

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 is almost 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 *nast-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 *Bāgh-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 want of imagination.

X

THE MARSIIYA: ANĪS AND DABĪR

1

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, al-Husain started at the head of a small escort of relatives, including his harem and devoted followers, for Kūfa, on the tenth of Muharram, A.H. 61 (10 October 680). The Umayyad general in command of 4,000 troops surrounded him and 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, killed him 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 askance 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 Ōudh, 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.

2

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 Gujrat and the Deccan. But there is reason to believe that this *genre* must have developed in the Deccan much earlier, as the rulers of Bījapur and Golkonda had been Shi'ite from the commencement. The *marsiyas* that have come down to us from the Deccan are those of Sharaf, Imāmi, Riza, Ghulamī, 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 Anis and Dabīr they are what the paintings of the earlier Renaissance artists like Fra Angelico and Giotto are to the highly sophisticated art of Raphaël. 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 ہو کھا دہن ترا اصغر	آج پُر جنوں کفن ترا اصغر
حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر	لال ہے گلبدن ترا اصغر
کیوں گلے میں لوہو کے جاری دکھا	کیوں ہیں زلفاں کے بال تاوتار
حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر	تجھ کوں سوتے کیونہ لگتی بار
نیند آتی تجھے سولاؤں میں	اٹھ گلے کا لوہو دھولاؤں میں
حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر	چل ترا پالنا، بھولاؤں میں
پھر میں گودنی لئے پھروں کسوں	کیوں جدا مجھ ستیں کے تجھ کوں

کیوں نہ لاگی بلا تری مجھ کوں	حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر
اللہ اللہ کیا تجھے پالا	من میں یوں تھا کرونگی بسم اللہ
ہائے تیسرا گیا جیا بالا	حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر
کس کا اب پالنا بھولاؤں گی	لوئی دے کے کئے سولاؤں گی
کس کوں چھاتی ستیں لگاؤں گی	حیف یو بالین ترا اصغر

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 symbolic 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':

سیج بھولے کی میں بناتی تھی بالے اصغر کوں تب جھولاتی تھی
 جب دولارا وہ تیرے بھرتا دود پینے کوں میں جگاتی تھی
 پھوپھیاں صدقے اسکے جاتیاں تھیاں چاڑسوں جب اُسے اوچاتی تھی
 میں جب اصغر کوں گود میں لیتی پھولے نین آنگ میں ساتی تھی
 پانی بن خشک ہو گیا ہے شیر دیکھ اصغر کوں تلملاتی تھی

آج بالک مرا نہیں دستا باس اسکی مجھے بھی آتی تھی
 ظالماں سنگ دلوں نے مارا تیر سخت نولاد اون کی چھاتی تھی
 تیر گذرا گلے سوں اصغر کے ہائے کس دکھ سوں جان جاتی تھی
 شاہ پھر کر لے آئے اصغر کوں بولے یوکر "ایتی جیاتی تھی"
 آج جنگل میں توں اکیلا ہے رات دن میں تری سنگاتی تھی
 آج کہہ کیا پوکا روں کہہ مجھے 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 lend itself easily 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 stories of Karbalā runs parallel to the story of King Arthur, Charlemagne, and of 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 imaginative 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.

4

Structurally, the episodic character of the *marsiya* is its main defect. Our poets do not present the story of Karbalā 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 wring the hearts of the audience; for this, as I propose 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 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 on 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 fully applied. 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, servingmen, 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 about 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 *marsiya*s 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 Shi'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 amount 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 will come perilously close to losing their dignity, and therefore forfeit the reader's 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 measure up to our idea of a princess. Now the impression the study of *marsiya*s 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 at all times 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 that excessive indulgence in grief or an unusual display of sensibility is deleterious and should, therefore, be deprecated 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 our 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 the amatory was seriously limited. In fact, if we exclude Nazir Akbarabadi, 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 flexibility. 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, Hali and Chakbast bear witness to the impact of Anis. The impassioned flow of Hali's *musaddas* is akin to that of Anis, though applied to a new theme and addressed to a different audience. No less is Iqbal a follower 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 Hali and which still holds sway over a large number of the poets writing today.

