

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 AĦMAD

Amongst Nazīr AĦmad'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 AĦmad 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 AĦmad'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

from his greatness. We cannot refuse to admit the excellence of an exquisite miniature because it is not a full-size portrait. We cannot blame an artist for what he has not done, and which we perhaps would have liked him to do; we can only judge him by how he has accomplished what he attempted, and Nazīr Aḥmad has done what he did attempt extremely well. In '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', '*Banāt un Na'sh*', '*Taubat un Naṣūh*' and '*Fasāna e Mubtalā*', he has painted for us the life led by the gentry of Northern India just after the Mutiny.

His touch is so sure, he knows his ground so well and he is such an adept at putting just the right stress at just the right place, that the pictures he has painted are unforgettable. He describes Indian life as yet untouched (or unaltered for it had already come into touch) by contact with the West. To-day, that is to say, nearly seventy years after these books were written, they alone are the means of our knowing what Indian life was like before it came into contact with the West, for even in the remotest part of India it would now be difficult to find an Indian social system quite unaltered in spite of its contact with the West.

In the society described in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', just after the Mutiny, people were no longer opulent; families who up till now had been able to support themselves with income from their properties, began to look round for jobs for their sons. A certain degeneracy among the younger generation was apparent. *Kalīm*, *Mubtalā* and even *Aṣḡarī*'s husband *Kāmīl*, are typical of those indolent, lazy and pleasure-loving but suave and polished young men. But life still had dignity and charm, people struggled to keep up appearances. There was still a great deal of old-world courtesy, loyalty, and sense of honour and duty. In short, the society and civilization which form the background of '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' and '*Taubat un Naṣūh*' were mellowed and seasoned. There was nothing crude or raw about it—if anything it was a trifle overripe, almost ready to decay.

For such a faithful rendering of the manners and morals of the period which have completely vanished, we owe Nazīr Aḥmad a great debt of gratitude. No other so completely unbiased picture of that period just before the advent of the Western influence exists in Urdu. Everything that has been written since is prejudiced one way or another. There has been exaggerated condemnation and criticism of it, especially by the women novelists, or a sentimental praise of it, especially to be found in the works of Rāshid ul *Khairī* and *Hasan Nizāmī*. Nazīr Aḥmad's picture alone is free from bias and, hence, the most reliable. He did not set out to defend either the purely Indian mode of life against the European or *vice versa*. He was merely telling the story about men and women of a certain period. The manners and customs of that period came in incidentally and not with any didactic purpose.

But the true greatness of Nazīr Aḥmad does not lie in this. It is only a side issue that the rapid change in the social life of India has made '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' a mirror of the life in the seventies. His greatness as a novelist is shown in his superb and masterly characterisation. To say that his "characters" are living is an under-statement. They live, they breathe, they are real men and women; we know them, we met them, we meet them every day; they are ageless, they belong to all times and to all nations. Though they speak the choice and idiomatic Urdu of old Delhi, they also speak the universal language of humanity. They are the products of their time, yet they belong to eternity; types like *Aṣḡarī* and *Akbarī*, of *Kāmīl* and '*Āqīl*', of *Maḥmūda* and *Husn Arā*, of *Na'ima* and *Kalīm*, of *Hamīda* and *Salīm*, of *Fahmūda* and *Naṣūh*, of *Mubtalā* and of *Gairat Begam*, of *Haryālī* and of *Nazar*, can be found in every country and in every age.

Not only are Nazīr Aḥmad's major "characters" drawn with masterly strokes that make them for ever immortal, he shows no less genius also in drawing his minor "characters";

people who just appear in the story once and drop off, who play no part in its development,—even they pulsate with life. *Fazīlat* and *Zulfan*, for instance, *Barībī* in ' *Fasāna e Mubtalā* ' or *Sāleha* in ' *Taubat un Naṣūh* ', *Maulvī Muhammad Fāzīl*, *Dūrandesh Khān*, *Tamāsha Khānam*,—none of these appears more than a few times and none of these plays an important role at all; yet they also are as real to us as *Aṣgarī* herself, for we have met and daily meet that counterpart. We regret their fleeting appearance, we feel we would have liked to have known them a little more, a little longer.

"Characters" that do not appear but are just mentioned, even their personality is quite adequately rendered in just a few lines. Not much is said about the superior officer of *Kāmīl*, but from what little has been said we easily gather his style, the gracious, patronising, understanding type of Englishman one met quite often in the seventies and eighties.

Then there is the *Raīs*. We hear very little about him but we see him clearly, we know him as thoroughly as if pages were written about him. He is the impecunious aristocrat who has not yet learned to cut his coat according to his cloth, and hence is unable to pay his employees regularly and give them any promotion. But his poverty has not yet taught him to be mean, he has been rich longer than he has been poor, so his manners and gestures are still those of an aristocrat. The large-handed generosity, the interest in the family of employees, the grand manner, are all brought out, and we see in him the hard-up but dignified and generous " *Navāb* " of the post-Mutiny period to perfection.

