

Rāshid ul Khairī, though she began as an imitator of Nazīr Aḥmad, she soon evolved a separate style and so is entitled to be regarded individually.

Nazīr Aḥmad can, however, lay claim to have influenced nearly all the women novelists inasmuch as they wrote—most of them, at least—domestic novels, devoid of love interest and having for their object the reform of social evils. In some instances, however, the imitation was conscious and acknowledged by the authoress, as in the novel ‘*Iṣlāḥ un Nisā*’ by Vālidā e Muḥammad Sulaimān.

‘*Iṣlāḥ un Nisā*’ is an extremely readable book, and has for its aim the reforming of those multifarious customs attendant on marriages, births, and deaths. Avowedly didactic in purpose like all domestic novels, it achieves in places excellent characterisation, and has lively scenes and good dialogue. The “characters” are well drawn, especially the sycophant servants, such as *Shabrātan*. The domestic intrigues and petty jealousies are well brought out; the story of how unscrupulous people take advantage of the ignorance of others for feathering their own nests is, though a common enough one, convincingly told.

The authoress has avoided the fatal temptation of making the scene of the story Delhi,—fatal without a first-hand knowledge of Delhi. She has located her “characters” in Bihar and hence succeeded in painting their environs in a manner that carries conviction.

‘*Iṣlāḥ un Nisā*’ can lay claim to having more body and spice in it than most of the novels written in imitation of Nazīr Aḥmad, and the field of competition was by no means narrow.

CHAPTER VIII

RĀSHID UL KHAIRĪ

Rāshid ul Khairī was the most prolific of the Urdu novelists. He has left no less than eighty books, which include novels—social and historical, short-stories and collections of essays.

His special *forte* was tragedy, or rather the depicting of the tragic consequences of such social evils as polygamy, marriage without the consent of the parties concerned, usurpation of women’s rights, headlong and ridiculous imitation of the Western mode of life, etc. But he attempted, especially towards the end, to write in a lighter vein too. He also wrote historical novels in the style of Sharar, and half-realistic half-imaginative romances in the style of Ḥasan Niṣāmī.

Rāshid ul Khairī is generally regarded as the chief and the most successful imitator of Nazīr Aḥmad. Except for the fact that they both use the same material, that is to say, that they deal mostly with the middle class Mohammedan family of Delhi, they do not have much else in common. Their technique and the way of handling the material is entirely different, as also is the tone of their work.

Rāshid ul Khairī is the more consciously didactic of the two. When Nazīr Aḥmad wrote, the public were only dimly aware of the existing social evils, no drastic change was desired or thought necessary. By the time of Rāshid ul Khairī the movement of social reform had gathered full force. Sweeping changes were being advocated and existing customs severely criticised. Hence the stronger didactic note of Rāshid ul Khairī’s novels. Besides which there is a good deal more sadness and sorrow to be found in his works than in those of Nazīr Aḥmad. This earned for him the title “*Muṣavvir i Gam*”.

Nazīr Aḥmad’s ‘*Mirāt ul ‘Arūs*’, ‘*Banāt un Na’sh*’, are very much of the “God’s in His Heaven, all’s right with

the world" kind of books, and even in '*Tarbat un Naṣūh*' and '*Fasāna e Muḩḩalā*' the tragedy is not so harrowing and heartrending as it is in nearly all the works of Rāshid ul Khairī. Excellent dialogue is to be found in both, they can both render the snappy back-chat of the Delhi women extremely well, weaving in the idioms and everyday sayings so well that in reading them one gets transported to an old Delhi house in imagination. But there is no such wit and humour to be found in Rāshid ul Khairī as in Nazīr Aḩmad. His work is not lit up every now and then with a flash of wit and humour like that of Nazīr Aḩmad. Not even when he is consciously trying to be humorous can he succeed in achieving the effect the latter almost unconsciously achieves. His humour is of a boisterous, broad kind, which often degenerates into utter ridiculousness, and never reaches the realm of pure wit.

