

In her style Hijāb Ismā'il is regarded as amongst the first-rate writers of short-stories in Urdu, yet her work is in direct contrast to that of the young socialist writers, and it cannot be considered as good as theirs for though escapist literature has its uses, literature that has a criticism of life and which tries to deal with its complexities and problems is the better and the more enduring. Hijāb Ismā'il's stories make one forget the realities of existence, but they cannot be forgotten for any length of time. Literature that can help us to face these realities or to understand them is the superior of the two.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HUMOROUS WRITERS

The foundations of the short-story in Urdu were laid by the humorous sketches of "*Avadh Panc*", but in the intermediate period of its development the Urdu short-story became extremely serious in tone. Writers of this period were so deliberately didactic in their aims that humour found no place in their works. The only short-story writer of the period who sometimes allowed himself to write in a lighter vein was Sayyid Sajjād Haidar. '*Hazrat i dil kī Savāneh* 'umrī', '*Cīre Cīryā kī kahānī*', '*Mujhe mere dostō se bacāo*' are facetious, if not actually amusing. But the rest, that is to say, 'Abd ul Majīd Sālik, Sultān Haidar Josh, Aḥmad Shujā', were all extremely serious in their tone.

The possibility of humour being used as an instrument for the correction of social evils has been realised only by the modern short-story writers, and in recent years stories of great literary merit have been written in a humorous style. The humorous short-story has attained such popularity that serious writers have tried their hand at it, but the well-known names in this line are 'Azīm Beg Cugtāi, Shaukat Thānavī and Mirzā Farḥatullāh Beg.

Sayyid Imtyāz 'Alī Tāj has introduced *Cacā Chakkan*, whose humorous character and anecdotes furnish the plot for many stories. This has been extremely popular and M. Aslam, Mullā Rumūzī and 'Azīm Beg have created "characters" in imitation of *Cacā Chakkan*.

Humour in modern Urdu literature differs in several aspects from the earlier variety. Humour in "*Avadh Panc*", like that of Shakespearean literature, was of a broad and coarse variety, while, like the humour of Pope and Dryden, that

of Sajjād Husain and Sarshār was directed against personalities and was quite offensive in tone. Modern humour is more genteel and refined and absolutely free from malice. It is considered extremely bad taste to bring in personalities or personal deformities as was the wont of "*Avadh Panc*" writers. Humour is now introduced either for just plain amusement or, as is more often the case, with the object of showing the absurdity of some mode, custom or situation. The defect or shortcoming of the case in question is magnified to the extent of making it thoroughly ridiculous, the object being thus to drive home the point and to draw attention to the defect which, if presented in its true proportions, would not strike the casual observer.

Shaukat Thānavī's '*Sudeshī Rel*' has been considered a masterpiece of this type of humour. It is a skit on the inefficiency and unpunctuality of the generally more easy-going methods of Indians as against the efficient, disciplined and well-organised working of Europeans. Its object is to make Indians realise that they cannot hope to have "*Swarāj*" and take their right place in the modern world till they get rid of this inherent defect of their character. In the highly industrial and mechanised civilisation of the modern world, there is no room for slackers. Only the very fittest can survive, so keen is the competition of modern life. '*Sudeshī Rel*' is a magnificent caricature, a really delightful thing, it has been written in a masterly way. Shaukat Thānavī has brought out all the little things that go towards the weakening of discipline and organisation amongst Indians, such as false consideration for others, false ideas of economy, indecision, lack of any central authority, etc. They all come in for their share of ridicule.

The story is more or less this. The author soon after attending a local meeting of the Congress sets out on a journey, and is told, while on his way to the station, that "*Swarāj*" has been attained. Much elated he proceeds; the

first jolt he gets is when the ticket vendor begins haggling with him about the price of the ticket. He cannot believe his ears when he is asked Rs.3/-, while he knows for a fact that the actual fare is only Rs.1/14. It may have been, says the ticket vendor, but there is now "*Swarāj*". Disgusted he refuses to buy the ticket at all. Whereupon the ticket vendor rapidly lowers his price, eventually giving it to him for twelve Annas.

Quite dazed he proceeds to ask several persons from which platform the train for Cawnpore starts. The platform shows a most unusual appearance: on Wheeler's book-stall was a "*pān*" shop and on the luggage track a man selling chappals. No one knew which platform the train was at or from which the train for Cawnpore would start. On enquiry he was given the cheerful reply that it had not yet been decided whether or not a train should be run to Cawnpore at all. It all depended on whether there would be enough passengers. If not, there would be no train for Cawnpore that day. The train would go to that station for which there were most passengers. When would it start? Everyone was very vague about that point also. Some one remarked that it was waiting for the local Congress President to come. When he arrived, it transpired that the foreman was away; he had been sent to the town to arrange to get some coal.

