

His name is still sometimes to be seen in the pages of "*Sāqī*", "*Adabī Duniyā*" and other literary organs of the present day. His collection of short-stories was published in 1926 entitled "*Fasāna e Josh*". There are nine stories in it and four or five articles. Several of the earlier collections of short-stories in Urdu incorporated essays as well, perhaps because the distinction between literary essays and short-stories was not established in the minds of the writers and they were thought of as interchangeable terms.

Some of the stories are written with a didactic aim, e.g. '*Musāvāt*' and '*Umr i Qaid*'. The author addresses the reader direct in these, and advocates his point of view supporting it with the incidents from the story. They can almost be regarded as articles incorporating real or imaginary stories to give the argument greater force. '*Musāvāt*' attempts to show how unpleasant will be the consequence of granting women equality. '*Umr i Qaid*' is a most unsavoury story about the immodesty and selfishness of modern girls. '*Talāsh i Ajīb*' and '*Tauq i Adam*' are the two best stories in the collection. They are in a humorous vein and about common occurrences in family life and amongst friends. They are told in a manner which awakes interest, and there is a definite plot in them.

'*Itifāqāt i Zamāna*', '*Nargis i Khudparast*', '*Pahlā Gunāh*' and '*Ijāz i Muḥabbat*' are stories without any special merit. '*Nargis i Khudparast*' is based on a very well-known legend, and '*Pahlā Gunāh*' is the type of story which was very popular during this period. Examples of it are found in Sālik and in Rāshid ul *Khairī*, and even writers of recent years sometimes write in that vein. '*Inqilāb i Zamāna*' and other stories that came out in "*Makhzan*" were in Rāshid ul *Khairī*'s style.

The intrinsic merit of Sulṭān Ḥaidar Josh's work is very little. It has historic interest as it serves the purpose of showing the stages by which Urdu short-stories have achieved their present position.

CHAPTER XIV

WOMEN SHORT-STORY WRITERS

As during the intermediate period in the development of the novel the best works were by the women writers, so in the intermediate period in the development of the short-story also some excellent work was done by women.

'Abbāsī Begam and Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar were the best known journalists and novelists amongst the women between the years 1900 and 1925. No collection has been published of their works, but they are to be found in the pages of the old numbers of "*Tahzīb*", "*Iṣmat*" and "*Tamaddun*", and other magazines as well.

'Abbāsī Begam has written some very good short-stories. '*Gariftār i Qafas*' in 1915, which relates the story of "purdah" life in the terms of a caged bird, is a clever bit of inventive writing. '*Zulm i Bekasān*' is a simple but touching story, showing the injustice and cupidity of men. '*Do Shāhzādiā*' is a delightful tale based on history. It is the story of the two daughters of Prince Shujā' who, because of their father's opposition to Aurangzeb, had lost all their wealth and were living in a small hut on the edge of a forest. Their only friend was a half-witted but extremely jolly boy who did all their work and kept them amused by his silly pranks. The younger of the two princesses was particularly fond of '*Alia*' and he specially endeavoured to keep her happy. After a few weeks, however, the local "*Navāb*" came to know of the princesses' stay in his territory and sent for them. They said good-bye to '*Alia*' with regret; the little princess gave him a ring to remember her by.

They were received with great ceremony at the "*Navāb*'s" palace and presented to the "*Navāb*" himself. The "*Navāb*"

ordered every one to leave, and got up from his throne and came to the princesses and asked them if they remembered their silly servant 'Alia or not. The "Navāb" was none but 'Alia himself. The story is extremely well-written and the *dénouement* is very clever.

Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar also frequently composed short-stories. '*Khūn i Armān*', '*Hūr i Şahrāi*', '*Nairang i Zamāna*' and '*Ḥaq ba Ḥaqdār*' are all extremely well-written stories; they are written very simply but are very appealing. The subject of her short-stories, as of her novels, is the inconstancy of man in matters of love and affection as opposed to the constancy of woman. Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar's works are very topical; whatever might be the burning question of the day finds an echo in her writing. During the Non-Co-operation movement her stories were woven round this topic; when the question whether girls should be allowed greater freedom in the matter of marriage was being widely discussed in the pages of "*Işmat*" and "*Tahzīb*", short-stories came from her pen in connection with it. '*Nairang i Zamāna*' and '*Ḥaq ba Ḥaqdār*', the two best of the short-stories written in this period, were on this theme. There was a remarkable discovery in 1926 when two children were found in the cave of a panther. This furnished the plot of '*Hūr i Şahrāi*', one of Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar's best short-stories.

