

'*Naṣr i Benaz̄ir*' is the prose version of Mir Ḥasan's "*Maṣnavī*" '*Siḥr ul Bayān*', and '*Śakuntalā*', 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 Maḥfil*' or '*Toṭa 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. Gavvāṣī's "*Maṣnavī*" of '*Saiḥ 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. Gavvāṣī wrote yet another "*Maṣnavī*" called '*Tuṭī 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 Nishāṭī'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*

o *Gulandām* ' has been taken from Nizāmī's famous " *Maṣnavī* " ' *Haft Paikar* '.

The other " *Maṣnavīs* " of the Deccani period of Urdu are Nuṣratī's ' *Gulshan i 'Ishq* ' which, in point of interest and style, is considered as good as, and by some critics even better than Nishāṭī's ' *Phūlban* ', Hāshimī's ' *Yūsuf-Zulekhā* ', 'Ajiz's two " *Maṣnavīs* " ' *Qiṣṣa e Qamar o Lāl* ' and ' *Qiṣṣa e Lāl Gauhar* ', Vali Dakhanī's ' *Qiṣṣa e Ratn o Padm* ' and Sirāj Aurangābādī's ' *Bostān i Khayāl* '.

Amongst the Northern Indian poets, no less a person than Mir has written some excellent " *Maṣnavīs* ". His ' *Shu'la e 'Ishq* ', ' *Daryā e 'Ishq* ' and ' *Khāb o Khayāl* ' do not have the same story interest which is to be found in other " *Maṣnavīs* ", but they are more concerned with the delineation of feeling, and thus approximate closer to the modern novel. Moreover, they are original compositions.

There are several " *Maṣnavīs* " to be found amongst both the Delhi and the Lucknow schools of poets in latter years as well. The two best, and the best-known, are Mir Ḥasan's ' *Maṣnavī e Sihr ul Bayān* ' or ' *Qiṣṣa e Badr Munīr o Benazīr* ' and Dayā Shankar Nasīm's ' *Gulzār i Nasīm* '. ' *Maṣnavī e Sihr ul Bayān* ' ranks very high in Urdu literature. Its realistic descriptions and its excellent characterization make it approximate to the novel more closely than any other " *Maṣnavī* ". ' *Maṣnavī e Gulzār i Nasīm* ' by Dayā Shankar, though very well known, is not as well written, nor does it possess the same literary merit, as ' *Maṣnavī e Sihr ul Bayān* '. Not as well known, but possessing great merit is ' *Maṣnavī e Asrār i Muḥabbat* ' written by Muḥabbat Khān.

The period of Vājīd 'Alī Shāh's reign saw great popularity for the " *Maṣnavī* ". The " *Maṣnavīs* " ' *Zahr i 'Ishq* ' and ' *Bahār i 'Ishq* ', written by Mirzā Shauq, achieved a popularity that had not fallen to the lot of any previous work. ' *Maṣnavī e Zahr i 'Ishq* ' is regarded as of special importance in Urdu. It possesses a great deal of elasticity and life. Besides these,

there were numerous other " *Maṣnavīs* ", but they did not possess any literary merits and were of extremely low moral tone.

The stories of the " *Maṣnavīs* " were rarely original, but were generally provided by the prose and the verse fiction of Persian and Sanskrit.

(ii) Prose Romances

The foundation of the novel lies not only in the earlier romances, but in the sagas and myths and legends of pre-historic times, in fact in the primitive instinct of human nature which craves to be told a story; but by the time this instinct has evolved itself and reached the stage of prose romances, the novel is only a little way off. In fact, the prose romances herald the coming of the novel in every language. Malory's ' *Morte d'Arthur* ', Sydney's ' *Arcadia* ' are regarded as landmarks in the development of the English novel.

' *Bāq o Bahār* ', ' *Ārāish i Maḥfil* ', ' *Bahār i Dānish* ', ' *Qiṣṣa e Lavlā o Majnūn* ', ' *Gul Bakāolī* ', are, in like manner, precursors of the Urdu novel.

Besides the translations of Fort William, there were about this time some other works that were translated into Urdu and enjoyed great popularity. The establishment of the Naval Kishor Press at Lucknow about the middle of the nineteenth century was a great landmark in Urdu literature and contributed much to the development of Urdu. Under its auspices were translated the gigantic cycles of stories called ' *Dāstān i Amīr Hamza* ' and that other famous cycle ' *Bostān i Khayāl* '. The translation was the work of several people as the ' *Dāstān* ' is a tremendous thing. The two most popular series are the seven volumes of ' *Ṭilism i Hoṣhrubā* ' and the two volumes of ' *Naushervān Nāma* '. The first four volumes of ' *Ṭilism i Hoṣhrubā* ' were translated by Mir Muḥammad Ḥusain Jāh and the last three by Aḥmad Ḥusain Qamar. Sheikh Taṣadduq

Husain also made a translation of a series at the instance of Munshi Naval Kishor.