There is also *Tamāsha Khānam*; how little she appears in the story, what a small part she plays, but how vivid is our recollection of her! This is because her "no nonsense about me" sort of downright personality is so clearly brought out. She has a rough tongue, but a golden heart. She is loyal but will not make a song and dance of her loyalty. She will do a good turn but with brusque words. We first hear of her when

*Aṣgarī* consults her about her predicament regarding her *trousseau*. She is not sentimental and tells *Aṣgarī* not to be a goose and take what by good luck is coming her way. We meet her counterpart to-day in the eyebrow-plucked, lip-sticked modern girl, who is not really such a bad sort when one comes to know her.

In *Dūrandesh Khān*, we see the successful careerist of modern India. He is a hard-headed man of business, has made a success of his life and wants to go further. He is by no means indifferent to human ties, nor is he lacking in moral values. He is sane and sensible, and business-like and, in fact, he is " *dūrandesh* ", as his name suggests. He is not the type who, at the mere hint from an old employee that his daughter's wedding is pending, orders a gift of Rs. 500/- to be made. Nor is his account ever likely to be overdrawn. Things like that do not happen to the " *Dūrandesh Khāns* " of this world.

Then there is the mother of *Muhammad 'Aqīl* and *Kāmīl*. She is the most important of the minor "characters". The quiet dignity of her personality, her gentleness and forbearance, her wisdom gleaned from years of experience, are all brought out with deft touches. She is what would be described by European writers as a truly Christian person. She, not *Aṣgarī*, is the best person in the book, judging from the point of view of abstract goodness and not material success attendant upon its practice. *Aṣgarī* is clever and shrewd rather than good, or, in other words, her goodness is of the practical type. *Muhammad Kāmīl's* mother's goodness is of the type that reaps little material gain from its practice, but she is no fool. It is her wisdom and forbearance that save *Akbarī* and *'Aqīl's* marriage from smashing up altogether. To *'Aqīl's*:

میں تو الگ نہیں رہونگا، بیوی رہے یا جائے

she replies:

بیٹا، یہ بھی کہیں ہوتی ہے، اشرافوں میں کہیں بیویاں چھوٹی

ہیں، تم کو اپنی عمر انہیں کے ساتھ کاٹنی ہے، ہمارا کیا ہے،  
قبر میں پاؤں لٹکائے بیٹھے ہیں !

What foresight, forbearance and unselfishness they reveal !

She does not assert herself against *Akbarī's* tantrums, nor *Aşqarī's* drastic measures, but she is not a doormat by any means. She pulls up *Muhammad 'Aqil* sharply when he pretends not to hear her calling him :

شاباش، بیٹا، شاباش ! میں تم کو پکار رہی ہوں اور تم سنتے  
ہو، جواب نہیں دیتے . تیرھویں صدی میں ماؤں کا یہی  
وقر رہ گیا ہے .

It is a perfect example of dignified reproach.

There is dignity in her resentment against *Aşqarī's* clean sweep of her régime. That she was not insensible to *Aşqarī's* high-handedness is shown by the salutary remark :

عظمت بری تھی، لیکن آٹھ آنے مہینہ پر پچیس برس سے  
اُس نے نوکری کی .

Quietly and unobtrusively she carries on the age-old customs and rites, like a priestess performing her ritual : " *Ramzān* " is coming, the house has to be redecorated ! " *Shab i barāt* " is coming, there have to be fireworks for the children and " *Fāteha* " for the dead ! It is the " *Īd* ", presents must be sent to the daughters-in-law's people !

There is an old-world grace in her quiet arrangement of these little things, as there is in the description of an English chatelaine pouring out tea on a summer afternoon on green lawns. Just as typically English as this scene is, so typically Indian are scenes evoked by remarks such as the following :

محمد عاقل کی مان نے کہا، یہ لو ایک رویہ تو اپنی سالی اصغری کے  
ہاتھ میں عیدی کا دینا، اور یہ ایک اٹھنی اپنی خلیا ساس کے

بیٹے میاں مسلم کو . اور آدھے کھلونے بھی لیتے جاؤ، اور ایک خوان  
میں دودھ اور مٹھائی کی ٹوکری بھی ماما عظمت کے ہاتھ  
اپنے ساتھ لوالے جاؤ .

and they express somehow the essential gentleness and sweetness of the lady of the house. Her consideration for other people's feelings and her warm sympathetic nature are brought out in many ways. In short, the essential gentleness and sweetness of her character are conveyed perfectly. We feel that she is the type of person whose gentle stroking of the brow would soothe away all worries.

Nor is she so good as to become inhuman. No, at times her patience wears thin with both her daughters-in-law.

She says, irritated at what she considers *Aşqarī's* inordinate ambition :

بھلا بیٹی، جھونپڑے میں رہنا اور محلوں کے خواب دیکھنا !  
کجا حکیم جی کا گھر کہ آج اُن کے یہاں وہ دولت کہ شہر میں  
اُن کا ثانی نہیں، اور کجا ہم غریب کہ رہنے کا جھونپڑا بھی  
درست نہیں .

