

imaginative work based on the tragedy of "Karbalā" is a creditable one and it is this that makes 'Arūs i Karbalā' important.

'Amīn kā Dam i Vāpsīn' is a novelette dealing with the struggle between Amīn and Māmūn, the two sons of Hārūn ur Rashīd. It has the same defects as all historical novels in Urdu, that is, its "characters" are not treated imaginatively, and the background is not vividly brought before the reader and no knowledge of the period can be gleaned from it. The historical novels of Rāshid ul Khairi did not achieve the popularity of his social novels and 'Smyrna kā Cānd', 'Yāsmīn i Shām' and 'Dur i Shahvār' are now out of print.

Men "characters" are found in the historical novels in greater number than in the novels, but are as insipid and uninspiring as the women "characters" in them. In his social novels, men "characters" hardly appear except as agents of injustice and tyranny. In 'Maūda' and 'Manāzil us Sāera' alone can their features be even dimly discerned. In the others we only hear of their misdeeds, but never see them, for the glimpse is far too fleeting to enable us to draw any conclusion from it. Even in 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs', which is essentially a story about women, the men are not so sketchy as in all of Rāshid ul Khairi's, while there is no novel in which they appear in their own right as in 'Fasāna e Muḩtalā' and 'Taubat un Naṣūh'.

Nevertheless, Rāshid ul Khairi holds a very prominent position amongst the writers of Urdu novels. He might be regarded as the Dickens of Urdu literature. All his books are written with the same consciously didactic object of bringing about a reform of social evils. His humour is of the same burlesque sort, though not achieving the perfection of Dickens. His tragedies are also of the same harrowing nature as those of Dickens, appealing to the reader's pity, but never succeeding in producing the true tragic effect of a novel like 'Anna Karenina'.

CHAPTER IX

WOMEN NOVELISTS

The most popular novels of the last two decades have been written by women. They are nearly all social novels, didactic in tone and aiming at reform. The influence of Nazīr Aḩmad is the strongest, and in some instances that of Sarshār can also be detected, but Sharar has found no imitators amongst women novelists, though he has found a large number of readers amongst them. Rāshid ul Khairi's style was imitated very much during the years 1919 to 1928, the period during which his works were most popular.

Muḩammadi Begam's name comes first amongst the women novelists by reason of its priority in time as well as for the fact that, as she was the editor of the first women's paper, her work received greater publicity than that of any of her contemporaries, and though her work was itself in imitation of Nazīr Aḩmad, it was imitated by other women writers. She wrote as many as eight or ten books, most of them manuals of instruction in the various branches of housework. Only four can be called novels, strictly speaking only three, 'Sharīf Beḩī', 'Safya Begam' and 'Ājkal'. The fourth, 'Candan Hār', comes more in the category of short-stories and is moreover a free translation of Maupassant's famous story 'The Necklace'.

The story of 'Sharīf Beḩī' has a close resemblance to 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs'; indeed in only one other novel, 'Zīnat un Nisvān', is the influence of Nazīr Aḩmad seen even more clearly, where not only the two-sister motif is adopted, but even the names, Anwarī and Akhtarī, resemble Akbarī and Aṣgarī.

In 'Sharīf Beḩī', we find Muḩammadi Begam using the theme of the "maktab" and of subsequent marriage into the family which the "maktab" has been the means of introducing. The story has, however, a different background and its people are of a different class. They are a more homely

lot than those of ' *Mirāt ul 'Arūs* '. Their talk and manners have not the polish of the inhabitants of Delhi, but are those of a provincial people. *Sharīfan* is rather colourless, we hear of her rather than know her. She has the traditional virtues of thrift and level-headedness, an ability to make £1 do the work of £3, and is rewarded in the end by a rich marriage. Her brothers are still more shadowy and play little or no part in the development of the story, though *Mas'ūd*, the eldest, appears to have the maturity that comes to children upon whom responsibility is thrust early in life. This is brought out in short telling sentences and not by any lengthy description. About *Sharīfan*'s parents even less is said. One gets the impression that they were very ordinary people, faced with the usual unequal struggle for existence. The pathos and simplicity of their life are, however, well brought out. The scene describing their joy at marrying into the new and larger house is a very touching and realistic one.

The most lively and interesting "character" in the book is, however, *Nain*. *Nain* is a very much alive person; she belongs to that gallery of "characters" who become more real to the readers than many a casual acquaintance. She is an easily recognisable, though fast disappearing, type of "character". She is warm-hearted, generous beyond her means, loyal in the extreme yet with a sharp tongue and a quick temper. She takes the unfortunate *Ganī* family to her heart and proves a tower of strength to them in every emergency. As a matter of fact, one cannot imagine what would have been their fate had she not been there to befriend them. On their part, they give her the love and respect she evidently did not get from her own children and she is happy in having found a home in her old age. Her talk has the racy flavour of a woman of the world and is very amusing:

حضور، آپ کے اقبال سے میں خود ہی بھوت کا گلا دبا دوں گی،
مگر مجھے اصطبل میں بندھنا منظور نہیں۔

she remarks when the *Begam* is reluctant to let her have the house on the ground that it is haunted. The way in which she sends the *Bakrī Vālā* on his business is but an indication how her wisdom and her prestige must have many a time saved *Sharīfan* and her brothers from being swindled through their inexperience. In this little scene a fine point of characterisation is brought out. *Sharīfan*, shrewd and able house-keeper though she is, is seen giving in to the bluster of the *Bakrī Vālā*, for she has not the assurance that comes only with age. Such small yet important points are unfortunately very often overlooked by most Urdu novelists, and *Muhammadi Begam* deserves great credit for paying attention to them; she has not forgotten *Sharīfan*'s youthfulness. In another instance also the penny-wise pound-foolish attitude, natural to youth striving after economy, is brought out against the wisdom of old age which knows when it is wise to spend. *Sharīfan* is shocked at the idea of having to spend Rs.7/- in carpeting the floor of the school-room, but *Nain* insists, knowing how important a first impression is, and that if *Sharīfan* succeeds in making a good one, the outlay of Rs. 7/- will have been well worth while.

The story has more or less the usual nice ending: "and they lived happily ever after". Considering that it is one of the earliest novels by women ' *Sharīf Beḡī* ' is not at all bad.

Muhammadi Begam's second novel, ' *Ājkal* ', is more original in its plot. Though written with an avowedly didactic aim, namely that of showing the evil consequences of for ever delaying to do things, yet it escapes being just a peg on which to hang a sermon, because of the manner in which the story is told and the "characters" are presented. What happens to *Fahmīda* is what matters; that it happened as a result of her own folly is not remembered. The fatal habit of delay, out of which arose all her misfortunes, takes almost a tragic quality. It is not of the usual class of domestic virtues and shortcomings. It becomes a study of a defect of character

which is inborn and which leads its victim to disaster as surely as fate; though this defect of *Fahmāda's* character is the main cause yet it is not the sole cause of her misfortunes; other factors contribute towards them. Her husband's character, chiefly his ready acceptance of this defect of hers, at first went a long way towards strengthening it. Had he shown in the beginning of their relationship a fraction of the ruthlessness which he later displays, it is very likely that *Fahmāda* might have learnt to curb it, as *Fahmāda's* mother had expected that she would.

In the matter of the theft of the jewellery, he is as much to be blamed as she. Having forgotten to lock it up during the day, she remembers and tries to go and do so in the middle of the night; he stops her. Then after the jewels are stolen and she almost gets the maid to confess to having taken them, he spoils her chance of getting an admission by taking the maid's part. This little incident is, like the scene with *Bakrī Vālā*, etc., in '*Sharīf Beḡī*', extremely realistic; that is how things do happen in domestic life; by noticing and reproducing them realism is achieved.

The story is told in the first person and thus takes on a greater poignancy.

'*Ājkal*' is described as a book depicting the evil of postponing what can be done to-day till to-morrow. But as one reads on, one thinks of it as the tragic story of a girl whom fate had blessed with all the good things of the world but whose one defect of character relentlessly drives her to destruction. We see her going down, down, as incident after incident is described; we feel danger getting nearer and nearer; it will end in disaster, we say to ourselves, and our foreboding comes true when we are told that her forgetfulness in repairing the wall of the terrace caused the death of her son. Tragedies come thick and fast after this, and the adoring husband of former days turns into a heartless monster. Somehow this change does not shock; there was a sweetness in his character

which was not of the stuff lasting affection is made of. He first sends her back to her people, remarries and then deals the cruelest blow of all by taking away the youngest child. Her diary closes with the almost welcome news that her miseries are not to last very much longer, that the dread disease of T.B. is soon to free her from her sufferings.

'*Safya Begam*' also is a tragedy. The tragic consequences of childhood engagements are described, but as in '*Ājkal*', in spite of the avowedly didactic purpose other elements come in giving it a quality of fatalism, and creating just such a muddle for which no one has really directly and deliberately worked, as happens in real life.

Safya had been betrothed in her childhood to her cousin, *Ṣafdar*, who grows up to be a good-for-nothing sort of fellow and, what is more, is a consumptive. *Safya* turns out to be a credit to her parents and in every way superior to her fiancé, but due to the fact that her parents had pledged their word she must be married to this unworthy boy. Luckily, he himself has the decency to refuse to marry in view of his uncertain health. The engagement is broken off, and a marriage is arranged with an extremely eligible young man. At the last minute, as a result of parental pressure *Ṣafdar* consents to marry, and with great reluctance *Safya's* parents, on the eve of her marriage to the other man, marry her to *Ṣafdar*. *Safya* cannot stand the shock and dies.

