

CHAPTER XII

BEGINNINGS OF THE SHORT-STORY IN
URDU LITERATURE WITH THE SKETCHES
IN "AVADH PANC"

The foundations of the Urdu short-story were laid in the pages of "Avadh Panc" (1877). The humorous character sketches of Munshī Sajjād Husain himself and those of the other contributors of "Avadh Panc" were the precursors of the short-story. The descriptions of seasons and of seasonal festivities such as "Basant" and "Holi", and of feasts and fairs such as "Muḥarram", "Īd" and "Shab i Barāt", that were written in "Avadh Panc" were written in such a style as to constitute character sketches. They vividly bring before the eye the rush and bustle, the comings and goings of the people, the altercations of the vendors, the happy chatter of the holiday-makers, and the gaily bedecked carriages of the "Navābs" and the "Navābzādās". The tone of amused irony gives the descriptions an added piquancy.

Not only feasts and fairs but seasonal changes were describe in a manner which made them extremely interesting reading. They contained the elements that go to the making of short-stories and novels. Munshī Sajjād Husain himself used to write a column regularly upon the change of weather which was a fund of anecdotes.

"Avadh Panc's" attitude was extremely orthodox and it was scathing in its ridicule of the new-fangled ways. The skits in that connection have all the features of the short-story in the making. Munshī Sajjād Husain's skit on women attending conferences and meetings called 'Ande Bacche vālī Cīl Cīlhār', Munshī Juālā Parshād Barq's ridicule of women aspiring to do men's jobs entitled 'Do gūna ranj o 'azāb ast

jān i lady rā * Balā e furqat i purdāh o ṣuḥbat i purdāh', and his other sketch 'Khizr ko dekh ke kahtā hai sabza e khat i yār * Bhalā jo cāho cale āo apnī rāh lye' which contains the dialogue between Kālī Bīvī and Gorī Bīvī, and 'Muhazzab Gentleman', are in the nature of short-stories.

In sketches such as Mirzā Macchū Beg Sitam Zārīf's 'Vaḡenā Rabbānā 'Azāb an Nār', 'Income-tax aur Myān Bīvī', and 'Bāt kā Batanggar', the features of the short-story can even more clearly be discerned. There is definite characterization in these, though no plot. The character of each type of wife, the quandary of the unfortunate husbands, the state of tension in the household, the interference of maid-servants and the hollow sympathies of the neighbours, all are portrayed in the 'Vaḡenā Rabbānā 'Azāb an Nār'. Nothing need be said of the humour in it which by itself would make it a gem of literature.

'Bāt kā Batanggar' approximates still closer to what we now regard as a short-story. It can even be said to have a plot. The whole trouble rises out of a wife's misunderstanding of the word "canda" which she takes to be the name of some woman. The husband leads her on to believe that it is so, and only when the situation appears to be getting very serious does he explain that by "canda" is meant subscription and not a woman.

The dialogue in this is perfectly delicious :

بیوی:—م کو سب گھاتیں معلوم ہیں۔ یہ آئے دن کمیٹی جانا خالی
از علت نہیں۔ جب خدمتگار سے پوچھو، تمہارے سرکار
کہاں گئے ہیں، معلوم ہوا کمیٹی گئے ہیں۔ اب جو
پوچھو اس میں ہوتا کیا ہے، تو نمکحرام بتاتا ہی نہیں، اور
مزا یہ جب کمیٹی ہوئی بی چندہ کے بھی کچھ نہ کچھ۔
نذر کرنا پڑا۔ یہ بندھی بات ہے کہ جب کبھی تم مردار

کمیٹی میں گئے، دوسرے دوسرے ادبدا کے بی چندہ کے نام دو سو چار سو حساب میں نکلیں گے۔ دیوان سے پوچھتی ہوں، ارے کبخت یہ کیا چیز ہے، وہ بتاتا ہی نہیں، اور میں کبخت اس راز سے کیوں کر آگاہ ہونے لگی۔ وہ تو اس دن چھوٹے بھیہا آئے، تو مجھے یاد آگیا اور میں پوچھ بیٹھی کہ کمیٹی کون چیز ہے۔ وہ تو جانو انگریزی، فارسی، زرذری، فروری سب میں دست و قلم ہے، چہ۔ مہینے کامل اسی انگریزی کی گٹپٹ اسکول میں سیکھی ہے۔ وہ سمجھ کر چپ ہو رہا۔ لا کہہ۔ پوچھتی ہوں، اب بتاتا ہی نہیں، جب بہت پوچھا تو کہا کمیٹی کو کہتے ہیں۔ بس میں سمجھ گئی، دو چار شہدے، لچے، جمع ہوتے ہوں گے، رنڈ منڈیاں آتی ہوں گی، ان میں ہی شفتل مردار چندہ بھی ہوگی۔

