

CHAPTER VI

SHARAR AND THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

Sharar is the best known name amongst the Urdu novelists. His works gained immense popularity and were the first to be referred to as "Novels". Nazir Ahmad's works had been called "*Qiṣṣas*" and Sarshār's "*Fasānas*"; but Sharar's works from the outset were called "Novels", and it is they which established this form of literary composition securely in Urdu literature. Sharar's works were recognised as something different from what had hitherto existed. This recognition was not gained in the beginning by Nazir Ahmad or Sarshār. The former's works fitted in with the long line of morality tales and the latter's were akin to the romances. Sharar's works were the first to have gained recognition as being an innovation.

He has been called the Scott of the Urdu novel, and he did consciously try to imitate him, or rather he wrote to refute the intentional or the unintentional false allegations against Islam that are to be found in Scott's novels and to show the other side of the picture—the corruption and the gross immorality that had crept into the Church in the sixteenth century, the backwardness in Art and Letters and the general standard of living of the Christians in the Middle Ages in comparison with the Mohammedans of that time, and the courage, power and strength of the Mohammedans that carried all before them and established them as the rulers of half of the then known world.

Sharar's conception is grand. The meteoric rise of Islam is full of dramatic incidents; it affords the greatest scope for the imagination of an author or a dramatist in its rich personalities, whose very names spell romance and conjure up visions of chivalry and of desperate heroic deeds, such as Ṣalāḥ ud Dīn,

Mahmūd of Ghaznī, Hārūn ur Rashīd, Malka Zubaida, Tāriq, and so many others. Sharar chose incidents that were full of possibilities, and personalities that were redolent of romance; but his knowledge was too superficial, his genius not great enough to have dealt with them so as to make the incidents real and the people alive for us. A historical novel has a twofold task to perform. It must depict the period it chooses for its story, its manners and customs, its thoughts and ideals, so thoroughly and well that in the reading of the story the period becomes familiar, and it should show the historical personages on their human side to make their actions more comprehensible by an analysis of their motives.

It is a more difficult and, at the same time, an easier task than writing novels of contemporary manners, for "the forgotten things and battles long ago" have in them already elements of interest which everyday incidents do not possess. So the writer of the historical novel starts with an advantage over the writer of the contemporary novel. Even if he is only a moderately good story-teller, he will succeed in evoking a greater enthusiasm, at least in the average reader, than the novelist who decides to write about the humble and lowly ones of the earth.

But as against this initial advantage there are several disadvantages which a writer of historical novels must contend with. The first is that he must have a thorough knowledge of the period he is dealing with, not just a knowledge of the historical incidents or the mode of life but a thorough knowledge and a complete understanding. He must have read and dreamt of it so much that he should be able to transport himself into that age; its people must be to him as real as, or more real than, his next door neighbour, only then can he make them real to his readers. In depicting those of his "characters" who are taken directly from history, he has the same advantage and disadvantage. A "Napoleon", a "Marie Antoinette", a "Queen Christine" have a glamour which

the Mrs. Poyzers or Mrs. Bennetts of the world do not have. But the public has already preconceived ideas about these personages, which it has not about creatures entirely of an author's imagination. George Eliot or Jane Austen could endow Mrs. Poyser or Elizabeth with whatever qualities they liked, but Scott could not show "Queen Elizabeth" as bashful nor could Bulwer Lytton make the "Earl of Warwick" a meek and mild person. The public does not like and will not accept the destruction of this fixed conception. The drawing of a non-historical "character" of the period in which the story takes place is no less difficult. Here great knowledge and understanding of humanity alongside a knowledge of the period, its manners and history, are needed. There are things in man that are eternal, and there are things in man that are the products of the age he lives in. A man or a woman of the sixteenth century could not have dressed, or talked or behaved like a man or a woman in the twentieth century. But in the fundamental matters such as love, hate and loyalties, he could not have been very different. To understand this, to endow fictitious "characters" of the past with the right proportion of that which is eternal and that which is topical, is perhaps the most difficult of the historical novelist's tasks.

Sharar's novels do not answer those requirements. He has dealt with various periods of history, the Crusades, the period of Mohammedan rule in Spain, the period when the Mohammedan conquests reached France, the period of Mahmūd Gaznavī's invasion of India. The Crusades and the period of Mohammedan rule in Spain, however, were his favourite periods. He placed several of his stories in them. '*Malik 'Azīz aur Varjanā*' and '*Shauqīn Malka*' are both stories of the Crusades. '*Alfānso*', '*Flora Florenda*' and even '*Maftūh Fāteḥ*', can all be regarded as of the period when there was Muslim rule in Spain. The story of '*Muqaddas Nāznīn*' is supposed to take place early in the tenth century and '*Manṣūr-Mohanā*' during the Mohammedan invasion of India; but

Sharar's knowledge of any of these times is not profound and thus the reader gathers little or no information about the manners or customs or about the periods in which the stories are placed. Such information as is given is given directly and deliberately and not woven into the fabric of the story. While in Scott's or Bulwer Lytton's historical novels we feel that we have been transported into that period and are seeing for ourselves the manners and customs, in Sharar's novels we are conscious of the reporter, and of the fact that the book is written several centuries later and we are being told of conditions that existed in the past,—we are not transported into the past.

