

## **The Satires of Sauda (1706-1781)**

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One of the more interesting things about the history of early Urdu literature is the absence of humour and satire in the first three centuries and its sudden emergence in Delhi in the eighteenth century. This points up to the comparatively little recognized fact that while Urdu literature was, in its initial couple of hundred of years or so, overwhelmingly sufistic or Islamic-religious, and acquired “worldly” tones only in the seventeenth century, it was the poets of Delhi in the eighteenth century who made Urdu literature the many-splendoured thing that it is. Literature, especially poetry, now began to be used for all purposes related to human life. Moods of inwardness and inclination toward sufistic themes remained, but now many more, newer elements appeared and actually became dominant. These elements can be described as “profane” (as opposed to “sacred”) and “secular” (as opposed to “religious” or “didactic”).

It is true that though the nature and literary idiom of the ghazal permits multiple possibilities of meaning, including sufistic meaning, yet the displacement of sufi themes from their primary position in poetry can be judged by the fact that the somewhat patronizing-pejorative remark: “*tasauwuf* [the subject or theme of sufism] comes in handy for composing poetry” was a common Persian saying in those days.<sup>1</sup> More than a century later, Ghalib wrote to an admirer, “Well, for the sake of embellishing themes of [my] poetry, I have garnered and brought into use a bit of astrology, a bit of sufism. Otherwise, there’s nothing in me, except a capacity to compose metrically.”<sup>2</sup> Even if we grant that like all Indo-Muslim gentlemen of quality, Ghalib is being self-

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<sup>1</sup> The actual author of this saying is not known. Muhammad Iqbal attributes it to the noted Persian poet Shaikh Ali Hazin (1691-1766, in India from 1733) who was rather contemptuous of Indian poets. See Muhammad Iqbal, *Asrar-e Khudi*, first edition, 1915 (later withdrawn by Iqbal) and edited by Sha’ista Khan as *Asrar-e Khudi, Faramosh Shudah Edition*, New Delhi, Maktaba Jamia, 1993, p. ze. Iqbal is not alone in giving this saying to Hazin. Tradition commonly regards Hazin as the author. I am grateful to Ahmad Mahfuz for locating Iqbal’s reference for me.

<sup>2</sup> Ghalib, Letter dated November 5, 1858, to Anvarud Daulah Shafaq, in Khaliq Anjum, ed., *Ghalib ke Khutut*, vol. III, New Delhi, Ghalib Institute, 1987, p. 987.

deprecatory, it is clear that he believes that *tasauwuf* is best used for “embellishment” or enrichment of the themes used in poetry and is not, for him, a field by itself to be explored and nurtured.

This is not to say that sufi thought disappeared from Urdu poetry in eighteenth century Delhi. In fact, it was flourishing to an unprecedented degree and scale in the Indo-Persian poetry and prose of that time and Urdu poetry was commonly believed to be “in the style of the poetry in Persian and in the language of the exalted city of Shahjahanabad [Delhi]”.<sup>3</sup> Yet Persian already possessed a plenitude of themes, meanings, and attitudes. Sufism was just one the many important themes for a Persian poet. Urdu before Delhi had mostly *tasauwuf* and only a bit of mundane concerns: worldly love, moral instruction or improvement, celebration of the military feats and achievement of kings.

Perhaps the most arresting thing that made its appearance in the Urdu literary culture of Delhi in the eighteenth century was an intense self-awareness and a strong tendency to examine and record the poetry of the times. Some prominent poets wrote Tazkirahs, or anthology-like biographical accounts of poets; this mode was promptly taken up in the south, perhaps because the Aurangabad register of Urdu had very much in common with that of Delhi. While it’s not quite clear who should be determined as the first writer of a tazkirah, tradition gives the credit to Mir whose tazkira *Nikatush Shu’ara* has been dated to 1752-53. It’s possible that actually, the tazkirahs of Fath Ali Gardezi of Delhi and Hameed Aurangabadi were the two earliest ones. Present scholarship now dates them to 1751-1752. It’s in any case certain that more than a dozen tazkirahs of Urdu poets were written during 1750-1780. It’s possible that there were more, now lost. Sauda himself wrote a tazkira, which has not been discovered so far.