Navāb Sayyid Muḥammad Āzād's 'Naī Raushnī kī Dictionary' and 'Naī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām' and 'Purānī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām' ridicule the newly-made gentlemen and the new-fangled ways in a unique and original way. 'Naī Raushnī kī Dictionary' explains the meanings of such words as have come into the vocabulary in the wake of the Westernisation of life, such as "ayah", "papa", "bearer", "chotā hāzrī", etc. These explanations are masterpieces of satire and at the same time excellent character sketches, as for example, "ayah" is described as :

مغربی نسوانی آزادی، شوخی اور چستی کی بگڑی ہوئی تصویر، باوجود بدرنگ ہونے کے ہزاروں عمدہ رنگ صاحبان

عالیشان کی کوٹھی میں استعمال پذیر۔ مہم صاحبان کی خدمت کا جاندار آلہ، کوٹھی کی تمام آرائش کی چیزوں کے اعلان کا بہت بڑا نقارہ، بابا لوگ کے سونے کا مضبوط و محفوظ چرمی گھوارہ !

The 'Purānī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām' and 'Naī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām' are a subtle ridicule of the "W.O.G." (a term of contempt for the Westernised Oriental Gentleman used by Anglo-Indians). The position is put from their point of view, but in such a manner as to make its absurdity obvious. Yet unlike similar satires it tries to do its victims justice inasmuch as it puts the case from their side and shows how reasonable and laudable appear the things that seem so ridiculous to others.

Each of these letters is to all intents and purposes a short-story. It contains a special situation and describes the reactions of the various characters to it. The entire workings of the mind of the hero, who is the writer of the letters, is revealed. As for instance, from one of the letters from the series entitled 'Naī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām' the following story can be gleaned. Sa'īd Azālī is a Westernised Indian, a type very common in the late nineties, that is to say, he has been, to quote a slang expression, "completely bowled over" by the Western mode of life, and finds every custom and every idea of his own country ridiculous. Despite the fact that all his values have changed he has very genuine affection left for his wife, 'Iffat Begam. He is writing this letter to her to try and get her to see his point of view so that when he returns from England she will be a suitable companion for him. Nothing is said about what the wife's reactions were to this suggestion, but her character is conveyed so admirably that it is not difficult to guess what they must have been. Consequently, Sa'īd Azālī's letter to 'Iffat Begam can be said to

contain the rudiments of a plot which, for the last forty years, has been the most popular and the most used, namely, the tragedy that follows when boys after their return from Europe cannot take up the thread of life where they left it.

The sketches of "*Avadh Panc*" have the same place in the development of the Urdu novel and short-story as the Roger de Coverley sketches in the "Spectator" and the "Tatler" have in the development of the English novel. Navāb Sayyid Muḥammad's series of sketches, '*Naī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām*' and '*Purānī Raushnī ke Nāme Payām*' are very like the Roger de Coverley sketches as in these also the same hero appears in different situations.

"*Avadh Panc*" can be regarded as having laid the foundation not only of literary journalism in Urdu but of its necessary appendage, the short-story, as well.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT-STORY
IN URDU FROM 1900 TO 1925

"*Avadh Panc*", it cannot be denied, laid the foundation of literary journalism as its character sketches prepared the ground for the writing of the short-story, and its scathing articles in connection with the poetry of *Hālī*, the authorship of '*Gulzār i Nasīm*', and the merits of Dāg, were the precursors of literary criticism. But the tone of "*Avadh Panc*" was too light and its attitude too frivolous and far too personal for it to be regarded as a serious literary organ. The style of writing of the contributors of "*Avadh Panc*" still savoured too much of the "*Navābī*" courts of Lucknow. The laughter was loud and long, the jokes full-blooded and vulgar, and the criticism highly offensive and of a personal nature.

Literary journalism having the dignity and the seriousness of tone and impersonality demanded by modern standards can be said to have started with the coming out of "*Makhzan*" under the editorship of Sir 'Abd ul Qādir in 1900. Short-stories have appeared in each language in the wake of the magazine and the same happened in the case of Urdu. The works of Sayyid Sajjād Ḥaidar Yildarim, *Khājā* Ḥasan Nizāmī, Sulṭān Ḥaidar Josh, 'Abd ul Majid *Khān* Sālik and Rāshid ul *Khairī*, were introduced to the public at first through the pages of "*Makhzan*".

"*Makhzan*" was soon followed by numerous other magazines, amongst which those with any literary merit were: "*Urdū e Mu'allā*", which came out under the editorship of Ḥasrat Mohānī, "*Tamaddun*", edited for a time by Rāshid ul *Khairī*, "*Nizām ul Mashāikh*", edited by Mullā Muḥammad Vāhidī, "*Kahkashān*", edited by Sayyid Imtyāz 'Alī Tāj,