Abdul Halim Sharar:
Guzâštâ Lakhnâû (c. 1920)

The pedigree of the modern prose literatures of South Asia tends to be derived from the remarkably productive output of a quite small number of writers active around the turn of the century. The prolific Urdu journalist, chronicler and novelist Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926) was just such a writer: and his hundred-odd books, plus countless essays and articles, continue to assure his respectful mention in all literary histories (UL, pp. 78–9).

This passage is made up of extracts from a chapter of the work for which Sharar is best remembered, a composite memoir of the former glories of Lucknow as capital of the last major Muslim kingdom in North India. After the British annexation of Avadh in 1856, the last Muslim ruler was exiled on generous terms to the Matiya Burj estate outside Calcutta. It was there that Sharar grew up, before returning to spend most of his working life as a writer in his natal city of Lucknow, alternating with somewhat stormily terminated periods of service in the premier surviving Muslim princely state of Hyderabad.

Sharar’s evocations of Lucknow’s glittering past were first published from 1913 onwards in his one-man journal Dil-gudâz ‘The Melter of Hearts’, and were then issued as a whole under the characteristically long-winded title of Hindustân men maṣrîqî tanaddun kâ âxîrî namûnâ ‘The Last Example of Eastern Civilization in Hindustan’, for which modern editions prefer the briefer Guzâštâ Lakhnâû ‘The Lucknow of Old’.

Sharar’s extremely orotund style is characteristically Lakhnavi in its inclusion of huge numbers of Arabo-Persian loans, especially in its fondness for the inclusion of a great many Persian izafat and copular phrases.

The first two paragraphs illustrate the great pride still taken in their traditions of elaborate formal courtesy by all who can claim association with the former Muslim ruling class of Lucknow. In the original, Sharar then rambles on at length on similar themes, pausing to touch adversely on the ‘naî paidâ kî huî hindi zabân’ for its failure to reproduce the subtle usages of Lucknow Urdu, here illustrated in the third paragraph by the carefully gradated formulae for asking after people’s health. The famously deferential courtesy of Lucknow — now equally famous through its repeated caricature by the comic stars of Hindi films — is more broadly characterized in the fourth paragraph, before Sharar is finally moved to an ageing man’s gloomy reflections on the later proletarianization of the aristocratic traditions of his beloved native city.


دنیا کی تاریخ حساب نہیں ہے، اس کی سادت کی خاکی زمین کے نظارے کرنے کی ضرورت پہلے جس کی تھوڑے انسان دنیا کے انگریزی اور انسان کو جانی چاہتا ہے اور انسان میں انسانی روح کو جانی چاہتا ہے۔ اس کے ساتے انسان کی تعلیم ترجمہ کہ جب کہ میں انسان ہوں تو میں انسان کی تعلیم کی نظر میں لیا جاتا ہے۔

سننے سکتے ہیں ان کی حفاظت کا کام نہایت ہے۔

بہت کا ہے کہ اس کا ہمہ ہمارے وقت میں ہونے چاہتا ہے کہ انسانوں کی کسی سہولت گرفتاری کے نظم کے تحقیق میں مدد ہے۔

اور اس کی تربیت کا انہی سے ہے، اس کی بہتر بنانے کی تعلیم اور اس کے سیاست سے متعلق وہی کہ جب انسانوں کی کسی سہولت گرفتاری کے تحقیق میں مدد ہے۔

مزج کی کھیڈیاں، برفینوں کی پندرہ، جب کہ برفینوں کی پندرہ، جب کہ مزاج کے ساتھ مزاج کا ازتمام ہے۔

برنگری اور میں کوئی چیز بہتر نہیں کہ مہارکے کے ساتھ میں جو اچھی مفہوم کے کونسے تحقیق میں مدد ہے۔

مزج کی کھیڈیاں ہے، اور مزاج کا ازتمام ہے۔

غریبزرگ کے لئے، ایک کمانوں کے لئے میں مذہب کا ایک مفتی، میں تہجی کے ایک مفتی، میں مذہب کا ایک مفتی، میں مذہب کا ایک مفتی۔

خود بھگانے سے، ایک انسان کے لئے مذہب کا ایک مفتی، میں مذہب کا ایک مفتی، میں مذہب کا ایک مفتی۔

کے اندازے سے کے اندازے سے کے اندازے سے کے اندازے سے کے اندازے سے کے اندازے سے کے اندازے سے
1 tahanib: ‘culture’, an A loan of verbal form II (721), with the corresponding adj. muazzab. P šāstagi f. ‘good manners, refinement’ and the corresponding adj. šāstā ‘refined, civilized’ express the central ideal of the code of politeness so assiduously cultivated in Lucknow, and hence occur frequently below. The linking of near-synonyms in P copular phrases (842), as in tahanib o šāstagi, is a favourite device of high-flown U styles, and is frequently employed in this passage, often to add more to the sonority of the language than to its meaning.