The next notable departure from the Dakini modes effected by the Urdu writers of Delhi was that they commented freely and copiously on contemporary matters and events. These poets used even the ghazal for commentarial purposes. Numerous individual verses and even whole ghazals can be found where the poets hold forth on non-love, non-sufi matters. Sauda, for example, has a fine ghazal of thirty she’rs of which eleven are devoted to delineating a theory of governance: something like a mirror for kings. Some others touch upon literary theory, though not in a heavy way.<sup>4</sup> Sauda again has a nine she’r ghazal in which he discusses his theory of poetry in a half-satirical, half-lecturing manner.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mir, Muhammad Taqi, *Nikatush Shu’ara*, ed. Mahmud Ilahi, Delhi, Idara-e Tasnif, 1972 [1752-53], p.

<sup>4</sup> Sauda, Mirza Muhammad Rafi, *Diwan-e Ghazaliyat*, Ed., Naseem Ahmad, Varanasi, Banaras Hindu University, 2001, pp. 377-380.

<sup>5</sup> Naseem Ahmad, p. 206.

From the eighteenth century onwards, poems begin to be written on natural events, political matters, climatic phenomena, quality of life in small and large towns, pet animals, homely objects like tobacco, coffee, the walking stick, the gun. There is a she'r of Abru's (1683/5-1733), which mentions both tea and coffee.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary life is often reflected in the new genre of shahr ashob, which is mainly about the change, or even a reversal in the order of things. While Urdu critics have been somewhat generous in treating shahr ashob poems as historical evidence and have disregarded its conventions, there's no doubt that these poems have a *faux* contemporary flavour. I say *faux* because taken together, the poems mostly read as one long, uneven poem pretending to represent the same vision of reality. There are, however, honorable exceptions to this.

Humour and satire are the earliest to appear, and their range is astonishing. In fact the first notable Urdu writer from Delhi proper is Jafar Zatalli (1659? -1713?). Pornographer, savage political satirist, humourist, a huge enjoyer of (often dirty) words for their own sake, he wrote the first mainline Urdu satirical poetry and a page of mainline Urdu prose, this last one a triumph of pure porno-scat: there's no desire to titillate, no attempt to *epater les bourgeois*, it reads like a soliloquy of a master pornographer in his cups or high on drugs, creating a prescription for a digestive powder. I wish I could find some way to translate it into English, but English has no vocabulary to match the hot and peppery nouns and adjectives poured out by Zatalli.<sup>7</sup>

Following Zatalli, Shah Hatim (1699-1783), the first Delhi poet to create a big following for himself, wrote a somewhat longer prose text apparently satirizing the complicated medical prescriptions written by physicians in general, and perhaps the physicians of those times in particular.<sup>8</sup> Hatim's nonsense is quite as delightful and outrageous as Zatalli's, but it's somewhat less given to dirty words. Both these pieces are best read as humour for its own sake.

As their dates show, Shah Hatim and Sauda are close contemporaries. Tradition credits Hatim as being the ustad of Sauda, though there's no real evidence for it. While Hatim earned a solid reputation as a poet, though he wasn't much educated<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>6</sup> Shah Mubarak Abru, *Diwan*, ed. Muhammad Hasan, New Delhi, Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, Government of India, 1990, p. 228. The verse is untranslatable because of a pun on *chah*, which means both "desire" and "tea".

<sup>7</sup> Jafar Zatalli, *Kulliyat*, ed. Rashid Hasan Khan as *Zatal Namah*, New Delhi, Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, 2003, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in full by Jamil Jalibi, *Tarikh-e Adab-e Urdu*, vol. II, pt. I, Delhi, Educational Publishing House, 1984, pp.447-449.

<sup>9</sup> Mir describes him in the *Nikat*, as a "fellow who is illiterate and well entrenched [as poet]", p. 77.

Sauda was the son of an affluent father, but he too seems to have had a moderate education, perhaps because he came into his father's inheritance at a rather young age and soon "squandered it away through his profligacy".<sup>10</sup> His advent upon the literary scene seems to have been rather late. This was perhaps because he was obliged to seek employment with the nobles of his day to earn his livelihood. He seems to have become famous rather quickly, and was arguably the most famous Urdu poet of his time. In 1794, Maulana Baqar Agah in the far south, wrote in a bit of pique that "Sauda...is...sought after by people everywhere from the North to Karnataka [=modern day Tamil Nadu]...they regard that poor fellow as better and greater than all the Rekhtah poets, or rather, all Persian writers."<sup>11</sup>

The name of Muhammad Taqi Mir (1722/23-1810) is often mentioned with Sauda's during literary discussions. Posterity has not given their due to any of the above three: Hatim, Sauda and Mir. Hatim wears the doubtful crown of having done a lot to "reform" the language and "purge" it of "unhealthy" or "undesirable" elements, as if Urdu was a patient suffering from severe constipation and accumulation of "unhealthy" fluids and solids and urgently needed medical attention to relieve it of its evil humours. Incidentally, Hatim's reputation as the Doctor who "cured" Urdu is based more on wishful thinking generated by the politics rather than the reality of language and literature in the eighteenth century.

