

A CRITICAL SURVEY OF THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE URDU NOVEL
AND SHORT STORY

BY
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(Begum Ikramullah)

TO
MY FATHER



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FOREWORD

FOR more reasons than one I gladly avail myself of the opportunity offered me, of according a warm welcome to this volume. The English reader of it who has some acquaintance with the work of modern Indian writers through translations of the works of Rabindra Nath Tagore, of the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and of the poems of Muhammad Iqbal, will find himself breaking new ground; for little has been written hitherto in English of the work of the Urdu novelists.

Of the book itself I need only say that he will find it delightful reading and that, as he reads, he will marvel at the ease and intimacy with which the author moves in two different worlds of thought—those of the East and the West. What, in the absence of this brief note of introduction, might escape him is the remarkable fact that the book is not the production of an elderly college don, but of a woman of comparatively tender years who is a member of that community in India which was admittedly slow in exchanging the education provided at the indigenous maktabas and madressahs, for that of the colleges and universities modelled on the educational institutions of the West. And as a former Chancellor of the Calcutta University, it gives me sincere pleasure to be able to congratulate her on being the first Muslim to graduate from that university with Honours in English literature, and the first Muslim lady from any country to have been awarded the degree of Ph.D. of the London University.

It is, perhaps, permissible for me to add in a note introducing the author to the English public, that I have more personal grounds for satisfaction at her success, for Shāista Akhtar Bānu Suhrawardy is the daughter of my old friend, Alhaj

Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Hassan Suhrawardy, O.B.E., a former Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University and a member of a family distinguished for its cultural attainments, whose own versatile gifts have enabled him to play for many years past a prominent part in the public life of his country. It is, indeed, of interest to note that the author of this volume is the granddaughter on her father's side of one—Bahr-ul-Uloom Maulana Obaidullah el Obaidy Suhrawardy—who was a pioneer of Anglo-Islamic studies and of female education in Bengal; and on her mother's side, of a distinguished public citizen of Dacca, Nawab Syed Muhammad; and, further, a near relation of two men of recognized cultural attainments, the late Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy and Sir Zahhadur Rahim Zahid Suhrawardy, both members of the Bengal Legislature during the term of my Governorship of the Presidency, and the latter for ten years a Judge of the High Court of Calcutta.

It will be seen, therefore, that Shāista Akhtar Bānu Suhrawardy carries forward a torch already lit and destined in her hands, if we may judge by the present volume, to blaze with increasing lustre in the days to come.

ZETLAND.

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INTRODUCTION

THE advisability of prefacing a publication with a short account of its author and his circumstances is sometimes suggested on the ground that it would establish a certain bond of understanding between the reader and him. The suggestion has been assailed on the ground that a book should establish understanding by its own merits, and the immediate approach might save the reader from having to correct an impression given by the third person in the biographical sketch. A knowledge of the history of the novel is not likely to produce a novelist, nor need it be a part of his equipment; neither is it nor acquaintance with the novelist's biography necessary to the reader's enjoyment of his work. But to a student of literature, of social movements, and of course the critic, a knowledge of a work's antecedents and contemporaries is at once interesting and necessary, and the volume before us meets a clamant need. The risk from it to a budding novelist of becoming self-conscious may be taken as negligible!

The talented author of this volume refrained from the unnecessary task of prefixing to it a history of story-writing in general, and of novel-writing in Britain in particular, and of deciding as to the paternity of the latter between Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, Sir Walter Scott's putative "Father of the English Novel", but references to these and other English writers of stories have been made as contacts in matter and manner have been established.

In his recent essay, "The Bridge of Ideas," contributed to the compilation *Binding the Atlantic*, Mr. Frank Swinnerton writes: "It would not be true to say that the English invented the novel; but it might be argued that they gave early

lessons in writing it to all other nations in the modern world." India has played the part of a sedentary disciple. There is not much from the epistolary style of Richardson's *Pamela*, through the historical of Scott, the didactic of moralists believing the world too good to ban if too bad to bless, the socially reforming of Kingsley and Reade, to the psychological of Henry James that has not been imitated or has not exercised an influence. But models have been taken from the Continent of Europe too; the Russian short story is occasionally found in translation, perhaps because of a certain measure of affinity, but though India's spirit is imbued with "the sincere asceticism of the sea" it is not to the same extent with the grimness of the reality in the shadow. She has some affinity too with the humorous earnestness characteristic of Britain at work and play, while her College-bred son has much with the intellectual alertness and mental outlook of Bernard Shaw in his plays.

Some two-score years ago America found in the novel new scope for expression. She prides herself on being the melting-pot for elements from many nations. The new emergent is faced with new situations and complexities, and wider spread horizons. Has India passed beyond the range of her models? It must be recognized that social conditions restrict the scope of her novelists, and to a considerable extent of her short story writers. The lines of demarcation between classes, groups and peoples, are still pretty rigid, and the veil is drawn before the intimate existence of a very large section of the population. Prem Chand will probably be generally accepted as having given the strongest directional lead towards independence in the short story. His gentle narratives describing conditions of social order and disorder do much to reveal the heart of the people and the heartlessness in custom and petty authority. His manner is not a hasty improvisation at the instance of a burning sense of man's injustice to man, an impatient impulse to escape from under the encom-

passing slough of ancient circumstance. It is the genuine art which Oscar Wilde maintained develops, not through the pressure of the external world on the artist, but according to impulses of its own. "The style is the man." Prem Chand's inner urge led him to depict the life of people ordinarily met with off the highway, and his sympathy to sketch in, with a touch like Dickens, a human trait, a sorrow or a sacrifice.

None will dissent from the author's conclusion that the novel and short story have made good in India. They have proved themselves viable and hardy, and their struggle for existence was not an easy one. Though the story has a universally popular appeal, and the story-teller is an historical and welcome figure in eastern lands, the novel met at once, on its appearance, with the opposition that stirred involuntarily or conscientiously in an unusually serious-minded public to the reading of fiction, on the ground that it deals with a fanciful world—and who can command fancies? Other obstacles are mentioned by the author, but this form of literature has survived for the tyro and the dilettante to find a market for their wits, the psychologist a clinic, the reformer a public to woo and win, and the women of India a platform whereon to represent, from the anonymity of the purdah if they still so desire, the ills of a one-sided social order.

A history of the Urdu novel and short story was much needed, and the author has placed under a deep debt of gratitude not only the reader of Urdu fiction, but the student of general literature. Her wide range of research, her generous résumés of stories of special note, and her soundness of judgment will make this a useful compendium for many years to come.

A. H. HARLEY.