

Nain Sukh

Nain Sukh is my pen name, actually I am Khalid Mahmood. My upbringing is of rural background but for the last 25-26 years I have been living in the city of Lahore as a barrister. Whatever earlier I heard, read, wrote, all were in Punjabi; these were, for example, qissas, folk tales, stories, songs, Sufi poetry etc., Impressed by these, I felt motivated to start writing poetry. The poetry that I wrote, was, then the kind of thoughts whatever came to my mind I used to write accordingly. For instance, one of my poems of those days “Kaale Khaatey” is:

Black accounts were opened at shops
With them the seeds of sleepless nights were sown in the eyes
And then seasons became, unreliable ,
Balanced sleep was mortgaged by (greedy) traders,
Thus vanquished our blue dreams
Just as clouds shunned the rivers,
Having given up the hope of peacock’s dance
Saddled with dim memories,
Moon, watchman and thief joined together
But blood leads the way still

I used to write such poetry, songs or kafis, but out somewhere it seemed that I could not express the thoughts I was carrying inside so I started writing down stories. In my stories I tried to bring a change and asked how my style would be different. The people who used to write earlier, I did accept their influence but tried that in my stories should reflect my own style, and in them I included social, political and historical factors. There is my story, “Uthal Puthal,” I’ll narrate a small part of it to you :

Hither and thither! all in turmoil, all helter skelter (blindly), from here to there, upside down; all of a sudden everyone is left on their own, there was chaos, no one bothered about others, nothing to distinguish between our own and strangers, friends and enemies all in pool; , no respect or acknowledgement. None to call a friend for help in need, who would make effort to help their beloved ones? People falling, coming, going, running, dying getting killed none thought twice to leave their places where were they going ahead? No thought how they were playing or could sit to contemplate; just take the space wherever they could. Everyday this goes on, happens to them, no support from anyone, where to get guide, who could help them? Those had who had no place in their eyes, why will they remember them? No veranda or walls, without security, with no permanent relationship, they are helpless and remain dumb and silent, even when any excess is committed. There could be ordered to leave the country anytime within moments, could

be homeless, where and whom to appeal, there are no justice, lawyers or legal recourse or appeals. They have no place of their own, no permanent address, useless (worthless), they were no part of a story, poetry and or part of pictures on a wall, nor were they like domestic pets. They were just worthless, so who could be bothered about them. They are not partners of any establishment, neither manufacturing gum nor silk. Just as insects carry grains by a single count making a handful as the whole community at work, , no place as of wasp's nest, nor weave webs to catch prey (like a spider), nor can they spoil live in a hole –with many legs to stand, they can be molested by anyone .. Even acting as predators, they hardly can kill, rather die can't walk away.

It was such kind of stories I used to write. I had two lots (collections) of my stories “*Theekriyan*” and “*Uthal Puthal*” were published. Then after that I felt inclined to write a story titled: “Lahore De Vel.” For that story I met a lot of people from different professions and sections of society, they were all of them seniors, old women and men. From them I heard their stories about Lahore that I noted down. As these accumulated, so many stories, I thought of compiling a novel about them. But I could not conceive a novel as these stories were about different people, drawn from a variety of professions, classes each with a different style; some were of prostitutes, gamblers, others about criminals. Alongside I kept on reading the history of Lahore and other relevant materials, all together, it created a canvas of diverse world inside me

Then, I came upon a book with the title “Hakikat toh Phukran.” This was a story of two faqirs (monks): Madho and Hussain, its two main characters and there was mention of Dullah Bhatti Wala as also the Emperor Akbar. Then it transpired to me that I would weave them together into a novel. Thus I created a novel from those stories. My main characters were from National College of Arts; a professor Hussain who is also a painter. The second one is Mehboob-al-Haq who later becomes Madho in the novel who in his memoirs and talks, as Madho Lal Hussain, they together go out to discover Lahore. My story revolves around their discovery of Lahore, talking about the city as my story moves forward. For this novel, I was given Dhahan Literary Award –for that I am here on visit to Vancouver. A few days back there was this literary function when I received that award. .

I will read out some portion from my novel, its full name is “Madho Lal Hussain – Lahore De Vel.” This novel has twenty-five chapters, the first chapter is “Basant 2005”, and I will read a page from this

- I am like a kite
With my string in my beloved's hand
We enjoyed playing such beautiful games.

This divine song was so accepted by nature that the moment he halted, his words were taken over by the naughty golden sparrow's chirps. Oh mother let me play, when will I get time to play. Taking turns adding to the rhythmic notes, talking to the wind, the little bird was hopping from one branch to another making them sway and touch the ground, but before it touched the ground, the little bird was hopping to the next tree and swing on it. The yellow color was spread all over, flowers were playing with each other, it was a scene to watch as if nature in full youthful bloom had come to Punjab for Saraswati worship (not sure) The pleasant season, the full melody of eastern glory was all imprinted in his mind, as in a garland of melodies there was beautiful fresh green color yellow orange color like, saffron colored robes of the, beloved, all colors were waving but he was lost somewhere else..

The long deceased Lala ji Lahori whispered in his ears "*happy basant.*" Soon, in his imagination, he sees Lahore city turning into yellow fields of *saron*. Residents of Lahore have really liked *basant* season. All around there were vibrant yellow colored turbans and dupattas. He looked above at the deep blue sky, it was full of kites. There in front is Maharaja Ranjit Singh with his queen Maura riding on their favorite elephant Hazraj going towards *dargah* of Madho Lal Hussain to celebrate the Basant. Everyone in Lahore is singing"

The season of Basant has arrived.
We are enticed by our beloved friend Madho.

I reflect often that a lot more people are attracted to poetry; few people lean towards prose, not a lot write fiction. On our side of Punjab that is in Pakistan, more write poetry, they are not into prose. There is need that more people should write prose, fiction, stories, novels, drama, this will benefit our language. In poetry, the language you are using has different shades; these come forth; but when you are writing prose say fiction describing ole a whole set of life the past, the contemporary, the language that is spoken now or before, all this can be portrayed through the language of fiction only. But as most of our people are writing poetry and among them there are some people whose style is very old fashioned, others very modern. And some so modern that they are not connected to the tradition (rivayat) at all, using much modern technique and so. And those who are traditionalists are hard core traditionalists. There is need to address the present age, contemporary issues (? Nafshiyati) and thoughts so expressed that the new generation can feel and understand that something is being written in my language which is relevant to the modern world. This is the kind of literature which should be written; it should also have modern techniques –all sort of explorations. And our tradition should also get along with it. That is how

good literature will be written. The second point is that on both sides of Punjab, whatever is written in Punjabi- of that at which is good literature, should be available in Shahmukhi as also in Gurmukhi; we need translation from Gurmukhi to Shahmukhi and vice-versa. Similarly, all such good literature should be translated to English so that the rest of world also knows what is written in Punjabi language.

There is other consideration; on our side, there is no official backing for the language - nothing is being done at the government level, Punjabi language is left behind. The Punjab Adabi Board gets no grant and there is nothing for writers to look forward to in this matter. Then there are Punjabis who speak to their children in Urdu which is wrong or among the well-educated families, they speak in English. So the attitude of Punjabis themselves towards Punjabi language is not too good. They should try to speak to their kids in Punjabi. Listening to Punjabi music or through Punjabi songs or dancing to Punjabi tunes on weddings alone will not save Punjabi language. Punjabi language will be saved and will o progress only if Punjabis whole heartedly commit themselves to love their language. That affection should be visible, expressed through conversation with their children who are the next generation of our language.