After hours of delay, the train eventually starts. Its journey is full of mishaps; it takes the wrong direction and has to come back again to where it started from. The passengers, who by this time are thoroughly fed up, want to go back home, but are not allowed to do so as it would create a scandal. The train again starts, and this time the result is a collision. The author wakes up and thankfully finds that it was only a dream.

'*Sudeshī Rel*' was published in a Special Number of "*Nairang i Khayāl*" in 1930. Since then it has been translated into all the Indian languages and into English as well,

and in 1936 was published in book-form. There was a positive flood of stories and sketches in imitation of it, but the authors of 'Sudeshī Pulis', 'Sudeshī Korī', 'Sudeshī Skūl', did not succeed in getting for their stories the popularity that was achieved by Thānavī, for they all committed the fatal, though common enough, mistake of gross exaggeration. The humorist is allowed to exaggerate, indeed his technique is exaggeration, but the exaggeration must be of existing defects or shortcomings and not of absolutely impossible ones, and it must be within a certain degree of credibility. Otherwise it fails to amuse and becomes annoying. Rāshid ul Khairī, when in his later years he attempted to write in a lighter vein, made this mistake and so did the imitators of Shaukat Thānavī's 'Sudeshī Rel'. The "characters" of 'Sudeshī Rel' have recognisable defects of Indian character, though obviously exaggerated. Its imitators exaggerated beyond the pale of credibility.

'Sudeshī Rel' is Shaukat's only sketch that approximates to a short-story, for he generally writes in the form of articles. These have not got definite plots, though they contain some excellent characterisation; they choose common enough situations and weave the story round them.

The humorous sketch which, next to 'Sudeshī Rel', was the most popular and was considered to have the greatest literary merit, was 'Lāhaur kā Juqrāfia' by Paṭras. It is a skit on the extremely bad town-planning by the Municipalities of Indian towns, and the appalling state of sanitation, etc., in them. Neither the irony nor the exaggeration is more than was necessary; it is full of left-handed compliments and phrases which on the surface seem quite innocent but are extremely telling. Paṭras's humorous sketches are in the form of short-stories and have been collected and published under the title 'Mazāmīn i Paṭras'. 'Maī ek Miā hū' and 'Mabel aur Maī' are extremely well-written, and in spite of the exaggeration necessary for the humorous treatment of "characters"

they are recognisable types of human beings. The *dénouement* in each case is entirely unexpected and extremely funny.

The story in 'Mabel aur Maī' is that a young student finds great difficulty in keeping pace with his girl friend's rate of reading; she seems to sail through dozens of books in no time. The unfortunate fellow spends sleepless nights in trying to keep pace with her and yet lags behind, till, in desperation, he begins merely to scan the pages and try talking about them on the strength of that. He finds he is succeeding extremely well and so is encouraged to rely entirely on this method. Some time after this he falls ill. Flu always produces depression and depression always results in a repentant mood. So this youngster feels extremely remorseful for having cheated Mabel, and when she comes to see him, he confesses his misdeed to her. Mabel, however, is very magnanimous about it.

After her departure, in order to make up for his past shortcomings, he picks up the books left by Mabel, intending to read them in earnest now. He finds that the pages have not even been cut; Mabel herself had not read them!

'Maī ek Miā hū' is an equally funny story about a "hen-pecked" but devoted husband. His wife strictly supervises his activities and does not approve of the orgies he indulged in before he was married. While she is on a visit to her parents he promises faithfully to be good, and is so for one morning. As a matter of fact, he is so good that he gets bored and sends a wire for her to come back; but things begin to hum after that. Friends gather and a game of "poker" is in full swing. Our hero loses heavily, and as a punishment his face is blackened and he is sent to the kitchen to get "huqqās" for his guests. While he is busy doing this, someone enters the kitchen from the back door. It is his wife, Raushan Arā, who has returned thinking her husband is feeling lonely and forlorn without her.