A comparison of '*Malik 'Azīz aur Varjanā*' and the '*Talisman*' will best bring out the weakness of Sharar in comparison with Scott, whom he sought to imitate. The period is almost the same, the plot is the same, even the point of view is the same. Both the authors agree in their conception of Richard and *Ṣalāḥ ud Dīn*. Richard is drawn as brave and chivalrous and much less narrow and prejudiced than his time warranted. *Ṣalāḥ ud Dīn* in both the novels is the chivalrous and noble enemy. But how insipid are Sharar's colours in comparison with Scott's vivid hues: while Richard lives and breathes and moves in the '*Talisman*', in '*Malik 'Azīz aur Varjanā*' he is wooden and lifeless. His courage is never manifested, his emotions never shown in play, but the author just puts down, like the historian before him, that Richard Cœur-de-Lion was a person with the following qualities. Nor is the portrait of the great *Ṣalāḥ ud Dīn* drawn any better. There also his qualities are put down categorically and unimaginatively as they would be in history; no intimate knowledge is gained of him, no enthusiasm aroused for his personality. *Malik 'Azīz* and *Varjanā*, the hero and the heroine, the counterparts of Sir Kenneth and Edith, are also as wooden, mere puppets brought on the stage by the pulling of strings and taken off the stage by further similar manipulations of the author, whereas Edith and Kenneth,

though by no means masterly "character" studies, have humanity and warmth. There is hardly any analysis in Scott's "characters"; there is not much individuality in them either; they are drawn to type. But though none of Scott's "characters" remain in the readers' mind as distinct personalities as do George Eliot's and Jane Austen's, and though they do not awaken such deep sympathies or strong aversions so that it is not possible to discuss and to take sides for or against them, yet they remain as types and enhance our knowledge of that class of the people and of that age. Edith in the 'Talisman', Rowena in 'Ivanhoe', Matilda in 'Rob Roy', all contribute to an understanding of the ladies of the Middle Ages. We do not know the deep recesses of the hearts of Edith or Rowena, but we do gather in a general way what the average lady of that time thought and felt, how she lived and what she said; and the same applies to the Knights and Squires, and his rough Scottish peasants and his dare-devil Highlanders. Scott's novels, have not made any one person but the entire period real. He brought the Middle Ages with its Knights and Squires and peasants, the '45 rebellion with its burning loyalty and its heroic stand for a lost cause and a charming Prince, the Scottish Highlands with their rugged beauty, and their rugged people, capable of strong hate and sincere love, before the reader's eyes.

Sharar's novels achieve no such thing for those "Sons of the Desert", those heroic and grand figures of Arabs and Saracens, who conquered half the world and defied the might of the rest; who were ruthless foes but noble enemies; who showed mercy to the vanquished, justice to the oppressed and honour to women; whose single-hearted devotion to religion alone is a fit theme for songs and sagas.

Neither the age nor the people of the age become alive and palpitating under Sharar's pen. Perhaps the novel in which he comes nearest to endowing his "characters" with life is '*Flora Florenda*'. The incidents of this story are supposed to have

taken place during the period of Islamic rule in Spain. This was a period in which Christianity had reached the lowest depths of degradation and corruption, and immorality was rife not only amongst the lay population but also in the religious orders and amongst nuns and priests. This is a historical fact and not a figment of the imagination. Sharar's object was to show the seamy side of Christianity by way of retaliation for the prejudiced and historically untrue picture drawn of Mohammedan rule by most European authors; but Sharar has allowed his object to become too apparent. He seems to be always pointing out and stressing to the reader the incidents that show Christianity in a depreciative light, and thus, by appearing to be so obviously prejudiced, he fails to make the reader convinced that what he is saying is in reality the truth; whereas Scott and other European writers do this very thing with a lighter hand, with a less obvious insistence and so win the reader's credulity more readily.

The plot construction of '*Flora Florenda*' is, however, much better than in any other of Sharar's works. It has a definite sequence of cause and effect. Certain factors set to work in the first few chapters have come to grips in the middle of the book, and in the last few chapters we are told what finally happens as a result of it all.

Flora and *Ziād* are both children of a mixed marriage, the mother being a Christian and the father a staunch Muslim. While *Ziād* is a staunch Muslim, Flora has definite leanings towards Christianity. *Ziād* ruthlessly tries to suppress these leanings, only succeeding as was to be expected in making Flora even more ardent in her convictions, though through fear she does outwardly conform to all the tenets of Islam. The Christians, however, are aware of there being a possible convert amongst the Muslims, and try their best to get Flora out at all costs. For this a most elaborate plan is made, and a nun from the Convent of Jesus is sent to be a neighbour of Flora and to pretend to be a Muslim widow; she is to try

to win the confidence of *Ziād* and thus gain access to Flora and abscond with her. Florenda, for this is the name of the nun, succeeds in her mission admirably, but she has to go to the length of marrying *Ziād* to win his confidence, for otherwise he would have nothing to do with her.