'*Dāstān i Am̄r Hamza*' is the fount and source of most of the romances and tales that are to be found in Urdu and Persian. It is the story of the adventures of *Am̄r Hamza*. There are thousands upon thousands of incidents in it. They are utterly incredible and absolutely impossible, but nevertheless they have the power to evoke interest and show tremendous imaginative and descriptive capacities. It is supposed to have been written in Persian by Abul Faẓl Faizī to amuse and entertain Akbar. But there are doubts as to the veracity of this statement. Most likely it is not the product of any one man's imagination but of that of several men. The tone of the story leads one to think that it could not have been written in Akbar's reign, for in it is described the struggle between the infidels and the Muslims. Such things were eschewed by Akbar, and it strengthens the belief that the reign of Maḥmūd Ḡaznavī saw its birth.

'*Bostān i Khayāl*' is another popular cycle; it is in seven volumes. Its author is one Mir Taqī *Khayāl*, and it was written to rival '*Dāstān i Am̄r Hamza*'. It certainly equalled if it did not excel it. '*Bostān i Khayāl*' was also originally written in Persian and was translated for the Naval Kishor Press by *Khājā* Badr ud Dīn Amān and Mirzā Muḥammad 'Askārī. '*Alf Lailā*', or 'Arabian Nights', one of the world-famous cycles of stories, was also at this time translated by the Naval Kishor Press. There had been an earlier translation in 1844 by a Munshī 'Abdul Karīm, but it did not achieve any popularity; it was the translation made by one Ṭoṭā Rām Aṣhyān for the Naval Kishor Press which became popular reading for all.

The fact that the taste of the public was now for the prose and not for the verse romances is shown by the fact that at this time there was written '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*' by Rajab 'Alī Surūr.

(iii) '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*'

Apart from the fact that it is the first original romance in the Urdu language, there is little to commend '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*'. Its rhymed prose makes it difficult to read, and this difficulty is further enhanced by the extensive use of every imaginary literary conceit. Of course this fact has to be borne in mind, that at the time of Surūr people's ears were so attuned to such styles that it was quite easily understood by them, and at that time the style was by no means a handicap, but rather an asset. Looking upon it retrospectively, as a landmark in the development of the Urdu novel, '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*' can claim no place on the ground of making any progress towards creating a simple, idiomatic prose, which is the first requirement of novels such as we know now. '*Bāq o Bahār*', though written earlier, contributes much more towards this. The language there is easy flowing, no redundancy, no unbalanced sentences, no unnecessary padding hamper the flow of the story. The influence of Fort William College was to a large extent responsible for that, '*Bāq o Bahār*' being translated under the auspices of that College whose object was to create a simple literature for the perusal of the English officers, and so it was not likely to encourage cumbersome style; and the fact that the translator was a *Dehlavi*, and extreme ornateness has never been much in vogue in Delhi, either in prose or in poetry, was also largely responsible.

The plot, incidents and "characters" of '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*' are of exactly the same style as are found in any of the romances derived from the famous cycles of romance: '*Ṭilism i Hoṣhrubā*', '*Bostān i Khayāl*', '*Qiṣṣa e Am̄r Hamza*'. Only they are not directly borrowed from any one of these, but drawn on the same lines. The spirit is exactly the same, and it even follows the same conventional line of development and *dénouement*.

Fairies, giants and *genii* aid and interfere as has been their wont in the romances. Yet, with so much of the old spirit in '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*', it is a step forward as it is the first attempt to create rather than to adapt or translate. The matter is new though handled in the old manner. *Jān 'Ālam*, *Mehr Nigār*, *Anjuman Ārā*, are creatures of Surūr's imagination, not importations from any known romance.

The same motif as in the older romances is also seen in '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*'. The Prince, the child of many prayers; his falling in love with a mysterious girl; his setting out in quest of her; meeting with many hazards and perils during the search; at last finding the beloved and returning home to live happily ever after. The natural and the supernatural elements mix as freely as ever. There is hardly any characterization—certainly no subtle delineations of motive and action. *Jān 'Ālam* is the embodiment of all the traditional manly virtues, that is to say, courage, justice, generosity, etc. He is gifted with extraordinarily good looks, which contribute much towards the misfortunes which befall him. Though courageous and wise in certain things, he is an easy victim of any treacherous person; hence his misplaced confidence in the *Wazīr zāda*, which nearly results in his losing his life.

Māh Tū'at, *Anjuman Ārā* and *Mehr Nigār* are the three women "characters" in the book. Of these, *Mehr Nigār* alone can be called a "character" at all in the sense in which we now use the word. She is loyal in the extreme; she has great capacity for self-sacrifice and can bear to take a second place, and is capable of love great enough to seek the pleasure of the beloved in preference to her own. It is her intelligence and practical commonsense that restore *Jān 'Ālam* back to human form and keep the *Wazīr zāda* at bay. *Anjuman Ārā* would never have seen through the ruse at all and fallen a victim to the evil machinations of the *Wazīr zāda*.