'Savere jo kal ākh khul gaī merī', 'Urdū kī Ākhrī Kitāb',

'*Sinemā kā shauq*', '*Marhūm kī yād mē*', are extremely funny sketches ridiculing the defects of character which are to be found in most people, such as laziness, prejudice, unpunctuality, and so forth. '*Urdū kī Ākhrī Kitāb*' and '*Tahzīb ke mustaqil 'unvānāt par ek Mard ke qalam se Mazāmān*', are clever parodies.

'Azīm Beg Cugtāi's humorous stories have the best constructed plots, and approximate more closely to short-stories than the sketches of Shaukat Thānavī, Paṭras or Farḥatullāh Beg, which are more in narrative style. 'Azīm Beg's '*Kol-tār*' is considered to be his masterpiece. It appeared in the "*Zarīf*" Number of "*Sāqī*" and was heralded as the most originally constructed and the best-written humorous story amongst the thirty in that magazine. 'Azīm Beg has further developed and published it in book-form, but the stories that have been added to it are separate entities in themselves and in no way help the development or *dénouement* of '*Kol-tār*', which is a complete story in itself. The other stories are records of the adventures of girl friends of *Kol-tār*, and are not connected with each other except by the fact that the story of *Shāhīda* and of *Jam-vātī* is brought to a satisfactory conclusion in the last chapter of '*Kol-tār*'. But the various chapters of '*Kol-tār*', such as '*Ālū kā bhurta*', '*Mahfūl i Milād*', '*Gur kā laddū*' and '*Gulāb Jāman*', are not really interdependent and appeared as separate stories before being collected together and published as '*Kol-tār*'. The same "characters" appear in different circumstances, that is all the connecting link between them.

The story of *Kol-tār* is this: some students are going home on vacation; *en route* they play numerous tricks on the unfortunate ticket collector and their fellow passengers. One of the students when posting his letter in the platform letter-box sees another letter stuck in the flap of the letter-box and on taking it out discovers it to be written to his fiancée.

Without any qualms he appropriates it, and on reading it comes to know of very strange circumstances. The girl who is writing to her friend seems to be in great trouble and, what is more, she adds in the postscript that she has just seen "her own and her mother's murderer". The young fellow is thoroughly mystified and wants to get to the bottom of it; by some means he gets the luggage of the girl so mixed with his aunt's that he gets her suitcase instead of his own. He discovers other letters in the suitcase that explain the situation to him and he realises with horror that the person the girl referred to is none other than himself. What he had done to merit this title is another story.

Some students lived next door to a girl whom they had dubbed "Coal-tar" and whom they used to tease mercilessly. She once retaliated by getting them bitten by bees, and they took revenge by getting her engagement broken off. The consequence of the broken engagement was much worse than the thoughtless students had foreseen. The girl being fatherless was unable to get engaged again and it so preyed on her mother's health as to make her seriously ill. The girl in consequence thought of those responsible for her trouble as murderers and referred to them as such in her letters to her friend, who happened to be the girl this young man was engaged to. When he realised the enormous harm he had done to the girl, he felt that the only way that he could make amends was to marry her. Consequently he broke off his engagement, and, through some relations, arranged to marry *Kol-tār*. The girl and her mother had no idea of the identity of the bridegroom, and it was only after the marriage the girl realised that she had married him whom she considered her worst enemy, but somehow she no longer felt bitter and the nickname of *Kol-tār* ceased to be irritating.

It is considered to be a most ingeniously constructed plot and the end is entirely unexpected. There are bits of real pathos interspersed with humour in it. '*Khānam*' and '*Rūh i*

Zarāfat are other collections of 'Azīm Beg's humorous stories. In '*Khānam*', as in '*Kol-tār*', the same "character" appears in different situations, but the story of each predicament is complete in itself. '*Khānam*' is written in imitation of Imtyāz 'Alī Tāj's '*Cacā Chakkan*' which made humorous "characters" very popular in Urdu literature for a time. '*Sharār Bivī*' is like '*Khānam*' a similar collection of detached anecdotes about the same person. It is Cugtāī's first work and the one which introduced him as a humorous writer to the Urdu-reading public.

