

## CHAPTER VII

THE IMITATORS OF SARSHĀR, SHARAR AND  
NAZĪR AḤMAD

Sarshār, Sharar and Nazīr Aḥmad had launched the novel in the Urdu language. So successful had they been in breaking new ground that it was to be hoped that the task of those who came after them would be easy and that their works would show a greater mastery over the craft of novel writing ; but it is not so. All the three had innumerable imitators, but not one of them even equals, much less excels, them ; so that after nearly thirty years from the death of Sarshār, twenty-eight years from the death of Nazīr Aḥmad and fifteen years from the death of Sharar, theirs are still the most notable names in the field of Urdu novelists.

It is difficult to account for this sterility of literary activity unless it be that during this period English had increasingly tended to become the medium of instruction, with the result that the modern educated have little or no knowledge of their own language and literature. And while very rarely such mastery is gained over English as to allow for creative work in it, their own natural medium of self-expression is closed to them. Except on this ground it is difficult to account for the extreme poverty of literature in this period. With the reawakening of nationalism, this is being rectified and works with literary promise are again beginning to appear.

Yet such has been the popularity of the three pioneers of the " Novel " that innumerable books were written in imitation of their style ; but not one book or author stands out in one's memory among these. So lacking in individuality and in power to impress themselves on reader's memory are they !

Sarshār made the clandestine love of *Husn Arā* and *Āzād*

the central point of his novel, as far as '*Fasāna e Āzād*' can be said to have a centre ; and this motif was adopted by all his imitators. As " purdah " obviously does not allow of men and women meeting each other and thus having the chance of falling in love, most ingenious and highly incredulous ways and means were found to make this possible. The heroine had a glimpse of the hero while leaning over a balcony, or perhaps he lived in the house next door and an accidental meeting was enough to light the unquenchable fire of love. Sometimes just the sound of a voice was sufficient, at others the repeated hearing praise of a favourite brother or cousin of some girl friend set the heart aflutter. Sometimes he was a cousin to whom the heart had been lost ere the age was reached when " purdah " was thought necessary. Sometimes it was the accidental encounter with one of the friends of a brother or cousin that began it. In short, it was always a case of love at first sight !

But while love at first sight is likely and of frequent occurrence in a society where men and women meet each other freely and always, it is surely straining the credulity of the reader too much when, after a cursory glance, the hero and heroine are made to appear so much and so deeply in love that they are ready to throw all caution to the winds and brave every disgrace and face any scandal.

The authors of these novels have utterly disregarded the influence of " purdah " on the minds of those brought up under it. While it is possible that the girl in " purdah " might fall in love with less excuse, since the rigidity of seclusion will act as an incitement, it is against all reason that she should show no compunction, no timidity, no hesitation before she submits to clandestine meetings and goes to the extent of elopement or secret marriage. That there should be no struggle, no agonies of misgiving and doubt, no tearing of the inherent restraint that age-long tradition is bound to produce, this not only does a grave injustice to the character of Indian

girls, but also shows a great ignorance of human nature. And yet this is what is done by these authors in the desire to emulate the English novel and introduce a love interest at any cost.

Apart from this great flaw, these novels are extremely poor in characterisation, weak in plot, and fail to evoke or hold the reader's interest. None of them have achieved any permanency, and this is best illustrated by the fact that no two Urdu reading persons are likely to be found who have read any one of these books, while any work that can lay claim to be regarded as a classic, as for instance ' *Mirāt ul 'Arūs* ', is sure to have been read by all who are acquainted with that language.

Though the myriads of novel writers of the period from immediately after Sarshār up till the modern novelists can be regarded as his imitators, there is not a book or an author worth mentioning.

Munshī Sajjād Husain, the editor of " *Avadh Panc* " and a contemporary of Sarshār's, wrote several novels.

In his novel ' *Hājī Baqlol* ', the " character " of *Hājī Baqlol* is an obvious imitation of Sarshār's immortal *Khojī*. ' *Tarhdār Lawṇḍī* ' is very like ' *Sair i Kohsār* ', the subject of both being the extravagance and fecklessness of the " *Navābs* ", that result in bankruptcy and disgrace. But Sajjād Husain did not have the genius of Sarshār and ' *Tarhdār Lawṇḍī* ' is rather a colourless piece of work; though of course, considering how early in the history of the novel it was written it is not at all bad.

