13

Mirza Farhatullah Beg: Nazīr Ahmad kī kahānī (c. 1925)

Although Mirza Farhatullah Beg (1884–1947) spent his working life in Hyderabad, where he rose to a senior position in the state's judiciary, he was born into an old Delhi family and it was in Delhi that he grew up. As a writer, he is chiefly noted for the very attractive essays which evoke the old Muslim culture of Delhi from his memory or his imagination.

The subject of the well-known essay from which this passage is taken is Maulvi Nazir Ahmad (1831–1912), himself an outstanding writer of narrative prose, who incidentally produced the official Urdu translation of the Indian Penal Code (UL, pp. 104–5). In the last period of his chequered career, he taught Arabic at the famous Delhi College. Farhatullah Beg was one of his students, and his essay records his memories of his old teacher.

The prestige of Delhi College attracted students from places as distant as Afghanistan, and the passage is a humorous description of the group of Pathan maulvis who attended Nazir Ahmad's Arabic literature classes. The first paragraph describes their outlandish appearance, while the second reports Nazir Ahmad's caustic judgment of their ability, in spite of the bright young Farhatullah Beg's confidence that the hardest Arabic texts are well within the reach of any decent student. There then follows an anecdote, illustrative of the difficulties faced by all South Asian Muslims in mastering Arabic, which tells of the howler in translation committed by one of the pious Afghans. The story is nicely rounded off by the author's description of his fear that his amusement might provoke the Pathans to attack him, leading him to a rapid exit.

Elsewhere in the essay, Farhatullah Beg is rather critical of Nazir Ahmad's style, which he regards — with some justice — as having been adversely affected by his desire to show off his linguistic gifts. Farhatullah Beg's own style, by contrast, is comparable in elegance to that of Ghalib's letters (3), with which it shares a studied exploitation of all the natural resources of the spoken Urdu of Delhi. This is literary Urdu prose at its best, avoiding the excessive incorporation of weighty Arabic and Persian loans on which so many Urdu writers rely for effect, and composed in short sentences whose construction so often demonstrates both the clarity and the subtlety of natural Urdu syntatic patterns. Although the date given for the essay is to be regarded as approximate, it is to be noted that this is the last of the Urdu passages included in this book whose style is not transparently influenced by English modes of expression.

The text is taken from Maulvi Nazir Ahmad ki kahāni kuch un ki kuch meri zabāni (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1956), pp. 66-68.

The finest of Farhatullah Beg's evocations of old Delhi is available in the translation of Akhtar Qamber, *The Last Musha'irah of Delhi* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979), which gives a vivid picture of the world of Urdu poetry in the age of Ghalib.

ہمارے پڑھنے کا طریقہ توس جیحے ، اب مولویوں کی جماعت کا حال سُن لیجئے ۔ اسس جماعت میں تمام کے تمام سرحد بار ہی کے لوگ محقے ۔ لیجے لیجے کرئے ، بڑی بڑی استینیں ، ڈیڑھ ڈیڑھ دو دو مقان کی مشاواریں ، شملہ بہ مقدار علم کے لحاظ سے کئی کئی سیر کے پیکڑ ، لبی لبی داڑھیاں ، غرض معلوم ہوتا تقا کہ افغانتان کا کوئی قطعہ اٹھا کہ بتا شوں کی گئی میں رکھ دیا گیا ہے ۔ محقومہ ایسے کہ رات رات بھرکتاب دیکھتے ۔ محقومہ ایسے کہ باوجود اس محنت کے کورے رہتے ۔

مولوی صاحب، ہم سے ہمیشہ ان کی موٹی عقل کی تعریف کیا کرتے اور کہتے ، " کھئی میں ان ملاؤں سے عاجز آگیا ہوں ۔ اپنا بھی وقت منا لئے کرتے ہیں اور میرا مبھی ۔ جواب اس لئے نہیں دے دیتا کہ دل مشکنی ہوگی ۔ مگر کیا کروں ، انٹر میاں نے ان لوگوں کو ادب سیجنے کا دماغ ہی نہیں دیاہے ۔ ہزاد سمجا تا ہوں ان کی سمجہ میں منہیں آتا ۔ کھبلا ان کو مماسہ یا متنبی برطھنے کی کیا صرورت بڑی ہے ۔ فوج میں نوکر ہوجائیں ، محنت مزدوری کریں یا ہمنیگ کا قربڑا گلے میں ڈال کر بیعج پھریں " ہم کہتے ، " مولوی صاحب آپ بھی عضنب کرتے ہیں ۔ رگر سے پھر بھی گس جا تا ہے ۔ امز متنبی نے ایک کون سے شعر کے ہیں جوغور کرنے سے سمجہ میں نہ آئین "

