive desire for what is far-fetched, remote, and subtle, is abundantly proved by his imagery. The imagery in Urdu poetry is mostly simple and drawn from the world of familiar observation. Ghālib's imagery is far-fetched, ingenious, and intellectual. Even when it is familiar, he is generally arrested by its unfamiliar aspect. Except in his early poetry and a few other instances, where he may be said to be straining for effect, neither his bizarre imagery nor his learned diction can be ascribed exclusively to affectation. With him the style is the man; and the key to his grotesque imagery is provided by the fact that what is unfamiliar to the ordinary man is familiar to him. His was essentially a subtle, brooding, and introspective mind, looking at things from odd and unexpected angles, so that his imagery comes home to us with a shock of surprise, like some of his profound comments on life discussed in an earlier section. The subtlety of his imagery can be aptly illustrated by the following:

نوازشِ نفسِ آشنا کہاں، ورنہ بزرگ نے ہے نہاں در ہر استخوانِ فریاد

I am without the favour of a friendly breath,
Otherwise there lies hidden in every bone of mine a cry of anguish, as in
a reed.

پیدا نہیں ہے صل تک و تازِ جستجو مانند موجِ آبِ زبانِ بریدہ ہموں

I do not know the real nature of the urge for quest which is ever driving
us forward,
Like the wave in the river I am an amputated tongue.

باعثِ ایذا ہے برہم خوردنِ بزمِ سرو محنتِ نختِ شیشہ بشکستہ جز نشتر نہیں

The dissolution of the festive assembly is a source of pain,
Every piece of a broken glass plate is sharp and painful like a lancet.

حاصلِ اُلفت نہ دیکھا جز شکستِ آرزو دل بدل پیوستہ گویا ایک لبِ فموس تھا

The final outcome of love has never been other than disappointment,
The two hearts bound together in love were like the lips compressed in
sorrow and regret.

This is not the pictorial imagery of one who lives by preference in the objective world only; it is that of a self-communing mind at home in thought also.

When his ingenuity is carried to excess, he becomes bizarre, as in

ہے عجب مُردوں کو غفلت ہائے اہل دہر پڑ مبنزہ جوں انگشتِ حیاتِ دردِ دہانِ گور ہے

The dead are lost in wonder at the thoughtlessness of the living,
The verdure at the mouth of the grave is like the finger raised to the lips
in a moment of surprise.

or strained as in the following:

یک ذرّہ زمیں نہیں بیکار باغ کا یاں جاوہ بھی فتیلہ ہے لالہ کے داغ کا

Not even the smallest particle of the garden is without its verdure and
flowers,
The pathway is like the plug inserted into the wound of the poppy.

The abstract character of his imagery can be studied in these:

کوئی آگاہ ہمیں باطنِ ہم دیگر سے بے ہر اک فرد جہاں میں ورقِ ناخواندہ

No one can fathom the mystery of another person,
Each individual in the world is like an undeciphered manuscript.

بُجز قیاس اور کوئی نہ آیا بروئے کار صحرا مگر تہ تنگی چشمِ سودتھا

No one was adventurous enough to meet the challenge of love,
The wilderness (in which lovers wander) was probably narrow like the
eye of a jealous person.

خانے پائے تزاں ہے بہار اگر ہے یہی دوامِ کلفتِ خاطر ہے عیشِ دُنیا کا

If this is the spring, it is no better than the henna applied to the feet of
the autumn,

All that we do in the world is a source of perpetual vexation.

His finest imagery has no touch of the bizarre:

فنا کو سوئپِ گر شاق ہے اپنی حقیقت کا فروغِ طالعِ ناشاک ہے موقوفِ گلخنِ پُر

Consign yourself to extinction if you are eager to know your true nature,
A chip of wood leaps into a flame when it is cast into a furnace.

پرتوِ نور سے ہے شبنم کو فنا کی تسلیم میں بھی ہوں ایک عنایت کی نظرِ موت تک

The light of the sun imparts the lesson of annihilation to the dew,
I also will endure till you bestow a favourable glance at me.

بیضہ آسانگِ بال و پے ہے یہ کنجِ قفس از سر نو زندگی ہو گر رہا ہو جائیے

Like unto the egg, this confinement in the cage of the body is a disgrace
for your wings and feathers,
Set your self free by obtaining a new life.

ہے تجلی تری سامانِ وجود ذرہ بے پرتوِ نور شدید نہیں

Thy light is the source of all existence,
The particle of dust shines by the light reflected from the sun.

16

Ghālib's theory of poetry was a part of his theory of life. With an aristocrat's sense of the futility and limitations of conventions, the goal of his endeavour was to discover new paths in poetry. So far so good. The refusal to tread the beaten path is a necessary condition for renovation and progress. Ghālib's instincts were sound; unluckily, in trying to be a reformer he was reckoning without the age he lived in; for it is not enough to be discontented with things as they are, or to refuse to follow the herd, as he did, to renovate literature. Every genius gives something positive to its age, although this positive something may in the last analysis be discovered to be no more than the contribution of the age itself. Ghālib knew his age to be a prison, but there were no cracks and fissures in its walls to enable him to have a vision of a different world. Hence, his iconoclasm, finding no constructive outlet, turned upon itself like a dammed stream. Eccentricity is originality without a conscious goal, a dynamic urge that is directionless; and since Ghālib's poetic energy was not directed into a productive channel, he was for the most part an eccentric. I believe it was the general aridity of his age which accounts for the feverishness and discontent that characterized his life. We can say of him what Matthew Arnold says of Gray: 'Born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man; born in the same year with Burns, he would have been another man'.³⁶ All through his life he plumed himself on the avoid-

ance of plebeian contacts; but what was the net gain? Artificiality. The greatest part of his poetry lacks passion; but to give it the appearance of freshness, he must bedizen it with useless scholarship and subtlety. Consequently his poetry looks most profound when it is least so. It is a hard nut to crack, but the reader gets little or no kernel for his pains.

In my opinion, Ghālib will be known to the future, first and foremost, by his poetry in the true classical vein in which he speaks out his mind simply and directly; and, in the second place, by his 'meta-physical' verse, in which he is subtle and sincere at the same time. '... but if the greatest poetry', writes Professor Grierson in his note on Donne, 'rises clear of the bizarre, the fantastic, yet very great poetry may be bizarre if it be the expression of a strangely blended temperament, an intense emotion, a vivid imagination.'³⁷ This is true of Ghālib also.

17

Ghālib's letters which have given him a permanent place in the evolution of modern Urdu prose were begun about 1849. In writing them he was following no conscious theory of style. Indeed, so far was he from feeling sure of his ground that he felt his innovation required an explanation if not an apology. This new role was thrust on him by two convergent causes; the infirmities of old age and his duties as the Royal Historiographer. He had neither time nor energy to write in the old rhyming style and, as a compromise, he hit upon simple prose for his correspondence. His prime motive was convenience not reform, and it was quite inadvertently that he became the forerunner of modern prose.

Ghālib's letters, except those addressed to the nobility, where he crosses his t's and dots his i's with punctilious care, have all the directness, informality, and well-bred ease of polite conversation. I believe the secret of all successful letter-writing is the joy of communication or expression. One feels, as one reads these letters, that the writer has something to say, and he says it without stint or reserve. The contrast between his prose style and poetry is striking. In the latter, he is self-conscious, pithy, intellectual, and wrote in full panoply. He wrote his prose in lounge-suit and slippers. Essentially utilitarian in tone, it possesses an easy, familiar, leisurely movement, and has no intellectual interest, having been written, for the most part, at a plane of consciousness totally different from that of his poetry.

Most of these letters have little interest beyond their style. Their themes are the well-worn themes of correspondence—instructions to his pupils on versification, critical dicta, news, inquiries, information or directions about the publication of his books, relations with the British Government, the withdrawal and restoration of his pension, greetings, condolences, reminiscences, and other personal odds and ends. They reveal a temperament at once cultured, urbane, social, and egoistical, in which much that is polished and courteous alternates with savage and rasping moods. The fact is that Ghālib was self-centred, and only a true hero-worshipper would fail to note some of his limitations.

From this engrossing self-love Ghālib was, to some extent, awakened by the Indian Mutiny. Ghālib, who had brooded over his wrongs, was now suddenly made to see by that great catastrophe all the cruelty and brutality of life. Some of the letters of the period are the best of their kind. They are the works of a sensitive man who is also a humorist—the sensitive man whose heart goes out to suffering humanity, and the humorist who from the vantage ground of this new knowledge can smile at his own mishaps.

Ghālib has been acclaimed as a great humorist. His letters do not provide much evidence for this judgement. His gift of humour was at best intermittent, and is confined to half a dozen letters of the post-Mutiny period. But though the quantity is limited, the quality is high. On the other hand he is often witty; and those who praise his humour usually mistake the former for the latter.

Besides the light they throw on his life, interests, and character, these letters are valuable for their style. Strange as it may sound, the earliest of them are quite as mature as the latest. For sheer beauty of style, the best of them are only surpassed by Muhammad Husain Āzād at his very best. I mean Āzād the raconteur and not the letter-writer.

18

With Zauq, Momin, and Ghālib, medieval Urdu poetry may be said to have come to an end. But poets continued to write in the old style. The best of those who belong to the interim period between medieval and modern literature are Dāgh and Amīr Mīnāī. They do not belong to the age of Ghālib, but instead of giving them a new chapter I have decided to review their poetry here.

Dāgh was born in Delhi in 1831, the son of Nawab Shams-ud-

Dīn Khān. He received his education in the Fort and immediately after the Mutiny moved with his family to Rāmpur, where he was treated with special consideration by Nawab Yūsuf 'Alī Khān and appointed companion of his son and successor, Nawab Kalāb 'Alī Khān. When the court poets were dismissed by the Regency, on the latter's death in 1886, he decided to move to Haidarābād, where he was appointed poetical preceptor to the Nizam, Mīr Mahbūb 'Alī Khān, and after living in great style on the munificent liberality of his patron, he died in 1905.

Dāgh is essentially a *ghazal*-writer. His poetry is distinguished by its purity of idiom and simplicity of language and thought. In the sparkle of its language, its raciness, its idiomatic flavour and brilliant wit, it challenges comparison with the best poets. Dāgh's ideal of the *ghazal* was that it should be light, easy, and limpid; he was therefore assiduous in the avoidance of *izāfat* and the heavy unfamiliar words of Persian or Arabic extraction. On account of their lightness and ease, his *ghazals* lend themselves naturally to music, and have been a great favourite with musicians. It is not without reason that he has been reproached with being the poet laureate of dancing-girls by some critics. In Dāgh there is no philosophy, no mysticism, no depth of thought; he just skims the surface of life, and reflects the iridescent atmosphere of the sophisticated world with which he was familiar.

In his temperament he offers a complete antithesis to Mīr, the most Petrarchan of Urdu poets. The latter has naivety and pathos. Dāgh is a highly sophisticated man who excels in intellectual qualities—in wit, irony, cynicism, and persiflage. His attitude is completely unsentimental. This aspect of his mind has been hit off by 'Abdus-Salām Nadvī: 'His themes are exclusively sarcasm, irony, jealousy, suspicion, banter, bullying, and romp; and he is in the habit of giving home truths to the loved one on all occasions.'³⁸ Dāgh's poetry is a war of wit between the lover and the beloved; both are realistic even to cynicism, both are arch and quick in repartee; but the product of a highly urbane society, they seldom forget their manners and are always their own masters. We are in an artificial world, like that of the Restoration Comedy in England, in which sentiment has no place, or is brought in to be ridiculed only. In his poetry Dāgh mostly drew on his own experiences. He had long hob-nobbed with the most brilliant courtesans of the day, and his scintillating wit, and want of soft emotions reflect his brilliant company.

Dāgh's contemporary and rival, Munshī Amīr Ahmad Mīnāī, never attained the phenomenal popularity of the former. Herein the contemporary verdict was not wrong. Dāgh's poetry was all of a piece. Amīr, on the other hand, had less confidence, less originality, and strove to shift his sails according to the spirit of the wind, often with little or no success. He was born in Lucknow in 1828, in the reign of Shāh Nasīr-ud-Dīn Haidar, and was educated at the famous seminary, the Farangī Mahal of Lucknow, where he acquired proficiency in Persian, Arabic, and theology. In 1852 he was invited to the court of Vājīd 'Alī Shāh. On the annexation of Oudh, he was invited to Rāmpur by Nawab Muhammad Yūsuf 'Alī Khān and appointed poetical teacher to his successor, Nawab Kalab 'Alī Khān, besides holding a high position in the administration of the state. He was on a visit to Haidarābād, when he was suddenly taken ill and died in 1900.

Amīr was a voluminous writer. He is known today by his two *divāns* of *ghazals*, the earlier, mainly composed in Lucknow, called *Mir'at-ul-Ghālīb* and the latter, *Sanam Khāna-e-'Ishq*, composed in Rāmpur. His first *divān* fully reflects the vitiated taste of Lucknow poets. Here he is intent on word-play and verbal associations, and is occasionally coarse and undignified. He prefers to linger in my lady's boudoir to lavish conventional praise on her dress and appearance.

Once in Rāmpur, he made a determined effort to get out of the conventional rut, as his artificial style was not in favour there. He now tried to approximate to the style of Mīr and Dard. The poetry of this period is contained in the two 'addenda' to *Sanam Khāna-e-'Ishq*, called *Gauhar-e-Intekhab* and *Jauhar-e-Intekhab*; but they lack the intensity of Mīr and Dard; and the lines that are fraught with genuine emotions are few and far between. The few lines in which he achieves the breath of genuine poetry are characterized by 'Abdus-Salām Nadvī as 'the expiation of a whole life of poetical sins'.³⁹ Dāgh is a greater poet than Amīr because he is always himself. He is to the manner born and reflects the world in which he lived. Amīr is a scholar who simulates the style of others.

Space must be found in this section for Zafar (Abul Zafar Sirāj-ud-Dīn Muhammad Bahādur Shāh), the last of the Mughals, if only for sentimental reasons. His four *divāns* bear ample testimony to his fecundity, but voluminous as his work is, its quality is not sufficiently high to guarantee him a place in this book on sheer merit. Two things stand out in his poetry; first, his passion for difficult rhymes, excessive word-play, often of a crude type, and love of fine writing,

i.e. over-indulgence in idiomatic language. This aspect of his poetry is traceable to the influence of Lucknow, through his poetical preceptors, Shāh Nasīr and Zauq, who had both cultivated this style to emulate the poets of Lucknow. The second is the sense of frustration and gloom. His poetry, in this respect, is a true image of his own life which had been far from happy. As is well known, his father had been persuaded by his favourite wife to nominate her son, Mirza Jahāndār, as his successor; and though in this he was overruled by the British, he continued to suffer from his father's resentment till his succession to the throne in 1837, when he was a little over sixty. It only remains to mention that Āzād claims his poems to have been written by Zauq;⁴⁰ and a similar inference may be made in regard to Ghālib, who had succeeded Zauq as the Emperor's preceptor, from a statement made by Nāzīr Husain Mirza.⁴¹

A NOTE ON THE FORT WILLIAM COLLEGE TRANSLATORS

THE Fort William College, Calcutta, was established in 1800 with the object of training British civil servants in the languages, law, history, and customs of India. Dr. John Borthwick Gilchrist, its principal, had been surgeon under the East India Company at Calcutta, and had compiled *Hindustani Dictionary* (1787-90) and *Hindustani Grammar* (1796) before his appointment to the College. For the cultivation of Urdu, he attracted scholars from Delhi and the United Provinces, and the College was a busy centre of literary activity for a few years. Some of the more well-known of these scholars were: Mirza 'Alī Lutf, Sayyid Haidar Bakhsh Haidarī, Mīr Amman of Delhi, Bahādur 'Alī Husainī, Sher 'Alī Afsos, Nihāl Chand Lāhorī, Lallū Lāl Jī, Kāzīm 'Alī Javān, and Ikrām 'Alī.

The Fort William College made no original contribution to literature and the works produced there are translations or adaptations. The emphasis is throughout on style which is simple and straightforward, though usually undistinguished. The intricacies and involutions of style and the figurative apparatus with which the orthodox school embellished its commonplaces of subject-matter were severely left alone as incompatible with the ideals which the college had set out to realize, namely, imparting a working knowledge of Urdu and other Indian languages to the civil servants of the Company.

Of the books produced at the college by far the best is Mīr Amman's *Bāgh-o-Bahār*, a rendering in simple prose of Tahsīn's *Nau Tarz-e-Murassa'*, a work in the old conventional style. Mīr Amman's style is direct, smooth, and flowing, and has occasionally a fine idiomatic flavour. And yet all he had to do to achieve this style was to come down off his stilts and write as he spoke. The historical importance of the book lies in the fact that it enables us to determine the changes in grammar and usage the Urdu language has undergone since the book was written a century and a half ago.

Bāgh-o-Bahār tells five stories within a given framework, and is structurally akin to the *Arabian Nights* and numerous other books similarly constructed. The stories are of indifferent merit and are

essentially romantic. As usual, motives from the old romantic lore have been freely used. The four dervishes who relate their experiences had once been men of high standing, but have renounced the world on account of their misfortunes. They are supernaturally guided to a certain city where, through the good offices of a king, himself a disappointed man, they are reunited to their loves and are happy once more. The book is a typical example of medieval optimism. We are made to feel that all is right with us in the long run. Our path may be in the dark for some time, but there is a special Providence watching over us through whose beneficence wrongs are righted and sorrows and loss end in joy and restitution.

Fort William literature has come in for a great deal of notice on account of the service it is believed to have rendered to the cause of Urdu. That, in a way, it marks the beginning of modern Urdu prose may be conceded. But it is important to remember that it stands outside the main current of Urdu prose and as such has no place in its evolution. It did not grow out of the soil but was artificially cultivated by a few scholars working under official instructions. Nor did it exert any influence on the course of Urdu prose. The writers of the Aligarh school did not look back to it for guidance or inspiration when they launched the new school of prose after the Mutiny. They wrote rather in response to a new set of intellectual, social, and economic requirements, and they derived their inspiration from the West and not from the Fort William College. No doubt, Sayyid Ahmad, the leader of the movement, speaks of Mīr Amman's book with approval, but nowhere in his writings does he acknowledge to have modelled his own prose style on him or to have resumed the broken thread of a once living tradition.

Grahame Bailey sums up Dr. Gilchrist's work in these words: '... he has given a great impetus to prose composition in these languages. It is true that after Gilchrist left the country the movement hung fire, but it is not possible to doubt that the revival of interest which took place later on was in great measure due to his work.'¹ As far as I can judge there is no evidence historical or literary to support this statement. Besides, Fort William literature is not the product of a *movement* as Grahame Bailey would have us believe. A *movement* is the expression of the collective will, aims, ideals or instincts of a people, or a section of a people, and the Fort William literature owed its genesis to a decision of Lord Wellesley. So little indeed has our modern prose been influenced by the Fort William College

translators that if the College had never existed the course of modern Urdu prose in all probability would not have differed, in any important respect, from what it has been. To sum up, Fort William literature did not enter as a formative factor in the development of modern Urdu prose.

PART II

XI

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE nineteenth century and, to some extent, the eighteenth, may well be described as the seed-time of modern India. It was the time when the isolation of the country, long unsuccessfully attacked in the past, was at last completely broken, and a vital contact established with the West. The results of this change have been momentous. With the removal of the old barriers, India was drawn within the orbit of the modern civilized world, and her life made to beat to a wider and deeper rhythm. Everywhere India has felt the dissolving hand of change. The old institutions have gradually crumbled, making room either for new ones, or have acquired a new potency by assimilating the Western spirit. The incubus of authority has been lifted. A new morality is in the air, with its watchword of freedom and self-determination - self-determination in politics, where the right of every person to independence has been gradually recognized; in religion, which has been disencumbered of the weight of dogma and wedded to the service of man; in literature, which has been freed from the cramping sway of rules and prescriptions and made to express the ideals which the new age has brought with it. India, today, is an integral part of the civilized world, and reacts to every change, political, economic, and religious, in the remotest parts of the civilized world. Such in brief has been the Indian Renaissance.

The scope of what follows is to give a brief account of the rise and growth of Modern Urdu Literature, to describe and review the forces that gave birth to it, and to show how and wherein its development differs from that of the old.

One of the greatest agencies in the emancipation of the Indian mind has been Western education, or the study of European literature, history, philosophy, and science; and a brief account of it would not be out of place here.

It is customary to ascribe the beginnings of Western education in India to the efforts of Lord Macaulay, in 1835. Organized education on Western lines, however, had begun several decades earlier, and the first step in this direction had been taken by Christian missionaries and some public-spirited persons, notably David Hare, the free-thinking watchmaker of Calcutta, Sir Hyde East, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Calcutta, and the great Hindu leader, Rām Mohun Roy, who started the Vidyāla—subsequently known as the Hindu College, and finally the Presidency College in 1816. There was at this time a keen desire on the part of Indians to acquire the knowledge which was considered to be the secret of the progress and efficiency of Western nations. ‘The natives’, wrote Lord Macaulay, ‘are desirous to be taught English and are not desirous to be taught Arabic or Sanskrit.’¹ To the same effect writes O’Malley: ‘Lord William Bentinck may be said to have responded to a popular demand when, on 7th March 1835, after studying Macaulay’s well-known minute, he announced his decision in favour of English education.’²

Although English education was already an existing institution in Bombay and Bengal in 1835, yet it is nevertheless a fact that Macaulay gave a new direction to it. Hitherto it had been the policy of the Government to set aside a lac of rupees for ‘the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives’ of British India. But the money had been spent on printing Sanskrit and Arabic books. Macaulay, appointed President of the Committee of Public Instruction, advocated a modern course of study against the antiquated classical learning, and defeated the conservative party, upholding the policy of encouraging oriental learning. Referring to the Revival of Learning at the close of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe, he wrote:

At that time almost everything that was worth reading was contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Had our ancestors acted as the Committee of Public Instruction has hitherto acted; had they neglected the languages of Cicero and Tacitus; had they confined their attention to the old dialects of our own island . . . would England have

been what she is now? What Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham our tongue is to the people of India.³

Thus began what has been called the Anglicizing period, which aimed at the promotion of Western knowledge by means of English education. The policy thus inaugurated was continued and confirmed by Sir Charles Wood's Educational Despatch⁴ (1854). It was now decided that education was to be extended to all classes: by means of the vernaculars to the masses, and through the use of English for higher education.

It is not my purpose to give a history of the development of British education in India. Suffice it to say that a policy of expansion was pursued. Immediately after the Indian Mutiny, the Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were established; the University of Calcutta being responsible for the Presidency of Bengal, Northern India, the Central Provinces, and British Burma. The University of the Panjāb was established in 1882 and that of Allahābād in 1887.

The introduction of Western education in India is a sociological phenomenon of the highest importance; and Seeley is right in regarding it as a 'landmark in the history of the British Empire considered as an institute of civilization'.⁵ English education has been an extraordinary agency of moral and intellectual regeneration. It has brought a large number of people into pregnant contact with Western ideas, and has been directly responsible for the growth of modern literature. It has been a solvent of old traditions and established beliefs, so that in one important sense Macaulay's forecast has not been falsified, viz., that 'the languages of Western Europe would do for India what they had done for Russia; and the people, like those of Russia, would emerge from ignorance and take their place among civilized communities'.⁶

3

Among the economic agencies at work in modern India, special prominence should be given to the printing press. The art of printing in India goes back to the sixteenth century, having been introduced by Christian missionaries; but its operations were strictly limited to the publication of religious literature. The establishment, in the early parts of the nineteenth century, of the printing press which introduced books in Indian languages and in English, had an extraordinary effect. English books let loose a flood of new ideas among those

who could read them. It also led to the revival of indigenous literature and stimulated education as well as original literary work. The steady growth of journalism in the vernaculars, and in English, stimulated curiosity, opened up new horizons, and hastened the modernization of India.

The press has not only been an organ of education and social reforms, it has been an article of political propaganda, and is primarily responsible for the political education of the people and the diffusion of nationalism.

Another important civilizing influence that worked for the regeneration of the Indian people was that of the British and American missionaries. It made itself felt in a number of ways. It worked for the moral uplift of the people sunk in superstitions and devoted to inhuman rites, by indoctrinating the higher ethics of Christianity. It stimulated a taste and provided opportunities for higher education by building schools and colleges. It helped the cause of female education through women missionaries, who carried the light of learning to women shut in zenana, and it fought disease and alleviated pain by opening hospitals, orphanages, and widows' homes.

The missionary was in the field before the British Government and the Indian reformers, and has been all along a steady and unselfish worker in the cause of humanitarianism.

5

The rise of political sentiment in India is a comparatively late growth. But though it ripened late, the seed was laid as early as the beginning of British education. It was but natural that the student who read about the constitutional struggle in British history, or studied the writings of Rousseau, Paine, or Mill should dream of self-government. This sentiment was deepened by two factors—a movement for the idealization of the past which began as a reaction against Western materialism in defence of local culture, and the loss of faith in the moral and even the material greatness of Europe which certain events inspired. Both these forces worked side by side, besides acting and reacting on each other, and gave an extraordinary impetus to nationalism.

The beginnings of national sentiment go back to the Indian Mutiny. According to Professor Dodwell:

As the memories of the horrors of the Mutiny grew fainter in the Englishman, a consciousness of the severity with which it had been repressed developed in the Indian. We find an inclination to seek a justification for its outbreak, and to express approval of its motives; . . . we find developing a predisposition to doubt at once the power and the benevolence of English rule.⁷

An event of great importance that intensified racial hatred was the Ilbert Bill of 1883. At that time, outside the Presidency towns, no European could be tried for criminal offences except by another European. It was an invidious racial discrimination, and it was thought fit to do away with it in respect to the feelings of the Indian judges. But when the measure was introduced, it roused a most violent opposition among the non-official European population, and the Government had to withdraw it.

This naturally provoked a strong resentment among the Indian middle classes who regarded it as a slur on their dignity, and gave a powerful impetus to the attempts which were being made by Indian politicians to establish an effective political organization.

The immediate effect of the lesson taught was the assembling of the Indian National Congress in 1885. It was a humble beginning, but once started the movement grew apace. By far the greatest worker in the field was Mahātmā Gāndhī, who made nationalism a practical and intelligent creed, and converted a movement confined to the intelligentsia alone into a great mass movement.

The smouldering discontent caused by the Ilbert Bill was fanned into a flame during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon. One of the most brilliant of the viceroys, it was his misfortune to come into violent clash with Indian public opinion, and he said and did things which wounded the susceptibilities of Indians and caused an intense resentment against the British Government. In his convocation address at Calcutta he called the Indians 'a nation of liars'.⁸ But what inflamed public opinion against him and the British Government was the attempted partition of Bengal in 1905, with the object of creating a new province of East Bengal, with Dacca as its capital. This change was made the occasion of a violent agitation. The cry rose that Bengal was being divided in pursuance of the policy of 'divide and rule', and her language and traditions were being destroyed. Others gave it a communal interpretation. It was said that the partition meant the creation of a province in which the Muslims were to

be in a clear majority. It was, therefore, represented as the designed subjection of Hindus to Muslim interests. The uproar caused by the measure was unprecedented. English goods were boycotted; there were communal riots, and some Englishmen were killed by a bomb thrown at them. The press poured forth a deluge of abuse, and it was held that it was a religious duty to get rid of the foreigner. When the measure was at last withdrawn (1911), it had done its evil work. Its repercussions on the Muslims will be discussed in a later section.

So far India had been crushed by a sense of inferiority to the irresistible West. The victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War (1904) sent a wave of hope and self-confidence travelling all over India. It was acclaimed as the victory of the East over the West, of an oriental David over a European Goliath. This is how Farquhar comments on the political significance of the event in his *Modern Religious Movements in India*:

This adult self-confidence was immeasurably strengthened by the victory of Japan over Russia. Every Asiatic felt himself recreated by that great event. To all Asiatic lands it was a crisis in race-history, the moment when the age-old flood of European aggression was turned back. The exultation which every Indian felt over the victory lifted the national spirit to its height and gave a new note of strength to the period.⁹

The influence of this event on Urdu literature is patent. It marks the dawn of its patriotic poetry.

From now onwards, India diligently studied the doings of the Europeans in India, Africa, and Europe. The treatment of the Indians outside India, the hostile designs of Europe on the Muslim world, the mutual jealousies of European states, utterly discredited Europe in the eyes of Asia. The net result of this rising spirit of nationalism, in the words of Hans Kohn, was that to the Indians:

All European ethics appeared double-faced and riddled with hypocrisy and lies. All grandiloquent pronouncements seemed at bottom only a cloak for the attempt to exploit commercial dominance. . . . Asiatics discovered that the white man's burden, willingly shouldered, of imparting to the coloured peoples the blessings of a higher civilization, meant in fact the burden unwillingly shouldered by the coloured races of providing Europe with an object of exploitation for her own profit.¹⁰

But national movements do not flourish on an orgy of hatred and vituperation. They must have something solid and positive to fall back upon; and Indians soon came to have abundant material to soothe their lacerated pride and provide them with inexhaustible

material to prove their superiority to the foreigner. This was found in the writings of the European scholars known as Indianists and Orientalists, and of the Theosophists.

The works of the great Orientalists—Charles Wilkins,¹¹ Sir William Jones,¹² Max Müller,¹³ Colebrooke,¹⁴ Wilson,¹⁵ and Prinsep¹⁶ had no immediate effect on the Indian mind. But a little later, when national feelings were running at fever heat, their works were enthusiastically cited as proofs of the cultural greatness of India in the past.

It was, however, from the Theosophists that the idealization of the past received its greatest support. Of these the most important was Mrs. Besant, who spent most of her life in India, devoting herself to the exposition and defence of Hinduism. Of her Farquhar writes:

Thousands of orientals, whose minds had been filled with shivering doubts about their religion by the Western education they had received, have fled to Theosophy for refuge with great joy and relief. . . . There is scarcely an exploded doctrine, scarcely a superstitious observance, which she has not defended with the silliest and most shameful arguments. . . . But there is another side to all this. It is a simple matter of fact that for several decades Hindu and Buddhist thought and civilization were most unjustly depreciated and unmercifully condemned by missionaries, by Europeans in general and even by some Hindus.¹⁷

The most picturesque figure in the field of the rehabilitation and idealization of the past was Svāmī Vivekanand, a Bengali by birth, who attended the Conference of Religions at Chicago in 1893, and made a remarkable impression on the American mind by his great conversational powers and by his interpretation of Hinduism known as Vedantism. The impression he made on the American mind may be gathered by the following extract from the *New York Herald*:

Vivekanand is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.¹⁸

On his return to India with his European disciples, he was acclaimed as the saviour of the ancient faith, and it was generally believed that America and England were being converted to Hinduism. Here is a summary of some of the views of Vivekanand made by Farquhar:

Hindu civilization, since it springs from the oldest and noblest of religions, is good, beautiful and spiritual in every part. The foreigner fails altogether to understand it. All the criticism of European scholars

is erroneous, and everything that missionaries say on the subject is wickedly slanderous. The Hindu nation is a spiritual nation. It has taught the world in the past, and will yet teach the whole world again.

European nations and Western civilization are gross, material, selfish and sensual; and therefore their influence is most seriously degrading to the Hindu. It is of the utmost importance that every Hindu should do all in his power to defend his religion and civilization, and save Hindu society from the poison of Western influence . . . the Hindu must even give up his vegetarianism, and become a meat-eater, it may be a beef-eater, in order to become strong, and build up a powerful civilization once more on the soil of India.¹⁹

The materialism and depravity of the West and the greatness of our ancient cultural heritage—these two ideas have appeared with wearisome iteration in our literature for the past three-quarters of a century. I do not know any other themes to which we respond with greater animation than these, and it seems desirable to account for their persistence and popularity. That our arraignment of the West on moral grounds is, in the first instance, due to our militant nationalism, is too obvious to require any comment. But this does not absolve the Englishman from incurring responsibility for this odium. It should not be forgotten that Englishmen, who had been most unsparing in their denunciation of Eastern morals, failed to stand the test of their own austere standards, when weighed in the balance. Whatever his virtues as a private individual, the Englishman in the domain of politics had been ruthlessly acquisitive and opportunist, and no amount of claptrap and sophistry could throw dust in the eyes of the Indians, once they had grown critical. This is one side of the picture. On the other hand, all our attacks on Western ethics and statesmanship would seem to be no more than a pitiable subterfuge, and spring from a subconscious desire to get rid of that overwhelming sense of inferiority to the West which in the words of Mayhew 'has worked as a most poisonous complex in the mind of the Indian intelligentsia'.²⁰ And the same complex accounts for our passionate adoration of our past. With practically nothing to show for ourselves in the present, what more natural than that we should turn to the past, annex it to the present and thus cheat ourselves of our sense of inferiority to the West? Extremely pertinent in this respect are Aldous Huxley's remarks on our reverent attitude towards the past:

One of the evil results of the political subjection of one people by another is that it tends to make the subject nation unnecessarily and ex-

cessively conscious of its past. Its achievements in the old great days of freedom are remembered, counted over and exaggerated by a generation of slaves, anxious to convince the world and themselves that they are as good as their masters. . . . In the course of the last thirty or forty years a huge pseudo-historical literature has sprung up in India, the melancholy product of a subject people's inferiority complex. Industrious and intelligent men have wasted their time and their abilities in trying to prove that the ancient Hindus were superior to every other people in every activity of life. Thus, each time the West has announced a new scientific discovery, misguided scholars have ransacked Sanskrit literature to find a phrase that might be interpreted as a Hindu anticipation of it. . . . Such are the melancholy and futile occupations of intelligent men who have the misfortune to belong to a subject race.²¹

Very true. But shibboleths and war-cries are good if they work. And however fallacious and fantastic the idea of the superiority of Indian civilization over that of the West may be, or may appear to some, it gave the people the self-confidence they so badly needed. Militant and self-conscious India stood in need of a general rallying point for her teeming millions in their struggle for independence, and it was found in the greatness of their civilization in the past. From a hundred sources, real and imaginary, did this idea receive support and confirmation, and imparted a wonderful animus to the struggle for political emancipation.

The impact of Western ethics and civilization divided Indian society into three sections: (1) the iconoclasts who, without any overt departure from the religion of their ancestors, became agnostics or atheists and became uprooted, as it were, from their native soil; (2) the reformers, mostly middle class and with a great zeal for religion, who were strongly conscious of weak points in their religion, and wanted to purify it by bringing it into line with Western standards of life and morality; and (3) the vast bulk of the illiterate population in cities and villages, perfectly at home in the inherited faith, and indifferent to the war that raged around them. The first group, a small minority, scarcely comes into the picture. It is the second class, intent on assimilating the maximum Western spirit while continuing to live within the old framework, to which we owe the overhauling of the social and religious system. The most striking thing about its leaders is that while recommending reform to their co-religionists, they strenuously deny that they are importing anything

foreign into their religions. They contend that they are only reviving the true religious traditions either overlaid with foreign accretions and superstitions, or forgotten by the majority in a decadent age. When to this revivalism, as it is called, was added the spirit of nationalism, it took the form of an utter repudiation of indebtedness to the West, and of the most violent attacks on it for its immorality and materialism. And this in the face of wholesale assimilations from it!

How to explain this passion for the discovery of modern European thought in our sacred writings? Here two convergent explanations are possible. In the first place, imagine what an immense relief it must have been to a self-conscious people, smarting from a sense of inferiority to their conquerors, to know that the highest achievements of the latter were but a tardy confirmation of what their ancestors had discovered in the remote past. Here was a magical formula that changed their sense of humiliation into pride: it made them feel that despite their political misfortune (which was ascribed to the material and technological superiority of the British) they were, in all that really mattered, superior to their conquerors. No less interesting is the other reason. We are, it must be admitted, so deficient in mental flexibility, Hindus and Muslims alike, and are so deeply rooted in the past that the only way to reconcile us to the new is to proclaim that it is old; not a departure from the sacred past but the rediscovery of a lost truth. It has been said of Svāmī Dayanand, rightly or wrongly, that he resorted to his over-subtle system of exegesis in the interpretation of the Vedas, because he was convinced that it was the only way to modernize Hinduism and to make his radical views acceptable to his co-religionists. In this ingenuity of interpretation he does not stand alone. A great deal of Western ethics and philosophy has been assimilated, consciously or unconsciously, into all religious movements of a liberal nature in modern India; and even the most orthodox schools of thought have not in this respect escaped the 'contagion' of the West.

It is neither possible nor desirable in a book dealing with the history of Urdu literature to review at length the numerous reform movements in the period under review. All that is needed is to indicate the general lines of development. It will be found that, barring minor differences, the objective of all the movements is the same—a desire for simplification and a wish to throw overboard the accumulated superstitions and dogmas which had become a part and parcel of Hinduism and Islam. Historically as well as spiritually, these

movements fall into two sharply divided categories. The earlier and more liberal reformers are idealistic in their attitude towards the West, and wish to emulate Western standards of life and conduct. With the birth of nationalism and, moreover, as a result of a more objective study of Western statesmanship in India and abroad, this early admiration gives place to a spirited defence of local culture and a denunciation of Western civilization. And this was but natural.

If it be true [writes Farquhar] that Hinduism and Indian civilization are purely spiritual and good, and that Christianity and Western civilization are grossly materialistic and corrupt, then the average Hindu was quite right in drawing the conclusion that the sooner India is rid of Europeans and Western influence the better.²²

Hence, by denouncing the West and exalting their own past, the reformers actually gave a moral sanction to their desire for political emancipation.

The greatest of the early Hindu reformers was Rām Mohun Roy (1772-1833), the founder of Brāhma Samāj, and the pioneer of all living advance, religious, social, and educational, in the Hindu community in the nineteenth century. He maintained that the *Upanishads* taught theism, and he asked his co-religionists to go back to the pure religion of their forefathers. The work begun by him was carried on by his successors. The inerrancy of the Vedas was given up; the sacred thread was discarded; female education, widow remarriage, and intercaste marriages were encouraged; and early marriage and polygamy were made penal.

From Rām Mohun Roy, with his sweetness and light, to Svāmī Dayanand, the champion of orthodox Hinduism, what a change! And yet his mission was as fully called forth by the requirements of his day as that of the former by the requirements of the times in which he lived. A fanatical exponent of Hinduism, he imported all the impetuosity of a crusader into religious revivalism. Two ideas stand out in his teachings: 'Back to the Vedas' and 'India for the Indians'. And since Islam and Christianity stood outside the pale of India in his opinion, they were to be extirpated. His third famous idea that there is no polytheism in the Vedas, is based on the assumption that the numerous gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are but personifications of the attributes of one eternal God. His rejection of idolatry follows from the above.

The method of exegesis by which he eliminated from Hinduism

whatever he held to be wrong and imported into it all that he thought desirable, is criticized by Max Müller as follows:

To him not only was everything contained in the *Vedas* perfect truth, but he went a step further, and by the most incredible interpretations succeeded in persuading himself and others that everything worth knowing, even the most recent inventions of modern science, were alluded to in the *Vedas*. Steam-engines, railways, and steamboats, all were shown to have been known, at least in their germs, to the poets of the *Vedas*.²³

On the credit side, the net result of his teachings was to give a remarkable impetus to nationalism by giving it a religious sanction. He also purged Hinduism of its evils and gave a great impulse to modern education among his followers. On the debit side, he was responsible for ill will and hatred against Christians and Muslims. His chief work, *Satyarth Prakāsh*, is needlessly severe in its criticism of Islam, and was a serious factor in alienating the Muslims from the Hindus.

Muslim political ideology, like everything else pertaining to this community in India, began to take shape under the masterful personality of Sayyid Ahmad. The decadence of the Muslims in India in the nineteenth century is before everything else to be laid at their own doors. But it is an admitted fact of history that there was another strong contributing factor which added to and hastened their social disintegration after their political decline. This was the repressive policy followed by the British towards them, before and after the Indian Mutiny. And this need not surprise us. It was only natural that they should be unfriendly to the people from whom they had wrested power, and whom they had long considered as their rivals in power and dominion in India. Enumerating Muslim grievances against the British Dr. Hunter writes:

They accuse us of having closed every honourable walk of life to professors of their creed. . . . Above all, they charge us with deliberate malversation of their religious foundations, and with misappropriation on the largest scale of their educational funds.²⁴

and concludes:

There is now scarcely a Government office in Calcutta in which a Muhammadan can hope for any post above the rank of porter, messenger, filler of inkpots, and mender of pens.²⁵

Hunter in his book warned the British that the policy of deliberate disfavour to the Muslims was full of menace to the peace and stability of British rule in India. His appeal was directed to the common sense, self-interest, as well as the conscience of the British; and it is not unlikely that it set the authorities thinking. In fact, the publication of his book synchronized with the changing attitude of the British towards their Indian subjects. In Bengal, Surendra Nāth Banerjī had started a political movement 'to kindle in the young the beginnings of public spirit and to inspire them with a patriotic ardour, fruitful of good to them and to the Motherland'.²⁶ In 1876 he had founded the Indian Association to spread this spirit through the middle classes as a whole. The spirit spread apace, so much so that in 1878 Lord Lytton passed the Vernacular Press Act to restrain the violent criticism of the Government by the vernacular press. Then came the Ilbert Bill controversy which ranged the Hindus against the Government. In the face of these facts, the Government was not slow to realize that there was a need for an effective counterpoise to the growing power of the Hindus. This was found in the Muslims.

We now enter on a period of Indian history when the Government followed the policy of conciliating the Muslims by encouraging them in education and protecting their rights. On the Muslim side the leader of this *entente* was Sayyid Ahmad, the greatest Muslim leader of the century. There is no denying his great ability, courage, and foresight; but at the same time it is fair to recognize that his extraordinary success was in part due to his friendly co-operation with the Government. In this respect it is not at all fanciful to surmise that the distinguished treatment accorded to him during his stay in England was in part dictated by political considerations, namely to befriend and strengthen the Muslims as a counter-weight against the middle-class Hindus.

Sayyid Ahmad's political role with its watchword of loyalty to the Government, which he inculcated upon his co-religionists as a religious duty, provided their religious liberties were not interfered with, has been arraigned by the liberal section of the Indian population; and he has been attacked as a sycophant and time-server. But to give him his due, it must be admitted that he sincerely believed that for the Muslims of his day the only useful policy was to stand well with the Government. Nor is it true that he was hostile to the Hindus as a community. His differences with the Hindus were political, not religious. He attacked the Indian National Congress in his speech on 28 December 1887, not because it was a Hindu body

but because he deprecated its criticism of the Government. In his speech he warned the Hindus no less than the Muslims of the lawlessness into which the Congress was drifting, and for which he held the Bengalis responsible. It was merely an accident that he fell foul of the Hindus who, being the most progressive section of the Indian population, had begun a constitutional struggle for their political rights. If the Muslims had pitted themselves against the Government, he would have opposed them no less. And he actually did this when they celebrated the Turkish victory over Greece in 1897, by condemning their action as uncalled for and unseemly. This was because he was opposed on principle to the extra-territorial sympathies of the Muslims. Criticizing their jubilations he wrote:

We are the devoted and faithful subjects of the British Government, and should not do anything in word or deed that goes against our faithfulness and loyalty to it. We are not the subjects of Sultān 'Abdul Majīd; he enjoys no power over us and our country. . . . He neither has, nor can have, any spiritual jurisdiction over us as a Khalīfa. If he is entitled to Khilāfat, it is confined to his own country and the Muslims over whom he rules.²⁷

In the paper *Khilāfat aur Khalīfa* he wrote:

Should the British Government decide to pursue a policy hostile to the Turks, even then, as enjoined by our religion, we should obey our rulers and be loyal to them. We can never absolve ourselves from that duty.²⁸

And in *Hindustān aur British Government*:

The welfare of all the people of India, and of the Muslims in particular, lies in this, that they should lead peaceful lives under the fostering shadow of the British Government. They should fully realize that Islam enjoins on us that we should be loyal to those whose subjects we are, and under whom we are leading peaceful lives. We should have no ill will against them; nor should we make common cause with those who are hostile to them.²⁹

Hence his attacks on the Congress were not motivated by any ill will to the Hindus, as such. It was the expression of his loyalty creed which knew no exception. Of course he was anxious that the Muslims should not join the Congress, and one is constrained to say that he was not above a great deal of claptrap to gain his end. In his famous speech referred to above, he belittles those Muslims who had joined the Congress, and sneers at them as 'small fry', boosted by the Congress to inveigle others. Indeed, he carried his suspicion of the Hindus so far that when the latter out of pure goodwill joined the

Muslims in celebrating the Turkish victory over Greece, referred to above, he treated it, with no justification whatsoever, as an insidious attempt on their part to entice the Muslims into the Congress.

To do justice to Sayyid Ahmad as a political thinker, it is necessary to study, as dispassionately as possible, three things: (1) the strong position of the British in India; (2) the deplorable condition of the Muslims in India after the Mutiny; and (3) the unfriendly attitude of the Hindus towards them. To begin with, Sayyid Ahmad was firmly convinced that the British Government was impregably established in India. It had weathered the greatest political upheaval against it, and as such the aspirations of the Congress to oust it, even in a remote future, were futile. As regards the Muslims, the Mutiny had completely shattered their power, ruined their prestige, and exposed them to a rapacity of vengeance of which there have been few examples in modern times. Sayyid Ahmad was, therefore, right in concluding that the Muslims had everything to gain by standing well with the Government, and everything to lose by an ill-advised agitation for what he thought to be a nebulous end. Nor should it be forgotten that the Muslim middle class had hardly come into existence then. For the carrying out of his educational programme he had to depend on the munificence and liberality of the landed aristocracy and the officials—people who owed their position to the goodwill of the Government. However, what clinched his decision in favour of co-operation with the Government was the unfriendly attitude of the Hindus. He was made to feel that there was no possibility of a stable and genuine *rapprochement* with them, and he decided to throw the weight of his community, whatever it was, on the Government side. And for such a deal the Government was only too eager. Suspicious of the Hindus, it was eager to take the Muslims into confidence and protect their rights, provided they were loyal and kept out of politics. All things considered, Sayyid Ahmad was not far wrong in closing with the offer. In fact he had no other alternative.

The disruptive forces which steadily gained ground and shattered the ark of safety which Sayyid Ahmad had built for his community, were two: Pan-Islamism or Islamic Internationalism, as it is called sometimes, and Indian Nationalism. It was but natural that in an atmosphere of criticism and intellectual and political growth provided by Western education the Muslims should outgrow the tight-

fitting jacket prescribed by Sayyid Ahmad. They were not slow to realize that his ecstasies about the moral greatness of the English were not supported by facts. The changed attitude is reflected in the writings of Hālī and Shiblī, the two most notable representatives of the Aligarh school. The former outgrew his docile discipleship and criticized British statesmanship in a number of pungent satires. As regards Shiblī, he was in open revolt against his master's political creed after his retirement from the Aligarh College in 1898. As we shall see, his poetry marks an utter repudiation of the approved Muslim ideology of the day.

The man who made a frontal attack on all that Aligarh had stood for, not only politically but educationally and theologically as well, was Abul Kalām Āzād. In his perfervid advocacy of Pan-Islamism and Indian Nationalism, he records a complete breakaway from Sayyid Ahmad. His articles in the *Al-Hilāl* and subsequently in the *Al-Balāgh*, the two papers he edited with unusual ability, cast an extraordinary spell on Muslim imagination in India, and made Pan-Islamism the political creed of Indian Muslims in the second decade of the present century. His criticism of Sayyid Ahmad lacks imagination. His youthful and arrogant iconoclasm fails to see that the latter was a realist and his policy was determined by the requirements of his age.

Another journalist who was a consistent exponent of Pan-Islamism, and of nationalism intermittently, was Zafar 'Alī Khān, editor of the *Zamīndār*, Lahore, whose tumid rhetoric, like that of Abul Kalām, fascinated the Muslims. The greatest single factor, in this respect, was the poet Iqbāl, who for over two decades extolled Pan-Islamism as the panacea for the political problems confronting the Muslim world.

So far the leaders of revolt against Sayyid Ahmad's political creed. It now remains to trace the growth of Muslim self-consciousness in India. And first the events inside the country.

The first important event inside India that shocked the Muslims and shook their faith in the British Government was the cancellation of the Partition of Bengal Act under pressure from the Hindus. They had all along considered the creation of a province with an overwhelming Muslim majority as a great concession to them. Its cancellation not only disappointed them; it also taught them the tremendous force of agitation.

Second in importance was the promulgation of the Urdu-Nagri Resolution by Sir Anthony Macdonald, Lieutenant-Governor, United Provinces, in April 1900, by which Urdu was replaced by

Hindī as the court language in the Province. The third was the Cawnpore Mosque Tragedy, following the demolition of a part of a mosque in Cawnpore by order of the Government (1912). The indiscriminate firing to disperse the crowd led to several deaths, while the approval of the step by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir James Meston, sent a wave of indignation among the Muslims.

