

CHAPTER-1: INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Pakistani Literary Tradition in English:

Pakistan became an independent nation on August 14 , 1947. At that moment Pakistani Literary Tradition in its Pakistani sense did not exist. There were many literary traditions in India before August 15, 1947, and these traditions can be considered as a background to the Pakistani Literary Tradition. The most significant traditions from which the Pakistani Literary Tradition grew were the South Asian Islamic Literary Tradition which was mostly represented by the Urdu Writers, and the English Language Tradition which had its roots in the British Raj.

The Urdu Literary Tradition, which was enriched by the celebrated authors like Iqbal and Altaf Husain Hali can be regarded as a solid foundation of the Pakistani Literary Tradition. This tradition projected the image of Pakistan as an ideal entity.

The English Literary Tradition, which began to assert in Pakistan after the Partition did not have a tradition. It was the result of the British colonial hold on the subcontinent, and especially, Lord Macaulay's "Minute on Education" (1935). English became the language of education and government produced, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru:

... a new caste or class in India, the English-educated class, which lived in a world of its own, cut off from the mass of the population, and looked always, even when protesting, towards its rules.¹

Most of the great Pakistani leaders like Iqbal and Jinnah were the members of the new English-speaking class. However, English language was limited to the upper class Muslim society only. It could not influence the masses. It is significant to note that in the 1930's a group of young Indian writers in English began to emerge. These writers, who wrote in vein of Western realistic techniques, were writing Hindu Indian novels in English. The prominent writers among them were R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand.

In 1930s we notice a similar development in Urdu literary tradition. This was the publication of an anthology of modern prose fiction in Urdu, Angarey (1932). Though it was written in Urdu it was largely western in structure and attitude. It was a joint venture of the following authors - Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Akhtar Husain Raipuri, Mahmuduz Jafar and young Ahmed Ali. It was appreciated by the Urdu progressives and highly criticised by the conservatives. 'Mullahs from the pulpits and priests from the minarets cried invectives against the book and the authors; semi-political and all-India organizations passed resolutions condemning

it. One such resolution passed at a public meeting stated that one of the authors (Sajjad Zaheer) had gone to London oblivious of the storm the book had created. On the floor of the United Provinces Assembly questions were asked and demands made for its proscription.² Consequently it was proscribed by the British Government. After the proscription the authors issued from Delhi their manifesto 'In Defence of Angarey' which clearly brings out their moral position. The manifesto reads:

The authors of the book do not wish to make any apology for it. They leave it to float or sink of itself. They are not afraid of the consequences of having launched it. They only wish to defend 'the right of launching it and all other vessels like it' - they stand for the right of free criticism and free expression in all matters of the highest importance to the human race in general and the Indian people in particular. They have chosen the particular field of Islam, not because they bear any special malice, but because, being born into that particular society, they felt themselves better qualified to speak for that alone. They were more sure of their ground there. Whatever happens to the book or to the authors, we hope that others will not be discouraged. Our practical proposal is the formation immediately of

a League of Progressive authors, which should bring forth similar collections from time to time, both in English and the various vernaculars of our country. We appeal to all those who are interested in this idea to get in touch with us. They may communicate to S. Ahmed Ali. ...³

This manifesto clearly brings to our notice Ahmed Ali's firm belief in his chosen ideas and his strong desire to implement them. It also points out his urge to do something better for the society through the medium of literature.

Thus the publication of Angarey inaugurated a new Muslim Literary Movement and Ahmed Ali emerged as a major literary figure. Immediately after he came into limelight, he published two stories, 'Mahavaton Ki Ek Raat' and 'Hamari Gali'. Written on an experimental basis, both the stories realistically explore the psychological dimensions of Indian Muslim people. Both the stories follow a stream of consciousness technique. These two stories, especially 'Hamari Gali' (Our Lane), are responsible for the production of his first novel Twilight in Delhi (1940). Thus Ahmed Ali can be considered as the most significant writer who began the Pakistani Literary Tradition in English.