The novels that were written immediately after ' *Fasāna e Āzād* ' almost seem like abridged editions of it. The " characters " are pale imitations of the " characters " in ' *Fasāna e Āzād* ', and few of its numerous incidents are chosen and presented in a slightly different manner. ' *Fasāna e Khurshīdī* ', ' *Navāb Jamāl ush Shān* ', ' *Farrukh Mirzā* ', are novels which have largely borrowed their plot and situations from ' *Fasāna e Āzād* '. In ' *Fasāna e Khurshīdī* ', there is a similar

two-sister motif to that in ' *Fasāna e Āzād* '; and *Khurshīdī*'s lover adopts the same means as *Humāyūn Far* in ' *Fasāna e Āzād* ' of gaining access to her. ' *Farrukh Mirzā* ' and ' *Navāb Jamāl ush Shān* ' have the fecklessness and extravagance resulting in bankruptcy and ruin of the " *Navābs* " for their theme.

Qārī Sarfarāz Husain is a novelist who achieved a certain amount of distinction in this period. His novels have the ruin of " *Navābs* " through their infatuation for " *lavāifs* " as their theme. " *Sazā e 'Aish* ", ' *Anjām i 'Aish* ', ' *Sa'ādat* ', ' *Sa'ād* ', ' *Shāhid i Ra'nā* ', all present this one story in different ways.

He has a distinctive style and his narrative is easy and flowing. His " characters " take on a greater semblance of reality and convey more conviction than those of many other novelists. He tells his stories always in a narrative manner but because of the charm of his style can hold the reader's interest till the end. The last pages of his novels always become quite obviously didactic, and in this he suggests and discusses ways and means of removing this regrettable state of affairs from the nation's life.

Qārī Sarfarāz Husain has managed to endow his " characters " with a great deal of humanity and, though attention is concentrated on only one aspect of the life of the " *Navābs* ", revealing glimpses are had of other aspects of their lives as well. The dignity, culture and nobility that these degenerate " *Navābs* " possessed and, despite their shabby behaviour in one respect, the sense of honour they had are also shown in these novels of Qārī Sarfarāz Husain.

It is because his novels also give a picture of the same type of society and people as ' *Fasāna e Āzād* ' that he can be regarded as one of the imitators of Sarshār.

For the rest, none of the other books and authors are worth mentioning. Their very title such as ' *Nigāh i Nāz* ', ' *Krishma e Shabāb* ', ' *Ishq kī Ghāten* ', show how very low in tone they were, to say nothing of the absence of any literary merit.

By far the largest number of novels of this period, *i.e.*, 1925, were translations and adaptations from other languages, mostly English. It was not the English classics that were the most popular; it was chiefly the sensational type of novels that was most often translated. Among the better known writers of English, Marie Corelli, Mrs. Henry Wood and Rider Haggard found favour with the Urdu translators. Some of these translations were extremely well done. '*Jaur i Falak*,' a translation of 'East Lynne', by Mirzā Muḥammad Sa'id; '*Zara-azīm*,' a translation of 'Mighty Atom' by Brij Kumārī; '*Aīma e Ibrat*,' a translation of 'Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles', by Khujista Akhtar Suhravardī, are for their style and language much better than any original work of this period. The other translations that can lay claim to style are S. Sajjād Ḥaidar's '*Zohra*' and '*Ṣāliṣ bil Khair*' which have been translated from Turkish; Sayyid Mumtāz 'Alī's '*Sheikh Hasan*' which has been adapted from Persian, and the translations by 'Abdul Majīd Sālik of the novels of Tagore. Zafar 'Umar's free translation of Edgar Wallace's detective stories achieved great popularity. His '*Nīlī Chatrī*', '*Bahrām kī Gariftārī*', '*Lāl Kathor*', have been so completely adapted and Indianised as to become almost original works. The translations under the auspices of '*Dār ul Ishā'at, Punjāb*' of popular English and French novels also have a purity of language and a certain amount of style. But like original compositions of this period, most of the translations were also extremely poor stuff and devoid of any literary merit. The translations were never literal but always incorporated a large element of originality.