So far India. In the meantime Europe was witnessing a series of events which reacted with shattering force on the loyalty cult preached by the Muslim League. I have put these compendiously under the heading of Pan-Islamism. Before we understand their influence on Muslim politics in India, it is necessary to trace the history and explain the significance of the movement.

Pan-Islamism was a popular movement which began to capture the imagination of the Muslim world towards the end of the nineteenth century. It aimed at uniting all the Muslim countries in a common defensive alliance against the aggression of European nations. It owed its origin to Jamāl-ud-Dīn Afghānī, a professor of the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo. Considered as a dangerous agitator, he had to flee from Egypt to take refuge in the court of Sultān ‘Abdul Hamīd of Turkey, the first prince to develop Pan-Islamism as a deliberate policy and to attempt the restoration of the office of the Caliphate. The movement was at its height in India during the first two decades of the present century and strongly coloured the literature of the period.

I have already pointed out how Sayyid Ahmad failed to crush the nascent movement. The gradual dismemberment of Muslim countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe gave it a great filip; while British sympathies with some of the despoilers ranged the Muslims against the British Government.

Though very popular at one time, Pan-Islamism failed to rise above a vague sentiment. As an expression of the extra-territorial aspirations of Islam it has been a great favourite with Indian Muslims, but has failed to stem the tide of nationalism in Persia, Turkey, Tunis, Algiers, Egypt, and Arabia. Why it captured the imagination of Indian Muslims so strongly will be explained in a subsequent section of this chapter.

9

The Muslim League was started immediately after the cancellation of the Partition of Bengal Act, and held its first meeting at Dacca in

1906. Recruiting its members mostly from nobles, ministers of State, great landlords, lawyers, and merchants, it has been, with one or two brief exceptions, conservative in politics. Its early history is a series of requests to the Government for concessions, jobs, and protestations of loyalty. Consequently, it never came into touch with the Muslim masses and the intelligentsia, as the Congress did with all sections of Hindus. Twice only in its uneventful history did it adopt an adventurous policy. First, during the Turko-Italian War (1911-12) and the Balkan War (1912-13) when, on account of resentment against British sympathies with the enemies of Turkey, it adopted as its aim, 'the achievement of self-government in a suitable form'; and again in 1916, when it joined hands with the Congress in a joint declaration for *Swarāj*. But even then it did not take an active part in the Congress programme. It was revived in 1924, the small militant element having been ousted, and it once more became the mouthpiece of the landed classes and high officials.

From the foregoing account of the political life of the Muslims it is evident that they never had a clearly defined political goal before them since the Indian Mutiny. Sayyid Ahmad, no doubt, did have a political ideal, whatever it was worth. 'For peace in India', he remarked in the course of his well-known speech at Allahābād, 'and for all-round progress in the country, it is necessary that the British connexion should continue for a long time, maybe for ever.' His empty mantle fell on the shoulders of the All-India Muslim League. As is well known, it never ventured on the high seas, being perfectly at home in a quiet backwater and content with the odds and ends of preferment. It played for safety—an ideal which is not calculated to lead to high endeavour or inspire great literature; and, as may be expected, it figures in literature as a perpetual mark for satiric shafts and derision. As regards the intelligentsia, for want of something better, they chose to pursue the *ignis fatuus* of Pan-Islamism, or frittered their energy on such utterly wild and fantastic dreams as the *Khilāfat* movement. And as they had no well-defined political goal and, therefore, no natural outlet for their energy, all their impeded zeal came out in spasmodic outbursts, in wildness and hysteria, which, the fitful fever being over, left them inert and exhausted.

We may wince at such a sweeping condemnation of Muslim statesmanship in India, yet the picture given above is substantially true. It does not, however, mean, as may appear at first sight, that the Indian Muslim was not a realist. The fact is that having refused to accept Indian nationalism, the dominant ideology of the day, he had not

vision enough to formulate a rival ideology for himself *inside India*. In this state of war with Indian nationalism he was driven to fall back on religion as his last support in a hostile world, and for want of something tangible to love and idealize at home, he developed a pathetic and inordinate interest in Muslim countries who, as is well known, never bestowed a friendly thought on him.

From 1936 onwards, the League was dominated by Mr. Jinnah. It now entered on a new and vigorous course. Mr. Jinnah regarded Pan-Islamism as an exploded myth. With the eye of a realist, he discovered that the future of Indian Muslims was connected neither with the activities of the Indian National Congress nor with the Utopian dreams of those who believed that the political future of Indian Muslims was dependent on the maintenance of a political *status quo* in the Muslim world. The demand for Pakistan originated neither with Mr. Jinnah nor with Dr. Iqbāl. It was first formulated by Chaudhrī Rahmat 'Alī, a Muslim barrister in England. But it was Mr. Jinnah who made it practical politics. He provided his co-religionists in India with an ideology at once simple, practical, and attractive. It gave them self-respect and self-confidence which Indian Nationalism had failed to guarantee; and it is for these reasons that the movement he inaugurated permeated all sections of Muslim society with such great speed. The fact is that the Muslims, who had felt themselves at home in India for over eight centuries, had suddenly begun to feel that they were outsiders, having only a precarious tenure in it, after the Mutiny. The step-motherly treatment accorded to them by the British Government for a long time was reflected in the attitude of the Hindus, who by dint of their ability, character, and prolonged government patronage, had entrenched themselves, economically as well as politically, into an impregnable position, and whose numerical superiority had still further enlarged their ambition. I do not think that the Indian Muslim is more of a visionary than a member of any other Indian community; and presumably his prolonged and vain interest in Pan-Islamism was dictated by two important factors—an unconscious distrust of Indian nationalism, and the absence of an adequate and practical alternative ideology. And for the same reason we may take a more charitable view of the failings of the Muslim League—its mealy-mouthed subservience and political inertia; for these were the direct result of the political impasse in India. No wonder, therefore, if it cultivated its own scanty plot of ground and looked up to government patronage and assistance alone for its existence.

The political decline of Islam in India, as well as outside India, coincides with several revivalistic movements, that is movements which, in one form or another, preached a return to the original principles of Islam. Widely different in their aims and ideals they are agreed on this one point—a return to the uncorrupted principles of Islam as an indispensable condition of the regeneration of the Muslims. Their history shows an earnest effort for the rediscovery of truth buried, as it was thought, under medieval accretions. The more conservative of these are blindly revivalistic. They ignore or underestimate the requirements of the present, and affirm with extreme dogmatism that all that is needed to rehabilitate Islam is to go back to the past. The more advanced persons, mostly a product of the modern civilization, feel, on the other hand, that mere revivalism is not enough, and wish to formulate a theology in accord with the rationalism and humanitarianism of the present. These are the two main sources of Modern Islam in India.

The greatest of the early religious thinkers in India had been Shāh Valīullah, who was born in Delhi in 1703 and died in 1762. The trend of his teachings was naturally determined by the changing political atmosphere. As long as Islam had been a great world force, the study of jurisprudence, or Islamic law, had occupied a paramount place in the curriculum. But when Islam declined as a political power, the study of Islamic law fell into abeyance. Shāh Valīullah was among those who led the revival of the study of the Koran and the Traditions, and thus attempted to bring the people once more in touch with the heart of Islam. To this end he translated the Koran into Persian, the court and literary language of northern India. It was published in 1737-8.

As a social reformer, Shāh Valīullah raised his voice against the practices that had been incorporated into Islam on account of contact with Hinduism. These were: prejudice against widow remarriage, extravagance on marriages and other festive occasions, and performance of funeral ceremonies such as *chiblam*, *shash-māhī*, and *sālāna*, which had no religious sanction, as viewed by him.

The work commenced by Shāh Valīullah was carried on by his son, Shāh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz (1746-1823), who issued the famous *fatva* permitting the Muslims to obtain English education, interdicted by the rank and file of contemporary theologians as heretical.³⁰ His second son was Shāh Rafī‘-ud-Dīn (1749-1818) whose chief work was

a literal translation of the Koran into Urdu. The translation is excessively literal and did not achieve the popularity of the translation published by Shāh Valīullah's third son, Shāh 'Abdul Qādir (1753–1814), in 1791. The publication of these two translations, a short time after the Persian translation, is significant. It shows how very quickly Urdu, the language of the people, was supplanting Persian, the court language of the Mughals, now that their power was on the decline.

Shāh Valīullah and his sons were cautious reformers. It was reserved for Sayyid Ahmad of Rāe Brelī (1786–1831) and his colleague and follower, Muhammad Ismā'īl—the leaders who sponsored the Vahhābī movement in India—to make Islam a dynamic force in the land. Their object was to restore Islam to its uncorrupted simplicity. In this they were influenced by a general movement for reform which originated in Arabia in the beginning of the eighteenth century, gradually spreading to Africa, India, and the Muslim world in general.

This movement, which is known as the Vahhābī movement, was started by Muhammad Ibn-'Abdul Vahhāb, after whom the movement is named. It was a protestant movement, and its object was to purify Islam of those heathen practices which had crept into it on account of inner decadence or contact with other religions and cultures. The Vahhābīs carried their iconoclastic zeal so far as to destroy the sepulchre at Karbalā and the sacred relics at the Prophet's tomb. The movement was crushed by the Turks, but not before it had spread over the Islamic world in the form of several reform movements.

The Indian Vahhābī leaders had come into direct contact with the Vahhābī movement in Arabia and imbibed its spirit. Their programme was to do for India what the Vahhābī leaders had done for Arabia. They found that the Muslims in India observed Hindu customs, maintained Hindu laws of inheritance and marriage, worshipped the tombs of saints, believed in magic and amulets, and forbade widow remarriage. Hence the need for reform and a complete break with tradition.

Sayyid Ahmad was forty when he launched his mission. He travelled all over the United Provinces and made a deep impression by his sincerity, simplicity, and earnestness. His right-hand man was Maulvī Muhammad Ismā'īl, and the success of the movement was largely due to his co-operation. His chief contribution to literature is *Taqwīat-ul-Imān*, one of the earliest prose works in Urdu. Its language

is forceful and direct, and both with regard to its vigorous style and subject-matter it deserves commendation.

The Vahhābī movement was one of the major religious movements in India in the nineteenth century. For a long time the British Government considered it as a political organization hostile to British rule. It was reserved for Sayyid Ahmad to vindicate the movement and explain its objective, in reply to Hunter's book.³¹

The excessive religiosity of these sectaries, especially their campaign against the Sikh Government,³² has evoked much enthusiasm, while their unjust extirpation by the British Government has invested them with a glamour not unmixed with pathos. There is no doubt that by the restoration of an earlier discipline, the movement helped remove some positive evils. But its standards do not appeal to us. It approved of certain things because they were orthodox; it treated others as evil because they were unorthodox. For Vahhābīs all that the world had achieved since the completion of the Prophet's mission was so much rubbish to be thrown on the slag heap; and if we are required to admire it, we can do so only from a distance.

The preoccupation with the simplification of the creed to be brought about by going back to Islam, as it was preached in the time of the Prophet, was likewise the programme of Ahl-e-Hadīs (the Followers of the Tradition) and the Ahl-e-Qur'ān (the Followers of the Koran). But although they aimed at the simplification of Islam and the reduction of authority, they were not forward-looking movements. They looked more to the past than the present or the future, and failed to take stock of the requirements of the Muslims in a fast-changing world.

The Ahmadiya movement, started by Mirza Ghulām Ahmad of Qādīān (1839-1908) who claimed to be the promised Messiah of Islamic tradition, is a conglomeration of old and new ideas. In fact, the modern element in it is almost negligible, and in the words of Professor Smith, it 'is modern only in the sense of being recent'.³³ The origin of the movement, though not its later development, is to be sought in a need for a greater organization and cohesion among the Muslims, especially in combating the militant zeal of the Aryā Smāj and the power and prestige of Christianity. Mirza Ghulām Ahmad was the greatest champion of Islam against Svāmī Dayanand, the most redoubtable opponent that Islam ever encountered in India.

Apart from this, the movement made no positive contribution to Muslim ideology. Its missionary activities in Europe, which led to the conversion of Lord Hedley in 1913, caused a big boom. Here was

the Muslim analogue to the achievements of Svāmī Vivekanand in America; and it led to similar idealism among the Muslims in India.

The only leader of thought who looked both before and after, and exerted a profound influence on the mind of the rising middle class and the intelligentsia, was Sayyid Ahmad, the leader of the Aligarh movement. He not only simplified the past but, unlike most of the reformers mentioned above, enriched Islam by the assimilation of Western culture and civilization. Some of his religious views were not acceptable to his co-religionists, and they rightly took exception to his exegesis, but they widely supported his views on social reform and education. The modernization of Islam in India was essentially the work of Sayyid Ahmad and his colleagues. The theme is so large that I propose to devote a whole chapter to it.

The history of Islam in India after the Aligarh movement may be defined as a gradual relapse towards the passive acceptance of orthodoxy. Important in this respect are: the Nadvat-ul-'Ulamā, or the Society of Muslim Theologians, started in 1890 at Lucknow, the seminary known as Dār-ul-'Ulūm, or the School of Theology at Deoband, near Sahāranpur, which dates from 1898, and the Madrasa-e-Ilāhīyyāt, or the School of Theology, organized at Cawnpore.

Started, in the first instance, to meet the challenge of Hinduism and Christianity, most of these institutions have lapsed into unthinking orthodoxy, and their programmes and attitudes have consolidated the smug, dogmatic climate of mind which prevails among the Muslims today. Though hardly liberal theologically, the Anjuman-e-Himāyat-e-Islām has been the most active instrument of education among the Muslim institutions in the Punjāb. In addition to this, its annual meetings have given an enormous filip to a sentimental type of communal verse, and are chiefly responsible for determining the outlook of a large number of minor poets. Its influence on Iqbāl will be discussed in the chapter dealing with him.

II

Among the educational institutions which hastened the Western penetration of India, the foremost in northern India was the Delhi College,³⁴ started in 1792. It was the first important interpreter of the genius of the West in this part of the country, and its famous teachers, M. Felix Boutros,³⁵ Dr. Sprenger³⁶ and Mr. Taylor,³⁷ did much for the diffusion of Western learning in Delhi.

The development of modern education in the Punjāb was the work

of Dr. W. G. Leitner, who was appointed the first principal of Government College, Lahore, in 1869. He founded in 1865 the Anjuman-e-Punjab, Lahore, a vernacular literary society of which he was the president. The object of the Anjuman was the advancement of popular knowledge through the vernaculars, and the discussions of questions of social, literary, scientific, and political interest. The work done by the Anjuman was supplemented by Colonel W. R. M. Holroyd, Director of Public Instruction, Punjab, who was responsible for the famous *mushā'ara* (1874), the first of its kind, which attempted to encourage the composition of poetry on Western lines in Urdu.

By far the greatest channel of Western influence which brought about a remarkable change in the attitude of the Muslims was the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, founded by Sayyid Ahmad in 1877. The numerous schools and colleges which sprang up in all parts of India after its establishment bespeak its great influence. The importance of the college is, however, to be sought in its dynamic outlook: it persuaded the Muslims to accept Western civilization in general and modern education in particular, and helped crystallize Muslim ideology in practically all important aspects of life. Strange as it may seem, its contribution to literature (apart from the works of Sayyid Ahmad and Shiblī) is almost nil. It passed the torch of learning and culture to others, and did very little to justify the hopes of its great founder.

XII

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN URDU LITERATURE

WHILE reviewing the Middle Ages in the first part of this book, I remarked that their most striking feature was their impenetrable conservatism. With the few exceptions already mentioned, the period in question presents the spectacle of a barren and monotonous landscape, rolling on from century to century, the same features appearing with persistent regularity. Among other factors making for this immobility was an idolatrous attitude towards the past. The great thinkers, philosophers, poets, theologians, and scientists of the past were considered to be perfect in all respects, and the people looked up to them with despairing or exultant veneration. It was this dogmatic faith in the inerrancy of the great men of the past that Sayyid Ahmad, Altāf Husain Hālī, and some others strove to demolish in their writings. The latter has given a trenchant expression to it in his *Madd-o-Jazr-e-Islām* and *Ta'assub-o-Insāf*.

As a result of this changed outlook, public opinion today is more critical and enlightened: it judges institutions by their usefulness and reasonableness. The centre of gravity has shifted from institutions to men. Formerly, the latter were required to adapt themselves to an inelastic system; now the system is modified to suit the changed conditions of life. Hence the modern age is in a state of flux, more or less. In the domain of politics, economics, and sociology it is assimilating every new advance in science and knowledge for the service of the community.

This has gone hand in hand with an increased belief in the goodness and beauty of life here below. The world, for long considered as unreal, or at best, a temporary sojourn, or a preparation ground for an eternal life of bliss hereafter, has grown wonderfully real and interesting. The ideal now is not to escape life, or to put up with it as a necessary evil, but to make it better and to have more and more of it. This does not mean any loss of interest in religion. A very large part of the literature in the period under review is directly

or indirectly concerned with religion. But so great is the bias in favour of life that it has permeated religion itself with a higher and sounder ethic, divesting it of its medieval bleakness, gloom, and asceticism. Vedantism, mysticism, pantheism, asceticism, have their votaries even today, but these do not have for the majority anything more than a mild speculative interest. They are fast getting out of court, and have been condemned as false and unhealthy medieval survivals, incompatible with the free and full growth of personality.

I have already pointed out that the meliorist tendencies of the modern age are the direct outcome of a secular view of life. The metaphysical trends of medieval thought, such as faith in fate, destiny, planetary influence, or the belief that sorrow and suffering are punishments for sin, were not conducive to meliorism or reform. Thanks to the study of economics and sociology, we are coming to have a more realistic view of life, and the knowledge thus acquired has given a fresh impetus to reform.

One of the immediate results of this secular view of life is optimism. Despotism, social rigidity, and a despressing theology had made the Middle Ages fatalistic. But the weakening of political and ecclesiastical pressures, and the consciousness of power created by man's achievement in modern times have dealt a heavy blow to the defeatist mentality of the Middle Ages. We, today, believe that most of the inequalities of life, and such inflictions as sorrow, suffering, and disease are the result of a faulty system which can be improved by better legislation, education, and organization; and the steady materialization of these ends has given us self-confidence and courage to battle against these man-made evils.

This takes us by a natural transition to another side of modern civilization—its humanitarianism. The Middle Ages were individualistic; every man for himself and God for us all—summed up the medieval attitude. The idea of social obligations, or of one's duty to one's neighbour, had not then emerged. The old Hindu system did not admit of universal charity. Discussing the Yoga system, Professor Rādhakrishnan writes: 'There was scarcely any place for the active manifestation of universal friendship in a scheme of life so individualistic. The altruistic ideal manifested itself in a negative way only.'¹ Nor was there much organized charity in the modern sense in Islam. Whatever little of it there was, was motivated by religious considerations, namely the desire for personal salvation.

There has been no greater and more far-reaching result of the Western penetration of India than the spirit of sympathy and love

of man as man, untrammelled by consideration of reward here or in the hereafter. It has roused us out of our selfishness, quickened fellow-feelings, and refined our sensibilities. Mere justice, sometimes held up as the highest ideal, has been found to be too colourless and inadequate, and has been softened by the infusion of charity and love. This is one of the chief causes of the various reform movements in the country. We believe that the poor and depressed have a right to happiness, and their disabilities, due to the accidents of birth or a defective social or political order, should and can be remedied with love and sympathy.

How far is this interest in the poor and depressed classes purely humanitarian, or the expression of the abstract love of humanity? It is largely altruistic, but it is also the expression of a strong sense of social solidarity. The strength of a community is the sum total of the strength of all the individuals of which it is composed, and, therefore, the weakness of any section of it is the weakness of the whole. Our humanitarianism is the expression of both moral and political considerations.

All this liberalism in life and thought was made possible and accelerated by modern economic agencies which have made the work of diffusion possible.

The English [writes Professor Sarkār] have admitted us to the entire outside world . . . and they have admitted the rest of the world to us in a degree not dreamt of under Muslim rule. India has now been switched on to the main currents of the great moving world outside, and made to vibrate with every economic or cultural change there . . . the telegraph, railway, newspapers have completed the suction of India into the whirlpool of movements of every kind. . . . And not only have these modern agencies connected us with the outer world more extensively and fully than ever before, but . . . they have also been tending to fuse the various races and creeds of India into one homogeneous people and to bring about social equality and community of life and thought which are the necessary basis of nationality.²

Of equal importance in this respect is the influence of the new industrial organization. Large-scale production, and the consequent increasing economic dependence, the rise of the new professions and the obsolescence of others, the meeting together of people of various castes and creeds in schools and colleges and railways, have worn off caste prejudices, and have completed by sheer force of necessity the intellectual emancipation which began in the closet or the school.

A noticeable feature of the new literature is its increased interest in life and its surroundings, and its eagerness to reconstruct society on a sound and healthy basis. Consequently, the realism of our literature is not so much the expression of an interest in life for its own sake—its richness, pathos, beauty, mystery, or complexity—as of the realization of the magnitude of evil, man-made evil, in the form of customs, conventions, or political disabilities, and the desire to attack and uproot them. Naturally, therefore, the literature is ameliorative and humanitarian. It descends into the arena to help and fortify the poor and humble. It studies them with love and sympathy, portrays the evils that afflict them, shows fortitude, courage, and charity flourishing in the bleak atmosphere of poverty and ignorance, and strikes at the chains of custom and conventions that bind them. The note is at its strongest in fiction, especially in Nazīr Ahmad and Prem Chand. It is strong even in a bohemian like Sarshār.

Among the changes that have taken place in literature, the one that would strike even a casual observer, is its wider franchise. Literature, today, envisages the whole of life. It is no longer confined to a few stereotyped subjects. The world of nature and humanity and their interactions; animal life; social problems; the lot of women, children, and the outcasts; the study of the past; patriotism, nationalism, philosophy, metaphysics, mysticism; all these springs of the artist's inspiration have begun to flow, and have imparted richness and variety to literature.

But although literature, today, theoretically embraces the whole of life, it is only partly creative. Literature has become with us, what it tends to become in every self-conscious age, a criticism of life. The greater part of the new poetry is intellectual; it is satiric, didactic, or philosophical. This racking self-consciousness shows itself in the subjective character of the poetry of nature. We carry our problems with us wherever we go, and even in our holiday moods we must invest nature with our own feelings and sentiments, or see in her peace and quiet a contrast to the fret and fever of humanity. As a result the literature of the age is more intellectual and critical than imaginative.

From the above it is a natural deduction that the greater part of the new literature should be merely topical, and therefore transient. It deals with the questions and problems of the day, and its appeal is confined to the writer's contemporaries only, or at best, to a generation or two. This accounts for the phenomenal popularity of

Hālī and Akbar in their day, as well as their gradual eclipse after their death. They do not grip us as they did their contemporaries. The writer today writes for his own age only.

A distinctive feature of modern society is the emergence of the middle class, which has had far-reaching effects on literature. The middle class is essentially a modern product. To quote Edwardes and Garrett:

A feature of the Mughal administration which must strike the modern inquirer was the complete absence of specialized departments, such as those concerned with medical aid, excise, forest conservancy, and technical industry, which absorb a recognized share of modern governments. . . . 'In Delhi', remarked Bernier, 'there is no middle state. A man must be either of the highest rank or live miserably.' In other words the professional classes—those engaged in the practice of medicine, in the pursuits of literature, art and music—could only hope for an adequate income by attaching themselves to the Imperial court or to the entourage of a provincial governor. . . . There was no large middle-class population, on whom they could depend for the purchase of their artistic masterpieces or for the employment of their professional services.³

This, no doubt, fettered talent and compelled the artist to produce his goods according to the taste and desires of the person on whose bounty he subsisted. The decay of the old order and the aristocracy, the growth of business and commerce, and the spread of education, favoured the rise of the middle class which soon became the most powerful class in the country. It was the emergence of this class, rich, prosperous, unencumbered with traditions of the aristocracy, supple, forward-looking, that released arts from the old bondage. Literature today is not aristocratic as it had been in the past. It caters to the taste and requirements of this new class. The changed outlook is indicated by the themes of the new literature, especially in fiction. The old literature was aristocratic and dealt with the lives of kings and princes in a romantic setting. The present literature is democratic: it deals sympathetically with the lives of the common people; and the old privileged classes are introduced in it as foils to the middle class and the poor, as in the works of Nazīr Ahmad, Sarshār, and Prem Chand.

While it is true in a general way that the modern age marks the

dawn of the emancipation of the man of letters and the artist, it would be unsafe to push the conclusion too far. The modern writer is free to choose his themes only in theory; in practice he is no more free than the artist in the past, and enjoys at best a very narrow margin of freedom. He imagines that he determines his attitude and values himself, but in reality it is the society that determines them for him. The earlier writers of the century were middle class by choice; the present-day writer is middle class by self-interest if not by compulsion. So powerful is the middle class today that no writer, however talented or independent, can look forward to recognition, much less economic competence, without some sort of adjustment or alignment with its ideology. Whatever the middle class looks at sideways has no chance of approval. Intensely religious, the middle class frowned upon love-poetry, and it has been added to the limbo of forgotten things. It was suspicious of the newly introduced drama from Europe, and it never received literary cultivation; while music, which was the pastime of princesses, has fallen into the hands of prostitutes. It is hardly possible to believe after this that a writer is his own master in a world dominated by middle-class values. The middle class is essentially puritan and, at any rate, in the realm of poetry, nothing has so fully found favour with it as communal verse.

The reader of this book would do well to keep steadily in mind that the history of our middle class falls into two parts: the earlier period of nearly a quarter of a century when it was fighting reactionary forces and stood for expansion and emancipation, and the long period of its triumph in which it grew reactionary. Its power today is immense. It has successfully guarded its privileges and values and held in check the growing spirit of the people.

One thing the middle class has uniformly lacked—a sensitivity to beauty or a feeling for the formal aspects of literature in general. In this respect, there is little to choose between Sayyid Ahmad and Hālī on the one hand and Iqbāl on the other. It is this deficiency, this neglect of the finer elements of style, and not the excess of the doctrinal element in it that is likely to kill the new literature eventually.

To go back, although Sayyid Ahmad appealed to the aristocracy for financial aid yet his mission was successful because of the support of the middle class.

The *Tabẓīb-ul-Akhlāq* did not influence the uneducated masses [writes Hālī], nor did it have any hold on the theologians. The latter considered it harmful not only to religion but to themselves as well. Hence the influ-

ence of the *Tabẖīb-ul-Akhlāq* was confined to the middle class which was neither entirely uneducated nor well versed in secular or traditional lore, neither extremely indigent, nor in very affluent circumstances.⁴

No wonder he takes pride in belonging to this class, as he does in his *Tarkīb-Band*, read out in the sixth annual meeting of the Muhammedan Educational Conference, held at Aligarh in 1891.

3

Another striking feature of the period under review is the development of the historical sense. This may sound paradoxical at first, considering what has been said about the general servile attitude towards the great men of the past; but it is a fact, nevertheless, that the ancient heritage of Hinduism and Islam remained practically a sealed book to the followers of these religions during the Middle Ages. Hindu achievement in the classical period was quite as much lost to sight after the Muslim conquest, as were Greek drama, poetry, science, and philosophy after the ascendancy of Christianity in Europe. Nor had Muslims in India any living contact with their cultural heritage in Baghdād, Cairo and Cordova. The destruction of Baghdād by the Tartars in A.D. 1258 rang the death knell of Muslim culture, and although it continued to act as a powerful leaven in the West for several centuries, the Muslims themselves grew up for several centuries in total ignorance of it.

The rediccovery of Muslim culture began in India with Shiblī; and, as he himself admits, he was fired to emulation by the work of the Orientalists, as the Hindus owed the resurrection of their culture to the indefatigable industry of the Indianists. Once begun, the work was pushed forward with great zeal. It had momentous results. The rediscovery of the past gave Indians the self-confidence they needed so badly. The fact is that medieval Hinduism and Islam no more represented the true spirit of these religions than did medieval Christianity, the spirit of Christ and the Apostles. Hence the re-discovery of the ancient heritage of Hinduism and Islam in philosophy, poetry, and science helped remove that overwhelming sense of inferiority to the West which marked the advent of the English. It has already been pointed out how it gave a powerful impetus to nationalism.

Like most good things this cult of the past was very much overdone and soon degenerated into a slogan. Hindus and Muslims alike clung tenaciously to the idea that all they needed to recapture their

ancient greatness and to come abreast of the civilized West was to go back to their past.

The popularity of this idea was due to two convergent reasons. It enabled Indians, in the first place, to repudiate the charges brought against their religion and culture by European writers, chiefly historians and missionaries. In the second place, it provided them with a blissful refuge from the humiliating sense of their insignificance in the present.

A marked result of this perfervid admiration for our classical heritage is that our reconstruction of the past is often false and tendentious; we are apt to see the golden side of the shield only, and very often we fancy we see what is not actually there.

Cognate with this idealization of the past is our denunciation of the West on moral grounds. As a little thought would show, our objurgations against the West and our admiration for our past stem from the the same root—our inability to meet the challenge of the West. It would be noticed that both these ideas have been popular chiefly with die-hard theologians or politicians with an axe to grind. The forward-looking reformers like Rām Mohun Roy, Renade, and Sayyid Ahmad did not set much store by them. The inference is clear. The glorification of the past is a part of the defence mechanism of those who lack the will and power to adjust themselves to a fast-changing world. Revivalism is no more than a variety of escapism, and its advocates, like drug addicts, wish to get rid of their torturing sense of frustration and incompetence in the present by dwelling on the achievements of their forefathers.

A similar reason may also be assigned for our arraignment of the West on moral grounds. Obviously, if we admire the West, as the earlier reformers did, then it naturally follows that we also should follow a similar progressive attitude. But by crying down the West, we absolve ourselves from that duty and justify our inaction.

I may appear to be labouring this point. The fact is that for the past three-quarters of a century there has been no greater passport to popularity and fame, both for writers and statesmen, than these two themes—a dithyrambic praise of our ancient civilization and equally mordant attacks on the West. The delight with which we rush to them, and the long fascination they have exercised on us, are due to their protective or compensatory value.

The new age kept the old forms intact. It was thought that the *ghazal* with its narrow range and technical difficulties would go by the board. This has not been the case. As a matter of fact, it may be said to have acquired a new potency by readily accommodating the new themes, for example, the satire of Akbar and the philosophy of Iqbāl. However, if we exclude Akbar, the *ghazal* has, on the whole, recommended itself to poets of lower vitality, or to poets of greater vigour in moments of relaxed tension. There are all the signs of such an emotional exhaustion in Iqbāl's *ghazals* of his concluding period. The abounding energy of his youth and maturity has almost spent itself now, and whatever little of it remains is found to drag itself languidly through the sand and silt of advancing years.

Formal changes had to wait till Iqbāl was at the apex of his power in *Payām-e-Mashriq*. The experiments made by him in lyrical forms in that book gave a lead to Hafīz who further elaborated them in his *Naghma Zār*.

On the whole, there has been very little formal advance in poetry in the period under review, and the poets have confined themselves to old forms to express the new consciousness.

5

No less important has been the development of modern prose. As a matter of fact, judged by actual achievement, the development of prose offers a more fertile topic of inquiry than that of poetry. In the latter, there is little more than the modification of a tradition already very active; in prose it is almost a new commencement. As we have already seen, there was no prose worth the name before the Indian Mutiny, and the little we had, was akin to poetry in its use of rhyme, word-play, and metaphor. The new prose is essentially a modern development; it is modelled on English prose, and is the result of those very intellectual and economic factors which laid the foundation of modern English prose in the eighteenth century.

Our old prose is so excessively given to decoration because of the paucity of its subject-matter, whereas our modern prose is simple and direct, intent upon communicating definite ideas or precise states of mind. The factors which promote this attitude are both intellectual and economic. The old style was artificial because the writer had practically nothing to say; moreover, he had leisure to let his fancy

play around his subject and bury it under a profusion of ornament. The modern writer is differently situated. The accelerated tempo of life leaves him no time for the studied effect of the old prose. He must write quickly. Still more important is the extraordinary development of the intellectual interests of life. The writer today, be he a scientist, reformer, historian, novelist, journalist, deals with facts; he has a definite attitude to communicate and he must look straight at his subject. He must be precise, clear, and brief before everything else. And because he is addressing those who like him are rushed for time, he must make no unnecessary calls on their time and attention.

I am not suggesting that the ideal described above has been fully realized. The love of flamboyant effects, so dear to the ordinary man, is not easy to get over. The language used in the greater part of our prose is often in excess of its subject. It is also frequently emotional, as in all but the best writers emotions continued to be in excess of the intellect. In the best writers of the Aligarh school, however, the language is used with restraint and propriety, and is largely utilitarian. It is often bald and pedestrian—defects which may be traced either to an unmusical ear or to a matter-of-fact attitude towards life, but it is seldom over-worded.

XIII

THE ALIGARH MOVEMENT

SAYYID AHMAD has been made the subject of a hundred sermons and encomiums; yet there is one noteworthy point supplied by his life which has escaped most writers. To me his life is instructive, because, among other things, it supplies the most satisfactory answer to the question: What is genius, and wherein does it differ from mere talent? There are some half-truths which the world will not let die willingly. The pedagogue, the moralist, the business man with an aureole of success round his head, in fact all those who have made their way in life, are never tired of repeating that genius is merely a capacity for taking infinite pains. And yet how utterly false to maintain that industry provides the only or even the chief motive force for genius. Sayyid Ahmad's biographer, one of the noblest of men, but a moralist at heart, the poet Hālī, ascribes his greatness to industry and excellent home training. It is not for me to underrate these. But are they not, after all, mere trappings and suits of genius, accidents, auxiliaries, but not the thing itself? Genius is essentially a gift. While your man of talent goes to work early, building inch by inch, with the sweat of his brow, as it were, the man of genius enters on his heritage like a monarch. Compare such men as Master Rām Chandra and Munshī Zakāullah with Sayyid Ahmad, and you will see what I mean. While the former were pushing forward the Renaissance with painstaking industry, creating a taste for literature, popularizing science—teaching, writing, lecturing—what was Sayyid Ahmad doing? Playing truant, angling, wrestling, being hail-fellow-well-met with men about town, and playing court—O horror of horrors! to the *demi-monde*, sniffing at science, and writing, whenever he did, in the old conventional style. Then came the Indian Mutiny, the turning point in his life. It gave a new and unexpected direction to his energies, and he became the most constructive force in the life of his community. Industry Sayyid Ahmad had, and energy and perseverance, but he had also genius—the capacity for originating ideas and of making them acceptable to his co-religionists. The Mutiny had left the Muslims utterly stunned and

paralysed. Their gradual transformation into a progressive community eager to assimilate Western civilization was the work of Sayyid Ahmad and his followers, whom he had filled with a new missionary zeal.

And yet, on second thoughts, you will find that genius alone will not explain his great work. The Great-Man theory goes a long way, but not all the way, when you come to look at it carefully. And here again the ecstatic biographer is liable to go wrong. Sayyid Ahmad has often been represented as a miracle of creative energy that swept over the land and transformed it in spite of itself. This view that does not take stock of his *milieu* is misleading. True, he found the world out of joint, but he was not a voice in the wilderness. He was in the truest sense the expression of the time-spirit. From the beginning of his mission he called forth a widespread and increasing enthusiasm in the intelligentsia; and this is as significant as the opposition by die-hard theologians. Sayyid Ahmad was the leader of the most progressive section of his community, the rising middle class. He put it on the map, no doubt, but it was already there, ready to utilize the present and turn it to account. They were the only people who mattered then among the Muslims, level-headed, active, and eager to march with the times; and they stood by him with exemplary devotion throughout his long career.

Sayyid Ahmad was born in Delhi in 1817, the son of Muhammad Muttaqī, a substantial and scholarly gentleman connected with the Mughal court. Like most young men of the day, he was allowed to grow up anyhow, and at nineteen, when he was married, all he had to his credit was a smattering of Arabic, Persian, mathematics, and theology. It was about this time that he cut off his connexion with the Mughal court, much against the wishes of his relatives, and joined the British service. This was, no doubt, a happy choice, as his biographer tells us. It cut him off from the enervating influence of a moribund civilization, and trained him in the traditions of useful work and industry. His rise was quick. In 1840 he rose to be a *munsif* at Fatehpur Sikrī, where he stayed for four years. The literary output of the period is a few theological essays of the orthodox type. They show that like most intelligent young men of the day, he was in sympathy with the reforms inaugurated by Maulvī Ismā'īl Shāhid and his colleagues. But with the scientific thought of the day

represented by the Delhi College, he had no sympathy. He met it rather in a spirit of antagonism, as is proved by a tract entitled *Qaul-e-Matīn dar Abtāl-e-Harakat-e-Zamīn* (Cogent Reason in Refutation of the Earth's Rotation) written in 1846, during his residence in Delhi.

His literary career began with a pot-boiler. This was *Āsār-e-Sanādīd*, or an archaeological history of the buildings of Delhi, written in 1847. Translated into French in 1864, it procured him a fellowship of the Royal Asiatic Society.

The book furnishes an account of the buildings and climate of Delhi, traces the rise of Urdu, and contains biographical sketches of the celebrities of the city. As originally written, it was in the orthodox style, stilted and ornate, affected by Bedil and Zuhūrī in Persian. Whether this was due to the influence of Imām Bakhsh Sahbāī, a scholarly gentleman who had collaborated with him, or his own conservatism, the inference is clear that in the decade preceding the Indian Mutiny, he was not only not marching with the times, but was considerably in the rear. When a second edition of the book was called for in 1854, it was re-written in the simple style that was replacing the old ornate language.

Sayyid Ahmad entered on his life-long mission after the Indian Mutiny. So far he had been no more than a literary dilettante, languidly interested in the thought and activities of his age. The Mutiny awakened his powers into full life, and he was to use them henceforth for the resuscitation and rehabilitation of his community.

His first task was to try to exculpate the Muslims of the chief share in the Mutiny. To this effect he wrote *Asbāb-e-Baghāvat-e-Hind*, or the Causes of the Indian Mutiny, in 1858. His main contention is that the Mutiny was not a religious crusade, but was mainly due to the despotic character of the British Government, and the spread of missionary activities giving colour to the suspicion that the Government intended to force Christianity on Hindus and Muslims alike.

This bold statement aroused an explosion of wrath in official circles in India and England, and for some time it appeared that he was a marked man. But saner counsels prevailed. For one thing, his brilliant record of service during the Mutiny was strongly in his favour, and he came out unscathed.

This was followed by the *Loyal Muslims of India* in 1860 and *Tabyīnūl Kalām*, or a Muslim Commentary of the Holy Bible, the

first volume of which came out in 1862 and the second in 1865. In the latter he has assumed the role of a peacemaker between the Muslims and the English by attempting to reconcile the principles of Islam with Judaism and Christianity, and by clearing the misunderstandings in the minds of the Muslims with regard to the authenticity of the Bible. It was not to the taste of his co-religionists, and was never completed.

After the Mutiny Sayyid Ahmad was fully convinced that the only remedy for the ignorance of the Muslims was education on Western lines. To this effect he started the Translation Society at Ghāzīpur in 1863, which acted as one of the earliest channels for the Renaissance by opening out Western learning to the Indians.

The journal of the Society, later on named the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, came out in 1866. At first a weekly, and then a bi-weekly, it continued to be published as long as Sayyid Ahmad lived.

These, however, were merely palliatives. His dream was to establish a college on Western lines. With this object in view, he left for England in 1869, and during his eighteen months' stay there made a careful study of the British educational system. On his return, he started the famous *Tabẖīb-ul-Akhlāq* (The Social Reformer), which effected a remarkable change in Muslim ideas.

The aim of this journal, to use his own words, 'was to persuade the Muslims of India to embrace the highest form of civilization with a view to clearing them of the contempt with which the civilized world looks down upon them; and in order that they may be called civilized in the world'.¹ It was a weekly started on 24 December 1870, and ran for nearly twelve years.

The radical views expressed in the paper called forth a strong opposition, and he was denounced as a heretic by the leading theologians in India and Arabia. Unfortunately, all the *odium theologicum* aroused by his religious views seriously handicapped his educational programme. But he persisted in his task, and the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, came into existence in 1877.

His chief theological work *Khutabāt-e-Ahmadīyya*, or Religious Addresses, was published in 1876. It discusses the pre-Islamic conditions of Arabia, the reforms introduced by the Prophet, and tries to give a rationalistic interpretation of Islam.

The eighteen months spent in England were the most fruitful in his life. He was no half-hearted convert when he left for England. But emancipated as he was, this direct contact with a higher civiliza-

tion deepened and widened his views, and from this vantage ground he was enabled to see, as never before, the limitations of his own community.

The long letters he wrote to his friends from England—they were published in the *Tabẖīb-ul-Akblāq*—bear a wonderful testimony to the spell cast on him by European civilization. The many disparaging references in these letters to his own people, in the midst of impassioned descriptions of England and the continent, gave serious offence to the Muslims. But Sayyid Ahmad had the courage of his convictions, and nothing could deter him from expressing his views. The following are typical of his attitude:

. . . although I do not absolve the English in India of discourtesy, and of looking upon the natives of that country as animals and beneath contempt, . . . I am afraid I must confess that they are not far wrong in their opinion of us. Without flattering the English, I can truly say that the natives of India, high and low, . . . when contrasted with the English in education, manners, and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man. . . . The English have reason for believing us in India to be imbecile brutes.²

One of his letters said that if his English maid-servant 'were to go to India and mix with ladies of the higher classes, she would look upon them as mere animals, and regard them with contempt'.³

Piquant contrasts between the East and West are not infrequent. Of Egypt he writes:

One matter which grieved me was the dirty state of the railway and stations—the lanterns looking as if they had not been cleaned for months, and the beautiful iron pillars for giving water to the engine being inches deep in dirt. . . . There is no doubt that the European sucks in a love of cleanliness and beauty in all things with his mother's milk.⁴

And of the Palace of Versailles:

I thought we were in some heavenly, not earthly palace. I was astounded at the lovely lakes, canals, and fountains; . . . and wondrous gardens filled with flowers. The famous canal in the Delhi Fort, . . . the Mehtāb Bāgh-pond . . . the palaces and fountains of Deeg, in Bhartpore, . . . are undoubtedly as far inferior to those of Versailles, as an ugly is different from a handsome man!⁵

In another letter he writes:

. . . if municipal commissioners be required in heaven, the Paris commissioners are undoubtedly the best fitted for the posts!⁶

At the Bois de Bologne, he was so entranced by what he saw that he 'remembered the Almighty God' and thought how 'wonderful are the things made by Him'.⁷ He fully agreed with the Parisians who 'called their city, not Paris, but Paradise'. It was in fact 'the Paradise of this world'.⁸

These unsavoury truths were not to the taste of his co-religionists and there were vehement protests. But thanks to his strong common sense, Sayyid Ahmad never paltered with his judgement. He was firmly convinced that the salvation of his community lay in the assimilation of Western culture and he boldly went forward with his work. A realist, he knew exactly wherein lay the greatness of England and where we ought to go to school to her. Our danger, he rightly held, lay in the complacent self-esteem bred of indolence, sentimentalism, and a sense of inferiority to the West that made us linger on the past and ignore or minimize the achievement of Europe. It was a bitter remedy that he administered to his community, but it was successful and shook them out of their chronic torpor. I wonder if the poets and publicists who have arraigned European civilization without at the same time stimulating us to an honest endeavour to improve ourselves have done us much good.

That Sayyid Ahmad had genius of a very high order is an indubitable fact. That his genius was more for practical work than for literature is equally true. The secret of his success lay in his great personality, his self-confidence, and his infectious zeal. He had the sinews of a Scandinavian god or an epic hero. For half a century, he waged war against ignorance, superstition, vested interests, and bigotry. He was jeered at, threatened, anathematized; but he never gave in. He gained adherents and influence; became the rallying point of a minority, and, at last, succeeded in bringing a large section of his community into line with Western thought. And throughout his long struggle, he showed a remarkable temperateness. He felt superior to his antagonists and their methods of warfare. There is no sign of bitterness or of bad blood in his writings. The mud-slinging by his adversaries never provoked him to retaliation. Our estimates of his work may vary, but nothing can diminish the greatness of his personality. He has been undoubtedly the greatest civilizing factor in the life of his community since 1857.

The writings of Sayyid Ahmad reveal an alert and critical mind. Born in a conventional age, he was the first to read the signs of the times, and to interpret his age to itself. The impact of the West had begun to act much earlier, but it worked slowly and there was no active thought. It was reserved for him to articulate the new self-consciousness, and to make it a real force in the life of his community.

Sayyid Ahmad epitomizes the Indian Renaissance and all that it stands for—its ardour for life and action, its faith in the future, its distrust of authority, its optimism, and self-confidence. As a thinker, he is singularly free from the spell of the past. Plato, Aristotle, and other demi-gods of the Middle Ages—he takes them from their pedestals and scans them critically, as they had never been scanned before.

Aristotle was not our religious leader [he writes] that we should consider his philosophy and metaphysics as infallible. Nor was Avicenna gifted with revelation that we should follow his system of medicine blindly. . . . Why should we not open our eyes and acquaint ourselves with the new knowledge that has been discovered? . . . We see that there are two kinds of people in the world; those who believe in the perfection of their forefathers and their civilization, and blindly follow them; and those who believe that nothing under the sun is perfect, and, therefore, make new discoveries in art and science. And now you can see for yourself which of these are progressing and which are going down.⁹

In repudiating the past, he was pleading for a fluid and evolutionary civilization which we ourselves make to suit our conditions of life, and not one imposed from without, rigid and inelastic like a coat of mail. The new civilization which it was his mission to herald was eclectic, woven out of all that he deemed best in the East and West, past and present. For him civilization is not only an inward condition, as the great thinkers and saints of the East have maintained; nor is it merely outward, as is the trend of materialistic thought today. It is a synthesis of the moral earnestness of the Reformation with the critical spirit of the Renaissance and its broad acceptance of the joys and amenities of life. Hence his programme is a very comprehensive one, embracing the whole of life. If he is waging war against superstition and dogmatism in religion, if he is fighting for a higher morality—for self-respect, courage,

truthfulness, courtesy—he is no less intent on beautifying life outwardly. He is never tired of emphasizing the importance of such minor items of life as dress, table manners, etiquette, hygiene, and sanitation. He found the life of his community drab and colourless, and he imported as much of sunshine and beauty into it as he could. Like the great men of the Renaissance in Italy, he believed that external grandeur is the symbol of a noble mind. It was with this idea that he raised the magnificent institution at Aligarh to educate the youth of his community.

It is generally held that all reformation is at bottom a simplification of life, the removal of the redundancies and excrescences which grow round life like useless fungi, and which must be removed in the interest of the life and health of a community. But a true reformation is much more than the application of the sweeping brush or the pruning knife; it is simplification as well as enrichment, the eradication of whatever is harmful and outmoded, as well as the assimilation of new and useful ideas, forms, and institutions. It is this synthesis of puritanism and humanism that makes the 'Aligarh movement' so important, and at the same time so different, from the other revivalistic movements of the century.

A special feature of his thought is the increased emphasis he lays on practical morality. As an ethical teacher, he places social service and humanitarianism above personal rectitude which was the cornerstone of medieval thought. According to him, devotion, abstinence, fasting, prayer, are all self-regarding virtues; they fall short of goodwill to one's neighbour and service to mankind.

Piety and worship, if they do not exceed the religious limit, would, no doubt, be classed as virtues and acts of devotion. But to strive for general good, and to employ oneself in activities which contemplate the moral and temporal welfare of one's co-religionists, is more praiseworthy than the former. Piety and devotion are the virtues of a miser, who cannot look beyond his shoes.¹⁰

Here is another characteristic utterance on the subject:

A life devoted to good deeds is better than a thousand acts of devotion and piety, retirement into jungles, and the repetition of God's name on a rosary.¹¹

5

As a thinker and critic, Sayyid Ahmad has brought about an apotheosis of reason, as the past had effected an apotheosis of faith

and authority. Other thinkers of the period, like some writers of the Victorian age, had divided life into two mutually exclusive parts, the world of religious experience and life secular. Sayyid Ahmad treats life as an indivisible whole, without any cross-sections for the play of faith and reason. He judges religious experience itself by the same rational standards by which he would judge a secular institution, and he believes in God, he tells us, because it was pre-eminently reasonable to do so.

