

LITERATURE AND LOVE

*Translated from the Urdu by
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A king heard talk of a princess' beauty and fell in love with her. Then he left his throne and crown, and set out for that remote country to see her with his own eyes. But Prince Jan-e-Alam did something even more marvellous, for on the mere word of a parrot he fell in love with Anjuman Ara sight unseen and wandered from pillar to post, covered with dust, in search of her. Then there was the prince who saw a form in a dream, and in the morning described her appearance to his father: "If I marry, I will marry only her--if not I will drown myself." And there was the prince who saw a slipper and said, "If the slipper is like this, then what must its wearer be!"--and gave himself up to love of the wearer.

It was not just princes--in those days everyone loved, and loved in such a way. A young woodcutter, while felling a tree, would hear a sweet voice. The voice would carry him away. "If the voice is such, then what must its owner be like!" Then when he had finished slowly felling the tree, a fairy-faced woman would appear and be gracious to him. I use the word *gracious* deliberately. A woman could only be gracious--she could not love. Love has remained the business of men. If a woman takes part in this business, it is a favor; if she does not, there is no cause for complaint. And when both are "graduates," then complaint is absolutely unbecoming.

Well, I was saying that love in those days was really and truly blind. Even the mere sight of the beloved was as good as the sweet wine of union with her. But who ever *saw* the beloved? Her perfume spread all around, but the light of her appearance was not to be seen. But perhaps I am speaking too poetically. To be prosaic: the point is that in those days man was blind, and woman was a dark continent. This dark continent both called out to man and frightened him. From its allure and fearfulness, enterprises, battles, and events were born, and blind love became the vision of the age. By its light people walked and did their work. By its light suicides took place, journeys were made, battles were fought, victories were achieved. One became a martyr, another became a victor; another was called a divine incarnation. Whoever could not become a martyr or victor or incarnation, wrote poetry and recited romances.

This was the age when man had firm faith in emotion. No one was at all ashamed to express himself by means of his emotion. Lord Krishna was both the sage of the era and a professional lover. It was faith in emotion that drew Achilles to the battlefield of Troy, and it was faith in emotion that made him disgusted with the battle. He grew angry, put aside his weapons, and said, "To hell with the honor of the Greeks! Agamemnon has taken away my beloved. I will fight no more."

Wars create and destroy sensibilities. As goes the battle, so goes the mind. The tale of the siege of Troy gave birth to Homer. Homer's faith in the meaningfulness of emotion was such that he believed an emotion-based battle was all-inclusive. So all-inclusive that by describing it the poet could explicate the sentiments, feelings, beliefs, and concerns of his age. But the Second World War produced Camus. He wrote *The Outsider*, and he also said that every writer tries to give form to the emotions of his age. Yesterday's moving sentiment was love. Today the sentiments of unity and freedom have stirred up a storm in the world. It used to be that a man would kill himself for the sake of love. Today collective sentiments create material for worldwide destruction.

Mr. Camus does not accept love as a contemporary sentiment. However, he is considerate. He has given you and me permission, if we have any leisure from necessary tasks, to love from time to time. So if it is a matter of sparing time from necessary tasks, it is better to love during one's student days. Then a man has no necessary tasks. The point is that if we have not committed emotional suicide by smuggling or black-marketing or some other such mischief, then the drop of blood inside us will certainly cause a tumult sometime or other. If that tumult takes place during our student days, so much the better. At worst, we miss our exams that year.

In the old world, love was not a part-time occupation. Its status was not that of an incidental and unnecessary task. When love began, all necessary tasks were suspended, and a man's whole psyche was enveloped by it. It is the *great* achievement of the industrial age that love has been denied recognition as a psychic event and life's representative emotion. So far as Europe is concerned, with the industrial age, human references are steadily disappearing. Europe fought two major wars during the twentieth century--and both without any human reference. Twentieth-century Europe was not able to summon up the heart to fight for the sake of a Helen. The drop of blood did cause a tumult--but not for the sake of any living, sentient being, nor on account of any pure and true emotion. Whether it was Hitler or his enemies, both set their sights on some kind of abstract, non-human references, and some imperialist goals. Wars do not destroy nations. Nations are destroyed when the goals of war change. The cause of Europe's moral decline lies in the fact that Europeans forgot emotions and fought two wars with non-human references. So where would an *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have come from? Only *The Outsider*, in which all human relationships have already lost their meaning, could be written.