Characterisation is good in the case of the minor "characters" and the dialogue is brisk and lifelike. In depicting the mother's attitude towards *Safya*, real insight and understanding are shown. She is for ever criticising *Safya* for her new-fangled ways. But in her heart of hearts she is very proud of her. She runs down *Safya* not because she really objects to her modern ways, or thinks ill of her; rather her criticism is a gesture of protection and love; she is afraid that others might criticise or condemn, and hence she herself takes up a critical attitude, for it is a psychological truth that

one's neighbours always take a diametrically opposite view to one's own. Hence, because *Safya's* mother herself thinks *Safya* modern and disapproves of her new-fangled ideas, they think her a very sweet and clever girl. That *Safya's* mother's attitude is based on her love for her daughter, and not on a real objection to her ways, is brought out in many a telling sentence. When *Safya's* mother is unable to recognise the portrait, she says :

میری صفیہ ہو تو جھٹ پہچان لے، چاہے کبھی دیکھا نہ ہو لیکن
پہچان ضرور لے۔ ہاں، اسے ایسی باتیں خوب آتی ہیں۔

A wealth of pride and affection is hidden in just that single phrase. Her father is, of course, obviously proud of her and loves her dearly. Loving and adoring her so much, how had they managed to make such a mess of her affairs that no escape but death was left for her? This needed careful handling. To draw villains and heroes is an easy matter, but to depict erring, yet human, people is not easy. *Aşgar Husain*, *Safya's* father, is shown as a man with views much ahead of his time, disapproving of old customs and not caring much for what people said, yet not really strong enough to make a firm stand, nor sufficiently advanced to think that the unfortunate girl, whose fate was being decided, merited at least intimation of, if not consultation regarding, her fate. That he did not put a stop to her childhood engagement though not really caring for it, that he did not even break it when he saw *Safdar* developing into a far from desirable husband for her, prepares us for his giving in twelve hours before her marriage to *Hāmid 'Alī* to his brother's unreasonable demand that she should be married to *Safdar*. *Aşgār Husain* was a man who meant well, who wanted to be modern, but was not really strong enough to face the scandal and talk that would result from his brother's not being present at *Safya's* marriage. Of course he does not think of, or rather does not fully compre-

hend, the disgrace that would follow his letting down the other family. This also is typical of all weak characters ; they seek to avoid what is unpleasant at the moment and do not pause to think of future complications that might arise out of their taking the quickest way of extracting themselves from an awkward situation like the present. In short, *Aşgar Husain's* character is drawn consistently and his actions made comprehensible.

Safya, the other "character" of the book, is not so well drawn. We are not prepared to accept her violent reactions to her parents' decision. No indication is given earlier that would prepare us for the ultimate catastrophe. We are not told anywhere that she had a bad heart, or was liable to fainting fits, or given any other hint that might lead us to believe that she could die of shock. However big a catastrophe, people do not die from it. Even after life has ceased to have any meaning, people live on ; broken hearts do not kill immediately,—no, not unless physical conditions are already such as to make death probable in case of a shock. Even the manner in which *Safya* prepares for death is not at all real. Had she died of sudden heart-failure, she would not have had time to write a long letter, to get up and say her prayers and to lie down calmly counting her pulse, waiting for life to ebb away. This is not natural. If *Muhammadi Begam* had made *Safya* commit suicide, that would have been natural. Having taken steps to end her life that had become unbearable, she would be likely to leave a document describing those things which had made her take this step, and would prepare herself to die. But if death came to her suddenly and not of her own doing, how could she prepare for it? Of course, it might be that *Muhammadi Begam* wants us to infer from all this that *Safya* really committed suicide, though she calls it a natural death from the fear that the idea of a girl committing suicide might be unacceptable to the public, might prejudice people against the education of girls if they were shown so headstrong as to

oppose their parents' wishes. But by making *Şafya* die naturally, only pity is aroused, not opposition, and the purpose of getting people to see the mistake of early engagements is better realised, as their attention would be focused on the wrong and not deflected by a greater wrong committed by *Şafya* in taking her own life. Most likely this is the explanation for this flagrant bit of unrealism in an otherwise realistic story.

In depicting *Şafdar's* "character" there is a lack of consistent development also. We are led to believe that he is a good-for-nothing lad. Yet in the two instances in which we hear him speak, he shows more nobility of character and decency of feeling than any of the other persons in the book. Of course, a desire not to hurt any one and a good deal of true unselfishness often go with what is considered an irresponsible and reckless attitude; they are somehow a natural complement in such natures. This trait of his character should not have been sprung upon the reader but brought out more carefully. While the conception is good and true to life, the execution is faulty; yet the authoress reveals herself as having a real understanding of people, so that the qualities she endows them with are such as do go together and are not contrary to one's knowledge of human nature.

Muhammadi Begam died early before her technique could reach perfection. Had she lived longer and had time for the maturing of her talents, it seems as if she might have given some really good novels to the language. She understood people and understood the fact that human nature was not perfect but made of contradictory elements, and was especially good in describing a certain type of character, that is, the piquant, racy, old servant of the house type. We have *Nain* in '*Şarāf Beī*', and in '*Şafya Begam*' a short sketch of *Bī Muḡlānī* is on the same lines.

Nazr i Sajjād Haidar comes next in the line of women novelists. She has written four novels and a number of short

stories. She has several unfinished works to her credit also. These came out in serials in "*Tahzīb i Nisvān*" and showed much promise. It is rather a pity, therefore, that they were not finished. Her first work is '*Akhtar un Nisā Begam*'. It was published in instalments in "*Tahzīb i Nisvān*" and later came out in book-form. It is the story of a girl who, through the machinations of her step-mother, is married into a disrespectful household and suffers much, but in the end succeeds through the fact of being educated in surmounting her difficulties. It is an immature work; the authoress was only in her teens when she wrote it, and the fact of her having just then lost her own mother gives poignancy to her descriptions of *Akhtar's* feelings. The plot is not intricate, but still there is a plot, and that is something as so many novels in Urdu almost become a narrative with time-sequence and no causality motive at all.

The characterisations are not too good; the conception is right, but the execution is not so sure. The authoress sees and senses the types but has not the power to transmit them so as to make them alive. Still there are good sketches now and then. *Akhtar's* step-mother while disliking his mother's relations yet makes up to his cousin, *Akhtar Hasan*, for she wants him to marry her own daughter. This shows understanding and true observation of the vagaries of human nature, as does the attitude of servile admiration which *Lādī* adopts towards all *Akhtar's* people. She dislikes them, yet she is deferential towards them; she is, by virtue of her mother's marriage to *Akhtar's* father, their equal; yet as in real life, people who are not what is regarded as "class" even on their entry into the circle never get over their own feelings of inferiority towards those who, by good fortune, have been born into it; they might dislike them, deride and run them down, but it is all an outcome of their inferiority complex; in their heart of hearts they respect and admire them; and this is brought out very subtly both in *Lādī's*

character and in the character of *Zafar*, *Akhtar's* husband. In fact, by not making *Zafar* into an out and out villain Nazr i Sajjād Haidar has escaped the fatal tendency of Urdu novelists to divide their "characters" into good and bad, black and white, a tendency which tells against their observation of life and knowledge of humanity. Human nature is not so divided, it is in neither black nor white but in a very varied range of grey.

Nazr i Sajjād Haidar, while showing the utter unsuitability of *Zafar* to be *Akhtar's* husband, does not make him either vicious or villainous, but just poor stuff and that is all—not so very poor either. When he finds himself, without any effort on his part, the husband of a girl far above him in every way, he makes every attempt to be worthy of her and his humility and devotion to *Akhtar* are quite touching.

Akhtar herself is a portrayal of what was considered a modern girl in the beginning of the twentieth century in India. She is endowed with all the qualities and accomplishments which were then considered desirable and which gave the modern girl a superior position to her orthodox sisters. That is, she is self-reliant and knows how to get about by herself without the help of her men folk, she does not believe in old customs and is contemptuous and critical of them, she is a studious and serious-minded young lady, but not very lovable and not very human either. Perhaps the new modern woman was not; as the suffragette of England under reaction from the excessive feminism of the Victorian woman became so aggressively masculine and militant, so perhaps the early educated and emancipated woman of India under reaction from the utter helplessness and trivial mindedness, which was not without a certain amount of warmth and charm, became very self-sufficient and strait-laced, a "no nonsense about her" sort of person. This must have happened, for the heroines of all the novels written by women round about 1915 to 1925 lack warmth, colour and life. They are too good, and their

goodness is not of the grand heroic variety but of the narrow priggish sort; estimable and admirable and desirable as they might be, they do not stir the imagination, especially after twenty-five years or so when values have changed so that their knowledge of English, ability to play the piano, etc., are not such accomplishments as can throw a glamour over their character; and they did not have the lasting and enduring humanity of *Akbari* and *Aşgarī*, of *Mahmūda* and *Husn Arā*.

Nazr i Sajjād Haidar has written several other novels as well: '*Āh i Mazlūmān*' in 1918, '*Hirmān Naşīb*' in 1920 and '*Şuryyā*' in 1930, and '*Jānbāz*', which came out in serials in "*Īşmat*" about 1918-19 and was completed and published in book-form in 1935.