Sauda has fared only slightly better. He is recognized as a great qasidah poet, perhaps the greatest in Urdu. But qasidahs have long been regarded in modern Urdu circles as exercises in hyperbole, full of flights of fancy, mostly in bad taste, and certainly "devoid" of "reality". Also, the race of the qasidah is seen everywhere as having been run, and none seem to regret this. But for the students of literature who are obliged to pore and sweat over the admittedly difficult and (for the modern youth) arid qasidahs, no one ever reads or enjoys qasidahs.

Sauda was a major ghazal poet too. But comparison with Mir, and perhaps Dard (1722-1785) was inevitable, and Sauda was generally dismissed as very good, but not in the same class as Mir and Dard.

The soundest rock on which Sauda's reputation rests today are his satires. Many of them are known to this day and some, particularly the shorter ones are actually enjoyed also by lay readers. Unfortunately, Muhammad Husain Azad's *Ab-e Hayat* (1880, then numerous editions) which is still perhaps the most

<sup>10</sup> Qa'im Chandpuri, *Makhzan-e Nikat*, ed. Iqtida Hasan, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1966 [circa 1754-1755], p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> Alim Saba Navedi, ed., *Maulana Baqar Agah ke Adabi Navadir*, Madras, Tamil Nadu Urdu Publications, 1994, pp.144-46.

popular book on the history of eighteenth and nineteenth century Urdu poetry, said this about Sauda's satires:

His fieriness and the sharp swiftness of his temperament had the effect of lightning—and a force that no reward could extinguish, and no danger could suppress...Then, closing the eyes of modesty and opening the mouth of shamelessness, he said such wild things that even Satan would ask for a truce.<sup>12</sup>

This was disincentive enough for serious prospective readers, especially in a time when Urdu literature was routinely blamed by the English for its immodesty and lack of “moral restraint”. Lack of good, accessible editions in the modern times also prevented Sauda's satires reaching a wider audience. Nevertheless, in his own time Sauda commanded a reputation greater than perhaps that of Mir's and he spent all his life in reasonable comfort, serving as companion or employee to many nobles, including, in the last decade of his life, at the court of Navab Asifuddaulah at Lucknow.

It might be useful to look at the word “satire” in the context of pre-modern Urdu poetry. No word for the term “satire” in its modern, western sense exists in Urdu. There are no words for “irony”, “tragic irony”, “dramatic irony”, or “irony of fate” either. The Arabic word *tanz*, which means “ridicule, scoff, taunt” was used in Persian to mean “innuendo, taunt”, and was borrowed in Urdu in more or less its original Arabic sense and was never used for any genre of writing or speech before the modern times. The Arabic word *hajv* was the generic name for all kinds of writing where all kinds of situations, events, individuals or groups of people were made fun of. There was a strong personal or tribal (as opposed to the “public”) motivation to the composing of the *hajv*. “Public” or “Political” issues did not figure in the *hajv*, unless they related to tribal (and now national) warfare.

In premodern Urdu, as in Persian and Arabic, the word for ridiculing or taunting writing was “hajv”, not “satire”. Poems on issues of public or general interest, even if they had an occasional flash of satire, were not called “hajv”. They were properly called *qasidah*. For example, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester's poem *A Satire Against Mankind* (1675) would be described as *qasidah*, if it were an Urdu poem.<sup>13</sup> In fact, it bears comparison with a *qasidah* of Sauda's, simply called *Shahr Ashob*, but also referred to in a preceding poem as *Tazhik-e Rozgar* (Ridiculing the Times). John

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<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Husain Azad, *Ab-e Hayat*, translated and edited by Frances Pritchett in association with Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, New Delhi, OUP., 2003, pp.152-53.

<sup>13</sup> Always provided that in Urdu such poems would have followed the structural and morphological features of *qasidahs*.