But there is much to commend him in his own realm. His work falls under several categories. The social novels form the biggest group, then there are the short-stories and the historical novels, several biographies such as '*Az Zahrā*' and '*Sayyida kā Lāl*' and '*Āmena kā Lāl*', and numerous stories and essays, which are all being collected and published by his son, Rāziq ul Khairī.

Rāshid ul Khairī has dealt with every social evil which might be found in Mohammedan society. Widows' remarriage is advocated in '*Nauḩa e Zindagī*', while '*Fasāna e Sa'id*' shows the other side of the picture, that is the suffering of children in marriages where the step-father gains complete control over them. '*Sanjog*' shows results of the common enough mistake of marriages made for the sake of wealth; '*Saukan kā Jalāpā*' shows the tyranny and torture women have to suffer in consequence of polygamy; and '*Maūda*' the injustice of denying a girl an equal share of the property with the boys. '*Tūfān i Hayāt*' is a tale of evils from the extravagances in the observance of ruinous customs; '*Sarāb*

i Maḩrīb', '*Bint ul Vaqt*', '*Satvantī*' and '*Jauhar i Qadāmat*' show the canker of materialism, irreligiousness and selfishness that is eating into society among an erstwhile spiritually minded and religious people. '*Tafsīr i 'Iṣmat*' advocates the restoring of the right of "*khul'a*" to women. '*Manāzil us Sāera*' can be regarded as showing the results of undue spoiling and petting of children. Otherwise it is just a study of an ordinary family in more or less ordinary circumstances. So are the trio: '*Ṣubḩ i Zindagī*', '*Shām i Zindagī*', '*Shab i Zindagī*'. In these the influence of Nazīr Aḩmad is most apparent. Even the good and the bad sister motif which was originated by Nazīr Aḩmad, and which gained immense popularity with his imitators, is found in '*Ṣubḩ i Zindagī*', while '*Shām i Zindagī*' and '*Shāb i Zindagī*' are illustrations, like the latter part of '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', of how a good woman surmounts all difficulties and how her labours at last meet with success. In short, "the path of a good woman is strewn with flowers but they rise behind her feet and not before them".

Except for these three, which can really be regarded as one, no novel of Rāshid ul Khairī delineates an average "character" in more or less average circumstances. All his other novels revolve round the effects of some one social evil. "Characters" are shown in relation to it, as the perpetrators or the victims of that particular social crime, with the result that a clear conception of their personality is not possible. They tend to become embodiments of an idea rather than human beings. As in '*Maūda*', where one keeps on thinking of *Maūdūd* as the kind of man who puts the love of his property before that of his child, and would rather have his child dead or disgraced than see his property split up. This phase of his character forms the theme of the book, and so every other aspect of it is deliberately omitted or unstressed. The impression is formed in the reader's mind that fathers who deny their daughters a share in their property or disown them on remarriage, as in '*Nauḩa e Zindagī*', or force them

to remarry so as to suit their own convenience, as in 'Fasāna e Sa'ūd', are thoroughly unpleasant people. That it may be possible for someone to be relentless in matters about which he at least is convinced that the right is on his side, and yet have normal affections and feelings towards other things, is lost sight of. Seeing that the first object of these books was to raise the feeling of indignation and horror against the perpetrators of such social crimes, it is understandable why their characters were denied mellowing touches of humanity. Yet it is a fault artistically speaking. However, though their one great error or obsession overshadowed their entire behaviour, the "characters" of Rāshid ul Khairī are not entirely devoid of good feeling. Both *Maudūd* in 'Maūda' and *Safyā's* father in 'Nauha e Zindagī' have real affection for their sons and their wives. Very little is said, but somehow the idea is conveyed that between *Maudūd* and *Muhsina* there existed a very real bond of affection and understanding regarding every matter except that of his treatment of *Maūda*. Though hating and tormenting his daughter because she would be the means of having his property split, he is considerate towards his wife, hence he is no woman-hater. In fact, like *Safyā's* father in 'Nauha e Zindagī', *Aḥmad* in 'Sāt Rūḥon ke 'Amal Nāme' and *Iṣfahān ud Daula* in 'Tamqa e Shaitānī', he is a victim of a social code. They do wrong but they think they are upholding what is right and proper. They are being cruel and ruthless and unjust, but the fault is not theirs but that of society. Because it is their nature to be thorough, they carry out its dictates with a ruthlessness which less thoroughgoing "characters" are not capable of and hence tragedy is avoided. But the codes have in them the germs of disaster and whenever a strong "character" is subjected to them by another equally strong "character", chaos follows.