As a religious reformer, Sayyid Ahmad tried to reconcile religion and modern science by rationalizing the Koran. At the back of his mind was the fear that the study of European science would react with disastrous effect on common religious ideas. Here he was not far wrong; and Macaulay was only partly right when he said that science could not militate against religion. True, science deals with the physical universe; and the great problems of religion, being moral or metaphysical, are beyond its reach. Nevertheless, there is much in religion that may come into clash with science as, for example, the Islamic cosmogony, miracles, belief pertaining to heaven and hell, angels, and the devil. The old scholastic philosophy, he held, was of no use in the present-day world. It had been framed to meet the impact of Greek science which was entirely theoretical. The modern sciences are experimental and their conclusions irrefutable. In one of his essays he thus argues the necessity of a new scholastic philosophy:

In the past the Ulema were of the opinion that to expound to the masses the esoteric side of religion beyond their comprehension would not be useful; on the contrary, it would turn their faith into doubt. But today things are different. Knowledge is spreading apace. . . . Consequently it is not enough to confine ourselves to a literal interpretation of religion. On the other hand, it is time to explain its mysteries boldly. . . .

As guides to the esoteric side of religion, Ghazālī's *Ihyā'-il-'Ulūm* and Shāh Waliullah's *Hujjat-ul-Bāliḡha* are standard works; but judged by modern standards they are not wholly satisfactory. This is because facts have been brought to light and discoveries made which were unknown in the past. Besides, the modes of presentation and argument in vogue today are different from those in use in the past. Hence it is necessary that these truths be restated in conformity with the current modes of exposition.¹²

In another place he writes:

In the past the spread of Greek philosophy among the Muslims resulted in widespread scepticism and heresy. To meet the challenge of the former

the Ulema wrote new books on scholastic philosophy. They formulated two principles to counteract doubt and atheism: they either reconciled religion with science, or rejected the latter as false. But I respectfully ask if we have any books on religion in which the theories of modern science and philosophy have been either refuted or reconciled with religious views.¹³

How does he go to work? He begins by preaching a return to the Koran, as Wycliffe and Luther had preached a return to the Bible. He then classifies the Traditions and discards the apocryphal, most of which, in his opinion, had been fabricated by selfish divines. He then subjects all religious beliefs and institutions to a sifting process, rejecting those which were originally foreign to Islam, but had been imported into it from other people, notably Roman Catholics, Jews, and Hindus. So far his programme for the simplification of Islam.

His most important work, as he conceived it, was the rationalizing of Islam. He argued that although the Koran is the word of God, yet it is in human speech, and, as such, should be interpreted as a human document. The stories of heaven and hell should not be taken literally, he says. They are not facts but mere parables to explain the unknown in terms of the known.

The truth of the matter is that the facts pertaining to man's soul, the revelation made to it, or the states of feeling induced on it by good or bad deeds, or the experiences after death, cannot be brought home to us except with the help of parables. For how can we conceive those things, which can neither be seen nor touched, except in terms of those that fall within our experience? For example, when it is said that the damned would be tormented by snakes coiling round them and biting them, we are not to understand that the snakes we actually see in life would coil around the dead. No, it is only a way of representing the spiritual torture incident to sin in terms of the sorrow, pain, and anguish which is caused by a snake-bite. The masses and the ignorant theologians take them literally, but those who see deep into religion explain them metaphorically.¹⁴

Very often the Koran refers to facts which we, today, know to be incorrect, e.g. seven skies, fixity of the earth, movement of the sun, etc. These inaccuracies with regard to scientific facts do not militate against the truth of religion, according to Sayyid Ahmad. He maintains that the object of the Prophet was not to teach scientific truths, but to take up the current notions of the people about heaven and earth, sun, moon, and stars, and to enforce moral lessons with their help. The Prophet is not a scientific teacher, he contends, but a moral and spiritual guide.

Lastly, he holds that whereas some institutions in Islam are eternal, others are temporary. Consequently, we must give up those customs and institutions which were useful in the past but are no longer so in the present.

Some of his views may be summarized here to give an idea of his departure from traditional theology. He did not believe in the existence of Satan as an independent entity outside man; according to him it only symbolizes the element of evil inherent in man. He denies the existence of angels and holds that they merely stand for the powers resident in certain forms of matter. Miracles he denies *in toto*, holding that the Prophet never worked a miracle; nor is there any mention of them in the Koran, he says. The stories of the Prophet's Ascension and the cleansing of his heart by an angel are explained as dreams. He also rejects the story of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the account of Creation, and the Fall of Adam. He rejects the idea of the vision of God, physical or spiritual, promised to the good on the Day of Resurrection.

In most of these interpretations, he is in agreement with his predecessors, the Mu'tazilites. There are, however, a few points on which he parts company with them. For example, he maintains that Islam abolished slavery and polygamy. As regards prayer, he holds that it is the expression of our spiritual yearnings and has nothing to do with the realization of our wishes.

In the end, it is only fair to point out that Sayyid Ahmad has not been generally successful in rationalizing the Koran. He is frequently tendentious and far-fetched, and arrives at his conclusions at the expense of a positive violence to the language of the Koran.

The foregoing discussion must make it clear that Sayyid Ahmad was not a rationalist in the strict sense of the word. A rationalist is either one who believes that reason is the ultimate authority in religion as in other things, or one who holds that reason is the foundation of all certainty in knowledge. Such were Clough, Arnold, and Spencer in England. In the clash between science and theology, they discarded whatever in the Bible was not in accord with human experience. Sayyid Ahmad, on the other hand, made it his business, as an interpreter of the Koran, to reconcile religion with the scientific knowledge of the age, by explaining whatever appeared to him to be morally and intellectually indefensible in it, in a way acceptable to reason. In other words, the rationalist prefers truth to everything, and is prepared to stake everything for it. Contrary to this, Sayyid Ahmad started with an unshaken faith in the truth and

the divine origin of Islam, and his mission as a religious thinker was to supply a rationalistic interpretation of those elements in the Koran which were felt either to transcend experience or to be out of harmony with the ethical outlook of his age. In Sayyid Ahmad, no less than in other notable thinkers of the age, one becomes increasingly conscious of an unresolved conflict. This is the result of an unavailing attempt at a synthesis of some of the opposite elements which go to make up their mind, and which they love with equal ardour. In Sayyid Ahmad, the emotional element is provided by his instinctive faith in the truth of Islam. On this was engrafted another element, an equally steadfast belief in the supremacy of reason. Had one of these elements triumphed over the other, there would have been no conflict. Had reason overcome faith, he would have been a rationalist like Matthew Arnold, who repudiated the preternaturalism of the Bible and decided to stand by the ethical contents of Christianity alone. Had faith triumphed he would have been like Newman. But in Sayyid Ahmad the two elements are in a state of equilibrium. Hence his feverish, and, it must be admitted, futile attempts to reconcile religion and science. To my mind, he is essentially a religious thinker, leavened with rationalism, and not a rationalist; and should be classed with the Christian scholars of the Renaissance who attempted to reconcile Paganism and Christianity, or with the nineteenth-century religious thinkers, who, after the publication of the writings of Darwin and Spencer, tried to make religion and science shake hands across the gulf.

Religious thinkers, reformers, statesmen, have a way of summing up their creeds in convenient formulas which act as watch-words or battle cries for their followers. Sayyid Ahmad's watch-word was 'Follow Nature'. Today, nature is not to us the paragon that it was to the Stoics or the Epicureans with their motto, *Naturum Sequi* (follow nature), or to the Romantics like Rousseau and Wordsworth, or even to Arnold. To us, she appears sinister and cruel, or, at any rate, apathetic or incapable of sympathy with man. We would rather agree with Mill, who writes

that the order of nature, in so far as unmodified by man, is such as no being, whose attributes are justice and benevolence, would have made, with the intention that his rational creatures should follow it as an ex-

ample. . . . In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature's every day performances,¹⁵

and who concludes, 'If Nature and Man are both the works of a Being of perfect goodness, that Being intended Nature as a scheme to be amended, not imitated, by Man.'¹⁶

The word 'nature' as a term of approval and moral obligation has not been used by Sayyid Ahmad in the sense in which it has been used by the thinkers named above, and he is relatively on a safer ground than they. He does not use it in the sense of the simple and primitive as opposed to the cultured and sophisticated, as used by Rousseau. Nor does he interfuse it with a spiritual significance like Wordsworth. In his use of it, he is more akin to the eighteenth-century English writers who use it as the opposite of whatever is far-fetched, remote, or unreal; and it is probable that he may have picked up the idea from the writings of the Augustans, presumably from Addison.

As a religious thinker, there were, for Sayyid Ahmad, two conceptions of nature, one of them being the corner-stone of his metaphysics, the other of his ethics. As a metaphysician, when he maintains that Islam is in full accord with nature, he is referring to the unchanging laws of nature which are above human will or superhuman intervention alike. In other words, Islam is like nature in that there is nothing miraculous or supernatural in the Koran. But quite as frequently, he uses it in an ethical sense. When he enjoins that we should lead a life according to nature, he is eager to repudiate the ascetic or monastic ideals which had dominated Islam in the past. Perfection, according to him, is not attained by self-denial and withdrawal from life and by starving the senses, but by cherishing them and cultivating them in the service of God and humanity. The following will elucidate his viewpoint:

- Real and true piety is that which is according to the laws of nature. All the faculties with which God has endowed man, have been given to him not with the view that they should be atrophied, but that they should be used. The religious law of Islam . . . has taught us how to utilize those faculties, so that they all grow and expand in a state of equilibrium, and do not fall into a state of decay by the preponderant development of any one of them. But there are very few who understand this. They believe that what the Prophet has called *asceticism* is the highest form of devotion.¹⁷

The English influence on Sayyid Ahmad was general and pervasive. He did not owe his emancipation to an intimate contact with English thought and institutions. His acquaintance with English writers was casual and meagre. His favourites were Mill, Addison, and Steele, and practically all his social and critical essays are translations, with slight modifications, from English. In the longer essays, adapted from Mill, he uses examples from Islamic and Indian history in place of those from European history in the original. The essays from Addison and Steele are accurate renderings of the originals. He dipped into *Buckle's History of British Civilization*, but there was a marked difference between their temperaments, and he has not borrowed anything from him.

He has made a general acknowledgement of these borrowings, in summing up his work.

We have also re-written some of the essays of the famous writers of Europe, Addison and Steele, in our own language and style. In all such cases, we have added A.D. and S.D. to our name, and have shown our co-religionists how an essay should be written.¹⁸

Sayyid Ahmad had a deep respect for Addison and Steele, and one is amused to find him again and again extolling them as great prophets. It was on the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* that the *Tabẖīb-ul-Akhlāq* was modelled, and he tells us with evident pride that his function as writer was to wage war against the licentiousness, vulgarity, ignorance, superstition, and the false taste of his age in poetry, very much as it was Addison and Steele's function to expose the loose morality of Restoration life and literature. There is certainly a general resemblance between the position and programme of Addison and Steele and those of Sayyid Ahmad. Like them he started and led a revolt against aristocratic extravagances; like them he created a strong middle-class opinion; and like them, again, he was the exponent of a humanized puritanism. Their methods, however, were different. Addison and Steele were humorists and laughed at the follies of the day. Sayyid Ahmad is matter-of-fact and emotional. In this connexion it is significant that the essays he has adapted from them are all serious. The light, bantering, ironical tone of the English writers is not his. Here is a list of the Essays which I have been able to trace to their originals:

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| 1. 'Ta'lim' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 215 |
| 2. 'Rasm-o-Rivāj kī Pābandī' | Mill, <i>Liberty</i> , pp. 79-90 |

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| 3. | <i>Āzādī-e-Rāe'</i> | Mill, <i>Liberty</i> , pp. 23-64 |
| 4. | ' <i>Samajh</i> ' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 471 |
| 5. | ' <i>Dunya ba Umed Qā'im hai</i> ' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 471 |
| 6. | ' <i>Akblāq</i> ' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 459 |
| 7. | ' <i>Riyā</i> ' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 399 |
| 8. | ' <i>Khushāmad</i> ' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 238 (Steele) |
| 9. | ' <i>Vāshiyāna Nekī</i> ' | <i>The Spectator</i> , No. 215 |
| 10. | ' <i>Apnī Madad Ap</i> ' | Samuel Smiles, <i>Self Help</i> , 'Introduction' |

It would be wrong to conclude from the above that Sayyid Ahmad drew his material from others and had nothing of his own to give to his age. He was not converted by Mill or by Addison and Steele. Long before he came to know these writers, he had emancipated himself, and he decided to introduce them to his countrymen because what they said was in line with his own views. There is no doubt, however, that he was much encouraged to find that eminent English writers before him had held views similar to his own.

Sayyid Ahmad quotes so frequently, so perseveringly, and with such evident pride, from the Mu'tazilites, that some readers may be led to conclude that the main source of his inspiration was these Islamic thinkers and not the impact of Western civilization. He also writes with great admiration of Shāh Valiullah, and was evidently in sympathy with the tenets of the Vahhābīs. But his moral and intellectual ancestry is to be traced neither to the Islamic Rationalists nor to Shāh Valiullah and Shāh 'Abdul 'Azīz. The decisive influence on his mind was that of British civilization. But having once broken with the dogmatic theology of Islam, and anxious to re-orientate his thoughts, he began to ransack the theological literature of Islam for whatever odds and ends he should find there to support his views. He could thus defend himself from the charge of heterodoxy by showing that he was in line with some of the great thinkers of Islam. This gave a weight to his utterances in the eyes of the laity, and made them readily acceptable.

With this important reservation, it is well to point out that he borrowed extensively from the thinkers of the Abbasid period. Their positions were analogous. The latter strove to reconcile Islamic theology with Greek philosophy and science which dominated the

Islamic world during the Middle Ages; Sayyid Ahmad attempted to adapt Islam to nineteenth-century European thought.

In estimating Sayyid Ahmad's place in Urdu literature we have to assess two different things, (1) his influence on the course of Urdu literature and the life of his community, and (2) his permanent contribution to Urdu literature. The answers to these questions will differ widely. If by a living author we mean, as we should, one who is read either for pleasure or instruction, then Sayyid Ahmad ceased to be a living writer soon after his death. His earlier writings were ephemeral; they did their work, and are no more read today than last month's newspapers. His theological writings to which he gave most of his time and labour do not interest the modern reader. The danger which seemed to threaten Islam in his day has largely turned out to be an unfounded one. The edifice of religion stands four-square, and science has done no more than pull down some of its outer fortifications and bastions. Hence, there is nothing to interest us in his theological writings today.

This is one reason for the neglect of his theological writings. Another, and an equally important one, may also be suggested. Sayyid Ahmad is essentially a mediator, and like all mediators he has met with little thanks from either side. He does not satisfy the intellectuals, because he fights shy of the conclusions to which stark rationalism would seem to lead him. They complain that he is not rationalist enough. The ordinary man, who is perfectly at home in the faith of his forefathers, is puzzled and annoyed by all this tilting at imaginary foes. There remain his social essays. These have occasionally figured in the curricula of some of the universities, but this artificial resuscitation has not added much to his reputation as a writer. What insures an author's fame is not so much his modernity as his style. Sayyid Ahmad never paid much heed to style; he had, in fact, little or no feeling for it, and only a handful of his essays have any pretence to it. As a stylist he is excessively pedestrian.

Wherein lies his greatness then? To my thinking in this. Without being a great writer himself he was the cause of great writing in others. The impulse he gave to literature was great; he inaugurated a new era in literature in northern India. His intellect was not subtle or far-reaching. Some of his views leave one not only cold, but wondering. But great reformers seldom excel in the profundity of

their vision or the greatness of their intellect. They rather excel in the fearless and passionate application of a few simple ideas to life. In this respect his greatness is incontestable. With modern education as his chief weapon, he helped break the spell of the past, waged war against inherited ideas and the fear of authority, and made common sense and reason prevail. He is our first great humanist. With him we have not only come out of the wilderness but penetrated far into the promised land.

10

The youngest of a family of four, Altāf Husain Hālī was born in 1837, at Pānīpat. The financial position of the family being far from sound, the early education of Hālī was haphazard and unsatisfactory. At Pānīpat, he studied Arabic and Persian; and when at seventeen he was married, much against his wishes, by his brother, his schooling, whatever it was, came to an end.

But Hālī's love of learning proved too strong for these matrimonial shackles. He left his home surreptitiously and joined one of the old seminaries in Delhi (1852). The reason for this choice has been given by him in an autobiographical note.

Although the Delhi College was then in a very flourishing condition, yet in the society in which I had been brought up, all knowledge was believed to be confined to Persian and Arabic. The divines ridiculed English schools as 'homes of ignorance'. . . In short, I did not even in passing, think of an English education. . . . For a year and a half I stayed in Delhi, but not once did I go to the College, or meet those who were being educated there —I mean persons like Zakāullah, Nazīr Ahmad, Maulvī Muhammad Husain Āzād, and others.¹⁹

It was during this short sojourn (1852-55) that he had his first brief contact with Ghālīb, who encouraged him to cultivate his poetic talent. But apart from the general encouragement, which no doubt must have heartened him, Ghālīb appears to have had no influence in moulding his mind or taste. In fact, they belonged to totally different spheres, and no fertilizing contact was possible between the liberal outlook of the old man and the narrow religiosity of his pupil. After six years of desultory study at home, he moved to Delhi a second time in 1863, and was lucky enough to obtain employment with Nawab Mustafā Khān Shefta of Delhi, with whom he stayed till the latter's death (1869). The only important poem of this period is the elegy on the death of Ghālīb

entitled *Marsiya-e-Janāb Asadullah Khān Marhūm Dehlwī Mutakhallis ba Ghālib* (1869). Spiritually he had made no progress so far. He was at heart a philistine, as he himself with his usual candour confesses in an anecdote in *Yādgār-e-Ghālib*, written twenty years later.

At this stage of my life, I was wholly given to religious fanaticism, and was a prey to dogmas and orthodoxy. I considered the Muslims the very cream of creation, and the Sunnites from among the seventy-two sects of the Muslims, the choicest of them all. Of the Sunnites, the Hanafites were the elect, and among these only those had hold on my affections who punctually followed the injunctions of the faith. These were the only men who, according to my narrow outlook, deserved salvation.²⁰

Hālī had his first contact with English literature and thought in 1871 when he was appointed as a clerk in the Book Depot, Lahore. He had no first-hand knowledge of English, but the revision and correction of books translated from English into Urdu for use as textbooks in schools, or for inclusion in the *Atāliq-e-Punjab*, of which he was assistant editor, acquainted him with the aims and ideals of English literature. By far the greatest stimulus, however, came from the literary and social ferment around him. India was then throbbing with a new life, and it was inevitable that a receptive mind like his should receive its stamp and pressure. Here is his own analysis of the situation:

If the movement had begun fifteen years earlier, it would, probably, not have borne any fruit; for at that period Urdu poets thought that fanciful love subjects and exaggeration were essential elements in poetry, while the portrayal of real life and facts was incompatible with true poetry. . . . Modern Urdu poetry had its birth at the moment when the spirit of the West entered into Urdu language. A number of books and essays had been translated from English. . . . Slowly the people came to accept the Western literary style. In 1872, Sir Sayyid had begun to issue his paper the *Tabẓīb-ul-Akhlāq*, which had brought about a rapid change in the ideas of the Muslims with literary interests. They had come to regard the earlier Urdu and Persian styles as unnatural and contemptible, and had begun to despise their system of poetry. There had been at that time no good imitation of Western poetry. But sometimes a small impetus suffices. Faint as was the melody coming from the West, it had yet been enough to inspire the seekers after new ways and to stir their enthusiasm.²¹

The literary output of this period comprises four *masnavīs*: *Barkharut*, *Nishāt-e-Umed*, *Hub-e-Vatan*, and *Mimāzara-e-Rahm-o-*

Insāf—all read in the meetings of the Anjuman-e-Punjab in 1874.

Hālī came into his own as a thinker and poet when he was transferred to the Anglo-Arabic College, Delhi, in the beginning of 1875. He had heard at Lahore of the reforming activities of Sayyid Ahmad, but it was only after his transfer to Delhi that he had a first-hand knowledge of his great mission. It was Sayyid Ahmad's mission that actually awoke him from his dogmatic slumber, filled him with moral earnestness, and made him the poet of the Islamic Renaissance in India. Lahore had emancipated Hālī without giving a direction to his energies. Sayyid Ahmad helped him to find his *métier*. The account of this apocalyptic change is given in the 'Introduction' to *Madd-o-Jaz̄r-e-Islām*, known as *Musaddas-e-Hālī*, which appeared in June 1879. It took the public by storm and ran through six editions, mostly pirated, in different parts of India. It was re-published by him in 1886 with the addition of a long 'Appendix' of nearly 120 stanzas. It lacks the fire of the original poem, and like most sequels is a failure.

The *Musaddas* actually ran like wildfire among the Muslims, and the author's name became a household word in Muslim circles. It called forth heated rejoinders from the conservatives, but they were no better than a straw to stem the rising tide of its popularity.

It was followed by *Shakva-e-Hind* (1887), *Mumājāt-e-Beva* (1886), and *Chup kī Dād* (1905). In the last two, he has tried to awaken the conscience of his compatriots to the pathos and tragedy of woman-kind in India.

The fourth and the final stage of his life commences in 1887, when he was granted a stipend by the Nizam's Government. The chief works of this period are in prose and include, *Hayāt-e-Sa'dī* (1886), *Dīvān-e-Hālī* with the *Muqaddama* (1893), *Yādgar-e-Ghālīb* (1897) and *Hayāt-e-Jāved*, or a life of Sayyid Ahmad (1901). He died on 31 December 1914.

His literary and social essays which had appeared from time to time in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* and the *Tabzīb-ul-Akhlāq* were collected and published by Anjuman-e-Tarraqqī-e-Urdū, Haidarābād, in two volumes as *Maqālāt-e-Hālī*. His letters were published in two volumes in 1925.

Hālī was the foremost writer of the Aligarh school. But far greater than his literary eminence is the charm and nobility of his personality. If there is any Urdu writer, old or new, who comes nearest to Anthony's great eulogium, probably the noblest ever pronounced, it is Hālī.

His life was gentle, and the elements
 So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
 And say to all the world, *This was a man!*

II

The new literary and religious self-consciousness found its first adequate expression in the writings of Hālī. He overshadowed Urdu literature in his day, and though his poetry began to date soon after his death, his historical position as the protagonist of the new school is unassailable. He is virtually the founder of the new school, though nominally the honour belongs to Āzād, who was the first to feel the need for reform in poetry, and anticipated him with his *Manifesto* (1874). But Āzād had not the stuff of which reformers are made. As an expression of his creed his pronouncement is neither deep nor adequate; nor did he follow it up with any satisfactory work, especially in poetry. It is only when we come to Hālī that we catch the first authentic notes of the Renaissance in poetry and criticism.

Hālī was temperamentally and intellectually the fittest person to herald the new movement. Casual and second-hand as his knowledge of English was, he possessed an inborn aptitude for feeling the vague and inchoate tendencies of his age in life and literature, and of giving them a coherent shape. What had been faintly and generally adumbrated by Āzād in his critical writings, finds a scientific and cogent expression in *Muqaddama-e-Shi'r-o-Shā'irī*.

The chief virtue of his poetry is its sincerity. He taught poetry to speak its mind, and thus inaugurated a revolution with far-reaching results. His main service to letters, however, is the elevation of poetry from a mere pastime to a great moral factor in the life of his community. The entire work of Hālī as a poet and critic reflects this. It is instructive to study in this connexion his strictures on Hāfiz in *Hayāt-e-Sa'dī*.²²

The poetry of Hālī is the expression of two alternating moods, the one tender, pathetic, and retrospective, the other manly and forward-looking; the one dwelling on what had been and was no more, the other fully conscious of the creative possibilities of the future, and pouring vitriolic contempt on the bigotry and conservatism that made light of Western civilization. Unlike Sayyid Ahmad he was deeply rooted in the past; he had also a vivid imagination, and it was but natural that the downfall of his community should cause him the most poignant grief.

Chief among his elegies are; *Shakva-e-Hind* and the elegy on the death of Hakīm Mahmūd Khān of Delhi. The languorous movement of the former is in harmony with its deep melancholy. In the same pathetic, retrospective vein is the elegy on the death of the Hakīm. Hālī had loved him as a relic of the adored past, and his death opens the flood-gates of memory. The great physician becomes the symbol of the departed genius of Delhi; his personal sorrow is merged in a deeper and more poignant grief, and the poem ends as a lament on Delhi—the cradle and burial place of Muslim civilization in India. The elegiac note intrudes itself even in his *ghazals* and what is begun as a pleasant exercise ends as a lament on the extinction of the beloved old order.

The best-known of his poems and his chief passport to fame is the *Madd-o-Jazr-e-Islām* known as *Musaddas-e-Hālī*. It is a landmark in the history of Urdu literature, because it is the first important poem written after the Mutiny. Between 1874 and 1879, no work of any worth had appeared. The poems of Āzād are uninspired. Hālī is slightly better, but he has not found himself. It was a period of experiment, of tentative groping after new ideals, not of substantial achievement. It was at this time that the *Musaddas* came out. It supplied the new school with a model work and directed poetry into a new and fruitful channel.

What gave the *Musaddas* its enormous vogue, was not its style, admirable as it is, but its subject-matter. By a happy prescience of genius, it appeared at the psychological moment. A wave of self-consciousness had run through the intelligentsia. Reform was in the air. The *Tahẓīb-ul-Akhlāq* was doing solid work to place social and religious life on a sounder footing. The *Musaddas* not only corresponded with the new spirit; it gave a most trenchant expression to the aims and ideals of the reformers. Herein lay the secret of the extraordinary success of the poem. It was the most complete expression of the *zeitgeist*.

Formally, too, it is no less remarkable. Simple, manly, and vigorous, its style is fully equal to the theme. The old poetic diction with its cloying touches, soon to be revived by Iqbāl, has been discarded. Hālī looks straight at his subject and does not allow anything to come between him and it. The metre with its preponderance of accented syllables (there are eight accented syllables to four unaccented) lends an unusual weight to the line; while the six-line stanza, a quartet followed by a couplet, offers ample scope for the development of his passionate theme.

To all this the modern reader assents, but he finds that he is not moved by it as were the poet's contemporaries. And no wonder. For him the period of storm and stress in which it was composed is a far-off historical event which he can contemplate with detachment; and though with a little effort he can imagine how it must have worked on its first readers, he cannot feel it like them, because it is not addressed to him. He complains that it is too long a harangue and, like most harangues, however good, a trifle tiring and monotonous. For this Hālī is only partly responsible. Urdu verse admits of no metrical variations so indispensable in a long poem, and the hard, metallic beat of the verse which moves the reader at first, begins to tell on his nerves after some time. Hālī's fiery intensity is no safeguard against this, for monotony is as likely to occur at a high as at a low emotional level.

These are formal limitations over which Hālī had no control. But even otherwise, the poem does not keep its level. It is not that his inspiration fails or is intermittent. The poem rises and falls with the nature of its subject-matter. There are certain themes that do not readily lend themselves to poetry, and some of the sections that deal with pre-Islamic Arabia or the reforms inaugurated by the Prophet are felt to be failures. The speed and fire of his versification, which are in full harmony with his flaming ardour in the best parts of the poem, are very inadequately supported by the unpoetic nature of his themes here, and instead of being genuinely eloquent he becomes rhetorical.

The poems written at Lahore for the Anjuman-e-Punjāb are mainly argumentative and descriptive. *Munājāt-e-Beva*, considered by some to be his masterpiece, falls short of the *Musaddas* because of its form, the rhyming lines in which it is composed giving much less elbow room to the poet than the six-line stanza of the *Musaddas*. It suffers, besides, from prolixity and diffusion, and is wanting in the eloquence of the *Musaddas*.

Posterity will value Hālī for the impulse he gave to poetry. He laid the foundation of a new school, and blazed a trail for those who followed him, by striking at the root of the rules and prescriptions which had so far forced poetry to move in prescribed grooves.

As regards the actual merit of his poetry, posterity will find it increasingly difficult to endorse the contemporary verdict. The *Musaddas*, on which his fame rested, is like a sacred relic which has lost all virtue, but which we continue to handle with extreme unction in public. The greater part of his poetry is excessively

pedestrian. His chief asset as a poet, whether you consider the *Musaddas* or *Munājāt-e-Beva*, is the strength and depth of his feelings, not a sensitive imagination or a musical diction. His imagery is commonplace, and his diction, though vigorous, is that of a proseman in its total absence of suggestion. In less inspired or uninspired moments, as in the numerous poems he wrote to order, his diction is flat, harsh, and unmusical, and in his *ghazals* many a likely line is ruined by dissonant words and expressions, some of them excessively colloquial. The *Musaddas* is generally, though not always, free from them. This clearly shows that his ear, even at its best, was far from faultless.

12

Like Wordsworth and Coleridge in England, Hālī and Āzād, the leaders of the poetic revolt in Urdu, were both poets and critics. This was but natural; for a rebel against an institution or school of thought must justify his departure from it, as well as defend his new position. Such is the scope and genesis of the new criticism. It is only incidentally speculative, analysing mostly the old motifs to illustrate their inadequacy and defects, and making out a case for its own ideals and practice.

Hālī is the most considerable figure in Urdu criticism. For about half a century, his critical importance was overshadowed by his reputation as a poet. For this many reasons may be assigned. Poetry is the general favourite, while criticism is the passion of a few only. Hālī's contemporaries were too intent on the moral fervour of his poetry to notice or appreciate his work as a critic. The present generation does not assign a high place to his poetry, apart from its historical importance, but it is becoming more and more conscious of the sterling qualities of his prose. His prose is being read today with interest, while the poet is no more than an honoured shadow.

Muqaddama-e-Shi'r-o-Shā'irī marks the dawn of historical and scientific criticism in Urdu. It is the first formal treatise on poetry. The first part is chiefly speculative, dealing with the nature and function of poetry, the relation of poetry with morality and civilization, the nature of the imagination, the place of metre and rhyme in poetry, etc. Except for a sprinkling of extracts from Arabic writers, the greater part of the material used in this section has been taken from English critics.

The second part is a historical survey of the social and political

factors that moulded Urdu and Persian poetry. His thesis may be summarized as follows:

The degeneration of poetry in the East is mainly due to political reasons. The despotism of the East killed sincerity, encouraged extravagance, and turned poets into social parasites.

Poetry is essentially a social product and, in turn, moulds society to its own nature; so that it is both a symptom and a cause. In a healthy and progressive society, life and literature are in a holy alliance to further and develop each other; while in a decadent society, they weave a vicious circle for mutual ruin. The decadence of Urdu poetry is the result of a long series of such actions and reactions. To reform Urdu poetry this alliance must be broken and poetry subordinated to morality. The great poet is also a great moralist who guides and instructs mankind.

Poetry, as far as possible, should be realistic. Emotional exaggeration under the stress of strong feelings is natural and admissible, but the fanciful and violent distortions at variance with nature and experience, in which the old poetry abounds, should be avoided.

The repudiation of the supernatural follows as a corollary to the above. It enfeebles the mind and withdraws it from reality; besides, the progress of science is hostile to such cobwebs of fancy. Hence the function of poetry is to envisage the real.

A vicious, narrow, and conventional taste not only reacts on morals; it works down to the vocabulary as well; and this in two ways. In the first place, words fall into disuse and language is impoverished by the confinement of poetry to set themes. In the second place, the coarseness and vulgarity of poetry is reflected in the daily speech of the people. Poets have always been the arbiters of taste, and their words and phrases filter down into the common speech.

A considerable space is devoted to linguistics. The last section is devoted to the reform of poetry in its three main branches—*ghazal*, *qasida*, and *masnavi*.

The strength and weakness of Hālī as a critic is evident even to a casual reader of his books. He excels in common sense and is, therefore, a sound guide as long as he is dealing with facts. On the other hand, he is weak on the speculative side, and is apt to lose his way in the tangle of psychological and aesthetic problems. His observations on Urdu poetry are just and penetrating. The theoretic part of the book is generally weak. His extensive borrowings from English are often unco-ordinated.

Hālī's chief contribution to criticism is the lofty place he assigns to instruction in literature. His predilection for morality amounts to an obsession and colours his whole theory of literature. According to him, poetry has its *raison d'être* in that it inculcates morality, one of his strongest grievances against medieval poetry being its deficiency in the moral element. The object of poetry, he maintains, is not to amuse or please; it is to exalt, ennoble, and to fortify the reader in his struggle for existence; and this not by inflaming the life of the reader as the fine arts do: it should directly subserve morality by teaching moral lessons. Hence the similarity between Plato and Ruskin and Hālī, is more than casual. Plato, as is well known, was interested in literature only in so far as it was helpful in moulding the life of a good citizen. He condemned the Attic drama because by its fictitious pictures of misery it encouraged sentimentalism and rendered audiences unfit for the real trials of life. Ruskin maintained that the fine arts must be 'didactic to the people, and that as their chief end'.²³ In his reaction from medieval poetry, Hālī swings to the other extreme; he overstresses the point and bends it on the other side.

Hālī's penchant for the didactic in fine arts seems due to the confusion in his mind between the function of useful arts and fine arts. The former by their very nature have some practical utility. The latter have no other purpose than to give the reader or spectator an elevating pleasure. In Hālī there is a clear overlapping of values, the utilitarian trespassing on the aesthetic. With his practical mind, he can very well see that a cobbler is useful, because he mends shoes, or a housebuilder, because he builds; but he cannot quite see the usefulness of a flute player. Giving artistic pleasure, than which there is no greater gift, does not occur in his values. He can tolerate music because martial music inspires soldiers, or the poetry of Byron because of its philhellenic ardour; but apart from this practical usefulness, he seems to see nothing in their favour. In this respect it is interesting to read his diatribe in the *Musaddas* on Urdu poets.²⁴

Of cognate origin is his predilection for the real. The subject-matter of poetry should be demonstrably real, or at least, within the orbit of experience, not the imaginary or the supernatural. Here Hālī, who started to enfranchise poetry from the old shackles, halts half-way and limits it to a fraction of life only. Why does he do this? First, because he had a matter-of-fact and logical mind; second, because of his theory of the interdependence of life and letters. The function of poetry is to strengthen life and to endear everyday duties and

loyalties—and the unreal enfeebles the mind and withdraws it from reality! Closely connected with this is the nineteenth-century bogey that the development of science is harmful to poetry, and that the extraordinary flourishes only in the infancy of mind, an idea he owed to Macaulay. In this connexion it is only fair to remember that in rejecting the extraordinary, he was repudiating the crude supernaturalism of the old Persian and Urdu romances. Hālī is not tilting against Shakespeare, or Goethe, or Coleridge, but against the infantile supernaturalism of the works immediately before him—the *Fasāna-e-‘Ajāib*, *Masnavī-e-Gulzār-e-Nasīm*, or the erotic *masnavīs* of Mīr: and as such his position is unexceptionable.

In his criticism of the supernatural, Hālī had failed to consider the function of the imagination which can bridge the gulf between the real and the unreal. And this is the more strange, as in his note on ‘imagination’ he has incorporated a passage from some English writer which completely demolishes his position. I refer to the following passage:

It (imagination) is the faculty which frees the poet from the trammels of time and space, and calls up the past and the future in the present, so that he describes the story of Adam, Paradise or the Resurrection, as if he had seen them with his own eyes. And everyone who reads these descriptions is affected by them as by real events. He has the power to invent unreal and imaginary things, such as demons, fairies, phoenix, the Water of Immortality with such plausible attributes that they appear real to the mind’s eye. The conclusions he draws are not supported by the rules of logic, but when the mind is lifted above itself, they are felt to be real and convincing.²⁵

In the discussion of the essentials of poetry, Hālī has enlisted Milton on his side by unconsciously misquoting his dictum—Poetry is simple, sensuous, and passionate. These words, like Aristotle’s catharsis, have been subjected to much ingenuity by critics. It is enough to point out that Hālī’s interpretation of it is in consonance with his own practice. Simplicity is argued to mean simplicity of diction. The poet should keep as close to everyday idiom as possible and discard the artificialities of the old school of poetry. ‘Sensuous’, by an unaccountable mistake, has been rendered as *real*. And lastly, poetry should be passionate, because it is the expression of genuine emotions; it should not be artificial in tone and sentiment like medieval Urdu poetry. In other words it should be something like his *Musaddas*.

Here again, it is entirely off the point to question Hālī’s interpreta-

tion of Milton's dictum. Hālī is innocently trying to entrench himself behind a great poet who seems to lend support to his own theories. Maybe he is trying to show off his knowledge, as he did by using English words in his writings, like Ahmad Khān and Nazir Ahmad. Anyway, Hālī has made his own meaning quite clear. He wrote the book to express his own views; and his reputation as a critic is not at all jeopardized by a failure to interpret aright Milton's dictum in regard to which there is no consensus of opinion among English critics themselves.²⁶

What Hālī's critics have failed to notice is that he has by mistake substituted a *judgement of value* for a *judgement of fact*. Milton does not say that poetry *should* be simple, sensuous, and passionate; he says that poetry *is* simple, sensuous, and passionate.

The importance of Hālī as a critic is best understood by examining his limitations. Persian, Arabic, and Urdu, the only languages he knew, had few models of scientific criticism to offer. His knowledge of English was rudimentary. Thus poorly equipped, he launched himself on a long voyage and produced a book which, despite all that adverse criticism may have to say, is still the most readable as well as the most informative book on the subject in the language.

Rightly to appreciate the work of Hālī as a critic of literature, especially poetry, we must constantly carry three things in our mind: (1) his temperament, (2) the requirements of his age, and (3) the literary values of the past, which he almost always meets in a spirit of antagonism. Those whose approach to him is doctrinaire or academic—in other words, those who take him out of his setting and judge him by the so-called absolute standards—are likely to carry a wrong impression of his mind and work. To take the three factors given above in order, we find that Hālī was a humanist as well as a puritan, the latter because of the influence of his age. As a humanist he was in favour of poetry because of its capacity to please, or as one of the graces of life. He supports it as a puritan and reformer because it could be made to subserve morality and indoctrinate useful ideas. The humanist ideal he never fully grasped, as his confusion of useful arts with fine arts, already referred to, clearly shows. Besides, pleasure had come to acquire the taint of bohemianism in his eyes as well as of his middle-class readers. Hence aesthetic considerations were more or less accidental in his determination of the function of poetry. His main stress is, therefore, on instruction. And since poetry has to be a vital factor in the lives of the people, it was essential that it should not be mawkish, strained, exaggerated,

or false. It must discard idle fancies and have its feet firmly planted on the earth. Nor should it be forgotten that as an interpreter of the new age he strongly reacted against the past. He advocated realism in subject-matter because poetry in the past had been false in sentiment. His moral fervour is likewise dictated by the irresponsibility of the elder poets. And finally, if he upholds the claims of inspiration, underrating the formal aspect of poetry, and holding like many a European critic that metre and rhyme are not essential to poetry, it is because he is reversing medieval values which were purely formal, in favour of the doctrine of inspiration.

The closest parallel to Hālī in Western criticism is the English Sidney. The latter wrote his famous *Apologie* to meet the attacks of the puritans; and he did this by upholding the usefulness and pleasure-giving qualities of poetry. Hālī's programme, as already pointed out, was to recommend poetry to the puritanical middle class of his day which was extremely suspicious of it. The English puritans held that poetry was 'the mother of lies,' . . . 'the nurse of abuse', corrupting the fancy, enfeebling manliness, and instilling pestilent desires in the soul. Sidney met this attack by demonstrating that it is not 'Poetry (that) abuseth man's wit, but that man's wit abuseth Poetry', and that 'the abuse of a thing' does not 'make the right thing odious'.²⁷ This is exactly Hālī's thesis also.²⁸ Again, according to Sidney, verse is 'but an ornament and no cause to Poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets . . . it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices . . . with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by . . .'²⁹ Hālī also assigns the first place in poetry to inspiration, and a secondary place to its formal aspects. The resemblance between Sidney and Hālī does not end here. Just as Sidney is the chief representative of the first period of the influence of Italian critics on English criticism, similarly Hālī is the first important writer to introduce Western canons of criticism to his countrymen.

The youngest of this triumvirate of letters, Shibli Nu'mānī, was born in the year of the Indian Mutiny at Bindūl, in the Ā'zamgarh district. Born of well-to-do parents, he was given every educational facility. With an intense zeal for knowledge, he went from place to place, like a medieval student, studying with the leading scholars of

the day. But the result was none too happy, for with much that was good, he also imbibed a fanatical zeal for the Hanafite creed, and consequently an equally senseless hatred for other schools of thought, especially the Ahl-e-Hadīs. His surname, Nu'mānī, was not a family name or a poetic title, but a party badge, recalling his allegiance to Abū Hanīfa, the founder of the Hanafite school.

This sectarian obsession Shiblī shared with the majority of his co-religionists in India. This was the time when the Islamic world was plunged into a serious controversy. The point at issue was this: Is the decisive factor in the religious life of Islam the Koran and the Apostolic Traditions, or the Koran as interpreted by the great doctor of canon law, Abū Hanīfa? Shiblī's earliest works (not extant) are said to have been violently polemical. This phase of his life lasted till 1882, when he came under the influence of Sayyid Ahmad. He now ceased to believe in ecclesiastical authority and became a liberal like him.

This spiritual crisis which was to enlist him under the banner of Sayyid Ahmad as the advocate of light and culture against ecclesiastical dogmatism came during his first casual visit to Aligarh. It is not improbable that he was then, like the great majority of the old theologians, suspicious of Sayyid Ahmad. But his prejudice wore off, and presently he was persuaded to accept the post of Lecturer in Persian and Arabic at the College.

Once at Aligarh he made rapid strides in the new humanism. The chief formative influence on his mind, besides Sayyid Ahmad's, was that of Dr. Arnold, Professor of Philosophy at Aligarh, who introduced him to Western literary criticism and helped enlarge his mind.

Shiblī began his literary career with short tracts and poems, e.g. *Guzashta Ta'lim* and *Masnavī-e-Subb-e-Umed*, the latter a neophyte's tribute to the personality and achievement of his master. This was the time when the past was being avidly explored by the Muslims, and it was this enthusiasm which enabled him to find his *métier*—historical research. He began by planning an encyclopaedic work on Islamic history, but this was too much for any single person and the programme was curtailed to a number of monographs on some of the great figures in Islamic history. These include: *Sirat-um-Nu'mān* (1892) and *Al-Fārūq* (1899). His essays and short studies were collected and published as *Rasūil-e-Shiblī* (1898).

In 1892 he undertook a tour to Egypt and Turkey with the two-fold object of recouping his health and collecting material for *Al-Fārūq*. His *Safar Nāma-e-Misr-o-Rūm-o-Shām*, published on his

return from his travels, is a valuable document embodying his observations on the general intellectual and political decadence of the countries visited. These gloomy reflections are lit with flashes of Pan-Islamic ardour which later on matured into an ardent political creed and led eventually to his retirement from Aligarh (1898).

In 1900 Shiblī was invited by Sayyid ‘Ali Bilgrāmī to Haidarābād and employed as Director of Arts and Sciences. The chief works, in their chronological order, which belong to this period are: *Al-Ghazālī* (1902) *Savānib-e-Umr-e-Maulānā-e-Rūm* (n.d.), *‘Ilm-ul-Kalām* (1903), and *Mimāzāna-e-Anīs-o-Dabīr* (1907).

In 1904 he took over the management of Nadvat-ul-Ulamā, an academy founded for the education of the Ulema by Muhammad ‘Alī of Cawnpore. The object of this institution was to bridge the gulf between Muslims with a Western education and the Ulema, by introducing the study of English in its curriculum. For nearly ten years he was the life of the institution. But his efforts were foredoomed to failure, as no real compromise was possible between things so antagonistic as medieval theology and Western science. His liberal views made the theologians restive; accusations of heterodoxy followed, and he had to retire from Nadva in 1913.

Another useful work of his was the founding of the Dār-ul-Musannifīn at Āzamgarh to encourage research. The academy is in a flourishing condition today.

Shiblī’s chief critical work is *Shi‘r-ul-‘Ajām*, or a history of Persian poetry, in five volumes. Planned in 1899, it was actually taken in hand in 1906, after the completion of the *Mimāzāna*. The first volume came out in 1908, a year after the publication of Āzād’s *Sukhandān-e-Fārs*; the second in 1909; the third in 1910; the fourth in 1912; and the fifth came out posthumously in December 1918. For some time he had been at work on *Sīrat-un-Nabī*, a comprehensive and critical life of the Prophet. Left unfinished, it was completed by Maulvī Sulaimān Nadvī.

As a man Shiblī was bold, fearless, and independent. Much as he respected Sayyid Ahmad, he never degenerated into a satellite. He lacked his master’s cautious and expedient nature, and was sensitive to a fault. Liberal in politics, and a staunch supporter of the Congress, he was a mordant critic of Sayyid Ahmad’s time-serving political creed and the Muslim League.

14

Shiblī is the father of modern history in Urdu. The factors that determined his method and outlook were two: (1) an urgent need to rehabilitate and vindicate Islam by rejecting the legendary and quasi-historical material which had been imported into it in the uncritical past, and the presence of which was exposing it to repeated attacks from its non-Muslim critics, and (2) the desire to bring historical writing in Urdu into line with the methods and practice of nineteenth-century European historians.

In regard to the first, he writes in the 'Foreword' to *Al-Fārūq*:

The ancients were very particular about preserving the traditions, but they seldom authenticated them. Today, we have not only to ascertain that the reporters were above suspicion; we have also to subject the matter reported to a searching criticism to satisfy ourselves that it is in accord with general experience, human nature, the spirit of the age, and the civilization of the period.³⁰

Here we have the critical spirit in full swing. Shiblī's work as a historian is, therefore, analogous to that of Sayyid Ahmad as a social reformer. The former had come forward to separate the theological chaff from the true grain of religion. It was Shiblī's programme to study the past in a critical spirit with a view to clearing it of the spurious traditions which a too credulous age had foisted upon it.

So far the general influence of the age on him. His specific outlook and method as a historian were determined by his knowledge of the two convergent forces which had radically changed the concept of history in Europe in the nineteenth century. The first of these was the growing self-consciousness of the masses, leading to a more democratic treatment of history. As the century advanced, history gradually ceased to be an account of the lives of kings and queens, of battles, sieges, conquests, and rebellions, and became increasingly an account of the contribution made by the people. The second was the application of the methods of science to human institutions, e.g. language, economics, social sciences, and history. This meant, at any rate in theory, the complete elimination of both feelings and imagination. The historian was required to efface himself and cultivate the objectivity of the scientist.

Shiblī owed his acquaintance with these ideas to the writings of Macaulay, particularly his essay on *Ranke's History of the Popes*. He was impressed with the ideas, and in his writings he made a

conscious effort to apply these to the material from the past. This is how he sums up his attitude:

The historian is like a draughtsman who presents with meticulous exactness the form, shape, boundaries, area, and angles of a piece of land. He is not like an artist who selects only those features of it which appeal to the feelings and emotions of the reader. A historian should never go beyond the bare transcript of events. He should cultivate perfect detachment like Ranke who rejected the imagination, had no sympathies, religious or political, and whose narrative leaves one in doubt as to his likes and dislikes and personal opinions.³¹

The other factor, namely, that history should have a wider franchise than the one hitherto accorded to it in the East, is no less explicit. Criticizing the older Muslim historians, he writes:

Of the morals, manners, and culture of the people there is not the slightest mention. The history of the rulers is there, but even here, there is nothing but an account of conquests and civil wars. . . . And no wonder! For despotism had been the prevailing form of government in Asia, and compared with the greatness and power of the ruler nothing ever mattered.³²

Both these shortcomings Shiblī attempted to remedy. It was his programme to rescue history from the dilettante and the sentimentalist, and to study it in a scientific spirit. In addition to this, he made it his business to bring to light the contribution made to culture and learning by Muslims as a people.

It was a laudable ambition of Shiblī's to raise history to the status of a science; but it is extremely doubtful if historical facts are susceptible of scientific treatment. The completely impersonal historian is more or less a myth. History does not deal with facts; it presents them as they are reflected in the mind of the writer. And since no two minds are exactly alike, it follows, therefore, that no two writers, however disinterested their approach, will give the same account of an occurrence. The human mind does not receive impressions of things passively, it reacts to whatever is presented to it, adding, modifying, eliminating, arranging, selecting—in other words, introducing the personal element. Hence history is more akin to literature than science. The elimination of one's personality is a good ideal in history. It is, however, no more than an ideal.

The above observations apply not only to Shiblī, but also to any and every historian, at any and all times. Shiblī, as a historian intent on stating facts, had not only to contend against this necessary element which makes history akin to art, be one ever so conscien-

tious. There was another factor peculiar to his age which side-tracked him and thrust on him the role of an apologist. Islam and Islamic civilization had then to run the gauntlet of a malicious criticism both in India and Europe, as never before. 'Islamic history', Shibli writes in one of his articles, 'was characterized as a butcher's shop by Europeans and the Muslims denounced as fanatics and barbarians.'³³ Under these circumstances it was but natural that, with his love of Islam and his wide knowledge of Islamic history, he should enter the field as a defendant and clear his religion of false accusations. In so doing, he was well within his rights. Does not a judge sometimes act as a counsel for a helpless and maligned defendant?