The Satires of Sauda, by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

Wilmot's poem has Reason and Man as its chief victims, but he chooses to exemplify some of his criticism by singling out some specific professions, or callings. This recalls the technique of the shahr ashob where each profession is described as having fallen on bad times. John Wilmot:

Huddled in dirt, reas'ning *Engine* lies  
Who was so proud, so witty, and so wise. [Lines 30-31]

...

For *Wits* are treated like common *Whores*  
First they're enjoy'd, and then kickt out of  
*Doors*:  
That fights the'njoyer, with succeeding pains:  
*Women* and *Men* of Wit, are dangerous Tools.  
And ever fatal to admiring *Fools*. [37-41]

...

*Birds*, feed on *Birds*, *Beasts*, on each other  
prey,  
But Savage *Man* alone, does *Man*, betray:  
Prest by necessity, they Kill for Food,  
*Man*, undoes *Man*, to do himself no good.  
[129-132]

...

But if in *Court*, so just a Man there be,  
(In *Court*, a just Man, yet unknown to me.)  
[179-180]

...

Is there a *Church-Man* who on *God* relies?  
Whose Life, his Faith, and Doctrine justifies?  
[191-192]

...

None of that sensual *Tribe*, whose *Talents* lie  
In avarice, *Pride*, *Sloth*, and *Gluttony*.  
Who hunt good Livings, but abhor good  
Lives,  
Whose Lust exalted, to that height arrives  
They act *Adultery* with their own *Wives*.<sup>14</sup>  
[201-205]

Sauda would have been delighted with this poem. Although it is somewhat non-specific in choosing its victims, it has the tone and temper of a qasidah in the shahr ashob mode. Although

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<sup>14</sup> John Wilmot, *A Satire Against Mankind*, in Oscar Williams, ed., *Master Poems of the English Language*, New York, Trident Press, 1966, pp. 239-244.

Wilmot's poem is angry, bitter and gloomy, and most shahr ashobs of the eighteenth century have quite a bit of humour in them, Sauda would have characterized Wilmot's poem as a qasidah-shahr ashob, not a hajv. Similarly, Samuel Johnson's celebrated poem *The Vanity of Human Wishes: The Tenth Satire of Juvenal, Imitated*, also described by the author as a satire, would be seen in Urdu as a qasidah, not a hajv. Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot* occasionally reads like a hajv, but would still have been characterized in Urdu as qasidah.

In other words, English has "satire" as a genre, and English satirical poems have mostly moral or political motivations. Some of the English satires attack human folly; other attack human wickedness. The Urdu hajvs and shahr ashob qasidahs are just that: hajv or qasidah. A qasidah may have a moral purpose, it may contain elements of satire, but it doesn't necessarily attack human folly or wickedness; an eighteenth century shahr ashob may have both humour and satire, but essentially it's a poem saying that the world is not functioning true to its laws: roles and characters have been reversed; a hajv is a poem ridiculing someone or something. A hajv is a poem with a specific target, its purpose is to ridicule the target, never mind what you say about the target is based on facts or not. The more scurrilous the terms of ridicule, the better the hajv. True, very often the hajv makes the reader laugh. But this is because human beings always tend to laugh at another's discomfort.

It would therefore be improper to judge Sauda's or any pre-modern Urdu poet's hajvs or shahr ashobs or shahr ashob-like qasidahs as if they were English satires. Unfortunately, this has been the case all these years since Muhammad Husain Azad.

Let's now turn to Sauda's most famous poem. As I said above, Sauda may have given it the title *Tazhik-e Rozgar* (Ridiculing the Times). It's qasidah in the classic shahr ashob mode: the world is not running according to rules. In order to illustrate this, the poet picks up different professions and tells us in a serio-comic way how bad is the state in which they have fallen. In Urdu, it is delightful and word-perfect. The poem, though essentially paratactic, flows like a well-knit narrative full of authentic sounding dialogue and comic-dramatic situations:

*Look, you fellows who are here,  
Young or old, don't ever claim from now  
That you have a tongue in your mouth—  
I have heard great Sauda's discourse.  
My God! What imagination, what flow!  
I just asked him, "Sir, be pleased to say  
If there is any way to survive here*