At this juncture it is very interesting to note the initiation

of Ali to progressivism. As referred to earlier, Angarey, the collection of experimental short stories published by Ali in collaboration with some young Urdu writers, ushered in the progressive Movement in Literature. As pointed out in Professor Ahmed Ali's bio-data by Pakistan High Commission, New Delhi, Angarey 'took society by storm and was banned within the four months of publication'. This led to the birth of Progressive Writers' Movement, of which Ahmed Ali was co-founder.⁴

1.2 Ahmed Ali as a Progressive Writer:

Creative literature is a complex process in which the writer's social stand is very important. Every serious writer expresses his own perception of life and creates his own artistic vision of reality. This vision governs the main content of a literary work.

Sometimes a realistic literary work is reduced to a mere documentary but it is the writer's aesthetic sense that turns the document into literature. The important thing is that it is not the ratio or the amount of the documentary material or of fiction which determines the relative strength of a construct. This strength lies in the function of various ideas and images that are embodied in a work of art. The truth of life becomes art only when the depiction of people and events, of characters and the relationships between them take on the meaning and significance of

creative generalization in a work of art. And anywhere where the raw material of life is assimilated into literature and embodied in a work of art an important part is played by the writer's social point of view. A progressive writer tries to show the conflict between socio-cultural progress and the decadent values in the society. At this point it is significant to note that when Ahmed Ali was writing, there was a new political awareness taking place in India. The British Raj after the World Wars received new challenges and ultimately the British had to withdraw themselves from India in 1947. These political changes had a great effect on the Indian princes. Already they were reduced to the images of mere caricatures by the Britishers and the emerging Indian nationalism further weakened them. The old feudal values were on the wane and the new nationalist democratic values were gaining ground. In such a situation a creative writer has to choose between the two bi-polar value systems. Ahmed Ali is such a writer who welcomes new ideas and realistically depicts the decadence of the old feudal aristocracy. It, therefore, becomes important to note Ahmed Ali's stance as a progressive writer.

Ahmed Ali was a member of the All India Progressive Writers' Association. The first conference of the Association was held on April 10, 1936 at Lucknow. Ahmed Ali presented his article, 'A Progressive View of Art' in the conference. The article, which defines the aims and objectives of progressive art and literature,

proclaims Ahmed Ali's stance as a writer of social commitment. He describes his views on Art in the following manner:

*Art, thus, has its roots in, and derives its material from life. It acts by imparting powerful emotion thus leading to action, by which I mean mental and emotional activity, stimulation of a progressive type, which leads us along the lines of the highest consciousness.*⁵

Ahmed Ali does not consider the word 'Progressive' to be synonymous with 'revolutionary'. Ali himself explains the term as follows:

*It does, however, mean trying for the betterment of our social life. It implies the banishment of mysticism ... and all that which stands in our way of attaining freedom. It also means the acceptance of realism as a primary factor in art and literature.*⁶

It is to be noted here that Ali thinks of the betterment of social life, but, initially he sounds to be vague in his concept of Progressivism as he does not explain in detail his idea of betterment. However, his idea of betterment seems to have been linked with the achievement of freedom from the British colonial hold on India.

Ahmed Ali criticizes the sentimental, mystical and unrealistic

type of literature. For him, the need of the times was an uncompromising realism. Naturally, therefore, he comments on the relationship between the form and the content. He does not want unnecessary embellishments and unnecessary insistence on form and technique. In this respect he observes:

On the other hand, it should lay greater emphasis on the truth of content, be more comprehensive and universal, and insist on the naked facts and realities of life.⁷

The first meeting of the All India Progressive Writers' Association was held on April 10, 1936. Ahmed Ali supported the manifesto of the meeting. The manifesto, which elaborately works out the aims and objectives of the association, is a very significant document in the literary field of our country. The manifesto condemned the spiritualism and ideality in the literature of the times by calling it baseless. It also attacked Indian literature which had developed the fatal tendency to escape from the actualities of life and consequently Indian literature became 'anaemic in body and mind' and had adopted 'a rigid formation and a banal perverse ideology'.⁸ The manifesto further defines the duty of the writers in the following words:

It is the duty of Indian writers to give expression to the changes taking place

in Indian life and to assist the spirit of progress in the country by introducing scientific rationalism in literature. They should undertake to develop an attitude of literary criticism which will discourage the general reactionary and revivalist tendencies on questions like family, religion, sex, war and society, and to combat literary trends reflecting communalism, racial antagonism, sexual libertinism, and exploitation of man by man ...⁹

These lines clearly define the stance of a Progressive Writer as they openly attack the reactionary and revivalist tendencies. It is obvious that these writers are influenced by Marxist ideology. They wanted to rescue literature and other arts from the conservative classes because in their hands, they felt, literature had lost its creative significance and did not lead to the bright future of the masses. They wanted to examine the established order from a new perspective and therefore, they said:

We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today - the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason we reject as reactionary.

*All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform we accept as progressive.*¹⁰

No doubt the Progressive writers had noble ideas as far as the socio-cultural and political upliftment of the country was concerned. But the very language of the manifesto points out the rigidity, a sort of leftist dictatorship and the total rejection of the establishment. Since it did not recognize the established literary values and lacked elasticity in the implementation of the manifesto, estrangement took place between Ahmed Ali and the majority of the members of the association. The main issue was whether the doctrine of socialist Realism as observed in Russia should be adopted in India. The result was that the movement split up into two groups - one, ideological group that believed in Marxism and two, a creative group which was flexible and non-political. Ahmed Ali did not associate his progressivism with socialist realism and came out with his own progressivism. Though Ali did not belong to Progressive Writers' Association for more than a year, in the opinion of Mulk Raj Anand, he just represents 'the hangover of the Progressive Writers' Movement'.¹¹

At this point it is significant to note the views of Mr

Rashed, one of the Marxist members of the Progressive Writers' Association, that highlight the leftist ideology which was not accepted by Ali. Mr Rashed states:

*The Progressives had basically two aims in view: firstly, to write for and on behalf of the proletariat, rather than for the elite; and secondly, to use literature for creating hatred against the upper classes, feudal lords, and the clergy.*¹²

Ali said that Mr Rashed was misleading about the aims of the Progressive Writers' Association and criticized the movement which was being directed to the middle classes and which incited no one against any one. Ali disapproves of Rashed's views, especially his aim to use literature for creating hatred against the upper classes, feudal lords and the clergy. This is evident in his two novels, Twilight in Delhi and Ocean of Night in which he recreates the decadent life of the Muslim lords and their value systems. There is a sort of nostalgia felt by Ali in the recreation of this phase. It means that Ali does not follow Rashed's views.

Against this background it becomes imperative to work out Ahmed Ali's parameters of Progressivism and place him in the tradition of the Progressive Writers. To demonstrate the role played

by progressive ideas in literature it is essential to consider literature in terms of images, symbols, characters etc. In the creation of images and characters the writer proceeds from his perception of life, not from abstractions but from concrete reality. The writer's conception of a work is usually based on his observation of reality and the impressions made on him by the things that happen in life and society or by historical events. In this context it becomes imperative to study the images, characters, symbols etc. created by Ahmed Ali, in relation to his moral stand.

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² Ahmed Ali, "The Progressive Writers' Movement In Its Historical Perspective", Comments and Reactions to an Interview with N.M. Rashed, Journal of South Asian Literature, 13 (1977-78), p. 92.

³ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴ Quoted from: A Letter to the author from Pakistan High Commission, New Delhi, No. 3(21)/89-IHF(ii) dated November 20, 1989, Bio-data p. 2.

⁵ Ahmed Ali, "A Progressive View of Art", Towards Progressive Literature, n.d., p. 30.

⁶ Harish Raizda, "Ahmed Ali", Indian English Novelists, ed. Madhusudan Prasad (1985), p. 3.

⁷ Ahmed Ali, "A Progressive view of Art" Towards Progressive Literature, n.d., p. 51.

⁸ Ahmed Ali, "The Progressive Writers' Movement In Its Historical Perspective" Comments and Reactions to an Interview with N.M. Rashed, Journal of South Asian Literature, 13 (1977-78), p. 94.

⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

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ibid., p. 94.

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