

CHAPTER II

CONDITIONS THAT LED TO THE BIRTH OF THE
NOVEL IN URDU(i) *Contact with the West resulting in a more Realistic Attitude*

The contact with English literature has had a profound and far-reaching effect on Urdu. With the impact of Western culture came new ideas and ideals, a new outlook on life, and a new conception of values. It revolutionized thought and changed not only the superficial outlook on life but the basic moral values as well. In short, contact with English life and literature brought about the same changes in India as the Renaissance had done in Europe. In fact this period is called, and rightly so, the Renaissance of Urdu. There is nothing like a shock to bring about the flowering of genius, and a new leavening from time to time is a very beneficial thing for any society.

Urdu poetry had reached its peak of achievement on the lines it had chosen in the field of the "Gazal" and the "Qasida". Even in the "Marṣia" and the "Maṣnavī" all that could be done had been done. The language had been polished and purified, until it shone like burnished gold. Every thought and idea that could be culled from mysticism and from philosophy had been culled and distilled and presented, not once but many times; nothing original remained to be done in that sphere any more. A further purifying of language and evolving of rhetorical rules would only have weakened it, and attempts to present thrice presented thought in new garb would only have resulted in artificiality.

The time was ripe for a change, for the exploration of new realms of thought and for the adoption of new ways of expression. And the Western influence did both.

Up till then, the stock of thought was an admiration for contentment, an exaltation of a fatalistic attitude towards life, a submission to suffering and unworldliness, while the noble-minded poets dealt solely with love and passion often in its less admirable aspects. The crumbling of the Mogul Empire and the destruction of their own culture imbued poets like Gālib and Mir with a feeling of utter melancholy and despair, which found expression in poems which, for sincerity, depth of thought and for sheer literary merit, remain unequalled. But still the thought expressed in them was akin to the thought and feeling of what could be called the "Age of the *Gazal*" in Urdu literature.

But the contact with the West brought with it an entirely new set of ideas. The ideals of unworldliness and concern with the ultimate good of the soul gave place to a desire for making the most of this world and achieving success. A spirit of struggle, a spirit of adventure and a desire for achievement took the place of resignation and the patient bearing of one's lot. Robust feelings such as these did not find adequate expression in the lilting couplets of the "*Gazal*". So the "*Musaddas*" and "*Maṣnavī*" came into their own as they gave greater scope for continuous thought. Love lyrics gave place to narrative and descriptive poems. Wordsworth had a great influence. Nature which had so far been ignored, and only incidentally brought in (as for example in the "*Qasida*") as a background, became a very popular subject and patriotic poems became the order of the day.

This influence brought about a more realistic attitude towards life. Urdu poets had so far lived in realms of fancy and imagination; now they were coming down to the reality of life. So far, their woes had been the coldness of an imaginary beloved, nor were they face to face with the (less poetic) misery of existence.

Prose naturally is a more suitable vehicle of expression for mundane thoughts of life than poetry. Hence the age of

Sir Syed Ahmad Khān and Hāli, or the Renaissance of Urdu literature as it has been called, saw the development of prose to its final perfection. The birth and popularity of prose were the natural complement of the general attitude of realism that was produced under Western influence. But not only in this indirect way was Western influence responsible for the development of prose; it had also a direct influence in bringing it about. It was under the auspices of the Fort William College, Calcutta, that the first works of prose fiction were written.

(ii) *The Development of Prose at Fort William, Calcutta*

All that existed in Urdu prose before Gilchrist were religious tracts. In the Deccan, as early as the close of the fourteenth century, religious maxims, sayings and the lives and practices of saintly men were written in Urdu prose. Some of these are still extant, and their language though archaic is intelligible. These are 'Mi'rāj ul 'Ashiqān', 'Hidāyat Nāma', 'Kalimāt ul Ḥaqāiq', 'Miftāh ul Khairāt', 'Aḥkām us Ṣalawāt', and the famous 'Dah Majlis', which however exists only in extracts and not in its entirety. But these early compositions in prose stand alone; they did not give an impetus to the development of Urdu prose. The Persian language continued to be employed on every occasion when it was necessary to write in prose. Letters, reviews, criticisms, prefaces all appeared in Persian. Two prefaces alone can be found in Urdu—one by Saudā and one by Inshā. They are interesting as they show the style which was in vogue, a highly ornate and cumbersome style. But for all practical purposes Urdu prose can be said to have been born in Fort William College due to the following circumstances.