8

Let us now make a brief survey of the history of the *marsiya*. In the age of Mir 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 Mir Khaliq and Mir Zamir, who were the first to rehabilitate the form. The great masters of the form were Mir Babar 'Ali Anis (1802-74) and his rival Salamat 'Ali Dabir, who was born a year after the birth of the former and survived him exactly by one year. Mir Anis was the great-grandson of Mir Zahir (satirized by Sauda), the grandson of Mir Hasan, and the son of Mir Khaliq—all poets; while the latter was a pupil of Mir Zamir, and a descendant of Mirza Ghulam Husain.

Shibli, who in his *Muwazana* rather lets his enthusiasm for Anis run away with him, maintains that there are two essentials of narrative poetry—*fasahat* and *balaghah*. 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 Anis is a much greater poet than Dabir—a conclusion which very few with a modern education would controvert.

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

صدقے گئی حبیب سے بھی کر لوشورت

صدقے کئے فرزند پھوپھی سوگ نہیں ہے

ہے ہے منافقوں کی نظر کھا گئی انہیں

بھیا ادھر تو آؤ یہ ہے کون سا مقام

زینت کو دیکھو سر پہ نہ بھائی نہ دونوں لال

In defence of Anis 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 preluded with tears.

ہے ہے مرے شفیق پسر نہراں لپیر

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 لے قوم شہریر کیا گناہ ہے مجھے کیوں مالتے 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 ستاؤ نہ کہ میں مر گیا آمادہ ہوں رحم لازم ہے کہ تیرے 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 تنگاز سے شاہ

Thus did the Shah (al-Husain), with tears in his eyes, address the cruel host.

روکے فرماتے ہیں بیٹے سے کہ اے جان پد

Weeping, he said to his son: O my dear son.

کہتے ہیں ظالموں سے خشک زبان کھلا کر بہرستی پانی کا اک جام پلا دو لا کر

Showing his parched tongue to the cruel foes, he said:
For God's sake give me a cup of water to drink.

آزار رسید ہوں گرفتار بلا ہوں گھر چھوڑ کے جلا دوں کی سرحد پلا 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.

شہیر نے رو کر کہا لو جلتے ہیں صغرا

Weeping, Shabbir said: I take my leave of thee, O Sughra.

روتے ہوئے حرم میں گئے قبلہ انام

Weeping, the leader of the Faithful entered the harem.

رو کر امام زین نے کہا جائیں کجیاں

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:

سہم آرام کہیں راہ میں جاتی نہیں ملتا

O sweetheart! There is no relief to be had in the way.

تم سے پھڑوں گی تو داری میں کدھر جاؤں گی

Parted from you, darling! Where shall I go!

This clearly shows that Anīs frequently failed to keep clear of the contagion of popular taste. Here are some of the stock epithets applied by him to the warriors in his battle-pieces:

سب تھک گئے مگر تھکے تیغین کے ہاتھ وہ معرکہ رہا اسی گل پہیرون 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 و شول گرنگ

On account of anger, their moon-like faces shone like the sun.

گنتے گنتے پیچھے لئے وہ غیرت ستر

Holding the daggers, said those young men more lovely than the moon.

یہ سن کے حادوں کو پکارا وہ منہ جبین

Having said this, that moon-faced young man called out for his followers.

دولاکہ سے نظر کسی غازی کی لڑ گئی بل کھائے زلف منج پہ کسی کے بکھر گئی

*The eye of a hero encountered (cast amorous glances at) those of a whole host,
The ringlet twisted and spread itself on the face of another (warrior).*

ہیں گرد بایاں سے آئے کیسے پیغم

The twisted ringlets are filled with the dust of the desert.

ہنس کے عباس نے فرمایا کہ اے غیرت ماہ

Abbās 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 false key. With her calculated effects, she is far too clever, far too knowing, for a child. But then the children who lip the wisdom of their elders and wallow in sentiment, 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 wring 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 servants' hall and call herself a *laundī* (slave girl), or make the following sentimental appeal to her infant brother in the cot:

بیخون ہوں کوئی میرا مددگار نہیں ہے تم ہو سو تمہیں طاقت 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 achieve that end. All this shows that in the *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 an almost Miltonic ring:

مرحب تھا کفر و شرک میں طاقت میں گبو تھا گھوڑے پہ تماشقی 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 گٹھا چھاگئی ڈھالوں سے بیکاروں کی برق ہر صف میں چکنے لگی تواریوں کی

The shields of the wicked darkened the sky,
The lightning of swords began to shine in each battle line.