In '*Hirmān Naşīb*', again, some of the authoress's own emotions are mixed giving a great deal of poignancy and pathos. The heroine, *Fīroza*, lost her adored brother, as the authoress herself had hers just then, and her feelings are truly portrayed as they are really the authoress's own feelings. For the rest, '*Hirmān Naşīb*' takes a bold step towards introducing a love motif in the story. This is the first instance where the heroine of a novel is made to appear in love openly and with the knowledge and approval of her parents. Up till then, in novels written by men a love interest had always been used, but it was always a clandestine love, for in a society where "purdah" was observed it could not be, and was not, otherwise. As a matter of fact, there was rarely even clandestine love, and by giving undue place to it in their writing, the Urdu novelists have shown a lack of understanding of the purpose of a novel, which is to depict contemporary life as it is in its daily happenings and not in out of the way incidents. But in '*Hirmān Naşīb*', *Fīroza* and *Zafar* are in love not clandestinely but openly. They belong, or at least *Fīroza* belongs, to a very Westernised Indian family and does not observe "purdah".

There is good plot construction in '*Hirmān Naşīb*'

the story is told partly in retrospect and partly in contemporary narration, with due attention paid to the elements of mystery and surprise. It is not a lengthy tale at all and yet the *dénouement* could not be foretold till the last chapter. Right till then the reader keeps wondering: What will *Zafar* do, what will his final reactions be, will he throw over his wife and go to *Firoza* or will he not? And things are brought about in a way that is true to life. It is in this way that tragedies do happen most often, not by the definite villainy and planning of an Iago but through mistakes and muddles. *Zafar's* marriage to *Nusrat* is plausible and understandable, as is his last phase of emotion when he sees *Firoza* again in Mussoorie and realises what a mistake it has all been and that she would have married him if he had only waited.

The story is well constructed; the characterisation is good, but not very good. Enough is not said about the "characters"; the reader is not allowed to have an insight into their motives and feelings. They are shown doing certain things and certain things happen to them. The reader sees it all like the people around them, but it is the privilege of a novelist to show the why and wherefore of the actions. In '*Hirmān Naṣīb*' we do not see enough; we should have liked to see more of *Firoza*, *Zafar* and *Nusrat*. They were interesting "characters" but not developed sufficiently.

The next, chronologically, is '*Ah i Mazlūmān*'. It is the weakest of Nazr i Sajjād Haidar's novels. It is more or less a narrative rendering of the story of the constancy of two wives notwithstanding the inconstancy and faithlessness of their husbands.

Nazr i Sajjād Haidar has used more complicated plots than most women writers. There is, even in her very immature work '*Akhtar un Nisā*', a greater element of complexity than is to be found in the works of other women novelists. Her later novels '*Ṣuryyā*' and '*Jānbāz*' both have fairly complicated plots.

'*Jānbāz*' came out in serial parts in 1919-20 in "*Iṣmat*" and was completed and published in 1935. The authoress herself admits that in this interval she had almost forgotten how she had originally intended to finish it. And one can see that for oneself. The earlier part of the book was written under the influence of the Non-Co-operation movement of 1920-21. The heroine, *Zubaida*, is shown as an ardent non-co-operator and her engagement to *Qamar* is broken off on account of it. This aspect is completely lost sight of in the closing chapters of the book. Still, the plot is fairly intricate.

'*Ṣuryyā*', from the point of view of plot construction, is the best of Nazr i Sajjād Haidar's works. In it, as in '*Hirmān Naṣīb*', one cannot know till the very end what is really going to happen.

There is yet another novel by her called '*Mazhab aur Ishq*'. This has been published by the editor of "*Daur i Jadīd*" as the work of Nazr i Sajjād Haidar's aunt but is in reality by Nazr i Sajjād Haidar herself.

'*Ek Maqrūr Amīrzādī kī Ibratnāk Kahānī*' and '*Us ne kyā kyā kiā*', two unfinished novels of hers that came out in serials in 1912, 1913, and in 1914, showed promise of being the most interesting written by the authoress. '*Ibratnāk Kahānī*' had an original way of entwining the fate and fortunes of several "characters" together. It had a large canvas and presented many varied types of "character" on it. Had it been finished, it would have been one of the best novels in Urdu. Even now, *Nāz Parvar*, *Naushāba*, *Nasīm*, *Muzaffar Ahmad* and *Safya* remain distinct personalities in the reader's mind.

Only a few chapters of '*Us ne kyā kyā kiā*' came out, but they also had the promise of an interesting story in them.

Nazr i Sajjād Haidar is definitely the best known writer amongst women novelists and has written more books than any other.

The other authoress writing under the direct influence of

"*Tahzīb i Nisvān*" is 'Abbāsī Begam. Her only full-size novel is '*Zohra Begam*', but she wrote articles and essays for "*Tahzīb i Nisvān*" and some short-stories as well, one of which, '*Qafas kī Ciryā*', has been published. '*Zohra Begam*' itself came out first in serial parts in "*Tahzīb i Nisvān*" in 1915 and 1916. '*Zohra Begam*' is, as it is described on the title page, the story of a girl whom her parents sacrificed to their love of money.

It will have been seen that nearly all the novels written by women are more or less round the subject of the mistakes made by parents in marrying off their daughters and its tragic results. It is understandable why this was such a popular theme for it was in the matter of marriage that the greatest reform was needed. The fact of educating girls and yet marrying them without any regard to their being educated and thus having wishes and whims of their own in these matters, was creating a lot of difficulties. Besides, marriage always has been the favourite pivot for novelists to weave their story round. It is either the object and aim of the ill-starred hero and heroine and the story is about their attempts to reach it, which succeed or fail according to whether the story is to be a comedy or a tragedy, or it is the basis for the eternal triangle, or it is the mecca of match-making mothers. But in some form or other it is always present in all novels, and in Urdu novels by women it takes the place of the climax or the knot of the whole story.

Zohra Begam is, like *Akhtar un Nisā Begam*, the typical modern woman of the period, at least till the time of her husband's death, after which she reveals unforeseen depths of noble feelings. But in the earlier part of the book she has just the categorical virtues of the new woman, that is to say, serious-mindedness—she never fools about or asks for clothes and jewels and frivolities but has a soul above such things, studiousness, thrift, ability to manage her house and a correct knowledge of how to bring up children. Her sister-in-law and dear

friend, *Khujista*, is after the self-same pattern, and *Ṣaqīr*, the brother, is their male counterpart,—all very correct and stiff; one mentally imagines them as belonging to the type who would sit down to dinner in dinner jackets even in the depths of a jungle.

Begam Ṣāḥiba, the mother, is more lifelike; one is made to understand her point of view and yet to dislike her. It cannot be a pleasant feeling to have one's own flesh and blood so estranged and to have nothing in common with them. Her role is that of the female villain in the book; she is shown as an ignorant woman who interferes with the enlightened conduct of her children, but one feels sorry for her as she repeatedly complains that no one bothers about her, that no one listens to her. It is true what she says and it could not be a very pleasant feeling; the authoress was not sympathetic to her but she has drawn her correctly and observantly, she has made her talk and act truly so that the reader can feel sympathetic towards her. Though 'Abbāsī Begam has not made out a case for her, she has shown her as rather a lonely woman who must needs place *Bī Muḡlānī* above her husband and son for she is the only one who is at all mentally in sympathy with her. 'Abbāsī Begam has tried to make out a case against her but she has not allowed prejudice to detract from a true portrayal of the type, or rather she was artist enough to observe and render truly. So that *Zohra's* mother can be regarded as an excellent study of the loneliness and unhappiness of those women who, through rapid changes of values, found themselves out-moded and even ridiculous survivals of a bygone culture.

There is, however, no excuse for her cupidity; she loves *Zohra* but she loves money more. She marries *Zohra* for the purpose of having such a wealthy son-in-law as *Qaiṣar Jang*. She shuts her eyes to the unsuitability of the match, the criminal difference in age between the seventeen-year-old *Zohra* and the seventy-two-year-old *Qaiṣar Jang*. Had she married *Zohra* to a young man, however ill educated,

she could have had an excuse, some sort of justification, for according to the canons of conduct that she understood she could not see any harm in a man for not knowing the English mode of life; but in marrying *Zohra* to *Qaisar Jang* she sins against the code she herself very well understood and she does this for the pure love of money. Yet perhaps that was not the sole reason; though it has not been stressed yet one feels that she does this almost as an act of defiance against *Khujista* and the *Shaukat* family. Enough is not made of this interesting psychological point, yet it is one which makes one understand her otherwise utterly base conduct. One feels *Begam's* opposition growing tenser as *Khujista* and Mrs. *Shaukat* become fonder of *Zohra*. As *Khujista* becomes more and more a favourite with her husband and father-in-law, the *Begam* determines that she will at least have *Zohra*. She will not be made to sit alone outside their warm circle of understanding and friendship, she will marry *Zohra* to someone who will have nothing in common with them and so will be hers entirely. To each act of opposition from *Sagir* she says he can please himself but she will do what she likes with *Zohra*.

Yes, not only her love of money but her pent up humility finds an outlet in marrying *Zohra* to a man of her choice; *Zohra* was made to suffer for all *Sagir* and *Khujista's* modernism, nay the modernism of the entire *Shaukat* Lodge. It was her way of getting her own back on the *Shaukat* family. And that makes one understand why *Sagir* and *Navab Kabir ud Daula* acquiesced in such a monstrous marriage. They also sub-consciously felt that the *Begam* had to have her way at least once; though this one way was very wrong, yet they somehow could not or did not oppose it with any real vigour because they felt they did not have the face to do so; they had opposed her so often and in so much already.