Yet the fact remains that great as was Shibli's love of truth, his love of Islam was still greater. Criticism, like logic, is a weapon for arriving at the truth, but just as logic is often used not for establishing the truth but for defending one's prepossessions and prejudices, similarly Shibli is often found using his critical powers to quash inconvenient allegations or bolstering up or glossing over what is not defensible. For instance, one of the charges generally brought against Muslims is that they had ordered Christians to wear a special dress as a badge of inferiority. Note the fantastic and utterly false defence put forth. 'The Muslims,' he contends, 'wherever they went, adopted the dress of the conquered people.'³⁴ He defends this untoward theory by citing one instance only—that of the Abbasids in Persia. Alas, poor Shibli! he forgets that the Abbasid revolution was in reality a Persian revolt against the Arabs. It was thoroughly anti-Arab and, as such, it meant the revival of Persian culture and power and, therefore, among other things, of Persian dress.

Such special pleadings and distortions are not many. But suppose they did not exist, and all the material he presented was unexceptionable—could we then regard him as an impartial historian? I am afraid not. Shibli's method throughout implies selection—selection of the episodes and events that redound to the glory of his community. In other words, Shibli often gives the truth but not the whole truth. He is intent on presenting the golden side of the shield only. Nor is he above letting his feelings run away with him. After a meticulously careful exposition of the life and government of Al-Fārūq, he rushes into the following gratuitous panegyric at the end of the book:

Those conversant with the laws of nature know that human excellences are of different kinds. It very often happens that a person is unique

in one form of excellence, but lacking in others. Now look at the life of 'Umar from all these points. You will clearly see that he was an Alexander, as well as an Aristotle, a Christ as well as an Ibrahīm Adham.³⁵

Could anything be more unfortunate and more uncalled for? It is clear that if facts cannot speak for themselves, nothing else will; and the good wine of 'Umar's personality, probably the best of its kind in Islamic history, could very well have been spared the anticlimax of such a sorry bush.

On the whole, Shiblī's emotional nature was too strong for the shackles of his scientific creed, and he discarded it early enough in his career as a historian. What could be more noble than the exordium to his *Sīrat-un-Nabī*, and at the same time what more contrary to his theories! On the whole, I am of the opinion that his scientific method is not a net gain when all is said and done. Shiblī may suit the dry-as-dust or the research scholar, but the general reader, and why not the elect as well, do require some breath of life, some semblance of art, some beauty of style.³⁶ Shiblī lacks charm. He is pedestrian and sometimes provokingly so. We miss in him the creative touch of Āzād; and though he excels him in critical insight, we miss in him that vivid sense of the past which we find in the works of all great historians. Shiblī prefers the draughtsman's pencil to the colour-box. This may make him next of kin to the scientist, but it makes him so much less a man of letters; and I hold that a historian is more of a man of letters than is generally conceded.

15

Shiblī is like Hālī, an outstanding figure in Urdu criticism. Although his contemporary reputation was mostly derived from his historical works, his chief passport to fame with us has been his *Shi'r-ul-'Ajām*. As with Hālī, his genius did not lie in speculative criticism. How commonplace, for example, is his introductory essay on poetry in volume IV! Shiblī's value as a critic lies in his sense of the rapport between literature and its *milieu*. Here he was by no means the first to enter the field. In the discussion of the influence of the natural environment of Persia on her language and literature, he had been anticipated by Āzād, and Shiblī had very little to add to it. Hālī, too, has a very informative section in the *Muqaddama* on the influence of despotism on the life and literature of the East. But what is incidental with Hālī is the thesis of *Shi'r-ul-'Ajām*; and there

is no doubt that he had shown throughout his work an exceptional insight into the political and sociological factors which moulded Persian poetry in the Middle Ages.

From this viewpoint volume IV is the life of the book. With remarkable penetration he traces the influence of despotism on poetry and its forms, the life of the people, their moral ideas and general conception of life. As this is his major achievement, it would be as well to summarize his views on the subject.

With regard to the forms of poetry and their general cultivation, Shiblī rightly argues that the extraordinary vogue of the *qasīda* in Persian poetry is directly traceable to patronage. He also holds that the failure of the poets to get adequate acknowledgement from their patrons, or the mutual jealousies of the poets competing for royal favour, led to the cultivation of the satire. The use of difficult rhymes and metres was likewise due to a subconscious desire on the part of the poets to outshine their rivals.

The impact of despotism was also responsible for the fatalistic philosophy of the age. The unlimited power of the rulers, their high-handedness, arrogance, as well as the propagation of the theory of the Divine Right of Kings by interested theologians who openly preached that the king being the shadow of God on earth was above the law— all these killed the spirit of liberty and free inquiry and led to the ethics of slaves, as it is called. The ethical content of Persian poetry, its emphasis on contentment, asceticism, life's instability and vicissitudes, as well as the blend of moral scepticism and epicureanism which gives its special tone to the poetry of Hāfīz and others—a key to all these is provided, according to Shiblī, by Persian despotism.

Of course no one key would open every lock. The peculiar life of a people at an advanced stage in its development presents a very complex pattern. Of this Shiblī is not unconscious. In his emphasis on the action of external forces he does not ignore or minimize the peculiar temperaments of the poets or the innumerable sociological factors which interact in a complex society and determine its peculiar physiognomy. In the last analysis every man arrives at his own equation of life, or to put it differently, reacts in an individual way to the form and pressure of his age. All this Shiblī knew. What he undertook to do was to single out one factor only, namely despotism, and to study its influence on the mind and character of the people. And within the limits of his thesis his conclusions cannot be called in question. Why was the medieval mind in the East so prone to mysticism? Shiblī asks. Because those who failed to get on in life

under a palpably unjust system were led to console themselves by denying the reality of life and setting their hearts on spiritual goals by way of compensation. Why did others rush so eagerly to epicureanism? Because finding life so unstable under despotism they were intent on making the best of it while it lasted. And finally, he explains the moral scepticism of the age also by reference to the autocratic form of government. Under despotism there is little or no justice; the good suffer while the wicked and base prosper, and consequently the people cease to believe in a righteous providence.

Some may be led to think that in his doctrine of the *milieu* Shiblī is sailing very close to the environmental determinism of the French critic, Taine, who treats man as the passive recipient of external forces and not as an active agent who can successfully withstand, select from, or modify the force of environment. This surmise would be wrong. As already explained, Shiblī does not leave out of his equation the personality or the peculiar temperament of the writer; its presence is throughout implied. He takes the latter for granted and confines himself to its peculiar reaction to its *milieu*.

No less conscious is he of the general moral level of the age and its influence on its great men. Sa'dī is by all accounts a great moralist; but he belongs to a degenerate age and has its defects, therefore. His pederastic verse and his low view of women, bear witness to the influence of his age. Similarly, the lapses of Rūmī, and Jāmī, and their occasional coarseness and obscenity, can be understood by a reference to the times in which they lived.

Another important contribution of Shiblī remains to be considered. This is his estimate of the influence of military life in the tenth and eleventh centuries on Persian life and character. He has brought to bear strong evidence on the point that the pederastic tendency in Persian poetry is bound up with the territorial expansion of Persia, involving prolonged camp life and an influx of youthful slaves from the conquered countries.

The book lacks form. It is a bundle of essays and not a homogeneous whole. There are some repetitions, presumably because the author did not live to revise it as a whole. There is some old-fashioned criticism about obsolete words. His notes on the poets could have been more revealing; as it is, he does no more than illustrate their characteristics. Another important thing: he is not afraid of great names and sometimes boldly rejects the traditional view, as in the case of Faizī.³⁷

Sbi'r-ul-'Ajām has been made the subject of an exhaustive study

by the late Hāfiz Mahmūd Shairānī. The criticism pertains mostly to historical and biographical inaccuracies—names of persons, parentage of poets, dates, etc. It does not touch the heart of the book, although much is being made of it in some interested circles. I take Shiblī to be a man of taste, a man who has a genuine feeling for literature and not a pedant, and his position as a critic is secure.

16

Verse is only a by-product of Shiblī's mind. It consists of occasional pieces written on the occurrences of the day.

His poems show how quickly Muslim India was emancipating itself from that faith in British civilization which was an article of faith with Sayyid Ahmad. There is some veiled satire in Hālī. Shiblī throws off all disguise and formally annexes politics to poetry. With a few exceptions, his poems deal with the political happenings of the day.

His method is ironic. He seems to praise, while he is really condemning. This is hardly known till the last line, when the concentrated sarcasm, coming all of a sudden, lights the poem in a retrospective glow of mockery.

Shiblī has also tried the new *qasīda* recommended by Hālī.³⁸ These poems dealing with great events in history have an inherent capacity for poetry; they have a nobility and greatness of their own which is very much enhanced by poetic treatment; but the technical difficulty of the monorhyme makes the task a difficult one. Several of these poems have no spontaneity and ease, and are laboured. Hālī and Chakbast were right when they betook themselves to the six-line stanza (*missadas*) for their elegies.

17

The scholastic philosophy of Shiblī is a halfway house between the extremes of the old dogmatic theology and the new rationalism, a sort of reconciliation of the two, more or less on the lines of Sayyid Ahmad, although less comprehensive and less adventurous than the latter's. Like Sayyid Ahmad, his guides are the rationalists of Islam—Ghazālī, Fakhr-ud-Dīn Rāzī, Ibn Rushd, and a few others. In the scholastic philosophy of Shiblī, there is a distinct, though a hesitating, attempt to enrich the old conventional morality by such

social values as humanitarianism, patriotism, and social service. In thus stressing practical morality at the expense of mere doctrinalism, he is at one with Sayyid Ahmad, and is reviving a tradition which is the cornerstone of the Prophet's teaching.

Whereas Sayyid Ahmad rejects miracles *in toto*, Shiblī neither accepts nor rejects them. He begins by belittling their importance. If a miracle means an occurrence against the laws of cause and effect, it is obviously impossible. But there may be, unknown to us, reasons for what appears opposed to reason. It is dangerous to dogmatize, Shiblī tells us, because how little of the laws of nature we know! He therefore defines a miracle, with Shāh Valīullah, as an event of an extraordinary nature, which is against everyday experience, but which does not contravene the chain of causation. Driven into a corner, he does not quite reject miracles, for there are unequivocal accounts of them in the Koran; and as a last resort, enlists mesmerism and spiritism to bring them within the world of psychic reality.

He explains prophethood by a reference to the genesis of poetry and fine arts. Just as an artist has an extraordinary and intuitive perception of beauty, so a prophet has a direct knowledge of spiritual values. The prophet, as defined by Shiblī, is a man dowered with this spiritual faculty. He is perfect in morals and can perfect others by his influence. Besides, he does not learn in the ordinary way; the nature of things is directly revealed to him.

The idea of punishment and reward as propounded by Islam is quite in accordance with average psychology, according to Shiblī. There can be no better incentive to virtue or deterrent from evil. Heaven and Hell, however, are not material realities. Our actions have a direct and immediate effect on the mind, causing pleasure or pain, softening or hardening the heart, according to the nature of the deed. Heaven and Hell are, therefore, merely symbols of spiritual pain or pleasure.

In regard to the reality of angels, the Devil, Resurrection, Heaven and Hell, three explanations are possible, he says. Either they ought to be taken literally, and then they refer to actual beings or facts, or they are analogous to dreams. Just as in dreams the senses are dominated by the imagination, and ideas present themselves in a pictorial form to the dreamer, similarly certain imaginative minds in moments of deep absorption are thrown into a dream state, so that their ideas take on a concrete shape. In the third place, they are to be treated metaphorically—an attempt to explain the spiritual in

terms of the material. Shiblī is inclined towards the third view, although he does not say it in so many words.

On the whole, the theological writings of Shiblī are a good summary of the views of the Islamic Rationalists. His treatment is neither exhaustive nor consistent. He seldom confronts the problem squarely, and very often tries to evade the issue. He is neither a cogent reasoner nor an original thinker. His notes on Evolution and the origin and presence of Evil, where he could not get much support from earlier Muslim writers, are rudimentary and unconvincing.

18

Other names that swelled the note struck by Sayyid Ahmad are: Nawab Muhsin-ul-Mulk, Sayyid Mehdī ‘Alī Khān (1837-1907) and Nawab Ā‘zam Yār Jang, Maulvī Charāgh ‘Alī Khān (1844-1895). The latter was a man of wide attainments. He knew Arabic, Persian, English, together with a working knowledge of Latin and Greek, and brought to bear all his scholarship and industry on the vindication, exposition, and interpretation of Islam. Like his master, he preferred the allegorical method of interpretation to the prevailing literalism of the day. He was an original thinker within his range, and was far from being a blind follower of Sayyid Ahmad. Most of his writings are in English and deal with theology and religion. His Urdu works are: *Ta‘līqāt* (1872), *Islām kī Dūnyavī Barkaten*, and *Qadīm Qaumon kī Mukhtasar Tārīkh*.

The first is a refutation of ‘Imād-ud-Dīn’s³⁹ *Tārīkh-e-Muhammadi*. His contention is that the book is based on apocryphal traditions and is, therefore, utterly untrustworthy. The third is a refutation of the charge that the accounts of some of the ancient people appearing in the Koran are legendary.

Charāgh ‘Alī is one of the most important of the early writers who came forward to defend Islam against the attacks of Christian missionaries. He gave some impetus to the reform movement inaugurated by Sayyid Ahmad, and consolidated the position of his co-religionists; but his literary importance is negligible. He is probably the heaviest and the most wooden of a school of writers who are conspicuously lacking in charm and freshness of style.

Sayyid Mehdī ‘Alī, entitled Muhsin-ul-Mulk, succeeded Sayyid Ahmad as secretary to the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College Aligarh, on the latter’s death, and was a frequent contributor to the

Tabẓīb-ul-Akhlāq. He also stuck to Sayyid Ahmad's political policy and proclaimed that the Indian Muslims owed no allegiance to the Sultān of Turkey, and was largely responsible for the founding of the Muslim League in 1906.

Charāgh 'Alī and Mehdī 'Alī are but little known today despite their important work. They were pillars of strength to Sayyid Ahmad, but history is apt to forget all except those who are leaders of thought or initiate movements—and they did no more than help carry on the work of their master!

No less has time dimmed the lustre of the name of Zakāullah (1832–1910), a miscellancous writer of note in his day, who had a useful and varied educational career, and was a staunch supporter of the Aligarh movement. He rendered important services to the cause of the New Learning by translating books on science, and mathematics from English into Urdu, and by writing numerous textbooks on subjects like history, geography, economics, ethics, and literature. As a writer his proverbial facility has gone against him. He never developed a feeling for style, and his voluminous histories ceased to attract notice once the medium of instruction was changed to English. Nor is he critical enough, especially when dealing with the British rule in India on which he lavishes praise.

Maulvī Vahīd-ud-Dīn Salīm (1869–1928), who occupied the chair of Urdu at the Osmania University for several years, began his career as Sayyid Ahmad's secretary at Aligarh. As a linguist he tried to stem the tide of indiscriminate importations from Persian and Arabic into Urdu. In this he was prompted by two motives—to make the Urdu language simple, and to commend it to non-Muslims by stressing and popularizing the indigenous element in it. His chief work is *Vazī' Istilāhāt-e-'Ilmīyya*, a comprehensive guide to word-formation from native elements, and was written to guide the Bureau of Translators at Haidarābād in the task of coining new scientific and literary terms. His thesis is, that like all Aryan languages, Urdu writers should resort to the use of the native material for word-formation, instead of importing foreignisms into it. In this he failed to influence his co-religionists, because the predisposition to borrow or adapt ready-made terms from Persian and Arabic was too firmly established to be overcome at that late stage.

Two writers who belong to literature only incidentally are Sayyid 'Alī Bilgrāmī (1851–1911) and Sayyid Husain Bilgrāmī. The former is known for his translation of Gustave Le Bon's *La Civilisation des Arabes* and *Civilisation des Indes* under the title of *Tamaddun-e-*

'*Arab* and *Tamaddun-e-Hind*, respectively. He had an essentially modern outlook and was in full sympathy with the Aligarh movement. His brother, Sayyid Husain Bilgrāmī, entitled Nawab 'Imād-ul-Mulk Bahādur, who had a distinguished political career, was in close touch with Aligarh, and his essays and addresses have been published under the title of *Rasā'il-e-'Imād-ul-Mulk*. Mention should also be made of Safīr Bilgrāmī (b. 1833), whose somewhat eccentric *Jalva-e-Khiz̄r*, a history of Urdu poetry, may still be read with interest.

Maulvī Sayyid Ahmad Dehlvī (1846-c. 1920), the last writer of note on our list for this chapter, wrote a number of educational works for women and girls. His most important publication is *Farhang-e-Āsafīyya*, a monumental work in four volumes, published in 1892 after twenty-four years' hard work. A part of it had come out serially under the title of *Armughān-e-Dehlī*, but the scheme broke down and subsequently the entire work was published under its present title in grateful acknowledgment of the generous financial aid received from the Nizam's government.

Farhang-e-Āsafīyya is the first Urdu dictionary in which the principles of modern lexicography have been observed. In compiling this work he was materially helped by the training he had received under Dr. S. W. Fallon, Inspector of Schools, Behar, whose *New Hindustani* English Dictionary had been published in 1879. Excellent as the work is, Maulvī Sayyid Ahmad has often interpolated quaint personal matters in the book which are a source of much unconscious humour. His use of risky quotations is traceable to the influence of Dr. Fallon.

XIV

MUHAMMAD HUSAIN ĀZĀD

ĀZĀD's approach to life and literature was in several respects different from that of the Aligarh school. He is the only writer of note in the period who, without being opposed to it, did not fully share its ideology. The pressing problems of the day, the desire for reconstruction, social and religious, a consuming passion with the reformers, did not enter his scheme of life; and if ever he approached them, it was from a nationalist rather than a strictly religious or communal angle. In his attitude towards the past also he offers a definite contrast to the reformers. What the reformers held up to admiration was the heroic age of Islam—a period of territorial expansion, religious purity, scientific achievement, and intellectual advancement. The past that Āzād loved was the past romanticized by his early memories, a glamorous world of colour and pageantry, of well-bred ease, courtesy, refinement, and ancient loyalties, fast retreating before the inroads of modern civilization. It was in this world that he would have liked to have lived, moved and had his being; and it was exactly this very world that was anathema to the reformers.

Muhammad Husain Āzād was born in Delhi in 1830. His father, Muhammad Bāqir, an enterprising man, was the pioneer of journalism in northern India. After some preliminary schooling at home, the boy Āzād was admitted to the Arabic class in the Delhi College, in or about 1847. Although he did not study English, in conformity with the common prejudice of the day, he pursued a course of studies in European history, principles of constitutional law, mathematics, physical science, and geography, in Urdu, and, on the whole, was well abreast of the knowledge of the day.

Simultaneous with his education at the Delhi College, and of like importance, was his early contact with the poet Zauq, his poetical preceptor and his father's trusted friend. It was really he who

kindled his life-long passion for poetry and poets which culminated in his famous *Āb-e-Hayāt*.

And now came the Reign of Terror following the Indian Mutiny, when all this happy life was broken up like a dream. His father was arrested and executed on a charge of treason, and his house and property confiscated. Āzād made good his escape in disguise and avoided a like tragic fate. There is no authentic record of the ensuing six or seven years. By his own account, he was in Lucknow in 1858, collecting material about the poets.¹ After a brief sojourn at Ludhiāna, he succeeded in getting a petty job in the Education Department, Punjāb. Once in Lahore, he found an outlet for his talents in the Anjuman-e-Punjāb, and his zeal was rewarded by his appointment as its secretary. Here he made valuable contacts, notably with Dr. Leitner, who got him appointed as Professor of Arabic at the Oriental College, in 1883.

Several years before (1865), when his tenure was still uncertain, he had been sent with Pundit Man Phūl on a secret mission to Bokhāra, Khiva, and Khokand (presently to be annexed by Russia) to report on the political conditions obtaining in those countries. His gleanings of Persian life and literature were embodied in *Sukhandān-e-Fārs*, a series of lectures delivered in 1872, and published in 1907. Another little book that has permanently added to his fame is *Qisas-e-Hind*, part 11, written at the instance of Colonel Holroyd, Director of Public Instruction, Punjāb, in or about 1869. To this period also belongs *Nairang-e-Khayāl*, a collection of allegorical essays, in two slender volumes, translated from the English. Only in one of them *Shubrat-e-‘Ām aur Baqā-e-Davām kā Darbār*, has he made a slight departure from the original, interpolating examples from Asiatic history in place of those from European history in the original; the rest of the essay being a translation like others.

Here is a parallel statement of Āzād's essays and their English counterparts:

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| 1. <i>Āghāz-e-Āfrīnīsh men Bāgh-e-‘Ālam kā kiya Rang thā aur Rafta Rafta kiya ho gaya</i> | <i>An allegorical History of Rest and Labour—Johnson</i> |
| 2. <i>Sach aur Jhūt kā Raḥm Nāma</i> | <i>Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction, An Allegory - Johnson</i> |
| 3. <i>Gulshan-e-Umed kī Bahār</i> | <i>The Garden of Hope --Johnson</i> |
| 4. <i>Sair-e-Zindagī</i> | <i>The Voyage of Life—Johnson</i> |
| 5. <i>Insān kisī Hāl men Khush nahīn rabta</i> | <i>The Endeavour of Mankind to get Rid of their Burdens, A Dream—Addison</i> |

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| 6. 'Ulūm kī Badnasībī | <i>The Conduct of Patronage—Johnson</i> |
| 7. 'Ilmīyat aur Zakāvat ke
Muqābale | <i>An Allegory of Wit and Learning—
Johnson</i> |
| 8. Jannat-ul-Humaqā | <i>Paradise of Fools—Parnell</i> |
| 9. <i>Khusb Tab'ī</i> | <i>The Spectator, No. 35—Addison</i> |
| 10. <i>Nukta Chīnī</i> | <i>An Allegory of Criticism—Johnson</i> |
| 11. <i>Muraqqa'-e-Khusb Bayānī</i> | <i>The Spectator, No. 35—Addison</i> |
| 12. <i>Sair-e-'Adam</i> | <i>The Spectator, No. 501</i> |
| 13. <i>Shubrat-e-'Ām aur Baqā-e-
Davām kā Darbār</i> | <i>Vision of the Table of Fame, The
Tatler, No. 81</i> |

In 1874 the Punjāb Government made an abortive attempt to renovate poetry. The famous meeting of 9 May 1874, in which Āzād read his well-known *Manifesto*, was not held by him on his own initiative, as is generally thought. It was organized by the Government, and Āzād's share in it was that of the Secretary of the Association only. This is made clear by the following extract from Colonel Holroyd's speech on the occasion:

This meeting has been called to find ways and means for the development of Urdu poetry, which is in a state of decadence today. The interest that His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor, is pleased to take in the matter is evident from the following letter addressed to me by the Secretary, Punjāb Government:

. . . I have been directed to ask you if it is not possible to include in the curriculum of our secondary and high schools a selection of Urdu poetry, aiming at moral instruction, and presenting a natural picture of feelings and thoughts. And, further, if a selection of this nature could be compiled from the works of Mir Taqī, Miskīn, Zauq, Ghālīb and others. . . . If in this manner, with the help of schools, an indigenous poetry of a non-sectarian character were written and were gradually to replace the poetry now in vogue, it would really be an important step forward.

Continuing his speech, the Director proposed:

Let us lay the foundation of a new *mushā'ara* today, with this special feature that instead of a hemistich we should announce a certain subject on which the poets should write poems. . . . I propose that we should hold monthly meetings, and that next month the poets should write on the 'rainy season'.²

The *mushā'ara* thus founded made no special headway in spite of much official optimism and propaganda. For one thing, it was premature; it provoked a most determined opposition, and after a short

and uneventful career of a year and a half it was allowed to peter out. In their enthusiasm, the authorities had not realized that poetry is a spontaneous growth, and you cannot promulgate a new era in literature by an act of parliament. The Indian Renaissance which was to give us the new literature had not yet crystallized itself.

In 1881 came out Āzād's great work, *Āb-e-Hayāt*, or a history of Urdu poets. Recognized at once as a masterpiece, it put Āzād in the first rank of the writers of the day. *Darbār-e-Akbarī*, his next book, is a failure. It is far too unwieldy, and, what is worse, is so excessively marred by his mannerisms of style that it does not make pleasant reading.

Āzād had done his life-work. Yet there was one sacred duty that had been all along on his conscience. This was the recension of the *ghazals* and *qasidas* of Zauq. In the rush of official work, his secretarial duties, his literary ventures, he had never forgotten it. He tells us how these poems had been salvaged after the Mutiny:

The soldiers of the victorious army rushed into my house and drove us out at the point of bayonets. There lay the house before me, full to overflowing . . . and I stood undecided what things to take, when my eyes fell on the bundle of his *ghazals*. And I said to myself: if I survive, I shall some day make up for all this loss. But never will Zauq come back to write his *ghazals*. His literary immortality depends on these. . . . If they are lost his name also will be forgotten. This decided me: I took the bundle under my arm-pit and left the house.³

It was an extremely difficult task - this one of collating Zauq's poems, and cost him many a weary month. The poems, at any rate many of them, were in a very poor state of preservation, faded and defaced. They were given to the world after his return from Persia. It only remains to point out that occasionally Āzād made too free a use of his editorial duties in collating these poems, having actually re-written some of the *ghazals* and *qasidas*. This conclusion of mine is based on a careful examination and comparison of the original manuscripts of Zauq's poems with Āzād's amended versions thereof. Very roughly, my conclusion is that some of the *ghazals* and *qasidas* marked 'Not revised by the poet' in *Divān-e-Zauq*, have been in some cases completely, and in others partly, re-written by Āzād himself.⁴

Āzād began to show signs of mental decline after the visit to Persia in 1885. He lost his mind completely about 1890, and lingering for nearly twenty years, passed away in 1910.

3

The reputation of Āzād mainly depends on three books. They are, in their chronological order, *Sukhandān-e-Fārs*, *Qisas-e-Hind*, and *Āb-e-Hayāt*.

The shortest of these, *Qisas-e-Hind*, is a collection of stories from medieval Indian history, told with great verve and vividness. It is a children's classic, but there is no book in our literature, to my knowledge, which applies in such a masterly way the gift of narrative and vivid imagination to 'old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago'. This magic gift which transports us suddenly into a strange world so different from our own is Āzād's peculiar gift—a gift in which he has no compeer in our literature. To the question—I do not know if it has been asked—is it historically accurate? I have always said, and will now repeat—strict historical accuracy is not the goal of a work of literature. Its function is rather to please, to hold the reader's attention, or to induce poetic faith; and these qualities no one can deny him. It may be pseudo-historical, but in its vivid re-creation of the past, it is really a masterpiece. And this brings me to two other important features of these stories—their pre-eminently romantic approach, and their broad humanity. Āzād is not a partisan; he does not take sides, and blame or praise on grounds religious or racial. To all concerned, he does equal justice. His appeal is to human nature, especially to the romantic element in it. It is this universality which marks him off from other writers of the period.

By far the greatest story is that of Padmanī, and its moving end is one of the great things in Urdu literature.

Only in two stories do his feelings get the better of his objectivity—*Muhammad Shāh kā Zamāna aur Nādir Shāh kā Āna*, and the two studies of Aurangzeb. In the first, he is too much a son of his age not to sneer at the easy-going voluptuary. As regards Aurangzeb, as a religious zealot, he was outside the orbit of his sympathy, and with what devastating irony he has told the story of his Deccan campaign!

Sukhandān-e-Fārs, as the name shows, deals with Persian language and literature. It is in two parts; the first, consisting of two lectures on the principles of philology, illustrated from Persian and Sanskrit, was published as a booklet late in the sixties. The second comprising eleven lectures on Persian language and literature, delivered in 1873, remained in manuscript till 1907, when both parts were published

together as *Sukhandān-e-Fārs*. The first part, however informative, need not detain us. The material for it has evidently been borrowed from European philologists. With most admirers of Āzād, *Sukhandān-e-Fārs* means the second part.

To begin with, much of the information about linguistics, such as the theories of the origin of language, semantics, loan-words, fossils, race-mixture, and linguistic development, has been borrowed from European linguists. This alone is enough to prove that Āzād knew more English than he cared to admit, or is given credit for.

With this minor reservation, the book is entirely original, and he can claim it as his own with perfect justice. Āzād was several things in one—critic, historian, linguist; but over and above all these, he was an artist. However technical or difficult his material, he seldom fails to make it interesting. This is the supreme gift of a writer; but it is not without its dangers. Let a writer be interesting, and he will be at once set down as superficial, be he never so informative. Even Shiblī, who ought to have known better, dismisses him with a curl of the lip as an amateur. I am second to none in my admiration of Shiblī's critical acumen, as this book shows, but I am not prepared to believe that he had a more profound insight into literature and language than Āzād.

Sukhandān-e-Fārs is a mine of information, and yet it has all the interest of a story of adventure. Here is the thesis of the most important part of the book in Āzād's own words:

It is impossible to understand a language properly without a satisfactory knowledge of the history, geography, and political institutions of its country. . . . The similes and metaphors which adorn it are necessarily based on some aspects of the land. The general conditions of the country, its physical features, the customs of the people, their ways of life, social forms, dress, etiquette—all are reflected in it. . . . In all countries, language is the only safe index to the ability, or backwardness, or civilization of a people. Even history cannot furnish positive and exact data with regard to the true condition of a people. But if we have access to their speech, we get the most conclusive evidence about their activities, conditions, and thoughts.⁵

Sukhandān-e-Fārs is highly informative, but with Āzād it is always the treatment that matters, and the book has all the vividness of a personal experience. Āzād writes with his intellect no less than with his feelings and imagination. A dangerous method! But writers before him have written with their whole life and succeeded, though their achievements are not to be measured by the foot-rule of the

scientific historian or laborious scholarship. His notes on Persian literature are brief, but how pregnant, how stimulating! He has summed up poets, prose-writers, sometimes whole schools, in a score of words, and every word is alive and winged. And then where else in Urdu prose can you get anything approaching the glamorous description of Persian climate, life, and social conditions? It is a book by a scholar, a scholar who is also a poet.

Āzād is, however, *par excellence* the author of *Āb-e-Hayāt*. This book has called forth more praise, and more blame, has been more read, more criticized, more cited than any other prose work in Urdu. And the reason is plain: it is the first book on Urdu poetry on modern lines, and, therefore, every new find in the lives of the poets, every eddy in critical opinion, has reacted on it and still reacts, in a favourable or unfavourable way. On the whole, the general critical opinion—mostly hasty, uninformed, or truculent—is disposed to the view that Āzād is not a trustworthy historian: that he is an unscrupulous partisan, writing up some and writing down others on personal or sectarian grounds. How far is this view correct?

Like *Sukhandān-e-Fārs*, *Āb-e-Hayāt* also falls into two parts, the first dealing with the growth and development of the Urdu language, the second with classical Urdu poetry. With regard to the first, he is a real pioneer. Scattered hints, here and there, about the Urdu language are found in some of the earlier writers, as in Sayyid Ahmad's *Āsār-e-Sanādīd*; but they are no more than stray hints. It was reserved for Āzād to write an authentic account of the evolution of the Urdu language. Later research has amplified his conclusions, but nothing very substantial has been added to them. The second half of this part deals with the influence of the Persian language and literature on the development of Urdu language and literature. It is packed with information, and anyone who would like to explore this subject further would find in him a reliable guide.

And now a few words about the highbrow view which dismisses the book as pseudo-historical. I had occasion to go through this evidence carefully some twenty years ago, and it is my considered opinion that the view is either partisan or inspired by envy. My personal view is that *Āb-e-Hayāt* is a carefully documented book. Its sources are: (1) the old *tazkiras* mentioned by the author in the text or footnotes, of which by far the most important is *Tazkira-e-Sh'uarā-e-Urdū* by Hakīm Abul Qāsim Mīr Qudratullah Qāsim; (2) oral information obtained from the friends and relatives of the poets; and (3) material obtained by correspondence. With regard to this

third source, I happen to possess some of the letters addressed to him, and I find that he has been scrupulously honest in using them. ⁶ Not that there are no inaccuracies in the book; Āzād is wrong where his sources are wrong; but of the conscious manipulation of material, I have not been able to get any positive proof.

As regards his inclusions and exclusions—always a difficult matter for a pioneer—they have been determined by personal taste and judgement, and it is unkind to impute motives to him. I believe there should have been room for Momin in the First Edition. Āzād did not think so, and there the matter should have ended. But criticism with a Sunnite bias at once jumped to the conclusion that he had been left out on sectarian grounds. I have gone through Āzād's life and writings with some care, and I do not know what evidence there is to justify such allegations except the bare word of the critics.

The most outstanding feature of Āzād's mind is his romantic love of the past. The past was to him what the cave must have been to Aladdin before he discovered that there was no exit to it—a glamorous world, overflowing with beauty, courtesy, refinement, good-fellowship. The greater part of this idealization was subjective, like our love of things and persons consecrated by early memories. That the world had been more beautiful in the past, had followed nobler ends, and had a statelier rhythm than our utilitarian and sophisticated age, was an article of faith with him. The result is that he not only exaggerates the goodness and beauty of the past; he frequently sees what is not there. Love is a great revealer, no doubt, but it is quite as prolific in creating illusions, as all those who have fallen in and out of love know; and a good deal that spellbound him in his immediate past was the work of his all too sympathetic imagination. Āzād's intellect was not on a par with his feelings. Strictly speaking, he was neither a reformer, nor a moralist, nor a realist, but a romantic enthusiast, and his critical dicta on the past are often of the nature of a reluctant afterthought.

To this romantic, almost militant enthusiasm for the past, a disparagement of the present was but a natural corollary. The present, he feels, is petty, bourgeois, and colourless; and while waxing eloquent about his beloved past, he is not above improving the occasion by sidelights, none too flattering, on the present. He writes

of Shāh Mubārak: 'An old and experienced poet, he would, nevertheless, ask Khān-e-Ārzū to revise his poems. See, how just these people were, and how ardently they pursued perfection!' ⁷ And yet, on the same page, before the ink with which the above was written was dry, he refers to a wordy war between Ābrū and Mirza Jān Jānān, so smutty, that he has to resort to a lacuna to hide its coarseness.

One of the drollest of his citations is the anecdote about the maid-servant of Mazmūn, recounted to him by Zauq. I fail to see what is so striking about the repartee, taking it to be true, which in all probability it is not. But it is enough to set his imagination on fire, and after a passionate apostrophe to Delhi and its departed greatness, he writes in a footnote: 'So well known and common were these literary allusions then that even women and maid-servants were capable of such sallies of wit, but of our own age the less said the better.'⁸

This is how he tilts at his own age in the account of Mus-hafī:

When the ancients read a book, they did it so thoroughly and carefully that its contents were stamped on the memory. Nowadays, if the people read at all, they hop, skip, and jump through a book, like a herd of goats broken into a garden. They take a bite here, a bite there, and leave the rest. They are driven forward by greed which allows them no respite. To pass an examination, get a degree, and then waste their lives in an office—this is their sole ambition. But, alas! even situations are hard to obtain now-a-days.⁹

Such is Āzād when carried away by his feelings. But as a critic he was no less conscious of the dynamic aspects of the present, and values them accordingly. No one knew better than Āzād that the old literature had entered a blind alley, that its progress had been vertical rather than horizontal, that it had rung changes on the same old themes, and had sought novelty by disporting into the fanciful. It is as necessary to remember that Āzād had intellectual affiliations with his age, as to keep in mind that emotionally he was a strong champion of the past.

One very notable result of this double attitude is that, unlike other writers of his time, he can see both sides of a question. His criticism comes in alternating waves of appreciation and disapproval. He is carried off by Sauda's satiric onslaughts, and claps his hands like a boy when the latter goes out for his adversaries like a champion bruiser. But he feels no less the coarseness of it all, and asks of his readers: 'We should play the bee and settle on sweet flowers, avoid

cobwebs and rotting leaves, and having sucked the juice fly away forthwith.’¹⁰

The fact remains, however, that Āzād’s critical dicta are mere interludes, or afterthoughts. Even when he writes of the shortcomings of the old writers, as of Sauda’s satiric irresponsibility, his tone is deprecating, like that of an indulgent parent describing with suppressed relish the escapades of his spoiled child. He relishes their bad blood, and genuinely admires at one time what he disapproves at another. Āzād was an eternal boy, naïve, exuberant; and his critical and moral reflections on the failings of his favourites are no more than a tardy reparation to his judgement.

5

The certainties of one age become the controversies of another. Whatever hard things the critics said about Āzād fifty years ago, they were unanimous on one point—he was the greatest master of prose style in Urdu. Today, we have begun to feel a need for revising this view. Āzād, as a proseman, has left us some pieces of great beauty which few things in his contemporaries or his successors can equal, much less excel. But he is far from being a model prose-writer.

The fact is that he is a proseman endowed with the imaginative sensibility of a poet, and his prose is effective or otherwise according as to whether it can or cannot naturally absorb the poetic element so strong in him. This brings us at once to the all-important question—how far is prose as prose susceptible of imaginative treatment? And since poetry is, in one important respect, metaphorical language, the question to decide is: how far is it desirable or permissible to use metaphor and other allied figures of speech in prose? On this point Read writes:

. . . The main use of metaphors is always poetical. . . . And as prose is essentially the art of analytical description, it would seem that metaphor is of no particular relevance to it. . . . We may say quite generally that the use of metaphor tends to obscure the essential nature of prose, because it substitutes a poetic equivalence for a direct statement.¹¹

Now what troubles many a reader, intent on having a direct statement, is this poetic equivalence, so common with Āzād. For example, he wishes to tell us what poetry was like with Nāsikh and others,

and, instead of stating his views simply and directly, as Hālī or Shibli would do, this is what he gives:

اس میں دو قسم کے باکمال نظر آئینگے۔ ایک وہ کہ جنہوں نے اپنے بزرگوں کی پیروی کو دین آئین سمجھا۔ یہ اُن کے باغوں میں پھریں گے۔ پرانی شاخیں زرد پتے کاٹیں چھٹینگے۔ اور نئے رنگ نئے ڈھنگ کے گلہستے بنا کر گلہستانوں سے طاق و ایوان سجائیں گے دوسرے وہ عالی دماغ جو فکر کے دخان سے ایجاد کی ہوائیں اڑائینگے اور برج آتشازی کی طرح اس سے رتبہ عالی پائیں گے۔ انہوں نے اس ہو اسے بڑے بڑے کام لئے۔ مگر یہ غضب کیا کہ گرد و پیش جو وسعت بے انتہا پڑی تھی اُس میں سے کسی جانب میں نہ گئے بالانہوں میں سے بالا بالا اڑ گئے۔ چنانچہ تم دیکھو گے کہ بعض بلند پرواز ایسے اوج پر جائیں گے جہاں آفتاب تارا ہو جائیگا۔ اور بعض ایسے اڑیں گے کہ اڑ ہی جائینگے۔ وہ اپنے آئین کا نام خیال بندی اور نازک خیالی رکھیں گے ❖

Not facts, not an analytical statement, but facts emotionalized and draped in imagination. Behind the imagery there is an idea, a sober fact, but it is not directly presented: it is suggested by a series of images. In other words, it is a case of the substitution of an imaginative equivalent for a direct statement, in what is meant to be a critical work; and the reader who wishes to get at the idea, thus swathed in imagery, must resort to a mental paraphrase. If it be said: Āzād was worked up to such a degree of emotional intensity when he wrote this and similar passages that the ideas actually presented themselves to him clothed in imagery, we shall say: What you say is true, but it is only an explanation not a justification. The fact remains that for the direct communication of ideas or facts imagination is a hindrance and not a help. Nor can you call the passage more beautiful than its simple prose equivalent would have been, for in literature beauty is only another name for the right adjustment of means to ends. On the whole, the imaginative style of Āzād is not an accurate instrument for an objective statement of facts or thoughts.

But then there are certain moods which are the very stuff of imagination, expansive situations which lift the heart, moments of high tension when we are made to feel the pathos or tragedy of life,

occasions when we not only state facts but also convey how we are affected by them. Here imagery is in its proper place, because it enables the writer to transmit his total experience—facts and feelings combined—to the reader. Take these two passages so different in mood and rhythm, the first grave and tense, the second light and free, yet both instinct with poetry:

راجہ نے بھی باہر نکل کر خوب خوب مُقابلے کئے۔ جان ہاروں نے مُلک کے نام پر
 جانیں قربان کیں۔ مگر کہاں تمام ہندوستان کا تاجدار۔ کہاں سپتوڑ کا باجگزار۔ جوان جوان بیٹے
 آنکھوں کے سامنے مارے گئے۔ بڑے بڑے سردار کٹ گئے۔ جب سب طرف سے آس
 ٹوٹ گئی تو ایک بیٹا باقی تھا۔ اُسے بلا کر کہا کہ اے فرزند! جو کچھ یہاں ہم پر گزرے گی
 ہمارا اس کے نمودار ہیں۔ اب بہتر یہی ہے کہ تم یہاں سے کسی طرف کو نکل جاؤ کہ نسل تو قائم
 رہے۔ بعد اس کے پدمنی کو سامنے بلایا اور دیکھ کر آنکھوں میں آنسو بھر لایا۔ ہر چند کہ وہ
 عورت تھی مگر بڑی رمز شناس تھی۔ اس نے اسی وقت صندل کی لکڑیاں منکا کر سات چٹائیں
 چُنوائیں۔ تمام خاندان کی عورتیں اور بڑے بڑے ٹھاکروں اور سرداروں کی بیبیاں جو
 خاوند اور خاندان کے نام کے آگے جان کو کچھ مال نہ سمجھتی تھیں سب آئیں۔ سر سے پاؤں
 تک چادریں اوڑھے گھونگٹ نکلے۔ پھولوں کی ایک ایک مالانگے میں۔ رام رام کے
 سمرن کرتی چٹاؤں کے گرد کھڑی ہوئیں اور خلقت کا ہنجوم ہو گیا۔ جس وقت چٹاؤں کو
 آگ دی اور شعلے بلند ہوئے۔ دلوں سے دھوئیں اور خلافت سے ایک نعل اُٹھا۔ ہر تنوتی
 لاج کی ماری ایک ایک سے آگے بڑھتی تھی۔ اپنی آبرو اور مردوں کی فتح کی دعا کرتی تھی
 اور پروانے کی طرح اس بھڑکتی آگ پر گر کر آن کی آن میں جل مرتی تھی ❖

جب اس بہت مردانہ سے کہ جس پر ہزار ہزار جوان مردوں کو صدقے کر ڈالے۔
 عورتوں نے یہ ساکھا کیا تو سب کا دل زندگی سے بنیرا ہو گیا۔ راجہ رہے سے رفیقوں
 کو لے کر اول قلعے کے میدان میں کھڑا ہوا۔ دل غم سے پانی پانی تھا اور نگاہوں سے خون

ٹپکتا تھا مگر نہ آنکھ سے آنسو نکلتا تھا نہ مُنہ سے بات نکلتی تھی۔ بھائی بھائی سے اور باپ بیٹے سے رخصت ہوا۔ سب سے آگے راجہ اور پیچھے تمام جان نثار جن میں سپاہی اور سردار سب برابر ہو رہے تھے قلعے سے باگیں اٹھائے نکلے اور ان گنتی کی جانوں کو گٹھی کر کے لشکرِ شاہی کے دریا میں دے مارا۔ اگرچہ دیکھنے والوں کے نزدیک ان کی وہ حالت ہوئی کہ کوئی ایک مٹھی خاک کی طوفانِ نوح میں پھینک دے۔ مگر اہل نظر جانتے ہیں کہ جب تک چاند سورج باقی ہیں ان مردوں کے نام آسمانِ مردانگی پر آفتاب و مہتاب ہو کر چمکیں گے ❖

دفعۃً ہوا بند ہوئی۔ ابر سا گھر آیا۔ دنیا دُھواں دھار ہو گئی۔ پھر سفید غبار سا برتا معلوم ہوا۔ تھوڑی دیر بعد دیکھا تو زمین پر کوسٹوں پر دیواروں اور منڈیروں پر کوئی سفید آٹا سا چھڑک گیا۔ غرض کہ ایک جھکولا برف کا اُور پڑا۔ رات گذری صبح کو دیکھا تو تمام درختوں پر برگ ریز کا حکم پہنچ گیا۔ دوسرے دن ایک جھکولا اُور۔ اور ساتھ ہی ایک سناٹا ہوا کا آیا۔ پھر جو دیکھا تو درخت پر پتے کا نام نہیں۔ جو درخت ہفتہ بھر پہلے پتوں سے بھرے تھے اب خالی جھاڑیاں کھڑے ہیں جیسے کسی نے کپڑے اتار لئے وہ بھی سیاہ رنگ جیسے بجلی مارا لوہا۔ ایک دو دن بعد برف برسنی شروع ہوئی مگر کس طرح جیسے کوئی آسمان پر بیٹھا روٹی دھنک رہا ہے۔ ایک دن رات جو برف کا تار لگا۔ تو درو دیوار۔ زمین آسمان تمام سفید۔ وہ سیاہ جھاڑیاں برف جم کر بلور کے درخت اور شیشہ

میں ہریں ❖

Āzād's prose recalls old patterns in its syntactical peculiarities and word-arrangement. The only writer of the age to have received a modern education, he is, in this respect, very much behind Hālī and Shiblī, who have almost completely shaken off the influence of Persian and are modern in sentence-structure and word-arrangement. You cannot read a page of Āzād without feeling that his syntax is Persian. As such, if not the entire, at least a very great part of the

credit for evolving modern prose style goes to the writers of the Ali-garh school, especially to Hālī and Shiblī. It is significant that not only in his outlook, but also in his style, Āzād belongs more to the past than the present.

The flagellation to which Āzād was subjected by his contemporaries for his poetry was not entirely undeserved, although what really incensed his critics was not so much his bad poetry as the man who wrote it. Āzād was not a poet by nature in the accepted sense of the word; the role was thrust upon him by the Government, and he paid the penalty for rushing into a role he could not well sustain. The fact is that Āzād could not move with ease in the verse medium. The most poetic of prose-writers, his imagination left him high and dry when he attempted poetry; and just as his prose is often bad because it is akin to poetry, his poetry is almost always bad because it is prosaic. You cannot defend him by blaming his unpoetical themes; they were the themes no less of Hālī and a few others, who like him were asked to write on prescribed themes. But whereas, to take one instance only, Hālī's treatment is comparatively free and natural, Āzād's is generally wooden and awkward. Among his mannerisms, perhaps the most irritating is his opening his lines with اور (and). Again, although he boasts of having discarded the old erotic diction, he has only to be within hailing distance of the old amatory subjects to succumb to it unconsciously.

اک گلخدا سا منے سرگرم ناز ہے اور جام دے رہی نگہ نیم باز ہے
 ننگِ مومر کی لب آب جو اک سل ہے پڑی اسمیں اک زشک پری ہاتھ میں ٹھولوں کی چھڑی
 زلف سُنبل کی سیہ تھی پس یہ کار نہ تھی خم تو تھے اس میں مگر تیج سے خم دار نہ تھی
 سر شمشاد کا طرہ وہاں طرار نہ تھا شوخی چشم سے زنگس کو سرو کار نہ تھا
 بجلی کبھی کبھی نگہِ فتنہ ساز سے کرتی نقاب ابر میں سپشک سے ناز۔

Āzād is not always prosing; he rises with his themes. But some of the most intractable themes he tried, e.g. his allegorical poems, were of his own choosing, and they show, without a shadow of doubt, how very deficient he was in self-criticism. Āzād's contemporaries who did not take him seriously were, some of them at least, spiteful reactionaries; but at any rate they had some sense of humour and courage not to be bluffed into believing that his laborious compositions were poetry.

7

Muhammad Ismā'īl, whose poetical works were published under the title of *Kulliyāt-e-Ismā'īl*, was a teacher by profession and served the Education Department of Āgra and Oudh as Head Persian Maulvī at Sahāranpur, Meerut, and Āgra.

Ismā'īl did for his province what Āzād did for the Punjāb, by compiling several textbooks in Urdu which remained long on school syllabi. As a writer of juvenile poetry he is well ahead of all Urdu poets, and Shiblī was right in ranking him as the best Urdu poet after Hālī. As a modern poet he anticipated both Āzād and Hālī, and is, therefore, the first modern Urdu poet. His graphic pictures of Indian sights and scenes, his adaptations from English lyrics, and his happy renderings from Aesop, endeared him to thousands of young readers for over two generations. Ismā'īl has a genuine feeling for nature and abounds in passages in which the familiar charm of the countryside, with its gardens, meadows and streams, sunset and sunrise, sky, clouds, and rain, is portrayed with accuracy and feeling.