In order to enable the employees of the East India Company to learn the vernaculars, the Fort William College, Calcutta, was founded in 1800, and Dr. John Gilchrist placed at the head of it. Dr. Gilchrist composed an Urdu grammar (generally considered to be the first, but there are some doubts as to the

correctness of this statement as an Urdu grammar in Latin is supposed to have existed before this) and an Urdu dictionary. He travelled in the regions where the choicest Urdu was spoken, and from Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore and Agra he collected a band of men who were masters of Urdu idiom. He set them to translate into Urdu prose stories from Persian and Sanskrit. As the object was to get as quickly as possible books which could be used as text-books for teaching young Englishmen Urdu, he had them written in easy flowing prose and not in the heavy ornate style which was so popular. The names associated with Gilchrist and the Fort William College are Mir Amman, Sher 'Alī Afsos, Mirzā 'Alī Luṭf, Haidar Bakhsh Haidari, Bahādur 'Alī Ḥusainī, Ḥafīz ud Dīn Ahmad, Nihāl Cand* Lāhaurī, Kāzīm 'Alī Javān, Lallū Lāl, and Mazhar 'Alī Vilā.

Amongst the books translated there were manuals of conduct, historical pamphlets and books of instruction. In fiction there are 'Bāq o Bahār' by Mir Amman, 'Ārāish i Mahfil' by Sher 'Alī Afsos, 'Naṣr i Benazir' by Bahādur 'Alī Ḥusainī, 'Mazhab i Ishq' by Nihāl Cand Lāhaurī, 'Śakuntalā' and 'Sīnghāsan Battīsī' by Kāzīm 'Alī Javān and Lallū Lāl in collaboration. They enjoyed an immense popularity, and are still read with pleasure and are included in the Urdu curriculum of most Colleges and Schools.

Though translations, they are part and parcel of Urdu literature. They popularised prose and developed a taste for it, whereas until then poetry alone was appreciated, and thus prepared the way for the coming of the novel.

'Bāq o Bahār' is the first of these translations (1801) and deservedly the most popular. Its language is easy and flowing, without any of the encumbrances of rhetoric; the manner of story-telling is intimate so that the reader feels that he is being taken into confidence and is listening to rather than reading a story. The "characters" are singularly alive,

* c in transliteration represents ch.

interesting and likeable. The four dervishes, King *Āzād Bakht* and *Khājā Sag-parast* stand out as individuals, and have the power to elicit the sympathy and interest of the reader. The incidents are of the usual kind, that is to say, far-fetched and with a mixture of the supernatural, yet the supernatural is not laid on with such a heavy hand as in '*Ārāish i Mahfil*' but sparingly. The story is of men and their joys and sorrows and disappointments, the supernatural intervenes only now and then, while in '*Ārāish i Mahfil*' one gets the impression that the man has, by mistake, tumbled into a land peopled by monsters and dragons, and giants and fairies. The human interest in '*Bāq o Bahār*' never gets submerged under an overlay of the supernatural; most of the incidents of the story are not improbable, only a few are impossible.

The "characters" of '*Bāq o Bahār*' encounter strange and unusual adventures in a far-away land. They have no authenticity about them, but there is an air of plausibility in it all. In days when access to and penetration into other countries was so difficult, it was very likely that anyone who ventured forth would meet with strange rites and customs, and so the experiences of the four dervishes, in their wanderings round the world, and of *Khājā Sag-parast*, take on the semblance of reality.

The scene of the story is supposedly Constantinople but there is not a vestige of local colour, and the period is not even mentioned; the manners and customs of the people, especially their talk, is that of Delhi in the last days of the Moguls. Like Sydney's '*Arcadia*', '*Bāq o Bahār*' is a reflection of the mood of the period in which it was written. It has no active women "characters", that is to say, there are none shown in action, but one hears of several; amongst these the Princess of Damascus alone can be said to be a "character". Although we are only told of her, she strikes us at once as being a personality, not a very pleasant one, but a very definite one all the same. *Khājā Sag-parast* is perhaps the most human

of the "characters" in '*Bāq o Bahār*'. We can feel the loneliness and the pathos of the man's life, as he tells us his story. Worldly success has indeed been his, the machinations of the brothers had not succeeded in keeping him down, but his has been a lonely life. The dog is the one friend he has had, and in his expressions of gratitude to it there is something very pathetic.

There are sentences in '*Bāq o Bahār*' which in their expressiveness of character and situation belong to the modern novel. For instance, when *Khājā zādā's* sister is saying good-bye to him, she says:

(امام ضامن کا رویہ میرے بازو پر باندھا، دہی کا ٹیکہ ماتھے پر لگا کر آنسو پی کر بولی): سدھارو، تمہیں خدا کو سونپا، پیٹھ دکھائے جاتے ہو، اسی طرح جلدی اپنا منہ دکھائیو۔

There is in it a homeliness and a quality of realism that belongs to the true novel. The whole of the conversation between the sister and the brother is actually in this vein. The sister tells him:

اے بیرن، تو میری آنکھوں کی پتلی اور ماں باپ کی موٹی مٹی کی نشانی ہے۔ تیرے آنے سے میرا کلیجہ ٹھنڈا ہوا، جب مجھے دیکھتی ہوں باغ باغ ہوتی ہوں۔ تو نے مجھے نہال کیا، کہیں مردوں کو خدا نے کمانے کے لئے بنایا ہے، گھر میں بیٹھے رہنا ان کو لازم نہیں۔ جو مرد نکمٹو ہو کر گھر سیتا ہے اس کو دنیا کے لوگ طعنہ سنا دیتے ہیں، خصوصاً اس شہر کے آدمی چھوٹے بڑے بے سبب تمہارے زہنے پر کہیں گے، اپنے باپ کی دولت دنیا کھو کر بہنوئی کے ٹکڑوں پر آپڑا۔

In it is also the reflection of the social etiquette of "Mogul Delhi". The essentially Indian code of action is here referred

to. The wazir's wife's outburst of anger again has this quality of realism.

As a matter of fact, dialogue in 'Bāq o Bahār' is always crisp and lifelike—for instance the talk between the second dervish and the fakir. The dervish, who was then the Prince, says :

سُن، ای لالچی، تو کیسا فقیر ہے کہ ہرگز « فقر » کے تینوں
حرفوں سے بھی واقف نہیں، فقیر کا عمل ان پر چاہئے۔

The fakir replies :

بھلا، داتا، تمہیں بتاؤ میں نے کیا کہا۔

These qualities have made 'Bāq o Bahār' very popular, and entitle it to be called the first prose classic of Urdu. One of the things that go to the making of a classic is that it can be read with pleasure decades after it was originally written, and 'Bāq o Bahār', alone among the several similar free translations that were made under the direction of John Gilchrist, is still read, or can be read, for the sake of the pleasure it gives, while others are read (if at all) for their historical interest alone.

'Ārāish i Mahfil', however, enjoyed a great deal of popularity in its earlier days. It is difficult to account for this, as it seems to be extremely cumbersome in style. There are roughly three adventures to a page, and the reader is thoroughly confused and only by repeated and vigilant reading can keep the thread of the story before his mind. It is extremely difficult, however, not to lose it among the innumerable and unconnected series of incidents.

The framework of the story is this. *Hasan Bāno*, the daughter of a merchant who had miraculously come into a great fortune, has declared that she will marry anyone who will answer her seven questions. A young man named *Munār* falls in love with her, but has not the courage to seek for the

answers to the questions. *Hātīm the Prince of Tai*, who is the most kind-hearted of men, takes pity on him and sets out to find the answers for him. The questions are :

- (1) Why was a certain man heard to say, "I have seen it once and desire to do so again" ?
- (2) Do good and throw it in the river.
- (3) Do no evil or it will return to you.
- (4) Truth alone is happiness.
- (5) Bring a pearl of the size of an ostrich's egg.
- (6) What is "Koh i Nidā" ?
- (7) What is "Himmām i Badgar" ?

Hātīm sets out to answer all these queries, and finds out the significance of all these statements. During each trip he meets with innumerable adventures. Dragons swallow him, he falls into fire and water, encounters giants, fairies waylay him, he meets animals that can talk and birds that can understand the human tongue. At the end of it all, he succeeds in finding the clue to a question and returns and tells *Hasan Bāno* the answer, and then sets out afresh to seek the answers to the remaining questions. Thus he goes seven times, at the end of which he has found all the answers, thereby enabling *Munār* to marry *Hasan Bāno*.

The story is spoiled by over-loading of incidents. There are far too many of them, and it is utterly impossible to keep count of them or remember them even while reading. They come crowding in without sequence, and they do not lead to the ultimate solving of the riddles. Their solution only appears when Sher 'Alī Afsos feels like winding up the chapter, and then he just stops and thinks out the answer and gives it without any regard to the fact that nothing that has gone before has, in any way, contributed or led up to it.

In 'Bāq o Bahār', incidents are nicely dove-tailed into one another. There is a gradual sliding into one from the other. In 'Ārāish i Mahfil' the chief defect is that it does

not allow any impression to be formed, or any image to be created in the mind. The framework of the story was ingenious, and had Afsos restricted himself to the inventing of incidents, he might have created a readable and enjoyable story.

'*Mazhab i 'Ishq'* or '*Gul Bakāolī*' is another of these well-known Gilchrist translations. The story existed in several versions already. There was the "*Maṣnavī*" '*Gulzār i Nasīm*' as well as a Persian prose version of the same story. The translation into Urdu was done by Nihāl Cand Lāhaurī. It is in simple, unadorned prose. If it has succeeded in avoiding the then common fault of over-elaboration, it has failed to achieve the simple dignity of '*Bāq o Bahār*'. It has no style, so it cannot be called literature. It has the prosaic quality and flatness of a text-book, and that is what it was meant to be.

