URDU POETRY IN LUCKNOW IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

We have seen that owing to the troubles in Delhi nearly all the poets left for other places where they hoped to find greater peace, gain recognition for their talents and secure the means of livelihood. There were several courts where literary men were welcomed; chief among them were Haidarabad, Patna and Lucknow. Of these Lucknow was the nearest—a matter of importance in those days of unrest and turmoil, when all journeys were dangerous. The Delhi poets were received with enthusiasm in Lucknow both by the court and by the populace; it soon became the centre of Urdu poetry. Life was luxurious and effeminate, particularly in the court, and the poets as court favourites came under its influence. Delhi and Lucknow differed in their literary point of view. Lucknow poetry reflected the court. It gave itself up to external things, such as outward ornament, rather than beauty of thought. It developed rules for language and idiom, restricted poetic licence and laid down laws for prosody and figures of speech, especially similes and metaphors. Vigour of style and depth of thought counted for little, verbal accuracy and idiomatic use of words were the ideal. Delhi was less careful about words and gave more attention to thought and subject. Many critics would subscribe to Gálib’s dictum (which reminds us of a famous Italian saying) that the aim of a poet should be the ‘thoughts of Delhi in the language of Lucknow.’

In the desire for power in the use of words Lucknow increased the length of the lyric (gazal) and the number of rhymes, till it became a mere string of words cleverly put together; and sometimes the poet’s striving after colloquial speech led to his using the language of the gutter. Delhi on the other hand had suffered much; consequently it had more loftiness of imagination and vigour of thought. Lucknow used to be regarded by many Indians as feminine in its ways.

Elegies, or marśiyan (see pp. 2, 34, 35), on the tragic events at Karbalá are characteristic of Muhammedan poetry, especially in Persia and India. They are essentially religious, indeed in the days before Zámir and Khaliq, mentioned below, they were short devotional poems and little attention was paid to their literary quality. Zámir changed that; and under Anis and Dabir the marsiya became practically a form of epic, having however this limitation that it must always revolve round the death of Hasan, Husain and the members of their family. Subject to this limitation, which is a very serious one, marsiyas take in Urdu the place that epic poetry occupies in western lands. Apart from them, Urdu has no epic poetry—a fact all the more remarkable when we remember the prominent place taken by epics in Hindi. These epics of Karbalá include historical narrative, moral and didactic teaching, description of natural scenery and delineation of human emotion. They suffer of course from their narrowness; every character is either friend or enemy, altogether good or entirely evil, and the only emotions are those which would be brought out by such a tragedy as that of Karbalá. Yet with all that, there is nothing so admirable in Urdu poetry as the marsiya.

129. Khaliq and Zamir. MÍR MOSTÁRÁN KHALÍQ (1774–1804), one of the earliest elegiac writers in north India, was the son of the famous Mir Hasan, and father of the still more famous Anis. He began writing poetry at an early age. His father, not having time to instruct him, committed him to the care of Muḥšafi. He made great progress, and on the occasion of a gathering of poets in his native place, Faizabad, read one of his lyrics with such effect that Atish, who had come specially from Lucknow to grace the meeting, would not recite his own poem, saying there was no need for him when Khaliq was there.

His contemporary,

130. MÚZÁFFAR HUSAIN ZAMIR, was another famous
writer of elegies. The two men constituted a pair who complemented each other, as has frequently happened in Urdu literature (p. 50). They were like Ātish and Nāṣik. Khāliq was simple and comparatively unlearned, but full of tenderness; Zamīr was learned and clever. To him belongs the credit of extending the scope of the elegy. Before his time elegies had been confined to descriptions of the events at Karbalā and had been intended as religious hymns of mourning, whereas now an elegy may extend to 1,000 lines and contain accounts of battles, individual heroes and their prowess, horses, accoutrements and natural scenery; or it may describe historical events with a view to increasing religious fervour. It is related that Ātish, on hearing an elegy composed by Dābir, inquired 'Is this an elegy or an account of a wrestling match?' To-day such elegies are the rule and not the exception. It was Zamīr who led the way to this wider field.

Khāliq was a truer poet than Zamīr; he felt the grief he portrayed and spoke more to the heart; his language, too, was beautiful in its simplicity and correctness. Zamīr was more scholarly and more artificial; his language, though very good, was stilted and difficult to understand, and his fancies were far-fetched.

131. Karāmāt Alī Shahīdī (d. 1840) was a native of Bareli, brought up in Lucknow, who lived at first a gay and careless life, but afterwards became a very religious man, went on pilgrimage, and died near Medina. It is remarkable that in a famous ode he had expressed a desire to die in Medina. Two of his books of poetry have been published, one containing odes, the other lyrics. He was a pupil of Mūshafī, and later of Shāh Naṣir, and had special facility in writing poems in difficult metres.