In this category of novels those that had historical personages and incidents for their themes might be regarded as written in imitation of Sharar. They show no advance on Sharar's technique and are sometimes even worse than his. He at least was attempting something new, and so had some excuse, but those coming after him have not the difficulties

of a pioneer and yet do not go an inch farther than Sharar. His work covers a very large field and deals with different countries and periods of history, and he did have at least a considerable if cursory knowledge of the periods and incidents he incorporates in his novels. Those who wrote in imitation of him most often only dealt with just one incident or period, and so could be expected to have a more thorough knowledge of it. But it is not so. The extremely superficial nature of their knowledge is apparent on every page. The periods chosen by these imitators are just those which were favoured by Sharar himself, that is, the Crusades, the period of Mohammedan rule in Spain, and those other instances when the Cross and the Crescent have been at war. Turkey's struggle against Greece produced several novels: '*Inqilāb i Symrna*', '*Dukhtar i Smyrna*', '*Fath i Symrna*' and many others. But there is no literary merit in them, nor in those numerous other historical novels with grandiloquent names, such as '*Hūr i Magrib*', '*Hūr i Mashriq*', '*Nāznīn i Marākash*', '*Mard i Maidān*', etc.

Among the numerous writers of the period immediately after Sharar and Sarshār the one to achieve any distinction was Muḥammad 'Alī Ṭabīb. He wrote many books: '*Gaurā*', '*Ja'far 'Abbāsa*', '*Ḥusn i Sarvar*', '*Akhtar o Ḥasīna*', '*Nīl kā Sānp*' and many others. They enjoyed great popularity at the time of their appearance but are now out of print and not available. Considering how early in the history of the novel these books appeared, they are not at all bad. Muḥammad 'Alī's style is distinctive, he is a good story-teller and can hold the interest of the reader till the end. The "characters" are treated objectively as was the practice of the novelists in that period, but there is plenty of action and life in his stories. Though not achieving the rank of classics Muḥammad 'Alī's novels can be considered good reading.

He, like more or less all writers of that period, was deliber-

ately didactic in his works. His novels were novels with a purpose. 'Gaurā' was written to show the evils of not allowing young widows to remarry, 'Ja'far 'Abbāsa' to show that discarding of "purdah" was fraught with danger, and 'Akhtar o Ḥasīna' to show that higher education was undesirable for girls. Muḥammad 'Alī was very orthodox in his views and his works are extremely reactionary in their attitude.

'Gaurā' not only advocates widow remarriage but also shows what harm is done by not keeping strict "purdah". Gaurā is a child widow who had lost her husband at nine and from that age had to forego all the luxuries of life. Her "-in-laws" treated her with extreme harshness and she had a miserable existence. She grew up to be extremely pretty. Her neighbour Candar Sen, who had always admired her, became completely infatuated, and at the same time a young Mohammedan, called Niṣār Ḥusain, also lost his heart to her. Gaurā disliked Candar Sen intensely, but felt drawn towards Niṣār Ḥusain. They both approached her through the help of the maidservants of the house. Gaurā repulsed Candar Sen and for a long time had nothing to do with Niṣār Ḥusain. At last she was won over by his importunities. Candar Sen soon discovered their attachment and informed Gaurā's father-in-law, and Gaurā was sent to her parents in disgrace. Niṣār Ḥusain, disguised as a pedlar, arrived in her village and managed to see her for a few moments. Gaurā's father immediately suspected him and a little investigation established the fact that it was Niṣār. Gaurā was further disgraced, but the fear of her completely going over to the Muslim religion made her parents decide to remarry her to some one. Candar Sen immediately pressed his suit and was accepted, but Gaurā had lost her heart to Niṣār and was horrified at the idea of marrying Candar Sen. Niṣār managed to communicate with her and she agreed to elope with him. Niṣār's parents were extremely shocked, but on the intervention of Niṣār's mother his father agreed to Gaurā's staying on in his house. Gaurā,

after much reluctance, agreed to become a Mohammedan and to marry Niṣār. Candar Sen, however, was not the person to forget that he had been passed over in favour of Niṣār and he managed to abduct Gaurā, or rather managed to get her to agree to abandon Niṣār and go over to him. It is not very clear what exactly happened, whether Gaurā herself went away or whether she was abducted by force, for just at that moment the flood of moralising comes full tide and the point of the story is lost in it.