The social evils dealt with by Rāshid ul Khairī are those that mostly concern women, or rather those whose victims

are women. Hence polygamy is dealt with repeatedly: 'Saukan kā Jalāpā', *Qudsīyā's* story inset in 'Sanjog' and *Qaiṣarā's* in 'Sāt Rūḥon ke 'Amal Nāme' and *Ṣāleḥa's* in 'Gauhar i Maqṣūd' are all condemnations of polygamy. They show the injustice and indignities that the first wife has to suffer after the husband's remarriage, her helplessness against his tyranny. And he severely indicts the society in which it is possible to discard a wife as easily as a pair of old slippers.

The fate of children at the hand of the step-mother is another oft-repeated motif of Rāshid ul Khairī's novels. It appears again and again as the main theme or as a side-issue.

Rāshid ul Khairī loved the old order of things, loved and admired the gentle, long-suffering, patient women of old India, and regretted—intensely regretted—their passing away. Some of the best lines in his books are those in which he describes them. They are prose poems:

نشہ ترقی کے سرشار جوانوا غور سے دیکھ لو، دنیا
ان کی صورتوں کو ترسے گی، آنکھیں پہاڑ پہاڑ کر دیکھو گے
اور یہ مکھڑے نظر نہ آئیں گے۔ یہ صحبتیں ختم اور یہ سہاں برہم
یہ وہ گہر ہیں جن کے ہر ذرہ سے صدائے ایمان کان میں آئیگی،
یہ وہ بیویاں ہیں جن کے بچپن پر والدین کی خدمت نے
دعاؤں کے پھول قربان کئے، جن کی وداع پر عزیزوں اور
پڑوسیوں کی آنکھوں نے آنسو گرائے۔ . . .

لو ہشیار ہو، مجلس فانی قریب آگئی ا دل بھر کے
دیکھ لو، چاند مدم ہوا، چاندنی پھیک پڑ گئی، تارے
جھلملا گئے۔ چراغ ٹمٹاتے ہیں، رات گر گئی، اور یہ پھول
جو ساری رات مہکے اب مرجھاتے ہیں۔ ان کی سادگی
پر نہ جاؤ، ان کی باتوں پر نہ ہنسو۔ یہ دنیائے نسوان کی وہ

مورتیں ہیں جن کے منہ سے پھول جھڑتے ہیں، جن کی صورت پر ادائیگی فرائض کا منہہ بڑستا ہے۔ ان کے سفید بالوں میں خلوص کی کنگھی ہے، اور ان کے ہاتھوں میں صداقت کے گلدستے۔ مرغ کی ازان نے ان کو بستر استراحت سے بیدار کیا۔ رات ان کی زندگی پر مرجا کہتی ہوئی، اور صبح صادق نے جانماز پر ان کا استقبال کیا۔ میرے دوستوں ادب کے ہاتھ اٹھاؤ اور ان بزرگ ماؤں کے سلام کو جھک جاؤ ۱۱

Regret for the old order that is no more is the theme of 'Jauhar i Qadāmat', 'Sarāb i Magrib', 'Bint ul Vaqt', 'Satvantī', 'Bacce kā Kurta' and of various short-stories.

The characterisation in these is good. The pictures Rāshid ul Khairī paints of the manners and customs of the old world are excellent. He chooses incidents and phrases that somehow reveal the heart of the things he has set out to describe. He shows the beauty, the grandeur, the spirituality of the standards that are now regarded as old-fashioned and discarded. He defends the native and indigenous culture of India against the imported and badly digested culture of the West. He sings a paean of praise to the courageous, the noble, the pure, the sweet and the gentle women of old India, and shows the hollowness, the cheapness, the insincerity and the lack of backbone and stamina in the product of the pseudo-Western culture.