Flora on entering the fold of Christianity finds that it is far from what she has imagined it to be. The immorality of the nuns and the priests shocks her terribly, she herself falls a victim and suffers much ignominy and pain. She makes, however, one friend amongst the Christians, Helen, the daughter of a French Duke. This girl, through chance, meets *Ziād* who marries her and they both try to find and rescue Flora. But they do not succeed in this till after Flora has stabbed the priest who was the cause of her sufferings, and is herself mortally wounded. She only lives long enough to relate her tale of disillusionment to *Ziād*; then, declaring herself to be a Mohammedan, she dies.

'*Flora Florenda*' has many sordid passages about the doings in the convents and nunneries; no doubt such things did happen. What Sharar states is a matter of common belief amongst Protestants, but it is all rather ill-digested and does not make pleasant reading. Flora's character, however, is well understood and well portrayed. It was natural that she should have leanings towards her mother's faith as probably her mother was the only parent she knew. It is not stated explicitly but somehow one gathers that the father had died before Flora could remember him, and anyway he must have been of the same unbending type as *Ziād*. Even if she could have known him, he could have evoked no feelings of love in her. Thus Christianity for Flora became synonymous with her mother and all she had meant to her. While *Ziād* stood for a personification of Islam, and all that *Ziād* did to prevent Flora from becoming a Christian further strengthened her belief in the harshness of the Muslims and consequently of Islam.

Ziād's lectures to Flora remind one of the lectures of Polonius and Laertes to poor Ophelia.

However worthy might be the motives of these gentlemen, the reader cannot but feel sorry for the poor girls committed to their tender mercies. No wonder they went mad or became apostates. But Flora was essentially a religious girl and the corruption and immorality that were rife in the religious orders then were bound to shock and disillusion her. This phase of the story should have been made much more poignant and interesting, and a great novelist would have dwelt more on it than on the iniquities of the nuns and priests; but Sharar is much too eager on that aspect to give as much attention as he could have given to the delineation of Flora's mind and heart when she finds that her idols have feet of clay.

Ziād, Flora's brother, is an interesting "character". He has all the faults and good points of his type. He is an ardent Muslim, he is really devoted to his religion and zealous in its defence; but he cannot see another's point of view and will not allow Flora to change her religion. This, however, is the general attitude of the sixteenth century among both Mussulmans and Christians; so *Ziād* cannot be blamed for it. He has no endearing qualities, he is stern and unbending. Flora is afraid of him, but does not leave him. Florenda and the Duke's daughter, Helen, both fall in love with him, so probably he has a certain amount of charm. Florenda and Aaronus are the two important "characters" in the other camp, in which Aaronus is a villain pure and simple, with no mitigating qualities. Florenda's "character" is more complex, she has a twisted sort of religious devotion. She at first offers her services for purely religious reasons, then she grimly falls in love with *Ziād*. Her love for him is not strong enough, as her love for religion is stronger. Perhaps she is so afraid of the priests and nuns because, if she did not abduct Flora, she would be betrayed to *Ziād*, who, knowing that she had deceived him, would never forgive her. She is thus forced to

go on with her mission, though it is not devoid of all pleasure for her. Then we see her struggling with her genuine liking for Flora and desire to save her from disillusionment on the one hand and her own loyalty to her Church on the other, and it is because she, in her eagerness to save Flora, confides in Helen that vengeance finally overtakes Aaronus, but she does not feel happy about it and confesses what she regards as her betrayal of the Church.

Sharar's other novels, dealing with the period when Islamic power was at its zenith and Christianity was in a decaying state, are '*Maftūh Fāteh*', '*Muqaddas Nāznīn*', '*Shauqīn Malka*' and '*Alfānso*'.

'*Maftūh Fāteh*' is on the subject of the penetration of the Mussulmans into France. That the Mohammedans did enter France and some Islamic influence remained in France as late as 850 A.D., and that they were finally defeated by Charles Martel, are historical facts. Sharar uses this and weaves a love story into it as well. The daughter of one of the Dukes of Southern France falls in love with the Commander of the Muslim Forces. A peace with honour is signed between the two enemies, as the love affairs of the leaders of either side blunted the edge of enmity amongst the soldiers.

The Muslim Commander, '*Uṣmān*', however, had many enemies who looked upon his marriage with a Christian woman as treachery to the Caliph, especially as it had been followed by peace instead of victory. They treacherously murder '*Uṣmān*' and invade France once again. They are defeated by the French Forces under Charles Martel, who is, however, again defeated in another encounter at Narbonne. The result is that the *status quo* remains, except for the fact that '*Uṣmān*' is killed, and his French sweetheart, Marina, disappears into the Islamic world and her fate remains unknown. Her father adopts one of her maids, the one who had played a very important part in bringing the lovers together, and she sums up the whole moral of the story in

her reply to Charles Martel, that conquerors and conquests are transitional and, therefore, worthless. It is an unsatisfactory sort of story with poor characterisation and plan construction. Perhaps it throws a certain amount of light on the internal feuds and politics of Moorish Spain and has a good moral lesson on the evil results of jealousy. *Qa'b's* unreserved jealousy of '*Uṣmān*' results in the Mussulmans losing all the advantages they had gained by the peace treaty with the French Duke, and in the ensuing battle both *Qa'b* and the Amir of Spain, who had condoned *Qa'b's* treacherous murder of '*Uṣmān*', are killed. So little impression do these "characters" make on the reader's mind that soon after closing the book it is difficult even to remember their names.