*in minimal comfort?"*

The narrator then goes on to describe, in Sauda's words, the sorry plight of those who want to live on earned as against unearned income. Soldier, Caller to prayer in a mosque, Companion to a noble, Physician, Trader and Merchant, Agriculturist, a Navab's Representative or petty Diplomat, Poet, Tutor, Calligrapher, Sufi Master or Shaikh, Nobleman, are the professions listed. The last one has been named and is a true historical figure. The poem has ninety-six she'rs, it's thus clear that it's not just a comic list that we have here. Numerous small details have been weaved into the narrative, details that, given Urdu's rigid metre and insistence of strict rhyming, need extraordinary poetic skill for proper execution. Here are some examples:

*For a hundred rupees or two per month, if  
one*

*Were to serve as a rich man's physician:  
Let the patron just sneeze and he glares  
at his tame doctor. He calls for a bow  
and arrow to ward off even the hint  
of a breeze. When the Navab eats,  
his doctor's blood pressure goes up.  
The patron hogs all sorts of things and if  
his belly aches as a result, then God  
help the doctor; even if he were  
Avicenna, he would be declared a fool.  
In short, they don't hire doctors.  
They hire soldiers to fight with death.*

The physician's sad plight reveals both him and his master to be a fool: no sane physician would accept such employment and no minimally intelligent, self-respecting patron would be so stupid and gluttonous. The sufi master is the butt of everyone's jokes (perhaps because he has taken to sufism as a profession, and not as a result of some spiritual experience):

*Should one give up all and take  
to Sufism, his fate is then to become  
a laughing stock for the poets—  
They compare his turban's end  
To a donkey's tail, the turban itself,  
to a dome.*

...

*If in ecstatic dance at songs  
divine, he shouldn't keep time, they whisper,*

*'How silly, to be out of step!' And if  
he moves to time, they say, 'What  
the hell, is it ecstasy, or a nautch-girl's  
dance?'*

*Forsaking the world, and trusting in God  
If you sit at home, the wife believes  
you to be an idle, feckless wastrel;  
Your son's sure in his heart that you  
Are in your dotage. Your daughter  
Thinks, 'The old man's mad, for sure.'*

The poor father who for once tries to behave like a proper sufi (sufis can accept gifts, but are forbidden to ask), is given a hard time by his family. The daughter is more severe than the son. Such small details lend character to the poem.

Scholars have not dated the poem. Internal evidence helps us place it before 1774 because Hafiz Rahmat Khan, a famous Rohilla general and nobleman has been mentioned in the poem as if he were alive at the time of writing. Whatever the date, the environment suggests Delhi around the middle of the century. The picture is not historical, nor is it entirely imaginary. Its beauty is not in its so-called realism, or "truth" of which there isn't much anyway. The beauty of the poem lies in its delicate weave of dialogue and narration, of situation and comment, and its gentle humour and satire.<sup>15</sup>

Let's now turn to one of the poems that shocked Muhammad Husain Azad. There are in fact only three of them. They aren't included in the Lahore edition because of their "filthiness" (*kasafat*). The Pakistani editor was most probably deterred by the fact that they are polemical and sectarian and grossly anti-sunni. Sauda, though a shi'a in personal life, doesn't seem to have been over-zealous about his religious beliefs. Yet he has come down very hard on his victim, one Maulavi Sajid, against whom he has two hajvs for espousing beliefs that go against the shi'a creed. The feckless maulavi had annoyed Sauda by decreeing that crow's meat was not prohibited for Muslims. Sauda wrote a longish, comparatively harmless hajv on the maulavi, though he is not named. The poem's refrain is:

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<sup>15</sup> The whole poem can be seen in *Kulliyat-e Sauda*, Vol. I, ed., Muhammad Akbaruddin Siddiqi, Lahore, 1976, pp. 344-359. I have translated here only small bits of the poem. For a somewhat bigger excerpt translated by me, see K. Ayyappa Paniker, ed., *Medieval Indian Literature, An Anthology*, Vol. IV, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademy, 2000, pp. 892-895.

*There's a clown who says crows can be eaten<sup>16</sup>*

Soon thereafter the luckless maulavi said something much more dire and objectionable. This brought forth a whole flood of Sauda's displeasure on him and he earned the dubious distinction of immortality because of having been crucified by Sauda in two hajvs.

