

Cultural Mosaic of Awadh and Ratan Nath Sarshar

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Abstract : Awadh has been a vital centre of Hinduism since ancient times. After the arrival of Muslims in India, the Islamic Empire gradually expanded across the country and Awadh was deeply influenced by this political shift. In Awadh, while the majority of the population was Hindu and Muslim, there were also small communities of Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jews. The Culture of Awadh represented the pinnacle of Indian Civilization, characterized by artistry, sophistication, elegance and refined manners. In the era of Awadh the administration and social life of Awadh were defined by a deep sense of communal harmony and mutual respect. If the Awadh culture is the spirit of Awadh region, then the Ratan Nath Sarshar is its most vivid biographer and the observer of life and society, A Kashmiri Brahmin born in Lucknow, Sarshar was a master of Urdu language, his literary work is the ultimate literary record of the composite culture with his novel Fasana-e-Azad. Sarshar's novel Fasana-e-Azad is often cited as one of the first true Urdu novels, though it remains the episodic charm of traditional Dastans. Fasana-e-Azad is a masterpiece that serves as a mirror to the civilization, it reflects the lifestyle of both the common people and the elite of Lucknow.

Keywords : Awadh, Lucknow, Sarshar, Culture, Fasana-e-Azad, Civilization, Language and Literature.

In this era of globalization modern technology has become an integral and indispensable part of human life. Today, the world has become so small that it has given rise to the notion of a 'Global Village'. It has become almost impossible for men to be at the same platform on the basis of religion, language, tradition, culture and education. Culture is

the fountain head of life in absence of which existence of men and its civilization becomes meaningless. Culture is a the collection of those values and traditions which influence an individual as well as social life. It encompasses geographical limits, climate, society, history and belief, traditions, spiritual, educational and material trend, philosophy of life and purpose of life. Similarly literature is the best instrument of expression of man's feelings, thoughts, experiences. Since ancient times India has been the melting pot of various cultures. The conditions is prevalent today also. The Indian composite culture is also known as Ganga-Jamni Culture.

Awadh is best cultural showpiece of the points made above. After the invasion of Nadir Shah, a literary vacuum was created in Delhi. All the literacy figures were attracted towards Awadh because of its diversity. A result, Awadh became a centre of literature and after the decline of Delhi as a literacy capital.

Mr. S.N. Singh is giving detailed information on this, he writes,

“Urdu literary life in Awadh begins with the immigration of Urdu poets and scholars from Delhi, following attacks by the Iranians, Afghan, Maratha and Jat armies. The newly independent state of Awadh offered generous patronage of poets, writers and scholars of Urdu and Persian. It was almost a trend where we find several scholars visited the city. Ali Jawad Zaidi gives a list of sixty-five such immigrants poets, including, besides Mir and Sauda, such prominent names Soz, Fughan, Zahik, Jurat, Insha, Rangin and Mushafi. It may be useful to note here that poets who are closely identical with Delhi in literary chronicles were not necessarily originally from Delhi, many of them had come there from elsewhere to seek livelihood and left when that became extremely difficult. In those days poetry was a profession, and its practitioners went where their profession could obtain proper patronage.”^{xxiii}

The language Urdu in Awadh differs significantly from Urdu of Delhi. Awadhi Urdu is celebrated of its external beauty and linguistic

perfection. The language in daily life is simple, polite and conversational Urdu mixed with Awadhi words, reflecting local culture and social etiquette. In his book 'Incredible Lucknow' Saiyed Anwer Abbas describes the beauty of Lakhanavi language, he says,

“Observing the Lakhnavi’s language and form one comes across certain characteristics. The words chosen are musical, soft and sweet. They are generally taken from Urdu, mostly derived from Persian. The lyrical Urdu style of combining two or more words in a phrased form is utilised to the maximum. For example Janaab-e-Aali and Huzoor-e-Waala are used though Janaab and Huzoor themselves would have sufficed. The use of hyperbole for enhancement of the degree of a term is supposed to be the main object of exclamation and the chief characteristic of the Lakhanavi style. But this artefact is only applied in the case of second or third person and the first person, the speaker himself, is presented in the most humble, downtrodden, earthly and inferior form. The person being addressed will be addressed with respectful words like Mohuturum and Muazziz meaning respected and exalted and exclaimed with Janaab, Sarkar, Huzoor, Hazrat and may even be called Qibla. The effect of salutation is further enhanced with additional words as Janaab-e-Waala, Sarkaar-e-Mohaturum, Qibla-e-aala.”^{xxiii}

The culture of Awadh presents the best forms of genres and style which are different from those found in Delhi, Hyderabad and Azeemabad. It has various means of creative expressions through Imambadas, Majalis, Music, Dance, Folk Songs and theatre. The literary figures of Awadh presented it in a new form. In short, it can be said that these people successfully presented life and society in a new form which has proved to be a milestone for the Hindu Muslim unity which can be interpreted as a cultural mosaic of the Awadh. In this period a number of novels were published which discussed different aspects of social and cultural issues of the society.