The second most interesting minor " character " is *Azmat*. She is a strange mixture of loyalty and treachery, and this is brought out very well. She is fond of her mistress, one feels, and also of the children, whom she must have known from infancy, but this does not prevent her from fleecing them. In spite of it, one can't make up one's mind to dislike her, she is somehow so human. We hear her speaking at length twice, once to her mistress, and once to *Hazārī Mal*. Her mischief-making nature is best revealed in her talk with the mistress, where for no reason but just out of malice she tells her mistress a lot of lies and makes the situation worse than it is, and thus frightens the dear old lady out of her wits. This hardens our hearts against *Azmat* very much, and we do not

feel sorry when she meets her deserts at *Aşgarī*'s hands. Her talk with *Hazārī Mal* is the best example of servants' gossip read anywhere. Her summing up of the characters of the different ladies and gentlemen she serves is very interesting. As it is an illustration of the servant's point of view it is very different from that of their own circle. *Aşgarī* might be clever but much '*Azmat* cares for that. She preferred *Akbarī*, who might have been a fool or quick-tempered, but left her alone.

*Muhammad 'Aqīl*'s mother gets the verdict :

بیگم صاحب تو اولیا آدمی ہیں، اور انہیں کے دم قدم سے  
گھر چلتا ہے۔ ہم غریب بھی انہیں کا دامن پکڑے ہوئے ہیں۔

Intrinsic goodness such as hers is sure to win recognition in the kitchen as much as in the drawing-room.

Each and every "character" introduced in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' is a little gem. *Shāh Zamānī Begam*, *Sultāna Begam*, the *Hakīm Shāhib*, *Akbarī*'s mother, *Hazārī Mal*, are all interesting studies that deserve praise. They are presented to us in a few deft strokes. It is in drawing the two major "characters" of *Akbarī* and *Aşgarī* that the author's power of characterisation is revealed to the full. So real and lifelike he succeeded in making them that *Akbarī* and *Aşgarī* are not regarded by the Urdu reading public as "characters" in a book, but as personal acquaintances, whom they have met, and know. How often are the various situations and phrases from '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' and '*Banāt un Na'sh*' quoted! How many mothers have smiled indulgently at their daughters' boastfulness and told them not to be a *Husn Arā*, and how often their petulant boasts and naughtiness have been likened to *Akbarī*'s!

*Akbarī*'s "character" can take on a new aspect and be doubly interesting when looked upon from the modern point of view. When the book was written, her type of girl was not popular. She was a bad housekeeper, she was far more independent than it was seemly for a young lady to be in those

days—even in Europe for that matter. She was lacking the dignity and reserve befitting a lady of her position. She made friends with common people very easily; she was very gullible, and was easily led away. In short, she did not have any qualities that go to make a thrifty wife and a good housekeeper. She cooked so badly that appetite fled at the sight of food. She forgot to lock the front door and did not remember to take out and air the woollen clothes that were stored up in summer. In an age when women were judged from that point of view alone, she stood condemned. Things have changed very much, and most of all the attitude towards women, and so *Akbarī* to a reader to-day does not appear such a bad sort after all. Looking at her as a human being, she is a more lovable person and has a warmer heart than *Aşgarī*. Indeed, most of her difficulties arose out of her generous impulses and her trustful nature. She did not lock her front door because she could not conceive that anyone would walk in and steal all her china and silver, nor could she believe that anyone so pious and so nice as *Bī Hajjan* could be a swindler and a thief. She must have felt a bit lonely and bored all by herself. Her long-drawn-out sigh at the mention of children indicates this, as does also the fact that she is a fool and is utterly lacking in any reserve or caution.

Well, she is bored. She sees the *Hajjan* with all sorts of gewgaws—what woman born is insensible to the lure of shop-windows? She decides to call her over and have a look. She does so, finds the *Hajjan* friendly, sympathetic and understanding (not many people treated *Akbarī* like that), so she chums up with her. She thinks she has found a real friend when her advice seems to have resulted in making her husband, perhaps for the first time, pleased with her. Also she, *Akbarī*, who so far has been regarded as a most unpractical person, has made some bargain purchases from the *Hajjan*; even her husband has acknowledged that. So she feels that she must make a few similar deals. So, when *Hajjan* declared that there

was a chance of getting something worth Rs.500/- for Rs.50/-, we can easily understand how she agrees to sell her bracelets and buy it. Her mind was too full of the idea of making another bargain. She must have gleefully pictured in her mind her husband's surprise when again she would declare the absurdly low price of the pearls. So, in her eagerness to appear thrifty in the eyes of her husband, she does not give a thought to the implications of letting the *Hajjan* walk off with all her jewellery, on the pretext of getting it cleaned, which *Akbari* thinks will be another feather in her cap. We can easily imagine how her mind was working,—how she would thrust the jewels under her husband's nose and say, "See, how clever I am! I have had them all cleaned and re-threaded."

Poor *Akbari*! Characters such as she are always pathetically seeking for the approbation of those who are what they themselves would like to be, and always succeed in making a worse impression.