Literature cannot be produced to order, nor was Gilchrist aiming at doing so. He was out to get books that could be used in teaching English officers the language quickly. Nihāl Cand Lāhaurī incorporates much less in his translation than Mīr Amman and Sher 'Alī Afsos. His is a fairly accurate rendering of the well-known story of *Tāj ul Mulūk* and *Bakāolī*. There is no background or local colour in it, but as in '*Bāq o Bahār*' and later in '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*', in it also can be seen the reflection of manners and customs of the India of that day. The description of *Bakāolī's* marriage ceremony tallies in every detail with the customs of Indian marriage. The attitude of *Bakāolī* and *Rūḥ Afzā's* parents on discovering the misdemeanours of their daughters is that of Indian parents; but '*Gul Bakāolī*' at no point shows any literary merit.

The other translations done in Fort William are more or less collections of short-stories, and not full-length romances. Of these '*Toṭā Kahānī*' was very popular, and though really only a collection of short-stories or fables, the fact of being

encased in the framework of another story gives it a claim to be regarded among the longer romances. The stories are told by a parrot who uses these means to prevent the wife of his master from meeting her lover. The way in which the parrot every day excites *Khujistā's* interest is psychologically most interesting. Casually, just by the way, not in the least appearing to detain her or being desirous of doing so, he mentions that he hopes that in her case it would not happen as it did in the case of so-and-so. *Khujistā's* curiosity is at once aroused and she stays on to hear what it was that had happened, and so day after day he prevents her from meeting her lover.

His tactics and mode of approach vary. He does not go on saying, as he did the first few days, that he hopes her affair would not end as so-and-so's did, or that of course in love you never can tell, as it happened in the case of—etc., etc.; he varies his tactics as time passes. Sometimes he says, "You have been delaying, and if your lover is angry show tact as did so-and-so", and then follows the tale. Next time he warns her not to get caught, and tells her what to do if she does. On another occasion, he tells her to be as resourceful as so-and-so, and then commences another tale.

As the day of her husband's return draws near, the parrot's counsels take on a different tone. "Supposing your husband returns and finds out what you have been doing, this is how you should behave," and that leads on to another story. In fact, how the *Toṭā* finds an opening for his stories is really clever, and does great credit to Haidar Bakhsh's inventiveness. The language is simple, straightforward and easy, there is no rhetoric or style about it. '*Bahār i Dānish*' is a similar collection of short-stories inset in a longer tale. This encasing of shorter stories in the framework of a larger was very popular amongst earlier writers. Examples of it are found in every language: '*Alf Lailā*' is itself written in this manner, and Chaucer's '*Canterbury Tales*' are also similarly put together.

'*Naṣr i Benazīr*' is the prose version of Mīr Ḥasan's "*Maṣnavī*" '*Sīhr ul Bayān*', and '*Sakuntalā*', a rendering in the form of a narrative of the story of Kālī Dās's world-famous drama. These translations, however, are less known than '*Bāq o Bahār*', '*Ārāish i Mahfil*' or '*Ṭoṭa Kahānī*' and did not have the same vogue.

All these translations, done under the auspices of the Fort William College, went towards the simplification of prose and the popularisation of prose romances.

CHAPTER III

THE FOUNDATION OF ROMANCE

(i) *Verse Romances*

Poetry always comes before prose in every literature and Urdu was no exception. Before prose had even taken shape, there was a rich store of poetry to be found in Urdu. Amongst the various poetic forms, the "*Maṣnavīs*" or verse romances can be said to contain in them the elements that go to the making of novels.

These verse romances which can be said to be the earliest precursors of novels appear very early in Urdu. They are to be found in the very first stage of the development of Urdu literature, that is to say, in the Deccan where Urdu poetry began. Ḡavvāshī's "*Maṣnavī*" of '*Saif ul Mulūk and Badī' ul Jamāl*' was composed as early as 1616 A.D. This "*Maṣnavī*" is a verse rendering of a Persian version of one of the 'Arabian Nights' tales. Ḡavvāshī wrote yet another "*Maṣnavī*" called '*Ṭuṭī Nāma*' which, though translated from a Persian "*Maṣnavī*", was originally a Sanskrit story. At the same period, one Taḥsīn ud Dīn composed an original "*Maṣnavī*" called '*Qiṣṣa e Rūp o Kālā*' in the traditional manner, which has been translated into English by Garcin de Tassy and is regarded as an extremely interesting story.

Two other "*Maṣnavīs*" of the Qutb Shahi period are '*Maṣnavī e Bahrām o Gulandām*' and Ibn i Nishātī's '*Phūlban*'. The latter has been accorded great praise by all authorities in Urdu. Dr. Grahame Bailey declares it to be of great value both from the historical and the literary point of view. The remarkable thing about it is that it gives a complete picture of the life of the period it was written in; it was not original but adopted from '*Basātīn*' a Persian "*Maṣnavī*". "*Maṣnavī*" '*Bahrām*