Not only topical events but her personal feelings find an echo in Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar's writings. '*Akhtar un Nisā*' and '*Hirmān Naşīb*', her two full-length novels, echo her own feelings after the loss of her mother and brother. '*Khūn i Armān*' was written after her sister's death and the account of her life is presented in the guise of fiction. The poignancy and pathos of the story are greatly enhanced by its being a record of actual happenings.

In the old numbers of "*Tahzīb*" one finds many short-stories written by women who did not write enough to gain individual recognition as short-story writers; but these

solitary or rare efforts by unknown writers are extremely good. '*Rail kā safar*' (1915) by Anjuman Ārā, '*Shash o Panj*' (1915), '*Tisrī tārikh kā Cānd*' (1918) by Āsaf Jahān, '*Kaukab*' (1919) by Sa'ida, '*Mashq i Sitam*' and '*Sālgirah*' (1920) by Āsaf Jahān, '*Nadāmat*' (1924), '*Martā kyā na kartā*' (1925) and '*Ujlat i Bejā*' (1925), are extremely good stories.

Rāshid ul Khairi's style was imitated and several short-stories in "*Tahzīb*" round about 1918 and 1919 were in his style. Bagdādī Begam, a writer of distinction of this period wrote several stories which were definitely under the influence of Rāshid ul Khairi; and Tāj un Nisā, a prominent writer in "*Tahzīb*" and the author of '*Ranj o Rāhat*', wrote some excellent short-stories as well, most of which were published in "*Tahzīb*". They showed the influence of various authors. '*Roza*' was in Rāshid ul Khairi's style; '*Afsāna e Gadar*' in imitation of Ḥasan Nizāmī's "*fasānas*"; '*Īfā e Va'da*', a delightful story, can, for its simplicity and its appeal, be placed beside the best of Prem Cand.

Though some very good short-stories were written by 'Abbāsī Begam, Nazr i Sajjād Ḥaidar and Tāj, and some excellent stories are to be found in the pages of "*Tahzīb*" by writers who did not achieve any literary eminence, no woman writer of short-stories had written a sufficient number to warrant the publication of a collection of them. This distinction was first achieved by Khātūn i Akram; a collection of her "*fasānas*" has been published and entitled '*Gulistān i Khātūn*'. Two of her longer short-stories, '*Paikar i Vafā*' and '*Bichrī Beṭī*', have also been published separately.

Khātūn i Akram died at the early age of twenty-four. Had she lived longer, it is certain that she would have achieved a very high place amongst the modern writers of short-stories. Most of the "*fasānas*" in '*Gulistān i Khātūn*' were written between 1918 and 1920 when the authoress was merely

eighteen. They show extraordinary maturity of mind and seriousness of outlook, and the style is also as polished and perfect as that of a writer of long standing. Khātūn i Akram's "fasānas" show the influence of Prem Cand and Rāshid ul Khairi. The same ideas as Rāshid ul Khairi's are to be found in several of her stories; the style of writing is also very reminiscent of his. In several instances erring characters are brought to repentance by significant dreams in Rāshid ul Khairi's works; this motive was imitated by several writers, and Khātūn i Akram also incorporated this in one of her stories called 'Balā e Amdanī'.

Like Prem Cand's, Khātūn i Akram's stories are about simple people and everyday occurrences of life. She writes with the same directness and simplicity and, like him, has got the gift of making her stories appealing though devoid of all rhetorical artifice. 'Ārzuō par Qurbānī' is the story of a mother's cupidity. Ruqyya makes her three-year-old daughter, Şuryyā, observe "roza" so that she can have the excuse for a party which was the passion of her life. She is warned against it by her sister, and her own common sense ought to have told her that it was madness to get a three-year-old child to fast in the month of June. But she was bent on having an excuse for a party, and she makes little Şuryyā fast, and gives a party in celebration. The guests arrived from early in the morning and in the rush and bustle of entertaining them Ruqyya loses sight of Şuryyā and does not miss her till the time of "iftār". Immediately a search is started but Şuryyā is not to be found. After a long search she was found in a little room lying with her face on the "şurāhī". She came there dying for a drink but fear of her mother's anger did not allow her to quench her thirst. As in the case of Prem Cand, the outline of her story cannot convey the pathos and the charm of it. The excellence of this type of story does not lie in the ingenuity of its plot or the unusualness of its character, but that indescribable something called the style, and the charm

of style cannot be conveyed through giving an outline of the plot.

