

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

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

PART II

CHAPTER IV

PANDIT RATN NĀTH SARSHĀR

'FASĀNA E ĀZĀD'

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

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

The incidents are placed without sequence, with no eye for cause and effect, they are just there as a part of the variegated picture Sarshār is painting. They do not contribute towards an unravelling of the plot, they are just separate links in a chain of events, and that is what detracts from 'Fasāna e Āzād's' merit as a novel. Indeed it has made critics deny that it is a novel, for it certainly has no plot. Or it would be more correct to say that its thousand-and-one incidents and hundred-and-one "characters" have nothing to do with the plot, which is of the thinnest, namely, Āzād's falling in love with *Husn Ārā*, his going to Turkey to fight the Russians at her command, there meeting with numerous adventures, returning successful and being accepted by her. This plot is not affected at all by the incidents that are crowded into the story by Sarshār. They have no bearing on, and contribute nothing towards, the development of the story. If they were all taken out, the story would remain intact, but a very poor story it would be. It is the brightly-coloured, vividly-painted, masterly-drawn portrait of incidents and events that make 'Fasāna e Āzād' such delightful reading and such a treasure-trove of wit and humour, repartee and *bons mots*. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the plot of 'Fasāna e Āzād' is extremely poor and the events are very loosely knit and contribute nothing towards the *dénouement*.

The "characters" also do not develop consistently; they act and re-act in an unexpected manner. Incidents do not alter or affect them at all. There is no subtle delineation, no analysing of motives, no showing of the mainsprings of action. We see the "characters" moving, acting, talking; we know their looks and hear their conversation, but we do not know their thoughts and are not admitted into the realm of their feelings. We know about them and of them, but their real selves are never revealed to us. The main function of the novel is to lay bare the motives and show the why and wherefore of human actions. Sarshār does not do this, yet his "char-

acters" are fairly realistic and definite, not by any means vague and shadowy.

'Fasāna e Āzād's' claim to be regarded as the first Urdu novel cannot be based on its plot or characterisation, and, therefore, by some it has been denied this title altogether. Though 'Fasāna e Āzād' does not show masterly construction of plot or subtle delineation of "character", yet it can claim to be the first Urdu novel on the ground of its realism. Sarshār wrote about men and women around him and not of princes and fairies and giants that never existed, of Lucknow which he knew and which we recognise, not of any "*Dayār i Gul*" or "*Arz i Husn*" of imagination.

The public's demand was so strong for the unreal and the incredible that Sarshār could not resist introducing, side by side with realistic descriptions of "*Aish bāq*" fairs and Muḥarram processions, such incidents as the raising of *Humāyūn Far* from the dead by the Dervish, and *Shāh Savār's* abnormal character and Āzād's escapades while fighting the Russians. These are highly improbable, if not altogether impossible. In fact, in 'Fasāna e Āzād' we see the elements both of the older "Fasānas" and the modern novel; one is giving place to the other but has not completely done so. The newer trends are discernible but as yet have not emerged definitely. It is a book that presages a new development, and in doing that alone its place would have been assured. Yet its achievements are by no means negligible; as a picture of Lucknow life and society, it will remain unparalleled.

To give even a bare outline of the contents of 'Fasāna e Āzād' is wellnigh impossible. It is in four volumes, and each volume runs into several hundred pages. The main thread of the story gets lost in the plethora of extraneous incidents, none of which has a causal connection with the others at all.

The first volume, which consists of 672 pages is, in many respects, the most interesting. In it are to be found the descriptions of Lucknow's social life in greater detail than in

the other three. "*Lakhnau kā Cehlum*", "*Lakhnau kī Barāten*", "*Lakhnau men Basant kī Bahār*" are all described in the first volume. The main story also moves at a greater pace in this volume, than in the others. *Āzād* meets *Husn Ārā* and is commissioned by her to go and fight for the Turks against the Russians. His acceptance of this task and his preparations for the journey all come into this volume.

Humāyūn Far falls in love with the other sister, *Sipehr Ārā*, and his attempts to reach her are also described. The first volume concerns itself more with the main "characters" than the others, and in it there are fewer extraneous incidents.