In 'Jauhar i Qadāmat' the favourite two-sister motif is used. Zāhida is brought up in the orthodox fashion by her mother and Shāhida in the modern way of her father. There is nothing flashy about Zāhida. She is not smart or clever, as smartness and cleverness are generally understood. She gets an old-fashioned, homely education from her mother, and has none of the treats that fall to Shāhida's lot, but accom-

panies her mother on her unostentatious errands of charity, and hence gets an early lesson in sharing and being sensitive to another's pain. She is married to a comparatively poor man, as girls of her kind are not much in demand nowadays, suffers much at his hand, but never loses courage and wins through in the end. Her life in the end has more real peace and happiness in it than the stormy and glamorous one of Shāhida. Whether Zāhida is or is not the typical old-fashioned girl, not all are as good as she. Shāhida certainly is the half-baked, ill-educated modern Indian girl. In drawing Shāhida, Rāshid ul Khairī has picked out just those traits of character which make the average modern Indian girl such an unpleasant person in spite of her surface smartness and gaiety.

Shāhida is early shown as insensitive to human suffering. She turns with distaste from the sight of a poor beggar, and says these people should be made to work—a typical example of the muddle-headedness of the pseudo-moderns and their flaunting borrowed ideas. Unaware of the sufferings of, and unwilling to do anything to provide work or shelter for, the unfortunate, they are ready with the cliché "we must not encourage begging". In showing Shāhida at an early age of this mind Rāshid ul Khairī prepares us for the subsequent intense hardness and selfishness of her character. He also shows his knowledge of human nature by it; he or she whom the sight of suffering cannot move will stop at nothing. And this foreboding is amply justified!

In her treatment of her maid, and later of her child's nurse, Shāhida is very typical of her kind, who are extremely selfish, unwilling to put up with even the slightest inconvenience and at the same time not quite realising the extent of damage they are doing. When Shāhida sent the police to search the house of old Rahīman, she never realised that it would mean such disgrace to the old woman as she would never be able to live down. No, so far have these people removed themselves from the lives and thoughts of their poor old-fashioned

neighbours that they do not know them at all, which in itself is a condemnation.

Shāhida's marriage is happy for the first couple of years, but as soon as things begin to go wrong a bit, all her latent selfishness comes out and makes both their lives a misery—to what extent is shown when, after a slight quarrel, she takes the drastic step of deserting *Hasan*, a step which involves her in a great tragedy. She spends her life chasing shadows and misses the substance, and is in the end a disappointed, dissatisfied failure. She ridicules the “*laṭ dhulāī*”, jeers at “*māiyoṅ*”; objects to “*roza kushāī*”; in fact, behaves in the petty, supercilious, irritatingly superior way of those who are rather unfortunately described as “the newly educated women”. *Shāhida* is perhaps one of the most convincing of Rāshid ul Khairī's “characters”.

In ‘*Sarāb i Magrib*’, similarly, the contrast between the old and the new, the real and the imitation, is brought out. How far from real progress are the so-called progressive people, how, in fact, they are degenerating, is shown by small incidents, like *Mīr Acchan's* stopping the pension of his old nurse, his being a party to the closing down of *Sa'ūda's* “*maktab*”, and his being absent at the time of his mother's death.

The pathetic attempt at being modern is well brought out in ‘*Sarāb i Magrib*’. The “character” of *Akram Jahān*, however, is not well defined. She is not as alive as *Shāhida*, nor is she quite so unpleasant. She is shown as hesitating in giving her photo to *Hamid*. She repels his advances. She has been schooled to be modern, but is not naturally so bizarre. Not much is said of her mother, *Ashraf Jahān*, either, but one gets the impression of her being one of those gentle, loving women who form the background of their family. Rāshid ul Khairī was particularly successful in depicting them. *Muḥsina* in ‘*Maūda*’, *Sajjād* in ‘*Jauhar i Qadāmat*’, *Shākira* in ‘*Manāzil us Sāera*’, are all of this type. They go about their

humdrum but by no means easy tasks with forbearance, courage and dignity.

