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**Editor
Dr. Parvez Aslam**

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Editor

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Modernism in Hameed Suharwardy's *Afsana Nigari* Urdu Short story Writing

Abdul Anees Abdul Rasheed

The Modernism in Urdu *Afsana* (Short Story) covers roughly a time span of two decades from 1960 to 1980. The modern Urdu *Afsana* is said to be a kind of reaction against the *Taraqqi Pasand Afsana*. In the *Taraqqi Pasand Afsana*, 'society' was the center, whereas the individual was the secondary element. The *Afsana Nigars* (Short Story Writers) under the influence of *Taraqqi Pasand Tahreek* (Progressive Movement) thought that the individual's problems could only be solved by means of social and economical reformation. *The Taraqqi Pasand Afsana* has mainly focused on the individual's external life; the connection between the individual and society though it has not completely discarded the inner world of the characters. Gazanfar Suharwardy observes:

'Taraqqi Pasand Afsana Nigaron k nazdik Fard se zyada Ahmiyat Maaashre ki thi. Aur wo Fard k Masayal ko Muashrati aur Maashi Inquilab ke zariye hal karne me koshaan raha karte the. Taraqqi Pasand Afsaano ke kirdaar Aam Zindagi se maaquz the. Taraqqi Pasand Afsana Nigar Fard ki Qaareji Zindagi ko Amiyat dete rahe agarche k Daqili zindagi par bhi Sarf-e-Nazar zaroor kiya tha.' (Gazanfar Iqbal. 2006: 17)

(Taraqqi Pasand Afsana Nigars intended to focus on society rather than individual. They tried to solve the individual's problems only by means of social and economical reformation/revolution. The characters of the Taraqqi Pasand Afsanas were common men and women taken from the existing society. Taraqqi Pasand Afsana Nigars in their afsanas, always focused on the external lives of the characters, though the internal lives of the characters had not completely been neglected.)

The modern *afsanā* paved a new way of thinking to the Urdu *Afsana Nigars* in Urdu literature. Characteristically, the modern *afsanā* has exhibited the creative imagination of the writer rather than the presentation of the real incidents. The modern *afsanā* started focusing on the individual and not society. Gazanfar Suharwardy further argues:

'Jadeed Afsanon me Waqiyat k bajaye Taquili Haqeeqat ne jagha li aur Samaj ki jagha Fard ko ahmiyat di gai. Fard ki zaat, zaat ka karb aur karb ka izhaar jadeed afsane ki pahchaan ban gaye.' (Gazanfar Iqbal. 2006: 18)

(In the modern *afsanā*, the presentation of the creative imagination of the writer seems to have replaced the record of the real incidents; an individual has become the main focus instead of society. The modern *afsanā* has been marked by the presentation of individuality; agonies of an individual and the representation of the individual's pains and sufferings.)

Dr. Hameed Suharwardy is one of the Modern Urdu *Afsana Nigars* (Short-story Writers). His *afsanās* (short-stories) have already crossed the borders and got him the international recognition. Being a modern short story writer, his *afsanās* have always been overloaded with number of symbols, abstraction, allegories and metaphors. Many times, without scratching the surface, readers can't get what the writer wants to convey. His *afsanās* (short-stories) always need re-reading, as just a single reading can't lead the readers towards the theme(s). One of the peculiarities of Dr. Hameed Suharwardy's *afsanā* is that the readers can't predict at which point the story begins and where it may take to the readers. Aref Qurshid, in his essay "*Who Ek Afsana Taraaz*" observes-

"Unke afsane me baat kahin se bhi shuru hoti hai aur kahin bhi qatm ho jaati hai."

(In his afsana, the narration begins from anywhere and ends at anywhere).

However, Aref Qurshid can't deny the concreteness of the narration within the *afsanas* of Suharwardy. He further admits:

'*Suharwardy ke Afsanon me baat, be maaini ya baghair kisi silsile ke nahi hoti*',
(*In his afsanas, the narration is neither meaningless nor incoherent*).