Nazir Ahmad did not set out to justify *Akbari* but to hold her up as a warning and to point out what the consequences of impulsiveness and thoughtlessness were. Nazir Ahmad was not a romantic writer, but a realistic one, and in real life caution and good sense always pay. Whether Nazir Ahmad set out to praise or condemn *Akbari* is immaterial. That he could so faithfully depict her is the important thing; so faithfully, in fact, that she can be discussed, praised or blamed, and one can take sides for and against her as a real person.

*Asgari* is the personification of all the conventional virtues. She has all the qualities that go to make an excellent wife, a thrifty housekeeper, altogether an efficient and practical person. How well this is all brought out—there is no laboured characterisation, no cataloguing of her virtues, just a remark here and there. The description of *Asgari* in the performance of her daily tasks :

اصغری نے برتن بہانڈا گری پڑی چیز سب ٹھکانے سے رکھی

اور باہر کے دروازہ کی زنجیر بند کی، کوٹھریوں کو قفل لگا کنبجیاں ماں کے حوالے کیں، باہر کے دالان اور باورچیخانے کا چراغ گل کیا، اور آیا اور بہنوئی سبکو پان بنا کر دئے، اور فراغت سے جا کر سو رہی۔

illustrates this. Little things in themselves, but they are just the little things that mark out a born housekeeper. *Asgari* automatically and instinctively does these things. They come naturally to her. She does not have to think them out, because she feels in her bones just what to do.

*Asgari* is not merely a successful housekeeper; she has to face several domestic crises and awkward situations, and she deals with them very efficiently and successfully. She makes no false move and, as if by a sixth sense, she says and does just the right thing.

How to get rid of '*Azmat*' was her most difficult problem, and one which anyone with less sense than she would certainly have failed to solve. There were so many complications, and not the least of them her sister's bad record, which handicapped her considerably. She could not complain directly to her husband or mother-in-law for fear of being thought to be following in her sister's footsteps. Then there were the debts incurred through '*Azmat*', the long time she had been in service, and the confidence she enjoyed of her mistress. Yes, it was a very difficult problem as domestic problems go. She handled it extremely well, by approaching just the people who were most likely to help her and not directly taking the dismissal of '*Azmat*' into her own hands, which would have put her in the wrong in the eyes of her mother-in-law. She so managed the affairs that '*Azmat*'s staying on became impossible.

She twice steered her husband clear of trouble. In the difference in her method of tackling him each time we again see that instinctive shrewdness of hers. In the early days of

her marriage when she is not so sure of her ground she makes an indirect approach to the subject, brings it up casually in conversation so that it does not appear to be officious interference. But when later on in Sialkot he has gathered round him some worthless friends she tackles him straight away and gets rid of them with very little ceremony. In the various roles of her life, she is reliable, helpful and sensible, a sort of person people turn to in time of trouble for advice. We are told that she was responsible for settling *Jamāl Ārā's* affairs, and we see her rushing off from her girls to advise someone about her sick child.

She is economical but knows where it would be worth while not to economise. She refuses to take a penny for the tuition of *Husn Ārā*, with the result that she enjoyed the esteem and regard of *Husn Ārā's* family, which would not have been possible had she placed herself on the footing of a paid governess.

*Aṣḡarī* is hard-headed, business-like and practical, but she is far from being just an embodiment of virtues demanded and admired by convention. That she is real and lifelike is shown by the fact that her amazing correctness on each occasion irritates and annoys, as does the "goody good the teacher's pet" type of person of real life. And therein lies the charm of all Nazīr Aḥmad's "characters". They are drawn from life not only in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', his masterpiece, but in '*Banāt un Na'sh*', in '*Taubat un Naṣūḥ*' and in '*Fasāna e Mubtalā*' as well.

'*Banāt un Na'sh*' deals exclusively with girls; there are no men "characters" in the book at all. As a matter of fact '*Banāt un Na'sh*' cannot be regarded as a separate book, for it is a sequel to '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*'. We only get a glimpse of *Aṣḡarī's* "maktab" (school) and her girls in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*'. The glimpse was so intriguing and interesting that we turn with delight to a fuller picture of them in another book. '*Banāt un Na'sh*' has been described by critics as a series of

lectures on geography and general knowledge; but nothing can be further from the truth. It is by no means a text-book. There is far too much good characterisation in it for it ever to be relegated to the position of a mere text-book for girls. Not only is the character of *Husn Ārā* and of *Maḥmūda* extremely well-drawn but that of several other girls also. Like the minor "characters" of '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' they say but little and very little is said about them, but what is said is so telling and so revealing that we mark them down as definite "characters" and types in our mind. *Ḥalīma* and *Khair un Nisā* are extremely well done; even "characters" described at second-hand as *Hoshmand*, *Nāz Parvar* or *Dildār Jahān* are very good. And those ladies at the wedding: how extremely well they have been described! One wonders how Nazīr Aḥmad came to such knowledge of feminine characters, living as he did at a time in which the sexes did not mix in society.