Ashraf Jahān tried to be modern and gave up all the beliefs of her girlhood because her husband wanted her to do so, not of her own accord, and so was in reality a very orthodox woman.

The old-world ideal of “honour”, the premium that was put upon it, the values of a bygone age that put noble blood before everything, all these are extolled in ‘*Sarāb i Magrib*’.

In ‘*Sarāb i Magrib*’, as also in ‘*Bint ul Vaqt*’, the mockery and farce of social service is revealed. How far from feelings of true charity and a real sympathy for suffering are those who pretend so noisily and loudly to be working for the alleviation of misery is shown by such instances as of *Ikrāmī Begam's* refusing help to a poor decrepit woman, while in the same breath claiming to serve the ill-starred community. Rāshid ul Khairī has brought out the mockery of it all by putting the usual *cliché* of her kind in her mouth, in reply to the pathetic appeal of a helpless, infirm old woman. It is often done and the absurdity of it not seen by those who perpetuate it, but somehow it strikes home as put by Rāshid ul Khairī. Just a shade stressed, perhaps, but it serves the purpose of driving home the point. In ‘*Bint ul Vaqt*’ the hollowness also of such claims is revealed when *Farkhunda* hurries off to a meeting leaving her husband in high fever. She speaks often and at length on the need of reform and on the defects of uneducated women, but is completely oblivious of her own glaring faults.

It might seem that Rāshid ul Khairī is contradictory in his books, that at times he is advocating greater freedom for women and at times condemning it; but a closer study shows that there is no such contradiction. In fact, he is one of the few writers in Urdu who have written enough and been sufficiently consistent in their writing to enable one to form a definite opinion on their philosophy and style.

Rāshid ul Khairi admired the women of the old India, women with courageous hearts, with pure souls, with strength and nobility of character. It is wrong and unjust that such women should be deprived of their rights, denied the liberty given them by their religion. But this does not mean that Rāshid ul Khairi thought it justified that they should throw all restrictions to the wind and answer cruelty by infidelity, forced marriages by elopement, disinheritance by unfilial conduct. This is clearly put forward in '*Tafsīr i 'Iṣmat*'. To his mind it was a much greater pity that women should change their religion, elope and break the code of decency their society has formulated, than that men should usurp and tyrannize and dominate. In fact it was to him a tragedy that women should do so. A much greater moral harm, a much greater spiritual injury is suffered by a nation in the weakening of the moral fibre of its women than from depravities on the part of its men. Hence his equal condemnation of men's usurpation of women's rights and women's resistance to it. In short, he wanted the rights of women to be restored by men, but he did not advocate or admire their fighting for them. He thought it took away from their gentleness and charm of character. In his later works he became more urgent in his demand for women's rights, for he realised that the denial of them any longer was now fraught with grave danger and not merely an act of injustice resulting in human suffering. Women were taking extreme measures, such as change of religion, elopement and suicide, in their determination not to be dominated. Rāshid ul Khairi never could admire such conduct. No, his ideals were women who died without a murmur, who suffered without a sign. Those, who as he says :

جنہوں نے شوہروں کے آرام پر اپنی راحتیں قربان کیں،
اور اپنے ہاتھ سے پکانا فخر سمجھا۔ بہتر سے بہتر کہلایا اور

اچھے سے اچھا پہنایا، بچی بچائی کھائی، اور پرانا دھرانا پہنا۔
ان کی خموشی اور سنجیدگی پر نہ جاؤ، یہ گھروں کی با اختیار
شہزادیاں شوہروں کی لونڈیاں ہیں۔ یہ طرحدار نہ ہوں،
ان میں چٹک مٹک نہ سہی، مگر ان کی پیشانیاں دیکھو،
ان کے جھومر جگمگا رہے ہیں۔ ترقی ان کی جہالت پر قربان
ہوگی، اور تصنع ان کی سادگی کی بلائیں لے گا۔ ان کی
کتاب حیات میں بڑے کارنامے ہیں، ان کے باغیچہ زندگی
میں سدا بہار پھول ہیں۔