'*Rūh i Zarāfat*' is a collection of eight different stories. It contains '*Kol-tār*' in its original form and two of the stories that were incorporated later in '*Khānam*'. The most amusing and the most ingeniously constructed story in this collection is '*Angūthī kī muṣibat*'. It is written in a delightful manner. The story is that a girl who frequently rummages in her father's room for letters containing her wedding proposals and pictures of suitors, one day comes across an open trunk with all sorts of exciting things, such as "powder-boxes" and "*itr-dāns*", half-displayed in it. She cannot resist the temptation to explore in the box further. She finds a ring among various other things, and at once tries it on; she accidentally knocks the "*itr-dān*" down and breaks it. In her confusion, she does not notice that someone else has entered the room till she hears a voice saying:

رہنے دیجئے، آپ ہی کی تھی۔

She is extremely embarrassed by this and does not know what to do. To make matters worse, the ring refuses to come off. Her fiancé teases her and says she does not want to part with it as she likes it so much. She gets thoroughly desperate and comes back to her room in great anguish. She sends for her friend and confidante, *Shāhida*, but even the two cannot manage to take the ring off. *Shāhida* suggests that she had better go to her fiancé again and see if he can

help her. With much reluctance she does so, and he manages to take it off after teasing her a lot. The accidental meeting removed the deadlock that had been reached between the parents regarding the date of the marriage, and all ends well.

'Azīm Beg is a prolific writer and several collections of his short-stories have appeared in recent years. '*Rūh i Latāfat*', '*Cinī kī angūthī aur Lotē kā rāz*', '*Kamzorī*', '*Dekhā jāegā*' all contain extremely well constructed and amusing stories. There is, however, a certain sameness about them in spite of the difference of plots. There is always an indifferent or antagonistic heroine who is eventually won over by an ugly and unprepossessing, or for some other reason unacceptable, hero. '*Kamzorī*', '*Jannat kā bhūt*', '*Dekhā jāegā*', are more or less the same as the story of *Shāhida* and *Jam-vālī* and *Firoza* in '*Kol-tār*' and the story of *Kol-tār* herself.

It is difficult to know what conclusions to draw from these stories. 'Azīm Beg is supposed to be advocating greater freedom for women and girls. Yet all these stories show that their judgment cannot be relied upon at all and that the men they hated, when they were forced into marrying them, they found to be delightful persons, and saw that their prejudices had been entirely unfounded.

Sayyid Imtyāz 'Alī Tāj's '*Cacā Chakkan*' is the first and the most amusing humorous "character" in Urdu fiction. For sheer stupidity and clumsiness and idiocy neither *Khānam*'s husband, nor *Mirzājī* nor *Mullā Rumūzī* can beat him. He means well, but alas, his good intentions always result in creating such chaos and disturbance in the household that *Cacā* shudders at the very offer of his help. He is an exaggerated model of those interfering, clumsy "characters" who cannot leave well alone but must have a part in everything and in consequence put their foot in it. Though each time they attempt to help they mess up the entire thing, yet this does not abate by one jot or tittle their enthusiasm to be of use. They are ready at the next opportunity with even

greater enthusiasm. Thus *Cacā Chakkan* is seen offering to write a letter for *Cacī*, to make out the laundry list for her, to help her to nurse the child, to give her a hand with the spring-cleaning, to do a bit of shopping, to fetch the boys from the school, and, in short, he is always ready to be most obliging and helpful. Only *Cacī* seems to show very little gratitude for all this willingness, and really the way *Cacā Chakkan* can make the simplest task a momentous affair is remarkable. One can only say that he has a genius for it.

Mirzājī is the most popular of the "characters" created in imitation of *Cacā Chakkan*. There are two large volumes containing anecdotes of *Mirzājī* as opposed to the one slim volume of *Cacā Chakkan*'s exploits. But as is almost invariably the case, imitators rarely achieve the excellence of the originator, and M. Aslam's *Mirzājī* is not anything like as good as Imtyāz 'Alī Tāj's *Cacā Chakkan*.

Mirzājī is a very similar sort of "character" to *Cacā Chakkan*. He is as self-confident, pugnacious and cowardly, without being aware of having any of these faults. He is not as interfering as *Cacā Chakkan* and does not as often volunteer to help in the various household tasks; he is more often shown in his public life, whereas it was the domestic life of *Cacā Chakkan* that was brought before the reader. *Mirzājī*'s wife is much less interesting a personality than *Cacī*. *Cacī* strikes one as an exceptionally sane and sensible person whose influence and common sense have kept the house together. *Mirzājī*'s wife is more shadowy and in her retorts to *Mirzājī* there is not the same piquancy. Nevertheless, 'Piknik', 'Mirzājī laukivāle', 'Da'vatī Ruqq'a', 'Miss Maudlin', are amusing enough sketches showing *Mirzājī*'s genius for blundering, his pugnacity and his naïve enjoyment of dress, parties, etc.