Here was material for some very good "character" sketches and psychological studies, but it was not developed. Bare incidents are mentioned; only a glimpse of their implica-

tions is given; the conception was good but the rendering poor. '*Zohra Begam*' is like looking at a picture which is faithfully painted but whose possibilities have not been fully explored. Yet as it has been so truthfully depicted, the looker-on can at least see the possibilities. In '*Zohra Begam*', the story of a family is told; all is related which, had we been living with that family, we could have gathered for ourselves and drawn our own conclusions from, but their innermost thoughts and feelings are not revealed, and this should be done by a novelist. Not only should people be shown doing things, but it should also be explained why they are doing them. In '*Zohra Begam*' this is not done, yet the outward demeanour is depicted with so much truth that we can make a good guess at the inner thoughts, as we can of real people with whom we are living, and that is something.

Zohra and *Qaisar Jang* as "characters" are not consistently drawn. *Qaisar Jang* in the earlier parts of the story is made to look like a ridiculous, pompous old man, yet in his death-bed scene he assumes a dignity not consistent with what we know of him; also in *Zohra's* mourning and lamentation for him he is referred to as an extremely dignified, generous, and loving and adoring father and husband, yet this is not the impression that we get of him while alive. *Qaisar Jang* in life and the *Qaisar Jang* whom *Zohra* mourned are not one and the same man; the latter is more noble, more real than the *Qaisar Jang* of whom we get brief glimpses. The same can be said of *Zohra's* own "character". After *Qaisar Jang's* death she suddenly comes to life; she is no longer a wooden personification of all the qualities thought desirable in women in the year 1915. She is a living, suffering woman with depths of feeling and nobility of emotion that were not suspected earlier. She is not only a better, but a better portrayed, "character" in the latter half of the book than in the first. In the first, she is a mouth-piece regarding children's upbringing, etiquette, etc.; in the latter half of the book she is an

individual, she has personality and opinions of her own. Her talk is natural, her behaviour more spontaneous.

When it is remembered that the first nineteen chapters of '*Zohra Begam*' were published in 1915-16 and the book was not completed till 1925, this maturing of technique is understood. The authoress' opinion perhaps had undergone much change, she was no longer a young girl and had learnt to look deeper and appreciate finer traits of character than such superficialities as the ability to sketch or to speak English. Hence the difference between the *Zohra* of the first and the second half of the book. However, it is a defect of construction which adds to rather than detracts from the enjoyment of the book. The latter half of the book is read with much greater pleasure than the first half, for it there loses its didactic aim of showing the superiority of the educated over the uneducated woman by means of wooden dialogues (the dialogue in the earlier part of '*Zohra Begam*' is very bad indeed—it is in the nature of a mouth-piece for the authoress' pet theories) and becomes an excellent study of a young girl's feelings of blasted hope. *Zohra* in the last chapters is very well portrayed, her emotions ring true, the pathos of her words is heart-rending, her sentiments are pure, and her actions noble. She is no longer a personification of the artificial virtues that society demands, but a woman with all the purity of thought and selflessness which have characterised Indian women during the ages.

Besides 'Abbāsī Begam and Nazr i Sajjād Haidar several other women wrote under the influence of Muḥammadī Begam, or rather under the influence of "*Tahzīb i Nisvān*", expanding and extolling the theories and precepts favoured by it, namely the education of women, Westernisation—which they preferred to call the simplification of modes of life, freedom, liberty for women, etc. They do not show any literary merit and are really long short-stories rather than novels. But some of these, as for instance '*Shāhidī Begam*', '*Badmizāj*

Dulhan', '*Jaisī karnī vaisī bharnī*' and '*Dukh bhārī kahānī*', etc., achieved great popularity and still form the standard books to be read by girls after having learnt to read Urdu.

Valida Afzal 'Alī was one of the very first contributors to "*Tahzīb*". Her extremely well-written novel, '*Gūdar kā Lāl*' which in its tone and object is very like novels under the influence of "*Tahzīb*" came out, however, in serials in another magazine, called "*Sharīf Bibī*", in 1911-12 and was then published in book-form. It has been out of print for some years and is almost unavailable. This is surprising as it is an extremely well-written book and its "characters" have that universal humanity which makes them interesting for all times.

'*Gūdar kā Lāl*' is a fairly long story. It is in three volumes ; but so well is the story told, and the reader gets so occupied with the fate of the "characters" that it seems all too short.

'*Gūdar kā Lāl*' has not two or three but six or seven major "characters", besides which there are several important minor "characters". But there isn't that lack of individuality that one often finds in the "characters" of the Urdu novel.

'*Gūdar kā Lāl*' deals with the fortunes of three families, or rather with the fortunes of the children of two sisters and one brother.

Zinat un Nisā and *Qamar un Nisā* are the two sisters ; the brother is not mentioned by name, but the sister-in-law, *Amīr un Nisā*, is the head of that household. *Zinat un Nisā* is married to a "*Navāb*" and lives in great luxury, but she and her children are very concerned about, and good to, the children of *Qamar un Nisā* and *Amīr un Nisā*, who are both of slender means. *Amīr un Nisā* and *Qamar un Nisā* live next door to each other ; and, when the story opens, we see *Maqbūl*, *Amīr un Nisā*'s daughter, who is the most important "character" in the book, engaged to *Yūsuf Razā*, *Qamar un Nisā*'s son.

The plot, or rather the plan or object with which '*Gūdar*

kā Lāl is written, is to show how through education and economy people can raise themselves in the social scale and achieve fame and fortune, and how through ignorance and extravagance their lives are ruined and spoiled. Each of the families is divided into two groups. Amongst *Amīr un Nisā's* children, *Hasan Razā* and *Surryā* are the good and the industrious ones. Amongst *Zinat un Nisā's*, *Raushan Arā*, *Jamīla Khātūn* and *Akhtar Hasan* are modern and educated; *Hāmida Begam* is old-fashioned and uneducated. *Qamr un Nisā's* three children, *Hāmid 'Alī*, *Khair un Nisā* and *Yūsuf Razā* are all more or less good, but amongst them *Yūsuf Razā* is the specially industrious and ambitious one.

These various cousins have intermarried. *Qamr un Nisā's* son, *Hāmid 'Alī*, is married to *Hāmida Begam*, the *Navābzādī*. But the first two volumes of the book deal very little with her as an individual, she appears only in the role of patron and benefactor of her younger and poorer cousins; especially does she favour *Khair 'Alī*, *Amīr un Nisā's* eldest son. He is married to *Khair un Nisā*, *Qamar un Nisā's* daughter, and *Qamar un Nisā's* son, *Yūsuf Razā*, marries *Maqbūl*, *Amīr un Nisā's* daughter. Both *Khair 'Alī* and *Maqbūl* are absolutely unsuitable as husband and wife for *Khair un Nisā* and *Yūsuf Razā* respectively, but this consideration is sacrificed to the idea of family loyalty.

Hasan Razā and *Surryā*, the good ones of *Amīr un Nisā's* family, while in their teens, go away from home to be able to carry on their education. They return years after, having achieved both academic distinction and wealth. But they continue to lead their lives separate from the family.

Yūsuf Razā's relationship with *Maqbūl* forms the bulk of the book, and is most interesting. *Khair un Nisā's* life with *Khair 'Alī*, though only brief glimpses are had of it, is no less interesting. *Yūsuf Razā* is forced to remarry. His second wife, *Mehr Jibīn*, is a cousin of *Hasan Razā's* wife, *Khurshīd Jibīn*. Through her influence, and after years, *Mukhtār Dulhan*,

that is *Maqbūl*, undergoes a change of heart and *Yūsuf Razā* at last has domestic happiness. *Khair un Nisā*, through her tact and tolerance, manages to keep her house somehow together. *Hāmida Begam* is ruined through the extravagances of her adopted son and estranged from her husband on his account, but is finally reconciled. *Surryā Jibīn* is married to a "Navāb". *Phūl*, we are told, married *Tāj 'Abbās*, a nephew of her step-mother. The book closes leaving every one happy and all tangles straightened out.

The plot itself is more intricate than is to be found in most novels by women, but it is in its characterisation and in that indescribable something called the style that the greatness of '*Gūdar kā Lāl*' lies. The language of '*Gūdar kā Lāl*' is not literary or polished, for the entire conversation between the "characters" who are not educated is in "*dehātī*" phraseology. But this itself gives an added piquancy to it.

But what makes '*Gūdar kā Lāl*' one of the most interesting of Urdu novels is the authoress' sureness of touch in her description of the human relations in it. There is not a false stroke; the actions and reactions of the "characters" are entirely lifelike.

The incompatibility of temperament between *Maqbūl* and *Yūsuf Razā*, and the tension in their relationship are conveyed so admirably. How dissimilarity of outlook and temperament can cause estrangement between very close relations is brought out in *Maqbūl's* attitude towards *Hasan Razā* and *Surryā Jibīn*, and in their attitude towards her.

The nuances in the relationship between the rich and the poor relatives, and the gulf that economic difference creates between them, the delicacy of the relation between a mother and a daughter-in-law, the mixture of loyalty and rivalry that exists between sisters-in-law, are all conveyed very subtly and admirably. The currents and cross-currents of antagonism and affection that pass between the members of a joint family are also subtly and admirably conveyed. One gets as interested

in the fortunes of *Yūsuf Razā*'s and of *Ḥasan Razā*'s family as if they were personal acquaintances. One feels like taking sides for and against the various "characters", feels like discussing to what extent *Maqbūl* was to blame and how far it was her fault that her marriage was not a success and how far it was *Yūsuf Razā*'s. To evoke this response from the reader is a proof that the authoress has managed to make her "characters" absolutely convincing and lifelike.