یہ یتیموں کی مائیں، عزیزوں کی عاشق، رانڈوں کی وارث،
خدا کے نام پر قربان ہونے والی، خدا کی بندیاں ہیں۔ یہاں
ظاہری ٹیپ ٹاپ نہ اوپر کی شوں شاں نہ سہی، مگر
ان گھروں میں سب کچھ ہے، یہاں زندگی کی بہار میں،
جینے کا لطف اور رہنے کا مزا ہے۔ ان گھروں میں برکت
اور گھر والوں میں خدا کی رحمت ہے۔ . . . وہ متبرک ہستیاں
اب دھندلی سی تصویر رہ گئیں۔

But if the metal was not the same any longer it was better, far better, to give them every right they demanded and still keep them in the fold than to run the risk of their being completely lost. That is what makes him, especially in his later years, almost desperately champion the right of "*khul'a*" for women.

Being a deeply religious man he was profoundly moved by the instances of apostasy that took place in 1926. Amongst the stories in which he directly or indirectly advocates the right of "*khul'a*" for women the best is '*Tafsīr i 'Iṣmat*'. In this novelette, he has shown great insight into human

nature in the drawing of the "character" of *Hashmat* as well as of Miss Berna(r)d. *Hashmat*, driven to desperation by her husband's conduct and goaded to frenzy by the insulting behaviour of the lawyer and his wife to whom she goes for help, takes the bold step of declaring herself to have embraced Judaism, as this, according to Mohammedan Law, would dissolve her marriage with *Ashraf*. She does this merely as the only way of escape open to her and not from any conviction. Yet that she could contemplate such a step at all shows that she had come very much under the influence of the line of thought called "Liberalism".

She finds that even that is not sufficient to ensure her freedom and her remarriage with one of her new faith is required for it. She agrees to go through a marriage ceremony which her Jewish teacher assures her is purely nominal. When she finds that it is not so, her indignation is aroused and she attempts to kill the supposed husband. It is in *Hashmat's* revolt at the idea of remarriage that Rāshid ul Khairī has shown how well he understood the mentality and character of Indian women. Perhaps from modern standards it might be difficult to understand such conduct, but to those familiar with Indian ideals it is perfectly comprehensible. More than a couple of decades of Westernization is necessary before it is possible for Indian women to face such things with equanimity. The force of the traditions of generations is not shaken off in a day, they are too deeply ingrained for that. To think that it can be done is a mistake and results in tragedy. Illustration of this psychological point is the most interesting thing in '*Tafsīr i 'Iṣmat*'.

In the drawing of Miss Berna(r)d's "character" also penetration into and understanding of human nature are shown. Though Miss Berna(r)d is a missionary, she is deeply shocked at *Hashmat's* easy abandonment of the religion she was born in. For Miss Berna(r)d realises that the religion of one's father is part and parcel of oneself; that it cannot and

should not be easily discarded, and that if it is discarded, it speaks of a deterioration of character and a weakening of moral fibre in the person who does so. This is not the usual point of view of a missionary, but is a view consistent with a character like that of Miss Berna(r)d. Somehow one believes it implicitly that a woman such as she could never approve of the kind of step that *Hashmat* was taking. Rāshid ul Khairī should not have made Miss Berna(r)d write that she was a Mohammedan at heart, for that mars his true conception of her. She was objecting to *Hashmat's* change of religion, not because she herself was a Mohammedan but on the ground that religion was too intertwined with one's obligation to one's community to be changed because of personal idiosyncrasy.