ایک روز فرمانے کیگے، " لو آج تم تحقیر حاؤ اور ان مولویوں کا رنگ بھی دیکھ لو مگر دیکھو کہیں سبس نہ وینا ، ورنہ چُھرا ہی مجھونک دیں کے یا اس روز ہم کو بھی چھٹی مھی ۔ہم پڑھ کر فارغ ہوتے سے کہ یہ جماعت کا گئ ۔ یہ لوگ مولوی صاحب کو کھیر کر بیٹھ کئے ، اور ہم اکھ کر ایک کونہ میں جا بیجیط - اس روز مقامات حربری کا سبق تھا ۔ کتابی کھولی گئیں ، اور ایک صاحب نے برطی کرجتی ہوئی آواز میں اَعُودُ بِالله سے سبق سروع کیا ۔ زید بن مارث کے سفر کا حال کا ، اور رات کے وقت سفر کرنے کو اف اناء الليل ، سے اوا کيا تھا ران سجلے آدميں نے رات کو قاموس دیکھ کر مطالعہ کیا تھا۔اس میں شامتِ اعمال سے ، انام، کے معنے مٹکے کے بھی ہیں۔ الشروسے اور بندہ ہے ۔ انہوں سے بیہاں مشکا مچھن دیا ۔ اور نہابیت متانت سے افی اناء الليلا کے معنے رات کے مطلح میں سفرکیا ، سے کر دینے ۔ مولوی صاحب نے فرمایا ، " ،اناء ، کے دوسرے معنی بھی تو ہیں " پڑھنے والے صاحب نے کہا " سبی بال کئ معنے ہیں سکی اس مقام پر مشکا ، ہی زیا دہ سیسیاں بہونا ہے " ہم کو مہنی ہ کی ۔ مونوی صاحب نے مسکرا کر اور ان نوکوں سے نہایت برے برسے دیدوں سے ہماری طرف دیکھا - ہم نے سوچا مجانی میاں ہمارا مشکانا منہیں - میاں سے کھسک بی حانا ساسب ہے . کہیں کوئی اُٹھ کر گلا نہ گھونٹ دے ۔ ہم نے اجازت چاہی ۔ مولوی صاحب کہتے سی رہے " بیٹے ورا اور کھیے سن جاؤ ؟ سم نے کہا ، " مولوی صاحب سم کو کام سے کسی اور دن دیکھا جائے كا " يه كهه جوتيال ببن سرير با وُل ركه كر كجائك ، كو عظ سے أثر كر جو مبننا مروع كيا تو كر بنج بنج ۳۰ بڑی مشکل سے مہنسی کرکی ۔

اب جب کہی خیال آتا ہے تو اس جاعت کا نقشہ آنکھوں کے پنچے کھر جاتا ہے ۔ادر دات کے شخے میں سفر کرنے کا فقرہ مہنساتا نہیں تومسکراسٹ ضرور پیدا کر دیتا ہے ۔