132. Davā Shāhshār Kaul Nāṣim (1811-43) was a Kashmīrī pandit who studied poetics under Ātish. His fame rests entirely on one poem, a romance called Gulzār-i Naṣīm, composed when he was 22. It greatly resembles Mir Ḥasan's Sihr-ul Bayyān, and is generally awarded the second place among Urdu poetic romances. Naṣīm also translated The Arabian Nights into Urdu.

133 and 134. Ātish and Nāṣik. Ḥaidar Alī Ātish (d. 1846) and Imām Bakhsh Naṣik (d. 1838). When Lucknow became the centre of Urdu poetry, these two important figures emerged to dominate literary circles till the death of Naṣīk in 1838, after which Ātish gave up writing. They corresponded to Saudā and Mir of an earlier generation in Delhi. Ātish was the natural poet, Naṣīk the master of words. Ātish used simple, colloquial language, the language of everyday speech; his verses flow from his pen very naturally and reflect the dislike of luxurious court life which characterised the man himself. He was a good swordsman, a man of powerful physique, and much of his poetry is manly in tone; yet in many places he falls a victim to the prevailing fashion and describes merely the external attractions of the loved one's face or hair or hands. His enemies admitted his purity of language and correctness of idiom, but said that his verses were mere words with no power of imagination or poetical vigour. His friends, on the other hand, maintained that Naṣīk was bombastic and obscure, that his verses, largely plagiarised from Persian sources, were full of sound and fury, but devoid of poetry. They said also that he had with disastrous results failed to distinguish between odes and lyrics, and that when finally he tried to give up obscurity and wild imagination he became merely flabby.

Ātish is one of the best of Urdu lyric writers. He is the author of two collections of poems; the first compiled by himself contains not far short of 30,000 lines, the other, compiled by a pupil after his death, is less than a quarter of that length. His work is marked by uncomplaining pathos, true feeling, simple thoughts and correct language. Naṣīk, like Ātish, almost confined himself to lyrics; he left three volumes of poetry; the first, called Dastār-i Pareskin, contains 18,000 lines, and the second nearly 30,000. The third is little esteemed. He wrote also a description of the birth of Muḥammad, and a romance which is a translation of Hadīt-i Mulassal. He is characterised by vigorous and immoderate imagination, obscure language and turgid style.

Naṣīk was fond of Persian and Arabic words, and as far as possible avoided Hindi words. He was very careful about gender and laid down rules for it. Mir, Saudā and the
writers of their time allowed themselves great licence in matters of prosody, forms of words, length of syllables and archaic language. Nasîkh made strict rules and observed them. Before his time literary Urdu had been called rekhâ and the name 'Urdu,' though found in Mughal and others was little used; now it became common. 'Rekhâ' had also been employed to denote a lyrical poem; from this time onward it gave place to 'gazal,' a word which had been used, though rarely, by Saudâ, Jur'at and Mughal. Some of the pupils of Nasîkh and Atish hesitated about the excessive use of Arabic and Persian words, Persian constructions and Persian modes of erotic verse with its hyperboles, similes, metaphors and plays on words; their tendency was to avoid monotonous references to black tresses, moles on the face, doves, nighingales, drinking and taverns; and finally they turned back again to many Hindi words which had unwisely been given up.

135. Ağâ Hajî Sharf, a pupil of Atish, exemplifies in an extreme form the movement mentioned above against Persian style. 'Abî us Salâm and Sañir Bilgrâmî have pointed out that he rejected the whole vocabulary of the wineshop.

As Atish and Nasîkh remind us of Mîr and Saudâ, so Sabâ and Vazîr are a still fainter copy of the great originals.

136. Vazîr 'Ali Sabâ (1795–1854) was a pupil of Atish, while (136a) Muhammad Vazîr Vazîr (d. 1854) acknowledged Nasîkh as his master. Sabâ left a large collection of lyrics called Gunqa e Arzâ, in good idiomatic Urdu, but very artificial in thought. Vazîr's poems were collected immediately after his death; he was a very religious man and the greatest of the minor poets of his time. His work has been compared to a beautiful, but soulless body. It is all in one volume called Daftar i Faṣâhat. He was superior to Sabâ in imagination and subject matter, but inferior in language and idiom.

137. Muhammad Khân Rind (1797–1857) was born in Faizâbâd, where he lived till he was grown up, when he went to Lucknow. His first volumes of poems, written while he was still in Faizâbâd, were destroyed by him shortly after he arrived in Lucknow, and under the influence of

Atish he wrote another to which he gave the name Gâldasta e 'Ishq. In middle age he gave up his licentious mode of living and entered on the religious life. He was on his way to Mecca when he died. He cannot be called a great poet, but there was a certain amount of simple beauty in his writings.