Khātūn i Akram used little telling phrases that gave her stories an air of veracity. In 'Shahād i Sitam' she neither shows the relations as absolutely callous and indifferent nor does she show them very concerned about the fate of Sa'ida, but just as much affected by her fate as relations whose own lives are full and happy are moved by the ill-luck of an unfortunate member of the family.

Khātūn i Akram shows this truthful reading of human nature in all her stories and does not paint her "characters" black or white. In 'Inqilāb i Zamāna' she has allowed a passing feeling of contempt and triumph to Husna when she sees her step-mother, Qaişar, standing humble and broken before her, and only on remembering that such a feeling is wicked does she get up and take Qaişar by the hand and make her sit next to her. This is a gesture of reparation not her first reaction.

In 'Bichrī Betī', regarded as Khātūn i Akram's best short-story, the same balance is observed and the "characters" are human with human weaknesses. In the ordinary relations of life seldom does anyone come up to the ideal. Most have at one time or another done something which cannot be defended. Thus Rafiq and his mother because of their desire for another child agree to a second marriage for him. But they are not shown proud of what they have done. The relationship between Aqīla and her husband and her mother-in-law was so good that it would have been incredible if suddenly they had been turned into evil incarnate. Yet this is what is done so often by so many writers of stories. In 'Nairang i Zamāna', one of the "afsānas" in the collection called 'Daulat par qurbāniā' published by "Işmat", a similar situation is described, but there is a change in the husband's and the mother-in-law's attitude which is utterly incredible. Though human nature can deteriorate terribly, such a change of

attitude without any reason or cause to make it feasible is unnatural.

Khātūn i Akram does not only make bad characters human, but her good characters are also not impossible. '*Aqīla* in '*Bichrī Beṭī*' is not shown like the heroines of *Rāshid ul Khairī* or *Ziā Bānu* as absolutely passive and not even making protest against the injustice meted out to her. '*Aqīla*'s lost child is restored to her parents after twelve years by getting married to her adopted son and nephew. Similar devices had been used before by other short-story writers. *Khātūn i Akram* is not original in her *dénouement*, but none the less the story is her own as the "characters" and the plot except in the end are quite different from those of the other stories in which similar means of finding the lost one are employed. '*Paikar i Vafā*' is the other story of *Khātūn i Akram* which has been published separately. It is a story of the constancy and devotion of an Indian wife in spite of her husband's repeated acts of faithlessness.

'*Paikar i Vafā*' is better written than many other stories on the same subject. The parts describing *Sa'ida*'s reactions and struggle in her mind in complying with *Zafar*'s demands are well done, and the plot has sufficient element of doubt and uncertainty as to the turn the story will take to hold the reader's interest. Still '*Paikar i Vafā*' and '*Bichrī Beṭī*', the two longer short-stories, are weaker than '*Shahīd i Sītam*', '*Arzuō par qurbānī*', '*Sac kī fataḥ*' and other short-stories of *Khātūn i Akram*. It indicates that *Khātūn i Akram*'s genius was primarily for writing short-stories, and had she attempted full-length novels, they would have been poorer than her short-stories, as are the novels of Prem Chand or any other writer who is preeminently a short-story writer.

'*Shahīd i Vafā*' is the second collection to be published of "fasānas" written by women. Amtul Vahī, the writer of these "fasānas", is amongst the first rank of contributors to "*Tahzīb*" and "*Iṣmat*". '*Shahīd i Vafā*' came out in

"*Tahzīb*" in 1927. It is an extremely well-written tale, it conforms to all the requisitions of a short-story, and this can be said about it with certainty that it will find its place in any collection that is brought out of the best short-stories of the last ten years.

It is not often that the "characters" of short-stories remain fixed in the mind; most often it is just the impression that was created, but in '*Shahīd i Vafā*' the "character" of *Salma* is drawn so well that it cannot be forgotten.