The modern *afसानa* usually deals with the presentation of the inner feelings of the characters, the situations the characters go through; and also the characters' reactions to the situations. That was why the writers preferred the innovative mode of narration. The modern Urdu *Afsana* is remarkably crowded by *Tajreed* (abstraction), *Isteaara* (metaphor) *Khud Kalaami* (Soliloquy), *Tamseel* (Allegory), *Ibhaam* (ambiguity) and so on. All these make the central idea or the story multilayered. The uniqueness of Suharwardy, as an Urdu *Afsana Nigar* lies in that he has paved his own way in terms of narration and the subject matter. In his *afसानas*, the readers can hardly witness the secret agents trapping the criminals; no *Jin* (a supernatural being) abruptly appears and bangs, "*Kya Hukm hai mere Aqua?*" (What am I supposed to do, my lord?). Besides, His creative imagination does not seem to be roaming only in the allies of *Laila, Shireen, or Juliet*. Rather, his *afसानa*, is either a kind of an outlet of his inner feelings or the reflection of his creative imagination.

On one hand, he narrates the story in such a way that the readers feel themselves to be accompanying the characters. On the other hand, he takes the readers now to *baazar* (Market), then suddenly to the *Jungles*, then to the *guphas* (Caves) and abruptly to *samander* (the sea). It results in that many times, the readers get confused, puzzled, embarrassed and even irritated. Readers can't understand where the story began, where it is now and where the story is taking them (readers). For the story-lovers, the *afसानas* of Suharwardy will be extremely brain-teasers. But the patient readers, who are capable of sustaining their concentration, can eventually get the central idea(s). Directly or indirectly, Hameed Suharwardy's *Afsana Nigari* (Urdu Short-story writing) seems to have been influenced by the *Afsana Nigars* (Urdu short-story writers) like Sadat Hasan Manto, Bedi, Quratul-ain Haider, Intezar Hussain and Jogendra Pal. Suharwardy has always used his *afसानa* as a device focusing on the various social, socio-economical and socio-political aspects of the society. And as an honest *Afsana Nigar*, he has always represented what he has seen and observed and it is too without any kind of prejudice. His *afसानas* candidly present everything as it really is. Hameed Suharwardy has adopted a particular style in his *afसानas*. He has always tried to give a touch of mystery to his stories. But it is not intentional. In an interview, he admits:

'Maine yeh sab shaoori taur par nahin kiya, bus koi qayaal, koi mauzoon zahen me aata chala gaya aur mai likhta chala gaya.'

(I have never done that consciously. I have always written whatever idea, subject come into view). It means that the *afसानa* of Hameed Suharwardy is just the unconscious out-let of his point of views. It is just a kind of bringing his ideas into being. His *afसानa* '*Mahshar*' (the Day of Judgment) has got allegorical significance. It is crowded by the number of symbols. By means of the symbols the writer has tried to focus on the dirty and hopeless political system, diplomatic, dual and cunning politicians and so on.

'Who kya mar chukka ? kaise mar gaya ?...bahot kuch dekh chuka hun...muh kholta huwa magarmuch, dahadta huwa sher, kampti huwi billi, bhonkta huwa kutta, ande dene wali murgi, mor ke aansu....' (Mahashar)

(*Has he died? How? Much has been witnessed: Crocodile with wide open jaws; fiercely roaring lion; frightened and shivering cat, barking dog; hen producing eggs; crying peacock.*)

The writer, by means of various symbols, has made a socio-political diagnosis. *Magarmuch* (Crocodile) and its open jaws symbolize the callous instincts of human being; *dahaadta huwa Sher* (furiously roaring lion) symbolizes the power that always threatens the common people; *Kampti huwi Billi* (frightened and shivering cat) symbolizes the confined, restricted and strictly monitored lives of the common people. It also shows how the common people have been treated like meek and submissive animals. *Ande dene wali Murgi* symbolizes the common man who is used as the well oiled machine doing bull work but has no share either in the production or the profit. But unlike the hens in George Orwell's *'The Animal Farm'* the hens in this *afsana* can't revolt and stop producing eggs. It also covers the weaker section of the society that mutely tolerates the physical and psychological exploitation. *Bhonkta huwa Kutta*, symbolizes how the political and administrative power keeps the common man continuously under threat. The term *'More ke Aansu'* needs to be explained. It is said that when peacock sees the clouds in the sky, it is filled with the romantic feelings and with ecstasy, he dances. But as soon as he sees his ugly feet, he is agonized and starts crying. In this sense, *'More ke Aansu'* has got allegorical meanings. It implies the irony of the human existence, and the expression of the agonies and the emotional vacuum of the innocent souls. By means of the appropriate symbols, the writer has candidly represented the hollowness of the modern society as well as its various tragic aspects.