Mehr Nigār is the type of woman whose lot it is in life to save other people from the consequences of their folly. Such

a character, somehow, is never of the kind that inspires men to heights of passion. Perhaps being so admirably able to manage their own affairs, such women fail to stir the protective instinct in men, which is really what makes them take every risk and chance every danger in an effort to protect the "weaker sex".

Anjuman Ārā, on the other hand, is just the type about whom it has been said:

"That sun-hearted men have given their lives
For a rose touched by her finger."

She has very little intelligence, shrewdness or commonsense. She is petulant, a spoilt darling of her parents. She is well-versed in coquetry. She never acknowledges her true feelings for *Jān 'Ālam*, for she is not used to looking things in the face. Brought up in artificiality and conventionality, self-deception has become a second nature to her, and perhaps she almost believes herself that it is the truth she is speaking when she tells her mother that she thinks *Jān 'Ālam*'s reward should take some other form than the bestowal of her hand. Nevertheless, she is rather a charming person, and one can understand why she inspires such love in men. She has just that mixture of childish innocence and womanly coquetry which a genuine person like *Mehr Nigār* lacks, and which gives her the appeal which men find attractive, because it flatters their vanity. She is good-natured and free from jealousy or pettiness, and does not grudge *Mehr Nigār* her crumb of *Jān 'Ālam*'s affection, nor does she later show any conceit towards *Māh Tū'at*, rather she goes out of her way to soothe the other's wounded vanity. She also shows humility and an acknowledgment of *Mehr Nigār*'s superior judgment when she takes her advice with regard to the *Wazīr zāda*. Any pettiness on her part, and it would have been the ruin of them all.

The least attractive of the three wives of *Jān 'Ālam* is the "character" of *Māh Tū'at*. She shows a great deal of pettiness, jealousy and conceit, parading in all her finery, angling for

compliments, and then when they are not forthcoming, flying into a rage. She is not content to dismiss the matter even after *Jān 'Ālam* says that the chattering of a bird should not be given much attention, and it is her insistence which really is responsible for *Jān 'Ālam's* coming to know of *Anjuman Ārā's* beauty and for his forsaking her and starting in search of *Anjuman Ārā*. Of course, her attitude towards the parrot is quite comprehensible and in keeping with the character of any ordinary woman. Such confidence as the parrot enjoyed, and the amount of time and attention that was given to it would have excited the jealousy of any wife; but she shows herself in rather an unfavourable light in comparison with *Mehr Nigār* and *Anjuman Ārā*, who are both above such feelings of narrowness.

The other "characters" in '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*' are very shadowy and indefinite, and make no impression of any sort on the reader's mind. The villain of the piece, the *Wazīr zāda*, is a singularly colourless "character". In fact, '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*' is an exact counterpart of 'Euphues' in English. 'Euphues' shows no advance in style or manner of dealing with the subject. Its "characters" are wooden, and have no life in them, yet it is regarded as an important landmark in the development of the English novel on the ground of its being the first original composition of its kind. The same applies to '*Fasāna e 'Ajāib*'. It is the first attempt at original composition, and as such it shows in which way the taste of the public was developing.

PART II

CHAPTER IV

PANDIT RATN NĀTH SARSHĀR

'FASĀNA E ĀZĀD'

With '*Fasāna e Āzād*' we come into the actual domain of the novel. The supernatural is left behind; the miraculous and the impossible are discarded; "characters" are no longer princes and kings of fictitious and imaginary countries, but men and women from all strata of Lucknow society. The setting is real—it is recognisable as the decadent nineteenth century society of Lucknow, and Sarshār paints this background with masterly strokes; it stands out bold and clear before us: its customs, manners, feasts and festivals—we see it all clearly. He takes us right into the midst of it all, and even behind the scenes. His canvas is very large: it includes everyone, from the prince to the peasant. Every type that goes to make society is to be found in Sarshār's story. The decadent Navābs, the insolent dancing girls, the hypocritical Sheikhs, the hangers-on and loungers sponging on a decaying aristocracy, the fakirs and miracle-workers trading on the credulity of the superstitious, the petty bourgeois in their pedantic morality and colourless life, and the Begams in their luxurious homes and fastidious refinement.

It is as full of incidents as of "characters". All sorts of things take place, from the most improbable to the most trivial. Murders are committed, elopements planned, burglaries take place, there are rows in the streets and brawls in an inn, and there are the ordinary comings and goings of life, train journeys and visits from relations, weddings and engagements, "Ids" and "Shab i Barāts" and such like.