'Gaurā' is an interesting enough story but it does not really serve the purpose for which it was written. The object was to show the evil consequences of refusing to remarry widows. This argument loses point from the fact that Gaurā's parents are forced to agree to her remarriage and that her subsequent elopement is due not to the fact that there was no way out of the drudgery of a widow's life, but that she had fallen in love with a man who was not of her religion and to whom she could not be married in the usual way.

'Ja'far 'Abbāsa' is written with the object of showing what comes of discarding "purdah". The scene is laid in Bagdād in the reign of Hārūn ur Rashīd. The chief "characters" are 'Abbāsa, Hārūn ur Rashīd's sister and Ja'far, his famous wazir. Hārūn ur Rashīd himself appears in the role of one of the "characters". The scene of the story is Bagdād and the period Hārūn ur Rashīd's reign. One would not have known it from any internal evidence, such as the manner of speech of the "characters" or the description of the background. As a matter of fact there is much flagrant anachronism, for instance in the discussion on music between Hārūn and Ja'far, in which Hārūn says that the "rāg" was of "Mālkoṣ" and Ja'far that it was "Bhairvīn". "Mālkoṣ" and "Bhairvīn" are terms that are known only to Indian musicians and cannot possibly have been known in 'Irāq in the eleventh century.

However, the fact of placing the "characters" in the past

does not have the same paralysing effect on Muḥammad 'Alī as on Sharar and Rāshid ul Khairī. The story in 'Ja'far 'Abbāsa' moves with the same ease as the story of 'Gaurā' or 'Husn i Sarvar'. The sudden fall of Ja'far from favour and the subsequent persecution of his family by *Hārūn ur Rashīd* are historical facts. The reason given in 'Ja'far 'Abbāsa' is the love of Ja'far for 'Abbāsa. History does not vouch for this. Of course, it is quite possible that this might have been the cause. In 'Ja'far 'Abbāsa' the declared object of the book, namely to show the evil results that come of discarding "purdah", is lost sight of due to the fact that Ja'far and 'Abbāsa are placed in a most unusual position in it. *Hārūn ur Rashīd*, because he wanted both his sister's and Ja'far's company at his parties, made 'Abbāsa give up observing "purdah" from Ja'far. This gave rise to much talk on the subject and to silence it he married her to Ja'far, but ordered them to treat that as a mere formality and to have nothing to do with each other. This injunction was not obeyed and it was the disobeying it which brought disaster, and not the non-observance of "purdah". Muḥammad 'Alī Ṭabīb is not able to handle this plot to the advantage of the point he wants to illustrate. But the story gains in complexity and interest from the failure of Muḥammad 'Alī to make it entirely didactic.

'*Husn i Sarvar*' is a novel in three volumes. It does not seem to have any didactic purpose. The story is rather an involved one. *Hasan 'Alī*, a young soldier, falls in love with the daughter of the Subedar and she with him. With great manoeuvring on either side they manage to get engaged; but a certain mother who wants *Sarvar* to be married to her son and a certain other who wants her daughter to marry *Hasan 'Alī* intrigue to break off the engagement. The three volumes are a record of the plots to break the engagement, but like all conventional stories this one ends well. There is nothing to specially commend this book except that it is very typical of

the works that were written in imitation of Sharar and Sarshār.

Nazīr Aḥmad's success with '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' was so great that innumerable people imitated him purely with a commercial end in view. They hoped likewise to make their fortune. But they were doomed to be disappointed. The work they created was of poor quality from the literary point of view, and did not have the cheap love interest of the novels in imitation of Sharar which could keep it in circulation amongst a certain class of readers, with the result that it has completely disappeared.

There were, however, those who wrote in imitation out of pure admiration and to furnish readable literature for girls and women. Amongst them the most prominent is, of course, Rāshid ul Khairī. He began in direct imitation of Nazīr Aḥmad, with the two-sister motif scenes, and a girls' "*maktab*", and so on, but he soon evoked a style so definitely his own and wrote so many works in this his own particular style that he cannot be classed amongst the imitators of Nazīr Aḥmad, for he has earned his own particular niche in the temple of the Urdu novelists.