Remote as his province was from that of Hālī, he has, in some of his poems, fallen under his influence, thereby proving how difficult it is for anyone, however individual, not to fall in line with the time-spirit. The poems that best illustrate the presence of social and religious purpose in him are *Jarīda-e-Ibrat* and *Qala'-e-Akbarābād Mausūm ba Āsār-e-Salaf*. The first is a satiric sketch of the Muslim society of the day, as viewed by him. The point of attack is the narrow dogmatism of the Muslims in theology, poetry, philosophy, etc. As often happens, the poem had its origin in a chance sight—a fencing match, which struck him as a worthless and unhappy survival. This gave him food for thought and he was led to conclude that the entire life of Muslims in India was dominated by formalism and conventionality. Poets, philosophers, teachers, theologians, and people with a modern education are one by one put in the pillory and laughed at.

The second poem, as its title shows, was inspired by the ruins of a medieval castle—one of the surest motives for the release of elegiac sensibility in post-Mutiny Muslim poetry. Its vigour and elevated style fully reflect and support its lofty theme.

XV

AKBAR ALLAHĀBĀDĪ

BORN in Bāra, a small village near Allahābād, 16th November 1846, Akbar Husain Akbar received his early education at home. A brief and rather belated schooling at the Jumna High School did not prove fruitful, and he left without matriculating. From 1863 onwards, for over fifteen years, he dallied with different professions, climbing the official ladder by slow stages from a *naqal navīs*, *misal khāwn*, *tahsildar*, high court advocate, to an officiating *munsif* in 1880, from which he rose to be a sub-judge, in 1889. His old age, darkened by ill health, was made more wretched by the death of his wife and fourteen-year-old son, Hāshim; and he died a lonely and pathetic figure in 1921.

Akbar seems to me to be a case of religious conversion like Bunyan. He was probably right in treating his taste for mysticism as an inheritance from his father; but it may safely be said, in the light of the biographical material now available, that this gift slept long in the subsoil, coming to life only when its possessor was well past the ardour and heat of youth. Akbar's youth was that of a typical man about town, given over to riotous living and dubious company. A happy second marriage failed to cure his roving disposition, and he continued to pay assiduous court to the reigning beauties of the day, which involved him in some very awkward scrapes, besides financial difficulties.

Exactly when the new vision dawned on him, it is difficult to say. But taking the gradually changing tone of his poetry as our guide, it will not be wrong to surmise that his religious or serious vein began to develop round about the age of forty. His subsequent life is marked by a growing absorption in religion.

The external influences on his mind and poetry were three—the Lucknow school of poetry, the *Avadh Punch*, and the Aligarh movement.

With regard to the first, it is enough to say that Akbar in his youth had steeped himself in the Lucknow school of poetry. His poetic preceptor was Vahīd, a pupil of Ātish. Akbar's poetry in its glitter and sparkle, in its wit and word-play, bespeaks its origin in Lucknow. The difference between the Lucknow decadents and Akbar is this. The former luxuriate in wit for its own sake, and in their poetry it is commonly associated with what is morally offensive, or, at least, flippant. In Akbar all these factors are pressed into the service of his satire which is moral at bottom. Hence Akbar's satiric verse is an apotheosis of the technique of Lucknow.

It is also important to note that what gave a lead to the satire of Akbar was the *Avadh Punch*. This paper, as explained in another section of this book, combined die-hard conservatism in religion and social reform with liberalism in politics. Akbar was far too timid to venture far into politics; but he used all his banter and irony, his periphrase and sardonic wit, his moral earnestness and dread of change, in his criticism of the liberal movements of the day. He came under its influence early and continued to find a strong ally and source of inspiration in it. In one of his longer poems he praises it for its wit and humour, and extols it as the bulwark of faith and religion in a changing world. There is no doubt that the paper influenced him strongly and provided him with an outlet for his satiric talent in its earlier stages.

There is one thing, however, that deserves mention in this connexion. Akbar soon outgrew the mere flippancy of his colleagues of the *Avadh Punch*, and weighted his satire with a moral intensity which was for ever beyond their reach.

Unlike the *Avadh Punch* which acted as a force of attraction, the Aligarh movement acted as the chief force of repulsion, and provided him with food for his satire. It will not be far wrong to say that it is difficult to visualize Akbar the satirist without Sayyid Ahmad, the social reformer. Akbar's four years' stay at Aligarh (1884-8) whetted some of the keenest of his satiric shafts. He was not without moments when he could realize the greatness of Sayyid Ahmad's mission and character. But, on the whole, he was too fast-rooted in the past to assess rightly his work and character. Nor should it be forgotten that, sincere as much of his criticism of Sayyid Ahmad was, it was not altogether free from the alloy of personal envy of the latter as a great social and political leader.

3

Akbar had a genius for opposition. He is the incarnation of the spirit of the Middle Ages, bitter and ironic, risen in revolt against the modern age. This passion for the past is temperamental, the instinctive recoil of a mind partly ascetic, partly gloomy, and intensely religious, from the aims and ideals of his age. The faith that feeds this opposition is full of sap and vigour; and from this source spring both his strength and weakness as a critic of his age. He lacks the mellow, sweet wisdom of those who see life steadily and see it whole. He is not born for reconciliation, or for evolving order out of a medley of contending forces. Unlike Sayyid Ahmad, Shiblī, and Hālī, he never passed through a spiritual crisis. It is, no doubt, a great testimony to his faith that he should pass untouched through a spiritual turmoil that shook India to its foundations; but this very absence of honest doubt would appear to some as the sign of an inferior intellect.

But this has its compensations. Akbar makes up in intensity what he lacks in breadth. His poetry is wrapped in a flame; it is the cry of his deepest nature against the moral and spiritual confusion, which, he thought, was coming over the world. Akbar stood in single and splendid isolation in the age in which his lot was cast. Unlike Sayyid Ahmad he was denied the victor's crown; he was swept away by the impetuous current he tried to stem; but nothing can dim the lustre of his heroic fight, and his unflinching faith in the righteousness of his cause.

And it was this uncompromising attitude that brought about his clash with the Aligarh movement. With this movement his differences were fundamental. The leaders of that school felt that they could no longer continue in the dogmatic faith of their ancestors, and strove to bring about a *rapprochement* between religion and the new knowledge. Their mission was twofold: to strengthen religion by a free absorption of new ideas, and to divorce it from obsolete conventions and forms of thought. The one party held that religion must move with the times, adapting itself to the growing needs and requirements of the age; the other maintained that religion was eternal and true for all times. Of course, much will depend on what we mean by religion. As I shall try to show, Akbar could not always see the difference between essentials and non-essentials, and often defended the merest outposts and excrescences as if they were the heart of religion.

To understand his attitude towards life we shall study the following aspects of his mind: (i) his mysticism, (ii) his ethical outlook, (iii) his love of the past for its own sake, (iv) his cynicism, (v) his neurotic temperament, and (vi) his wit. These are indubitable facts, as a careful study of his poetry will show; they are always at work singly or in union, and his general outlook is determined by their interplay. Let us analyse them one by one to see what they contribute to his general outlook.

That there was a large infusion of mysticism in Akbar's temperament, goes without saying; every page of his poetry bears witness to it. It grew with time, overshadowing his entire mental life as he grew old. This medieval element in his mind we must try to grasp firmly; for by far the greatest part of his opposition to his age was the direct outcome of this mystical bias. Akbar, like Tennyson's Sir Galahad, lived in two worlds, for ever passing from one to the other. And as he entered the world of men, he came trailing clouds of light from the spiritual world in which he lived in his higher moments. Hence his criticism of his age is that of a mystic. Akbar had a distrust of life, and believed that too much absorption in the world incapacitates man for that spiritual union with the Absolute which is the goal of human life. This suspicion of life occasionally rises to renunciation, but in less tense moments it expresses itself as a belief in the vanity of life and its concerns.

Quite a large element of Akbar's distrust of life, it appears to me, was the result of a moral revulsion, like that of Sa'dī, whose emphasis on contentment and self-respect was a reaction from the meanness and degradation of court life. Intent on the higher ends of life, the insane struggle of the worldlings for material ends, appeared extremely degrading to him.

دُنیا نے دُنئی کی یہ ہوس جانے دو گلچیں ہو اگر تو خار و خس جانے دو
مالک کے بغیر گھر کی رونق نہیں کچھ اللہ کو اپنے دل میں بس جانے دو

Do not run after the petty things of this base world.
Art thou a flower-gatherer? Then let go the thorns and weeds.
There is no life in a house without the master,
Let God alone dwell in your heart.

خدا ہی کو فقط حاصل ہے سق دسبر می اکبر دیاد دل جس نے دنیا کو تحقیق میں فوہ مشرک ہے

God alone is worthy of your love,
He who gives his heart to the world is truly a polytheist.

It was on account of these moral and spiritual ideas that Akbar was out of conceit with the material aspects of his age. As viewed by him, progress lies in inward perfection, and not in the acquisition of material things, or an increased control over the forces of nature, as is generally held. Essentials in the scale of life, he held, are always spiritual; they alone are the touchstone of progress. Hence when he is girding at schools, colleges, the Congress, etc., he is trying to emphasize that progress does not consist in the exclusive pursuit of material ends, as his compatriots thought, but was largely moral and spiritual. Akbar was no nerveless ascetic driven by the glare of life into monastic shadows. In condemning his age, he deprecated the mad pursuit of wealth and power, unrestrained by moral considerations which, in his opinion, was undermining the life of the nation.

This mystical element comes out again in his attacks on science and philosophy, and on reason in general. Akbar is the apostle of instincts; and believed in the intuitive apprehension of truth, against the reformers who exalted reason as the only touchstone of the usefulness of institutions and beliefs. The reformers believed in the unity of intellectual and spiritual life and judged all things by reason. Akbar, like the Tractarians in England, held that there was a domain of reason and a domain of authority, and they should be severely kept apart.

The third important element which transformed this moralist and mystic into a satirist was cynicism. Akbar had a satirist's hypertrophied sense of evil, but was quite blind to the images of beauty and goodness in his age. What S. A. Brooke says of Matthew Arnold is true of Akbar also.

He had insight into the evils, the dullness, the follies, the decay and death of the time at which he wrote; but he had little insight into its good, into the hopes and ideas which were arising in its darkness, or the life which was collecting itself together under its decay.¹

In the fourth place, he was inclined to be gloomy and cheerless by disposition. He was a man with frayed nerves. This temperamental gloom deepened, until he became almost diseased. He is extraordi-

narily alive to the seamy side of life, exaggerates little inconveniences into calamities, reacts abnormally to life's minor ills, and believes that the world is rushing headlong to ruin. This aspect of his mind comes out with special force in the treatment of his personal sorrow, but is present in his general criticism of his age as well; in fact it influences the latter.

In addition to this, Akbar was more dogmatic than critical. He had no faith in reason, and instinctively recoiled from separating the grain from the chaff in matters doctrinal or theological. It will no doubt be conceded that Sayyid Ahmad gave much offence to some by his drastic exegesis; but at the same time he was also removing many useless and some really harmful excrescences which had grown round the sacred edifice. Akbar construed this as an attack on Islam. To him the past was sacred and above criticism; and this spirit of reverence was not only confined to religion; it spread to everything savouring of the past; to poetry, literature, dress, education; in short to every secular thing that had come down from the old world.

This was the weakest point in his armour. Satire is great as it is inspired by high motives and ideals. Akbar, criticizing the material civilization, is a noble and heroic figure; as a defender of prejudices he is a mere obscurantist. His gospel sometimes resolved itself into a gospel of stagnation and immobility. In such moments he reminds one of those strange people, described by ancient travellers, who had their eyes in their hind-head.

The conclusion we arrive at is this: in so far as Akbar stresses the moral elements in life, he is doing a great service to his community. But, unfortunately, Akbar's spirituality is not pure gold; it is freely mixed with the base alloy which Sayyid Ahmad and his friends tried to dissociate from it. Akbar has a conservative mind steeped in the past; in the good as well as the bad of it, and very often he is palming off the superstition and dogmatism of a decadent age as religion on his compatriots.

Again, though he does not deny greatness of a sort to the achievements of science and the character of Western people, he is too sneering by half in his attitude. His strictures on Darwin are a case in point, and in their violence they remind one of Carlyle. On the whole, it will be generally admitted that Akbar's cynicism and fears often get the better of his sense of fairness, and he sees nothing but self-seeking and ambition in much that is generally agreed to be praiseworthy in his age.

This reminds me of what Trollope writes of Thackeray, who saw an excess of snobbery everywhere.

Thackeray tells us that he was born to hunt out snobs, as certain dogs are trained to find truffles. But we can imagine that a dog, very energetic at producing truffles, and not finding them as plentiful as his heart desired, might occasionally produce roots which were not genuine,—might be carried on in his energies till to his senses every fungus root became a truffle. I think that there has been something of this with our author's snob-hunting, and that his zeal was at last greater than his discrimination.²

But these exasperating perversities cannot dim the lustre of Akbar's mission which, as we have already pointed out, was to reinforce moral values in a world given over to the worship of matter and machinery. Akbar judges civilization not by what we have, but by what we are. He holds with the greatest thinkers of the world that man is neither good nor bad, but a mixture of the two, and, therefore, liable to go astray. Akbar felt that this tendency had very much increased in the present-day world, on account of the new horizons which were opening up, giving man a sense of power which he had never known before. Hence the question: how is this newly acquired power to be used? In the interest of man; to bring joy, peace, or plenty to him, or in the interest of self-aggrandisement, individual or national? There were not a few who felt the menace of this power uncontrolled by moral consideration. Tolstoy, Carlyle, Ruskin raised their voices against the growing materialization of life, but to no effect. Materialism spread apace; God and the Bible were forgotten in the reckless pursuit of money and in earth-hunger, until the world rushed into an orgy of mass murder and ruin which had no example in recorded history.³

Akbar firmly believes that real progress lies in the supremacy of law; in taming our rebel will to the laws of the universe. Power, money, secular education, democracy—these he treats as mere fetishes which a blind world adores; and in support of his view he points to history to prove how worldly power and greatness have always been the necessary adjuncts to moral greatness.

In thus calling the world from the blind worship of matter, Akbar is at one with the great thinkers in India who are getting more and more out of conceit with Western civilization. To some extent, this has been a natural recoil from the too perfervid enthusiasm for the West which a critical study of European statesmanship has cooled down. But much of the present-day attitude of India towards the

West can be traced to the warning voice which Akbar, and after him Iqbāl, raised against the West.

Akbar's criticism takes three forms. When the moralist in him is uppermost, that is, when he is in a didactic mood, he gives a direct expression to his views. To this class belong most of his quatrains, which, though not very poetic, will serve as a useful introduction to his views.

The second class is elegiac. In it comes out all the pathos of his nature. There is a wistful charm about these verses bemoaning the extinction of the old order.

خبر دیتی ہے تحریک ہو تبدیلی موسم کی
کھلیں گے اور ہی گل زمرے بلبل کے کم ہونگے
عقائد پر قیامت آئے گی ترمیم ملت سے
نیا کعبہ بنے گا مغربی پستلے صنم ہوں گے
کسی کو اس تغیر کا نہ حس ہو گا نہ غم ہو گا
ہوئے جس ساز سے پیدا اسی کے زیر و بم ہونگے
تمہیں اس انقلاب دھر کا کیا غم ہے اے اکبر
بہت نزدیک ہے وہ دن کہ تم ہو گے نہ ہم ہونگے

The direction of the breeze indicates a change in the season;
New flowers (evils) will now blossom and the song of the nightingale will
be heard less and less.

Old faiths will dwindle and die on account of religious reforms;
There will be a new Ka'ba and Western statues will be the idols.

No one will feel this change nor be sorry at it,
They will all be the notes of the new harp that gave them birth.

Why should you break your heart over this revolution, O Akbar!
The time is quite near when neither you nor I shall be here.

For the most part, however, Akbar's mind finds outlet in satire.
With wonderful skill he anatomizes his age—its cant and hypocrisy,

its false ideals, its shortsightedness, its flashy enthusiasms, its blindness and perversity, its airy and pathetic confidence. If there is another side to the picture, Akbar has nothing to do with it. His genius is like some curious machine that can distil only the blundering, ludicrous, and misguided elements of his age. And the distillation is not odious or disgusting, for, thanks to the cast of his mind, Akbar is a humorist, and all the ugliness and meanness he lays bare is changed into the ludicrous.

Akbar does not rave or denounce. He prefers the rapier to the bludgeon. Medieval in outlook, he is modern in his method. For humour is specially a modern weapon to fight folly, which has superseded the gibbet, the stake, or the frenzied outbursts of the medieval censor. The Middle Ages were far too serious and earnest ever to smile at follies.

Akbar's satire is much more effective than the heavy cannonading of the moralist. He is in the tradition of those great satirists who hold that the best way of shaming evil into good conduct is to laugh at it. And he is right. Virtue is never so effective as when it lays aside its vinegar aspect, its asperity and disdain, and frisks about in cap and bells with a sly smile on its face.

Akbar is not the exemplar of 'laughter holding both his sides'. He does not burst into guffaws or roll under the table; he curls his lips and smiles a sardonic smile. You laugh with Dickens at his villains. In his wonderful tolerance, he is not provoked by them: they titillate him without outraging him. Akbar has not the geniality of Dickens or Fielding. He stands between the two extremes—not an Aristophanes, or a Cervantes, or a Rabelais, much less a Dickens or a Meredith, but a cross between Thackeray and Swift. Akbar seldom laughs, and even if he does, his laughter is not open and kindly. It has a dry, rasping, and frequently a disagreeable undertone; at times it is little better than a leer.

His repertory as a humorist consists of odd and ludicrous comparisons, puns, droll images, witty sayings, unexpected and funny rhymes, irony, anticlimax, and other witty odds and ends, the paraphernalia of the professional jester. The humour of Akbar is not the humour of ideas; it lies rather in the startlingly funny and original form he gives them. That colleges in India are a failure even from the economic point of view; or that externals, like dress, are an integral part of the cultural solidarity of a country, and by giving them up we weaken our resistance to a hostile culture, are far from funny. But as the commonplaces of thought and feeling assume an imperish-

able form in great imaginative minds, similarly these commonplace ideas put on a harlequin garb when they confront Akbar. The laughter is provoked by the droll figurative apparatus, and not by the intrinsic power of amusement in the ideas themselves. Hence the large element of wit in the humoristic effects of Akbar. He has a faculty for perceiving what is odd or unusual, that is, he is a humorist. But he also excels in nimbleness of intellect and liveliness of fancy, in a capacity for saying brilliant and sparkling things in an amusing manner; in a word, in wit. Hercin lay his strength. His best laughing effects are due to an unexpected and ingenious play on words, their sound associations, and meanings. Here are a few examples:

رقیبوں نے رپٹ لکھوائی ہے جا جا کے تھانے میں
کہ اکبر نام لیتا ہے خدا کا اس زمانے میں

My rivals have repeatedly gone to the police station to report
That Akbar worships God in this age.

نہایت حکمت آگئیں آپ کی اسپج ہوتی ہے مزا شربت کا دیجاتی ہے گوڑہ بیچ ہوتی ہے

O how ingeniously is your speech worded!
It tickles the palate like sherbet, although it is as insipid as rice-water.

مغربی دھول کا سترک نہ پہنچتا تھا اثر اس قدر بات بہت خوب تھی عمائم میں

The rappings of the West did not penetrate to the head
At least, there was this strong point in favour of the turban.

سید کی روشنی کو اللہ رکھے قائم ہتی بہت ہے موٹی روغن بہت ہی کم ہے

May God preserve the light of Sayyid!
The wick is very thick, but there is very little oil in the lamp.

مسلمانوں کو لطف عیش سے جینے نہیں دیتے خدا دیتا ہے کھانا شیخ جی پینے نہیں دیتے

Alas! they do not let the Muslims lead a happy life;
God gives them food to eat, but the sheikh does not let them drink (wine).

نہ لیسنس ہتھیار کا ہے نہ زور کہ ٹرکی کے دشمن سے جا کر لڑیں
ولے دل سے ہم کو تے ہیں ضرور کہ اٹلی کی توپوں میں کیڑے پڑیں

We have neither strength nor license to bear arms,
So that we could go and fight the enemy of Turkey;
But we curse heartily and say:
May there be worms in the guns of Italy!

کالج میں دھوم مچ رہی ہے پاس پاس کی عہدوں سے آرہی ہے صدا دُور دُور کی

The colleges are resounding with the shouts of Pass! Pass! (Near! Near!)
From the situations comes the cry: Away! Away!

As we have seen, Akbar is not the first to make comic use of language in poetry. He has a long if dubious ancestry in Insha, Rangīn, Jān Sāhib, etc., some of whom fairly equalled him in their quick fancy. What raises Akbar above the mere jester is the use of the comic faculty for the higher ends of criticism and reform. He has raised satire from its fetid purlieus and its smirking indecencies into a fine art by its marriage with higher ends. It is the greatness of his mission which reflects dignity on the form. The laughter of Insha is useless and inane—the crackling of thorns under a pot. In Akbar it is used for a lofty purpose. But not always. There are occasions, and they are quite frequent, when he falls into the vein of the lesser humorists, using his wit for no constructive end. Such verses where he exercises his wit for its own sake are no better than facetiae:

جو پوچھا میں نے ہوں کس طرح ”ہے پی“ کہا اُس نے کہ میرے ساتھ ہے پی
اُس کے دستِ نازنین سے پائی ”ٹی“ اب کہاں ہم میں رہی ہے ”پائی ٹی“
مجنوں کی پیاس کو بھجاتی لیلے کچھ باؤلی نہیں ہے

The comic element in Akbar brought him immediate recognition. His fame spread apace, so that during the last twenty years of his life he overshadowed all his compeers. Imagine, what large classes he catered for! He was the idol of the religious conservatives who used

him as a stick to beat the liberals. No less were the liberals amused when he whacked the Muslim League for its conservatism in politics, or pilloried the theologians for their laziness and ignorance. There were covert hits at the Government which pleased all; there were tears for sentimentalists, jests and word-play for the witty, philosophy for the thoughtful, mysticism for the religious, national sentiments for patriots; in short a literary banquet to suit all palates. He wrote for all sorts and conditions of readers, and was, therefore, a favourite with all.

And yet Akbar has not kept his pedestal. The reasons for this decline are not far to seek. Like the greater part of the present-day literature, his verse is topical, the criticism of a phase of life which is fast passing away. The moral earnestness which inspired his satire is eternal, but the evils he attacked were peculiar to the period he lived in. We have left behind us the period of *Sturm und Drang* which the mission of Sayyid Ahmad had called forth. It has become a part of history, and friends and foes alike view it dispassionately, as we look at our old loves and hatreds with an amused tolerant interest. And this has reacted on Akbar's fame also.

Perhaps we have grown more critical also. Now that the battle is over, and life has returned to its normal rhythm, we seek in literature for the more enduring qualities of style; and here also he does not fare very well. As time passed, success and popularity drugged his literary conscience, never very alert; and a large section of his poetry would be voted as mediocre by present-day readers.

XVI

NOVELISTS

THE novel, in the restricted sense of a study of contemporary life in its social bearings, is an entirely new development in Urdu literature, and began with Nazīr Ahmad. He was born in December 1836, at Rohar, a small village in Bijnaur district. After a desultory education at home, he came to Delhi, where he passed through a period of distress and humiliation similar to that of Dickens in the blacking factory. Shiftless, improvident, and poor, his father could give him no education, and at the age of fourteen he was sent to a *madrassa* attached to a mosque. His life here was that of a typical medieval scholar. With the alms basket slung over his arm, he would promenade the streets, noon and evening, for the usual orts on which medieval scholars subsisted. To this was added the drudgery of slaving for his teacher's daughter, or acting as nurse-maid to his granddaughter. Years after, when he emerged from the slough of poverty, he was to become the latter's husband.

Nazīr Ahmad's release from this drudgery, and his admission to the Delhi College, was providential. He had been attracted, we are told, to the Delhi College to watch the annual prize distribution; and as the crowd poured out of the building he fell down, receiving a few bruises. This accident proved the making of his life. So well did this mite of a boy, rescued from the crush, impress the kindly Principal with his ready wit, that he decided to admit him to the College with a stipend. He was advised to join the English class, but his father strongly opposed the idea, saying: 'I would rather that my son were to die or become a beggar than that he should study English.'¹ He was at the College for eight years (1847-54).

Nazīr Ahmad began life as a teacher in the Punjab in 1854. During the Mutiny, he saved the life of an English lady, and in recognition of his services was employed as Deputy Inspector of Schools at Allahābād. He now began to study English and made some headway in it. In 1861 he was entrusted with the task of translating the *Income-Tax Regulations*, and, later, the *Indian Penal Code*. This brought

him into official notice, and he gradually rose to be a Deputy Collector of Settlements in 1863.

In 1877, he was persuaded to proceed to Haidarābād, on deputation, at a high salary. He worked his way up till he was a member of the Revenue Board. His rapid rise, and to some extent his uncertain temper, made him many enemies, and he returned on pension to Delhi in 1883 or so. He died in 1912.

Nazīr Ahmad's writings are literary and theological. The former comprise novels of which *Mir'at-ul-'Urūs* (1869) and *Banāt-um-Na'sh* (1873) were written before he left for Haidarābād. *Taubat-um-Nasūb* came out in 1877, and *Fasāna-e-Mubtalā* and *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* in 1885 and 1888 respectively, after his return from Haidarābād. These were followed by *Ru'yā-e-Sādiqa* and *Ayāma*, the latter appearing in 1891. His religious views are given in *Al-Huqūq-va-Farāiz* and *Ijtihād* (1908). *Ummabāt-ul-Ummab*, a theological work, raised a storm. It aimed at repudiating the charges brought against the Prophet's life on the score of polygamy; but his views caused serious resentment, and the unsold copies were publicly burnt.

His first story, *Mir'at-ul-'Urūs*, contrasts the lives of two sisters. The present scheme of the book, we are told, was an afterthought, carried out at the importunity of his daughters, the original version dealing with the ne'er-do-well Akbarī only. *Banāt-um-Na'sh*, coming out two years after, turns on the education of a refractory girl by her mistress.

Family education, this time on a more ambitious scale, is the theme of *Taubat-um-Nasūb* also. Nasūb is warned, during an attack of illness, to reform himself and his family. He has little difficulty with his younger children, but finds his eldest son, and, to some extent, his eldest daughter intractable. Kalīm refuses all parleys, and proud of his poetic talent quits the paternal roof. He is exploited by his friends and relatives, and, after a series of misadventures, including arrest, gets an appointment as an officer in the army in a native state. Wounded in a skirmish, he is brought home dying, where he repents of his misconduct and dies. His sister who had likewise rebelled, and left home after a scene, is reformed and united to her husband.

Fasāna-e-Mubtalā turns on the evils of polygamy. Mubtalā, a romantic young man married to a well-connected but boorish

woman, secretly marries Haryālī, a courtesan, introducing her into the house as a maid-servant. A chance discovery leads to an explosion, and, henceforth, there is nothing but warfare and confusion. An abortive attempt to poison Haryālī, about to become a mother, leads to legal complications which ruin Mubtalā. Haryālī, finding the game is up, decamps one night, and Mubtalā dies broken-hearted.

Ibn-ul-Vaqt is a thesis against the cheap imitation of the West. The hero, who has saved the life of an English officer in the Indian Mutiny, is persuaded by the officer to adopt the European style of life. All goes well as long as his friend is at his back; but things begin to go wrong with his transfer. The British officers look down upon him as an upstart, and though he fights bravely against heavy odds, he finds it wiser to go back to his own community. The remaining two books have little plot. *Ayāma*, his last novel, is a plea for widow remarriage, while *Ru'yā-e-Sādiqa*, an exposition of the fundamentals of Islam in the form of a dialogue between an inspired wife and her sceptical husband, is a confession of faith on the part of the author.

3

The Urdu novel, like the new poetry, made its entrance through the back-door of didacticism. Nazīr Ahmad's aim is purely instructional. His first two novels were meant to supply textbooks for juvenile readers, and though, later on, he outgrew this programme, education, in the broad sense of the word, continued to supply the chief motive for his fiction. About his earlier stories he writes:

Although there is no female education in this country, yet ladies in well-to-do families in big cities can read the Koran in translation, as well as theological works and books on moral training. In accordance with the family tradition, my daughters also read the text of the Koran with its translation, *Qiyāmat Nāma*, and *Rāb-e-Najāt* with elderly ladies. But, all along, I felt that advanced religious questions did not suit children. I then began to look for a book which should inculcate morality and refine the minds of women. . . . Besides, I felt that it should be in an attractive style. I searched the whole library, but found no such book. It was then that I thought of the plot of this book.²

By the time he wrote *Taubat-un-Nasūh* his view of the form and function of fiction had widened. But his insistence on education is as great as ever. He writes of *Taubat-un-Nasūh*:

This book deals with family education, and its main object is to rectify the mistakes generally committed by people on this head, by bringing home to them the fact that in bringing up their children they should not confine themselves to such items as health, choice of a profession, marriage, but improve their manners, habits, and beliefs. Family education on which this book has been written is a branch of that general humanity which it is the duty of everyone to further according to his capacity. The real cause of our national decline is the neglect of this duty by our countrymen. People are so ignorant of social obligations that they should be instructed in it like children. This book is the A.B.C. of such an education. We shall begin with the application of this principle to family life, since reformation, like charity, must begin at home.³

There are references all along in his writings to the evil influence of the literature on which the youth and children were then being fed. Nasūh, who made a bonfire of his son's library, who scored out passage after passage from his wife's copy of *Gulistān*, and sometimes pasted slips of paper on whole pages and chapters in it, is surely the author himself, recounting his own difficulties. Important in this respect are his comments on the unhealthy erotic themes of Persian and Urdu poetry and their influence on the mind and character of the reader.⁴

His insistence on a sound moral training comes home to all his readers. In *Mir'at-ul-'Urūs*, the elder sister is spoiled by bad company, and is ill-bred and stupid; she can neither please her husband nor her parents, and comes to grief. Asgharī, who has been well brought up, wins all hearts in her father-in-law's house, and successfully fights the chronic mismanagement there by her tact and ability. *Banāt* deals with the education of a vain and refractory aristocratic girl. Nazīr Ahmad ascribes her early failings to her aristocratic surroundings, and her reformation to the healthy surroundings to which she has been transferred. The ruin of Kalīm is due to his Laodicean father who wakes up to his sense of duty when it is too late. Nazīr Ahmad is not so much holding up Kalīm as a warning to young men, as trying to awaken the conscience of parents to the duty they owe to themselves and to their children. Lastly, the aesthetic proclivities of Mubtalā, which lead to polygamy and other complications, reflect the predilection of his family for beauty. He, too, is the victim of the evil surroundings in which he had been brought up.

Nazir Ahmad is a moralist and the course of his stories is entirely directed by didactic considerations. He invents a story in strict accordance with a thesis, and then fits it out with ready-made characters. He is not interested in them for their own sake. Like pawns on the chess-board, they are required to carry the story to its predestined end.

What is said above can be easily illustrated. Kalim is raw and headstrong, but there appears no reason, when you come to think of it, why he should have been so unlucky in his friends, or why he should have been so consistently dogged by misfortunes. The only answer is that it served the author's end to do so. The plot is evidently factitious, but we accept it because it has a certain amount of plausibility. Again, *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* is an evident case of plot-manipulation. In this novel the thesis is established by getting Nabal Sahib, the hero's patron, off the stage, and leaving the coast clear for his enemies to plot and intrigue against him. A very good instance of how his purpose influences and modifies his characters is provided by *Fasana-e-Mubtalā*. Note how Ghairat Begum, the feckless and submissive female of the first half of the book, who has watched her husband's peccadilloes with passive acquiescence, suddenly grows masterful and combative towards the middle of the book, while Mubtalā, who has carried it off so well so far, gets weak-kneed and passive in the second half. How can we explain this reversal of roles except on the apparent assumption that the plot required it?

5

Nazir Ahmad's plots are thin and unequal. Only in one, *Taubat-un-Nasub*, is the plot-interest sustained till the end. *Ibn-ul-Vaqt* starts well, but begins to sag after a few chapters, and is presently lost in the wastes of disquisition. *Ayāma* is very sparsely incidented and drags most of the time. *Fasana-e-Mubtalā* gets under way when more than half the book is over, and then it moves swiftly to the end. It differs from his other novels in that its plot turns on a triple motive. Its central theme is no doubt polygamy; but after the first forty-five pages the author is side-tracked into an exposition of the Islamic law of inheritance with regard to women. The result is that both Mubtalā and Ghairat Begum are out of the picture for nearly forty pages. The author has an eye, no doubt, for the main chance,

but is not averse to a wayside adventure, if after unhorsing an adversary or two theologically, as it were, he can meet his original adversary full tilt and face to face. In the third place, he has been girding at homosexual love. Of this his beautiful but effeminate hero, whom he hates with all the strength of his middle-class heart, is the text. This motive has been discreetly kept in the background, but it is recognizably there in the introductory chapters, and even later.

Nazir Ahmad has a keen sense of comedy, and despite his long sermons, it is comedy that presides over his fiction. He could very well have made Mubtalā odious by making a martyr of Ghairat Begum. Mubtalā's second marriage would be much more criminal if she had made him a good wife. A husband persecuting an innocent wife by a second marriage is a heartless tyrant fit for the utmost rigour of poetic justice. But a husband with a slatternly wife has almost a justification for a second marriage; at least, he does not arouse the moral indignation necessary for a moral piece. But it does not enter into Nazir Ahmad's scheme to make him odious, and his wife an innocent persecuted thing for sentimental readers to sigh over, as does Rāshid-ul-Khairī who, strange to say, has been considered by some to be the follower of Nazir Ahmad. He wants to make him ludicrous—him and his beauty cult of which he is the exponent. And how well it is brought off! And so with Kalim. He could very well have brought him to the dust by a gruesome picture of misery, want, imprisonment. What do we get instead? A devil-may-care fellow, who defies his parents, sows his wild oats, never confesses himself beaten except when driven into a corner, and is, on the whole, a very likable person when compared with those monstrosities of virtue, his younger brothers. Nazir Ahmad's way is the way of comedy. There are no villains here, but only fools. Kalim and Mubtalā are comic characters, even though the curtain is rung down on their death scenes. They die obligingly to enable the author to deliver his last sermon to clinch the moral.

As a humorist Nazir Ahmad's range is sufficiently wide. Sometimes his humour springs directly from personal observation and has a strong intellectual basis. To this class belong the account of jealousies of official life and the piquant realism of making calls, in *Ibn-ul-Vaqt*, and the account of official tours in *Ayāma*. These are excellent essays which can be detached from their context and

enjoyed for their own sake. More frequently, as in *Taubat-un-Nasūh* and *Fasāna-e-Mubtalā*, his humour verges on caricature. Mirza Zāhirdār Beg's rodomontade is pure farce, and so is also the greater part of *Fasāna-e-Mubtalā*. Mubtalā's confusion at the unexpected arrival of his uncle from Mecca, during one of his sprees, and the huddled retreat of the musicians into the bathroom; the worldly-wise and litigious brother who would misappropriate his sister's patrimony; his cleverness and resourcefulness when he turns tables on Mubtalā and the police officer; the first *début* of Haryālī and its unexpected fiasco, her second, and this time a more humble entrée; the chance revelation by the old woman and the explosion; the first-rate poison case; the inimitable passage of arms between Mubtalā and the litigious brother; the miscarriage—all are limned with great gusto.

Nazīr Ahmad has been kept alive by this strong preservative of humour. Hundreds of such moralized tales have been written; but they have been deservedly forgotten. His dullness becomes exasperating when so many of his unsupportable good men inflict their sermons on you, but wait till the next chapter, and you will find recompense for the boredom.

In conformity with his humoristic design, Nazīr Ahmad's people are types and not characters. They have type names, e.g. Mubtalā, Ghairat Begum, Ibn-ul-Vaqt, Nobal Sāhib, Jān Nisār, Masīha (the physician), Mirza Zāhirdār Beg, Nasūh, etc. For the most part he is content to portray people of whom he has an intimate knowledge. The only exception is Haryālī. Interesting as she is, she is no courtesan, but a housewife, steadfast, patient, hard-working; and yet towards the end she must show the cloven foot. Is it because the courtesan is proverbially a fair-weather friend, and Nazīr Ahmad felt she must be true to type? or was it to deepen the pathos of the last days of Mubtalā? Be this as it may, in portraying a courtesan Nazīr Ahmad stepped beyond his depth.

I have already referred to the dullness of his sermons. The same criticism applies to his good characters. His comics are interesting and likable, and it appears that their creator has a sneaking liking for them, strict moralist though he was. At any rate, if the moralist in him condemned them, the humorist in him must have liked them. On the other hand, how tiresome his good people are!—automatons,

who open their lips to preach sermons, and whose voice is the voice of their creator.

Nazir Ahmad has little or no dialogue; and even his most lively scenes lack the thrust and parry of comedy. His people deliver speeches: they do not talk. Readers also complain of his unusually slow tempo. This is traceable to a number of factors: the paucity of dialogue, the balanced and antithetical style his characters use, and, to some extent, the prolonged dissection of motives, as in Richardson.

9

In Nazir Ahmad you see the art of fiction in its infancy. Nevertheless, he has strong assets. In his stories you see, for the first time, the signs of the time-spirit, the preference of the actual and the real against the unreality of the uncritical romance. His novels are realistic in the sense that they are based on life, carefully studied and presented with the exacting care the new age had inaugurated; and though his vision is insular and limited, and he sees life through the coloured glass of his own theories, his work is not any the less interesting on that account.

10

Before Nazir Ahmad there had been no novel, as such, in Urdu. A few books had been translated from English, e.g. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Johnson's *Rasselas*, Maria Edgeworth's *Simple Susan*, and *Robinson Crusoe*. They have a heavy instructional bias, and must have been popular with the puritan middle class. Nazir Ahmad may have read some of them, but they did not inspire his work. The first English story which had a definite influence on him was the *History of Sandford and Merton* by Thomas Day, and his *Banāt-un-Na'sh* is modelled on it. The former is one of the numerous pedagogic stories that came in the wake of Rousseau's *Emile*. In it two boys are brought into dramatic contrast; Thomas Merton, the son of a rich Jamaican planter, naturally good-natured but ruined by wealth and indulgent parents, and Harry Sandford, the son of a plain, honest farmer, who is represented as the unspoiled product of a normal country life. The former's instruction is entrusted to an eccentric clergyman

named Barlow who, with the help of Sandford, gradually weans the boy from his aristocratic prejudices and defects, very much as Asgharī, with the help of Mahmūda, reforms and educates the spoiled Husn Ārā. In both, by means of stories and Socratic dialogue, the young are taught to see the worth of astronomy, geography, history, ethnology, political economy, and the cardinal virtues. In *Banāt* the syllabus is slightly varied so as to include some feminine accomplishments, such as sewing and cooking, but the plan of both the books is substantially the same. It is interesting to note that Asgharī, like Barlow, accepts no remuneration and, like him again, insists on educating the girl at her own house.

The plot of *Taubat-um-Nasūb* is taken from Defoe's *Family Instructor*, Part I. The father in the English story, having realized how remiss he had been in regard to the education and morals of his children, enlists the support of his wife to reform them. They succeed with the younger children, but fail to make any impression on the eldest brother and sister. In the end, the son runs away to join the army, coming back a cripple, and dying miserably. The daughter, however, is reformed by a religious aunt and marries her cousin. As in *Taubat-um-Nasūb*, there is a long discussion about the matters that have resulted in the demoralization of the children.⁵

II

Nazīr Ahmad is a theologian of the old type with a modicum of modern ideas. He believes in the literalism of the Koran, and takes his stand by the *fiqh* and the *hadīs*. There is no *odium theologicum* in his writings, and he prefers the followers of Sayyid Ahmad to those of other sects of Islam.

Of all Islamic sects, he is most intolerant of the mystics. His opposition, unlike Iqbāl's, is purely religious. The latter is opposed to mysticism, because it does not affirm life. Nazīr Ahmad is opposed to it, because, in his opinion, it is a revolt against Islam. His arguments against mysticism may be summarized as follows:

Mysticism was originally born of a reaction in pious minds against the externalism of Islam. But the mystics by emphasizing internal purity went to excess, and discarded the formal side of Islam altogether. Here they did an irreparable harm to Islam; for, says he, 'if formalism in religion without internal purity is hypocrisy, then internal purity without the observance of forms is open revolt'.⁶ He goes so far as to say that 'Islam has suffered more at the hands of

mystics than from dogmatic theologians. Pantheism,' he writes, 'is worse than polytheism or the Trinity.'⁷

Nazir Ahmad is opposed to the deification of reason effected by Sayyid Ahmad. He believes that religion and reason are eternal foes, and the universal application of reason to religious beliefs and institutions encourages scepticism. Hence he classifies life as follows:

- (1) The world of religious emotions and experience;
- (2) The world of intellect and reasons; and
- (3) The world common to both.

The world of religion is mainly metaphysical, comprising such questions as the existence of God, the nature and attributes of Godhead, immortality or the nature of life after death, the why and wherefore of the details of religious injunctions, for instance, the number, distribution, or the form of prayers in Islam, free will, predestination, and the nature of the soul. All these questions, argues Nazir Ahmad, are beyond the reach of reason, and the only infallible guide to them is revelation.

To the second class belong all the phases or aspects of our mundane life. Here reason is the only guide.

The third or the intermediate zone, where religion has equal sway with reason, is the world of morality or personal conduct. He maintains that the morality inculcated by Islam has a rational basis.

Nazir Ahmad believes in miracles, although he does not set much store by them. 'Every occurrence in the world', he argues, 'is a miracle. Our wonder is due to the rarity of the occurrence.'⁸ Consequently, a miracle is a very rare event. As a Muslim, he found satisfaction not in the miracles performed by the Prophet, but in his wonderful life and teachings.

He also believes in the physical nature of paradise, holding that the physical state is not a low one, as considered by the critics of Islam. What is not sinful here is not sinful in paradise. No legitimate pleasure of life is sinful. He ascribes the adverse criticism of the concept of a physical paradise, as embodied in the Koran, to the unconscious persistence of the ascetic ideals of its Christian critics.

On the whole, Nazir Ahmad accepts all the dogmas of religion. He has no curiosity or desire to explain or understand them. He does not believe in the dubious light of reason to explain religious mysteries. It is best to leave them alone, he says, for we make things worse by ingenious and far-fetched explanations and surmises.

Pandit Ratan Nāth Sarshār, the author of *Fasāna-e-Āzād*, was born in Lucknow, in or about 1845. His schooling was of the sketchiest. After the Mutiny he joined the Canning College, Lucknow, but left without taking a degree. There is, however, no need to regret the absence of academic honours in the case of a man like Sarshār. If he had plied the books diligently, he would have missed life, and the loss would have been his no less than ours.

Sarshār's real training-ground was the streets of Lucknow. It was here that his education really began, and it was here that it was completed. The impressions thus gathered lay ready at hand when his famous work began to take shape in his mind.

Sarshār's career as a writer began when the new literary ferment was coming to a head in Lucknow. The literary god of the day was still Rajab 'Alī Sarūr, whose *Fasāna-e-'Ajāib* was considered a model of prose style. To break away from this tradition and lay the foundations of the new prose in Lucknow was the work of Sarshār and the writers associated with the *Avadh Punch*.

Sarshār found his *métier* in 1873 when, after a brief course of freelance journalism, he was installed as the editor of the *Avadh Akhbār* by its proprietor, Munshī Naval Kishore. This made him intimate with the literary coterie to whose efforts the *Avadh Punch* owed its early fame; and if the tradition be true, it was to them that he owed the idea of writing a humorous novel on the lines of *Don Quixote*. This period of his life is marked by a growing interest in contemporary life, shown by his studies entitled 'Humour'. It was out of these humorous sketches that his *Fasāna-e-Āzād* grew, and was published serially as an 'Appendix' to the *Avadh Akhbār*, from December 1878 to December 1879. It came out in book form in 1880.

The *Fasāna* gave a great boom to the *Avadh Akhbār*. This roused the jealousy of the *Avadh Punch*, and the *Fasāna* was made the subject of several caustic reviews. The result was an open war between the two papers, which, after a crescendo of abuse and whacking blows on both sides, resulted in an honourable truce.

Sarshār has left us a large number of novels,⁹ long and short, but, to my mind, there is nothing in them that is not in the *Fasāna*. They are merely variations on the earlier themes, and like all variations are of little worth.

During and after the publication of the *Fasāna*, he was one of the

most popular figures of the day, courted not only by the general reader, but saluted by his rivals and compeers also. His fame travelled to the Deccan where he was given a high post by Mahārāja Kishan Parshād, in Haidarābād; but by his excessive addiction to drink, he estranged his patron, and went back to Lucknow to die at a comparatively early age on 21 January 1903.

13

The plan of the *Fasāna*, as far as I can judge, is in the first instance traceable to the literary form known as the 'character sketch', which had then been imported into Urdu from English. Just as the isolated sketch led in time to the Sir Roger de Coverley Papers, and then to the realistic English novel; in a similar way, the realistic accounts of fairs, festivals, and pastimes in Lucknow, e.g. *muharram*, *chiblam*, *basant*, *divālī*, a municipal election, cock-fighting, law-courts, paved the way for the *Fasāna*. Sarshār's contemporary essayists had given isolated pictures of life as they knew it. Sarshār, in the *Fasāna*, knits his observation and criticism into a larger unit by presenting the life of Lucknow, as he knew it, through a central figure. Such is the scheme of the book for the first 300 pages or so. Then it is discarded—why, I shall explain later on—but never for long. He returns to it again and again in the realistic episodes with which the book is interspersed.

With the beginning of the *Fasāna*, Sarshār leapt into sudden fame. Readers speculated feverishly about the fortunes of his characters and laid siege to him, imploring new instalments of the adventures of their favourite characters. This praise, no doubt, stimulated him, but not all for good. Sarshār's taste was never sure, and the excessive praise bestowed on Khojī is responsible for much cheap fun and repetition. It always takes two to write a book, the author and his readers; and Sarshār was rather unlucky in being at the beck and call of his readers.

It is said on very good authority that *Fasāna-e-Āzād* was modelled on *Don Quixote*. No doubt there are obvious resemblances between the two. Both are picaresque in form and satirical in purpose; both attack outgrown institutions, one the romances of chivalry, and the other the decadent medievalism of Lucknow. Again, the comradeship of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza has its counterpart in that of Āzād and Khojī, the resemblance extending to the celebrated Rosinante of Don Quixote which came to life as the nameless but

equally sorry jade on which Khojī rode forth. But here the resemblance ends. Cervantes ridicules chivalry in the person of Don Quixote, whereas Sarshār does it *through* Āzād who acts as the author's mouthpiece. In assigning the chief comic role to Khojī, Āzād's lieutenant, Sarsār has effected another important departure from his model: in *Don Quixote* the hero himself is the comic character.

These similarities notwithstanding, there is strong internal evidence that Sarshār could not have had *Don Quixote* in mind when he *began* his novel. There is no evidence of its influence in the first half of the first volume which, as already explained, is a loose bundle of sketches of the life of Lucknow, with Āzād as the central figure. If it resembles any work at this stage, it is the Sir Roger de Coverley Papers.

It is about the time when Āzād is smitten with Husn Ārā that the book begins to outgrow its original design. Āzād is now rehabilitated—as far as Sarshār could do it. What is more, he begins, for the first time, to interest us for his own sake. Now, too, is Khojī detached from the levee of his patron and attached to Āzād. Now, too, lapses the critical interest which had been in the foreground, and the story begins to take shape as a tale of adventure. In other words, the influence of *Don Quixote* comes between the original design and the outcome of the *Fasāna*. The comradeship of Āzād and Khojī was an afterthought, and not the starting-point of the story.

Personally, I can imagine the author writing his Lucknow sketches, when he found that his invention was beginning to flag; and then he had a brain-wave. The Muslim world had then passed through the excitement of the Turko-Russian War (1877-8). The Pan-Islamic impulse to rally round Turkey in her hour of need must have been at work in the community. Sarshār, I believe, may actually have heard the more adventurous canvassing and discussing the need of participating in the war. With a journalist's eye, he realized the appeal of this motive. And so he made up his mind to send Āzād to Europe. A Muslim hero from Lucknow, braving dangers by land and sea, rising high in office, and taking a decisive part in the war, nay inflicting defeat on the enemy—what could flatter the vanity of the Muslims more, or appeal more irresistibly to their feelings! It was a bold stroke, and its success was commensurate with its boldness. Such appears to me to have been the genesis of the book and the line of development it followed.