The second volume is the shortest of the four; it has only 442 pages. In it the story is carried a step further. *Āzād* arrives at Constantinople after a few adventures *en route*. He is received very well by the Turkish officers, but, rather inexplicably, is thrown into jail. Later it transpires that it was due to the machinations of a young lady called *Miss Mīda*, who had fallen in love with *Āzād* and had been repulsed by him; she had revenged herself on him by declaring him to be a spy. He is, however, released on the charge having proved to be false, and is given the rank of an officer in the Turkish Army. There are several chapters dealing with the war, and of *Āzād* and *Khojī*'s exploits.

These are interspersed with the chapters about *Husn Ārā*, as it is contrary to convention that "the path of true love should run smooth". *Husn Ārā* is made to face some opposition. Her grandmother referred to in the book as *Barī Begam* refuses to allow her to wait for *Āzād*'s return, and when *Husn Ārā* does not agree readily, she attempts to force her to marry. *Husn Ārā*, however, falls ill at the decisive moment and thus avoids the issue.

The disappointed suitor tries, by spreading numerous rumours about *Āzād*, to poison *Husn Ārā*'s mind against him. But she remains steadfast in spite of them. *Humāyūn Far* presses his suit for *Sipehr Ārā* and his proposal is eventually

accepted by *Barī Begam*. There are, of course, many intervening chapters dealing with the amours of *Humāyūn Far* and *Sipehr Ārā*.

The *Bhatyārī* or *Allā Rakkhī* of the first volume becomes a "jogan" in this, and the "character" referred to as *Shāh Savār* in the first volume is again introduced here. He is shown in many roles and his character is so abnormal, and his behaviour so eccentric, that it is impossible to form any conclusions about him. He is shown enamoured of the *Jogan* as well as being in love with *Husn Ārā* and *Sepehr Ārā*.

The third volume is of 1,148 pages. It is the longest of the four. It mainly deals with the adventures of *Allā Rakkhī* alias *Jogan* alias *Shabbo Jān*, who now takes on the name of *Şurayā Begam* and plays the role of a respectable lady and manages to get married to a Navāb. There are chapters after chapters about her. Her wedding is described at great length, and a whole host of new "characters" is introduced in the shape of *Şurayā Begam*'s new relations and friends and the guests at the wedding. The marriage of *Sipehr Ārā* with *Humāyūn Far* takes place in this volume. *Humāyūn Far* is killed by an unknown enemy as the "barāt" reaches the bride's house. The unknown enemy turns out to be *Shāh Savār*. *Shāh Savār* is arrested but makes his escape. *Sipehr Ārā* is plunged into grief, and there are several chapters describing the funeral and other rites in connection with it. A whole host of new "characters" is also brought on the scene in this connection.

The account of *Āzād*'s adventures and of his love affairs and the story of *Khojī*'s misadventures fill many chapters. The Princess of Poland falls in love with *Āzād* and he is again thrown into jail. This time he is rescued by the help of *Mīda* with whom he is by now on excellent terms. There is yet another young lady, called Clarissa, who has fallen a victim to *Āzād*'s charms.

By far the largest part of the book, however, deals with

the affairs of *Surayā Begam*. It is most confusing, and utterly irrelevant to the story of *Husn Ārā* and *Āzād* or *Sipehr Ārā* and *Humāyūn Far*.

The fourth volume opens with the news of *Āzād's* having started for India. Of course, being *Āzād*, he meets with numerous adventures on his way, and several beauties lose their hearts to him, and he also stops and dallies with them. *Sipehr Ārā* is married to *Humāyūn Far's* brother, but at the time of the wedding she thinks it is *Humāyūn Far* who has been resurrected through the miraculous powers of a dervish. There are several chapters gradually building up the belief in the dervish by recounting his powers, and finally a most elaborate description of the resurrection itself. Later, as a concession to realism, Sarshār explains away the whole thing as an elaborate plan for getting *Sipehr Ārā* agreeable to re-marriage. Had she realised it was not *Humāyūn Far*, probably she would not have agreed. Once married, *Sipehr Ārā* realises that it is not *Humāyūn Far* risen from the dead, but a lost brother of his who has married her. This becomes generally known through the Government inquiries in connection with the property of *Humāyūn Far*.

