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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 Haidarābād, 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 Gālīb'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 (*gāzal*) 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 *marṣiyas* (see pp. 2, 34, 35), on the tragic events at Karbalā are characteristic of Muḥammadan poetry, especially in Persia and India. They are essentially religious, indeed in the days before Zamīr and Khalīq, mentioned below, they were short devotional poems and little attention was paid to their literary quality. Zamīr changed that; and under Anīs and Dabīr the *marṣiya* became practically a form of epic, having however this limitation that it must always revolve round the death of Ḥasan, Ḥusain and the members of their family. Subject to this limitation, which is a very serious one, *marṣiyas* 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 Karbalā 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 Karbalā. Yet with all that, there is nothing so admirable in Urdu poetry as the *marṣiya*.

129. **Khalīq and Zamīr.** MİR MUSTAḤSAN KHALĪQ (1774–1804), one of the earliest elegiac writers in north India, was the son of the famous Mir Ḥasan, and father of the still more famous Anīs. He began writing poetry at an early age. His father, not having time to instruct him, committed him to the care of Muṣḥafī. He made great progress, and on the occasion of a gathering of poets in his native place, Faizābād, read one of his lyrics with such effect that Ātish, who had come specially from Lucknow to grace the meeting, would not recite his own poem, saying there was no need for him when Khalīq was there.

His contemporary,

130. MUZAFFAR ḤUSAIN ZAMĪR, 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 *Nāsikh*. *Khaliq* was simple and comparatively unlearned, but full of tenderness; *Zamir* 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 *Karbala* 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 *Dabir*, 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 *Zamir* who led the way to this wider field.

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

131. *KARĀMAT '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 *Muṣḥafī*, and later of *Shāh Naṣīr*, and had special facility in writing poems in difficult metres.

132. *DAYĀ SHAṆKAR KAUL NAṢĪM* (1811-43) was a *Kashmiri* paṇḍit 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 Hasan's Sihr ul Bayān*, and is generally awarded the second place among Urdu poetic romances. *Naṣīm* also translated *The Arabian Nights* into *Urdū*.

133 and 134. **Atish and Nasikh.** *Haidar 'Alī Ātish*

(d. 1846) and *Imām Bakhsh Nāsikh* (d. 1838). When *Lucknow* became the centre of Urdu poetry, these two important figures emerged to dominate literary circles till the death of *Nāsikh* 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, *Nāsikh* 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 *Nāsikh* 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. *Nāsikh*, like *Ātish*, almost confined himself to lyrics; he left three volumes of poetry; the first, called *Daftar i Pareshān*, 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 *Hadīṣ i Muṭaṣṣal*. He is characterised by vigorous and immoderate imagination, obscure language and turgid style.

Nāsikh 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. Nāsikh made strict rules and observed them. Before his time literary Urdu had been called rekhta and the name 'Urdū,' though found in Muṣḥafī and others was little used; now it became common. 'Rekhta' 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 Saudā, Jur'at and Muṣḥafī. Some of the pupils of Nāsikh and Ātish 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, nightingales, drinking and taverns; and finally they turned back again to many Hindi words which had unwisely been given up.

135. ĀGĀ HAJJŪ SHARF, a pupil of Ātish, exemplifies in an extreme form the movement mentioned above against Persian style. 'Abd us Salām and Ṣafir Bilgrāmī have pointed out that he rejected the whole vocabulary of the wineshop.

As Ātish and Nāsikh remind us of Mīr and Saudā, so Ṣabā and Vazīr are a still fainter copy of the great originals.

136. VAZĪR 'ALĪ ṢABĀ (1795-1854) was a pupil of Ātish, while (136a) Muḥammad Vazīr Vazīr (d. 1854) acknowledged Nāsikh as his master. Ṣabā left a large collection of lyrics called *Gunca e Arzū*, in good idiomatic Urdu, but very artificial in thought. Vazīr'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 Faṣāhat*. He was superior to Ṣabā in imagination and subject matter, but inferior in language and idiom.

137. MUḤAMMAD KHĀN RIND (1797-1857) was born in Faizābād, where he lived till he was grown up, when he went to Lucknow. His first volumes of poems, written while he was still in Faizābād, were destroyed by him shortly after he arrived in Lucknow, and under the influence of

Ātish he wrote another to which he gave the name *Guldasta 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. 'ALĪ AUSAṬ RASHK (1799-1867), a pupil of Nāsikh, 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 Karbalā. Two collections of his poems are extant, *Nazm i Mubārak* (1837) and *Nazm i Girāmī* (1846). A third, said to be the best of all, has been lost. In 1840 he compiled an Urdu dictionary called *Nafs ul Lugāt*, part of which has been published.

139. MUḤAMMAD RĪẒA BARQ (d. 1857) was born in Lucknow. He attached himself to the court of Vajid 'Alī Shāh, 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, Nāsikh. He followed his royal master into exile and wrote a rather uninspired account of his own loneliness.

140. HĀTIM 'ALĪ BEG MĪHR (1814-79) is perhaps better known as a correspondent of Gālib than as a poet, for his own prolific writings do not display much poetic power. His chief collection of poems is called *Almās i Darakhshān*. He wrote several poetic romances, one of which, *Shu'ā e Mīhr* (1858), won Gālib's admiration.