The story of '*Muqaddas Nāznīn*' is woven round the rather doubtful legend of a woman who had managed to get elected as the Pope. The author does not seem to have decided in what light to present his "characters". Thomas at first seems to be the hero of the book, and the priest the villain; but as the story progresses, the poor wretch falls from favour and is shown as importunate, jealous and malicious, and the priest as disinterested and good. Right up to the end, Sharar keeps on changing the attitude of the priest, and the reader is at a loss as to how exactly to take Lazarus. When he advised Martha to disguise herself and take holy orders, was he doing so with the motive of thus bringing her away from home and having her under his influence so as to seduce her, or was he really doing this to give Martha an opportunity of serving her religion? At one moment he is shown to us as a worldly, unscrupulous priest, next moment his *bona fides* is credited. This inconsistency remains to the end and keeps the reader thoroughly confused. The whole of the *dénouement* is utterly fantastic and incredible, and the entire story colourless.

'*Firdaus i Barīn*' is another historical novel, but has for its subject not the Crusades, or any of the Muslim invasions of

Europe, but the mysterious and reprehensible practices of a sect of Mussulmans known as "*Ismā'īliā*", who flourished about the end of the sixteenth century. They seemed to have practised all sorts of queer rites and are supposed to have constructed an earthly Paradise into which were taken the newcomers, and there won over body and soul. How far all this is true and how far they owe their existence to the prejudices of other sects is a moot point, though it is a fact that such beliefs were commonly entertained by people generally regarding the "*Ismā'īliā*".

The plot is an ingenious one, and the author has well portrayed *Yūsuf's* "character", especially in showing his gradual deterioration of judgment, and shows an understanding of human nature and its complexities. This is not displayed much in the delineation of "characters" in Sharar's other novels.

How a blind infatuation can drive a man on from one crime to another, how it can make him suspend all judgment and shut out all reason, is clearly brought out. *Yūsuf* and *Zamarrud* are travelling on dangerous roads—roads supposed to be infested by robbers who kill anyone young and good-looking. *Zamarrud's* brother, *Mūsā*, has been killed there and therefore *Zamarrud*, in spite of *Yūsuf's* remonstrance, insists on taking that way and investigating the mystery of his death. No sooner have they entered into the valley than a group of people swoop down upon them. *Zamarrud* disappears, while *Yūsuf* is made unconscious and left in the valley. *Yūsuf* refuses to leave the place, and sits day and night on what he thinks is *Zamarrud's* grave. One day a letter appears on that grave telling *Yūsuf* to leave the valley and go away. He refuses. After some time, another letter appears, which promises a meeting with *Zamarrud* if he will go and see such and such a person in such and such a place and do, without demur, all that he tells him to do. This starts *Yūsuf* on a career of crime. In depicting this Sharar has

shown both imagination and understanding. He has succeeded in making us see in what light *Yūsuf* saw the committing of those criminal deeds. We share the gradual conviction which comes into *Yūsuf's* mind that the *Imām* is really a holy man. The incidents which are chosen add to our belief as well as to *Yūsuf's*; we ourselves begin to wonder as to how, if not supernaturally informed, the *Imām* was able to foretell and have first-hand knowledge of so many things.

The description of the Paradise is an excellent example of imaginative work. The removing of the illusion is no less well done than the conveying of it in the earlier part of the book; Sharar had gradually built up belief, he now sets himself to destroy it and to show how that all we in conjunction with *Yūsuf* had regarded as beyond explanation could be easily explained. The "character" of *Zamarrud*, the heroine, is an interesting one. No doubt she has a certain amount of egotism, and her part in the process of getting *Yūsuf's* services cannot be entirely forgiven, though easily understood. If she had been of a stronger material she could have refused, or at least taken some steps to warn *Yūsuf* earlier, but she does not do so till such time as *Yūsuf* falls from favour and there is no way of meeting him save by destroying the entire fabric of pretence. But *Zamarrud's* egotism is made as comprehensible as *Yūsuf's* crimes. '*Firdaus i Barīn*' is Sharar's best historical novel.

'*Shauqīn Malka*' is also a story of the Crusades. It is less didactic and has a better plot than most of Sharar's historical novels. It attempts at least to show both sides of the picture. If the courage, bravery and single-heartedness of the Mussulmans are extolled, justice at least is done to the devotion and the sincerity of the Christians, and how they felt about the situation is also shown.

The story is that, as a result of the Mussulmans having reconquered Odessa and the surrounding territories of Palestine, another Crusade is launched by the Christians.