یوں صبح کے طائر سرتن 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 زمین پر نشان اس تکان سے کرتا ہے جیسے تیر سحاب آسمان سے

The spear flew and struck the earth
With the speed and violence of a meteor from the sky.

ایا گیا فرس جو سمٹ کر ادھر ادھر ڈھالوں کا ابرہ گیا پھٹ کر ادھر ادھر

As the charger cuts 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 پہرہ مدقوق زرد تھے

The leaves were pale like the face of one suffering from a wasting disease.

ہم لوگ زمانے میں جناب لب جو ہیں

We, in the world, are like bubbles on the brink of a stream.

کھلتی تھیں اور جابوں کی آنکھیں بھپکتی تھیں

The eyes of the bubbles opened and twinkled.

تھی دشت کربلا کی زمیں رشک آسماں تھا دور دور تک شب متاب کا سماں
چھٹے ہوئے تاروں پہ زردی کا تھا گال نہر فرات بیچ میں تھی مثل کھکشاں

The wasteland of Karbalā was beautiful like the sky;
Far and widespread 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 فرغش 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 were 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 insipid figure of speech which were popular in his day. He excels in narrative and description, and here, whatever his theme—irony, pathos, tragedy, landscape—he, at his best, is always adequate.

The battle that has been fought for over three quarters of 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 opinion 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 *Muvāzana* in behalf of Anīs, criticism has generally veered round to his views. In Shiblī's thesis there is no wilful detraction. In attacking Dabīr, he was attacking 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 Shiblī'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.

Be this as it may, the fact remains that with the publication of the *Muwāzana*, Dabīr began to lose ground and Anīs came more and more into his own. He has been anthologized and reprinted and made the subject of appreciative studies several times, while Dabīr has been neglected, and has not been reprinted since his first publication by Naval Kishore in the 1870s. The common opinion today is that whereas Anīs is simple and direct Dabīr swaths his material in an arabesque of conceits, hyperbole, high-sounding phraseology, recondite learning, and far-fetched and remote allusions; and all this for its own sake, to display his extraordinary reach in these respects.

I have read Dabīr with some care and find that the above is true only of the combats, battles, nature-pieces, descriptions of horses and swords. These are not very numerous; in fact, they constitute a small part of his *marsiyas*, the parts recounting the hardship and tribulations of the Aih-e-Bait being simple and straightforward.

As regards Anīs, he deserves his reputation for realism, but he is too much a product of his age to be entirely free from the blemishes rightly ascribed to Dabīr. When he gets worked up and goes off the line, his descent into bathos is as abyssal as that of Dabīr.

I am inclined to think that Dabīr was most unlucky in his admirers. I do not absolve him from an innate leaning toward the flamboyant and the fantastic; but it is arguable that it acquired alarming dimensions on account of the exaggerated praise lavished on him. All the same, the main fabric of his verse is plain, and the embroideries worked on it are no less present in Anīs, though, on the whole, not so bizarre as in Dabīr.

It now remains to quote extracts in support of the view given above. The following illustrates the wanton waste of scholarship when Dabīr rides his hobby-horse to death:

پیدا شعاع مہر کی مقراض جب ہوئی پہنہاں دراز مئی پر طائوس شب ہوئی
اور قطع زلف بیللی زہرہ لقب ہوئی مجنوں صفت قبائے سحر چاک سب ہوئی
فکر رفو تھی چرخ ہنسر مند کے لئے
دن چار مکرٹے ہو گیا پیوند کے لئے

یوسف غریب چاہ سید ناگہاں ہوا یعنی غروب ماہ تجلی نشاں ہوا
یونس دہان ماہی شب سے عیاں ہوا یعنی طلوع نیر مشرق شاں ہوا

فرعون شب سے منکر کہ آرا تھا آفتاب
دن تھا کلیم اور ید بیضا تھا آفتاب

When the scissors of the sunbeams did flash forth;
The long pinions of Night's peacock were lopped off,
And severed were the tresses of Night, the beautiful lady.
The cloak of the Morn was rent asunder like that of Majnūn,
And being anxious to provide some darning work to the craftsman of the sky,
The day split itself into four pieces.
Joseph was suddenly cast into the dark well,
That is, the bright moon went down.
Jonah appeared from the mouth of the fish of Night,
That is, Sun, the conqueror of the east, burst forth,
The Sun waged war against Night's Pharaoh,
The day was but Moses and the Sun his glittering hand.