1 zabān: here in its basic sense of ‘tongue’.

2-3 agar . . . zarūrat pes bhi āe: ‘if it (actually) does prove necessary’. Cf. 4 agar girān guzreñ bhi for this sense of bhi in conditional clauses.

4 P girān: lit. ‘heavy’, i.e. ‘unpleasant, hurtful’. Lightness of touch is the essence of Lucknow courtesy.

5 is bārā-e xās: ‘in this particular respect’. P bārā is more familiar in U in the common ppn. ke bāre mēn lit. ‘in respect of’.

7 ahl-e zabān-e lākhnaś: an extended izafat phrase (841).

7 angrezī asar se mu‘arrā kar-ke: ‘without having regard to British influence’, i.e. as mentioned in 6 maujūdā ta‘lim o tahanib.

7 biz-zār: an A prep. phrase (742).

7 šāstagi o ūstagi-e zabān: combining a copula with an izafat. P ūstagi f. ‘polish’ and the adj. ūstā ‘polished’ are natural pairs for the key šāstagi and šāstā. Yet a further extension with P rūfā ‘refined’ occurs below in 23 šāstā aur ūstā o rūfā.

8 lohā mānnā: lit. ‘to acknowledge the iron (sword)’, i.e. ‘to bow before the superiority of’. The ext. ptc. māne hue hain as usual implies a state, thus emphasizing the established authority more than logān ne . . . lohā mānnā hai.

10 jis qadar . . . hai: the grudging tone has already appeared in 6 ek had tak.

12 cunān cunān: a compound of two P pronominal adj., corresponding to HU vaisā and aisā, used in U as a f. ‘high-flown talk, palaver’, vs. 11 sāf sāf bāteñ ‘simple straight talk’.

12 dar asl: a P prep. phrase (843).

12 ye ‘uzr bad-ṭar az gunāh hai: ‘this is a case of the excuse being worse than the sin’, incorporating a P tag based on the P comparative construction (832).

14 mizāj-e ālī/mubārak/aqdas/mugaddas/mu‘allā: lit. ‘(how is your) lofty/blessed/most revered/revered/exalted health’? This is a splendid illustration of the resources of a vocabulary formerly quarried for the expression of elaborate courtesies, now reduced to mizāj-e šarif and its few current synonyms. aqdas is an elative form (735) from the same root as mugaddas.

16 šuraṭa-e lākhnāś: ‘the polite classes of Lucknow’, whose elaborate courtesy is the subject of the following paragraph. The concept of the šarif, p. šuraṭa, is as fundamental to the values of traditional Indo-Muslim society as that of the ‘gentleman’ to its British counterpart.

19 munāsib darje tak: ‘to a suitable degree’. The qualification is very characteristic of the Lucknow code, like the following 21 šafqat o muḥabbāt ‘kindness and affection’.

22 mazkūr-e bāla: ‘aforementioned’, consisting of A mazkūr(a) and P bāla ‘above’. This occasional use of the flexible izafat to indicate the qualification of an adj. by an adv. is also illustrated by the common antonym mundaṛaṭa-e zail ‘below-mentioned’.

22 zamār: ‘pronouns’, referring to a previous discussion of tū tum āp and their social implications. Besides noting the particularly careful use of āp in Lucknow U, Sharar also mentions the general use of tum in U by Englishmen, Arabs and Persians, whose languages lack the additional resource of an āp-form for the nice expression of courtesy.

25 zī ‘ilm: ‘educated, learned’. A zī ‘possessor of’ is occasionally used in this way in U, as a pref.: it also occurs in the names of the last two months of the Hijri year, zī qa’dà and zil-hijjā. It is originally the obl. of zī, the first element in zuftīqār ‘possessor of the vertebrae’, the name of a sword given to Ali, and part of the given name of Zulfīqar Ali Bhutto.

25 magar afsos: ‘but alas!’
berūnī log: the collapse of the old order in Lucknow which followed the annexation of the kingdom of Avadh in 1856 naturally led to an influx of ‘outsiders’ from the surrounding areas, often more vigorous than the displaced former ruling class.

qānūnī āzādī: ‘legal freedom’. The phrase loosely indicates the theoretical equality granted to Indians of all religious communities and classes under British rule.

juhalā o ‘avām: ‘the ignorant and common people’, as opposed to the šurafā. Here paired with the derogatory juhalā, the term ‘avām has since acquired the positive sense of ‘the people, the masses’, as in 18 and 22 below.

adabi xūbiyān: ‘beautiful forms of courtesy’. The A noun adab means ‘courtesy, manners’, as well as ‘literature’: cf. the use of the broken p. ādāb as a polite greeting in U.

cand roz ba’d: lit. ‘a few days later’, i.e. ‘in a short while’.