138. 'Ali Aqsa Rask (1799–1867), a pupil of Nasîkh, gave himself up almost entirely to improving the language and laying down rules for it. He was very fond of the colloquial, which he employed freely in his poems. He became a great authority on all points connected with idioms and use of words, but as a poet he was inferior. He died in the holy city of Karbala. Two collections of his poems are extant, Naqm i Mubârak (1837) and Naqm i Girâmî (1846). A third, said to be the best of all, has been lost. In 1840 he compiled an Urdu dictionary called Naqî ul Lugât, part of which has been published.

139. Muhammad Riza Barq (d. 1857) was born in Lucknow. He attached himself to the court of Vajîd 'Ali Shâh, who helped him in his career. He was fond of far-fetched metaphors and similes, delighted in puns, and wrote voluminously in the style of his teacher, Nasîkh. He followed his royal master into exile and wrote a rather uninspired account of his own loneliness.

140. Harim 'Ali Beg Mihr (1814–79) is perhaps better known as a correspondent of Gâlib than as a poet, for his own prolific writings do not display much poetic power. His chief collection of poems is called Avmâs i Darakhshân. He wrote several poetic romances, one of which, Shi 'a i Mihr (1858), won Gâlib's admiration.

141. Imdâd 'Ali Bahâr (1810–82) lived in poverty till he was an old man. He sat on a little mat every day and was visited by many people who smoked and discussed poetry. He and Vazîr and Raskh were Nasîkh's chief disciples. Rashk and he shared with their master a reputation for authoritative knowledge of Urdu. The Navâb of Râmpîr, Kalb 'Ali Khân, summoned him to his court and gave him a salary which he enjoyed till homesickness made him return to poverty in Lucknow. His poems were collected by his friends. He is a second rate poet who combines verbal correctness with some facility of composition.
142. Dost ‘Ali Khalil (flor. 1800) was a great friend and faithful follower of Atish. He was a writer of lyrics.

143. Ismail Husain Munir (1819–81) lived a wandering life and wrote many poems. He wrote some good odes, a romance called Malikul Mazamim, and collections of poems which he called Muntakhabat-i Alam, Tanvir ul Ashar and Nagm-i Munir. He is typical of his time.

144. Mahdi Hasan Khan Asad (flor. 1850) wrote a great deal of verse. His best known lyrics are those in Nigaristan-i Ishq. He also compiled an anthology called Baharistan-i Sukhan.

All the Navabs of Lucknow wrote verse, but the most prolific was the last who reigned from 1847 to 1856 when he was banished to Calcutta. His name was

145. Vajid ‘Ali Shah Akhtar. Of his works, the best worth reading are perhaps his Husn-i Akhtar, a poetic description of his exile, and the Letters which he wrote from Calcutta to his favourite wife in Lucknow. The British Museum possesses a valuable MS. of his unpublished poems.

146. Musaffar ‘Ali Khan Asir (1800–81) was another of Vajid ‘Ali’s courtiers. Apart from articles on grammar and prosody he wrote a complete work on prosody, several poetic romances and six other volumes of poetry. He had a considerable number of pupils, of whom the best known were Amir Ahmad Minai and Ahmad ‘Ali Shauq (Nos. 178 and 238).

147. Arshad ‘Ali Khan Qalaq (flor. 1850) is regarded by some as one of the greatest writers of romances (masnavis). This opinion is based upon his Tilmis-i Ullat, which is very popular, but has little merit beyond that of a clever use of words. He wrote also a well-known lyric on the Qaisar Bag in Lucknow and some eleglogms of his master, Vajid ‘Ali.

148. Mahdi ‘Ali Khan Zakir (d. 1866) spent his life in wandering from one court to another. He wrote a book on rhyme and prosody entitled Yad Gir (1848), and was the author of a short history of the Panjab (1850). The year of his death was probably 1866, not 1864 as sometimes stated. His poetic works, published in Lucknow, have not much value.

149. ‘Ali Khan Dara Khwaja wrote moral and didactic poems in a good colloquial style with rather fanciful conceits. Along with Barq (No. 139) he accompanied Vajid ‘Ali into exile.

150. Agha Hasan Ammat (1815–58) was another of the second-rate poets of Lucknow. He wrote a number of elegies in honour of Hasan and Hussain, two collections of lyrics, and a very popular play called Indar Sabba. Its special importance lies in the fact of its being the first drama in Urdu.

151. Muhammad Sadiq Khan Akhtar (d. 1858) wrote in Persian at the court of Vajid ‘Ali Shah and left one volume of Urdu lyrics.