No less bizarre is the following:

تنہا کھڑے تھے دن میں امام فلک جناب گرمی دکھا رہا تھا قیامت کی آفتاب
بے آگ مرغ قبل نما ہوتے ہیں کتاب خط غبار سے ہے لپی اجڑی سحاب
پچھلا ہے آفتاب کا گردوں کے پاؤں میں
خود دھوپ چھپ رہی ہے درختوں کی پھاؤں میں
مٹی حرارت چرخ نہ ہے برج آب کی رنگت ہے برج حرمت میں ماہی کتاب کی
دریا میں آنکھ بیٹھ گئی ہے حباب کی حدت ہے موج نوح میں تیر شہاب کی
قوتار سے کو نہ حوض میں گرمی سے کل پڑی
پانی کی بھی زبان دہن سے نکل پڑی

Alone stood the sky-ranking Imām in the battlefield;
The sun was blazing like a ball of fire.
Even without fire the qibla-indicating bird was roasted.
The thick sheet of the cloud was covered with dust.
The sun was a blister on the foot of the sky.
Even the sunshine was hiding itself in the shade of the trees.

The sign of Aquarius in the sky had been dashed with dust;
The sign of Pisces had the colour of the roasted fish.
The bubble's eye had sunk in the water.
Each and every ripple had the heat of the meteor's fierce arrow,
The fountain felt ill at ease in the cistern;
Even the tongue of the water leapt out of its mouth.

It is noteworthy that Dabir who lets his fancy run away with him in the passages quoted above, is also the writer of the following. Such passages are quite common in him; in fact, there are whole *marisiyas* in this unblemished style.

سرنگے گرد جھولے کے سب کنبہ ہے ہم پھیلا ہے ہیں سمٹے ہوئے پاؤں کو حرم
تیکہ پہ سر ڈھلا ہوا رکھتے ہیں دم بدم بچھاتی پہ ہاتھ رکھ کے کبھی دیکھتے ہیں دم
قرآن کی ہوا کبھی گھبرا کے دیتے ہیں
بانو کو دیکھتے ہیں تو مونہہ پھیر لیتے ہیں
آخر کہا یہ سب نے بلاؤ امام کو لاؤ خدا کے واسطے لاؤ امام کو
اس بے زباں کا حال سناؤ امام کو نیلی رگیں گلے کی دکھاؤ امام کو
اکبر کی لاش لے گئے ہیں قتل گاہ میں
کوئی پکارو وہ ابھی ہونگے براہ میں
ہاتھوں پہ لے کے اس کو چلے شاہ القیا اور ساتھ ساتھ گود کو کھولے ہوئے قضا
لگتی ہے دھوپ تیرتی اور گرم تھی ہوا اصغر پہ ماں نے ڈال دی اچھی سی اک ردا
چادر نہ تھی وہ چہرہ پر آب و تاب پر
ٹکڑا سفید ابر کا تھا آفتاب پر
ہراک قدم پہ سوچتے تھے سبط مصطفیٰ لے تو چلا ہوں فوج عمر سے کہوں گا کیا
نت بھی گر گردن کا تو دیویں گے کیا بھلا
پانی کے واسطے نہ سنیں گے حدومری

بچے کی جان جائے گی اور آبرو مری
پہنچے قریب فوج تو گھبرا کے رہ گئے چاہا کریں سوال پہ شرما کے رہ گئے
غیرت سے رنگ فق ہوا تھرا کے رہ گئے چادر پسر کے چہرے سے سر کا کے رہ گئے
آنکھیں جھکا کے بولے کہ یہ ہم کو لائے ہیں
اصغر تھا لے پاس غرض لے کے آئے ہیں
گر میں بقول شمر و عمر ہوں گشاہ گار یہ تو نہیں کسی کے بھی آگے تصور وار
شش ماہ بے زبان، نبی زادہ، شیر خوار ہفتم سے سب کے ساتھ پیا سا ہے بے قرار
سن ہے جو کم تو پیا سا کا صدر نہ زیادہ ہے
مظلوم خود ہے اور یہ مظلوم زادہ ہے
یہ کون بے زباں ہے تمہیں کچھ خیال ہے در نجف ہے بانوئے میکس کالال ہے
لومان تو تمہیں قسم ذوالجلال ہے یثرب کے شاہزادے کا پہلا سوال ہے
پوتا علی کا تم سے طلب گار آب ہے
دے دو کہ اس میں ناموری اور ثواب ہے
پھر ہونٹھ بے زبان کے چومے جھکا کے سر رو کر کہا جو کہنا تھا وہ کہہ چکا پدر
باقی رہی مذا بات کوئی لے مرے پسر سوکھی زبان تم بھی دکھا دو نکال کر
پھیری زباں لبوں پہ جو آسن نور عین نے
تھرا کے آسمان کو دیکھا حسین نے