The next most conscious imitator of Nazīr Aḥmad was his own son, Maulvī Bashīr ud Dīn Aḥmad. In his preface to the first edition of '*Iqbāl Dulhan*', he himself acknowledges that his father's works have been his source of inspiration.

Bashīr ud Dīn Aḥmad wrote several books bearing on social reform, and three domestic novels, '*Iqbāl Dulhan*', '*Husn i Ma'āshirat*' and '*Iṣlāh i Ma'āshat*'. In all three the influence of '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' and '*Banāt un Na'sh*' can be clearly seen, though it is in the last-mentioned that the two-sister motif is adopted. '*Iqbāl Dulhan*' is the first of the trio. It is interesting to note, in passing, Nazīr Aḥmad's criticism of it, as it gives an idea as to what was understood by the term "novel" then, and what were the qualities necessary in a good one. It seems that by "novel" was meant a

story that dealt with real people and credible events as opposed to romances which dealt with fairies and giants and unusual, if not impossible, happenings. And the test used for judging whether a novel was good or bad was that the events it recorded should strike the reader as real and have the power to evoke his sympathies, and that the "characters" should be convincing and lifelike.

That what is meant by a novel should have been understood so early, and yet so little produced that comes up to that standard, is surprising. True, the full scope of the novel, how it can transmit, as in 'War and Peace', the entire human tragedy; how, as in the 'Egoist', lay bare the inner workings of the human mind; how it can portray human frailty and strength as no other medium of art can,—all this was not realised. But the main essentials of what constitutes a novel were thoroughly understood by Nazir Ahmad, and he judges '*Iqbāl Dulhan*' by these standards and deems it deserving of a fairly high place.

It is not a great work, it reaches no heights, but it is good reading. Its language is delightful, and it does portray the domestic scenes of a Mohammedan family in the early part of the twentieth century with lifelike precision. If we look at it as a whole, we notice certain flaws. In several places the touch is uncertain, but in bits there is good work. The whole episode of '*Alia Begam*'s surprise visit to the mother of '*Iqbāl Dulhan*', how very natural the description of it is! One feels it, not as an incident in a book, but as amongst one's personal reminiscences. The scene comes before the eyes.

The conversation between the two ladies is so typical that it does not seem part of a story but a fragment from real life. More credit is due when it is remembered that it is a man writing about women, and that in a society where opportunities for studying the manners of women were very restricted.

Bashir ud Din Ahmad succeeds in achieving this complete

illusion of reality by the same trick as Defoe, that is, by recording in great detail every incident. This had secured for Defoe complete credulity for incidents that were highly improbable. This same wealth of detail secures for Bashir ud Din Ahmad, whose incidents are not at all improbable, an absolute illusion of reality. The plot construction of '*Iqbāl Dulhan*' is clumsy. There was in it material for a first-rate plot, but it is so handled that it loses its force. The crux of the story is that '*Iqbāl Mirzā*', while deeply and sincerely in love with his wife, is forced, by his desire for a child, to remarry, which he does with extreme reluctance and after much hesitation. Here was a great field for a psychological study, and yet this is placed almost at the end of the book as the closing incident of '*Iqbāl Mirzā*'s life, the whole story of which is told in a narrative manner. And yet it was not as if this incident was not conceived in the writer's mind as the most significant in the hero's life. We know from the preface that it was so, and that the whole purport of the book was to show that in some circumstances a second marriage was justifiable.

It is known that the author himself underwent similar emotional struggles and that the book was written as an *apologia*, which makes it all the more surprising that it should not have been done better. But perhaps the very fact of its being partly autobiographical prevented it from being treated in an objective—and therefore better—manner.

Though enough is not made of this excellent dramatic situation, a great deal is shown of the mind of '*Iqbāl Mirzā*' and of '*Iqbāl Dulhan*' and of '*Iqbāl Dulhan*'s reactions, thus displaying an excellent understanding of human nature and especially of a woman's heart. It is a pity that such a situation was not utilised. Bashir ud Din Ahmad was taking an unpopular attitude. Polygamy was becoming increasingly unpopular. Books were being written against it. Yet it was true that in certain circumstances, according to the then prevalent ideas, it could appear justifiable, and that a man might have

a second wife and yet hate it. Here was a subject for a first-rate tragedy, but it was not used as such.