That in spite of being avowedly didactic '*Gūdar kā Lāl*' should have managed to be so interesting is remarkable. At the end of most of its chapters the authoress directly addresses the reader and points out the moral of the situation that has just been described. But this is in the nature of a footnote and never superimposed on the story.

The "characters" of *Mehr Jibīn*, and to a less extent of *Ḥasan Razā*, *Ṣuryyā Jibīn* and *Yūsuf Razā* also, are ideal rather than real. *Mehr Jibīn*, *Yūsuf Razā*'s second wife, really is "too good for human nature's daily food". She seems to be above all feelings of jealousy or enmity, malice or meanness. She is good and beautiful, religious and kind, an excellent housekeeper, an expert at bringing up children, a loving and dutiful wife. *Ḥasan Razā* and *Ṣuryyā Jibīn*, to a lesser degree, are similarly embodiments of virtues and in consequence are much less convincing and interesting than *Khair 'Alī* or *Shākir*, the other two brothers of *Maqbūl Begam*, who are good for nothing. *Akhtar Ḥasan*, *Falak Arā* and *Raushan Arā* appear very little directly in the book, and are very pale figures in comparison with *Hāmida Begam*, who is the typically generous, open-hearted, affectionate "Begam", who is also extremely self-centred and can brook no opposition to her will. Nevertheless, one has a sneaking affection for her.

Yūsuf Razā was meant to belong to the group of the idealistic "characters", but perhaps unwittingly the authoress has given him several shortcomings which at once make him less perfect and a more interesting person. He had never liked

Maqbūl or *Mukhtār Dulhan* as she is called later. He does not acknowledge that, and the authoress does not, but it is apparent that *Mukhtār Dulhan*'s temper, silliness, and bad house-keeping merely provided him with legitimate excuses for discarding her. But he was the unconsciously hypocritical type, so that had she not given him these excuses he would not have had the courage to break with her. And so when he repeatedly says that he has been forced against his principles to remarry, he is telling the truth.

Yūsuf Razā is typical of those steady and serious-minded persons of forty years ago who thought that their own and their country's salvation lay in giving up "pān", "ḥuqqa" and "īr", in avoiding Indian dances and parties, and in making women give up bright colours, "mehndī", "afshān", "camkī" and other Indian cosmetics and styles of dress.

By far the most interesting "character" of the book is *Mukhtār Dulhan*. Though she has been put in an unfavourable role, she is the strongest and most consistent of the "characters". It is because she has a good deal of personality and a good deal of individuality that she refuses to fall in with *Yūsuf Razā*'s new-fangled ways, and in consequence estranges him. She is warm-hearted and loving, and must have been lovable too for her other two brothers dote on her and she on them. And her mother-in-law also loves her deeply in spite of the fact that she treated her with scant ceremony. She is shown as a very bad housekeeper, entirely careless, extravagant, uneducated and completely untrained. These traits in her character play havoc with her life, but, to a certain extent, are necessary ingredients of her type of "character". They can be controlled but never fully got rid of. Towards the end *Mukhtār Dulhan*, like *Na'ima* in '*Taribat un Naṣūh*', is made to reform. This is a concession to convention but in it also allowance has been made for her character. That type can never be made through lectures to repent or to realise their shortcomings. It is not the lectures of *Yūsuf*

Razā that convert *Mukhtār Dulhan*, but the example of *Mehr Jibīn* and her friendliness, as it was the example of *Ṣāleḥa's* household that converted *Nā'ima*. *Mukhtār Dulhan's* change of attitude is made still more convincing by the fact that *Najaf*, her friend and the chief cause of estrangement between her husband and herself, confesses to having deliberately planned to ruin her. This revelation naturally shows *Mukhtār* that her husband was right and she wrong in her estimate of *Najaf's* character, and so predisposes her to acknowledging herself wrong in other matters as well.

Najaf's part in the breaking up of *Mukhtār Dulhan's* house is not properly worked out. She is said to have been the cause, but is only once seen deliberately giving *Mukhtār Dulhan* bad advice. And towards the end, the authoress loses interest and winds up the story in a very summary manner. We are told out of hand that *Phūl* married *Tāj 'Abbās*, and how *Shākīr* fared.

But in spite of a certain amount of weakness in plot-construction and presentation of "characters", '*Gūdar kā Lāl*' remains one of the supremely enjoyable and readable books in Urdu.

Vāḍida Afzal 'Alī is supposed to have written other novels as well, but they have not yet seen the light of publication. '*Mazhab aur 'Ishq*', a novel published as hers, is in reality by *Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar*.

There are several novels written by women besides those in which the influence of "*Takzīb*" is apparent. They are all written by different people; none of the authoresses wrote any other book and some, like the authoress of '*Shaukat Arā Begam*' and of '*Raushnak Begam*', are almost unknown to the journalistic and literary world. Yet their work, especially '*Raushnak Begam*' and '*Shaukat Arā Begam*', shows a great deal of promise, an excellent command over the language and an understanding of and the power to depict various types of character, and so it is a pity that they did not follow up their

first effort. Of these works, '*Shaukat Arā*' and '*Raushnak Begam*' show the influence of *Sarshār*. '*Raushnak Begam*' in particular is in the style of '*Fasāna e Āzād*', but it is very much smaller in bulk, confining itself to depicting the fortunes of *Humāyūn Far's* family instead of taking within its scope the entire society as '*Fasāna e Āzād*' does. Yet it is the same sort of book. The very names are borrowed, as *Humāyūn Far*, *Ḥusn Arā*, *Rūḥ Afzā* and *Māh Jibīn*. In '*Raushnak Begam*' the hero, *Humāyūn Far*, is a miniature *Āzād*. His adventures are very different from *Āzād's*, yet one is made to feel that he is a superman—extraordinary luck as well as extraordinary brilliance falls to his share. About him it can be said that he was born not with a silver but with a golden spoon in his mouth. Born in a rich family, he is adopted by a still richer uncle, who sends him to England at the early age of thirteen. There he has a brilliant academic career, taking not only the B.A. and the Bar and the Civil Service examinations with credit, but passing the examination in Medicine as well and returning to India as I.C.S. plus Barrister plus Doctor. Within two years he is made a member of the Viceroy's Council. Honour follows honour; his English wife dies most conveniently and leaves him free to acknowledge his marriage with his cousin *Raushan Arā*. Both his wives adore him, even though the first knows that he has a second wife; his relations are devoted to him, his children turn out to be a credit to him in every way. We leave him full of years and honours. Such is *Humāyūn Far*.

The characterisation cannot be called faulty on the ground of being unrealistic but it is more in line with the older romances than modern novels. *Humāyūn Far* is a romantic hero modernised; instead of wrestling and overthrowing giants he achieves impossible academic distinctions. He is shown as great and good, but his greatness and goodness are not accounted for, they are superimposed. He is good, he is great, for he must be so as he is *Humāyūn Far*, the hero of the book.

We do not see the influences that go to make him so. How and why is it that he prays five times regularly and observes the month of the "fast"; whose influence is it that keeps him such a staunch Mussulman even though he has spent all his life in England and even married an English girl? We are not told that; we are not shown the main-springs of his actions.

The heroine, *Raushnak Begam*, is only little less marvellous a person than *Humāyūn Far*. She is intelligent, generous, loyal above any pettiness of jealousy. She forgives *Humāyūn Far* readily for marrying again, she has no jealousy towards her rival and after her death brings up her step-children with the greatest love and care. Mary, the English wife, is likewise an embodiment of all that is good and noble. The minor "characters", such as *Qamar Arā*, '*Aliā Begam*, *Bahār un Nisā* and *Maryam*, are all delightful people and one enjoys listening to their polished and suave dialogue and feels happy at their good fortune.

'*Raushnak Begam*' has a more intricate plot and contains a much more interesting and lifelike dialogue, generously sprinkled with wit and humour, than the novels showing the influence of "*Tahzīb*". Though '*Raushnak Begam*' itself is a book published by the "*Dār ul Ishā'at*, Punjab", it is the influence of Sarshār and not of Muḥammadī Begam that is most apparent in it. The plot-construction is really good, the situation is worked up to a climax and then unravelled. Besides the main plot there are two more *dénouements*, namely the plot against *Humāyūn Far*'s life and its failure and the death of Mary. The latter, of course, can be regarded as the final *dénouement* of the main plot, which is that *Humāyūn Far* is married while still a very young boy to his child-cousin, *Raushnak*, whose father had adopted him as a son and who after his marriage to *Raushnak* sends him to England for study. While he is in England, the uncle dies and the aunt who has been against the marriage from the beginning writes requesting him to divorce *Raushnak* as neither she nor her mother is

willing that she should be his wife. He does not actually divorce her but resolves to do so on his return to India, and meanwhile thinking himself thus a free man marries an Englishwoman. On his return to India his father absolutely refuses to allow him to divorce *Raushnak*, and *Raushnak*'s mother is equally determined not to marry her to *Humāyūn*, who himself is not desirous at all of marrying her as he has already married Mary. *Raushnak*'s mother arranges to get *Raushnak* married to her worthless nephew, *Lāḷle Mirzā*, and everything is fixed up for it. *Raushnak*, it then turns out, is very much against her second marriage and utterly devoted to *Humāyūn Far*, and prepared to die as his betrothed if only he will not annul the marriage. She writes a desperate letter to him which makes him rescue her at the eleventh hour. He does that in a moment of impulse, and finds after doing so that no other alternative is left to him but to marry *Raushnak*, whom he comes to love very much; to solve his difficulty Mary dies most conveniently at just this moment, and so he is freed from the necessity of leading a double life. The rest of the book is mainly a further account of his and his children's good fortune and success.