All these writers, namely, Shaukat Thānavī, Paṭras, 'Azīm Beg Cugtāi, Tāj and M. Aslam, are humorous rather than witty. Their stories and sketches are funny and amusing but

never reach the realm of pure wit. The humour in the words of these writers is the type of modern English humour. It relies on absurdities of conduct and dress for creating laughter and is admittedly written in imitation of English and American humorists. Tāj owns to be writing in imitation of Jerome K. Jerome, and M. Aslam is indebted to Mark Twain.

Mirzā Farḥatullāh Beg alone of modern writers is truly witty. His work has that quality of humour which is to be found in Naẓir Aḥmad and Nāṣir Naẓir Firāq. It is created by the appropriate choice of words and clever phrases. It is the manner in which an incident or a person is described that causes the amusement. The incident or the person *per se* has none or but little of the element of fun.

Mirzā Farḥatullāh Beg mostly writes in essay-form; his works have been collected and published in five volumes as '*Maẓāmīn i Farḥat*'.

He sometimes writes in the form of short-stories as well, and '*Maulvī Šāhib ki bībī*', '*Miā bīvī ki larāi*', '*Ḥakīm Šāhib*', '*Gurṡā ki shādī*' and others are perfectly delightful stories.

'*Miā bīvī ki larāi*' is told in narrative style. The writer has a niece called *Šafya*, who was for ever quarrelling with her husband. She has the fateful habit of grumbling and her husband has a terrific temper. They are genuinely fond of each other, and always make up their quarrels, though on each occasion it seems that there will be no reconciliation this time. The unfortunate uncle is always dragged in as go-between and judge. He tries his best to get both parties to give up their faults and advises patience, tolerance and other such virtues which are necessary for the smooth running of married life. But his admonitions have no effect; again and again they quarrel and again and again he has to play the thankless part of a go-between.

It happens that he has to go away for a while on business.

Throughout the period he is concerned about *Safya* and her husband, and wonders how they are getting on. On his return, he finds them quite happy; but that very evening they have a row and, to his surprise, the maid who has been in the house for some time accuses him of being the cause. "How am I the cause?" he asks indignantly, "I am sick and tired of acting as a go-between". The maid replies:

ماما نے کہا، میاں برا مانویا بہلا، تمہاری ہی وجہ سے لڑائی ہوئی۔
وہ جانتے ہیں کہ ہم لڑیں بھڑینگے ماموں ملاپ کرا دینگے،
تو وہ لڑتے ہیں۔ اب مہینہ بھر تم نہ تھے تو ایک دفعہ بھی
لڑائی نہیں ہوئی۔

There is nothing in itself amusing in Mirzā Farḥatullāh Beg's stories, it is the way he tells them that makes them so.

There is no short-story writer with an ironical type of humour. Rashid Aḥmad Ṣiddiqī is the exponent of this, but he always uses essays as his medium. The most popular form of humorous stories of that kind are those written in imitation of the English. They use the method of the caricaturist and the cartoonist and by exaggeration and enlarging of defects aim at reforming them or at least at making the owner aware of them.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FUTURE OF THE SHORT-STORY AND THE NOVEL COMPARED

To prophesy is always risky. There is the likelihood of unforeseen developments which might alter what now appears to be the only likely course. But one can be sure of not making a mistake in predicting a brilliant future for the novel and short-story in the Urdu language, for they have without any doubt chances of great success. It is not yet eighty years since the first Urdu novel, that is, '*Fasāna e Azād*', made its appearance in the language, and since then, hundreds of novels have appeared. Though there have been very few of literary merit, yet every type has made its appearance in Urdu; the domestic novel, the historical, the psychological, the novel with a purpose, novels without plots, romantic novels, novels of adventure, detective novels, all are to be found.

It is true that perfection is not reached in each of these types, and one cannot emphatically declare that more than half-a-dozen of the novels written within the last eighty years will be read fifty years hence for the sake of pleasure and not for their historical interest as landmarks in the development of the Urdu novel. But still, '*Mirāt ul 'Arūs*', '*Taubat un Nasūh*', '*Gūdar kā Lāl*', '*Umrāo Jān*', '*Shaukat Arā Begam*' and '*Landan kī ek Rāt*' are works that can be put beside the best in any language, and to have produced even half-a-dozen novels of such excellence and merit as these is not a mean achievement for a language that is not more than two hundred years old, and which has been denied the status of being the medium of instruction and is consequently not known by a large number of educated people in its own country.

Though a latecomer the novel has ousted all the earlier