The pioneer of Urdu novel Deputy Nazeer Ahmed wrote on social reforms. Through his novels he tried to convey a message to society. After Nazeer Ahmed, Ratan Nath Sarshar has greatly contributed to Urdu through his fiction writings which could be defined as mirror of the then culture. His greatest achievement is the realistic portrayal of the culture of Awadh. He is the first novelist of Urdu who has seen life from a secular point of view and presented it realistically. In his novel 'Fasana-e-Azad', Sarshar has portrayed the culture of contemporary society. He has brought to life the festivals, fairs, theaters, dances and culture and traditions of Awadh. He has pointed a vivid portrait of decaying contemporary society in such a vibrant colours that through this, one can observe all aspects of human life.

The Ganga-Jamni culture was not just about the religions but a deep fusion that influenced language, literature, cuisine, traditions, dances, Majalis and Holi. The Nawabs of Awadh were the patrons of this culture. Ratan Nath Sarshar's novel 'Fasana-e-Azad' is known as 'encyclopedia of Awadhi Culture, this novel provides a vivid and satirical portrait of society and descriptions of then culture, most popular Indian festivals and traditions. For example the Basant festival is described with sensory richness with mentions of marigolds, roses, saffron – tinted sweets like barfi and the kesari-dyed clothing of the residents of Awadh. Sarshar describes the mourning rituals and processions with accuracy. He notes how the 'black' attire wear all the men and women in these mourning days.

The popular entertainment of that time, such as cock-fights, kite-flying, Kabutar-baazi and traditional poetry sessions. It shows the cultural lifestyle of Awadh that loved fairs, market places and social gathering. After all, Sarshar highlights the 'Ganga-Jamni' culture of the city where religious events were shared experiences and social harmony was a core value. He depicts a culture where different communities lived and created

together, as seen in the communal participation in festivals and the shared appreciation of Urdu literature.

Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar was a pioneer figure of North India. His works remains an unparalleled picture of Awadh through the immortal characters of Azad and Khoji, he provided a mirror for his society to see its own foibles and potential for reform. Sarshar's legacy is not just literary but cultural and he showed that Urdu was a product of India's Ganga-Jamni culture, a language that belonged to anyone who loved its idiomatic beauty. His ability to weave together humor, social critique and a deep love for his society. The adventure of his famous character Azad and the antics Khoji continue to remind us of a glorious, decadent era when manners, music and Tehzib were the defining features of life in Awadh.

It is essential to look at the literary atmosphere in which Sarshar opened his eyes. At that time, Rajab Ali Beg Suroor was shining on the horizon of Urdu literature. His imaginative storytelling, colourful use of words and rhythmic style ruled over the language. During Ratan Nath Sarshar's time, literary giants like Deputy Nazir Ahmad, Abdul Halim Sharar, Munshi Sajjad Husain were also present. But Sarshar was a confluence of both modern and ancient civilization. Besides Fasana-e-Azad, Sarshar wrote other novels including Sair-e-Kohsar, Jam-e-Sarshar and Kamini, which became very famous. These novels were initially published as serials in newspapers like Oudh Akhbar and were later edited and published as books. These stories are well-connected and show his strong grip on storytelling.

Sarshar's greatest quality is that he presented a unique example through his style of narration. In his writing, characters are not just toys, they are living, breathing people who run, play and laugh. He taught Urdu literature how to properly use the dialects of different sections of Indian society. His novels feature characters like washermen, potters, gamblers, Nawabs and Sahukars who truly represent their social classes. While

describing scenes, he uses eloquent language, witty phrases and poetic Persian and Urdu expressions to make his narrative beautiful. The result is that the entire scene revolves before the reader's eyes, feeling like a movie or a play. This proves his observation was extra ordinary and his most important quality is his unparalleled ability to describes scenes.

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