There is more humour in '*Banāt un Na'sh*' than in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', though the field is still narrower and plot almost non-existent, and the "characters" only school-girls. But here, again, does it matter what the subject is, provided the treatment is good? Granted that a school-girl is not as difficult a "character" to delineate as Tolstoy's Anna Karenina or Dostoevsky's Ivanova or Dumas' Camille. Nevertheless, to paint still-life requires nearly as great a mastery of technique as the painting of portraits. Even if depths and heights of passion are not to be expressed, yet the play of light and shade has to be recorded, and it is not everyone who can express the careless rapture of a bird's song, nor can everyone render the innocent emotions, the little hopes and fears, the petty jealousies and ambitions of girlhood.

If in '*Banāt un Na'sh*' the field is narrower than in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', in '*Taubat un Naṣūḥ*' and in '*Fasāna e Mubtalā*' the scope is larger. In both these books the men "characters" come in not only as complements of women "characters" but in their own right. The story is about them. In '*Taubat*

in *Naṣūh*, *Naṣūh* and *Kalīm* are by far the most important "characters". In '*Fasana e Mubtalā*', the tragedy is of *Mubtalā* and not of *Gairat Begam*. Not only is the field larger but the subject-matter is also more complex.

It is no longer a case of just describing the ordinary events that happen in the life of any and every person. *Naṣūh*, *Kalīm* and *Mubtalā*, all three have a tragic quality in their character. Tragedy, according to Hegel, occurs when a certain type of "character" is placed in a certain kind of situation, a situation which in the case of any other "character" would result in nothing at all unusual, but in the case of this particular "character" spells tragedy because of some inherent defect.

*Naṣūh*, *Kalīm* and *Mubtalā* are all victims of this tragedy of "character". What happens to them would not have meant tragedy to any other persons but themselves. But being what they were, it brought them grief and disillusionment and disappointment.

*Naṣūh* is a very pathetic case. He is sincere and earnest, his object is praiseworthy and we sympathise with his efforts in trying to achieve it. But he shows a great lack of imagination as well as of knowledge of human nature in the way in which he sets about reforming his family after having let them do pretty much what they liked so far.

Even after making allowances for the time in which it was customary to treat children with a heavy hand, even when they had reached an age in which they should be allowed to decide for themselves, even after making allowance for this generally mistaken attitude, *Naṣūh's* treatment of *Kalīm* is very unimaginative. His persistence in insisting on *Kalīm's* coming to see him is childish; his burning of *Kalīm's* library and furniture a mixture of pettiness and bad temper. It is too melodramatic a gesture to be an expression of a genuine horror or dislike in *Naṣūh's* mind of such books as were found in *Kalīm's* library. It was rather an unworthy way of wreaking

vengeance on *Kalīm*, like Mr. Barrett's wanting to destroy Flush so that it would hurt his daughter's feelings.

His lecture to *Kalīm* after he is brought before him in disgrace, though an excellent one in its subject-matter, is tactless. He should have realised that *Kalīm* must be smarting from the humiliation of having had to be beholden to his father for his freedom and would not be in a mood to derive any good from a lecture however excellent. The tactful thing to do would have been to let him go home quietly. That after it *Kalīm* bolted again is not surprising; anyone with an ounce of pride would do the same. Only the previous night he had defied his father and now he had been humiliated before him, and the father showed no inclination for letting bygones be bygones but was rubbing it in. Had *Naṣūh* refrained from lecturing *Kalīm* at that moment and not burnt his library, it is very probable that *Kalīm* would have come back home and perhaps an understanding could have been reached, and the irrevocable breach might not have taken place. But *Naṣūh* would make no allowances, brook no obstacle to the achievement of his object. He is the typical missionary or reformer, so convinced of the fact that what he is doing is right that he cannot see that it might not appear in such a light to the other person. The forcing down of something, however good, against one's wishes and inclinations is apt to be resented. Only those who are mentally lazy easily and without demur accept another's view as to what is or is not good for them. Most people, if they have any capacity, like to make up their own minds as regards what is or is not good for them.

*Kalīm* is a difficult "character". He is a strange mixture of good and evil. That he had a first-class mind and was a man of wide reading, literary taste and poetic gifts is quite obvious. He could brook no criticism and was of a very independent nature, yet he had allowed himself to become financially dependent on his father. We hear that he was



frequently in need of money, that his friends were degenerate, idle, good-for-nothing fellows, and so forth. In short, he is a type of intellectual to be found frequently both in Europe and in India. Such people are unusually gifted, and brilliant, with powers of independent judgment and frank criticism, yet make little or no use of their gifts, are always in financial difficulties and are generally disliked and criticised by conventional people for their Bohemian ways.

*Katīm's* obstinate refusal to go and see his father is in extreme bad taste, but his resentment at the sudden change of front in his father is understandable. The dogmatic assurance of the born reformer has always roused the criticism of the sceptical intellectual. A mind like *Katīm's* was too subtle to easily accept, as did *Alīm* and *Salīm*, the view that, if they followed the broad outlines of the accepted code of morality, all was well. Capable of understanding and following the true spirit of religion, such a type of mind is apt to lose faith altogether as a reaction to the smug self-satisfaction of the bourgeois religious.