Louis VII and his wife, Queen Eleanor of France, take the most active part in this Crusade. They start with a retinue of Knights and Squires and Knights Templars from France for the Holy Land. Amongst their followers are also some pilgrims from the Holy Land, of whom one named Matthew becomes a favourite of the Queen. The Queen is shown as a woman of extremely loose character, though not without a sort of religiousness and even good-heartedness. While enamoured of Matthew, she tries to lure Crawford, the German Prince, as well; but he, suspecting her designs, leaves the camp. King Louis himself is in love with one of the ladies-in-waiting of Eleanor. Intrigues such as these are afoot everywhere in the camp.

Louis wants first to go to the Holy Land and begin the war. Eleanor wants to stay at Antioch. Encouraged by her uncle she refuses to go with Louis, who does not comply with Eleanor's request. Eleanor asks for a divorce, Louis refuses and forcibly takes her with him. Matthew, her admirer, follows and rescues her with the help of some Bedouins. While in the camp of these Bedouins he discovers that his sisters, mother and other members of his family, whom he has not seen for years, are the slaves of these Bedouins. Matthew, as stated earlier in the story, was in reality a Mohammedan, who in search of his family had adopted this guise. He had seen them taken prisoners by the Christians and hoped by donning Christian garb to come across them. But it transpires that they have been taken by the Bedouins from the Christians.

Through the influence of the Queen Matthew manages to get the freedom of all his family and they all proceed to Antioch. There Queen Eleanor realises that Matthew has fallen in love with one of the girls of his family and she tries to poison her. Matthew perceiving her designs warns *Zamarrud* and she escapes. Next day he leaves for Mosul with his family, and Eleanor receives a letter saying that, as she had tried to poison *Zamarrud*, Matthew found himself

free from his promise to return to her as she had first broken the trust between them.

In describing the relationship between Eleanor and Matthew Sharar has displayed greater knowledge of human nature than is usual in his books. Matthew is shown to be much attracted by Eleanor and yet disgusted by her licentiousness. Eleanor herself is shown as a creature of contradictory moods, capable of great generosity and yet extremely unscrupulous and mean if crossed in her egotism. For the rest, '*Shauqin Malka*' is as poor as others of Sharar's historical novels. Sharar did not have the conveying of atmosphere, and this is the most essential quality needed by all historical novelists. And therefore the period he deals with failed to become alive under his pen.

Sharar had the gift to realise which period of history was redolent with romance and which historical incidents would provide material for a first-rate novel. But his technique did not match his conception, and he did not transport his vision to paper; hence the insipidity of his novels in spite of the fact that they deal with periods so rich in colour and romance.

The period of Mogul rule in India is laden with material for a novelist. It is a positive treasure-trove of romance and adventure. The names *Nūr i Jahān*, *Mumtāz Maḥal*, *Zeb un Nisā*, *Jahān Ārā*, *Anārkalī* and *Akhtar Maḥal* spell romance. No period of history is so colourful, so rich, so laden with material for a novelist's pen as this. That no Indian novelist has reaped the rich harvest of romance that is to be found in this period is surprising, and that Sharar himself should have gone so far afield for his material and only once tapped the sources nearer home is strange.

In '*Mīnā Bāzār*', however, Sharar has taken the period of *Shāh i Jahān*'s rule in India as the background for his story. "*Mīnā Bāzār*" was amongst Akbar's many innovations to further Hindu-Muslim unity. To it came the noble ladies of the

land, they kept stalls in the manner of the charity bazaars and sold jewels and precious stones. The buyers were also ladies of high degree, but the King and his nobles were also privileged to come without any restriction to "*Mīnā Bāzār*" and to buy from the fair shopkeepers, who asked fabulous prices for their wares. Even the poorest imagination can picture the scene of "*Mīnā Bāzār*"; how colourful, rich and like fairyland it must have looked! How magnificent must have been its setting when that Prince of Palace Builders, Shāh i Jahān, designed the building and planned the garden of "*Mīnā Bāzār*"! In that setting were placed the beauties of India's first families, and amongst them freely moved the King and his Princes with all their magnificence. Could Cupid have resisted the temptation to use his silver bow when he was offered such a galaxy of victims!

In Sharar's novel Shāh i Jahān himself falls a victim and loses his heart to a fair seller. He orders her to come to the Palace and to be his and the Queen's guest for three days. On her return she is divorced by her husband. The King is furious at this as he considers it a reflection on him, and condemns the husband to death. His wife who still cares very deeply for him begs that he should be forgiven. The King grants her petition on the condition that she grants him his, that is, becomes his wife. She agrees after demurring for some time, and the husband is forgiven and restored to favour, and all ends well.

In attempting not to shock the conventional morality, Sharar has to cramp and destroy the possibilities of the story. He tried to justify Shāh i Jahān and his conduct which could not be justified. It was wrong—palpably and obviously wrong—but Sharar dared not show a popular monarch in an unfavourable light, and he also dared not uphold what he did. Thus in attempting to steer clear of offending either party he destroys the story.