Bareheaded the whole family is standing round the cradle. The ladies are spreading the babe's contracted legs again and again, putting the limp weak neck on the pillow, and examining its faint breath by placing the hand on its chest. In their dismay, they fanned it with a copy of the Quran; and at the sight of Bāno (the child's mother) they drew away their faces, unable to meet her anguished looks. At last they all said: Send for the Imām! For God's sake send for the Imām, and show him its woeful plight and the blue veins on its neck! He has gone to the battlefield with Akbar's dead body. Shout for him; he must be on his way to it. . . . When the King of Brightness carried the babe in his hands, Fate also accompanied him with open arms to receive it. It was extremely hot and the air was scorching. The mother covered Asghar with a clean

sheet; it wasn't a sheet, it was a white piece of cloud covering the sun. As he went along, he said to himself again and again: "I am carrying this babe, but what shall I tell Umar's army? I can neither beg for water nor know how to supplicate, and even if I beg they are not going to accede to my request. The child will lose its life and I my self-respect. When he approached the army, he did not know what to say. He felt perplexed. At the idea of thus lowering himself, his face lost its colour and his whole body shook. He removed the sheet from the babe's face and said: This babe has brought me here; Asghar has come to make a request. I may be guilty in Shimar's and Umar's eyes, but this babe has done no wrong—a babe only six months old and descended from the Prophet! It has remained convulsed with thirst for seven days. A babe, it feels more acutely the pangs of thirst . . . Do you know who this babe is? It is the pearl of Najaf, and the light of the forlorn Banu's eyes. Do accede to its request. I implore you in the name of God. This is the first request by the Prince of Yasrib. The grandson of Ali beseeches you for a drink of water. Do give it to him. A pious act, it will give you a good name. He then bent down his head, kissed the babe's lips and weeping said—There is nothing more for me to say, O my son. Husain shuddered and looked towards the sky. You also show your parched tongue. When the babe passed its tongue on its lips.

Compared with Dabir's extravagance in the first two passages quoted above, Anis confines himself to the real in the following:

طے کر چکا جو منزل شب کاروانِ صبح ہونے لگا افق سے ہویدا نشانِ صبح
گردوں سے کوچ کرنے لگے اخترانِ صبح ہر سو ہوئی بلند صدائے اذانِ صبح
پہنہاں نظر سے روئے شب تاز ہو گیا
عالم تمام مطلع اتوار ہو گیا
پھینا وہ مابتاب کا وہ صبح کا ظہور یاد خدا میں زمرہ بہر دازی طیور
وہ رونق اور وہ سرد ہوا وہ فضا وہ نور خشکی ہو جس سے چشم کو اور قلب کو سرور
انساں زمیں پہ محو ملک آسمان پر
جاری تھا ذکر قدرت حق ہر زبان پر
وہ سُرخِ شفق کی ادھر چرخ پر بہار وہ بار و درخت وہ صحرا وہ سبزہ زار
شبم کے وہ گلوں پہ گہرائے آبدار پھولوں سے سب بھرا ہوا دامن کہسار
ناسے کھلے ہوئے وہ گلوں کی شمیم کے
آتے تھے سرد سرد وہ جھونکے نسیم کے

When the caravan of the morning had traversed the expanse of the night, signs of the dawn began to appear on the horizon. The morning stars began to depart from the sky and the sound of the morning-prayer call arose from all sides. The face of the inky night disappeared and the whole world was flooded with dazzling light. And O the hiding of the moon and the appearance of the dawn! The chanting of birds in praise of God! The brightness, cool breezes, the fresh atmosphere, and the extensive landscape that soothed the eyes and gladdened the heart. On the earth men praised God and the angels in the sky, and not a tongue but glorified His handiwork. And then the splendour of the red twilight in the sky, the fruit-laden trees, forests and green valleys; the glistening pearls of dew on the flowers and the entire foot of the mountain full of flowers; and the open musk pods of fragrant flowers and draughts of the cool breeze.