*Mubtalā* in '*Fasāna e Mubtalā*' is a somewhat similar "character", but he is much more of a dandy than *Katīm*, and is not gifted with any real poetical talent like *Katīm's*. *Mubtalā* typifies the degenerate, over-refined and supine young men that are always to be found in the twilight of any culture. They retain the outward graces of their forefathers but lack their sterling qualities and character, and they have not yet come to terms with the new order of things and mastered its laws. *Kāmīl* in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', *Katīm* in '*Taubat un Naṣūh*' and *Mubtalā* in '*Fasāna e Mubtalā*' are all of the same type, but while *Kāmīl* was saved by *Aṣḡarī*, and *Katīm's* career was cut short by premature death, *Mubtalā* had to blunder through life until it broke him completely.

Born in an age when the old order had gone and the new one was not yet fully established, *Mubtalā's* lot is made harder by the undue adulation of his parents. They thoroughly spoil

him and bring him up totally unfitted for any work. To crown it all, he is married to a woman with whom he has not the slightest affinity of mind, nor is she gifted with any practical sense or foresight that could neutralise his own lack of these qualities. She is his counterpart in this much that she is as irresponsible as he is himself.

*Mubtalā* lands himself into a second marriage, with *Haryālī*, almost without any intention of doing so; it is really a result of his semi-conversion by the *Hājī Ṣāhib*. His character is a study in weakness rather than in viciousness. Much knowledge of human nature is shown in the drawing of it. In the portrayal of *Haryālī*, also, Nazīr Ahmad shows his knowledge of humanity by never painting his "characters" black or white, for very seldom in life are the lines so clearly marked. And *Haryālī* is his finest study in grey!

*Haryālī* is desirous of making good, and genuinely so. She shows considerable self-control, and at times, even dignity against the tirade of abuse that *Gairat Begam* directs against her. She tries to be a good wife to *Mubtalā* and shows deference to his slightest wish, yet the shrewdness and the love of money inherent in the nature of a courtesan is never wholly absent from her character. Just glimpses of it are shown during the period of her reformed life, yet without these glimpses her final treachery would have been unaccountable.

This again shows how well Nazīr Ahmad understood how to depict a "character". Had he omitted those flashlights into the less admirable side of *Haryālī's* character, and just in the end shown her reverting to type, he would have strained our credulity. As it is, we readily accept it.

In showing *Gairat Begam's* final regret and remorse Nazīr Ahmad brings out the difference between a gentlewoman and a courtesan—the inherent nobility and loyalty of the one against the essential baseness and treachery of the other—but it is not done in an obviously didactic way. It is

not artistically jarring; it is just reached in the process of characterisation.

The same is true with regard to his "characters" in other works and makes the charge unjust that his books cannot be called true novels because they were written with a purpose. All Dickens' novels were written with a purpose; all Shaw's plays were written with a purpose; but that does not make them artistically any the less great, provided the story has not been used as a peg just for airing the author's ideas on any subject, but is well told. If the incidents and "characters" are interesting and if, during the reading of it, we are not constantly aware of the moral intended, the fact that it has a purpose in no way detracts from but adds to the merits of the book. All the great books and plays in the world's literature are indirectly in defence of truth. The other ground on which Nazīr Aḥmad's novels are excluded by some people from the category of true novels is that they do not have a "love interest". This is an even more absurd criticism. A novel's object is to depict real life and not an imaginary one. At the time when Nazīr Aḥmad wrote, there was not, and could not be, any love interest in a novel in which the "characters" were women in "purdah". By omitting it, he showed himself a greater realist and better able to grasp the real spirit of the English novelists than those imitators who, just for the sake of making their works conform to every outward detail of the English novelists, introduced a love interest in their novels and thus did not make them a true picture of Indian society.

Nazīr Aḥmad compares with Jane Austen in English literature. He limited himself to subjects he thoroughly knew, and thus gave such descriptions of them as to establish them as classics.

'*Ibn ul Vaqt*' is the most ambitious of Nazīr Aḥmad's novels. In it he was attempting a subject of profound interest and one which contains in itself great opportunities for psychological analysis. Nazīr Aḥmad has not made the most

of it, but the fact that he could, as early as 1876, grasp the difficulties of the relationship between the English and the Indians, could understand the imperialistic attitude of the ruling classes on the one hand, and the blind prejudice amongst those ruled, is in itself a great achievement. Most of all, he could realise the conflict of mind of the ultra-Westernised Indian, and see the pathos as well as the humour of it.

Though this problem has since become much more acute, no other novelist dealt with it till as recently as 1938, when Sajjād Zāhīr in '*London kī ek Rāt*' took this tragedy of the Westernised Indian as his theme.