As for us, western imperialism did us in in 1857. After 1857, Maulana Hali¹ came and the poor man made a simple, genuine confession:

*We are partly afraid of the heart, and partly afraid of
the heavens.*

Afraid of the heavens, we submitted to English rule; afraid of the heart, we took shelter in Victorian morality. Then the heresy of "natural" and nationalist poetry began, and the poetry written with reference to love was damned, and Maulana Hali issued the statement:

*Brothers! Don't give away your heart--don't give your heart,
no matter what!
Don't go living into the jaws of death, no matter what!*

It is true that long before, Mir Sahib² had already said:

*Mir's last testament to me was only this:
Whatever else you do, don't fall in love!*

But between those two voices is a very basic difference. Hali's voice is the voice of a terrified man, a man afraid of love. Mir's voice is the counsel of a ruined and heart-sick lover, a man who has been through it all. In one way it is the kind of counsel that used to be given to inexperienced young princes: "Take all the other paths, but not the twelfth path!" Or: "Open all the other doors, but not the seventh door!" But this was hardly counsel--it was a challenge: "If you have courage, open the seventh door; if not, just sit still like a well-bred person!"

In those days the drop of blood continually caused a tumult. So the princes accepted the challenge, opened the seventh door, and got themselves in trouble. Trouble was in their blood. Brahmans cast their horoscopes and reported that there

were indications of madness, marks of trouble: "Till the age of twelve he must not behold the sky or sleep in the moonlight." But the turmoil in the blood deliberately disrupted the reckoning. On the last night of his twelfth year, the prince beheld the sky, and a fairy flew away with him. But for him who was not a prince, but a poet--for him every night of his life became the last evening of his twelfth year, and fairies kept appearing in the moon and troubling his daily existence. His name was Mir Taqi. His father had advised him: "Son, be always a lover." The obedient son held hard to his pure, mystic father's admonition. He became a lover, lost his reason, and wrote *ghazals*.

An age later came Maulana Hali. The times were different. There was fear of the heart on the one hand, and fear of the heavens on the other. Maulana Hali could become neither Mir's father Sayyid Ali Muttaqi, nor Mir Taqi. The age of lovers and mystics had already passed. This was the age of reformers. Sermons had displaced direct experience. Maulana Hali shunned the *ghazal* and came around to reformist poetry. He admonished the young men of the community to avoid love and study English. The young men of the community accepted the advice. They studied English and produced reformist literature. If love made any claim, they answered:

*Don't ask me, my love, for the love of former days.*³

In other words, for that love in which a man eventually went mad and tore his garments in distraction.

But no matter what kind of love it is--still it is love. The new poets' perception brought out this point:

*There are other sorrows in this age besides love,
There are other comforts besides union.*⁴

*This veil is lovely on your forehead, but
Would be better as a banner in your hand.*⁵

This is the morally corrupting poetry of Urdu. The fact of the matter is that the preachers have said a great deal about moral and immoral literature. Maulana Hali and Deputy Nazir Ahmad,⁶ too, have had something to say. But D. H. Lawrence has also put in a word. But wait--first listen to a moral dictum of the writers of 1936.⁷ When the charge of obscenity was levelled against their various stories and poems, they said in their own defence, "If a description of sex arouses pleasure, it is obscene. But in our stories and verses, sex is presented with revulsion. It is devoid of any overtones of pleasure, so it cannot be called obscene." The meaning of this was that emotion is a disgusting thing. It is only proper to shun it.

And now listen to Lawrence. When a writer presses his thumb on the scales and tries to tilt the valance to suit his purpose, then this is an immoral act. Faiz committed one immoral act when he pressed his thumb on one side of the rod and tilted the balance, and another immoral act when he divided up the sorrows of life. Sorrows are not separated. All sorrows are united. One sorrow is interwoven with a second, and the second with a third. They are all blended into one and shine in the form of the sorrow of life. If you do not accept this fact, the result will be that either you will dismiss Mir as an escapist poet, or you will pull out some second- or even third-rate verses from his work and prove that Mir realized the sorrows of his age and that he also possessed political consciousness. But in Mir, personal sorrows and the sorrows of the age dissolved into one and became his own sorrow. When all the sorrows were blended into one, they became the sorrow of love. Now how will you distinguish one sorrow from another?