There is a legend that once a fair seller of "*Mīnā Bāzār*"

sold a clear-cut *misry* to Shāh i Jahān as a diamond for a lakh of rupees. This is the nucleus of Sharar's story. He ought to have let his imagination wander freely and make of it a romantic tale, not tried to justify it conventionally for it cannot be justified. But none of the great love stories of the world can pass the censure of conventional morality. He tries to show that Shāh i Jahān did not do any wrong, that only when the husband had divorced Gulrukh Begam did he want to marry her, and that before that his intentions were purely platonic. In doing so he has destroyed the romance and not succeeded in exonerating the King at the bar of morality. Such crimes can never be exonerated morally, but only by the canon which declares that "all things are fair in love and war".

In '*Husn kā Dākū*' and '*Asrār i Darbār i Harāmpūr*', Sharar has tried to deal with contemporary history. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to decide whether to regard '*Husn kā Dākū*' and '*Asrār i Darbār i Harāmpūr*' as social or historical novels.

The misdemeanours and licentiousness of the ruler of an Indian State are the subject of these two novels. Here again Sharar's strong prejudice has ruined the story. Most of the incidents mentioned are actual facts, but he has exaggerated the faults of the Navāb's character to such an extent as to have turned him into a monster, or worse than a monster. In '*Husn kā Dākū*' there is a story of sorts, but '*Asrār i Darbār i Harāmpūr*' is just a chronicle of the Navāb's iniquities.

Sharar wrote about twenty to twenty-five historical novels. They are very like one another as the "characters" possess very little individuality, and the knowledge of the background is in every case very sketchy. "*Hasan aur Anjalīna*" has the Crimean War for its theme; it is very like '*Malik 'Aziz aur Varjanā*' or '*Shauqīn Malka*'. A Christian woman's love for a Mohammedan is the basis of the story. '*Manşūr-Mohanā*' is a similar story, only the background in this case is India, and the period that of Maḥmūd Ḡaznavī's

invasions. 'Joyā e Haq' is rather interesting. The story is the search of a deeply religious and sincere man for a true religion, who felt his dream realised on witnessing the dawn of Islam. It incorporates the various incidents that happened just before and in the early days of the birth of Islam.

'Qais o Lubna', 'Filpāna', 'Azīza e Miṣr', 'Zavāl i Bagdād' and 'Malka Zanobia' are very little known works of Sharar, and did not enjoy even the temporary popularity of others of his works.

Though first and foremost Sharar is regarded as a historical novelist, he has written several social novels as well: 'Badr un Nisā kī Muṣibat', 'Āqā Ṣādiq kī Shādī', 'Dilkash', 'Dilcasp', 'Tāhira' and others. Sharar was perhaps one of the first persons to oppose the "purdah" system! 'Badr un Nisā kī Muṣibat' and 'Āqā Ṣādiq kī Shādī' are both written with the object of showing the evil results of "purdah". The easy flow of the language, the admixture of humour, the vivacity and the liveliness of the "characters" in these novels stand out in contrast to the halting pace and the woodenness of the "characters" in the historical novels, and lead us to think that, had Sharar confined himself to writing social novels only, he would have made a much better job of it, for he was sure of his ground and could describe it with assurance, while his knowledge of history was too academic and scanty and so he could not give his "characters" any semblance of life or reality. 'Badr un Nisā kī Muṣibat' is a very well written novel, compact, without any undue trimmings; the "characters" are not described at length, but the short sketches are convincingly lifelike. *Kubrā Begam*, *Ṣafdar Husain*, *Aṣqar Husain*, *Badr un Nisā*, her father and mother, are all real people and talk and act as real people. The incident that leads to the whole tragedy is one that could easily happen where "purdah" is observed with such strictness as was common in respectable Mohammedan families. It is surprising that it did not happen oftener.

Badr un Nisā, while about six years old, is married to her nine-year-old cousin, *Aṣqar*, when his mother is on a visit to her parents. When *Badr un Nisā* grows up, her father-in-law comes to fetch her; she has never seen him, nor has he seen her. It does not occur to her parents to let him see her because the "rūnumā" has not yet taken place, and it was not customary for the bride to be seen by the "-in-laws" before it. So *Badr un Nisā* starts off for her new home with her uncle who is a complete stranger to her. The fact that *Badr un Nisā* is sent for so abruptly is accounted for in a manner which is convincing enough, for such things are common enough amongst Mohammedan families. *Badr un Nisā* was married to *Aṣqar* on the insistence of his mother against the consent of his father, or at least with his forced consent. He therefore refuses to bring the "barāt" with the traditional pomp and ceremony, and just comes and takes *Badr un Nisā* summarily away. Her parents reluctantly let her go; as the girl has actually been married, they could not very well stop her.

By a strange coincidence another bride is going home in very similar circumstances. The escort in her case is the elder brother-in-law, who has also not seen her. Her story is this. Her father had made a *mésalliance* and she is the child of that marriage. He marries her to a cousin of his, hoping in this way to have the *entrée* into the family again, but the young man's father refuses to acknowledge the marriage for a long time and, in the end, only consents to have the bride sent for unceremoniously, and thus she also is going without any pomp and ceremony.