Nazīr Aḥmad conveys the impression of the strain in the relationship between the English and the Indians admirably, and accounts for it too. There is humour as well as irony in his descriptions of the scenes between an English official and his Indian subordinates, as well as a smouldering indignation. The interview between a Deputy Collector and his District Magistrate is an excellent piece of satirical description, equivalent to those of E. M. Forster's, and true even to this day. The sense of humiliation that the Indian Deputy Collector feels is put in terse and pungent sentences:

کلکٹر اور جائنٹ کی تو بڑی بارگاہ ہے، اگر یورشین ڈپٹی کلکٹر سے بھی ملنے جائے (اور نہ ملے تو رہے کہاں!) احاطے کے باہر اترنا ضرور۔ اور احاطہ بھی شیطان کی آنت، ہم جیسے پرانے فیشن کے لوگ تو کوٹھی تک۔

The deliberate rudeness and the slighting behaviour of the servants of the higher officials who, by virtue of their nearness to the "heaven-born", think that they themselves have acquired some sinister qualities are also brought out.

The climax of the whole thing is the superciliousness of the officer himself, the lack of any imagination which would lead him to see that the fact of being an Indian subordinate

does not make the task of waiting for several hours in the scorching heat of June any the less tedious, or a three-mile-walk from the gateway to the house pleasant.

This unimaginativeness which still seems to be a special characteristic of the higher officials (who continue to entertain the idea that any Indian under the rank of a Maharajah is not capable of feeling the ordinary discomforts), is capped by the insulting attitude of the officer during the interview.

Round about 1876, when the memory of the horrors of the Mutiny had made all Indians quite insensible to the insulting behaviour of the English, and when admiration for the efficiency of the British was at its highest, to have seen all this is a proof of the penetrating observation which is the hall-mark of the true novelist. Another scene, bringing out the true attitude of the various sections of the Indian population and the different types of Europeans, is the party scene at the house of the English missionary. The generally friendly and kindly attitude of the missionary Englishman is in contrast to the domineering and superior attitude of the official. The abject and disgusting servility of the "Babu" mentality, which has gained notoriety through Kipling, is set against the irritating behaviour of the Eurasians who think that, by virtue of the doubtful drop of English blood, they also are entitled to assume a superior attitude towards the natives.

The story in '*Ibn ul Vaqt*', for the book is named after its hero, is this: *Ibn ul Vaqt*, a Mohammedan belonging to the upper middle class of Delhi, gives during the Mutiny shelter to an Englishman called Mr. Noble. During the period of Noble's stay in *Ibn ul Vaqt's* house, they have long discussions on the subject of the relationship between the British and the Indians. After the Mutiny, through Noble's influence, *Ibn ul Vaqt* gets the post of an Extra Assistant Commissioner and takes to a Western mode of life. He does so in the beginning with a firm conviction that in it lies the good of his community, that only by dropping prejudice against the

English and adopting their ways and manners can the Indians make any progress. He drifts, however, from this laudable intention towards a slavish imitation of everything English because of its being English.

The fact of having got an *entrée* into English society goes to his head. All his waking hours are spent in thinking how he can further ingratiate himself into the good graces of the English.

He spends much beyond his means in giving lavish dinner parties and shikar parties to the English, and in maintaining a household on English lines. While he has Noble's backing all goes well with him. But Noble has to leave suddenly on account of ill-health, and the man who comes in his place, Sharpe, is very anti-Indian, and determined from the first to crush *Ibn ul Vaqt*.

He soon gets an occasion, and *Ibn ul Vaqt* finds himself in great difficulties. He had estranged all his own people, and now finds that his new friends are not to be relied upon. The bitter truth dawns on him that the prejudice has to be broken down on both the sides, that it is not only the Indians who are prejudiced against the English, but the English are just as much prejudiced against the Indians, that an Indian, no matter how Westernised he might be, can never hope to be accepted by the English as one of them, and the majority of the Englishmen, far from desiring the Indians to be Westernised, frown upon it and regard it as presumptuous.

As Nazir Ahmad's genius was not tragic, a reconciliation is effected between *Ibn ul Vaqt* and Mr. Sharpe through the intervention of a relation who is a subordinate officer to a cousin of Sharpe's. *Ibn ul Vaqt* is left with his position restored but his *sang froid* considerably shaken.

'*Ayyāmā*' is the weakest of Nazir Ahmad's novels, for in it the didactic aim of the author makes him forget the fact that the *dénouement* should not be a forced one, but should be the natural outcome of the "characters". An author is

at liberty to choose such "characters" and incidents as seem to illustrate his point, but once the selection is made, he must allow for a logical development of "character", and for the incident to rise out of it. In '*Ayyāmā*', the end is neither logical nor the expected one. The reader is led on to think that *Āzādī Begam* will brave convention and remarry. Her character, the importunities of *Mushtāq*, the clever machinations of *Chalāva* that have succeeded in destroying her loyalty to her husband, and the danger she seems to be in of losing her reputation, all seem to be leading up to the conclusion that in these circumstances *Āzādī Begam* will perforce remarry.