The introduction of the unnecessary humorous element spoils this otherwise excellent study of two unusual "characters". It was not at all necessary; it does not fit in with the tone of the rest of the story; and what is more, it is not really witty—just farcical. The same can be said about all his humorous stories; he can never be truly witty. His humour is that of the broad farcical kind that relies on absurdities of dress, appearance and situation for invoking laughter. Even this would not matter, as this is a sort of humour also, if he did not make the situations utterly fantastic. A humorist is entitled to the same liberties as a caricaturist, that is, of exaggerating the points, but Rāshid ul Khairī went beyond the recognised limits of exaggeration. In '*Nānī 'Asho*', which is considered his most humorous sketch, he is being utterly incredible when he makes *Nānī 'Asho* ride on the back of the "*Mujāvir*" and makes a group of "purdah" ladies allow her to appear in their midst in that manner.

The absurdities of '*Rāfa'ī*' are also beyond the bounds of credulity, and the sudden turning of a farcical sketch into a tragedy is bad workmanship. In '*Sajda e Nadāmat*' the humorous situations are not as absurdly improbable but of a

believably exaggerated type, but the mixture of tragedy and farce in it also, as in '*Tamga e Shaitānī*', spoils the otherwise penetrating "character" sketches.

His historical novels, also, are very poor stuff. The "characters" never come to life. No knowledge of the social conditions of the time is shown, and the reader can glean no information regarding the manners and customs of the period and country in which the incident is supposed to be taking place. In '*Māh i 'Ajam*', for instance, the scene is laid in the Persia of the first "*Hijra*" of Islam, but except for the names there is nothing that would make a reader think that it was about Persia and the Persians. No knowledge of the country or of customs of that period is shown at all, and from the very fact of its being on ground with which he was not familiar, his characterisation is very poor. His historical "characters" never come to life, they are mere names. Though he deals with such interesting personalities as Māmūn and Malka Zubaida and Caliph 'Omar and Shahr Bānū, the daughter of Yazdjird, personalities essentially romantic and glamorous, yet he cannot invest them with as much interest as a plain reading of history endows them with. In his fictitious "characters" he is not any more successful. Isabella, in spite of all her misfortunes and adventures, never comes to life, or succeeds in evoking the sympathy or liking of the reader.

'*Arūs i Karbalā*', generally regarded as Rāshid ul Khairī's best historical novel, is not very much better than '*Māh i 'Ajam*'. A certain amount of ingenuity is shown in the manner in which the fictitious element in the story is placed within the historical frame. But the "characters" are sketchy, the background is indefinite and the story as unsatisfactory as '*Māh i 'Ajam*'.

The tragedy of "*Karbalā*", looked at from the point of view of a dramatist or an artist, is one that can furnish either with many a subject. Imagination can find many tragedies, many shattered romances, many deeds of heroism

and valour that history does not specifically mention. The life of any one of those seventy-two loyal followers of Ḥusain can be dealt with imaginatively and the story, at once tragic and noble, woven round it.

Any movement of momentous consequence, such as the French Revolution, or the Napoleonic Wars, or even the Rebellion of 1745 and the plots to restore Mary, Queen of Scots, to the throne, serves to bring to the surface the latent nobility of men, and therefore alongside the record of the nation's struggle are found the pages of its golden deeds. World history cannot show an event as tragic and as heroic as the tragedy of "*Karbalā*". The thoughts and reactions, the dreams and ideals of the handful of men who staked their all for the sake of right, and who gave up all the world had to offer for just a dream, just an ideal, are most befitting subjects to be celebrated through history, legend, tune and song! But respect for the sanctity of character of "*Karbalā*'s" heroes has not permitted the writers to allow their imagination a free run. Though "*Marsyas*" have endowed the characters with humanity to a large extent, yet purely imaginative work with the tragedy of "*Karbalā*" as its centre has not been written. '*Arūs i Karbalā*', therefore, is a very important landmark, for in it the "characters" Rose and 'Ubaid are entirely fictitious, as are also '*Azam* and *Khālid*, *Sa'dia* and *Munavia* and several others. History has no warrant for any of them but it is not only credible, it is even extremely likely, that such events did take place.