14

The *Fasāna* is a huge medley extending over nearly two thousand pages. What Phelps says playfully of Richardson's novels is truer by far of the *Fasāna*—'I sometimes think that his novels were not meant to be read by individuals but by dynasties and generations; the grandfather puts in a bookmark and dies, and his mature son takes up the burden at that point.'¹⁰

The *Fasāna* is the most chaotic book imaginable, and to read it is like losing oneself in a tropical forest. Yet the adventures of Āzād, the hero, after whom the book is named, easily detach themselves from the mass of irrelevant material. Briefly told, they come to this. During his peregrinations in Lucknow, Āzād falls in love with the high-born Husn Ārā, obtaining from her a promise of marriage on condition that he first proceeds to Europe to fight for Turkey against Russia. This is the first part of the story and covers nearly the entire first volume. The second volume is divided between the adventures of Āzād in Europe, his love-affairs, his captivities and escapes, the fears and regrets of Husn Ārā, and an elaborate history of her family from day to day. Nor is she without her own troubles. She is pestered by the attentions of a blackguardly suitor who has worked himself into the confidence of her relatives, and who attempts an unsuccessful diversion in his own favour by publishing disparaging accounts of Āzād's character.

With Āzād's return to India, accompanied by two European ladies, the story enters on its third and final stage. They are deeply attached to him, and he stands honour-bound to wed them, in consideration of services rendered and his solemn pledge. How is this complication to be got over? Sarshār, with his usual playful inconsequence, cuts the knot by devoting them to social reform, leaving Āzād free to wed the heroine.

The subsidiary narratives which cross and recross the above are many. Of these only two may be mentioned—the courtship of Husn Ārā's sister, Sipihr Ārā, by Prince Humāyūn Far, and the adventures of Allah Rakhkhī. The prince's murder by an impossible villain, and Sipihr Ārā's marriage with the prince's long-lost brother, who is palmed off as the resuscitated prince, is fantastic, and an evident concession to the old romance. The adventures of Allah Rakhkhī, on the other hand, contain some excellent comedy.

Sarshār reminds one of the artist in *Don Quixote* who on being asked what picture he was painting replied, 'That's what it may turn

out'. The story has neither unity nor much consistency in portraiture. It is a loose bundle of the most miscellaneous material, without the least pretence to design or architecture. The *Fasāna* has a multiple plot with a dozen or so narratives crossing and recrossing one another. The wonder is not that the book is so long; it is rather that it does finish after all! Strictly speaking, such a book should never end, or end with the author's death.

15

In spite of its forbidding size and its incoherence why did the *Fasāna* find so many readers? I suppose because they found it interesting. Sarshār unfolds before the reader a teeming world of men and women of all sorts, the effete nawabs and their retainers, drunkards, opium-eaters, thieves, idlers, doctors, quacks, pundits, ascetics, beggars, dancing-girls, dervishes, fools, wrestlers, swash-bucklers, adventurers; and whatever we witness, the *muharram* ceremonies, the preparation of a marriage, or a dancing party; and wherever we are, in the street, the market, or the seraglio, there is the tang and savour of life, and an air of verisimilitude obtained by local colour and a reproduction of the language peculiar to those people.

16

The *Fasāna* has no unity of action. Nor has it any unity of tone. Sarshār's attitude towards life is never the same. He is a realist, romanticist, reformer, and bohemian by turns. It is this aspect of the book to which I should like to draw the reader's attention. And first his bohemianism.

Sarshār's dominant interest is love. His characters have no other business than to fall in love and to talk incessantly about it. Public opinion is singularly weak in the society that he portrays; reserve, modesty, self-restraint, having little use in it: Āzād, the hero, living in a constant blaze of adoration, is ever on his knees before a petticoat, and does not scruple to disguise himself as a fakir to steal a glance at one of his old flames. His princes throw dignity to the wind; disguise themselves as women to see their loves; take servants into confidence; play gardeners; change scarlet and jewels for homespun and clouted shoes to steal a glance at their tormentors; and

when found out, play mahouts to spy over garden walls, or pick up and wed street girls because they are pretty. The master makes love to the mistress inside the house and pays compliments to maid-servants in the vestibule. Maid-servants, arch and graceful, promenade the streets, swearing at their host of admirers, who shower compliments on them from right and left, from house-tops and balconies. There is a deep Arabian-Nights atmosphere about the *Fasāna* which is the essence of romance.

The staple talk of his women is love; their chief occupation adornment. They rally one another on their beauty and talk perpetually of their love-affairs. They may be true to their love—some of them are; others change their hearts like their garments. It may be thought that Sarshār would shed his pet obsession in his war scenes. Far from it. His bohemian proclivities travel with him to Europe, and his hero's time is fairly divided between fighting and love-making. We are not so much in the midst of war in these scenes, as in the thick of love intrigues. Patriotism, duty, self-respect, are like straw before the rising tide of love. It is the only reality with Sarshār.

This is one aspect of his bohemianism. Another is his wide acquaintance with the gipsy side of life. The *Fasāna* is a museum of the underworld. It is impossible that he should have studied this world from a distance. He must have known the company intimately. He must have attended the effete nawab's levees, hob-nobbed with opium-eaters, frequented courts, and fraternized with thieves, vagabonds, and dancing-girls.

17

Sarshār's central characters are individuals; the rest are mostly types. The conservative gentleman who comes in for a series of misadventures in the railway train and waiting-room is a typical conservative seen through a magnifying glass. So are also his countless opium-eaters, beggars, rakes, and dancing-girls. Āzād, his hero, is a professional woman-killer, very handsome and sensitive to female beauty, always ready to bestow his heart on the veriest chance-comer, yet cherishing throughout his amatory experiences, like another Tom Jones, a constant and fervent adoration for his betrothed. But this bohemian is no less a reformer and critic of society, and it is through him that we are made to see the social anomalies, superstitions, follies, and excesses of the day. As a little thought will show, psychologically there is nothing incompatible in

these two roles, although their combination in one person may strike some readers as bizarre. It is well to remember in this connexion, that Sarshār has put a great deal of himself into his hero. In fact, Sarshār was all that Āzād is, without the latter's handsomeness and prowess; and it is not at all improbable that Sarshār, in his more complacent moods, should have thought that he was Āzād himself.

As a humorous character, Khojī is no tame copy of Don Quixote, though, psychologically, he is built on a somewhat similar pattern. Like the latter, he is subject to a permanent delusion. A dwarf, he tries to cover the defects of his mind and body by a brave show of manliness and courage, but the more he tries to bully and bluster, the more he gives himself away. The jeers and taunts at his expense are unremitting; and as he is determined to live up to his delusions, the result is a succession of misadventures—every one as luckless and comic as that of Don Quixote himself. In this respect the parallel between the two is obvious. Don Quixote, as is well known, is an elderly gentleman who becomes so utterly mad reading romances of chivalry that he finally believes them to be true, and goes forth into the world to defend the oppressed and to undo wrong. With Khojī what must have been a pose at one time has grown into a permanent state of mind; he has come to believe that he is a hero with a prescriptive right to swagger, command, insult; to put his foot in everything that is going and to get beaten for a meddling, opinionated ass. This is one source of his delusions; the other is his addiction to opium.

Unlike Don Quixote who is both mirthful and tender, the function of Khojī has been to provide fun for a callous generation. Sarshār is hearty and robust, but he has no tenderness, and so we roar with laughter at Khojī's misadventures; he never touches our heartstrings.

At one time Khojī made his living by a mixture of wit and folly as one of the dependants of a nawab. But that was before he fell in with Āzād, and to suit his new role he had almost to be re-created. But Sarshār never cared what transformations his characters underwent so long as they remained interesting—and Khojī was the darling of Sarshār's contemporaries, as he continues to be today of a large number of readers. Not all the heroism of Āzād, not all his love-affairs, would have given the novel its place in the hearts of his contemporaries, as did the comicalities of this tiny mite of a man who believed that he was as brave as Hercules and as handsome as

Apollo. So far the attitude of Sarshār's contemporaries towards him. The modern reader, however, does not react so favourably to him. The fact is that Khojī has had his day as a comic character.

Sarshār's women have all a family likeness—they are coquettish and languishing. Nor has he any firm grasp of men and women in higher circles. This is especially true of his women, cut off, as they are, by the impenetrable walls of the purdah. His ladies are suspiciously like his humbler females, except in their names, dress, and a thin veneer of politeness and culture. It appears that Sarshār's bohemian proclivities had brought him into contact with the *demi-monde*, and in limning his better sort of women, he drew freely on his knowledge of the latter. Sarshār's women have no soul of seriousness. They are gay, flippant, sentimental, even theatrical—true to the tradition of the courtesan. There may be exceptions here and there, but like all exceptions they prove the rule. His Jogan, in spite of the varied amatory experiences thrust on her, is not a dubious character. She cherishes a constant devotion for Āzād despite her adventures. Yet note the theatrical way in which she expresses herself when she meets the spurious Āzād.¹¹ Visions of a finished coquette dallying with her admirer rise before us when we read the passage. And if Jogan is an adventuress who has picked up the gay accents of the freelance sisterhood, note how the impeccable Husn Ārā conducts herself in her first interview with Āzād.¹²

To sum up, Sarshār was not conversant with the psychology of the upper strata of society or with people in their higher moods. Yet in his own world he could move with ease and confidence. His Jogan is interesting and so are also his many maid-servants. Another of his successes is a full-length portrait of Husn Ārā's mother with her superstitious and old-world ideas.

Characterization is not Sarshār's forte. His characters are almost always inconsistent. His villains are stogy and unnatural. On the whole, the richness and variety of his picture gallery and situations is more apparent than real. Most of his characters are mere types and repeat themselves. You cannot tell one of his maid-servants from another maid-servant, nor one of his opium-eaters from another opium-eater. They differ only in the accidents of their names.

Sarshār is many things in one. His fiction shows the clash of his temperament with his age, and of his heart with his head. He is

a bohemian who is also a reformer, a realist who is also at home in the properties of the old romance. His realism is uppermost in his sketches of the life of Lucknow: its gay youngsters, and old rakes; its musical assemblies and fairs; its pictures of the decadent nobility and their clients and parasites—the extreme gullibility of the one and the knavery of the other; its bad school-masters; its objurgations against drunkenness, gambling, duelling, unequal marriages, and numerous other topics which figured so well in the programme of the social reformers of the age. Unlike Nazīr Ahmad, Sarshār has not definitely aligned himself with the modern world. He crosses and re-crosses from one into the other, now revelling in the world before him as a bohemian, now criticizing it as a humorist.

19

Sarshār is too good-natured, too genial, to be a satirist. He is not so much put out by the vices of his age, as tickled by its follies. His gulls, fools, and sharpers are not monsters of wickedness, but amiable knaves or rascals whose eccentricities are diverting. A little more of moral earnestness, and he would have declaimed against vice; a little more of bitterness and he would be a satirist. As it is, his likes and dislikes hold each other in check. His critical power is just strong enough to show him what is wrong with the men and women he loves. His love is never so excessive as to blind him to their defects. Sarshār seems to caress his fools and knaves while he laughs at them. His is, in short, the world of comedy.

Sarshār long held the field as our humorist *par excellence*. Today, his reputation is on the decline. Humour has been aptly defined as the gift of thinking seriously and talking lightly. This type of humour which we get in Mīr's realistic *masnavīs*, or in some of Ghālib's letters, the humour which is akin to pathos, is not within his reach. He is too mirthful, too full of animal spirits to have done anything more than merely skim the surface of life. But, with this important reservation, there is fun enough in him, and it is sufficiently varied. There is, in the first place, a great deal of social satire in him. Here his weapon is caricature. He exaggerates the various social types that have come within his purview and holds them up to laughter.

Then there is a great deal of the comedy of frustration. In this respect his humour is at its best in the adventures of Allah Rakhkhī (Jogan)—that charming coquette who, with a constancy rare in her tribe, sets out to find Āzād. The Jogan herself, her sprightly maid-

servant, the septuagenarian Dārogha, and above all, the impecunious lawyer, and his insolent servant, who helps foil his master's mild amatory designs—all are genuinely amusing. It is in this part of the book also that we meet his policemen—lazy, inefficient, swaggering, and none too honest—caricatured with success. It is here again that we get that doughty pair, the fire-eating Khān and his still more audacious wife who routs even the hardened policeman with her cannonade of oaths. Nor are his foreigners with their mispronunciations, solecisms, and malapropisms, or his hakīms and doctors with their professional jargon and jealousies, to be lightly passed over. Again, much of the comedy lies in the passage of arms among the servantry, especially maid-servants. His women are best in their tantrums; and their clever retorts, sharp, crisp, and scintillating, are very amusing.

Sarshār's partial eclipse as a humorist is due to the changing taste of the people. Since he wrote, there has been a gradual rise in humanity, so that what amused our parents leaves us cold. One of the most infallible tests of the culture of a people is a study of the things that amuse it. Sarshār was not much above his age in his taste. Hence his humour is often of the horseplay type. It is here that Khojī, that favourite of the groundlings, fails. His malapropisms are too wide of the mark to excite laughter; while his gasconades, his numerous love-affairs, his poetical ebullitions, his wrestling matches, his panegyrics on opium, are too puerile to amuse. Sarshār's chief fault, here as elsewhere, is repetition. So constantly does he twang the same string that he begins to bore.

There is another reason also why his slapstick humour does not satisfy us to day. He harks back to the old ideal when humour was cruel, as witness the gladiatorial shows, the medieval fool in courts or great houses, e.g. Gvynplaine, or Quasimodo. The present age is more kind-hearted and finds no pleasure in the infliction of pain.

In its mixing of the old and new, *Fasāna-e-Āzād* will serve as an excellent example of the work of a transitional period. The story is, on the whole, a *romance d'aventure*, and was written in emulation of *Fasāna-e-'Ajāib*, as its name indicates. In the old romances the plot is a peg for the most audacious display of magic and marvel—fighting against demons, sorcerers, giants, and dragons. Sarshār retains the old framework and uses it for adventures of a somewhat realistic

character, and a satiric and realistic picture of the life of his day. But even here there are unconscious concessions to the past. As already described, a large part of the book is purely fantastic. Sarshār, therefore, belongs to two worlds. As a picture of contemporary life the *Fasāna* is a modern work; in its preference for the fantastic and the ultra-romantic, it harks back to the old ideals.

Again, how often does he tap the repertory of the elder romance for his motives! One of the most dominant motives of the elder romance, both in East and West, has been the performance of some great exploit by the hero, at the instance of his lady-love, to win her hand. This motive which has worn a rut in the folklore and tales of the East no less dominates the *Fasāna*. Hence there has been only a partial break with the past in it, and the properties of the old romance pop up again and again, slightly disguised, in the new setting. In *Masnavī-e-Sibr-ul-Bayān*, on incurring the displeasure of the fairy, the hero is cast into a deep well, which is then covered with a huge boulder. This is exactly how the irate Polish lady punishes Āzād, when he rejects her love. And all this in Europe, and in the nineteenth century!

Students of European literature will recall how medieval writers medievalized the classical legends, by dressing them up in the forms and conventions of their own day. A reverse process is in full swing in Sarshār. In his treatment of war, he has considerably medievalized the Turko-Russian War. The emphasis is laid throughout on Āzād's swordsmanship and dexterity and skill in the art of medieval warfare. There are challenges and counter-challenges, as in epics and medieval tales; and defeat or victory is determined, as was the case in the past, by the prowess of the individual hero. Sarshār's war scenes are complete failures, judged by any realistic standard. Nevertheless, they illustrate with uncommon clearness how Sarshār is for ever vamping up the properties of the old romance in his modern setting.

It is, however, in his treatment of love that we see the persistence of the old traditions at their strongest. I have already discussed at some length the sickly and morbid conception of love, with its attendant symptoms, which pervades Urdu poetry. I have also explained how this conception became conventionalized, so that it became customary to associate love with some well-known symptoms, such as groans, tears, and fainting fits. It is one of the strongest proofs of the continuance of the old traditions in new art-forms that this conception still persists in our fiction. Sarshār does not go to the

excesses of his contemporary, Sharar, but he is too much a son of his age to be free from it. His hero, a veteran soldier, often resorts, like his other male characters, to that invaluable cathartic—a private weep. Sarshār strikes another medieval note in his excessive pre-occupation with love. His men and women are all emotional vessels, who talk incessantly of love, and, since talking is a convenient prologue to the deed itself, fall in and out of it with transcendent ease. His women vaunt their charms, recount their conquests, and appeal to their maid-servants for compliments, as they invariably do in the old romances. Compared with *Fasāna-e-‘Ajāib*, *Fasāna-e-Āzād* is a modern work, as already pointed out; but the leaven of the old sentimentalism, a legacy of the dying age, is still unmistakably there. *Jān-e-‘Ālam* and *Āzād* are both equally brave and equally tearful. The hunger for praise on the part of Māh Tal‘at, which indirectly leads to *Jān-e-‘Ālam*’s miraculous quest, is shared no less by Husn Ārā and other ladies, who complacently view their charms in the mirror after toilet, and appeal to their maids to pronounce on their attractions.

The upshot of the matter is this. The influence of the West has introduced us to new art-forms, which the writers employ to portray the life around them. But either because they are deficient in observation and psychology, or because they are obsessed with the conception of love embodied in Urdu poetry and old romances, they, instead of studying the actual specimens before them, fall back on the stock notions about love with which the old literature has familiarized them. And this tearfulness not only characterizes their Indian characters, but appears in all its fullness in Europeans as well. Sarshār studies Europe through the eyes of Lucknow; we shall see how Sharar will portray the Islamic world in the same spirit, after him.

It need hardly be pointed out that here is a process at work which is the opposite of what we shall study in the case of Iqbāl. In him we have the new wine in old bottles, the accommodation of the new consciousness to old art-forms and diction. In Sarshār, on the other hand, we have a notable instance of the reverse process, the old wine in new bottles. The ingredients that go to make modern Urdu fiction are neither entirely old nor entirely new; they are a blend of both. In other words, it is a literature of a transitional period.

The above conclusion is borne out as well by the idiosyncrasies of Sarshār's style. It is no doubt true that nearly all prose-writers of the period, from time to time, slip unconsciously into the idiom of the bygone age. But such survivals are neither very common, nor very pronounced. In Sarshār the two elements, the old and the new, are for the most part kept apart, so that after a little acquaintance with his method it is not at all difficult to anticipate which of these two styles he will use at a given moment. So different are these styles, the one excessively artificial, the other natural, that one is tempted to imagine there were two Sarshārs, utterly different from each other, who had entered on a literary partnership on a division-of-labour basis, each doing his own apportioned bit and then passing on the pen to the other. Sarshār's descriptive passages are no better than a mosaic of all that the new writers had decided to discard—rhyming words, dead metaphors, stock words and phrases, such as abound in the pages of Sarūr. His dialogues and narrative passages, on the other hand, are in the current idiom of the day. Of this complete dissociation Sarshār is the only example in our literature.

It was fashionable once to extol Sarshār for the range of his vocabulary and his idiomatic facility. This view is being given up now. No doubt our first impression on reading him is one of ease, abundance, even prodigality. But it is soon discovered that he does not use language either with discrimination or moderation. His fault is not so much the love of display, as exuberance, and the inability to know where to stop.

Sarshār's idiomatic facility is deceptive. Just as his characters and situations tend to repeat themselves, so does his vocabulary also. The same words and phrases recur page after page. What is more, they hunt in packs, like wolves, and come rushing pell-mell at the heels of one another. The fact is that Sarshār had allowed himself to be overmastered by his excessively colloquial vocabulary, very much as he had allowed his love of drink to overmaster him, and he uses the same language on all occasions, light or serious. He is deficient in decorum, and seldom succeeds in adjusting his style to the speaker, situation, or subject-matter. From this viewpoint, he is a very apt example of the saying: the style is the man. What he lacked as a man was discipline, and its absence is quite as obvious in his rambling and chaotic plot, his numerous repetitions, as his unrestrained and careless use of language.

Born in Lucknow in 1860, 'Abdul Halīm Sharar was educated at Mutia Burj, near Calcutta, where his father was in service with Vājid 'Alī Shāh, ex-king of Oudh. At seventeen, he was suddenly sent back to Lucknow, his father fearing lest the gay life of the princes, with whom he was on very friendly terms, should tell on his character. This transportation must have cost the boy many a sigh. The glamour of the place continued to haunt him, and comes out in his enraptured description of it in *Guzashta Lucknow*.

Like several other writers of the period, Sharar owed his awakening to the influence of Sayyid Ahmad. A visit to Aligarh and the study of Hālī's *Musaddas* brought home to him the need for reform, and he became a life-long supporter of the Aligarh movement.

Sharar resolved on a journalistic career and was for five years assistant editor of the *Avadh Punch*. In 1887, he started the *Dil-Gudāz*, one of the premier journals of the day which, with a few intermissions, ran till his death (1926).

The articles published in the *Dil-Gudāz* at first, were mostly poetic and imaginative; but Sharar was soon drawn to history and fiction. His earlier romances—*Malik-ul-'Azīz Varjana* (1888) *Hasan aur Anjalīna* (1889), *Mansūr Mohana* (1890), *Yūsaf Najma*, *Flora Florinda* (1897), *Shaukīn Malika* (1907), *Qais aur Lubna* (1891), appeared serially in the paper.¹³ He then decided to stop the serial method of publication, and almost every year a new novel was published whole and presented free to the subscribers of the magazine at the end of the year. Besides the *Dil-Gudāz*, Sharar started other journals at different times. Of these, the *Parda-e-'Ismat*, started in 1892, roused bitter resentment in conservative circles by his attack on purdah. This was one of his chief dislikes, and he attacked it in two novelettes, *Badr-un-Nisā kī Musibat* and *Āgha Sādiq kī Shādī*, and a play entitled *Meva-e-Talkh*.

Sharar had begun the study of history for raw material for his romances. But soon after, he decided to turn this knowledge to advantage by writing histories and historical studies. Of these, two are: *The History of the Crusades*, published in the *Dil-Gudāz* (1901-5), and the *History of Sind*, published as supplement to the *Dil-Gudāz*, and subsequently brought out in two volumes in 1906 and 1908, respectively. With a journalist's instinct, Sharar seldom gave offence to his readers, but sometimes his love of truth and his personal convictions outran his discretion. He gave much offence to the

Shī'ites by his article on Sakīna, the daughter of al-Husain, son of 'Alī. The publication of a part of it caused a commotion and he was privately advised to stop its publication. But Sharar decided to suspend the magazine rather than succumb to public pressure, and the concluding part of the study came out in the first issue of the *Dil-Gudāz*, when it was re-started in Lucknow, in January 1900.

Sharar is a voluminous journalist and he has been compared with Defoe by an Indian critic.¹⁴ His essays reprinted from the *Dil-Gudāz* cover eight volumes. His novels are over twenty-five in number. He wrote his essays for the day, but those dealing with the civilization of Lucknow, published as *Guzashta Lucknow*, in 1914-16, may still be read with interest.

23

Sharar's literary reputation is made up of his historical romances. The first of these, *Malik-ul-'Azīz Varjana*, was a rejoinder to Scott's *Talisman* which he considered to be a libel on Islam, and the aggressive spirit which runs through it marks most of the romances dealing with the Christian world. Although obviously a follower of Scott, his romances are not inspired by a romantic love of the past. They are not mere pleasure jaunts to borrow scent and savour from an age of glitter and pomp, of noble deeds and ringing battles. His object is to combine instruction with amusement, by unfolding the greatness that was Islam for our admiration and emulation; and if, occasionally, he selects periods of decline and disintegration, it is with a view to pointing a moral. In his note on *Malik-ul-'Azīz Varjana* he says: 'This novel depicts those splendid achievements of Muslims which can revive their drooping spirit and dead aspirations. Every sentence of it moves one with a sense of national pride; and we are sure that those who have read the novel carefully were moved by it, and are intent on making progress.'¹⁵

Hasan aur Anjalina aims at improving Sunni-Shī'ite relations. It deals with the Turko-Russian War of 1872 in which the Turks, who are represented as carrying everything before them, are defeated by the defection of their Shī'ite Persian allies. *Mansūr Mohana* was written to rehabilitate Sultān Mahmūd, by clearing him of the charge of a freebooter. *Flora Florinda* presents a picture of the 'disgraceful excesses' of the Christians under the equitable and just rule of the Moors in Spain, with sidelights on the corruption of the monastic system prevalent there. His object is ever to show the golden side of

the shield where Muslims are concerned. He not only defends them, but carries war into the Christian camp by exposing their bigotry and superstitions.

24

Sharar's range is wide. He moves practically in the whole of the Islamic world, with occasional excursions into Italy, France, and Russia. He has selected great events in Islamic history—the conquest of Spain, Africa, India; the Crusades; the invasion of France; and by interweaving facts and fiction, introduced his countrymen to Islamic history.

The task that Sharar set himself was a difficult one and would stagger a much greater novelist. To re-create the Islamic world, as it had been from the time of the Prophet to within two centuries of his own day, required a reach of imagination, industry, and scholarship beyond the grasp of the greatest historical novelists. But Sharar took it in his stride. He had, moreover, a strong ally in the ignorance and credulity of his readers. He had the advantage of moving in a world very little explored, a world which the popular imagination treasured as the store-house of strangeness and beauty, greatness and glorious deeds; and his readers greedily swallowed whatever he gave them, without bothering about its authenticity. His study of Islamic history had given him something like a panoramic view of the background of his stories, and having a general knowledge of the art of fighting, bric-à-brac, and the customs and social habits of the Muslims in the past, he could splash with a broad brush his pseudo-historical stuff on the canvas.

25

With one or two exceptions, Sharar's novels are built on the same pattern. The fictional core is generally supplied by the love of the hero, a captain in the Saracen army, with a highborn damsel in the invaded country, and their marriage after several setbacks.

Even when his novels are not historical and deal with Muslim society in India or elsewhere, the same pattern persists. Significant in this respect are the titles of his stories, e.g. *Mansūr Mohana*, *Malik-ul-'Azīz Varjana*, *Hasan aur Anjalina*, *Yūsaf Najma*, etc.

The profusion of the romantic element is in full evidence in *Māh Malik*, *Firdaus-e-Barīn*, and others. In the first named, a prince and his friend, who have fallen in love with the daughter of the king of Ghaur and her maid-servant, respectively, enter the royal palace disguised as maid-servants; periodically disappear to fight the king's battles, even against their own country (maid-servants inside the palace, they are also in the king's service as generals); rise to eminence in service; flourish inside the palace as well as on the battle-field, and wed their loves, the maid-servant also turning out to be a disguised princess. In *Firdaus-e-Barīn* the story turns on the hero receiving letters from his mistress who is supposed to be dead. Disguise is the chief stock-in-trade of Sharar, and he uses it with a prodigal hand, as in *Philipāna*. Women disguise themselves as men, men disguise themselves as women, Muslims disguise themselves as Christians and Christians as Muslims: and all goes merry as a marriage bell. And thus tricked out, they step forth into the enemy's camp and fool their foes to the top of their bent. Arrests are common, but there are always obliging guards who go to sleep at the psychological moment, or hob-nob with the prisoners over huge flagons of wine, as if to aid their escape. Sharar has given full rein to his fancy in his romances; it is a world in which anything may happen at any time.

His heroes bear a charmed life and are irresistible. So are some of his heroines—Varjana (King Richard's niece!) who has fallen into most passionate love with Malik-ul-'Azīz (Saladin's son) has embraced Islam, and runs through a dozen of Richard's soldiers in each encounter. We may well laugh at such unlikely happenings, but such is the way of romance. Are not Dumas' heroes irresistible? Does not the hero of Sienkiewicz's *Pan Michael* slay the greatest Turkish knight with an indifferent stroke of his sword? And does not Azya, the heroine in the same novel, deal with Saracen soldiers in the same summary way in which Varjana deals with Christian soldiers?

In fiction it is characters that matter most. What faults will we not condone in a novelist if he can put *living* people on his imaginary stage! Historical inaccuracies are quite common in Shakespeare, Scott, and Dumas; but these anachronisms and inaccuracies and deviations from history are overlooked by all except dry-as-dusts. The general reader does not care a rap whether or not Richard of

England had a niece of the name of Varjana who deserted her people to share the fortunes of the hero of the novel. Nor will he feel much perturbed to know on historical grounds that Saladin, who is represented as making love to Queen Eleanor of France in *Shaukīn Malika*, was only six years old according to the sober facts of history during the second Crusade.

27

Sharar's chief weakness as a novelist is his faulty knowledge of human nature. His men and women, be they real or imaginary, seldom come to life. Moreover, he is excessively tainted with the false and sickly emotionalism of the old school of Urdu poetry; and in his heroes we at once detect the effete and tearful lover of the Urdu *ghazal*. Few things are more amusing than the heroes of Sharar who combine the sinews of a Hercules with the proneness to tears of a gushing schoolgirl. Once in love, they are incapable of anything except the luxury of grief. The greatest sanctities of life, patriotism, and love of one's religion, are as straw in the tempest of their passion. This morbid conception of love as an enervating disease is the cornerstone of the *ghazal* and strongly colours the fiction of Sharar.¹⁶ His characters, be they Indians, Persians, Afghans, Egyptians, Arabs, Turks, Romans, all display the same symptoms, and have a family resemblance in this respect. Once in love, their life is a round of groans, cries, wilderness, and despair. Mansūr, the doughty hero of *Mansūr Mohana*, the foremost general of Sultān Mahmūd's, rushes with puerile haste into a trap, and when locked up in a room by a few ascetics, eases his overwrought heroic soul with such copious whines as:

منصور۔ آہ! مجھے ستانا بیکار ہے! تم لوگ کیا جانو کہ میں کس مصیبت میں مبتلا ہوں۔ میری زندگی خدا جانے کیونکر گزر رہی ہے۔ ہائے تم نے مجھے دھوکا دے کر گرتا کیا ہے۔ یہ تمہاری خطا نہیں یہ خود میری قسمت کا قصور ہے۔ میں نے ایسے ایسے لوگوں پر ظلم کیا ہے جن کے ظلم زمانہ اٹھایا کرتا ہے۔ آہ! میں نے معشوقوں پر ستم کئے ہیں۔ آہ! موہنا! میں نے تجھ پر ظلم کیا تھا۔ آہ! عذرا! خدا جانے

تُو مجھے کیوں چھوڑ کے چلی گئی! ہائے میں نے تیرا کیا قصور کیا تھا۔ تیرے ہی لئے میں نے موهنا سے بیوفائی کی! تو بھی مجھے دغا دے کے اور مجھے چھوڑ کے چلی گئی۔ آہ! لیلابھی نہیں! جو شاید تلی ہی دیتی! اُس نے بھی تیرا ہی ساتھ دیا! اتنے معشوقوں سے چھوٹ کے میں اس سفر میں یونہی اپنی جان سے بنزار ہو رہا تھا۔ اس پر یہ ستم! نہیں ستم نہیں (جوگی کی طرف متوجہ ہو کے) بہتر ہو کہ تم مجھے قتل کر ڈالو۔ تاکہ میں ان عذابوں اور روحانی بلاؤں سے نجات پاؤں۔ منصور یہاں تک بیان کر کے دوڑنے لگا۔

Mansūr—Ahl you're tormenting me for nothing. How can you people know what misfortune has befallen me or how I'm passing my days! You've captured me deceitfully. But I don't blame you for it; it is all my ill luck. I've been cruel to those who exercise cruelty on others. Ah! I've been cruel to many beloveds. Alas! I was cruel to you, Mohana. I don't know why you deserted me, 'Azra? How did I offend you? It was for your sake that I was false to Mohana. But you too jilted me. Alas, even Laila is not here to console me. She also played me false like you. Parted from all these beauties I was even otherwise feeling sick of life in this expedition. And on the top of all this, this calamity! (turning to the jogīs) Better kill me so that I may be relieved of this pain and mental torture.

This is how Sharar presents the heroes of the heroic age!

The hero of *Māb Malik* is still more characteristically sentimental. He has been hit on the thigh by a chance arrow of the princess who is out hunting with her female attendants. He rushes into her presence, pours forth the most maudlin verbiage and then vanishes. A week later, he falls in with the princess again, with the arrow still in his leg. On her offering to pull it out, he shrinks from this calamitous contingency. He is already in love with the arrow of his beloved. He cherishes it as a keepsake, and would rather die than lose it. Besides, she could comfort his body, but what about the arrow of love lodged in his heart?

For over two decades after the publication of *Fasāna-e-Āzād* there was no fiction in Urdu apart from Sharar's romances. The broken

thread of the novel proper was resumed by Munshī Prem Chand who came into general notice with the publication of his *Bāzār-e-Husn* in 1917. Prem Chand's real name was Dhanpat Rā'e, and he was born on 31 July 1880, in a small village near Benares. He studied Persian for about eight years with a *maulwī* who conducted a village school, before joining the Collegiate School, Benares, from which he matriculated in 1904. His father had been an ill-paid clerk in the postal department, and on his death in 1895 the boy Prem Chand had not only to shift for himself but also to support his step-mother and two half-brothers. These were his hardest days, and he had to sell his books and then the clothes off his back to feed himself and his dependants. A chance encounter with a headmaster who stood in need of a teacher gave him his first opening in life, and he was installed as a teacher at Rs. 18/- p.m. Humble as this beginning was, Prem Chand had at last turned the corner, as his subsequent history proved. He passed his B.A. as a private candidate and gradually rose to the position of a Deputy Inspector of Schools.

Prem Chand entered on the final stage of his life in 1920 when, under the influence of Mahātma Gāndhī, he withdrew from government service and joined the Non-co-operation movement. He was now a free man, but financially his position grew less satisfactory, and for the rest of his life he made his living by his pen. Prem Chand had two strings to his bow: he wrote both in Hindī and Urdu; but in spite of his best efforts he could not win his way to competence, and was never for long in easy circumstances.

His first book, a volume of short stories entitled *Soz-e-Vatan*, was published in 1907. These patriotic tales provoked acute resentment in official circles, and Prem Chand was not only subjected to a humiliating apology but had also to surrender the unsold copies of the book, 500 in number, which were publicly burnt under instruction from the Collector. This attempt to kill the author and the patriot in Prem Chand did not succeed, and social reform, agrarian problems, the clash between capital and labour, and bureaucratic tyranny continued to exercise his mind and provide material for his fiction till the end.

Prem Chand was a prolific writer, but several of his books are mere pot-boilers and have little literary value. Important among his novels are: *Bāzār-e-Husn*, *Gosha-e-'Āfiat*, *Chaugān-e-Hastī*, *Maidān-e-'Amal*, and *Gāū-dān*. His short stories cover nearly a dozen volumes of which *Prem Pachīsī*, *Prem Batīsī*, *Prem Chālīsī*, *Zād-e-Rāb*, *Vāridāt*, *Ākhirī Tuhfa*, and *Khāk-e-Parvāna* deserve consideration.

It is not generally known that Prem Chand's novels have all been translated from books originally published in Hindī. His first choice had been Urdu, but about 1914 he decided to write in Hindī. Was this because there was not enough demand for his books among Urdu-speaking people, or was it because of his increasing interest in Hindi? One must know more of his life than I do to be able to answer this question. But this much will have to be admitted that Muslims continued to treat him more or less as an outsider. And yet the fact stands that he wrote Urdu with unusual distinction, and so far as the use of the dialect spoken in the neighbourhood of Benares is concerned (call it Urdu or Hindustānī), he stands in a class apart.

29

Prem Chand is an idealist who has created a new world to redress the balance of the old. His novels are a strong expression of the idealistic reaction in favour of the poor and humble that came in the wake of the Indian Renaissance. He is not moved to indignation by the selfishness and perversity that afflict society; his function is to reveal the soul of beauty in unlikely places, which on account of our selfish interests and conventional ethics we fail to perceive. He does not beg for the humble the supercilious condescension of the rich; he obliterates the differences which wealth and snobbery have made between the high and the low, by revealing the essential humanity of the latter; by demonstrating how goodness, truthfulness, fellow-feeling, and sacrifice find a more congenial soil among the poor than on the arid heights of the rich. A democrat by temperament, Prem Chand is a reformer and dreamer by environment. The persistence and inveteracy of the evils he has to fight are reflected in his writings in two different ways. Sometimes he is grimly realistic, holding the mirror up to the philistine world in its callousness and inhumanity, as in his *Bāzār-e-Husn*. On other occasions the dream element, so strong in him, asserts itself; the hard facts of life take on a pleasing malleability, and he fashions the world to his heart's desire. Such is the genesis of his fiction.

30

Of his novels, *Bāzār-e-Husn* is, on the whole, the most satisfactory. Its theme is simple, almost trite—a fallen woman's repentance and discovery that the world is not prepared to forgive her. Saman, after

her father's misfortune, is married to an ill-bred poor man. Her only failings are vanity and love of display, venial enough in one who has seen better days. Yet these very failings conspire with her surroundings to bring about her ruin. Saman's evil genius is a courtesan who lives in great style opposite her humble dwelling. For some time Saman fortifies herself in her chastity, and contemns her riches. But she soon finds that her fancied superiority is a mere illusion: she discovers that society worships in practice what it abhors in theory. If a woman of sin, she feels, can command respect not only with the rich, but the religious as well, the popular appraisal of virtue and sin is misleading, and evil is not so degrading as it is represented to be. Saman is well on her way to moral scepticism. Matters come to a head when her husband shuts her out one night on the merest suspicion. She takes shelter with Padam Singh, whose wife is her friend. This sets people talking, her husband and some of Padam's friends being the most censorious. Driven from her last refuge by a scandal, she takes the fatal step and sets up as a courtesan in the city. She is saved by some public-spirited people and retires to a widows' home.

Saman's experiences, however unfortunate, have been of the nature of a liberal education. They have enlarged her mind; she has risen through her fall. But public opinion is notoriously unfeeling. It is outraged by her stay in the widows' home: there is a panic and the place is threatened with desertion. The consequences of her fall are not confined to her; they reach her family. Her sister's marriage is postponed, and it is only after they have undergone much sharp suffering that the betrothed is mollified. Up to the very last, Saman is contemned by those she serves. Her sister is actually suspicious, and the sister's husband, Saman's former lover, is disgustingly outspoken in his contempt. Forsaken by all, Saman is installed as a mistress in an orphanage, the only place where the hounds of public opinion did not care to follow her.

The motive of the story is the same as that of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or Hugo's *Les Misérables*—the wreck of a beautiful life by a single false step in a self-righteous world. It is not without serious defects. Like all works of the author, it suffers from a mixture of motives and from unnecessary digressions which his reforming proclivities are always forcing on him. He must remove brothels, and the like, as Dickens fights bad school-masters, ill-kept poor-houses, and other nuisances. Prem Chand is not uniformly successful in these attempts.

The charm of the book lies in the arresting figure of the heroine. It is customary with novelists to sentimentalize the fallen woman, as in *La Dame aux Camelias*. Prem Chand is very much in earnest. He takes his stand upon fact, and appeals against custom and tradition to reason. With unflinching realism he traces her fall; the social factors which lead to it; her emergence from the slough of sin with a radiant love of goodness; the uncompromising attitude of the philistine world; and asks: Is she really a bad woman? and are we justified in treating her as we do?

Prem Chand has impaired the realism of the story by insisting on the technical purity of his heroine during her fall. Not quite certain how far he could carry the reader with him, he has made a timid compromise. It would have been better art and better philosophy if he had braved public opinion by stating facts. As it is, he has weakened the verisimilitude of the story, and one cannot forgo the just suspicion that he is telling much less than he knows, or ought to know.

Again, the author's psychology is at fault in the scene where the heroine, immediately after her repentance, plays wild pranks on her lovers. That a woman with Saman's charity should succumb to horseplay, at a moment when she is feeling most humble, is entirely out of character.

Chaugān-e-Hastī deals chiefly with rural life. Even more than its predecessor, it is good only in parts, the reforming zeal of the author resulting in over-emphasis and exaggeration. The hero is a village, although ostensibly the role has been assigned to the blind beggar Sūr Dās. As the chronicler of rural life, Prem Chand is at his best. The quaint antiquated life with its wealth of incident and detail, the rise and fall of parties, the defections and realignments—here is all the poetry of village life! And for all this, Prem Chand is drawing on his well-furnished memory. It was in this village that he had been brought up; and the simple, ingenuous life of the people around him must have gone deep into his mind. The rapid means of communication, a cheap and ubiquitous press, the spread of education, have brought villages and cities together; and the former have lost much of their primitive simplicity. The village of Pandeypur is still a relic of the old world. But its simplicity is not inviolate. There is already a cloud no bigger than a man's hand which will burst on it and engulf it. The motive of the story is the losing battle fought by Sūr Dās against an influential citizen, who wants to acquire his plot of ground for the site of a factory. Later on, the plot being acquired,

the entire population is ordered to evacuate to provide space for cottages for factory hands. The struggle resolves itself into a sharp tussle between the police and the villagers. The protagonist, Sūr Dās, the backbone of resistance, is shot down, and the village disappears.

The greater part of the canvas is occupied by aristocratic families who directly or indirectly influence the fortunes of the battle. All of them without any exception are lay figures and interest no one.

31

The fiction of Prem Chand contains much criticism of life implicit and explicit. Despite his dark moods, he is not a pessimist; he is a meliorist, steadfastly believing in the emergence of a better order. The panacea for our ills, according to him, is the free application of the spirit of love. In *Bāzār-e-Husn*, he is painfully conscious of what man has done to man; how ignorance, prejudice, and conventions have made the world the sorry affair it is. According to him we are so hard on sinners because we love evil inwardly, but lack the boldness of the libertine. We are hypocrites, and are desperately intent on keeping up appearances. We castigate so ruthlessly because we are afraid of being found out.

In *Changān-e-Hastī* life is felt to be a hard and grim struggle with no promise of the victor's crown at the end. Achievement plays ever so small a part in Prem Chand's philosophy of life; it is a mere accident of effort, and does not at all weigh with the true sportsman. Prem Chand believes that there is something glorious in the very exercise of our virtues. His hero is neither cast down by reverses, nor elated by victories. They do not matter. He bears no one any ill-will or malice; but once he has made up his mind, he works like a law of nature; and when he is mortally wounded he is not sorry. He has played his part manfully, and there is an end of it.

32

Prem Chand's characters vividly reflect his surroundings. He has a steady grasp of village life, and has furnished a fine portrait gallery of men and women from rural areas. His peasants are Wordsworthian in the sense that they are intimately connected with the soil: their whole life is woven out of the influences that breathe about them.

He is at his weakest in the higher sphere of society. He knows

little of high life, and falls back on hearsay and theory in its portraiture. Viney, Sophia, Mr. Clark, and others, are all lay figures stuffed with sawdust. They have not an ounce of flesh or a drop of blood between them, and their conduct, motivated by propaganda alone, arouses little or no interest.

In the second place, Prem Chand's failure in characterization is referable to his strong sympathies and prejudices. The blind old beggar, Sūr Dās, is idealized to the point of unreality. His is a thesis dressed up in human form, and then seen through an immense magnifying lens. The tendency to exaggerate is most manifest in whatever he does not like. He has no feeling for urban life and his attitude towards it is uniformly cynical and destructive. The money-grabbing lawyer in *Bāzār-e-Husn* who commences his cross-examination with a series of irrelevant questions because he has not studied his case, or greedily accepts a case when he should be tending his ailing child; or better still, that delectable adventurer, Ījād Husain, who has started an orphanage recruited out of his own children; who dodges his creditors, and later makes capital out of his National Association; the M.L.A. in the same novel who speedily reels out a series of questions for the Legislative Assembly, when asked to subscribe to the fund for the maintenance of Saman—are all caricatures, sometimes highly amusing. To the same category belongs the old Mr. Clark who is reminiscent of Dickens' caricatures.

33

Prem Chand's besetting fault in his passion for reform. He can rise to moderate heights when his enthusiasm is controlled by his intellect. But once it gets the upper hand, there is no depth of bathos or boredom but Prem Chand would plumb it. The Viney-Sophia and Clark episodes are, in all conscience, droll. To find Prem Chand at his most naïve, one has only to read the second half of *Gosha-e-'Āfiat*, where the story is wrenched from its natural course, at the cost of all probability, to present the idyllic picture of a happy village under a humane landlord.

Prem Chand's easy conscience is again evidenced by the way in which he gets rid of his supernumeraries and sometimes his leading characters, even when this is not required by the plot. The specific in such cases is suicide. Recollect how many characters in his novels make a violent exit! Others become ascetics, which is as good as dying so far as the story is concerned. Drollest of all, in this respect,

is the death of old Mr. Clark who, vexed by his son's extravagance, strikes his head against a wall and dies either of injury or old age. Even more melodramatic is the death of John Sevak who is found dead under the statue of Sūr Dās which he went out to pull down under cover of night—an example of nemesis which might please the groundlings, but which is most ludicrous, and shows Prem Chand at his funniest.

34

That Prem Chand is more interested in ideas and theories than in men and women is proved, among other things, by the titles of his novels. They indicate the controlling ideas which give coherence and a representative character to the experiences embodied in them. And yet, as descriptive of their contents, the titles are far from adequate. *Bāzār-e-Husn* deals with the life of a group of people, with Saman as the central figure; it touches brothels, from which it derives its title, only incidentally. Similarly, the title, *Chaugān-e-Hastī*, covers, strictly speaking, one episode only—the clash between villagers and the usurping rich. *Gosha-e-Āfiat*, too, as a title, is a misnomer, for it does not comprehend the storm and stress which characterizes the greater part of the novel, and refers only to the Utopian world at the end of the book with which the visionary in Prem Chand consoles himself. As regards *Gaī-dān*, its significance does not dawn upon the reader till the last paragraph of the novel has been read, and then how insignificant it turns out to be! From the above it is clear that Prem Chand writes with his eyes fixed on certain social problems or ideas. Social reformer that he is, life for him tends to integrate itself into sociological patterns.

35

To Prem Chand goes the credit not only of having resumed the broken thread of fiction after a lapse of nearly two decades, but also of having given the short story a permanent place in Urdu literature. True, the short story of a sort did exist before him, but it was mostly exotic or romantic, dealing with stereotyped motives—crime, mystery, or romantic love in a foreign setting, principally Persia, Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt. Prem Chand's stories reflect the social reality of the day; he writes of the life which had come under his observation.

And yet Prem Chand has not the detachment of a realist. He does not paint the world he knew, with its men and women, for its own sake. He is primarily a reformer and a humanitarian with a strong sense of social anomalies, domestic muddles, religious pharisaism, class distinctions: and his pictures of life strongly reflect this bias. This influences not only his choice of material; it affects his characterization also. Prem Chand deals with the exceptional—both in situation and character—the bane of all propagandist or didactic fiction. He is fond of piquant contrasts; his people are either good or bad. But human nature is neither wholly good nor bad; it is a mixture of the two. Let a writer succumb to propaganda or, for that matter, to any theory of life, and he will begin unconsciously to substitute imagination for observation. For a man with a socialist bias, for example, all officials are corrupt, the priests hypocritical or dishonest, the rich wicked and inhuman, and the poor long-suffering and gentle. Driven by his theories, such a person simplifies life and writes according to a formula.

What is the net result of this reformist zeal in Prem Chand? In one word, exaggeration. He has an incurable tendency towards the stagy and the melodramatic. His pathos is overdone and is almost always sentimental. He exaggerates the goodness of the poor, and his treatment of them is idealistic. He sees no good in the urban rich, hence his cynicism. In *Mantar*, a well-to-do doctor who is about to go for his evening constitutional refuses to attend an untouchable's son who, consequently, dies. Some days later, when the doctor's son is bitten by a poisonous snake, the untouchable, a snake-charmer by profession, overcomes his dislike of the doctor so far as to save his son's life, stealing away after his ministrations without disclosing his identity. The story, as is clear, is based on parallelism and contrast: parallelism in situation and contrast in character. Extremely simple by nature, Prem Chand was suspicious of the sophisticated, and, therefore, incapable of studying them from a sympathetic angle. He has no liking for lawyers, government officials, judges, capitalists; and in his stories they are generally presented as foils to the poor.

In story after story he unmasks the cupidity and hypocrisy of priests. His pictures of them are palpably overdrawn. In *Mandir*, an outcaste mother who implores permission to worship Thākur Jī to save her ailing baby's life, is refused admission into the temple by the priests, although they are eager to negotiate a false amulet with her. A lurid story of this type is *Najāt* (note the irony of the title)

in which he exaggerates both the sufferings of the poor and the cruelty of the Pundit and his wife. It is not enough that the victim (Dukhī Chamār) is exploited by the Pundit (Ghāsī Rām); he must also die. It is not enough that he should die, his body must lie rotting to be devoured by dogs and jackals. Prem Chand writes in a simmer of feeling. Significant, in this respect, is the title of this story and the names of the characters in it.

Another thing that often militates against Prem Chand's realistic intent is that his people do not talk in character. In *Ākhirī Tuhfa*, the remarks of Māltī are keyed up to an intellectual level very much above the mind of a vulgar uneducated girl. His dialogues lack the broken rhythm of life, and frequently there are long impassioned speeches which remind one of a debating society.