'*Raushnak Begam*' reads well and has a very good story. The reader's interest is aroused and maintained right till the end. Its pictures of "*Navābī*" life, parties and dinners are good, but it has some glaring faults, mostly because of ignorance of the technicalities of the subject introduced, such as making *Humāyūn Far* into a Doctor *plus* a Civilian: it would not be possible to be both because either requires full-time attendance at courses of study and no one student would be allowed to attend lectures for both; also no amount of qualifications or ability would succeed in making an I.C.S. in the second year of his service a Member of the Viceroy's Council and get him knighted; also a member of the Viceroy's Council is not entitled to any salute of guns.

The attempt to justify *Humāyūn Far*'s marriage with an Englishwoman is not successful. The authoress has been very courageous in attempting to defend and justify a thing against which the average Indian public has a great deal of prejudice. For personal reasons the authoress does believe in such marriages, but she has not been able to put her case well to us. It would have been difficult to surmount the prejudice of readers in such a matter even if she had shown a really good excuse for it, but the excuse with which she furnishes *Humāyūn Far* does not hold water. A fact which further antagonises the reader against him is that he not only marries an English girl while he is already married to an Indian girl, but that Indian girl is the daughter of the man to whom he owes all. It says much for the success of Maḥmūda Begam in endowing *Humāyūn Far* with so much charm that he does win the reader's heart in spite of his conduct, which according to the rooted prejudices of India is utterly despicable. She has made *Humāyūn Far* incredible but lovable. In fact, everyone in '*Raushnak Begam*' is rather charming.

'*Shaukat Ārā Begam*' is another novel in which the influence of Sarshār can be seen, but only in this much that the language is racy and there is an abundance of wit and humour. For the rest, it is a very individual piece of work and easily the best amongst those written by women. '*Shaukat Ārā Begam*' is the sort of book which can be read and re-read with enjoyment. Its "characters" are such that they stamp themselves on the memory of the reader, and the style in which it is written is a joy to read. The dialogue is excellent, being perfectly natural and colloquial yet never falling below the level of literature. Most of its "characters" are endowed with a sense of humour and *Sarvarī Begam* in particular is bubbling over with frivolity and mirth.

In fact, *Sarvarī Begam* is in the class of those immortal creatures of fiction who have become forever one's friends or acquaintances. She is what can be best described as a major-

minor "character" in the book, being in reality the life and soul of it. It is her personality and scintillating wit that make the book such good reading.

Sarvarī Begam is the friend of *Shaukat*. She stands by her through thick and thin, goes through fire and water for her sake; she is ready to make every sacrifice which might ensure *Shaukat*'s happiness. She is true as steel and open as the day. She has no use for insincerity, even for the polite hypocrisies of society that go under the name of good manners. If she does not like people, she takes no trouble to mask her dislike, rather goes out of her way to show them just where they stand with her. *Sarvarī* is drawn with a masterly hand, her virtues are never catalogued. We are not told she is like this or like that, that she does this or does not do that, we are just shown her. We see her in action and draw our own conclusions. The actions are not described from without, her motives are revealed from within. We are made thoroughly to understand and comprehend her. And this was not an easy task for *Sarvarī* is not a simple "character". She has an extremely complex personality, she cannot be labelled or described in a word, good or bad, she cannot be described in a sentence or even a paragraph. She has so much light and shade, so many half-tones in her, but the writer of '*Shaukat Ārā Begam*' has succeeded in transcribing on paper a character at once so delightful and difficult. *Sarvarī* begins to take shape from the time we see her coming from school with *Shaukat*. Her humour and generous and whole-hearted devotion to *Shaukat* are already apparent in this short sketch. In connection with *Nāzima*'s affairs we see her level-headedness. In this connection we are also made to realise the absolute integrity of her moral character which, because of her surface flippancy, we might have been led to doubt, and this is done in so natural a manner:

ہوں، بڑی منتظر بنی ہیں، کچھ۔ خبر بھی ہے ناظمہ نے کیا طوفان

اٹھا رکھا ہے . نا بابا، میں باز آئی ایسی پڑھائی سے، مجھے باپ دادا کی ناک کٹوانی منظور نہیں . تمہارا گھر مجھے پیارے نامراد کی وجہ سے چھوڑنا پڑا، اور یہاں اس نے آفت مچا رکھی ہے .

At the same time we are made to realise that there is nothing angelic about *Sarvarī*—oh dear no, she is a very human person pulsating with life and warmth. She has nothing of the gentle and all-embracing charity which excuses and forgives all concerned. She calls a spade a spade, hence her contemptuous reference to *Nāzīmā*'s parentage :

شریف یہی تو ہیں موٹی کینیاں، جب پڑھائی جائیگی یہی ہوگا، رویہ پیسہ سے اصالت تھوڑی بدل جاتی ہے .

No, *Sarvarī* is a friend when she is a friend, otherwise she has not the temperament that regards the whole world as kin—a very human person as a matter of fact. But we shall see later to what heights she can rise on behalf of those whom she does love, and that never with a fanfare of trumpets or loud and long announcements, but just as a matter of course, in most cases under cover of rude and flippant remarks.

Sarvarī's greatest feat in the book is her rescuing of *Shaukat* from the clutches of *Pyāre*. Though this action is daring and unusual enough for the author to apologise for it and explain in the Preface, yet it is entirely in keeping with *Sarvarī*'s character. It is just the sort of thing she would do not only for her love of *Shaukat* but for the sheer fun of it. What amusement it must have given her we can see from her absurd love-making to *Shaukat* once she has got her out.

Sarvarī plays the fool but is far from being one. She has plenty of common sense, and it is her direct tackling of the situation which after *Shaukat*'s engagement is broken prevents her from being engaged to *Pyāre*. Again, when *Mushtāq* has

disappeared for more than a year and she realises that it would be difficult for *Shaukat* to get married to anyone else, she swallows her own intense dislike of *Pyāre* and tries to get *Shaukat* to consider him. When *Mushtāq* disappears for the second time, she is again to be found by *Shaukat*'s side consoling, encouraging, and by her common sense and humour helping her to bear the ordeal.

The heroine, *Shaukat Arā*, and the other major "characters" of the book are all excellently drawn. But a sketch of the plot first is perhaps necessary for understanding them. It is this: *Shaukat Arā Begam* is the only child of *Āqā Aḥmad* and *Jamāl Arā*. They belong to an old U.P. family, who have been residing in Madras for some time, and have made very good friends there. *Shaukat* is betrothed to her cousin. Soon after the engagement *Jamāl Arā Begam* dies. *Āqā Aḥmad*'s brother, with the object of undermining *Āqā Aḥmad*'s love for *Shaukat* so that he might consent to her marrying his son, *Āqā Bannu*, forces *Āqā Aḥmad* to remarry. The step-mother, *Ṣaqīra Begam*, and *Shaukat*, however, manage to get on very well; but further complications arise out of the fact that *Pyāre*, a cousin of *Ṣaqīra Begam*, falls in love with *Shaukat*, and his mother tries her best to get *Āqā Aḥmad* to consent to *Shaukat*'s marriage with him. Failing to do that, they get her engagement to *Aḥmad 'Alī*, her cousin, broken off by spreading malicious rumours against poor *Shaukat*. Even this fails to secure her for *Pyāre*, as *Ṣaqīra Begam*, who is genuinely devoted to *Shaukat*, would not agree to her being married to worthless *Pyāre*, though by this time *Āqā Aḥmad* has been won over by *Bādshāhī*, *Pyāre*'s mother. A marriage is, however, arranged with a young doctor previously unknown to the family but who appears to be a very good match. Just after the marriage ceremony, *Pyāre* and *Āqā Bannu*, the two disappointed suitors of *Shaukat Arā*, manage to drug the bridegroom as well as tell him such malicious lies about *Shaukat* that he bolts even without seeing

her face. This incident brings poor *Āqā Ahmad* into such disgrace that he, on *Bādshāhī*'s advice, resigns his job at Madras and moves to Hyderabad, where, through *Shaukat*'s application to the Nizām, he gets a very good post. He is by now completely under *Bādshāhī*'s influence and insists that *Shaukat* marries *Pyāre*. She, however, is adamant. She does not want to marry at all a second time and certainly not *Pyāre*. To escape from him, she goes off to "Haj" with only her foster-sister as companion. During the voyage on the Island of Pairim she meets her runaway husband, who even without knowing who *Shaukat* is falls deeply in love with her, and on discovering that she is his wife is overjoyed.

They return and live very happily for some years till, during a fishing excursion, he again disappears. He is kidnapped by some Somaliland chieftain with the object of securing from him treatment for his son. His letters and messages are intercepted by *Pyāre*, and *Shaukat* thinks him to be dead. *Pyāre* leads *Shaukat* into an ambush from which she is rescued by *Sarvarī*'s courage and resourcefulness. While she is on a visit to her home town of Benares, *Mushtāq*, her husband, turns up again. There is much rejoicing, a visit to his village of Sathrak and a meeting with his people, glimpses of whom the reader has already been given in the beginning of the book, then their return to Bombay, in which city *Mushtāq* works, and there we leave them living happily ever after.

