

BheRi NZAR (THE EVIL EYES) by Sain Sucha

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IT IS IMPERATIVE FOR A LANGUAGE TO SURVIVE THAT IT IS READABLE IN A READER FRIENDLY SCRIPT.

Author of several books including short-stories, debate articles, poems and inventor of a new script for Shahmukhi Punjabi Sain Sucha has after a long time published 10 short-stories under the intriguing title, BheRi Nzar (The Evil Eyes). I received the English and the Punjabi editions. There is an Urdu version, and a Swedish version is soon to be published.

I was curious about the original language in which he wrote but he told me that it was the Story which determined the language in which he writes rather than any one language. That is in sharp contrast to me who can write only in English. To write in four languages surely enabled Sain Such quickly to shift from one language to another.

Since I have been following with great keenness his work on the Shahmukhi script for the Punjabi which the literati use in Pakistan I wanted to try reading first in the new script he had invented. He has in the beginning explained the innovative script he has devised.

And Lo and behold! reading it was amazingly easy, I hardly felt the need to read the English edition but did it to be sure that I understood him correctly. The reason is that he has tried to use the language spoken in everyday life in urban Pakistani Punjab, especially in the Lahore and other cities. This I think is a very wise decision because the language of the cities always sets the trend and undoubtedly Urdu vocabulary is now internalized into everyday spoken language.

The 10 stories are Cchhotha Saiyana (The Fourth Magus), Rah (The Strategist), Photo Finish, Dil, Farebi (The Cheating Heart), BheRi Nzar (The Evil Eyes), Tasbih (Rosary), Aakhri Dhamki (The Final Challenge), Anngothi (The Ring), ChaviiN Hiss (The Sixth Sense), Baigunaah (An Innocent Question).

It is a vast and variegated spectrum of stories which the author sets forth with amazing economy of words, eliminating embellishment of ideas and arguments and instead in a few poignant words and expressions he vividly describes the variation situations and contexts in which his protagonists are placed.

The bottom line is the perennial urge to obfuscate the reality with mysticism and the fear of the unknown. In Cchotha Saiyana the Magus, the cab driver exposes the pretensions of his three customers by underlining the importance of observation and experience in contrast to religious and mystical arguments which serve no purpose in grasping the objective reality. This idea or argument permeates many of the other stories.

In Rah, Sain Sucha exposes in blunt Punjabi how the general himself achieved rapid promotions and endeavours to do the same to the daughter of the general who promoted him when she is asked to visit him for the promotion of her husband. Her husband exploiting the sexual appeal of her's to attain promotion. In short corruption instead of merit makes people climb the ladder quickly. These two stories at the beginning are the yardsticks through which he probes some different plots employing few words to say a lot.

Another set of stories take up the predicaments estranged marital relations and infidelity, the garb of hypocrisy and deceit to conceal guilt permeate many of the other stories.

The key story, BheRi Nzar (The Evil Eyes), puts in sharp relief the culture shock which children, especially Muslim or Pakistani girls experience as they grown up in a free Swedish cultural milieu while simultaneously being part of the conservative, repressive cultural values which all immigrants carry with them in their baggage as they set up home in the West. Each family must make a decision how to function in both and girls devise their strategies to handle the contradictions. It boils down to the same person choosing different attire to harmonize with the social environment. Indeed, it all depends on the family, how educated they are and how they value the right of their daughter to lead a "normal" in two diametrically opposite contexts.

BheRi Nzar (The Evil Eyes) is therefore not the Evil Eye which superstition keeps away as is widely believed with some talisman but how through the cultural frameworks of Swedish and Muslim/Pakistani eyes look upon a young girl.

Let me add, that from practical experience I know that Muslim female kids are very often the most oppressed sections of Muslim immigrant communities. While at school they are treated as equal and free and are expected to take part in gymnastics and swimming lessons and develop their talent in drawing and painting, when they return home they are told that all such activities are forbidden for Muslims: the women are expected to defend the honour of their families and their communities, a rule which does not apply normally to men.

I read all the stories in Shahmukhi Punjabi and only then in English. For me this is most encouraging because normally I do not read Punjabi though I do read Urdu.

Here. a crucial point must be made. A people or nationality such as Punjabis can only consolidate their cultural and linguistic identity if people start reading literature in the Punjabi script. In the Indian Punjab this is well-established and Gurmukhi script is widely read and written in.

It is just the opposite in Pakistan where the Punjabis constitute 55-48 per cent of the population but overwhelmingly, they are illiterate in their mother tongue. They can't read or write in it. A people without a written copus of literature in their tongue are culturally a poor people. Sain Sucha has demonstrated that reading and writing in Shahmukhi Punjabi using his scheme of alphabets and phonetic marks is a breakthrough. I know some other comrades are also working on the Shahmukhi script and have developed new alphabets and phonetic marks.

Hopefully all such scholars while agree on a script which they find must useful and start writing and publishing in it.