During the journey they get changed, and the mistake is not discovered till nearly two days after; after a great deal of wiring and writing of letters the two brides are restored to their proper homes. But that is not the end of it; tragic consequences come out of it all. *Aṣqar* is killed by the husband of the other girl in revenge for the unintentional dishonour he has done to him and he himself gets hanged for it. Both the

girls are widowed and their lives ruined for no fault of their own. Sharar has been rather ingenious in showing that "purdah" defeats its own ends, that is to say, instead of protecting women it exposes them to dishonour by keeping them helpless and ignorant.

'*Āqā Ṣādiq kī Shādī*' has the same theme for its story; the plot, however, is different. *Āqā Ṣādiq*, a middle-aged gentleman, is desirous of marrying, and insists that the girl should be pretty. The marriage is arranged and the girl shown to him at the "*rūnamā*" is certainly pretty, but it is not the girl with whom "*nikāh*" has been performed. The treacherous "*mashhātā*", who has taken money from both sides, tells this to *Āqā Ṣādiq* at the ceremony of "*ārsī mushaf*", and so he insists on taking the girl straight away with him. This spoils the plan of the girl's people who had counted on an interval for changing over to the real bride, and so the false bride is taken away by *Āqā Ṣādiq*. Next day she comes home and instead of her the real bride, who is far from beautiful, is returned. *Āqā Ṣādiq* says he has been cheated, and divorces the girl then and there; but the unfortunate girl who had masqueraded as the bride is also divorced by her husband for he is furious when he hears what she has done. After some time *Āqā Ṣādiq* marries her. Thus the story ends.

Here Sharar uses the same argument: how "purdah" encourages such shady transactions and how risky it is to marry without seeing the person to whom one is being married! Sharar tells the story convincingly: such things can happen though, of course, such instances of deliberate cheating are rarely heard of. It could only take place because the bridegroom was a foreigner and was quite unaware of the family he was marrying into, and had no female relations to ascertain for him the truth about the girl he was going to marry. The story, however, is a possible, if not a probable, one; and there is wit, humour, vivacity and individuality in the "characters" and it makes amusing reading.

'*Dilcasp*' is a novel in three parts and, though a social novel, is as wooden and sketchy as his historical novels. A part of the scene is laid in England, and thus it is understandable why the incidents should lack the ring of reality for, as in the case of bygone periods of history, Sharar's knowledge of his subject was extremely sketchy. He relied on hearsay for his knowledge of English social life, and perhaps he had done some superficial reading, but very much more than that is needed for becoming sufficiently conversant with a country and a people's manners and modes of living to use it convincingly as a background for one's creative work; but the earlier part of the work is not any better, and this cannot be accounted for except by the fact that the very idea of incorporating scenes in England took away the easy assurance with which he tackled his other social novels.

Lines are blurred in '*Dilkash*' and it is not easy to gather what exactly is the motive of the story. It is a novel aiming at social reform, but what exactly it wants to reform, what particular evil or groups of evil it sets out to condemn, is utterly impossible to find out. The story in brief is this: *Aşgar*, *Şafdar* and '*Abbās*', three students of Lucknow, are staying at Aligarh in the house of a Professor of the College. *Aşgar* happens one day to catch sight of the niece of the Professor, falls in love with her and, through rather underhand ways, gets her to agree to marry him. But unfortunately the "*Maulvī*" who is called to perform the "*nikāh*", is the father of the boy *Husna* is betrothed to, and he goes and informs *Husna*'s uncle. The uncle arrives on the scene and is prevailed upon by *Aşgar* and his friends to consent to the marriage, which he does. A short time after the marriage *Husna* goes to Lucknow to *Aşgar*'s people; then they set out for Haj, but change their minds and go to Europe instead. In Europe they meet with some misadventures, and in a chastened mood go to perform the Haj. The story ends there, leaving the readers extremely dissatisfied, and completely

mystified. There is not even a logical sequence to it all, much less a well-defined plot, the characterisation is extremely poor, the "characters" are not only lifeless, they move with jerks; there is no consistency in their actions, no accounting for their words and deeds. For instance, take *Husna's* attitude after her marriage. She talks and behaves as if someone has done her a great wrong instead of being herself the culprit, while her uncle's acquiescence in what would be regarded by Indian standards as scandalous behaviour is incredible. He not only acquiesces in *Husna's* elopement, but gives orders in his house that *Husna* should not even be teased or questioned. Her aunt also adopts a most submissive attitude.

'*Tāhira*' again goes to prove that Sharar can write much better social novels than he can historical ones. '*Tāhira*' is partly autobiographical and partly narrated by a second person.

Navāb Lāiq ud Daula was amongst those who came with Wājid 'Alī's court to "*Matia Burj*". His knowledge of Persian was remarkable, and once, when questioned by a pupil as to who was his tutor, he happened to remark that it was a lady. This excited the curiosity of the pupil and he asked to be told about her. *Lāiq ud Daula* after some hesitation agreed.