More glimpses of *Shaukat*'s life are to be had in the Third Part of '*Shaukat Ārā Begam*'. But that is almost a self-contained story dealing mainly with an account of *Mahmūd*, the adopted brother of *Mushtāq*.

In the first two parts of '*Shaukat Ārā*' the story of her life is told and in them, apart from the "character" of *Sarvarī*, there are several other excellent characterisations. The "characters" of *Āqā Ahmad* and *Ṣagīra Begam* are especially well done. In drawing the former the most interesting and difficult bit of work is the showing of the gradual change

in his attitude towards *Shaukat*, from one of almost idolatry to one of almost dislike, without making him into an inhuman or naturally unreliable person. Without any lengthy explanation the entire working of *Āqā Ahmad*'s mind is revealed to the reader and his attitude made entirely comprehensible. We see and know that he is in the wrong and that he is being exploited by that crafty cat, *Bādshāhī*; but we also see how it all appears to him, how it seems under the circumstances the best possible thing to him that *Shaukat* should marry *Pyāre*, and how he should find her attitude irritating and in consequence his liking for her should diminish, or rather his admiration for and pride in her, for a paternal love can never die. How he, a firm believer in "*Ta'tīm i Nisvān*" and one who had done a lot for its future, could be led through exasperation to doubt at times the wisdom of it himself,—all this is made entirely comprehensible to the readers. In fact, the portrayal of *Āqā Ahmad*'s "character" is perhaps the best thing in the book. It is almost unerringly sketched, there is not a false stroke. He is never made to do one single thing or say a single sentence that is not in keeping with his character. He is not changed from a dotting father into a tyrannical one. He is never even in the height of his indignation wholly insensitive to *Shaukat*'s sufferings, but is all the time feeling for her, almost understanding her point of view, even respecting it, for does he not say that if *Shaukat* will not see reason she had better go away to Benares for a bit? Even then he does not say he will force her to marry *Pyāre*. But he does indeed force her morally, he uses a great deal of mental coercion and this because he has been entirely taken in by the cunning *Bādshāhī*. He is, in fact, a very good but a weak and rather credulous sort of person, who because of his own guileless nature cannot or will not believe that others may be as simple, and also has the unbearable complement of these traits, a quick temper and an obstinate insistence that he alone is right.

Ṣagīra Begam, his second wife, is another very well-drawn

“character”. She is warm-hearted and generous, takes *Shaukat* to her heart immediately, and is not moved by petty feelings of envy or jealousy. Knowing all about *Pyāre*, it is she who prevents in the first instance *Āqā Ahmad* accepting his proposal. Later she stands by *Shaukat* and gets into the bad books of both her husband and *Bādshāhī*; during the latter period of *Shaukat*'s story we only get glimpses of her, but she continues to remain the sincere friend of *Shaukat*. Now the portrayal of *Ṣaqīra* was a difficult task as well. She was the step-mother, and as such convention demanded that she should be the personification of malice and all *Shaukat*'s troubles should have arisen out of her machinations. But the authoress had wide enough knowledge of humanity to realise that this is by no means an infallible rule. That there are and can be instances when a step-mother and daughter by virtue of closeness of age and common interests are and can be friends.

Besides which there were several other factors that make *Ṣaqīra Begam*'s behaviour quite understandable without making her appear a saint. Her love for *Shaukat* was her first means of establishing herself in the good graces of *Āqā Ahmad*; his introduction of *Shaukat* to her was a sufficient indication of his feelings towards *Shaukat* and she took the hint. That she sides with *Shaukat* against her own relations is not so much from abstract justice but due to the fact that she had not much to thank her relations for. This point is not elaborated but one somehow gets the idea that as a young widow she must have had a difficult time, and now that she has a home she is not going to jeopardise it for their sake. This does not mean that her liking for *Shaukat* was just diplomacy,—not at all, it was a very genuine liking which gradually deepened into love; it was a warm human relationship not a cold one of abstract rights. *Ṣaqīra Begam* is a supremely likeable and entirely understandable human being. She is *Shaukat*'s step-mother, so she is never made to stake recklessly all her own

and her child's interest for the sake of *Shaukat*. She is the second wife of *Āqā Ahmad* and his marriage to her was one of convenience, and she knows it, so she cannot presume on it and talk to him as *Jamāl Ārā* did on an equal footing. By never making her talk as *Jamāl Ārā* used to do, what a subtle understanding of relationship and situations is shown!

Other minor “characters”, such as *Murātī Khānam*, *Gokal Parshād*, *Bādshāh Husain*, are all well done. *Mushtāq* as a man is perhaps the weakest, but as a boy he is very well drawn. His little sister, *Kanīz*, too is well drawn. She is the most convincing child “character” of Urdu fiction. Though she appears only in about four chapters, she remains in the memory as a sensitive, proud child, wise far beyond her years due to the harsh lesson in the school of adversity.

What is so admirable about the “characters” in ‘*Shaukat Ārā*’ is that they are human, they are not made what is described in a rather slang expression as “goody-good”. They do not love their enemies and turn their left cheek if the right is smitten, which is certainly an ideal but not a natural reaction of human beings. Thus *Kanīz* is shown as an extremely warm-hearted child; her love for her brother is something which brings tears to one's eyes. She also loves *Khātūn*, that sweet-natured girl who helps them all she can, but she is by no means enamoured of *Nāzīm Husain*'s wife or of *Zakya*. She is not rude, but she does not like these her tormentors and cannot hide her dislike of them; it is her sharp retort which strikes too near home for *Zakya* and *Ruqyya* to like it that causes her death.

So much for the minor “characters”; but what of the heroine of the story, *Shaukat Ārā Begam*, herself? How is she presented? Not perhaps with the same mastery as some of the minor “characters”, such as *Āqā Ahmad* for instance, but considering that hers is a full-length portrait while others could be called just head and shoulders studies, it is very well done. *Shaukat Ārā* awakens the reader's sympathy and

gets him to feel really concerned as to what will happen to her, and that is the test of whether or not a "character" is really well drawn. The heroines of most of the other Urdu novels, in spite of their categorical virtues, leave the reader cold and unconcerned about what fate might befall them. Whereas in *Shaukat's* case a real interest is evoked, one begins to heartily detest *Bādshāhī* and *Pyāre* and wish that their evil machinations might fail. When they succeed in getting *Mushtāq* to run away, we feel as grieved and annoyed as if our own scheme had been worsted. The same feeling is roused again when we find *Shaukat* in *Pyāre's* clutches. To get readers thus to range themselves on the side of the hero or the heroine is the proof that the author has succeeded in depicting his favourite "character" really successfully, for, according to Arnold Bennett, the hero is the person who possesses the greatest interest for the author, and if the author has managed to convey this interest which he feels in his hero's or heroine's character, he has succeeded, in transmitting to the reader his own vision. *Shaukat's* personality is not as glamorous or striking as *Sarvarī's*, and the authoress ran a great risk when she endowed the minor "character" with so much charm. But she has succeeded in keeping *Shaukat* and not *Sarvarī* the chief character, and in making it the story of *Shaukat* and not of *Sarvarī*. We do not see the latter as an individual "character" even; the fact of making everything run smooth for her in itself is a trick to ensure the concentration of interest on *Shaukat*, for it is human nature to lose interest in those whose life runs smooth.

But, in spite of excellent characterisations and unusually good plot, there are some obvious defects in '*Shaukat Arū*', for instance in connection with the two disappearances of *Mushtāq*, especially his second disappearance, the cause of which is perfectly plausible and shows the authoress' knowledge of geography and of topical events as well. *Mushtāq* is made to be abducted by a Somaliland chief at war with the

British; the fact of their being at war with the British explains why they could not obtain Doctor *Mushtāq's* services openly. The geographical position of Somaliland makes the meeting in the island off Bombay possible, but what is improbable is his long silence, and not only his but Captain *Mahmūd's* as well who had gone for the express purpose of getting news of *Mushtāq*. Is it likely that *Mushtāq* who was now devoted to *Shaukat* would leave her in suspense for nearly eighteen months? We are told that his first letter miscarried, but would he not try to get into touch again especially as no reply was received?

It was necessary for the sake of the story that *Mushtāq* should again be made to disappear for some time, but some more plausible reason should have been found for his silence. He should have been made out to be too ill or under arrest so that he could not be held responsible for his long silence, otherwise it is an incident not in keeping with his character.

His silence during his first disappearance is also a bit inexplicable. He is supposed to have got over his fit of insanity, induced by the drug administered by *Pyāre*, after six months or so, but he does not communicate with any one or try to find out what happened to the unfortunate girl he had left on the eve of her wedding. He continues to keep silence after his recovery as well, till he meets *Shaukat* two years or so later. It is an act of great inconsiderateness and not in keeping with *Mushtāq's* character. These silences alone put a strain on the reader's credulity.