His *afsana 'Samandar'* (the Sea) is also a candid representation of the modern society. The writer has realistically portrayed the heartbreaking scene of the communal riots. He has dealt with the panic, anxiety and loss of the human values caused by the Hindu-Muslim riots. This panic makes the emotionally agonized writer cry. He is emotionally collapsed to see the desolate and dreary streets which were always crowded by the innocent children and common people irrespective of their caste, creed and religion. The children, in the same streets used to sing the songs of love, togetherness and even their hectic activities and childish games were really source of everlasting pleasures. But the series of communal riots have left the streets and lanes mourning over the loss of humanity.

"Darwazon ko din ki roshni me paheli baar muqaffil huwe maine dekha hai."

(Samandar)

(For the first time, in day time, I have seen all the doors of the houses locked.)

The writer is frustrated to see the locked houses in day time. The riots have always created panic. The writer also shows how the communal violence transforms the colonies into *Qabrastaans* (graveyards). During the riots we can only witness the howling silence in the colonies. All the people are reluctantly enforced to be in their houses as the most familiar world across the thresholds, seems to be haunted by the beasts in the form of human beings. People dare not to open the doors and even to peep through the windows. And in such situations, all the human and social values must be only shedding tears somewhere far away from the riot haunted cities and deserted colonies.

In *'Khoe huwe Raston ki Shab'* (the Night of the Lost Ways) the writer has presented a lonely woman sitting on the old and fragile bench. The woman represents all the men and women in the modern world who are emotionally deserted. She is alone and seems to be eagerly waiting for someone. The fragility of the bench symbolizes the fragility and futility of human endeavor.

"Ek Aurat jiske chahre per sadiyon ka karb jhank raha tha aur jiski aankhon me weerani thi, qamosh baithi thi." (Khoe huwe Raston ki Shab)

(There was a woman whose face was reflecting the agonies of the previous Centuries; her eyes were desolate. She was sitting silent.)

By means of the lonely woman the writer has presented the sense of alienation of the modern man. The huge loss of the modern world that can not be compensated is the modern man's sense of alienation, the sense of emotional marginalization, the communication gap and the futility of human relationship. It has resulted into the pessimism, listlessness, hopelessness in the life of the modern man. The modern man has been emotionally devastated and psychologically marginalized. The woman represents the alienated modern man who is eagerly waiting for someone to talk to; to communicate his feeling, to share his happiness and sorrows. But it seems that nobody is anything of anybody though he/she is surrounded by innumerable faces. Each face seems to be strange. One Urdu poet, *Nida Fazli* has summed up the feeling of loneliness and sense of alienation in his couplets:

Har taraf har jagha beshumaar Aadmi
Phir bhi Tanhaiyon ka Shikar Aadmi

(Everywhere, at every place, there are innumerable men; however everybody seems to be haunted by the sense of loneliness.)

Though man seems to be surrounded by number of people, he feels himself isolated. It is because nobody is there to share either happiness or sadness.

"Aurat baar baar pahelu badal rahi hai. Jis raah se bus aane wali hai, wo us taraf dekh rahi hai. Yun lag raha hai k wo bus ka nahi, apne Aashique ya Shohar ka intezaar kar rahi hai." (Khoee huwe Raston ki Shab)

(The woman frequently is changing her position. She is eagerly looking at the direction from which the bus is supposed to come. It seems as if she is not waiting for the bus but either for her lover or husband.)

The frequent change in the position of the woman symbolizes the human psyche. It reveals the psychological and emotional restlessness of the modern man which is caused by the sense of loneliness and yearning for the companion. She seems to be waiting for the bus or she may be waiting for lover or husband. Her waiting allegorically symbolizes the modern man's immense desire to have at least someone to talk to, to love and to be loved. But nobody seems to be coming from any direction. It also represents the communication gap which needs to be bridged. The modern man who is emotionally and psychologically deserted wants that someone should come to him, talk to him though there may or may not be any point to be discussed. At least he may have a companion. But it is just like someone's following the mirage in the desert. The modern man is ironically behaving like the robot which has everything but is devoid of human emotions. Such robotic life has nothing to do with the human values. It is just like nobody living with everybody. Thus Hameed Suharwardy's *asfanas* focus on the various social aspects. His mode of narration is often confusing and brain-teasing, but he honestly represents what he observes.

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