But no, the very next chapter tells us that *Āzādī*, after several years of this conflict of mind, develops tuberculosis of the bone and dies, leaving behind a document telling of the struggles of her widowhood. There is no causal connection at all between the end and the rest of the story. It is indeed so merely for didactic reasons, namely, to excite pity for young widows who are doomed to live in widowhood for the rest of their lives. Had *Āzādī Begam* been allowed to remarry, this object would not have been realised. Such an act would have shocked, and not appealed to the pity of, society. As Nazīr Ahmad's object was to rouse pity, he did not allow it to end in such a manner as to forfeit it. But then he should not have developed the "characters" and arranged the incidents towards that end. To do this was very poor craftsmanship. If the object was to rouse pity, then *Āzādī's* "character" should have been drawn in a completely different manner; she should have been placed in greater financial difficulties, and her death been the natural and incidental consequence of poverty, neglect and misery. But the realism that was in Nazīr Ahmad, and the gift he had of grasping the changes that were coming over people,—which is better illustrated in '*Ibn ul Vaqt*', make him draw *Āzādī* as a very modern woman, a woman as modern as the conditions of the late nineteenth century would

allow. She might act in conformity with the conventions, but in her heart of hearts she does not believe in them. She wished most acutely that she herself should have a voice in the selection of her husband. She was none too pleased that she was married into a family of "*Maulvīs*", who from the very nature of their profession must lead austere and simple lives. She is shown desirous of fun and gaiety and life. Was it likely that such a person would submit to years of that empty existence which is a widow's life in India, especially as she would not have to take the initiative in ending it (and this would need an extraordinary amount of courage in a society in which *Āzādī Begam* lived), as that was being taken by *Khājā Mushtāq*? We are told that *Khājā Mushtāq* had been an admirer of *Āzādī* from her childhood, that he had been deeply disappointed *Āzādī* was not married to him, that his suit was approved by *Khājā Āzād*, *Āzādī Begam's* father, and that on *Āzādī Begam's* becoming a widow he sets himself to win her with all the resources at his command. He engages a go-between to get *Āzādī Begam's* mind poisoned against her dead husband. This unadmirable project succeeds; *Āzādī* is completely won over to the idea of remarriage. And then one hears that she did not marry after all, and died some years afterwards. But why, why did she not marry? True, *Khājā Mushtāq*, having waylaid her, annoys her, but, surprisingly, her annoyance is not as great as it should have been. Even after that she is shown debating whether it would not have been a good thing if she herself had talked to *Khājā Mushtāq* on that occasion. And yet nothing more happens. *Khājā Mushtāq*, who moves heaven and earth to get *Āzādī*, does nothing further. Why? *Āzādī* does nothing further. Why? The ending is obviously a forced one and bears no relation to the "characters" as they have been portrayed.

The "characters" themselves, though not as good as those in other novels of Nazīr Ahmad, are still very good and there is charm and spontaneity in the narration.

An interesting point to note in connection with Nazīr Aḥmad's novels is the names of his "characters". They are indicative of the dominant trait in their make up or in some way illustrate their position in the story.

In ' *Mirāt ul 'Arūs* ', the two heroines are called *Akbarī* and *Aṣḡarī*, which mean the older and the younger respectively; their position in the story is that of elder and younger sister. *Mahmūda*, which means good, *Husn Arā*, which means beautiful, ' *Āqil*, which means wise, *Ṣāleḥ*, which means good, and so on. In ' *Taubat un Naṣūḥ* ', the names are still more in keeping with the character. *Naṣūḥ* means preacher, *Kalīm* means eloquent and ' *Alīm* means learned, *Ṣalīm* means good. The "characters" are what their names indicate. The same is the case with the women's names: the spoilt child is called *Na'īma*, which means someone brought up in luxury. *Hamīda* and *Ṣāleḥa* are the names of the innately good girls.

*Kalīm's* false friend is called *Mirzā Zāhīdār Beg*. In ' *Ibn ul Vaqt* ' also the characters and names go together. *Ibn ul Vaqt*, Noble, Sharpe, *Hujjat ul Islām*, are all described by their names. And even in ' *Ayyāmā* ' the names are similarly indicative of the character and the role the "characters" play in the story.

The heroine and her father, *Āzādī Begam* and *Khājā Āzād*, both possess very liberal views. The mother is called *Hādī Begam*, because she is ever trying to check their irreligiousness. The importunate suitor of *Āzādī* is called *Khājā Mushtāq*, and the woman he employs as a go-between is called *Chalāva*.

Another interesting point in connection with Nazīr Aḥmad's popular classic ' *Mirāt ul 'Arūs* ' is that it was written by the author for his own daughter without any intention of publishing it. It was discovered by an English officer accidentally. On asking Nazīr Aḥmad's son, Bashīr ud Dīn Aḥmad, who later became an author of considerable merit himself, what he was reading, he was surprised to note a new name, ' *Cand Pand* ' ; and his question as to what his sister was reading pro-

duced the answer ' *Mirāt ul 'Arūs* '. These were new names for the Director of Public Instruction, and he immediately wanted to see these books. He was so intrigued with them that he took them along with him and, on his insistence, Nazīr Aḥmad had them published for the public. The most amusing thing about this incident is that, when the book was taken away by the Director of Public Instruction and the daughter thought it lost, he replied to her :

بیٹی روتی کیوں ہے، اور لکھ۔ دوں گا۔