



## URDU FICTION: FROM PROGRESSIVISM TO MODERNITY

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### Abstract

Literature after 1974 witnessed noticeable changes. The fiction moved from being anecdotal and realist in relation to social issues to a battle of self and inner self. If progressive literary movement was a collective revolt against the mere depiction of emperors, monarchs and their families in literature, modernism was a rebellious reaction against the constant repetition of 'roti, kapda, makan' in literature. In this context, this paper examines the tradition of Urdu short stories whose starting point is attributed to Premchand's last epic "Kafan".

**Keywords:** Urdu Fiction, Short Stories, Modernity, Progressive Literature

### INTRODUCTION :

After 1974, literature saw new changes. A new form of imagination became part of the writers' consciousness. These changes at the level of thought and expression also affected fiction. The fiction that came before us in the 1960s was centred on character and technique, not on events. The fiction which until now had taken its characters and themes from society and travelled from anecdotal to realist in relation to social issues, now revealed itself as a battle of self and inner self. If the progressive literary movement was a collective revolt against the mere depiction of emperors, monarchs and their families in literature, modernism was a rebellious reaction against the constant repetition of 'roti, kapda, makan' in literature. Modern fiction writers emphasized on individuality instead of plurality, isolation instead of crowds, psychological and sexual conflict instead of social behaviour, and internality instead of externality. The high-pitched tone subsided and the chanting changed to a whisper. These are some of the key points that distinguish modern fiction from progressive fiction. But the question arises as to what we call progressive fiction?

1. Is the fiction in which a social situation, event or problem has been made the subject and its effects on the individual or individuals have been marked?
2. Or the fiction in which the action, thought, emotion and attitude of the character or characters have hints towards social and social problems that can make it possible for the reader to understand the real social situation.

3. Or, apart from these two, the myth which also has social problems and their solution which is suggested by Communist ideology.

### Urdu Fiction: From progressivism to modernity

Keeping the above points in mind, when we examine the tradition of Urdu short stories whose starting point is attributed to Premchand's last epic "Kafan", we can argue that all these epics have their themes which can be described as a mere extension of the tradition of Mahabharata, Hitopadesha, Panchatantra, events narrated in Bible and Qur'an, Gulistan Saadi, Alif Laila, Talisman Hosh Ruba and Ramcharitmanas. It goes back to Premchand himself and his contemporary fiction writers. That is, the subject and character of the story has always been human. Even in stories with animals or supernatural elements, the characters' actions and moods are usually human. The emotions expressed by these characters can also be described as human emotions.

It is another thing that there is a significant lack of intellectual and logical elements in these stories due to which they are not successful from the realistic point of view. As the awareness of the realistic observation of society, the creative and artistic presentation of this observation began to grow and the story became closer to reality. Yes, it must have happened that the human problems that were reflected in the fiction before Premchand were not collective or social in nature and were usually individual and personal.

An important thing is that the subject of the story was indeed a human being, but this human being was a human being of a special class. Our stories are also full of similar examples. Apart from this, these stories cannot be classified as a separate genre because they are part of a larger story with a story-by-story plot. Premchand is the first writer who brought Urdu fiction close to western fiction from the technical point of view. He laid the foundation of modern style of fiction in Urdu with his first story "Ishq Duniya Aur Hubb e Watan" (1908). He also tried to follow the contemporary narrative style of expression. However, he came to the conclusion that mere change of themes is not enough; fictional literature needs a new language, a new creative narration which will save the overall atmosphere of social realism from this unnatural style of expression prevalent at that time that focused on display of linguistic features and did not paid attention to the mood and nature of the characters, and the temporal and spatial background of the event.

The progressive literary movement changed the nature of the event or character. The inclusion and presentation of contemporary social issues and economic disparities were emphasized by the progressives, but we do not see any significant change in the composition of fiction, its structure and storytelling techniques. This is the reason why generally progressive fiction refers to fiction that reflects social issues. But would it be fair to call them the fruit of the progressive literary movement? I want to raise this question because we usually call any fiction, based on social realism as progressive fiction and forget that originators of this movement did not consider it sufficient to merely identify and present a social problem, but his advice to writers was to propose the same solutions to social problems that have come down to us through Communist ideology. It was for this reason that Krishan Chander asked the reader at the end of his short story "Mahalakshmi Ka Pul" whether "are you on the right side of the road or on the left side". Obviously, this one sentence has brutally slaughtered a very good fiction.

Now let's come to those stories that have the character of social realism and in which a social and collective or personal and individual problem is presented with the help of characters and events with the background of time and place. Below are the names of some legends:

- Bade Ghar ki Beti, Do Bail, BoodhiKaki, Panchayat, Shatranj ki Naazi.(Premchand)
- Toba TekSingh, Naya Qanoon, Khol Do, Hatak, Thanda Gosht.(Sa'adat Hasan Manto)
- Garm Coat, Lajwanti, Bhola, Babbal, Garhan, Apne Dukh Mujhe De Do.(Rajendar Singh Bedi)
- Poore Chand ki Raat, AdheGhanta ka Khuda, Taai Isri.(Krishan Chander)
- Chauthi ka Joda, Jaden, Lehaaf, BichhuPhuphi.(Ismat Chughtai)

Are all these stories or some of them completely compatible with the principles laid down by the progressive literary movement? Does a legend like "Khol Do" tell us that if Sirajuddin had not given the responsibility of finding his missing daughter to the volunteers of his nation and given it to the workers of the Communist Party, Sakina would not have been in this situation? Is the psychological crisis of Lajvanti and Sundarlal not the result of the mentality formed under the influence of our social values and born from the womb of the class system which Communism considers the biggest problem of mankind. Obviously, the answer to these questions will be negative. So, in what sense do we consider them progressive fiction? In such a case, we have to admit the fact that the tradition of social realism and progressivism in literature is not new. Before the Conference of Progressive Writers in April 1936, Premchand had not created the best fictions on social issues? Was RashidulKhairi and some other story tellers Were not performing the task of social realism in fiction? Were the social and personal problems reflected in the fictions under any fixed principle or any particular ideology? If we reject all these assumptions, then we have to admit that the story with all its components - event, plot, characters and setting - was being told thousands of years ago and at the beginning of the progressive movement. It is another thing that the perception of social realism has been different in every era.