*What can be said of the heart's desolation?
This city was plundered a hundred times.*⁸

In this verse how will you separate the sorrow of the age from personal sorrow?
And in what compartment will you put this verse of Ghalib's?⁹

*Is fire about to rain down on the garden, or spring about to come?
Why is a drop of blood causing tumult in my heart?*

In the compartment for political poetry? In the compartment for love poetry?

The truth is that all other sorrows come to be understood only with reference
to the sorrow of love:

*When I reached myself, I reached God;
And so I know how far away I had been.*¹⁰

Reaching God and reaching the age. And now I again turn to Lawrence, who said that in human affairs the greatest relationship will always remain that of man and woman. The relationships of man and man, woman and woman, mother and father--these are all secondary relationships. And the relationship of man and woman will change every moment, every hour, and will become, in whatever guise, a new key to human life. And what is important is not the man, nor the woman, nor the children born of their relationship. Rather, the relationship itself is important.

The *ghazal* and the *dāstān* recognized this relationship as the key to human life and came to understand all human relationships through events in the course of love. And the conclusion emerged that man is only a sinful human, and that man's devil is man himself, and that

*It was good that I saw all your evils.*¹¹

Thus:

Come, evil one, that I may kiss you.

This last line is Firaq's,¹² but the insight is one which he has inherited from the classical *ghazal*. And in that era the lover tore his clothes so much in distraction and raised the dust in deserts with his wandering and beat his head against walls; but with no result. Fathers admonished their sons: "Son, be always a lover." And the sons loved--those sons who knew emotion as the only reality, and also those who set great store by the intellect. However, they did achieve one insight--an insight concerning man.

Just this insight was the possession of the classical *ghazal* and of the *dāstān*. The possession of the literature of the reformist and progressive eras is a sermon. To today's writers both roads are open. If they wish, they can adopt the sermonizing attitude. They will thus acquire the popular formula for producing literature, and their task will be easy. And if they wish, they can take the first-mentioned road. But that road is difficult. For it is the process of reaching insight through experience.

NOTES

"Adab aur 'ishq," from *Savērā*, No. 47 (January-March 1974), pp. 7-13. The translator thanks C. M. Naim and S. R. Farooqi for their assistance. Notes have been added by the guest editor.

1. See note 16, above, in "Urdu Literature of Our Times."

2. Mīr (Muḥammad Taqī Mīr) was born in 1722 in Allahabad and died in 1810 in Lucknow. He was one of the greatest *ghazal* poets in the history of Urdu literature. For an excellent introduction to his poetic art and for a partial translation of some of his *ghazal* poetry, see Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), in conjunction with Frances W. Pritchett, "Convention in the Classical Urdu Ghazal: The Case of Mir," in *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. III, No. 1 (Fall 1979), 60-77, which provides the necessary corrective to some of Russell/Islam theories. See also Frances W. Pritchett, *Urdu Literature, A Bibliography of English Language Sources* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1979), pp. 114-115.
3. The title of a poem by the renowned Pakistani poet Faiḏ Ahmad Faiḏ (b. 1911); he was awarded the Lenin International Peace Prize in 1962. For an English translation of the whole poem, see *Poems by Fais*, tr. Victor Kiernan (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), pp. 64-67. For some other translations, see Pritchett, *Bibliography*, pp. 56-57.
4. A couplet from the poem by Faiḏ referred to in note 3, above.
5. A couplet from a poem by (Asrāru 'l-Haqq) Majāz (1911-1955); a progressive-romantic poet. His only collection of poetry, *Ahang*, appeared in 1938. For English translations of his poems, see Pritchett, *Bibliography*, p. 108.
6. Nazīr Ahmad (1836-1912) is famous for writing a series of didactic novels. For translations of his works, see Pritchett, *Bibliography*, p. 39; for a critical evaluation of his creative output, see Ralph Russell, "The Development of the Modern Novel in Urdu," in T. W. Clark, ed., *The Novel in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp. 102-141.
7. I.e., the progressive writers; see note 3, above, in "Urdu Literature."
8. A couplet from a *ghazal* by Mīr.
9. Mirzā Asadu 'l-Lāh Khān Ghālib (1797-1869). For further information on him, see references in Pritchett, *Bibliography*, pp. 61-74.
10. A couplet from a *ghazal* by Mīr.
11. Ibid.
12. (Raghūpatī Sahā'ē) Firāq Gōrakhpūrī (b. 1896) is the most prolific Urdu poet from India. For translations of his poems, see Pritchett, *Bibliography*, pp. 60-61.