His other two books, '*Husn i Ma'āshirat*' and '*Islāh i Ma'āshat*' follow the plan of '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' more closely, that is, they show how a good wife can make a heaven of hell and a bad one a hell of heaven. In '*Husn i Ma'āshirat*', the contrast is between the first and the second wife; in '*Islāh i Ma'āshat*', between two sisters. In the second part of '*Husn i Ma'āshirat*', the characteristic recounting of every detail gives an air of complete credibility to the story, and the household of *Sanjīda* in '*Islāh i Ma'āshat*' is described in a similar manner. There is humour in them and the language is racy, and the dialogue good, and being in Delhi Urdu it is a joy to read.

There is another Delhi author who wrote in imitation of Nazir Ahmad and who was an eminent writer, namely Sayyid Ahmad. His two works '*Rāhat Zamānī*' and '*Mehr Afroz*' are meant, like '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', to be suitable books for young girls to read. But though all three were written with this object, the genius of Nazir Ahmad has made '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*' a classic, whereas Sayyid Ahmad's '*Rāhat Zamānī*' and '*Mehr Afroz*' remain mere text-books. The author being a "Dehlavī", the dialogue is racy and piquant, but there is very little of it; the bulk of the book consists of dry lectures on conduct and housekeeping.

Nāṣir Nazir Firāq can be regarded as one of the most successful writers in Nazir Ahmad's style, though he was mainly an essayist and has written only two little booklets that have a story in them. But '*Begamon kī Cher Chār*' reminds one of the wedding scene in '*Banāt un Na'sh*'. The language of '*Begamon kī Cher Chār*' and '*Sāt Talāqanon kī Kahānī*' has the same flavour and piquancy as the language of Nazir Ahmad's works.

'*Ranj o Rāhat*', a book written by Muḥammad Sa'id of Bhopāl, is in parts reminiscent of Nazir Ahmad. The scenes where the four girls, *Jamīla*, *Hamīda*, *Zohra* and *Roqaiya*, do

their lessons, recall '*Banāt un Na'sh*' or the "maktab" scenes of '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*'. But it has a very different and original plot and the style of writing is also quite different from that of Nazir Ahmad. It is less simple and more literary than Nazir Ahmad's, but withal not as charming.

'*Ranj o Rāhat*' can be regarded to be in imitation of Nazir Ahmad, not because there is much resemblance between the story of '*Ranj o Rāhat*' and any in the books of Nazir Ahmad, but because it was written mainly for girls and did not contain a love interest.

It is extremely readable and among the best of the type.

One Abdul Majid of Agra wrote a book in exact imitation of Nazir Ahmad, called '*Zīnat un Nisvān*', which gained some popularity and is interesting, not for its intrinsic merit, but as an illustration of how very closely Nazir Ahmad's style was imitated. '*Zīnat un Nisvān*' is the story of *Anvarī* and *Akhtarī* (note the resemblance to the names *Akbarī* and *Aşqarī*). The story of two sisters, *Jahān Arā* and *Husn Arā*, is introduced in an inset, like that of *Husn Arā* and *Jamāl Arā* in '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*'. Instead of the "maktab", there are private lessons by governesses, and the marriage of the dolls of the two sisters is made the framework that supplies the excuse for lengthy discussions on various social problems, such as whether or not it is advisable to have music and dancing at marriages, etc. The story ends by the two girls themselves getting married to two very nice and eligible young men.

The story, in spite of such close imitation of Nazir Ahmad, does not carry any conviction or illusion of reality as Nazir Ahmad's or even Bashir ud Dīn's did, for the author has failed to create a lifelike background or environment through placing his story in Bagdād while imbuing the "characters" with the moral values of the inhabitants of Delhi and Agra.

Most of the early women writers were strongly influenced by Nazir Ahmad. Muḥammadī Begam's first work, '*Sharīf Beṭī*', is an obvious imitation of his writing. But like



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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER VIII

### RĀSHID UL KHAIRĪ

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

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

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

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

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