141. IMDĀD 'ALĪ BAHR (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 Vazīr and Rashk were Nāsikh's chief disciples. Rashk and he shared with their master a reputation for authoritative knowledge of Urdu. The Navāb of Rāmpūr, Kalb 'Alī Khān, 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 'ALĪ KHALĪL (flor. 1860) was a great friend and faithful follower of Ātish. He was a writer of lyrics.

143. ISMĀ'IL ḤUSAIN MUNĪR (1819-81) lived a wandering life and wrote many poems. He wrote some good odes, a romance called *Ma'arij ul Mazāmin*, and collections of poems which he called *Muntakhibāt i 'Ālam*, *Tanvīr ul Ash'ār* and *Nazm i Munīr*. He is typical of his time.

144. MAHDĪ ḤASAN KHĀN ĀBĀD (flor. 1850) wrote a great deal of verse. His best known lyrics are those in *Nigāristān i 'Ishq*. He also compiled an anthology called *Bahāristān i Sukhan*.

All the Navābs 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. VĀJID 'ALĪ SHĀH AKHTAR. Of his works, the best worth reading are perhaps his *Huzn 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. MUZAFFAR 'ALĪ KHĀN ASĪR (1800-81) was another of Vājid 'Alī'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 Amīr Aḥmad Mīnāi and Aḥmad 'Alī Shauq (Nos. 178 and 238).

147. ARSHAD 'ALĪ KHĀN QALĀQ (flor. 1850) is regarded by some as one of the greatest writers of romances (*maṣnavīs*). This opinion is based upon his *Tilism i Ultat*, 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 Qaiṣar Bāg in Lucknow and some eulogiums of his master, Vājid 'Alī.

148. MAHDĪ 'ALĪ KHĀN ZAKĪ (d. 1866) spent his life in wandering from one court to another. He wrote a book on rhyme and prosody entitled *Yād 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. 'ALĪ KHĀN DARAKHSHĀN wrote moral and didactic poems in a good colloquial style with rather fanciful conceits. Along with Barq (No. 139) he accompanied Vājid 'Alī into exile.

150. ĀGĀ ḤASAN AMĀNAT (1815-58) was another of the second-rate poets of Lucknow. He wrote a number of elegies in honour of Ḥasan and Ḥusain, two collections of lyrics, and a very popular play called *Indar Sabhā*. Its special importance lies in the fact of its being the first drama in Urdu.

151. MUḤAMMAD ŠADIQ KHĀN AKHTAR (d. 1858) wrote in Persian at the court of Vājid 'Alī Shāh and left one volume of Urdu lyrics.

Anis and Dabir. 152. BABAR 'ALĪ ANĪS (1802-74) and No. 153, SALĀMAT 'ALĪ DABĪR (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 Mīr and Saudā 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 Gālib and Mīr are the three greatest poets in the language. Poetry seems to be hereditary in his family. His great-grandfather Zāhik, his grandfather Mīr Ḥasan, his father Khaliq, were all poets, and the gift has been given also to his son Nafis, his brother Mūnis, his grandson Jalīs, and his great-grandson 'Arif. He himself is the greatest of all, his grandfather comes next, and his brother Mūnis 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 *Vāqī'āt i Karbalā*, 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 Anīs, 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 vividness of an eyewitness. He wrote approximately half as much as Anīs; like Anīs he confined himself to elegies. His works have been published in two large volumes. He too had a very extensive vocabulary; his ideas were sometimes fanciful and clever rather than impressive, and his pathos was much less true to life than the real sorrow depicted in the verses of Anīs.

154. MĪR MUḤAMMAD NAVĀB MŪNIS (d. 1875) was the brother of the famous Anīs, and son of the elegy writer *Khalīq*. 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. NAVĀB MIRZĀ SHAUQ (d. 1871) was a pupil of Ātish, famed for his *maṣnavīs* or romantic love stories, four in number—*Bahār i 'Ishq*, *Zahr i 'Ishq*, *Lazzat i 'Ishq*, and *Fareb i 'Ishq*. They enjoyed considerable popularity in Lucknow and the author was regarded as one of the best *maṣnavī* 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 *Lazzat i 'Ishq* is not unlike Mīr Ḥasan's *Sīhr ul Bayān*. His *Bahār i 'Ishq* is founded upon Aṣar's *Khvāb o Khayāl* and shows the influence of that poem in both language and style, the similarity amounting sometimes to actual plagiarism.

156. SAYYID MIRZĀ TA'ASHSHUQ (d. 1891) brother of

Husain Mirzā 'Ishq, and son of Mīr 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, 55 in number.

157. HUSAIN MIRZĀ 'ISHQ (d. before 1890), elder brother of the foregoing was, like him, an elegy writer of considerable ability, but not so popular. His elegies were published in two volumes.

158. KHURSHĪD 'ALĪ NAFĪS (1819–1901) was the son of Anīs and nephew of Mūnis, 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. MUṢṬAFĀ MIRZĀ RASHĪD (1845–1917), generally called Piyāre Sāhib, was the son-in-law of Anīs and nephew of Ta'ashshuq and 'Ishq. He followed his uncles 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. 'ALĪ MUḤAMMAD 'ARIF (1861–1916), great-grandson of Anīs, first wrote lyrics, but became afterwards a well-known elegy writer. He was brought up by his grandfather, Nafīs, whom he greatly resembled in character and poetic style.