Salma and *Sa'īd* are very happy together; a little boy is born to them to complete their happiness, and for him they employed a nurse. This nurse, whose name is *Mehr un Nisā*, completely wins over *Salma* by her devotion and efficiency. On hearing that *Mehr un Nisā* came of a good family and had been forced to take up service through bad luck, *Salma* was especially kind to her, and on her telling the story to *Sa'īd* he also becomes very considerate towards *Mehr un Nisā*. *Salma* soon after notices a change in *Mehr un Nisā*; she seems to be fretting about something and keeps very quiet. Soon it becomes quite apparent that *Mehr un Nisā* is in love with *Sa'īd*. *Sa'īd* advises *Salma* to get rid of her. *Salma* tries, but *Mehr un Nisā* adopts such an attitude that she is forced to persuade *Sa'īd* to marry her. *Sa'īd* refuses for a long time, but is gradually won over. *Mehr un Nisā* becomes his wife. For a long time *Sa'īd*'s attitude towards *Salma* and his love for her do not change, but gradually *Mehr un Nisā* begins to influence him more and more, and after a four months' tour in which *Salma* was not able to accompany him, but *Mehr un Nisā* went, *Sa'īd* is completely changed. *Salma* is sent away to his mother's, where after a period a still-born child is born to her and she is very ill. *Sa'īd*, however, has no further dealings with her, and for *Salma*'s maintenance some property is left to her by her mother-in-law, who dies soon after her arrival at Lucknow.

The story is really quite complete at this stage, but another

chapter tells of *Salma's* subsequent sacrifice for *Sa'ūd*. After some years he comes and takes away *Jamīl* from her as *Mehr un Nisā* had no children. Poor *Salma* is distressed by this further blow and follows *Jamīl* to Lahore where *Sa'ūd* is now stationed. There she lives in a house near his and sees him and *Jamīl* going past her door. That is her only consolation. When *Mehr un Nisā* falls ill, *Salma* gains access to the house as nurse. As she disguises herself she is not recognised, and on *Mehr un Nisā's* recovery she continues to be a visitor. *Sa'ūd* falls ill and the doctor declares a transfusion of blood to be the only means of saving his life. *Salma* willingly agrees to give her blood. But she was not able to stand this drain and begins to sink as he recovers. On her death-bed she is recognised by *Sa'ūd*, who is deeply shocked and remorseful, but it was too late for any reparation. *Salma* dies with *Jamīl* and *Sa'ūd* by her bedside.

'*Shahīd i Vafā*' is definitely amongst the best short-stories written in the last two decades. The way Amtul Vaḥī has conveyed *Salma's* character is excellent. The scene between *Mehr un Nisā* and her when *Salma* has come to dismiss *Mehr un Nisā* is extremely good. Young, inexperienced, God-fearing *Salma* is completely outwitted by the cunning, mischievous *Mehr un Nisā*. By threatening suicide and by putting on an air of despair akin to madness, *Mehr un Nisā* thoroughly frightens her. She does not ask her to go because she feels her blood will be on her head. *Mehr un Nisā* plays her role well and the moment when *Salma* could have got rid of her passes away.

Sa'ūd still thinks that *Mehr un Nisā* should be sent away, but gradually begins to get affected by this manifestation of love for him. Here again Amtul Vaḥī has understood and portrayed a very delicate situation extremely well. *Sa'ūd* was not in love with *Mehr un Nisā*, he did not want to marry her, but his vanity was flattered as any man's would be. The faithlessness of men had been the most popular subject of novels

and short-stories written by women; but the way Amtul Vaḥī has shown the gradual change that comes over *Sa'ūd* is a different thing altogether. It is the best piece of psychological study to be found in any short-story in Urdu.

To successfully convey any one mood is the aim of any short-story. In this also Amtul Vaḥī has been eminently successful in '*Shahīd i Vafā*'. The prevailing impression left in the mind is of *Salma's* youth, simplicity and sweetness.

The other seven stories in this collection are also very well written; each of them has an extremely good plot. Amtul Vaḥī has shown originality in her tales and her themes are different. She has not made them didactic, rather she has written stories that have a greater element of interests and complexity in them. The end is always unexpected and surprising.

In recent years women are writing short-stories in increasing numbers but there are not many who have written sufficient to warrant publication of a collection of them; but still recent years have seen the appearance of several collections. Zubaida Zarrī, a writer in "*Humāyūn*" and "*Adabī Dunyā*" has brought out a collection of '*afsānas*' entitled '*Adab i Zarrī*'. Rāḥat Ārā Begam, a prominent writer in "*Nairang i Khayāl*" has, in recent years, published several collections of her works entitled '*Premī*', '*Bāñsrī kī Āvāz*', '*Guncāpāna*', etc. 'Iṣmat Cugtāī, Ṣāleḥa 'Ābid Ḥusain, Mehr un Nisā Begam, are writers of very good short-stories.

In the pages of "*Iṣmat*" and "*Tahzīb*" one still sees extremely well written short-stories by women writers who have not yet achieved any distinction in the literary world. Ḥijāb Ismā'il and Rashīda Zafar are two very good women writers. Their work, though that of one is entirely different from the other's, is so very good that it merits separate treatment.