Anis and Dabir. 152. Babar ‘Ali Anis (1802–74) and No. 153, Salamat ‘Ali Dabir (1803–75) are the two most famous elegy writers in Urdu. Elegiac epic poetry, the highest form of Urdu verse, reaches its culminating point in them. They are related to each other in the literary sphere as Mir and Sauda had been a century before.

Anis was the greater and more natural poet of the two. The considered literary judgment of to-day would probably say that he and Qalib and Mir are the three greatest poets in the language. Poetry seems to be hereditary in his family. His great-grandfather Zahir, his grandfather Mir Hasan, his father Khaliqu, were all poets, and the gift has been given also to his son Naif, his brother Mumin, his grandson Jalil, and his great-grandson Arif. He himself is the greatest of all, his grandfather comes next, and his brother Mumin third. He employed an enormous number of words, but preferred a simple, easy and flowing style. His family is famous for the use of pure and idiomatic Urdu. He had a wonderful power of description. This is seen best when he depicts human feelings, especially pathos and bravery, or scenes of nature and fighting. He writes as if he had been present himself on the occasions which he describes and as if the people had spoken the very words which he has put down. His works have been published in four volumes containing more than a hundred elegies with well over 100,000 lines. A good idea of his writing may be obtained from Vagiat-i Karbalai, a volume of selections so
connected as to make a single story. It contains between
5,000 and 6,000 lines.

Dabir showed more scholarship in his poetry than Anis,
and in power of imagination was his superior; but his
style was sometimes laboured, and he tended to use
unsuitable or great swelling words which lack the vivid-
ness of an eyewitness. He wrote approximately half as
much as Anis; like Anis he confined himself to elegies.
His works have been published in two large volumes. He
too had a very extensive vocabulary; his ideas were some-
times fanciful and clever rather than impressive, and his
pathos was much less true to life than the real sorrow
depicted in the verses of Anis.

154. Mir Muhammad Nava' Muni (d. 1875) was the
brother of the famous Anis, and son of the elegy writer
Khaliq. Some have maintained that he was as good a poet
as his brother. He had a great command over language
which he showed in his elegies. At first he wrote ordinary
lyrics, but latterly confined himself to elegies, by which
alone he is known. He was a very religious man, and apart
from his frequent appearances to read elegies, he was little
seen. His powers of recitation were far-famed. His works
are published in two volumes of considerable size. His
brother's death in 1874 was a severe blow to him, and he
himself died very suddenly in the following year. Being
childless he had adopted his sister's son.

155. Nava' Mirza Shauq (d. 1871) was a pupil of Atish,
famed for his magnavis or romantic love stories, four in
number—Bahar i Ishq, Zahr i Ishq, Laghat i Ishq, and
Faroh i Ishq. They enjoyed considerable popularity in
Lucknow and the author was regarded as one of the best
magnavi writers in the language, but if the truth be told
their chief merits are idiomatic use of good Urdu and an
excellent choice of rhymes. They are valueless as stories,
and the conversations are stilted. His Laghat i Ishq is
not unlike Mir Hasan's Sihr ul Bayan. His Bahar i Ishq
is founded upon Agar's Khwab o Khayal and shows the
influence of that poem in both language and style, the
similarity amounting sometimes to actual plagiarism.

156. Sayyid Mirza Ta'ashshuq (d. 1891) brother of

UruPoetry in Lucknow

Husain Mirza 'Ishq, and son of Mir Uns, was noted for his
elegies. His lyrics were poor, but after writing a few he took
to elegies and surpassed all others of his time in the pathos
which he infused into them. His words were well chosen
and his ideas striking. His published works comprise two
volumes of elegies and forty pages of love lyrics, 54 in
number.

157. Husain Mirza 'Ishq (d. before 1890), elder brother
of the foregoing was, like him, an elegy writer of consid-
erable ability, but not so popular. His elegies were published
in two volumes.

158. Khurshid Ali Nafis (1819-1901) was the son of
Anis and nephew of Muni, and followed the tradition which
they had laid down. He wrote a great deal, but only one
small volume has been published. Even in advanced age he
used to hold enthralled the audiences which went to hear
him recite.

159. Mustafa Mirza Rashid (1845-1917), generally
called Piyare Sahib, was the son-in-law of Anis and nephew
of Ta'ashshuq and 'Ishq. He followed his uncle's rather
than his more talented father-in-law. Unlike most elegy
writers he wrote many love lyrics; they have no merit
beyond that of elegance. His elegies are much better.
He is said to write in the 'Spring Style,' i.e. he brings into
his elegies descriptions of Spring.

160. Ali Muhammad Arif (1861-1916), great-grand-
son of Anis, first wrote lyrics, but became afterwards a
well-known elegy writer. He was brought up by his grand-
father, Nafis, whom he greatly resembled in character and
poetic style.