'*Arūs i Karbalā*' follows history closely in the matter of the struggle between Mo'āvya and Ḥazrat 'Alī. The tragedy of "*Karbalā*" is also described with absolute historical accuracy. The fictitious element of the story is the introduction in it of the "character" of *Kulṣūm* or Rose. *Kulṣūm* is the daughter of a man who was killed by Mo'āvya's orders as he had attempted to poison him and thus to remove the cause of the growing rift in Islam. He had left *Kulṣūm* in the

charge of his brother, *Khālid*, who adored the child, but the wife was extremely jealous of her and in *Khālid*'s absence she took the child and threw her in a well, thinking that she was sure to die. *Kulṣūm*, however, was rescued by a Christian couple who brought her up as their child and gave her the name of Rose. On reaching an age to think for herself, she felt drawn towards Islam and rejected several Christian suitors. At this crucial moment she met 'Ubaid, a young partisan of the house of 'Alī, and it further strengthened her leanings towards Islam. Her foster-parents on divining her predilection for Islam began to illtreat her in many ways. 'Ubaid happens to arrive at this critical juncture and rescues her. Interspersed in the story of Rose's fortune is the description of the gathering storm against *Husain*. 'Ubaid encouraged and inspired by Rose, tries to do his level best to get the "Kūfīs" to remain loyal to *Husain*, but he is outmanœuvred by *Ibn i Ziād*. Rose herself attempts to end the nefarious life of *Ibn i Ziād*, but is not successful either. She and 'Ubaid are twice arrested by *Ziād*, and each time they manage to make their escape. Each is eager to do what he or she can for the "Imām". They reach the field of "Karbalā" independently and try to lay down their lives at the feet of the "Imām". 'Ubaid is wounded and Rose is taken prisoner by *Ibn i Sa'd*, the General of *Yazīd*'s army. He falls in love with Rose and wants to marry her. *Ibn i Ziād* himself, however, was enamoured of Rose, whom he had seen and married with the consent of her foster-father but she had made her escape. They both put their claims before *Yazīd*, who promptly appropriates Rose for himself.

Rose, as she is being dressed by a lady-in-waiting, is recognised by her as the child for whom she has been carrying a message from her dying mother and for whom she had been searching for a number of years. This message tells *Kulṣūm* about her parentage and asks her to avenge her parent's death by destroying the treacherous house of *Yazīd*. Rose hides a dagger in the folds of her dress as she comes to meet *Yazīd*

and stabs him through. Just then 'Ubaid also appears with the same intention, and the two lovers meet. Rose's foster-parents are somehow also there, and so are Rose's uncle, *Khālid*, and his cruel wife. There is a general reconciliation and recognition and *Kulṣūm* or Rose is married to 'Ubaid with everyone's consent.

The story is extremely involved and disconnected. It is very difficult not to lose the thread and to remember the proper sequence; numerous escapes of Rose from imprisonment are not accounted for, and it is not explained how 'Ubaid managed to appear at every critical moment in Rose's career. The presence of *Maimāna*, an ardent partisan of the house of 'Alī, in *Yazīd*'s household as a trusted servant is not accounted for, nor does one know how *Khālid* and his wife could be there. The incidents are extremely disjointed, there is no logical sequence of action in them. Rose is left in one chapter as a prisoner of her foster-father, in the next she is seen somewhere with 'Ubaid. How she managed to avenge the death of *Hazrat Muslim* and his two sons, and find access to *Ibn i Ziād*'s palace and again reach "Karbalā" is not explained. Each chapter shows her in a different place and in a different situation. Of course, the chapters do not follow each other, in between comes the description of what is happening to *Imām Husain* and his followers. Here Rāshid ul Khairī follows what history says without any addition of his own. The search of the woman whom *Kulṣūm*'s mother had entrusted with a message for *Kulṣūm* is interspersed in the two other motives. These small threads of interest in 'Arūs i Karbalā' often get intertwined and it is difficult to distinguish them. *Ibn i Ziād* and *Yazīd* are just shown as evil incarnate; there is no psychological study of their "characters". Neither is the "character" of the noble *Imām* and his heroic followers analysed or presented in a manner to enlist for them that glowing admiration and warm support given to those "characters" of history whom fiction has endowed with humanity. Still the attempt at all to write an