There used to live in his "*mohalla*" a Begam about whom strange stories were told. She was never seen at any functions and no one was allowed to enter her place. European women, however, were seen going in and out frequently. *Lāiq ud Daula*, who was then six or seven years old and was made Risaldar by the King who was amused at his audacity, was taken in by some European women to see *Tāhira Begam*. *Tāhira Begam* liked him and ordered him to come and see her frequently.

He began going to her and came to like her very much. His mother, however, did not at first approve of it. It was said that *Tāhira Begam* was not a Mohammedan and that she

hated Indians. She did not like her boy to see much of a person of this sort. The little boy, being only a child, told *Tāhira Begam* what his mother had said, whereupon *Tāhira* got his mother to come and see her, and at her request told her the story of her life and the reason why she lived in such seclusion.

A certain "*Maulvī*", *Sa'īdullāh*, had been more or less ostracised by his family for having taken employment in the Residency. He lived with his wife and only son and an orphan niece. They did not mix with any other family as the nature of his work compelled him to keep aloof, lest suspicion be aroused that he was open to bribery.

Their only visitors were the Resident's Secretary and his wife, Colonel and Mrs. Mackintosh. Colonel and Mrs. Mackintosh became so fond of the little girl that she began to teach her English. Though it was against their traditions *Maulvī Sa'īdullāh* and his wife did not stop her from doing so as they were extremely fond of Mrs. Mackintosh. Their own son *Valīullāh* was, however, being educated by "*Maulvīs*" in the old traditions. The intention was to marry Nanny to *Valīullāh*. When the subject was put to *Valīullāh*, he refused point-blank. He considered Nanny an apostate as she had been taught English and had been much under Mrs. Mackintosh's influence. No amount of threats or force could move him and he got the "*Maulvīs*" he studied with to take his side.

Maulvī Sa'īdullāh and his wife, who were devoted to Nanny, were extremely hurt by the attitude of their son. Their combined efforts did not persuade *Valīullāh* to marry Nanny and, as a result of his parents' displeasure, he left the house. The shock was too much for the parents who both died within a short time of his departure. Colonel and Mrs. Mackintosh became the sole guardians of Nanny, for whom they arranged a generous allowance from the Residency. They tried to persuade her to marry a young and eligible boy amongst her own

people, but Nanny, who considered herself engaged to *Valīullāh*, refused. This was her story. Nanny was no other than *Tāhira Begam*.

Lāiq ud Daula's mother was much impressed by the story and became a staunch friend of *Tāhira Begam*. She tried to persuade *Tāhira Begam* to marry, but *Tāhira* said that though now her feelings about *Valīullāh* were not those which had prevented her from marrying, she still did not think she could be happy with any man from her own community as his ideas would be bound to be different from her own which were very liberal. In the circumstances, she would only make herself unhappy by marrying and so desired to spend her days just like that.

Years went by and *Tāhira Begam* continued to take an interest in the little Risaldar. An impostor tried to bully her into believing that he was her brother. Colonel and Mrs. Mackintosh died and, many years after, *Valīullāh* returned. He had travelled much and met the most learned people of the Islamic world. His ideas had changed. He was no longer prejudiced as he had been. *Tāhira Begam* after much hesitation agreed to marry him, and they left for Egypt. Soon after their departure the Mutiny broke out and *Lāiq ud Daula* came out to "*Matia Burj*". He continued to hear from *Tāhira Begam*, who had gained a prominent place in Egyptian society, and had done several Haj. She had now been dead for several years.

This is the story and this is the manner of its narration. *Tāhira Begam*'s "character" is extremely well drawn and so is the "character" of *Valīullāh*. The tragedy of *Tāhira Begam*'s life is well brought out. Through no fault of her own she had been ostracised and condemned by her community. No doubt such things were very common in the days when Western influence had just begun to be felt. It illustrates the relations between English and Indians in the early days of the British rule in India. Though on the one hand there

was a much greater prejudice against them, the relationship was much more personal as well; English men and women of those days did become real friends as Colonel and Mrs. Mackintosh became with *Maulvī Sa'īdullāh* and *Tāhira Begum*.

'*Gaibdān Dulhan*' is another very interesting novel of Sharar's. There is ingenuity and humour in it, and the plot is extremely well constructed; one cannot guess the secret of the "*gaibdānī*" of *Hamid*'s wife, and the final revealing of it in the end comes as a real surprise. The "character" of the *Gaibdān Dulhan* is cleverly drawn, and that of *Hamid* also shows a knowledge of human nature. '*Gaibdān Dulhan*' is one of the most amusing and interesting of Sharar's novels.

There are a few more social novels by Sharar: '*Yūsuf aur Najma*', a love story with no particular merit; '*Dilkash*', a similar novel to '*Dilcasp*'; '*Khaufnāk Muḥabbat*', showing how "purdah" and ignorance make women an easy prey of villains and intriguers.

Sharar has written about thirty-five novels. Even if the quality had been uniformly very poor, this would have been a remarkable achievement. But it is not so; Sharar, especially in his social novels, is often extremely good. He was one of the earliest novel writers of Urdu—the first whose works were described as novels. His works went to popularise and to familiarise the reading public with this new form of fiction, and for this reason Sharar's is a very high place in Urdu literature.