وہ گرمیوں کے دن پہ پہاڑوں کی راہ سخت پانی نہ مٹتے لوں نہ کہیں سایہ درخت
ڈوبے ہوئے سینوں میں ہیں غازیوں کے خست سنو لگے ہیں رنگ جو انان نیک بخت
راکب عبائیں چاند سے چہروں پہ ڈالے ہیں
تونسے ہوئے سمندر زبانیں نکالے ہیں
وہ دن ہیں جن دنوں کوئی کرتا نہیں سفر صحرا کے جانور بھی نہیں چھوڑتے ہیں گھر
ریخ مسافت میں ہیں سلطانِ جسم و بر لب گگل سے خشک ہیں چہرہ عرق میں تر
آتی ہے خاک اڑنے کے بیمین وینار سے
گیسوئے مشکبار آئے ہیں غبار سے

Hot summer days, arduous mountain tracks, and for miles together neither water nor the shade of a tree! The clothes of the warriors were drenched in sweat, and the faces of those noble young men were tanned in the scorching heat of the blazing sun. The riders have cast the flaps of their cloaks over their moon-like faces, and the thirsty horses are lolling out their tongues. These are the days when no one sets out on a journey. The king of land and sea is bearing the hardships of the journey. His 'lips, so like rose-petals, are dry, and the countenance wet with perspiration. Dust blows from right and left, and his musk-scattering locks are through and through smitten with it.

And now take this by Anis. In what respect does it differ from the worst excesses of Dabir?

نکلی جو رن میں تیغِ حسینی غلاف سے اڑنے لگے شر دم خارا شکاف سے
بجلی بڑھی چمک کے جو دشتِ مصاف سے صاف آئی الامان کی صدا کوہ قاف سے

طبقتے فلک کے صورت گہوارہ ہل گئے
 دب کر پہاڑ خاک کے دامن میں مل گئے
 پریوں سے قاف چھوٹ گیا اور جنوں گھر شیروں سے دشت، گرگ بن، اژدہا ہوس در
 شاہین و کبک چھپ گئے اک جا ملا کے سر اژگر گرسے جہیروں میں جنگل کے جانور
 سمیٹے پہاڑ مونہہ کو جو دامن میں ڈھانپ کے
 سمرغ نے گرا دیئے پر کانپ کانپ کے

When Husain drew his sword from the scabbard in the battlefield, fiery sparks flew out of its granite-tearing edge. When its dazzling lustre shone through the desert of the battlefield, there rose the cry of 'Give us quarter!' from Mount Caucasus. The regions of the sky shook like a cradle; mountains collapsed, becoming one with the ground. Not only did the waves run helter-skelter, the river itself forsook its banks. Struck with terror, the fairies forsook Caucasus, the jinn their abode, the tigers the forest, the wolves the woods and the dragons the caves. The partridge and the eagle huddled themselves together in one place, and the birds of the jungle flew away and fell into islands. The mountains were crushed and their tops became one with their base. The *simurgh* (who lives on mountain-tops) seeing the destruction of its habitat trembled so violently that all its plume fell off.

My own impression is that in their descriptive passages both are false and exaggerated, Dabīr more than Anīs. In narrative, both are simple and matter of fact; Anīs a little more than Dabīr. In another respect Anīs is much ahead of Dabīr; he has a finer feeling for language.

Even during the lifetime of Anīs and Dabīr, the *marsiya* had grown stereotyped and exhausted. The *marsiya*-writers who followed them found themselves bound by a powerful tradition, and all they could do was to ring the changes on an overworked theme. They could not give it a new orientation, and therefore suffered the fate of those who grow under the shadow of a dominant unchanging tradition.

The *marsiyas* have their fervent admirers, but it is not possible to agree with them. From what I know, the average, unattached reader with a modern education would endorse 'Abdul Hayy's concluding remarks on the *marsiya*. He writes:

'In regard to the history of the *marsiya*, it will have to be admitted that *marsiya*-writers have signally failed to do justice to the real greatness of the Aīh-e-Bait. Very often dignity and firmness have given place to lamentations and anguish.

The ladies portrayed in the *marsiyas* look like a body of terror-stricken persons indulging in cries and lamentations; although these august personages were above such weaknesses. The object of the poet was to melt the hearts of the people with grief and to subject them to anguish. All this seriously lowered the standard of the *marsiyas*. It may have put a new life into poetry by extending its range, but its moral and religious aspects were paralysed. Extremely touching as the subject was it was so handled as to lose all effect.¹