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Although Prem Chand is not above creating monsters, his view of human nature is inclined to be kindly. Our primary impulses, he believes, are good; only they have been overlaid with the evils of a corrupt system. Appeal to a man's goodness and he will rise to the occasion. In the story called *Kaffūra*, the clerk who has embezzled the superintendent's money, on the latter committing suicide in despair, is genuinely repentant, and makes amends by supporting the family of the deceased. The theme of *Ghās Vālī* is the conversion of a landlord by a simple village girl, whom he had pursued with evil intentions. A typical story of the kind is *Imān kā Faislā*. A dishonest agent, having misappropriated his master's money, gets a favourable verdict from the court; but when appealed to to tell the truth, outside the court, he confesses his guilt 'in a trembling voice'. Prem Chand has a pathetic faith in the goodness of human nature which does great credit to his feelings. But it leaves one with the important question: when is Prem Chand right? Is he right when he idealizes human nature, or when he is in his darker moods? Prem Chand's fiction shows that he had an oppressive sense of the evils of life, but he was too good-natured to think evil of others; and from this viewpoint his optimism is a reflex of his own good nature. On the other hand, his optimism may be no more than escapism, the author creating a substitute world to get rid of the magnitude of evil with which he is faced.

Our first impression of Prem Chand is that he is a modern: he would scrap the past and throw it in the dust-bin. But in his sentimental moods he is not above idealizing and romanticizing it. His distrust of the townsman—to which I have already referred—is in its essence a distrust of modern civilization; and it is only in the relics of the old order—in villages and homely cottages—that he finds hearts of gold behind simple and homely exteriors. He would have told you with much earnestness that these people still retained their essential goodness and were unspoiled by civilization. The strong predilection for the past is seen potently at work in his deep interest in the transmigration of souls, telepathy, clairvoyance, and renunciation. It is on account of this subconscious persistence of old views that his attitude towards the modern educated woman would appear shallow, even reactionary to some. In his short stories he is wont to present her as a foil to the self-effacing long-suffering women of the old type. It may be argued that in these stories, in which he is sentimentalizing the old ideal of womanhood, he is in reality presenting what he actually saw; but this is not the case. Prem Chand's presentation is not detached; it is evident that his heart goes out to such women, and he writes of them with approval. Take, for instance, his *Kash-makash* in which the engagement between a low-caste student and the daughter of a courtesan is broken off, not by the opposition of the boy's parents, as might be expected, but by the young man's own scruples. From this story there clearly emerge two Prem Chand ideas; first, that the so-called educated, in spite of their superficial veneer of culture and advanced ideas, are cowards and philistines at heart: they vaunt their emancipation but fail to rise to the occasion at a critical moment; the second, that the Indian woman's perverse faithfulness and self-castigation, even when she is maltreated, is a thing to be admired. Now there is much to be said for this angelic perversity of women, but one feels, all the same, that a writer who wishes to strike at tyranny, as Prem Chand does, should go to work in a different spirit. Prem Chand's effusive approval of such women shows that his subconscious mind is at odds with his conscious mind. This conflict between the intellect and emotions is, as we have seen, a special feature of the new age, and Prem Chand's modernism is often in full retreat before his old-world sympathies.

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He is at his best in a few stories written in a minor key. There is not much external action here. They deal with some revealing moments in one's life, moments when the crust of conventional opinion breaks under the stress of a sudden illuminating experience, and we are brought closer to the heart of humanity. Such moments are a turning point in life, and henceforth we must go a different way. Such a story is *Ranshni*, in which a high government official, caught in a storm, is brought to a sense of grace by witnessing the nobility of motherhood and deep-seated humanity in a poor woman of the soil. This means that his best stories are those which have a true psychological interest.

39

Mirza Muhammad Rusva (1858-1931), the writer of half a dozen short novels, is known today by his *Umrao Jan Aida* (1899), the life story of a courtesan in Oudh before its annexation by the British. The story is in the first person and tells how the heroine, the daughter of poor but respectable parents, is abducted and sold to a procuress who trains her for prostitution. This is made the occasion for a full-length picture of the life of prostitutes, their education, habits, and customs, their clientele, and their dealings with them.

Did Rusva know that on venturing on this theme he was running counter to the puritanism of the day? At any rate, there are mitigations, compensations. Before the end is reached the didactic element begins to emerge, and so Rusva can indulge his taste for the unconventional without flying into the face of public opinion. It is of a piece with this attitude that he is discreetly reticent throughout, and the risky episodes incident to the narrative are brief and colourless. There may also be a psychological reason for the author's reticence, namely that the narrator is a woman, and a repentant woman at that, and the remorse she feels colours the entire narrative.

Towards the end, the didactic element becomes more pronounced. 'Then came a time when I began to look down upon the disgraceful profession of a prostitute, and at last renounced it, depending on dancing and music or taking service with noblemen to make a living. Gradually I gave up this also.' She is now filled with remorse and is full of praise for her fortunate sisters in wedlock.

There is an episode describing a visit to her native town, during

which she ventures to call on her parents. Here was material for a powerful scene; but *Rusva* has thrown it away by indulging in conventional sentiments and heroics, her parents wishing that she had not been born, and her brother attempting to kill her by placing a dagger melodramatically at her throat. He could have done no more, we realize, for, if he had driven in the fatal weapon, there would have been no *Umrāo Jān Ada* to tell the story.

Towards the end, she contrasts 'good women with fallen creatures and describes their differences', adding that 'courtesans like me should envy them and their pride in virtue'.

As if this were not enough, she is made to address a warning to her erring sisters:

I take this occasion to advise those women who follow my calling. O, you foolish prostitutes! Never deceive yourselves with the idea that someone will ever love you truly. Your lover who is passionately fond of you will desert you ere long. He cannot be constant to you, and you don't deserve it either. The joy of true love is the privilege of those pure women who, having pledged their troth to their husbands, never waver in their loyalty. God will not bless you with such happiness.

For all the praise lavished on it, *Umrāo Jān Ada* does not strike me as a successful novel. The characters are indifferently portrayed, and there are very few gripping moments in the story. As a novel it is inferior to *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* to which it bears resemblance. Like Defoe, *Rusva* paints the shady side of life to point a moral, but his story lacks the dash and sparkle of Defoe, and his copious moral seasonings—a sop to his middle-class readers—take the bite out of his story and make it rather savourless. The great interest aroused by it in some circles is due to the fact that it satisfies the reader's suppressed cravings, or to put it differently, by admiring its unconventional theme the reader releases his own rebellious impulses.

XVII

MUHAMMAD IQBĀL, CHAKBAST, HAFĪZ JALANDHARI

BORN in Siālkot, on 22nd February 1873, Iqbāl was educated at Murray College, Siālkot, and Government College, Lahore, where he took his M.A. in Philosophy in 1889. Among the earliest as well as the most formative influences affecting him were first, a thorough grounding in Persian literature and mysticism which he owed to the stimulating contact of Sayyid Mīr Hasan, one of his teachers at Murray College, and second, a taste for philosophy acquired under Professor Arnold at Government College.

Iqbāl became vocal early. Most of his early poems were published in the *Makḥzan*, a popular monthly edited by Shaikh ‘Abdul Qādir. A still more effective outlet for his poetic energy was provided by the Anjuman-e-Himāyat-e-Islām, whose annual meetings at Lahore attracted large Muslim gatherings. His *Nāla-e-Yatim*, *Abr-e-Gubar bār*, *Tasvīr-e-Dard*, *Naya Shivāla* and *Tarāna-e-Hindī*, the last three celebrating Indian nationalism, were all recited at its annual meetings.

In this poetry, written before he left for England, he is still in an experimental stage, there being distinct echoes of the English Romantics and the Persian mystics in it. Partially derivative as some of these poems are, they are not without a clear foreshadowing of his later philosophy.

After some tentative work as a lecturer at Government College, Lahore, Iqbāl left for Europe for higher studies in philosophy and law (1905). He received an honours degree in Philosophy from Cambridge, a Doctorate in Philosophy from Munich, and qualified as a barrister in London. On his return to India in 1908, he joined Government College, Lahore, as part-time lecturer in philosophy and English. But soon afterwards he gave this up to practise as a barrister in Lahore, a profession which he pursued till 1934, when chronic bad health compelled him to retire.

The three years’ stay in England had far-reaching effects on his outlook. In the first place, he got out of conceit with nationalism.

Religious questions, so far ignored, now pressed on him for solution. The Islamic world was then threatened with imminent dissolution. Turkey was in the throes of disintegration, Persia the target of Russian ambition, while a few years later the Turko-Italian War was to ring the death-knell of Tripoli. Beneath all this despoilment, Iqbāl saw one great evil at work—nationalism, which henceforth became his *bête noire*. As an offset against European aggression he advocated Pan-Islamism as the political goal of the Islamic world, and it long remained the burden of his poetry. The chief poems of this period are: *Shakva* (1909) and *Sham'-o-Shā'ir* (1912), both recited from the platform of the Anjuman-e-Himāyat-e-Islām. *Javāb-e-Shakva* was composed for the Balkan Relief Fund in November 1912. Two poems which conclude the first period of his Urdu poetry, *Khizr-e-Rāb* and *Tulū'-e-Islām*, appeared in 1921 and 1922 respectively, and record his reactions to World War I and its aftermath. The former poem is in a lower key and unmasks and dissects European civilization and statesmanship. The latter strikes a jubilant note. It came at the heels of the famous *coup d'état* which led to the withdrawal of the Allies from Constantinople.

A little after the composition of *Sham'-o-Shā'ir* Iqbāl began to change over from Urdu to Persian. This was not, as some think, because Urdu was unequal to the strain put upon it by his feelings and imagination. Some of the poems in *Bāng-e-Dirā* are a standing refutation of this view. The real reason seems to be that Iqbāl was eager to secure a wider public than the one warranted by Urdu-speaking Muslims. He felt that he had a message for the Muslim world, and this, he believed, could only be delivered in a language which had long enjoyed the position of the *lingua franca* in the Islamic countries of Asia. Whether it really gave him a wider public than before is debatable, for if he could number Persians and Afghans among his readers, he had to forgo a large section of his readers in India, whose knowledge of Persian was not equal to an understanding of his Persian works. His Persian poetry, however, gave him a certain amount of recognition outside India.

To the student of psychology this switch over to Persian is symptomatic of an unconsciously waning interest in India and things Indian, and a growing absorption in Islam. He must have come to feel that Persian was somehow nearer to the heart of Islam than Urdu.

Iqbāl's two *masnavīs* in Persian—*Asrār-e-Khudī* and *Rumūz-e-Bekhudī*, appeared in 1915 and 1918, respectively. The translation of

the former by Professor Nicholson of Cambridge University, in 1920, brought him a rather tardy recognition in the form of a Knighthood in 1922. His subsequent Persian works are: *Payām-e-Mashriq*, a collection of odes and poems in response to Goethe's *Westostlicher Divan* (1922), *Zabūr-e-'Aiam*, or the Psalms of the East (n.d.), and *Jāved Nāma* (n.d.), a work in the style of the *Divine Comedy*.

When Iqbāl resumed Urdu again with *Bāl-e-Jibrīl* (1935) and *Zarb-e-Kalīm* (1936), he was an exhausted man. They bear distinct signs of a waning inspiration; but they are not without some interest as a direct exposition of his maturer views.

Iqbāl's life has little interest outside his poetry. In 1928 he was invited to Madras, Mysore, Haidarābād, and Aligarh to deliver a course of lectures which were later printed under the title: *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (published again by Oxford University Press in 1938). He went to England in 1931 and 1932 as a delegate to the Round Table Conference to frame a new constitution for India. On his way back, he visited Rome, Egypt, Palestine, and Spain. His poetry bears the impress of these visits.

He was the advocate of Pakistan, and in his Presidential Address at the meeting of the Muslim League in 1930, he elaborated his idea of Pakistan as a solution of the political deadlock in India.

He died in Lahore on 21 April 1938.

The breakaway from the Middle Ages, which found its first characteristic expression in the writings of the Aligarh school, reached its apogee in the philosophy of Iqbāl. In him the old values are all transvalued. The cornerstone of his philosophy is the affirmation of Self or Personality. 'This luminous spark of consciousness,' writes Iqbāl, 'which illuminates all human desires, feelings, ideas'¹ is not an appearance, or an illusion, or an evil, as was thought in the past, but the living principle of the universe, the foundation of all human endeavour and achievement. Life, according to him, is not a completed act; it is an evolutionary process, a becoming, not a being; and the only way to quicken it is to cherish, enrich, and enlarge Personality. But how can Personality be enriched and developed? Iqbāl is of the opinion that it grows by the incessant creation

of ideals and desires. Nations and individuals grow as long as they are in a state of tension—keen-edged and eager for battle; relax the tension and they would revert to the passivity of the animal and vegetable world. As viewed by Iqbāl, while the decline of the East during the Middle Ages had been chiefly due to the prevalence of systems of thought, pantheistic or pessimistic, which denied the reality of Self or treated it as evil, the rapid advance made by the nations of the West since the Renaissance has been due to their love of action, spirit of adventure, and intellectual curiosity: in a word, the affirmation of Personality.

Iqbāl judges all religions, philosophies, institutions, and arts by this new principle. All those systems and institutions which stimulate effort, uphold and strengthen life, and brace us for action are good; those which lead to inertia, and thereby weaken Personality, are evil. This urge that makes for the expansion or growth of Personality he called '*Ishq* or love, and comes very close to Bergson's *Élan Vital*.

Apart from the influence of systems of thought which consider life evil, the negation of life, according to Iqbāl, manifests itself in the form of *su'āl* (asking). It is a comprehensive term and includes whatever is borrowed, whatever we do not owe to our own efforts, be it money, property, rank, or knowledge. All passive acceptance is bad, we are taught, because it sends our energies to sleep. Another form of *su'āl*, according to him, is *imitation*. We imitate, he explains, because we lack the courage and resourcefulness to accept the challenge of life and prefer the beaten path to the hazards of an untried way. Biologists tell us that the instincts which were once useful for the self-preservation of the race become hindrances after a given stage has been passed. In the same way, we are handicapped by obsolescent forms and useless conventions. Imitation may enable a man to meet a stereotyped situation, but in the untried situations incident to a life of action and adventure, it will be entirely ineffective.

According to Iqbāl, life is at its strongest when it is least handicapped by useless survivals, and defeatist philosophies. It is a state militant, an arena for endless unfolding and growth. What will life be like if we continue to cherish the sacred flame of life inside us? No one can tell. But this much is sure: life will continue to grow in strength, and man's domination may one day transcend the globe itself. This is the burden of the greater part of his poetry and is the theme of the following *ghazal* in *Bāl-e-Jibrīl*:

تاروں سے آگے جہاں اُور بھی ہیں ابھی عشق کے امتحاں اُور بھی ہیں
 تہی زندگی سے نہیں یہ فضائیں یہاں سینکڑوں کارواں اُور بھی ہیں
 قناعت نہ کر عالم رنگ و بو پر چمن اُور بھی آستیاں اُور بھی ہیں
 اگر کھو گیا اک نشیمن تو کیا عنم مقاماتِ آہ و فغاں اُور بھی ہیں
 تو شاہیں ہے پرواز ہے کام تیرا ترے سامنے آسماں اُور بھی ہیں
 اسی روز و شب میں الجھ کر نہ رہ جا کہ تیرے زمان و مکاں اُور بھی ہیں

Beyond the stars there are still other worlds;
 There are other fields to test man's indomitable spirit.

Not devoid of life are these open spaces of heaven;
 There are hundreds of other caravans in them as well.

Do not remain contented with this sensible world;
 Beyond it there are other gardens and nests as well.

If thou hast lost one nest, what then?
 There are other places for sighing and wailing as well.

Thou art an eagle; thy business is to soar in the empyrean;
 Thou hast other skies in which thou canst range as well.

Be not entangled in this world of days and nights;
 Thou hast another time and space as well.

In the early poetry of Iqbāl, this philosophy takes the form of a contrast between the life of nature and man. Nature, he tells us, is inert and passive, rolling on from day to day without a single spark of self-consciousness. Man, on the other hand, is progressive and self-conscious, impelled for ever by an irresistible curiosity to know things and subjugate them to his service. It is this instinct for self-development harnessed to the intellect that raises man above nature as the greatest creative force in the world.

There are certain poets who idealize nature and yearn for her quiet and repose, sick of the pressure of life. Iqbāl is not without fugitive moods, when he lets his fancy run on certain happy aspects

of nature. This view of the life of nature comes home to him in his early poetry when he strives to rise above religious and racial considerations into the religion of humanity. Nature, he feels, has no prejudices and preferences; she treats all her children alike. Man, on the other hand, is the creature of prejudice and passion; he falls into factions and creates false barriers. Nature knows no such passions; she is, therefore, the best exemplar of goodwill and tolerance. But such moods are transitory and, frequently as he dallies with the sentiment, he ends invariably by establishing the superiority of man over nature. This faith in the creative energy of man is implicit in *Gul-e-Rangīn*, *Aftāb-e-Subh*, *Mauj-e-Daryā*, *Sarguzasht-e-Ādam*, and several others. It is worked out fully in the last where the entire fabric of civilization and philosophy is ascribed to man's instinctive curiosity. The contrast between man's freedom and nature's passivity is also the theme of *Insān*. Man, he tells us, is the only exception to the necessity pervading the universe. By dint of his intelligence, foresight, and strength, he has risen superior to circumstances and moulded the world to his requirements.

3

Historically, the philosophy of Iqbāl records the utmost swing of the pendulum from the other-worldly ideals of the Middle Ages. The centre of gravity has shifted from the pantheistic dreams which spellbound medieval thinkers to the reality and worth of life here below, and a faith in man's unbounded capacity for self-improvement and power. This is the message of the Renaissance, and Iqbāl is its greatest exponent in Urdu poetry.

The Renaissance was a great liberating force, and Iqbāl's dynamic attitude and his optimism are, in the first instance, traceable to it. But the peculiar form his philosophy came to have is traceable to Bergson's *Creative Evolution* and the writings of Nietzsche.

As viewed by Professor 'Abdul Hakīm,² the most pervasive influence on him has been that of Nietzsche. How far he was influenced by him would be made clear by a brief outline of the latter's philosophy.

Nietzsche was an evolutionist who set no limit to the growth and

power of man. He believed that man had not come into his own as yet because of the enervating philosophy of Christianity—its faith in humility, obedience, pity, charity, resignation, forbearance, and passivity of every kind. This he calls the ethics of *slaves*, a system evolved by the subject people which they adroitly imposed on their Roman masters to emasculate them. Over against this is the ethics of *masters*, with its watchword of independence, courage, self-confidence, self-effort, progress, and achievement. The application of this latter code to life, writes Nietzsche, will produce the Superman, who will outstrip the present-day man as we have outstripped the ape. The whole trend of his philosophy is aristocratic and individualistic. We do not live for others, he says, but for ourselves: the ultimate unit is the individual. The weak, he teaches, should be ruthlessly eliminated, for to help the weak and the unfit is to throw gratuitous difficulties in the way of evolution. In the scheme of life as seen by him, God plays no part. Man will not march forward, he says, as long as he is handicapped by faith in Him.

It is evident that Iqbāl could not go all the way with Nietzsche without ceasing to be a Mussalman. But his philosophy of development appealed to him with great force, and he made it into an instrument for the revival of his decadent community. When he asks us to inure ourselves to hardships, as in

اگر خواہی حیات اندر خطر زمی

Dost thou want Life? Then live dangerously.

he has in mind the famous dictum of Nietzsche: Live dangerously; erect your cities beside Vesuvius. Send your ships into unexplored seas. Life is a state of war.

Nietzsche accepts Darwin. The French scientist and philosopher, Bergson, rejects Darwin's theory of environmental control, which makes for determinism, by expounding his theory of *Élan Vital*, or the inner compulsion that neutralizes the force of environment, and makes progress possible. The difference between Bergson and Darwin is this: for the latter the organism is the helpless sport of the forces operating upon it. Bergson gives the organism itself a share in the direction of its own development. According to him, creatures change because they want to. In other words, he gives a mind to the universe which Darwin had banished from it. If man is at the mercy of his environment, his progress is only an accident, and the conclusion is determinism. But if he can subdue his surroundings, as

Bergson maintains that he can, then evolution becomes at once the ally of hope. Just as nineteenth-century Europe had been depressed by the influence of Darwinism, in many cases misunderstood,³ so Iqbāl, like many European writers, e.g. Wells, Meredith, and Shaw, has been fired by the optimistic philosophy of Bergson.

With regard to the influence of European philosophy on the development of Iqbāl's thought, there are two irreconcilable views, expressed with equal dogmatism. There are, in the first place, the true blue Iqbālites or the ecstatic disciples. These, who take their cue mostly from the poet himself, are inclined to minimize the influence of the West on him, and trace his philosophy to Islam. Their acknowledgements of his borrowings from the West are evasive and grudging. Others maintain with equal vehemence that his philosophy is a hodge-podge of some European philosophies, notably those of Bergson, Nietzsche, and Fichte.

This is no place for an exhaustive study of the subject, nor am I fit to undertake it, having no more than a 'pennyworth poor' of philosophy. But the question is not so difficult as it looks at first sight, and even a layman, by sailing between the Scylla and Charybdis of extreme views, may arrive at a conclusion which would be acceptable to all except zealots and iconoclasts.

To begin with, I should like to point out that Iqbāl himself was chary of acknowledging his indebtedness to modern European thought. It made him wince to hear that he had borrowed from Bergson and Nietzsche. Now, it is possible to look at the question from two different points of view. In the first place, it is not unlikely that the nervousness with which he denied all indebtedness to the West pointed to the subconscious fear that the critics were on the right track. On the other hand, it may be a reaction from the exaggeration of the critics who held that his philosophy was wholly derivative. 'He owes everything to the West,' said the critics. 'I owe nothing to the West,' retorted the poet in a passion of perverse denial; one categorical statement calling forth the other. Personally, I think there is something hasty and puerile in the charges of plagiarism and its refutation. Originality, whether it be in literature or philosophy, does not mean creating something out of nothing. We do not live in a vacuum; we live in a medium which is soaked and shot through with influences of all kinds, from past and present, from far and near, and in which action and reaction is inevitable. Genius, as such, means, among other things, an unusual power of assimilation. We hear it said almost every day that Dante sums up the Middle

Ages, and that Goethe is the continent and summary of the modern world. Surely we mean praise when we say this.

It is interesting to note that as late as 1916, Iqbāl's attitude remained fairly objective. The Foreword to *Asrār-e-Khudī* is full of admiration for the dynamic West. 'The philosophical people of the East', he writes, 'are inclined to favour the conclusion that Self is a fiction created by the imagination, and salvation lies in freedom from its trammels. On the other hand, the practical taste of Western people guided them to such conclusions as were compatible with their nature.'⁴ The decline of the East, in his opinion, is mainly due to philosophies which preached the negation of life. The Hindu philosophers argued: 'Since the Ego is determined by action, there is only one way to be free from it, namely, by cessation from activity.'⁵ As regards Islam, it lost its practical spirit when the pantheistic philosophy of Ibn-e-'Arabī became an integral part of it. When this philosophy permeated the masses, 'it rendered the entire Islamic world unfit for action'.⁶

Iqbāl's diagnosis of the decline of the East is correct and so is also the remedy prescribed by him. 'The Western people', he writes, 'are distinguished in the world by their power of action; and for this reason a study of their literature and philosophy is the best guide to an understanding of the significance of life.'⁷ He praises the Germans for being the first to insist on the reality of the Ego. But his special praise is reserved for the realism of the English; and he concludes with the remark: 'Hence English philosophers have an outstanding place in the literature of the West and are worthy of being studied by Eastern people, so that in their light, they may overhaul their philosophical systems.'⁸

Henceforth Iqbāl's efforts were directed towards discovering these ideas in the Koran, the Traditions, and Arab and Persian writers. But although he did not search in vain, he is sometimes tendentious, and those who are competent to speak on the subject often hesitate to accept his conclusions. Let us hear what Professor 'Abdul Hakīm, a very sympathetic critic, has to say about his philosophy of Time:

. . . the verses about the nature of Time and the flux of Life are based on Bergson's philosophy. It is a pity that in his *Asrār-e-Khudī* Iqbāl has made no mention of Bergson and versified his entire philosophy of Time by ascribing it to a saying of Imām Shāf'ī. Imām Shāf'ī's saying embodies no philosophy. The philosophy which Iqbāl has borrowed from Bergson and presented as an exposition of the said saying would have been above

the understanding of the Imām himself. His religiousness and piety studiously avoided such reflections. This philosophy of Bergson is more akin to atheism than the affirmation of faith in God.⁹

5

An absolutist in mental processes, Iqbāl is a pragmatist in action. His intellect and feelings seldom go together, but pull in different directions. His revolutionary ardour, his passion for 'fresh woods and pastures new', is for ever crossed and thwarted by a transverse current of nostalgic yearnings, so that he is a conservative and revolutionary at the same time. While he yearns for an ampler and freer life unimpeded by forms and conventions—relics of the dead past—he is no less conscious of the fact that the old moulds, once broken, may not be easily replaced. Nay, he frequently feels that the old moulds are the best we can ever have. Hence we find that the poet who is not above twitting God for the unprogressive order of Nature, with

طرح نوافکن کہ ماجدّت پسند افادہ ایم این چہ حیرت خانہ امروز و فردا ساختی

Lay the foundation of another world, for we are in love with newness;
What is this wildering show of days and nights which thou hast created?
who greets the rising sun of Socialism in the impassioned verses

ہم نشینِ افسانہ بیدار می جمہور چھیڑ قصہ خواب آورِ اسکندر و جم کب تک
توڑ ڈالیں فطرتِ انساں نے زنجیریں تمام دوری جنت سے روتی چشمِ آدم کب تک
آفتاب تازہ پیدا بطنِ گستی سے ہوا آسماں ڈوبے ہوئے تاروں کا ماتم کب تک
ہمتِ عالی تو دیا بھی نہیں کرتی متبول غنچہ ساں غافل تھے دامن میں شبنم کب تک
باغبانِ چارہ فرما سے یہ کہتی ہے بہار زخمِ گل کے واسطے تدبیرِ مرہم کب تک

O friend, tell the story of the awakening of the masses;
How long wilt thou beguile thyself with the sleep-inducing story of
Jamshed and Alexander?

Man's nature has broken through all the chains that kept it in bondage;
How long could Adam's eye shed tears at the loss of paradise?

Out of the womb of existence a new sun is born;
How long will the sky mourn the loss of the sunken stars?

Those endowed with soaring aspirations do not accept even the river;
O unmindful of thy powers, how long wilt thou fill thy skirt with dew drops?

To the anxious gardener, says the springtide (which brings flowers and fruit in its train),
How long wilt thou try to obtain ointment for the wounds of the rose?

and who advises us to destroy all that is outmoded, all that is incompatible with development of Personality, in

گفتند جهان ما آیا بتو می سازد
گفتم که نمی سازد گفتند که برهم زن

They asked: 'Does our world agree with thee?'
'No, it does not,' said I. 'Then destroy it,' said they.

is also the ecstatic advocate of Islamic Revivalism and exhorts his compatriots 'to be intent on the melody of the past in the tumult of the present'. His *Muslim* is a reasoned exposition of these divided sympathies.

If we turn from his poetry to his prose, where he is at close grips with facts, and where his intellect leads the way and not his emotions, as in his verse, we find that his passion for change is more imaginary than real. So great is his caution that he hesitates to break with the past even on minor points. The following shows that he is no blind revivalist:

. . . a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection constitute no remedy for a people's decay. 'The verdict of history', as a modern writer has happily put it, 'is that worn out ideas have never risen to power among a people who have worn them out.'¹⁰

Wisely and beautifully put! Iqbāl admires Turkey for her break with the past and, after a general survey of the conditions obtaining in the Islamic world, writes:

We heartily welcome the liberal movement in modern Islam; but it must also be admitted that the appearance of liberal ideas in Islam constitutes also the most critical moment in the history of Islam. Liberalism has a tendency to act as a force of disintegration, and the race-idea which appears to be working in modern Islam with greater force than ever may ultimately

wipe off the broad human outlook which Muslim people have imbibed from their religion.¹¹

In the same lecture he observes:

The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life is, in my opinion, perfectly justified. The teaching of the Quran that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems.¹²

Should Muslims then, go ahead with reform? This is his answer:

Unfortunately, the conservative Muslim public of this country is not yet quite ready for a critical discussion of 'Fiqh', which, if undertaken, is likely to displease most people, and raise sectarian controversies.¹³

So intent is he on maintaining old forms that he fights shy of even minor changes with regard to the externals of life.

In the evolution of such a society even the immutability of socially harmless rules relating to eating and drinking, purity or impurity, has a life-value of its own, inasmuch as it tends to give such society a specific inwardness, and further secures that external and internal uniformity which counteracts the forces of heterogeneity always latent in a society of a composite character.¹⁴

How are we to reconcile this extreme practical caution with his speculative boldness? I believe Iqbal's love of action was that of a person who was essentially a thinker and, as such, had little aptitude for action. It was besides, like Hamlet, a case of thinking too precisely on the event, which impaired his power of action, so that he was an apt illustration of his own verse:

بے خطر کود پڑا آتشِ نمرود میں عشق عقل ہے محو تماشاے لبِ بامِ ابھی

Love jumped fearlessly into the bonfire lit by Nimrod,
But the (calculating) intellect is still watching the show from the housetop.

Nietzsche, it is said, came to worship the soldier because his health would not allow him to become one. He once remarked: 'What I am not that for me is good and virtue.' The reader will also recall General Wolfe, who said: 'I would prefer being the author of that poem (Gray's *Elegy*) to the glory of beating the French tomorrow.' From this viewpoint Iqbal's apotheosis of action was a

speculative person's exaltation of what he most lacked himself and what he most admired in others.

Strictly speaking, Iqbāl's confidence in the creative power of man was much less than his faith in the garnered wisdom of the past. He feared that the thin edge of reform would confound the old values. He was also unwilling to hurt the feelings of the conservative. What led him to withdraw his criticism of Hāfīz from his *Asrār-e-Kbudī*? Not the fact that he had been wrong in animadverting against the former's defeatist philosophy. He expunged the offending passage because he felt that by attacking the popular idol he might lose his hold on the people and thus fail in his mission as their guide and teacher.

Ideologically the poetry of Iqbāl falls into two unequal periods. He began as an enthusiastic exponent of nationalism, but recanted it soon after and remained for the greater part of his life an unwearied exponent of Pan-Islamism. So great was his revulsion that he came to treat his nationalist verse as no better than literary wild oats or a boyish escapade, and made cautious excisions from it before giving it to the people.

Briefly speaking the new position is this. Nationalism is narrow and insular; it divides man from man and nation from nation. It is, moreover, materialistic, putting a premium on ties of race and blood, which should be subordinated to the spiritual bond provided by Islam.

Pan-Islamic, inasmuch as it aims at promoting unity and sense of brotherhood among Muslims all over the world, is in reality as old as Islam itself. It is said to derive its sanction from a saying of the Prophet to the effect that all Muslims are brethren. It was at best a tepid dogma and remained inoperative for centuries except during the Crusades when a common danger led to a concerted action among some Muslim countries.

What led to its revival towards the end of the nineteenth century, and made it something like a living force, especially among Indian Muslims, was European aggression against Muslim states in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Iqbāl felt, like Jamāl-ud-Dīn Afghānī before him, that the only effective way to stop the victorious tide of European conquest and to maintain the integrity of Muslim states was a concerted action on their part. It was essentially a defensive measure

and its object was to unite all Muslim states in one common defensive alliance. Iqbāl was its high priest in India, and in impassioned verses he exhorted the Muslims to override their racial and geographical barriers, to forget that they were Arabs, Indians, Turks, Persians, and, with the Ka'ba as their centre, become the citizens of the international organization called Islam.

This was the positive side of Pan-Islamism. But since the danger that threatened Islam was European nationalism, an important aspect of it was the denunciation of the selfishness and greed of European nations. Soon after, this condemnation of European countries was rationalized and nationalism was denounced as a sinister ideology—a religion of hatred which sanctified aggression, war, and economic exploitation of the weaker nations of the world.

It goes without saying that there is much to be said for Iqbāl's arraignment of European imperialism. More than ever before, we feel today that patriotism is not enough, and nothing but an international organization of some sort can save us from race extermination. But is nationalism evil *per se*? And further, is Pan-Islamism, as expounded by Iqbāl, a practical creed? These are important questions and deserve a detailed discussion.

To begin with, nationalism is not such a monster as he paints it. A healthy interest in the affairs of one's country, goodwill towards one's neighbour, and a desire to understand his viewpoint and cooperate with him for the attainment of common benefits is a creed as useful as it is practical. And in the second place, is not a healthy and vigorous nationalism the first requisite of a sound international system? Just as a family merges into a tribe, and a tribe in turn into a nation, similarly, to be the member of a federation, there must first be a nation. It may be mentioned here, incidentally, that Iqbāl overlooked a very important thing while recommending his ideology to Indian Muslims, namely, that before they could enter into an effective partnership with the rest of the Islamic world, it was imperative that they should be an independent political unit.

It is possible from an academic point of view to wax eloquent on Pan-Islamism. But what would make any wise and sincere Pan-Islamist halt are the numerous difficulties in the way of the realization of the ideal. Scattered all over Asia, Africa, and a part of Europe, how are all Muslim nations to be welded into a political unity?

Iqbāl tells us that Pan-Islamism is a recoil from politics to religion. But are not religious sentiments, when they degenerate, as mischievous as political ones? If political sentiments degenerate into jingo-

ism and earth-hunger, so does religious fervour sink into mere fanaticism and war on the infidels; and history will furnish as many examples of one as of the other. True, Iqbāl is alive to these dangers and rules out aggrandizement and selfishness from his Pan-Islamic scheme; but will not nationalism purged of its grosser elements be equally commendable? Iqbāl, in his advocacy of Pan-Islamism, is trying to show up a corrupt political system saddled with all its shortcomings by contrasting it with an ideal and untried system. This is not fair to nationalism.

Pan-Islamism is therefore pure moonshine, an iridescent bubble with which Iqbāl used to beguile his visionary moments. We are coming to realize more and more that what the world lacks is spiritual values—sympathy, humanitarianism, love; and when at last these have superseded selfishness, nationalism will not be the monster that it is made out to be today; and as long as they persist there will not be much to choose between nationalism and a so-called international system like Pan-Islamism.

Strange as it may sound, it appears that Iqbāl had completely changed his views in regard to Pan-Islamism towards the end of his life. He explained to one of his interlocutors in 1934:

This doctrine [Pan-Islamism] was formulated by a French statesman, whose name I cannot now recall, with a view to inflaming the feelings of European nations against Muslim countries and by frightening them of Muslim aggression to give them an excuse for interference in their countries. English statesmen themselves gave currency to it in India in order that Muslims should not attend to internal political questions, and should dissipate their power of action by lip-sympathy with the Muslim world. They wished that Indian Muslims should not be practical but theoretical.¹⁶

It is interesting to know that this emphatic disclaimer belongs to the period when the idea of Pakistan was already in the air, and when Muslim statesmanship in India was at long last becoming practical.

The final word in regard to Iqbāl's Pan-Islamism remains to be said. There is no doubt that he preached it to safeguard the integrity of Muslim countries; but there was another subconscious reason which, quite apart from his resentment against European aggression, may have stiffened his attitude still more against nationalism. As I see it, his Pan-Islamism was quite as much a recoil from nationalism in general, as from Indian nationalism. Like all important Muslim leaders and thinkers before or contemporary with him, he must have

been made to feel by the irresistible logic of facts that the freedom of India would not mean the freedom of Indian Muslims; that there were age-long and irreconcilable differences between Hindus and Muslims which Indian nationalism would fail to solve. I feel that his tirades against nationalism, his contention that Islam was international were, in part, an unconscious plea to justify his secession from an impossible political position in India. Iqbal's political creed was nebulous, as I have tried to show above; but the danger that drove him to embrace it, and idealize it by giving it a religious colouring, to make it the more acceptable to his co-religionists in India, was real. But no sooner was the idea of an independent Muslim state presented to him than he accepted it with avidity; and his first reaction was to abjure Pan-Islamism as fantastic and futile, an invention of European statesmanship, which anyone who has even a rudimentary knowledge of European statesmanship in India knows only too well that it was not.

It is astonishing how little has been written about the formal aspect of Iqbal's poetry. With most writers his philosophy is what matters, and they have worn it threadbare among themselves. In what follows I shall very briefly examine his diction and imagery.

Iqbal's poetry, as is well known, is heavily charged with the erotic diction and imagery of the *ghazal*. The question before us is this: How does Iqbal use the language inherited from the past? Does he try to tame it to his individual requirements, or does he come under the category of poets of low vitality who, in the words of Professor Lowes, 'ensconce themselves like hermit-crabs, generation after generation, in the cast-off shells of their predecessors'.¹⁶

Iqbal does not try to winnow and purify the diction that has come down to him. He takes it as he found it, and uses it without much consideration of its propriety. His mind runs in grooves. His memory is stocked with a limited number of words, metaphors, and similes borrowed from his predecessors, and he employs them again and again. 'The problem of style', writes Pater, 'is to find the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay, or song, absolutely proper to the single mental presentation or vision within.'¹⁷ Iqbal does not usually mould his language to his individual use. He follows the line of least resistance, abounding in clichés, faded words, and dead

metaphors. Here are a few examples of his predilection for certain images and phrases:

آئینہ سا شاہدِ قدرت کو دکھلاتی ہوئی

Mirror-like, reflecting the sweetheart nature.

رشکِ جامِ جم مرا آئینہٴ حیرت نہ ہو

The *mirror* of my wonderment may be better than the cup of Jamshed.

مرا آئینہٴ دل ہے قضا کے رازدانوں میں

The *mirror* of my heart knows the secrets of fate.

میرے آئینے سے یہ جو ہر نکلتا کیوں نہیں

Why does not this virtue leave my *mirror*?

تجھے بھی صورتِ آئینہ حیراں کر کے چھوڑوں گا

I shall plunge you in wonder like a *mirror*.

مگر دیکھی نہ اس آئینے میں اپنی ادا تو نے

But you did not see your beauty in this *mirror*.

تعصب چھوڑنا داں دہر کے آئینہٴ خانے میں یہ تصویریں ہیں تیری جن کو سمجھا ہے بُرا تو نے

Give up your prejudice, O thou ignorant, for in the *mirror*-chamber of the world,

What thou abhorrest are thine own pictures.

کفِ آئینہ پر باندھی ہے او نا داں جنا تو نے

To the palm of the *mirror* thou hast applied henna.

آئینہٴ ٹوٹا ہوا عالم نما ہونے تو تھا

The broken *mirror* of my mind was about to reflect the world.

نئے جو ہر جوئے پیدا مرے آئینے میں

The *mirror* of my mind acquired new virtues.

آئینے کے گھر میں اور کیا ہے

What else is there in the house of the *mirror*!

کچھ مکدر سا جبین ماہ کا آئینہ

The *mirror* of the moon's forehead is somewhat beclouded.

بہ ۱ بہ ۱

The palm tree is adorning itself, with the rivulet as its *mirror*.

روح کو سامانِ زینت آہ کا آئینہ ہے

The *mirror* of a sigh is a means of adornment for the soul.

غازہ ہے آئینہٴ دل کے لئے گردِ ملال

For the *mirror* of the heart, the dust of sorrow acts as rouge.

آئینہٴ روشن ہے اس کا صورتِ رخسارِ حُور

The *mirror* of the stream is shining like the face of a houri.

کیسے بے تاب ہیں جوہر مرے آئینہٴ میں

How restless is the light of the atoms in the *mirror* of my mind!

اس کے آئینہٴ ہستی میں عمل جوہر تھا

In the *mirror* of his life, action was the light.

موجِ دُودِ آہ سے آئینہٴ ہے روشن مرا

My *mirror* is bright with the wave of the smoke of a sigh.

—o—

خاتمِ دستِ سلیمان کا نگین بن کے رہا

It became the *precious stone* for Solomon's *signet*.

ہویدا تھی نگینے کی تمنا چشمِ خاتم سے

The desire for the *precious stone* was evident from the eye of the *signet*.

خاتم ہستی میں توتا باں ہے مانند نگین

In the *signet* of the world thou art like the *precious stone*.

ہے نگین دہر کی زینت ہمیشہ نام نو

The *precious stone* of the world is ever adorned with a new name.

جس سے تیرے حلقہ-خاتم میں گرد و تھاسیر اے سلیمان تیری غفلت نے گنویا وہ نگین

That which imprisoned the sky in the sphere of thy power,
Thou hast lost that *precious stone*, O Solomon!

-o-

مطمئن ہے تو پریشاں مثل بو رہتا ہوں میں

Thou art at peace; I am restless *like fragrance*.

چھوڑ کر مانند بو تیرا چمن جاتا ہوں میں

I am leaving thy garden *like fragrance*.

چھوڑ کر گل کو پریشاں کاروان بو ہوا

On leaving the rose, the caravan of *fragrance* scattered itself.

وہ گل رنگیں ترا رخصت مثل بو ہوا

That colourful flower of thine departed *like fragrance*.

مثل بوئے گل لباس رنگ سے عریاں ہے تو

Like the *fragrance* of the rose, thou art free from the dress of colour.

خاموش صورت گل مانند بو پریشاں

Silent like the rose, and diffused like its *fragrance*.

نکل کے باغ جہاں سے بزمگ بو آیا

Thou left the garden of the world *like fragrance*.

چھپا کر اپنے دامن میں بزمِ موجِ بولے چل

Bear me stealthily in thy skirt like the wave of *fragrance*.

—○—

سنگلہ ہے مثلِ سپرِ لالہ صحرا ترا

Thy flame is like that of the *wild poppy*.

لالہ صحرا جسے کہتے ہیں تہذیبِ حجاز

The *wild poppy*, by which we mean the Arab civilization.

In the world, I am like the *wild poppy*.

نازشِ موسمِ گلِ لالہ صحرائی تھا

The pride of the springtide was the *wild poppy*.

—○—

موجِ مضطر توڑ کر کرتی ہے تعمیرِ حباب

The *restless wave* breaks the water to make bubbles.

موجِ مضطر ہی اسے زنجیرِ پا ہو جائے گی

The *restless wave* will become a chain for its feet.

موج گہرائیوں میں مستِ خواب

The *restless wave* lay lost in sleep somewhere at the depth of the river.

موجِ مضطر کس طرح بنتی ہے اب زنجیرِ دیکھ

Watch how the *restless wave* turns into a chain for its feet.

—○—

تُو تجلی ہے سراپا چشمِ بینا کے لئے

Thou art a light for the *seeing eye*.

وہ حُسنِ کیا کہ جو محتاجِ چشمِ بینا ہو

It is a poor kind of beauty that is indebted to the *seeing eye*.

بہشتِ دیدہٗ بینا ہے حُسنِ منظرِ شام

The beauty of the landscape at evening is a paradise for the *seeing eye*.

محرومِ تماشا کو پھر دیدہٗ بینا دے

Vouchsafe once more the *seeing eye* to one lost in apathy.

جو ہے پردوں میں نہاں چشمِ بینا دیکھ لیتی ہے

That which is hidden behind curtains, the *seeing eye* can behold.

ہے غبارِ دیدہٗ بینا حجابِ مگھی

The curtain of self-knowledge beclouds the *seeing eye*.

—o—

جس طرح عکسِ گلِ ہوشبنم کی آرسی میں؛

As the flower is reflected in the *ārsī* [a small mirror worn in a thumb ring by Indian women] of the dew.

پہنا کے لال جوڑا شبنم کی آرسی دی

Dressed it in scarlet, and gave it the *ārsī* of the dew.

نروں کے آئینہ میں شبنم کی آرسی میں

In the mirror of the streams and the *ārsī* of the dew.

It is interesting to note that with Iqbāl *mauj* (wave) is almost always *mauj-e-mux̄tar* (the restless wave), *dīda* (eye) *dīda-e-bīnā* (the seeing eye), and *khīrām* (gait) *khīrām-e-nāx̄* (coquettish gait). By far the most overworked word in *Bāng-e-Dirā* is *hangāma* (tumult or commotion). It is the maid-of-all-work in his vocabulary and has been worked to death.

Another result of this indiscriminate use of erotic imagery is the discord between the feelings and experiences to be communicated and the associative life of the imagery. A classic example of this is the following apostrophe to God in *Shakva*:

تیری محفل بھی گئی، چاہنے والے بھی گئے شب کی آہیں بھی گئیں، صبح کے نالے بھی گئے
 دل تجھے دے بھی گئے اپنا صلہ لے بھی گئے اہ کے بیٹھے بھی نہ تھے اور نکالے بھی گئے
 آئے عشاق گئے وعدہ مندا لے کر
 اب انھیں ڈھونڈ چیراغِ مرغِ زیبا لے کر

Thy assembly is broken up and gone are Thy lovers,
 Gone, too, are their nocturnal sighs and their morning groans.
 They gave their hearts unto Thee, and this is the reward they got—
 They had hardly taken their seats when they were turned out.
 Thy lovers came, but they were put off with the promise of tomorrow:
 Seek for them now with the lamp of Thy bright face.

There is very little to suggest God here. It is the picture of a typical courtesan, her innumerable lovers, their groans and sighs, their ejection, and her consequent remorse. Thought and language do not blend here, as they always do in good poetry; the stronger of the two, the imagery, has compelled thought to adjust itself to it with disastrous results.

Here is another example of his inappropriate imagery:

صف بستہ تھے عرب کے جوانانِ تیغ بند تھی منظرِ خنا کی عروسِ زمینِ شام

The intrepid Arab warriors stood ready for fight in battle array;
 The bride of the land of Transoxonia was awaiting the application of
 henna.

The line is from a battle-piece. But the imagery is not epical, as it ought to be. It is softly erotic, and instead of witnessing a grim action the reader finds himself in my lady's boudoir.

It will be found that Iqbāl is most satisfactory when he looks straight at his subject, as in *Vāḍida Marhūma kī Yād*. Here he is certainly more poetic and therefore more effective than in *Sham'-o-Shā'ir* where he tries to peer through the cloudbanks of his conventional imagery. The latter poem is diffuse and vague, for his

imagery being fixed and inelastic refuses to adjust itself to his thoughts, so that he cannot say what he would like to say but what his imagery permits him to say.

No less pronounced is his predilection for frigid personifications which give a false air of life to abstractions. A few examples will suffice.

لئے ہے پیرِ فلکِ دستِ رعشہ دار میں جام

The old man of the sky was holding the cup of wine in its trembling hand.

صدیوں سے سن رہا ہے جسے گوشِ چرخِ پیر

The song which *the old man of the sky* has been hearing for centuries.

جب پیرِ فلک نے ورقِ ایام کا اُلٹا

When *the old man of the sky* turned over a leaf of time.

دل بے تاب جا پہنچا دیارِ پیرِ سنجر میں

My restless heart arrived in the land of *the old man of Sanjar*.

زمعہ ۱۱، سہ ماہ

This is the teaching of *the old man of the West*.

پیرِ گردوں نے کہا سن کے کہیں ہے کوئی

The old man of the sky listened and said: someone is here.

—○—

اس محلِ خالی کو پھر شاہدِ لیلے دے

Once more give the *sweetheart Laila* to this empty litter.

شاہدے کے لئے جملہ جامِ آئینہ

For the *sweetheart wine*, the canopy of the cup is the mirror.

آئینہ سا شاہدِ قدرت کو دکھلاتی ہوئی

Holding the mirror up to *sweetheart nature*.

شاہدِ مضموموں تصدق ہے ترے اعجاز پر

The *sweetheart of subject-matter* is stricken dumb by thy power of expression.

ناستہ شاہدِ رحمت کا حُدی خواں ہونا

To be the minstrel of the she-camel of the *sweetheart of divine grace*.

شاہدِ قدرت کا آئینہ ہو دل میرانہ ہو

My heart should be something more than a lump of flesh; it should be the mirror of *sweetheart nature*.

لیلیٰ شب کھولتی ہے آکے جب زلفِ رسا

When the *Laila of night* loosens its long tresses.

لیلیٰ ذوقِ طلب کا گھر اسی محفل میں ہے

The *Laila of the desire for achievement* has its house in this litter.

رہتی ہے قیس روزِ کر لیلیٰ شام کی ہوس

The Qais of the day pursues the *Laila of the evening*.

محمل میں خاموشی کے لیلائے ظلمت آئی

Into the litter of silence came the *Laila of darkness*.

Most of these occur in poems in which he is not at his best. It seems quite plausible to infer, therefore, that he resorts to them to eke out the paucity of his inspiration.