It might be considered that the drug incident also is very improbable, but that certain drugs have a power of rendering a person insane, or perhaps hysterical would be the better word, is a fact. It was some such stuff that was given by *Pyāre* to *Mushtāq* in "*ilāecī*" and in the glass of "*sharbat*". The fact that the whole incident is described as that of "*tona*" is in no way harking back to the introducing of the supernatural, for the kind of society which is described in '*Shaukat*

Ārā did and does still believe in the potency of "charms". That it was possible for unscrupulous people to trade on this credulity is not impossible. An excellent illustration is to be found in ' *Mirāt ul 'Arūs* ' where the *Hajjan* with her unusual penetration at once grasps the reason why *Muhammad 'Āqil* remains displeased, suggests its removal under the pretext of the necessity of keeping the " *ta'viz* " in a clean place, thus ensuring *Muhammad 'Āqil*'s pleasure and consequently *Akbarī*'s belief in the power of the amulet. No doubt, that is how the trust of the people was won by those professional " *faqirs* ", but actually it is not necessary to analyse the true reasons for the hysterical effect that comes over *Mushtāq* after he has drunk the drugged " *sharbat* ". It is sufficient that in the society in which the story is placed it would be accepted quite naturally as " *tona* ". Both those who bring it about and those who suffer from it believe it to be " *tona* ", and that is their explanation of it and the reader will have no difficulty in accepting it.

The question whether such and such a thing can and does happen in real life should not be raised for, according to such authorities on the novel as Arnold Bennett and E. M. Forster, nothing that is described in a book or a novel could or should have an exact counterpart in real life but should be such as to seem real and plausible within the story, and the incident of *Mushtāq*'s hysteria is the logical development of the hatred and determination of *Bādshāhī* and *Pyāre*. ' *Shaukat Ārā Begam* ' is thus, from all aspects, a perfect novel of its kind, and it is a matter of great regret that its authoress did not live to enrich Urdu literature with more such work.

Next in order of chronology comes a book, ' *Husn Ārā Begam* ', written by Begam Shāh Navāz, who has since attained a great name in the political field and as a social worker, and has now more or less given up writing. Her essays in " *Tahzīb i Nisvān* " showed a great deal of literary merit, and this book, though written in the accepted didactic

vein, has a more original theme. *Husn Ārā* is the conventional heroine, but the difficulties she has to face and overcome are not the usual ones of incompatible or unwilling marriages. She is the victim of an intrigue for the sake of property which later turns out to be due to hatred on the part of *Safdar*.

The novel had a great scope. It could have made very good reading if the authoress had attempted a portrayal of " *character* ", but she has confined herself to a bold narration of events, with just a short description, or it would be more accurate to say labelling, of the " *characters* ". Her object was rather to show how education helps a girl to surmount all difficulties than a study of personalities. *Husn Ārā*'s feelings while in prison have a poignancy which is touching, and the entire story has a simplicity like ' *Silas Marner's* '.

' *Fuqān i Ashraf* ', ' *Anjām i Zindagī* ', ' *Fareb i Zindagī* ', are written in the style of Rāshid ul *Khairī*. They were published in 1922 when his style was most popular. They are written in the racy Urdu of Delhi, which itself differentiates it from the books under the influence of " *Tahzīb* ", and though the language of ' *Shaukat Ārā* ' and ' *Raushnak Begam* ' is also very racy, it is not the language of Delhi but that of Lucknow. ' *Fuqān i Ashraf* ' and the two novels of *Zyā Bāno* also differ from the other books by women authoresses in this that their heroines are more like the heroines of *Nazir Ahmad* and Rāshid ul *Khairī* than of ' *Abbāsī Begam* ' or *Muhammadi Begam* ; that is to say, they are not Westernised. They are educated though not in the modern way, but as *Aşqarī* and *Fahmīda* were. Though written later than ' *Zohra Begam* ' (1916), ' *Safya Begam* ', ' *Raushnak Begam* ' (1920) and ' *Shaukat Ārā Begam* ' (1917), they deal with a set of people nearer the world of *Nazir Ahmad*. The authoresses of old Delhi and Delhi have not yet undergone such a rapid transition as those of Lahore, hence the difference. ' *Fuqān i Ashraf* ' is the story of a girl called *Rāhat Zamānī*. It is just plain narration with no attempt at a plot, but its

style makes it a pleasure to read. It describes incidents in a very natural manner. The visits of relations, preparations for a journey, the naggings of a step-mother, the talk between two friends are all rendered with easy unaffected grace. How perfectly natural is the dialogue! It is just as people speak, but most writers tend to make dialogue extremely wooden by trying to make it an obvious illustration of the ideals that "characters" are supposed to hold.

The story of *Rāhat Zamānī* is such as happens very often in Mohammedan families; there is nothing far-fetched in it. It is written with the object of showing the injustice of it all. The moral it points is: Is it not a pity that girls like *Rāhat Zamānī* should fall into the clutches of such men as *Aşgar 'Alī* and have no way of escape open to them, and that in the name of decency and loyalty they should be bound to bear such indignities and cruelties? What is there to justify loyalty in a marriage such as *Rāhat's*? Why should the woman be expected to do her part, and not the man his? seems to be the burden of it all. Poor *Rāhat* had had to bear a lot even before for part of which no social institution could be responsible, though her father's second marriage is also meant to be an illustration of the undue privileges of men.

Zyā Bāno's two novels are written exactly in *Rāshid ul Khairī's* style, and the subject matter is very similar. '*Anjām i Zindagī*' is very reminiscent of '*Sanjog*'. The story shows what happens when girls are married for money. '*Fareb i Zindagī*' shows how spoilt and uneducated girls ruin their lives. The language of both is a joy to read.

In '*Anvarī Begam*', written by Mrs. *Khādiv Jang*, and '*Sarguzasht i Hājra*', written by Mrs. *Humāyūn Mirzā*, a glimpse is had of Southern Indian society. Part of '*Anvarī Begam*' came out in "*Işmat*" in 1909 in serials and was later published in book-form. A second edition of it has been brought out by *Rāziq ul Khairī* in 1930.

The plot of '*Anvarī Begam*' is not very different from those

in other stories written by women. The heroine is more or less the same sort of person as the heroines of other novels by women. The scenes showing the domestic life of noble Hyderabad families are good and the dialogue is lifelike and vivacious. There is a great deal of humour and wit in it which makes it very good reading, and the servants are made to talk in Hyderabad Urdu which in itself is very amusing. The authoress manages to hold the interest of the readers right till the end, and though the story is mostly in narrative style with very little complexity in plot, yet it is not possible to leave the book without finishing it.

The story opens with a scene of illness of *Anvarī Begam*, the heroine. Then in retrospect we are told of how she came to get engaged to *Sajjād*, her cousin. Then the story again shifts to the present. *Sajjād* arrives from England and through his careful nursing *Anvarī Begam* recovers. They are married and live a life of ideal bliss for a little while, during which time *Anvarī's* brother gets married and her sister gets engaged. But *Anvarī*, always extremely weak, dies on the birth of her third child and *Sajjād* renounces the world and becomes a missionary.

Aḥmadī is very upset by her sister's death, but recovers from the shock after a time and is married. That is all the story. But the style makes it extremely interesting. *Anvarī*, the heroine, is extremely shadowy. One cannot understand how she could evoke such ardent love in *Sajjād's* heart. *Aḥmadī*, her sister, and *Kāzmī*, her cousin, who later becomes her sister-in-law, are much more vivacious than she. The older women, *Jamīla Begam*, *Anvarī's* mother, *Haidarī Begam*, *Anvarī's* aunt, and *Rāhat Begam*, another aunt, are all very lively people, especially *Rāhat Begam*. There are plenty of men "characters" also in this book, and they are there not merely on sufferance, but on their own merits. They are fairly well portrayed. '*Anvarī Begam*' is interesting from this point of view also that it shows the gradual change

of ideas and ideals of society. In it *Sajjād* is shown to be in love with *Anvarī*, a great step forward from the novels that had hitherto been written!

'*Sarguzasht i Hājra*' is another book in which some glimpses are given of Hyderabadī life. Mrs. Humāyūn Mirzā, its authoress, is amongst the well-known writers in Urdu. She has written several other books of the nature of household manuals and pamphlets of instruction. '*Sarguzasht i Hājra*' is in the form of a story but the story is a mere skeleton in which to fit moral precepts. Four women tell their life story and each incorporates a good deal of moralising in it. The result of it all is that one of the four who had been separated from her husband decides to get reconciled, and lives happily afterwards. '*Sarguzasht i Hājra*' can hardly be called a novel. It is so obviously didactic, and there is hardly a plot in it. Its interest lies in the fact that, besides '*Anvarī Begam*', it is the only book in which a glimpse is had of Hyderabadī life.

Arnold Bennett has described novelists as those who see life so intensely that they must transmit their vision to others. Judged by that maxim all these women writers are true novelists, however faulty their technique and however weak their characterisation. They are all intensely moved by the injustices that their sex has to suffer. With one voice they condemn all social abuses bringing such heart-breaks in their train, for example marriages for the sake of money, marriages for the sake of family connections, marriages made without due investigation; and unitedly they demand more freedom, better chances of education, in short an acknowledgment of their position as man's equal.

Also their work has a higher tone and language much more polished and literary than the works that were just then being produced by their men contemporaries. Although they may not have become classics, they have achieved a position similar for instance to that of "Little Women" or

"Good Wives", that is to say they are and should be read by each generation of girls. Almost none of the books written during this period, namely 1901-1925, except those of Sharar and Rāshid ul Khairī, has achieved even this. They merely serve the purpose of filling the shelves of the cheap libraries and station book-stalls. The best work of these years is undoubtedly women's.

There have been many other writers under the auspices of "*Tahzīb*" and "*Iṣmat*" who have expounded in fiction those ideas and ideals which it is the object of these magazines to foster. They possess no particular literary merit.