The third hajv is, most unexpectedly, against the great sufi and scholar Shah Waliullah who is universally respected as perhaps the greatest Muslim reformer, religious leader and intellectual sufi of the eighteenth century. Shah Waliullah is reported to have viewed with some favour the shi'a practice of honouring and weeping for Imam Husain's martyrdom at Karbala. Yet he also held that the Caliphate of Ali (the first and greatest shi'i Imam and the Prophet's son in law) wasn't really established technically because a section of Muslims didn't swear the oath of allegiance to him. This seems to have caused Sauda's outburst against Shah Waliullah.

The hajv against Shah Waliullah, though interspersed with dirty words, doesn't have much to recommend itself as a work of literature, but the first one against Maulavi Sajid is brilliant with obscene innuendo:

**Qasidah in Hajv of Maulavi Sajid<sup>17</sup>**

*Sajid, why shouldn't you be flying up to the heavens?*

*For this is the way that your legitimacy has come down from generations:*

*Your birth and your mother's marriage coincided,*

*At your grandma's betrothal, your father's seed heaved and writhed in her womb.*

*Were someone to ask in your family, "What's chastity?"*

*They would say, "Oh, it's something entirely alien from our people."*

...

*The whole world has searched and researched your family*

*But found no virgins except in the mother's womb.*

...

<sup>16</sup> *Kulliyat, Vol. IV, pp. 115-124.*

<sup>17</sup> *Qasa'id-e Sauda, Ed., Atiq Ahmad Siddiqi, by the author, Aligarh, 1976, pp.366-368.*

*Just as each human being has a  
doppelganger,  
So all your women have a husband, and a  
paramour.*

*No woman among your people ever got a  
crust of bread  
From her husband's earning, anywhere under  
the sun.*

...  
*If two girls are born to someone, he becomes  
The brother in law of his own son, you tiny  
runt of a man.*

...  
*In this household, the father always lusts for  
the daughter,  
And the uncle's heart, all the time, leaps after  
the niece.*

...  
*So when such deeds are allowable in your  
house,  
How could your mind have doubt about the  
legality of crow's meat?*

Not many today would perhaps take delight in such incessant barrage of abuse, but the Urdu has such verve that the poet's obvious enjoyment at his own cruelty becomes infectious. The *haju* as a genre has always had a streak of cruelty and meanness: humour and even satire always take a distant place to the merciless strokes of wit. Western satire, and English certainly, is rarely cruel or mean. Swift could be mean to his women in his personal life, but even his *A Modest Proposal* is so oblique and charged with irony that many contemporary readers missed the point. The *haju* writer makes sure that you don't. Some bitterness, but little malice comes occasionally through in Swift's greatest poem:

**Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift<sup>18</sup>**

*Occasioned by Reading a Maxim in  
Rochefoucauld*

*Dans l'adversite nos meilleurs amis nous  
trouvons toujours quelquechose, qui ne  
nous deplait pas.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> *Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. I, New York & London, W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 2301-2312.

<sup>19</sup> In the misfortunes of our best friends we always find something that does not displease us.

The time is not remote, when I  
Must by the course of nature die;  
When, I foresee, my special friends  
Will try to find their private ends:  
Though it's hardly understood  
Which way my death can do them  
good:  
Yet thus, methinks, I hear 'em speak:  
"See how the Dean begins to break!  
Poor gentleman! He droops apace!  
You plainly find it in his face." (Lines  
73-82)

...  
"For poetry, he's past his prime:  
He takes an hour to find a rhyme;  
His fire is out, his Muse decayed  
His fancy sunk, his muse a jade.  
I'd have him throw away his pen—  
But there's no talking to some men."  
(99-104)

Thus his friends, who feared his pen when he was alive,  
will talk disparagingly of him when they hear that he is dying.  
There is no bitterness or anger here, much less dislike of the  
worldly wise friends who know that they no longer have to fear  
Swift's stinging pen. Now, when he's actually dead:

Here shift the scene, to represent  
How those I love, my death lament.  
Poor Pope will grieve a month, and  
Gay  
A week, and Arbuthnot a day.  
St. John himself will scarce forbear  
To bite his pen, and drop a tear.  
(205-210)

...  
My female friends, whose tender  
hearts  
Have better learned to act their parts,  
Receive the news in doleful dumps:  
"The Dean is dead (and what is  
trumps?)  
Then, Lord have mercy upon his soul!"  
(226-229)

...  
One year past; a different scene;

No further mention of the Dean,  
Who now, alas! is no more missed,  
Than if he never did exist.  
(245-248)