Social facts and personal details used to be the subject of stories too, but these stories used to be symbolic and allegorical. The progressive movement emphasized truthfulness and made the common man of the society the subject of the story. But along with reflecting the social problems, it also proposed their solution and this solution was hidden in the establishment of a communist state. Despite this thematic innovation, progressive movement did not tamper with the essence of fiction or story and its basic and essential elements. It was for this reason that the reader, whose literary training was under the shadow of Hakayat Gulstan, Panchatantra, QisaChahar Darvesh and Jatakatales, could not remain indifferent to this trend or movement of social realism and it came to the fore from the beginning of the twentieth century. This new creative attitude was readily accepted.

In 1936 AD, when the slogan of reflecting the society was raised in literature, it was nothing new to the extent of fiction. Thus, the tradition of social realism that we think of as the gift of the progressive movement is limited to those fictions that reflect the social problem as well as present its cooperative solution. Undoubtedly, among this type of fiction we find a few good ones, but a large number are those where ideology has prevailed over the art of fiction. The balance of thought and art which is the essence of literary creation is seen in purely progressive fiction. On the contrary, the ideological outcry, which has its place in politics, is the main mood of these stories. Obviously, this ad-hoc objectivity did immense damage to the progressive myth. The response to this was two-fold. First, those who were advancing the tradition of social realism but did not want to create literature under a coined organizational principle, shunned the movement. The second class was that which, as a reaction against the monotony and thematic repetition in fiction, rejected the mythic tradition itself, which consisted of event, character, time and place, and in which

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storytelling was the main factor. This new creative tendency tried to give a modern colour and harmony to fiction from the three angles of subject, structure and technique.

If modern fiction writers had deviated only at the level of subject matter, we could have called it a healthy creative experience. Whether the subject of fiction is society in relation to the individual or the individual in relation to society, it makes no difference to the tradition of social realism. Whether the problem is personal or collective and social, it should be reflected in the story with the story-elements. A puzzle can be arranged with numbers and shapes, but a story cannot be told. We cannot completely ignore the Haitian and technical requirements of any genre of literature. Storytelling in story, myth in fiction is as important as symbolism in ghazal. If the soul of the ghazal is *taghazzul* and we cannot separate the ghazal from it, then why are we required to ignore the events in the story. Idea and emotion can be the basis and soul of poetry but fiction cannot be based on thoughts and emotions by ignoring the event and turning away from the character. Allegorical stories have been a part of our mythological tradition since ancient times, but unlike modern allegorical stories, they have never suffered from the tragedy of failure of transmission and understanding. The only reason for this was that these stories did not focus solely on plot and character. Even if modern fiction writers wrote such fictions, the reader also accepted them. Another important thing can also be said in this regard that our reader was not only aware of the social problems that the progressive fiction writers took as themes in their stories, but these events, situations and issues all around them. Poverty, ignorance, cruelty, exploitation, social oppression, violence etc. are the problems that are generally found in feudal society and since the time when literature containing social realism was being created, even before the progressive literary movement, the reader was interested because this period contained more or less all the evils of the feudal society and obviously these problems were not alien to the reader of that time.

Modernists tried to write fiction on the basis of human psychology instead of these problems, but completely ignored the societal factors behind this psychological condition. These fiction writers began to repeat the themes of loneliness, human destitution, psychological conflict and the breakdown of relationships and doubts among social contacts and relations in a low pitch rather than a high tone, which resulted the lost in their meaning and they also became so common in the same way that some topics and words of the progressive writings such as labour, bread, cloth, house, etc. The problems of the individual apart from the society presented in the modern short stories was not very compatible with our mood and thoughts. Apart from that our social situation was very different from that of Europe. Loneliness may be the tragedy of the people there, not ours, and even if it is our problem, it was the problem of the apartment culture found in the posh areas of big cities. One more thing which is commonly said about the themes of modern fiction is that the tragedy of migration, resulting uncertainty and homelessness are portrayed by modern fiction writers. Here the question must arise whether the problem of migration was not a social problem? How can we describe the biggest human tragedy only as a personal problem? I think no one can deny it that migration was a personal tragedy for Intizar Hussain, Nasir Kazmi, Joginder Pal and many other poets and writers but by and large it was a social tragedy. Even those who present it as a personal problem in fiction cannot avoid the fact that the problems caused by the migration of millions of people from one country to another not only limited to personal anxiety alone but we know it as a large and widespread social tragedy. That's all it's meant to say, we cannot deny the fact that our external and social behaviour and inner self have nothing to do with our environment and society.

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that if modern fiction had not ignored the fictional elements and tried to avoid the use of poetic elements in its place, the contemporary themes would have given a new dimension to Urdu fiction along with characters and events. It would have maintained its relationship with the reader of literature. Abstract story, plotless story, metaphorical and symbolic story and many other such meaningless experiments made fiction a mystery.

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