Clarissa and *Mida* both come with *Āzād* to India. *Mida* declines to marry *Āzād* as he had pledged his word to *Husn Ārā* first. *Husn Ārā*, on her part, tries to persuade *Mida* against it. Many chapters deal with this.

At last this unwieldy story is brought to a close in the accepted way. *Āzād* and *Husn Ārā* marry, and we are told lived happily ever after. *Āzād* was the recipient of many honours and performed many further creditable deeds. The Misses *Mida* and Clarissa devoted their lives to education and social work. *Husn Ārā* also did much in that line, and we leave them leading useful and happy lives.

'*Fasāna e Āzād*' is a novel of action, and in these the stress is always on action; "character" is only by the way and is always presented objectively. But even for a novel of action

the characterisation of '*Fasāna e Āzād*' is very poor. *Āzād*, the hero, is described as gallant and brave, debonair and attractive, a great linguist, a fine soldier; in short, an embodiment of all manly virtues. But all this we are told by the author; it is not the information we ourselves gather of *Āzād's* character from seeing him in action. The impression he creates is of an adventurer, a man-about-town, as of one who lives by his wits, not of a gallant and cultured gentleman. In the same way, Sarshār has not been able to present *Husn Ārā* and *Sipehr Ārā* in the light he had intended to. He wanted them to appear as extremely decorous, modest, cultured and refined young ladies. But from their actions they appear as extremely forward and bold. They seem to have an independence and freedom of action which is surprising, and not at all likely to have been enjoyed by girls of good family in 1880. Their conversation and idioms are also not those of *Pardah* ladies. In fact, it is generally said about Sarshār that he made ladies of good family talk like "*Ṭavāefs*".

Sarshār's characterisation has another defect as well. His "characters" are absolutely static. They do not change or develop at all. *Āzād*, *Husn Ārā*, *Sipehr Ārā*, *Humāyūn Far*, appear as finished products and remain as such throughout. They remain entirely unaltered by their experiences and their environment has no effect on them. The story is spread over a number of years, but *Husn Ārā* and *Sipehr Ārā* talk and behave at the end of it just in the same way as on their first appearance in the book. Neither their attitude, nor their point of view, has changed, and yet they have undergone so much.

The "character" of *Khojī*, however, is a remarkable achievement. He is amongst the immortal "characters" of fiction. Small, insignificant, boastful, conceited, addicted to taking opium is *Khojī*. He falls in love as many times as his master *Āzād*, and always gets into trouble in consequence. But his ardour is in no way abated, nor does his good opinion

about himself suffer. He thinks he is the handsomest and bravest of men. One always hears him saying

نہیں ہوئی اس وقت قرولی، ورنہ لاش پھڑکتی ہوتی !

but unfortunately the "qararū" never is handy and we never get the opportunity of having a proof of his valour. He tries to deceive not only others but himself also, and his self-deception is marvellous. He never realises that it is ridicule that he is exciting wherever he goes, but persists in thinking that the crowd gathers round to admire him.

Khojī has been declared by Saxena a unique character in the whole range of Urdu literature and the most original and wonderful creation of the humorist's art.

Shāh Savār is another fantastic creation of Sarshār's. He can hardly be called sane or human. He seems to be the type whose effigies one finds in Madam Tussaud's 'Chamber of Horrors'. He has numerous murders to his account, and attempts to kill *Āzād* and does kill *Humāyūn Far*. The reason given for murdering *Humāyūn Far* and attempting to murder *Āzād* is his love for *Husn Ārā* and *Sipehr Ārā*, but in reality they are the acts of a madman.

It is not in the subtlety of his characterisation or the excellence of his plot construction that the greatness of Sarshār lies. His "characters" are poor and his plot is almost non-existent, but in spite of it there is a vigour, a life in '*Fasāna e Āzād*' which made it one of the most popular works of its time and which still makes it such enjoyable reading. There is a spirit of *bonhomie* in '*Fasāna e Āzād*'; it somehow conveys the fact that life is supremely livable and enjoyable, and in the reading of it one gets swept away by its rush of events.

Sarshār wrote several other novels besides '*Fasāna e Āzād*'. They were none of them as unwieldily voluminous as '*Fasāna e Āzād*', nor did they possess that charm of spirit of good fellowship that radiates from it.