- 1 sun cuke: 'now you have heard', a reference to the previous paragraphs describing the author's own classes with Nazir Ahmad.
- 2 tamām ke tamām: 'absolutely all of them'. The use of reduplication (542a) in this paragraph is a marvellous illustration of the possibilities it offers for ironic exaggeration in HU.
- 2 sarhad-pār: 'across the Frontier', i.e. Afghanistan. The adv. suf. -pār has something of the sense of the E pref. 'trans-'.
- 3 thān: 'bolt of cloth', i.e. the full length of material sold by a cloth-dealer for the customer to have made up by a tailor. The outrageously baggy clothes described here are still favoured by orthodox Pathans.
- 3 šamlâ ba-miqdār-e 'ilm: 'turban-end in proportion to learning', a P tag used to ironic effect.
- 4 paggar: the m. form of the familiar f. pagrī suggests the colossal size of their turbans. Cf. 15 churā m., suggesting a more fearsome weapon than churī f., for another illustration of the HU distinction of m. and f. pairs to indicate large and small varieties of inanimate objects.
- 4 ser: 'seer', the traditional Indian weight, equivalent to 2lb. or about one kilo: 40 seers make a man 'maund'.
- 4 batāšon kī galī: 'Sugar-puff Lane', the name of a street in Old Delhi.
- 5 mihnat $k\bar{l}$ ye hālat ki...: like the following thoth aise ki..., the omission of the verb in this pointed phrase is a nice example of the economical possibilities of HU syntax.
- 7 moți 'aql: 'thick head'. This is not a loan-translation, but one of those cases where U and E idioms converge.
- 7 bhai: a familiar term of address, not to be confused with bhāi, and which is used to both men and women. Here the rough sense is 'my dear boy'.
- 8 mullānon: 'mullahs', the obl.p. of mullā.
- 8 javāb denā: 'to dismiss' here, vs. the basic sense of 'to answer'.
- 9 allāh miyāh is a familiar term of address to men, also used as a pref. or suf., e.g. in miyāh miṭṭhū 'Mr. Sweetie' a pet term for parrots. The set phrase allāh miyāh is characteristic of the way in which women talk to their children about God, but can hardly be translated directly into E.
- 10 hazār samjhātā hūn: 'however much I try to explain'.
- 10 bhalā: regularly used in HU to introduce questions expecting the answer 'no', and thus similar in sense to the E formula 'I ask you...'.
- 10 The *Hamāsâ* or 'Verses on Bravery in War' is an early anthology of A poetry compiled by Abū Tammām (d. 849), and is a regular part of the traditional syllabus of A literature, like the notoriously difficult poetry of Mutanabbī (d. 965).
- 11 hing: 'asafoetida', used as a flavouring in many Indian dishes. The asafoetida trade in India was traditionally carried on by Afghan pedlars, hence this addition to the traditional Pathan occupations of soldiering and labouring.
- 12 āp bhī ğazab karte hain: 'surely you are too going too far'.
- 12 ragar se patthar bhī ghis jātā hai: 'even a stone is worn by rubbing', a proverbial expression.
- 14 lo: in its common sense as an intj. 'well..., look...'.
- 14 rang: lit. 'colour', but here in its wider idiomatic sense, i.e. 'see what they are like'.
- 12 The *Maqāmāt* or 'Stations' of Hariri (d. 1122) is one of the standard texts of classical A prose, pored over by generations of Indian Muslims.
- 18 a'ūzu billāh: 'I seek refuge with God', a common A formula (743).
- 18 Zaid the son of Haris (d. 629) was a famous hero of early Islam. The A bin 'son of' also appears in U as the PA ibn-e in personal names.

- 19 fi anā' il-lail: 'in the time of the night', an A prepn. phrase of the same construction as bismillāh 'in the name of God' (742). The point of the anecdote is that A anā' 'time' looks just like inā' 'pot' in the script.
- 20 qāmūs: 'dictionary', an A word derived from the Greek okeanos 'ocean', thus suggesting the unfathomable depths of the A lexicon. The al-Qāmūs al-Muhīt by al-Firuzabadi (d. 1415) is the classic A dictionary, used for centuries throughout the Muslim world.
- 20 šāmat-e a'māl se: an ironically grand way of saying 'unluckily'.
- 21 allāh de aur bandā le: 'God proposes and man disposes', another idiom introduced for ironic effect.
- 23 paṛhne-vāle sāhib: 'the gentleman who was reading'. As often, the HU inf. ptc. corresponds to an E relative clause.
- 24 muskarā-kar: 'with a smile'. The cj. ptc. is here syntactically an adv., like the following bure bure dīdon se modifying the final dekhā.
- 26 kahin: when followed by a negative subj. regularly has this sense of 'I hope they don't...'.
- 26 ijāzat cāhī: 'begged permission to leave'.
- 22 $zar\bar{a}$ aur kuch sun jāo: 'listen to a bit more before you go'. Both the abs. sun and jāo have independent meaning.
- 28 sar par pāon rakh-kar bhāge: 'ran away as fast as my heels could carry me'.
- 28 ghar pahuncte pahuncte: 'as I was getting home', a typical reduplication of the adv. ptc.