I have tried to establish two things in the foregoing discussion: first, that style is the use of language which enables a poet to express his thoughts and feelings in all their subtle shades and nuances. Without this there can be no access to his inner life. It has been my contention that Iqbāl's use of language is conventional. I have also established that his thoughts lose much of their force and freshness in transmission because of the conventional phraseology in which they are presented. But conventional imagery and diction are not bad in themselves. It is possible to use them creatively, and Iqbāl often succeeds in doing so. *Tāra, sitāra, firdaus, paimāna, maikada* are

among the commonplaces of the old diction and have shed their vivid associations, but note their evocative power in the following:

جس طرح تارے چمکتے ہیں اندھیری رات میں

تھی تارے کی طرح روشن تری طبع بلند

پھر اسی کھوئے ہوئے فردوس میں آباد ہیں

تو نہ مٹ جائیگا ایران کے مٹ جانیسے نشترے کو تعلق نہیں پیمانے سے

Iqbāl's strongest point is his flaming ardour. However commonplace and insensitive his diction may occasionally be, his red-hot feelings burn themselves through its texture and make themselves felt; and this is particularly so when by a happy coincidence his language is in harmony with his feelings. But since this union of a high poetic sensibility with appropriate form is, at best, fortuitous, the beauty of his verse is felt only intermittently. Nor is it only that his imagery and diction are at fault. His ear, too, though good, is not always certain. His *Abr* which contains these exquisitely modulated lines:

سیاہ پوش ہوا پھر ہاڑس بن کا

گرج کا شور نہیں ہے خموش ہے یہ گھٹا عجیب میکہدہ بے خروش ہے یہ گھٹا

has also the following sprawling line:

نہاں ہوا جو رخ مہر زبیر دامن ابر ہوائے سرد بھی آئی سوار تو سن ابر

Or take these stately lines from *Kinār-e-Rāvi*:

سکوتِ شام میں جو سرد ہے راوی نہ پوچھ مجھ سے جو ہے کیفیتِ کردل کی

پیامِ سجدہ کا یہ زیر و بم ہوا مجھ کو جہاں تمام سوادِ حرم ہوا مجھ کو

کھڑے ہیں دور وہ عظمتِ فزائے تنہائی منارِ خواب گہ شسوارِ چغتائی

and compare them with

رواں ہے سینہ دریا پہ اک سینہ تیز ہوا ہے موج سے ملتا جس کا گرم ستیز

the second hemistich of which is pure padding.

Apart from his intensity, to which a reference has already been made, a very strong point of his is his mastery of versification. The smoothness and flow of his verse is remarkable; and in his more impassioned moments the reader is carried on irresistibly as over a swift and stately current. Not the least among his assets is his mastery of rhyme, which anyone who reads his *Shakva*, or the concluding part of *Javāb-e-Shakva*, and stops to analyse the source of his poetic enjoyment, can see for himself. Iqbāl writes out of a full heart. The strength of his emotions is almost inexhaustible, and however excessive the demand he may make on them, the supply does not run short.

His style is sufficiently varied. Some of his poems coruscate with imagery; others are simple and restrained; others still, swift and racy. The best in my opinion are those which have no superfluous ornament. From this viewpoint '*Aql-o-Dil, Sarguzasht-Ādam, Chānd aur Sitāre, Ek Shām, Shab-e-Mi'rāj* are better than *Ek Ārzū* and *Jugnū*. The latter at best are pretty. And the same is true of his best passages and lines. They are a forthright expression of his thoughts and feelings, and show a delicate sense of language:

یہی آئینِ قدر ہے یہی اسلوبِ فطرت ہے جو ہے راہِ عمل میں گامزنِ محبوبِ فطرت ہے

This is the law of nature, this is her ancient jurisdiction;
He who betakes himself to a life of action is her favourite.

دہر میں عیشِ دوام آئیں کی پابندی سے ہے موج کو آزادیاں سامانِ شیون ہو گئیہ

In this world everlasting joy lies in observing the laws of nature;
The lawlessness of the waves ends in mourning (they break into a shower of drops).

علم کی سنجیدہ گفتاری بڑھاپے کا شعور
مذنیوی اعزاز کی شوکتِ جوانی کا غرور
صحبتِ مادر میں طفلِ سادہ رہ جاتے ہیں ہم
زندگی کی اوج گاہوں سے اتر آتے ہیں ہم
بے تکلف خندہ زن ہیں فکر سے آزاد ہیں
پھر اسی کھوئے ہوئے فردوس میں آباد ہیں

The sobriety given by knowledge, the wisdom which comes with old age,
The splendour of worldly greatness, and the pride and power of youth—
From the high places of the world we come down,
And feel and act like children in our mother's company;
Carelessly we laugh, and are free from worries,
And are dwelling once more in the same lost paradise.

موت تجدید مذاقِ زندگی کا نام ہے

Death is only another name for the renewal of the zest for life.

فطرتِ ہستی شہیدِ آرزو رہتی نہ ہو خوب تر پیکر کی اسکو جستجو رہتی نہ ہو

Life is for ever driven forward by desire,
It is ever intent on discovering a more perfect form for itself.

سنگِ رہ سے گاہِ بپستی گاہِ طنکراتی ہوئی

Now slipping past the impeding boulder, now dashing itself against it.

وہ درختوں پر تفکر کا سماں چھایا ہوا

The trees standing wrapt in thought.

مسلمان نہیں خاک کا ڈھیر ہے

The Muslim is no longer alive, he is a heap of dust.

گراں خوابِ چینی سنبھلنے لگے ہمالہ کے چشمے اُبلنے لگے

The Chinese immersed in heavy sleep are coming out of their torpor,
The Himalayan springs are once more in flood.

نوگرہ پرواز کو پرواز میں ڈرکچھ نہیں موت اس گلشن میں سبز سنجیدان پر کچھ نہیں

Those who are used to flying run no risk in so doing,
What is death but the temporary folding of wings in this garden!

بندگی میں گھٹ کے رہ جاتی ہے الِ جو لم اب اور آزادی میں بحرِ بیکراں ہے زندگی

In servitude life is reduced to a tiny stream,
In freedom it is like the boundless ocean.

اگر عثمانیوں پر کوہِ غم ٹوٹا تو کیا غم ہے کہ خونِ صد ہزار انجم سے ہوتی ہے سحر پید

If the Turks were overwhelmed by disaster—what then?
The morn is born of the death of millions of stars.

جہاں میں لہلہاں صورتِ خورشید جیسے ہیں ادھر ڈوبے ادھر نکلے ادھر ڈوبے ادھر نکلے

In this world the true believers live like the sun;
When they set in this world they are born in the other; when they set there they rise here.

The finest of his short lyrics is *Sitāra*. Brief as it is, it does not strike me as perfect. I find the six facile rhymes in the first stanza a little too cloying, and variety of some sort would have given it a finer cadence. But there are few things in Urdu poetry so poignantly suggestive as

ماہِ حُسن کی کیا مل گئی خبیر تجھ کو

The second stanza which enunciates his philosophy is perfect, and the fourth hemistich

فنا کی نیندِ زندگی کی مستی ہے

with its subtle alliteration is a marvel of condensation and beauty. The last line makes a beautiful falling curve, so that the poem seems to fade into silence.

The lyric is so moving because the poet has interwoven some of the deepest thoughts and feelings of humanity with regard to life, beauty, and death with his philosophy. It is the enunciation of his philosophy against the background of the eternal facts of life that make its study so memorable an experience.

The most satisfactory of his longer poems, apart from *Vālida Marhūma kē Yād*, is *Tulū'-e-Islām*. Here a live coal from the altar has touched his lips and he glories in the vision opening out before him—the vision of the re-birth of Islam of which Mustafā Kamāl's *coup* was, in his opinion, the promise. In the vibrancy of its emotions it reminds one of the vision of the New Jerusalem, coming from heaven, granted to John of Patmos.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And the

ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Nor can the lover of his poetry pass lightly over the famous passage in *Sāqī Nāma* in which he enunciates his evolutionary philosophy. It is not an integral part of the poem and does not blend with the rest of it. But it is a splendid *tour de force*, and as a piece of impassioned philosophy reminds one of Lucretius at his best.

Judged by results the adequacy of Iqbāl's Persianized diction cannot be questioned. It is the most appropriate dress for his lofty thoughts. It would appear to some that his failures were due to his Persianized diction, but this would not be a correct inference. It is rather a defective ear, or mere carelessness, or the occasional inability to subdue his language to his peculiar requirements, that account for his failures.

موجب تکسین تماشائے شہرارِ جنتہ
ہونہیں سکتا کہ دل برق آشنا کرتا ہوں مئی

is not poor because it is over-Persianized; rather it shows a defective ear. The sonority of some of his most impressive lines is due to his stately diction, as in the following:

پھراٹھی ایشیا کے دل سے سچنچاری محبت کی
زمین بولا نگہِ طلسم قبا یا بن تاراری ہے

It is generally thought that as a stylist Iqbāl has inherited the mantle of Ghālib. This view appears to me to be a superficial one, justified, if at all, by his predilection for Persianized vocabulary which he no doubt shares with the latter. Otherwise, his style offers a striking contrast to that of Ghālib. The latter is usually compressed, close-packed with thought, pithy, even to the point of obscurity, ingenious, conceited, in a word 'metaphysical'. Iqbāl, on the other hand, is rhetorical, expatiating like an orator to large imaginary audiences, especially in his longer poems. These poems in their style clearly show the subconscious influence of the occasions for which they had been composed. Addressed to large emotional audiences they reveal the style of the public speaker or orator. He must declaim, revolve round his subject and present it in a variety of ways, and beat out his ideas thin; for compression would be out of place here. The quality of his rhetoric differs. It sometimes sinks into fanfaronade as in the early *Tasvīr-e-Dard*, but rises to genuine eloquence in *Tulū'-e-Islām* and *Vālida Marhūma kī Yād*. As such, Iqbāl is

in reality an inheritor, if for the moment we forget his Persianized diction, of the rhetorical traditions of Anīs and Hālī. In all three, at their best, the style responds naturally to the theme, or the occasion for which the poem was composed, and for some of their best effects they rely upon expansion, not compression. Iqbāl has, however, a wider range and in some of his lyrics is restrained to the point of austerity.

8

When Iqbāl came back to Urdu with *Bāl-e-Jibrīl* and *Zarb-e-Kalīm* after a long immersion in Persian, he was a changed man. In the first place, it is evident that he has written himself out. The signs of fatigue are on him, and he is writing out of an exhausted mind. The lyrical rapture is no more. He is more restrained, more austere, no doubt; but he is also more didactic and less musical. The loss is set off by some gain—he is simple even to bareness. In his earlier poetry he would sometimes tear the passion to tatters, and take grandiloquence for passion. It is no less clear that, like the dyer, his hand has been subdued to what it worked in. The prolonged use of Persian has left a permanent mark on his diction. Urdu has drawn heavily on Persian, but one wonders if, despite Iqbāl's authority, the following would pass muster as good Urdu with any discriminating reader:

انہیں کا کام ہے یہ جن کے جوصلے ہیں زیاد
 اک اضطرابِ مسلسلِ غیاب ہو کہ حضور
 مقامِ عقل سے آساں گزر گیا اقبال
 عشق ہے صہبائے خامِ عشق ہے کاسِ الکرام
 بادہ ہے اسکا حقیق تیغ ہے اسکی صیل
 تو خالقِ اعصار و نگارِ زندہ آفات
 جسے فرنگی مقاموں نے بنا دیا ہے قمارخانہ

مرا سبُوچہ غنیمت ہے اس زمانے میں کہ خانقاہ میں خالی ہیں صوفیوں کے کدو
 زجاج کی یہ عمارت ہے سنگِ خارہ نہیں
 تُو ہے تو آباد ہیں اجڑے ہوئے کاخ و کو
 اے انفس و آفاق میں پیدا ترے آیات
 خالی ہے کلیموں سے یہ کوہ و کمرورنہ
 نوش آگئی ہے جہاں کو فتلندری میری
 اس کی زمین بے حد و اس کا اُفق بے ثغور

The influence of Persian on his mind can also be measured from another aspect. It is well known that the *qāfiya* has a pivotal position in the *ghazal*, and some *ghazal* writers use it to display their mastery of Urdu idiom, e.g. Zauq and Dāgh. In Iqbāl the pivotal position is given to Persian substantives and qualifying words. This reliance on Persian vocabulary, as on a crutch, is evident in nearly three-fourths of his *ghazals* in *Bāl-e-Jibrīl*. Here are the *qāfiyas* of two *ghazals* in it. The reader can verify this in numerous other cases.

آرزو مندی - خداوندی - پابندی - دیر پیوندی - آشتیاں بندی - فرزندى -
 الوندى - سخا بندی -

درویشی - خویشی - ناخوش اندیشی - گوسفندی ویشی - بے نیشی - بیشی -

On the other hand there are some *ghazals* in it where he uses Urdu with discrimination and beauty, e.g.

اپنی جولان گاہ زیرِ آسماں سمجھتا میں اب دگل کے کھیل کو اپنا جہاں سمجھتا میں

دل سوز سے خالی ہے نگہ پاک نہیں ہے پھر امیں عجب کیا کہ تو بیباک نہیں ہے
خرد کے پس خبر کے سوا کچھ اور نہیں ترا علاج نظر کے سوا کچھ اور نہیں

The best of them has already been quoted on page 361.

Iqbāl is the hierophant of a new order. He made it his business to bring out the dynamic side of Islam just as medieval thinkers had stressed its pietistic and other-worldly nature. In his reconstruction of Islam he was influenced by the general spirit of the Renaissance in the East as well as by the writings of Bergson and Nietzsche. Iqbāl is not in advance of his age as is often maintained. He is a characteristic product of it. His revivalism, i.e. his faith in the universality of the fundamentals of Islam, his belief in the spirituality of the East and his objurgations against Western materialism and imperialism—in all these he was influenced by those who had been in the field before him: an impressive array including such leaders of thought as Sayyid Ahmad and his colleagues, Salāh-ud-Dīn Khudā Bakhsh, Amīr ‘Alī, and among Hindus, Svāmī Vivekanand and Svāmī Dayanand, who had a programme similar to his, and whose work had a profound effect on the outlook of their community. The same is true of his Islamic internationalism. Picked up out of the old armoury of Islamic dogmas, it had all been brandished about in a spectacular way by Jamāl-ud-Dīn Afghānī. Iqbāl took it from him and gave it a new edge. His optimism is the result of his unshaken faith in the survival value of Islam as a way of life; but here, too, he was heartened by the nascent revival in the Islamic world. He does not think ahead of his day, therefore, he thinks in terms of it, that is to say, to meet the challenge of the present. He has been acclaimed as a modern by some and dubbed as a reactionary by others. These are short-sighted views. Iqbāl has a strong sense of tradition, but this does not mean that he is a reactionary. Modernism does not preclude affiliations with the past; it is on the contrary a necessary condition of its health and vitality. Hence we find that although he dreams beautiful dreams about the future, he no less cherishes and loves the past. In this ambivalent attitude, this alternating impatience with and love of the past, this suspicion of and ardour for the

present, he is akin to a large number of thinkers in Asia today; and it is not so much a limitation as a sign of the width of his sympathies.

IO

Pundit Brij Narāin Chakbast, whose early death deprived Urdu literature of a very promising poet, was born at Faizābād in 1882. He was educated at the Canning College and qualified for the bar in 1908. He died of a sudden attack of paralysis in 1926. His poems were published posthumously under the title of *Subh-e-Vatan* in 1931.

Chakbast came to feel the full force of the national aspirations which the Russo-Japanese War had quickened into life all over India. There is no other poet who responded with greater enthusiasm to the new inspiration. Patriotism is only a minor note, or, at any rate, one of the notes, in the verse of most other poets. Chakbast has no other interest; he is the poet of Indian nationalism *par excellence*.

The poetry of Chakbast may well be called *Songs Before Sunrise*. His dominant mood is one of rapture: like the Welsh Bard of Gray's, he is enraptured by the glorious vision before him.

Chakbast's creed may be summed up in one word: humanitarianism. For him the highest virtue is the service of mankind, and he attacks all that may stand in its way—religious tyranny, conservatism, and conventional morality. He believes in the blessedness and reality of life, and measures it by action and effort. In other words he is a typical example of the modern mind.

The third part of *Subh-e-Vatan* is elegiac. The short pieces on the death of Ghokale, Tilak, Bishan Narāin Dar, and others, are a thing apart in Urdu poetry. They come straight from the heart and bear testimony to his hero-worship and the steadfastness of his love and loyalties. There is nothing forced in their sentiments and language. They are masculine in tone, and their grief though deep is restrained.

It was a happy instinct that led him to chose the *musaddas* as his chief form. Of this stanza he is a master like Anīs and Hālī. Chakbast's diction is chaste and occasionally felicitous; he has fluency, a careful sense of the sound and sense of words, and a mastery of rhyme. He lacks nothing but a touch of the imagination to be a leading poet.

Born in 1900, Hafīz had an uncertain career for nearly thirty years, trying in vain one profession after another to make a living. His *Naghma Zār* (1925) though well received by a few intellectuals, made no impression on the general public, and *Soḡ-ḡ-Sāḡ*, which followed in 1933, fared no better. Luckily for him, he now undertook to versify Islamic history under the title of *Shābnāma-e-Islām*. This brought him immediate recognition, and established him. The poetical career of Hafīz is an irrefutable proof of the fact that no poet or writer in this country, however real his merit, can make a name for himself, or make a living by literature, without aligning himself in some form with middle-class ideology.

Like all true poets, Hafīz looks both before and after. He has assimilated the best of the tradition in the midst of which he grew to poetic consciousness, and then added something of his own to it to enrich and amplify it. This extension is technical, pertaining, that is, to the form and style of poetry, as well as thematic. Taking the latter first, there had been little poetry of nature as such since Nazīr Akbarābādī. Iqbāl, as his early poetry shows, was not without feeling for nature, but it was gradually dominated by his predilection for philosophy, and nature is felt to be no more than a decorative adjunct or background to his speculative verse, very much as it is in the Italian paintings of the Renaissance. As a poet of nature Hafīz is uniformly detached and sensuous. He loves nature for its own sake, for its colour and motion, especially the former, and his *Naghma Zār* is a picture gallery of some of its most pleasing effects. So far his themes. This modification of the existing tradition is no less evident in his diction and imagery. These are in the romantic tradition, worn threadbare by other poets, including Iqbāl, as we have seen. But Hafīz uses them with discrimination, and the impression he leaves on the mind is one of originality and freshness. In regard to his lyrical stanzas, his indebtedness to Iqbāl is obvious, as anyone who reads *Payām-e-Mashriq* may find for himself. But here, too, he gives much more than he receives. For if forms belong to those who make the best use of them, he may be said to have discovered his forms. Hafīz is, therefore, a new voice in poetry, and yet compared with the moderns, strictly so called—with their gloomy introspection, their highly concentrated style, and personal imagery—his alignment with the earlier tradition is evident.

Hafīz's joy in nature is genuine though not deep, and it did not

survive his first surprised awareness of it. His range, too, is narrow. He has a feeling for the ordinary aspects of nature—the calm and beauty of the countryside, streams, rivers, trees, verdure—but he has no feeling for the sublimer effects of nature. But then he is to be judged by what he gives us, and there is no doubt that the best of him, though small in quantity, has a fine evocative power. His forte is personification, as in the following:

اُٹھی حسینہ سحر پہن کے سر پہ تاج زر
لباس نور زیب بر
چڑھی سراز کوہ پر
وہ خندہ نگاہ سے پہاڑ طور بن گئے
وہ عکس جلوہ گاہ سے سحاب نور بن گئے
نوائے بویبار اُٹھی
صدائے آبشار اُٹھی
ہواؤں کے رباب اُٹھے خوش آمدید کے لئے

Robed in light,
A golden crown on her head,
Up rose the beautiful damsel of the Dawn
And went up the mountain.

With the light reflected from her face
The clouds were all afire;
The gleam of her laughing eyes
Turned the mountains into burnished gold.

The gentle streams,
The thundering waterfalls,
And the winds holding their harps,
All rose
To salute her with their song.

The poetic impulse, so far as nature is concerned, is already on the wane in *Sor-o-Sāz*. He can no longer feel in the presence of nature as

he did before. Something has gone out of him—the rapture of his first contact with it, and his utterances are derivative and flat, sometimes mere echoes of Iqbāl.¹⁸ He has also left behind him the buoyancy of his youth, and shades of the prison house are closing around him. He is in the vortex of life now, and this has given poignancy to his domestic poems. More important still are *Dara-e-Khaibar* and *Gulshan-e-Jannat*. Here we have the earlier vintage which was to ripen in his *Shāhnāma*. Finest by all accounts are *Jāg Soḡ-e-‘Ishq Jāg*, *Purānī Basant* and *Prīt kā Gīt*. Here his lyrical gift is at its best.

Shāhnāma-e-Islām has added considerably to his social status without adding much to his reputation as a poet with the *élite*. As regards its quality, I believe it is not fair to dismiss it as inferior stuff because it falls short, as some think, of the best of his lyrics. Narrative poetry is a class apart; it is to be judged by the rules peculiar to it, and is not to be underrated because it lacks the fire and music of his best lyrics, any more than a lyric is to be condemned because it falls short of narrative verse in its organization and staying power. However, we feel that narrative verse does not come naturally to him and he had to toil hard before he could get his hand in.

His lyrics are not all of a piece; not even the best of them. He usually feels as a poet, but his judgement is not equal to his feelings, and his lyrics are not free from lapses. His facile rhymes which add so much to the musical quality of his verse often lead to padding, while his lapses into conventional diction mar the total effect of some of his successful pieces. His poems are interspersed with fine passages, but he has few good poems to his credit, poems of which it may be said that they keep their level from start to finish.

Reviewing his own career Hafīz wrote:

شکیل و تکمیل فن میں جو بھی حفیظ کا حصہ ہے
نصف صدی کا قصہ ہے دو چار برس کی بات نہیں

Hafīz's contribution towards the shaping and perfection of art is not a matter of a few years, but a tale stretching over a half century.

This is true in a way. He did not storm Parnassus overnight and had to wait long before he won recognition. But in all likelihood posterity will remember him by his earlier work. Meagre as his output is, it is good in quality, and gives him a place in the evolution of Urdu poetry.

XVIII

DRAMA

MUSLIM rule in India came as a long hiatus between the growth of drama in Hindu India, and its subsequent revival, centuries later, under the impact of the West. Why the Muslims did not extend their patronage to the drama is not difficult to determine. To begin with, after its golden age under the Guptas, the drama had begun to undergo a gradual disintegration, and when the Muslims came to India, all that remained of a once great tradition were the crude performances given by the *rahs-dhārīs*, who entertained the vulgar with certain amatory episodes from the life of Krishna, interspersed with song and dance. Evidently, there was little in the drama, as it then existed, to recommend itself to the Muslims. It had also been semi-religious in character—another possible cause for its avoidance and neglect by the Muslims. But over and above these, it must always be remembered that Urdu literature was an off-shoot of Persian literature, and the Muslims in India cultivated only those forms of literature which were in line with Persian traditions.

The revival of drama in India in the middle of the nineteenth century owes nothing to the discovery of an indigenous tradition. It is essentially an exotic. But once established, it drew a large number of its themes from the classical source, although its technique remained throughout Western. The criticism which sees in modern Indian drama the revival of an old tradition is tendentious, and owes its popularity to the anti-European bias which the spirit of nationalism has engendered.

Indar Sabbā, the first Urdu play by universal consent, was written by the poet Amānat, in 1853. Was Amānat a courtier of Vājīd 'Alī Shāh, the last ruler of Oudh? Did he write the play at the instance of the king? Did Vājīd 'Alī Shāh, his courtiers, and his concubines take part in the play?—these are moot points which need not detain us in a critical study of Urdu drama.

Indar Sabbā is a musical comedy modelled on European opera. Its plot is of the thinnest. Sabz Parī, an attendant of the god Indra, has lost her heart to a mortal, Gulfām, and has him transported to her boudoir through the good offices of a jinnee, named Kāla-Dev. Gulfām rejects her advances, and at last consents to requite her love on her promising to take him surreptitiously to the court of Indra, where no mortal may enter. His presence is detected, and at Indra's order he is cast into an old well to die, while the *parī*, her wings clipped, is banished from the court. She now disguises herself as a *jogan*, and charming the ear of the god with her music, wins back her beloved.

The plot of the play is not original, as even a casual acquaintance with Indian folklore will show, and is woven out of motives once familiar to all. Nor is the synthesis his own. He has drawn heavily on two of his predecessors. Sabz Parī's love for Gulfām and the latter's imprisonment, is traceable to an almost identical episode in *Masnavī-e-Sibr-ul-Bayān*; while the secret visit to Indra's court, its detection and punishment, are motives borrowed from *Masnavī-e-Gulzār-e-Nasīm*. His indebtedness to the former is clinched by his having lifted some verses from it into the play.

The play is in rhyming lines. The first act is completely static—Indra seated on his throne, and entertained with song and dance by the fairies. It would tax the resources of a modern producer to impart life and movement to it. It should, however, be remembered that the author had no dramatic intention as such. The entertainment value of *Indar Sabbā* lay in its dance and music, its rich costumes and gorgeous setting, the plot only providing a slight dramatic motive for the musical performances of the attendant *parīs*. In fact all the *parīs*, except Sabz Parī, are not necessary to the plot and are there to give charm and variety to the court scene. The versification is unforced, but undistinguished. The whole thing is frigid, except for the mutual inquiries of the lovers in the 'restoration' scene. Here, for once, we are in the presence of genuine human feelings.

The drama thus started came to stay. The commercial possibilities of the theatre were first realized by the Pārsī community, and a number of companies were launched, at first in Bombay and Calcutta, and later in Delhi. Most of them had a chequered career; they rose with the enterprise and ability of their founders and either languished or

collapsed at their death, or split up into a number of rival companies, each financed and directed by some well-known and ambitious actor of the parent company. The first of these, with the somewhat odd name of the Original Theatrical Company, was started by Seth Pestonjī Frāmjī. On its founder's death it split up into two companies. Thus was laid the foundation of the Theatrical Company, owned by Ballīvāla, which set up its theatre in Delhi. Ballīvāla was a comic actor of distinction and made a name for himself all over India. A disastrous trip to England practically ruined the company, but it struggled to its feet in India, and finally collapsed with the death of its founder in 1914. Kāusjī, another notable actor of the Original Theatrical Company, started the Alfred Theatrical Company. Another well-known company was the New Alfred Theatrical Company.

Most of these companies were itinerant, and would go on a round of the leading cities in India, staying in each till they had run through their repertoire. As there was quite a large number of these touring companies, the chief cities in India seldom lacked dramatic fare for long.

The drama thus produced seldom attained the dignity of literature. Urdu drama may be defined as a vagabond type of literature hovering on the borders of literature proper, but seldom, if ever, crossing over into it. The playwrights were generally men of mediocre talent—literary hacks who made a living by dressing up themes given to them, in conformity with a prescribed formula. The dramatist had no independent status as such, and was ever at the beck and call of the manager, the chief actor, and the musical director, and had to shape his material according to their whims, or the requirements of the cast. As such, it is not desirable to waste the reader's time by an account of the lives of the dramatists or the names of their plays. The inquisitive reader can sample them by a casual selection. Some of the general features of the plays, however, may be set down here in brief.

The taste for drama once firmly implanted in the people, the question was how to find new and popular themes for plays. For these

the dramatists turned with an unerring instinct to the familiar themes of mythology and folklore. For people who were familiar with the stories from sacred history, and had read or heard, generation after generation, the great deeds of their heroes or the achievements of their saints—what more interesting and inspiring than to see these enacted on the stage! Of first importance, therefore, was the storehouse of Hindu mythology—*Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata* and the sacred folklore in general. Of equal interest were the themes drawn from Persian mythology and history, an intimate contact with the Muslim civilization having familiarized the people with them. Realistic drama, dealing with contemporary life and manners, was the last to appear, and though very exciting when its themes were political, it was neither so popular nor so numerous as the one pertaining to the two classes described above. Another important department consisted of adaptations from Shakespeare and Sheridan and from English novels. Most of these are adaptations only in name; in several cases the dramatists knew no English and worked up the scanty, and very often misleading, material supplied by someone familiar with the contents of the novel or the play.

Of the achievement of Urdu drama, I have given more than a hint already. Its interest was neither strictly dramatic nor literary. It was meant to be a composite performance, or a sort of variety programme. Here was music, dance, pageantry, declamation, ostensibly as part and parcel of an interesting or well-known story. The play was to be everyman's cup of tea; it was to cater for all tastes, especially that of the groundlings.

Characterization, in almost all the plays, is rudimentary. The plays are melodramas, in that character in them is always subordinate to excitement and thrilling situations. Most of them are built on a piquant contrast in character, the noble hero or the heroine in distress, confronted with the diabolical villain. Such plays were popular, as they gave much scope for hysterical speeches, rant, and frenzied acting. In others, we have epic heroes treading the stage; or saints and saintly kings who live up to their preternatural virtues, suffer spectacular changes of fortune, run through the whole gamut of misfortunes which human ingenuity can devise, climbing back, in the last scene, to their original greatness, to prove that goodness triumphs in the long run. In all these there was no scope for complex characterization. In Urdu plays pathos and passion run to a lurid excess, and humour means mere clowning.

The popular element enters these plays in another way also. How-

ever coarse the playwright may occasionally be, he may always be relied upon to insist on poetic justice, or the apportionment of reward and punishment according to the deserts of the characters. The wicked never prosper for long, and the good, however great their tribulation, eventually come out at the top. At the end there is a complete reversal of position, the harassed innocents are triumphant, while their persecutors are either repentant or in disgrace. This shrinking from realism is the pervasive feature of all popular literature, and is not confined to Urdu drama only. The ordinary man wants to have his inherited values confirmed; he does not want to be vexed with thoughts which do not fit into the framework of accepted opinion. Intent on a happy ending, the dramatist would reconstruct his original sources, and so providence tips the balance at the end in favour of Lear and Cordelia,¹ as in Cibber's adaptation.

Indar Sabbā, as we have seen, was a verse play. Subsequent dramatists struck a compromise and wrote in verse and rhyming prose combined. The persistence of this tradition may be differently explained. Urdu drama lived in a world apart, practically untouched by the literary ideals outside it. Hence, the taste for ornament and poetry which had gone out elsewhere was allowed to have full scope in it. Moreover, as the manager would have told you, rhyming prose is easier to remember than the straightforward one, and the manager was most reluctant to let go this advantage. And then what magnificent opportunities for declamation did the high-sounding verses offer! The most notable feature of this style is its artificiality, its bombast, and excessive rhetoric. The populace does not appreciate moderation, balance, or naturalism in dialogue or acting. It is always for excess in sentiment, excess in pathos, in passion, and in fun. The strong rhetorical element in drama was reinforced by some other causes also. To begin with, the Elizabethan drama which had been ransacked for themes had its influence on the pitch of the dialogue, the rhetoric of Shakespeare degenerating into the most impossible rant in the Urdu plays. Another supplementary reason may also be suggested. The Indian theatres were large wooden structures, with canvas roofs and walls poor in acoustics, containing a turbulent and noisy audience. The material conditions of the Indian theatre inhibited restraint in acting. Like a painter painting a very large canvas, the actor developed a style that suited his medium. He cultivated large sweeping gestures, and a shrill declamatory style. Both the playwright and the actor adapted themselves, in this respect, to the requirements of the stage. For the same reason, the actor was all the

time addressing the audience. These are some of the reasons why naturalism had no place in our drama.

And though the audiences would prefer a sad and lugubrious fare, the dramatist would always let in laughter and fun. These comic interludes are often not in good taste, but they tickled the audiences, made them roar with laughter, and are almost always there. This concession to the popular taste is obviously traceable to the influence of the English Romantic drama.

Why Urdu drama did not keep pace with other literary activities and was not cultivated by literary men is not difficult to explain. The drama was of the people, popular, and had to suit the taste of those it was written for. It would not, however, explain the essential mediocrity of the drama to say that it was mainly commercial. The Elizabethan drama was no less commercial. Nor would it do to put the whole blame on audiences and their poor taste. Dramatic fare must suit the palate of those who order it. And yet, in spite of all limitations, Elizabethan dramatists produced a drama of high literary merit. There is much that is popular in it—mystery, murder, sensationalism. But the popular element does not exhaust the plays, and over and above the popular element there is always a great deal for the serious reader and playgoer. The Elizabethan playwrights transcend their limitations, our playwrights either succumb to them, or have no capacity for rising above them. Before we make a scapegoat of audiences, let us remember that Urdu drama is the work of needy adventurers who did not do better because they could not.

Last though not least, it should not be forgotten that the drama was suspect with a large section of the sober, matter-of-fact middle class that looked upon the theatre as a limb of the devil. And they were not far wrong. The actors were mainly bohemians, recruited from the lower ranks of society; and they lived up to their dubious reputation. The owners of companies were often gay and licentious young men, who strove to combine business with the pleasure of an undisturbed intimacy with the *demi-monde* employed in the company. And who were their patrons? Dissolute young men, prostitutes, rakish members of the aristocracy, old roués, hooligans, and city riff-raff. Rowdyism, lawlessness, and free fights, in which anybody and everybody might join, were the order of the day. The ordinary decent-minded people gave a wide berth to the theatre.

The theatre was at the zenith of its power fifty years ago. With the dawn of the new century, the cinema began to come into its own, and the theatre entered on a period of slow but sure decline. And no wonder. The cinema gave the people, in a prodigal measure, what the theatre had given them at best in dribbles only—sensational and sentimental stories, gorgeous setting, music, dance, pageantry. In its appeal to the eye and ear, the theatre can never compete with the screen. All the same, the stage has always triumphed over its limitations by an appeal to the imagination of the spectator; its strong point always has been, and will always be, suggestion. The screen, on the other hand, exhausts the senses. Unfortunately Urdu drama seldom made an adequate use of suggestion; it rarely tried to rise above the merely visual and auditory. Hence, with the emergence of the screen with its unlimited possibilities for visual entertainment, the theatre has been all but deserted. A new literary drama which avoids the besetting faults of the old plays and explores and utilizes the strong points of the drama, may, in the course of time, come into existence; but so poor and fragmentary has been the work done in this department during the last three decades that it is not easy to be optimistic about the revival of the drama in the near future. The great difficulty in the way of a dramatic revival is that there is no genuine dramatic tradition in the country. Men of letters have in some cases come forward to write plays, but they have one and all failed. You cannot write a play like a lyric in a closet. The great dramatists all over the world have been those who belonged to the stage and knew its technique. Our modern playwrights, more often than not, write dialogues and call them plays. You cannot put them on the boards because the playwrights never visualized their persons living their parts on the stage.

XIX

JOURNALISM

PERSIAN, which had begun to lose ground with the coming of the English into power, received its death blow with the establishment of Urdu as court language in 1836. Urdu journalism is the direct outcome of this change, and the first Urdu paper immediately followed this enactment in 1836. This was the *Urdū Akhbār*, Delhi, edited by Maulvī Muhammad Bāqir, father of Maulvī Muhammad Husain Āzād. Like most early newspapers, the *Urdū Akhbār* was not merely a purveyor of news; it was also interested in literature. It came to an untimely end with the execution of its editor immediately after the Mutiny. Another newspaper which had a short run was the *Sayyid-ul-Akhhār*, edited by Sayyid Ahmad's elder brother. This paper came out in 1837. After the death of its editor, the editorial duties devolved on Sayyid Ahmad; but his other literary activities left him no time for it, and it suspended publication soon after.

So far the beginnings of Urdu journalism in northern India. The first Urdu paper in India, however, was the *Jām-e-Jahān Numā*,¹ the property of an English commercial house of Calcutta, and appeared from that city in 1822 under the joint editorship of Lāla Sada Sukh and Mr. W. E. Pearce. According to Muhammad Sa'īd 'Abdul Khāliq,² the first Urdu paper was the *Faujī Akhbār*, printed at the government press, established by Sultān Tīpū in his capital. A weekly, its distribution was confined to the army only. It pursued an anti-British and pro-French policy. After the death of the Sultān, the press was confiscated and the old numbers destroyed.

Coming back to Delhi, the number of newspapers here grew apace, and by 1852 there were as many as eight newspapers in that city alone. Of these, two monthlies, edited by Professor Rām Chandra of the Delhi College, deserve mention. These were the *Mabbūb-e-Hind* and the *Favā'id-e-Nāzīrīn*. Rām Chandra had a progressive outlook, and his articles on scientific subjects, with their mild infusion of rationalism, caused not a little stir in the city.

Urdu journalism in the Punjāb began in Lahore on 14 January 1850, with the *Koh-e-Nūr*, started by Munshī Harsukh Rā'e, a Kāyasth

of Sikandarābād. It was a weekly, and published notifications from the Government Gazette, news taken from English papers, statistics, book reviews, literary discussions, etc. It survived the shock of the Mutiny, became a bi-weekly, and, later on, a tri-weekly. For about three months, in 1888, it was a daily; but the experiment did not succeed. After 1890, it began to wane and came to an end in 1904. The *Avadh Akhbār*, a weekly started in or about 1859, in Lucknow, was interested in social reform, politics, and literature. It rapidly grew in size. Consisting originally of four, it was raised, first, to sixteen, then to thirty-two, and finally to forty-eight pages. According to Garcin de Tassy, it was the most voluminous paper of the day.

The *Avadh Akhbār* entered on the heyday of its fame under the editorship of Pundit Ratan Nāth Sarshār, who was appointed its editor in 1878.

In 1870, there appeared in Lahore another weekly, the *Akbbār-e-Ām*, which introduced a fresh element in vernacular journalism. So far the vernacular papers had been costly. The annual subscription of this paper was Rs. 2/8/- at a time when the vernacular newspaper postage had not yet come down to one pice. Its founder was a Kashmirī pundit, named Mukand Lāl, who had served as a calligraphist for the *Kob-e-Nūr*. It was a small paper, appearing in four ordinary-sized pages. Its style was simple and direct, and although it was often ridiculed by those who preferred an ornate style, yet in selecting readableness for its goal, it was following an inevitable trend in modern journalism. Again, by using cheap paper it popularized the vernacular press, and made it possible for Urdu papers to reach people of average income.

By far the most notable journalists in Urdu were Sayyid Ahmad and Sharar, whose journalistic activities have been noticed in their biographical sketches.

Started in Lucknow in 1877, the *Avadh Punch* ran uninterrupted for nearly thirty-five years under the editorship of Sayyid Sajjād Husain.

This paper was modelled on the *Punch*, and had a distinct social and political creed. Narrow and illiberal in its social outlook, and a stalwart champion of the past in almost everything except politics (where it supported the Indian National Congress) it was throughout its career the rallying point of every conservative prejudice, and was opposed among other things to religious and social reform, female education, and the abolition of purdah. Notable among its victims were Sayyid Ahmad, Hālī, and Sarshār. The onslaught on Sarshār

was born of mere journalistic rivalry. The *Avadh Punch* had maintained, not without some justification, that the ladies in *Fasāna-e-Aẓād* did not speak the language of *begums*, but used the lingo of the servants' hall. The criticism though just was needlessly violent. However, Sarshār could well take care of himself, and the result was an honourable truce. The differences with Sayyid Ahmad and Hālī were both religious and literary.

The humour of the *Avadh Punch*, besides being excessively topical, was commonplace. For all the praise lavished on it, its prose was seldom of a high order, being too self-conscious, clever, and slangy to be entirely agreeable. The *Avadh Punch* was at its best for about twelve years; then it began to decline and was closed down in 1912.

The famous *Paisa Akbbār*, started by Munshī Mahbūb 'Ālam in 1888, marks a turning point in Urdu journalism in several ways. By reducing the price of the paper to one pice, he secured for it a wider circulation than had been possible so far; while by including advertisements in it after the European model, he made journalism, for the first time, a lucrative profession in India. Apart from this, it marks the dividing line between the older and modern journalism in another way also. The old journals combined two functions in one; they were literary journals as well as newspapers. From now onwards, the literary journal and the newspaper begin to differentiate, and the newspaper becomes a purveyor of news only. Maulvī Mahbūb 'Ālam was an enterprising journalist, and was probably the first Muslim to go to England for training in journalism.

After the dawn of the present century, new stars appeared on the journalistic horizon. They began writing at the time when the cult of Pan-Islamism was at its height, and, as spokesmen of it, they acquired a hold on the Muslim reading public which very few papers enjoy in our age of divided aims and shifting ideologies. By far the most important journalist in the Punjāb in the first two decades of the present century was Maulvī Zafar 'Alī, editor of the *Zamīndār*, started in 1910.³ Maulvī Zafar 'Alī lacked balance and restraint, both as a thinker and stylist. His intellect was not above the average; nor did he improve it by reading. His style was excessively rhetorical and overcharged with Persian and Arabic vocabulary. His besetting faults (for some, his great assets) were violence and vehemence, and he wrote like a cavalry in full charge. Ever ready to break a lance with

an adversary great or small, in jest or in earnest, he was never so happy as in the thick of a fight. Consistency was never one of his virtues, and he denounced with unparalleled violence one day what he had cherished or supported the day before. And yet, paradoxical as it may sound, he was, throughout his varied career, singularly steady in his devotion to Islam. From this viewpoint, his frequent changes of front reflect the uncertain ideology of Indian Muslims. The poetical form supplied the restraint which he so conspicuously lacked, and he has done good things in verse satire which is characterized by mordant irony and Rabelaisian fun. Apart from the inherent defects of his intellect and temperament, Maulvī Zafar 'Alī gave a powerful impetus to journalism. He was the founder of Urdu journalism, and though the modern journalists no longer believe in his heavy-artillery methods, the fact remains that they have all been strongly influenced by him.

No one will accuse Maulvī Abul Kalām Āzād of a poor understanding or a shallow mind. His scholarship was adequate and he was eager to supplement it. But he was quite as destitute of self-restraint and self-criticism as Maulvī Zafar 'Alī, and was almost always carried away by his love of rhetoric and flamboyant effects. His importations from Arabic and Persian would make the most dogged Arabicist or Persianist halt. For the most part he 'writ no language'. His reputation rose with the *Al-Hilāl*, started in 1912, and the *Al-Balāgh* which followed in 1915. They deeply stirred the Muslim imagination in India, and together with the writings of Iqbāl made Pan-Islamism the political creed of the day. As a writer he possessed an extraordinary facility, but his passion for Persian and Arabic vocabulary, and his excessive and, very often, needless rhetoric had a very unhealthy influence on the style of his lesser contemporaries. And yet in his torrential periods you come across passages which have the warmth and glow of poetry, and you wonder why the man who wrote so beautifully could sink as low as he so frequently does.

3

One of the earliest of literary magazines in Urdu in the Punjāb was the *Makbzan*, edited by Shaikh 'Abdul Qādir, which enjoyed a considerable vogue and provided a necessary opening for literary aspirants of the day. The *Humāyūn* founded by Mīan Bashīr Ahmad in 1902, in memory of his father, Mīan Shāh Dīn, was cautious without being conservative in its outlook, and failed to keep pace with the

changing times. The *Ma'ārif*, the organ of the Shiblī Academy of Ā'zamgarh, is often informative, though pedestrian in style, and is more of a theological than a literary journal. The *Urdū*, a quarterly started by Maulvī 'Abdul Haq, is the literary organ of the Anjuman-e-Taraqqī-e-Urdū. Its forte is research and criticism, and has done solid work in the former. The *Zamāna* of Cawnpore, edited by Daya Narāyan Nigam, has been one of the leading literary journals in the United Provinces. Its career has been steady but undistinguished.

4

The steady increase in the number of newspapers and journals since the second half of the last century is symptomatic of the increasing literary, social, and political awareness of the Urdu-reading public. In 1849, there were as many as twenty-three papers in northern India; in 1852 the number rose to thirty-one; two years later, it was thirty-three; and in the same year there were as many as eight papers in Delhi alone. A decade or so after the Mutiny their number was legion. But it is as well to remember that this journalistic popularity and prosperity was more imaginary than real. Most of the journals and newspapers had a limited circulation, and the very best of them seldom got beyond a few hundred. The taste for journalism grew with the growth of political sentiment in the country, in general, and with the development of the Pan-Islamic sentiment among the Muslims, in particular. Zafar 'Alī Khān, it is said, was issuing as many as 20,000 copies of his paper twice a day in northern India alone; while the circulation of *Al-Hilāl* reached 25,000 during World War I.⁴

Again, though there has been a widespread taste for journalism, especially in recent times, its most noticeable feature has been mediocrity. Urdu journalism has its valleys and uplands, but no peaks. Journalism, more than any other form of literature, is addressed to the taste and understanding of the general public. Hence, its mediocrity in this country reflects the mediocrity of the reader to whom it is addressed. But surely a good journalist can improve the taste of his readers; and if our journalism has not risen above ordinary heights, it argues faults on both sides. Very few of our journalists have been men of exceptional ability and sound training. More than any other profession, journalism has been the province of the literary adventurer or dilettante. Another important factor to be constantly kept in mind while reviewing the state of our journalism, is the un-

questioned primacy enjoyed by English which has continued to absorb all along the best journalistic talent in the country.

Has, then, the Urdu journalist been at work in vain? No, he has been useful, and in several ways. The earlier journalists were not so much business men writing for a living, as teachers and reformers. In developing the self-consciousness of the people, especially their political self-consciousness, the primacy belongs to them. In this respect, they have supplemented the work of the educationist, and have carried to all and sundry what the latter could at best give to a few.

Our journalist has been as much liable to journalese as the journalists all over the world. He writes against time and cannot stop to polish and refine. And writing for the most part for those who have no feeling for the delicacies of style, he must perforce be loud and garish to make any impression at all. This much, however, is certain: the cultivation of a direct and business-like style was in the first instance his work, and his alone. He had to discard the old conventional style, because he wrote hastily and under pressure, and those he wrote for had likewise no time for the intricacies, involutions, and ornaments of the old style. Nor is it realized how much he had done to enrich Urdu with a fresh stream of technical terms in almost all branches of learning. In Europe, scientists, historians, politicians, and economists themselves coin new terms and pass them on to the journalist. With us it has been the business of the journalist to make or find their equivalents overnight. Without claiming too much for our journalists, it is safe to say that whenever a new term has come to us through an English newspaper, its equivalent in Urdu has generally been coined by a journalist.

XX

CONCLUSION

THE school of poetry inaugurated by Hālī came to an end with Iqbāl: he may be said to have added the coping-stone, and there remains nothing to add to it. In other words, the type has exhausted itself. Not that the ideal he represents has been superseded or is likely to be superseded soon. The middle class is very much alive today; but there seems nothing left for those who share Iqbāl's ideology except to repeat him; and there is no dearth of minor poets, who, having nothing to say of their own, continue to speak his language and imitate his accents. If the middle class continues to retain its power, as it is likely to do, there will be variations on the themes it favours, but no addition to them. From this viewpoint the writer of *Shāhnāma-e-Islām* is no more than a belated revivalist.

Outside the all too powerful middle-class tradition, the history of poetry is very depressing, and reminds one of Shakespeare's lines:

The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither have they vanish'd?

For over thirty years now poets have come forward, raising great hopes and then as inevitably belying them. What mysterious canker eats into their vitality and leaves them the ghosts of their former selves, it is hard to know!

Some twenty years ago, the Progressive school was launched under the most auspicious gales, and forthwith the whole atmosphere was alive with poetry of a new type. Of late it has grown rigidly separatist, reserving its membership for Communists only, but in its earlier stages it was hospitable enough to offer a place under its banner to all and sundry, and was the rallying centre of the liberals and intellectuals. The impetus it gave to literature was remarkable. A new technique, derived largely from modern English poetry, developed and perfected itself in an amazingly short time, leading to remarkable results in half a dozen poets; and it was believed that Urdu poetry had at last sloughed off its middle-class skin. It is often contended that these rising poets were silenced by the Partition of India (1947), its horrors and the depression and disillusion that came

in its wake. This inference is incorrect in so far that most of these poets had written themselves out before 1944. However, the blight that has fallen on literature since 1947 is, in some respects, the direct result of the Partition and its aftermath. The Partition has put an extraordinary premium on religiosity and intolerance, and middle-class utterances have since then acquired a stridency that recalls the Middle Ages. The intellectuals who alone can create an enlightened public opinion are timid and hypocritical, and the climate of mind thus created is not helpful to the growth of literature and the fine arts.

One thing, however, is certain. Whenever we emerge from this slough of despond, the new poets and writers will have for their guidance the technique and style evolved by these young writers who have lapsed into premature silence. The literary ideals of the Age of Iqbāl are utterly beyond resuscitation.

CHAPTER XVIII

¹ In Āgha Hashar's adaptation of *King Lear*, Lear and Cordelia appear as Qāqān and Zāra. The play ends happily.

CHAPTER XIX

¹ I owe this information to Dr. Tassadduque Husain Khālid. See also O'Malley, op. cit., p. 202.

² *Maisūr men Urdū* (Haidarābād, 1942), pp. 76-77.

³ Started originally at Karamābād by Sirāj-ud-Dīn Ahmad, Maulvī Zafar 'Alī's father, it was transferred to Lahore by the latter in 1910.

⁴ These figures are taken from *Modern Islam in India*, op. cit., pp. 235-6.

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