'*Kāmnī*' is the only novel of Sarshār which deals with the fortunes of a Hindu family; in '*Fasāna e Āzād*' itself, and in '*Sair i Kohsār*', '*Bichrī Dulhan*' and '*Hushshū*', the chief "characters" are from Mohammedan families. '*Kāmnī*' is not distinctive in any way. Of course for years nothing better than it could be found in Urdu and, considering that, it is a creditable achievement. *Kāmnī* is the daughter of a rich Rajput family. She grows up to be a remarkably accomplished and beautiful girl. She is engaged for a while to a worthless sort of fellow, but this is broken off and she is engaged to *Rangbīr Singh*, who is as handsome and as accomplished as she, and through the offices of her and his friends they manage to see each other's photographs and fall in love. Efforts are made to break the engagement by various people but it fails and *Kāmnī* and *Rangbīr Singh* are married.

Soon after, *Rangbīr Singh* is called to join his regiment and ordered to the front. News comes that he has been killed. *Kāmnī* is naturally grieved. She becomes a "jogan" and lives in a hut in the outskirts of the town, helping young mothers, and doing other charitable work.

Her far-famed beauty once or twice gets her into trouble, but she comes out unscathed. Unexpectedly, *Rangbīr Singh* returns and all is well once again.

There are passages in '*Kāmnī*' which recall the Sarshār of '*Fasāna e Āzād*'. The talk between *Kāmnī* and her sisters and sisters-in-law is in the style of the talk between *Husn Ārā* and *Sipehr Ārā*, *Bahr un Nisā* and *Rūh Afzā*. But the greatness of '*Fasāna e Āzād*' lay in the truthful picture it painted of the life of every stratum of Lucknow society. No such thing is achieved by '*Kāmnī*', and characterisation or construction of plot was not Sarshār's forte, and in consequence there is not any distinctive quality about '*Kāmnī*', and the same can be said of all the other novels of Sarshār. They are lit up every now and then by witty, humorous dialogues, but have not that particular charm of '*Fasāna e Āzād*'.

NOTE.—'Fasāna e Āzād' chronologically appears later than 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs'. The date of publication of 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs' is 1869. 'Fasāna e Āzād' was not completed till 1880, but 'Fasāna e Āzād' was recognised as a novel very much earlier than 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs'. 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs' continued to be called a suitable text-book for girls for years, and only recently has been accepted as a novel. Besides which in style and spirit 'Fasāna e Āzād' is nearer the romances than 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs', and, therefore, though chronologically it should come after 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs' in the history of the development of the novel, it must be treated as a work of transition bridging the gulf between the true novel and the romance.

CHAPTER V

NAZĪR AḤMAD

Amongst Nazīr Aḥmad's works we find the best novels written in the Urdu language. He has had a host of imitators, but none have equalled, much less excelled, him. His 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs' is the first real novel in Urdu, and still the best. 'Fasāna e Āzād's' plot is too loosely knit, a number of its "characters" are rather unusual, and most of its incidents border on the impossible, and these factors detract from its right to be considered a perfect novel. 'Fasāna e Āzād' is an improvement, a transition, a bridge between the absolute romance and the realistic novel. With 'Mirāt ul 'Arūs' achievement is reached. The trammels of the supernatural have been shaken off once and for all. Recourse is no longer made to impossible or improbable incidents for the sake of enhancing interest and holding the reader's attention, yet it more than succeeds in doing both. Members of both sexes and of all ages have found it delightful and its popularity remains unabated with each succeeding generation.

Nazīr Aḥmad established the fact successfully that ordinary events in the life of ordinary people succeed in getting a deeper response than extraordinary events in the lives of superhumans. Nazīr Aḥmad's canvas is not large, he does not attempt to portray "grande passion" of any description, neither intense love, nor intense hate, no soul-scorching jealousy or gnawing ambition devours his "characters". They are none of them villains of the deepest dye, nor are any of them complicated, difficult or obscure "characters", motives for whose actions lie in their sub-conscious inhibitions and repressions. They are ordinary normal men and women with the very ordinary emotions the human heart is subject to.

That his field is limited and he only portrayed domestic life of the middle and the upper middle class Muslim families, and did not try to attempt anything bigger, does not take away