...  
The Dean was famous in his time,  
And had a kind of knack at rhyme.  
His way of writing is now past:  
The town has got a better taste.  
(263-266)

Bitterness creeps into the poem gradually, and bits of self-pity and self-praise. But Swift can't bring himself really to hate even those he'd good reason to hate or at least despise. Sauda has nothing comparable, perhaps because he had no bitterness or real frustration in his life. Sauda doesn't also have the lightness of touch that Swift was able to achieve, though Swift amply proves the truth of La Rochefoucauld. Sauda remains closer to John Wilmot than to Swift or Pope. But as a hajv writer, he could easily be cruel to the dead and the defeated:

**Verses Recording the Date of  
Maulavi Umar's  
Being Thrashed With Shoes<sup>20</sup>**

*Those whose dearest darling was the  
Mulla of Kather,  
Well, the day God destroyed them all,  
The Mullah, who hated the Prophet's  
progeny,  
His bigotry brought humiliation  
upon their head: The true Believers,  
inspired by God  
Thought the thought: Let's give their  
brains  
A shaking with shoes, for they're  
destined for Hell.  
Then each of them was given sixty and  
sixty blows  
With shoes, and to Maulavi Umar  
were delivered  
Two more. The Voice from Heaven*

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<sup>20</sup> *Kulliyat*, Vol. IV, pp. 307-308.

*Spoke out to give the date: What a thrashing with shoes for Mulla Umar!*<sup>21</sup>

Lest it be felt that Sauda was driven by religious motives and chose sunnis alone to vituperate, it's worth while to note that his blacket *bete noire* was apparently Ghulam Husain Zahik (1706/7-1782), a comic poet of very distinguished shi'a lineage, and in fact a Sayyid, that is, one who claims descent from the Prophet, while Sauda was most probably a Mughal of Kashmiri origin. Here are some of Sauda's she'rs from a masnavi accusing the hapless Zahik of gluttony<sup>22</sup>:

*Let there be anywhere even a whiff  
of something eatable, he'll concentrate all his senses there,  
And like a fly, he'll pound  
his head with both hands. If someone's house  
is on fire, and there's just a trace of smoke,  
While people go rushing to put out the fire,  
He dashes forth, plate in hand  
Hoping for food.*

...  
*If he can't even get roasted grain to chew,  
He torments his own arse  
And goes to the privy  
Trying to pluck out to eat the pustules of his piles.  
He says bad things about the people; he dies  
to earn at least insults to swallow.*

Let me conclude with a truly enjoyable short piece, and also uncharacteristically subtle. In order to get the point, we should know two things: scribal errors in manuscripts are a well-known phenomenon of the pre-print age. Sometimes the author sought to explain his mistake by attributing it to scribal error. The other thing is that Muhammad Taqi Mir, in his tazkirah *Nikatush Shu'ara*, has often suggested corrections to the she'rs of other poets. This naturally offended not a few poets. Now here's the poem:

**In Hajv of Mir**<sup>23</sup>

*I went visiting a kind friend,  
Just hear this, it's a rare and strange tale:  
There's an old man in his house, he*

<sup>21</sup> The total numeral value of the letters in the last line of the Urdu text is supposed to give the date of the event, but the resultant date doesn't seem to be correct.

<sup>22</sup> *Kulliyat*, Vol. III, p. 121.

<sup>23</sup> *Kulliyat*, Vol. IV, pp. 318-319.

The Satires of Sauda, by Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

*Earns his livelihood by calligraphy,  
He's so good; it'd be proper to describe him  
As Deputy to the Calligrapher of destinies.  
He came in upon us, and said,  
"Alas, the baseness of the self, full of desires,  
It governs my life. Or I'd gladly give up  
My trade, but what to do? It's written:  
One must earn one's bread."  
When I asked him the reason, he said:  
Don't ask. It isn't proper to let you on to it;  
But since you're keen to hear my sorrow,  
listen.  
Whatever prose or verse there is in the world,  
Is subject to Mir Sahib's fault finding;  
Every page bears Mir's corrections, and  
people  
Say: oh, these scribal errors!"*

As time passes, satires on specific social or historical themes generally lose much of their point. Abusive verse, if expertly done, lasts longer. All of us enjoy the sight of another fellow having egg on his face. La Rochefoucauld was dead right. Sauda proves this again and again.

Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

Author's note: All translations from Urdu and Persian have been made by me.