

“JEHRA GUL GULAB JA”

Book Review

By

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Ghulam Rabani Agro, “Jehra Gul Gulab Ja”, Sindhi Adabi Board, Jamshoro, 1991, two volumes, 688 p.

The book is a causal bio-graphical sketch of thirteen Sindhi prominent contemporary men and three non-Sindhis of an equal merit, and conveys their out-standing character and exemplary life.

The first book in the Indian sub-continent written on similar lines by an Indian Civil Servant, Sir Richard Temple in 1882 was entitled, “Men and events in My Life in India”. It covered the period of 1847-1881 discussing the various aspects of Indian affairs from 1847 and the achievements of the British administration, with evils still existing as in 1981 and encouragement for the future. It has bio-graphical sketches of some famous British administrators but it includes the details of many other not so famous, visitors and their view and conditions prevalent from time to time covering thirty five years, including roles played by the author. Thus the book also became a limited auto-biography of author himself. The book had such an impact and has so much contemporary material, that it became indispensable for the future writers on British administration. No book of this type had ever been written in the sub-continent before, though a number of bio-graphical sketches of noble-men, scholars, saints, and men of consequence had been written in Persian, but no one had concentrated on his contemporaries and thus they lacked the first hand information derived by closer contacts as Richard Temple did.

It was expected that some authors of the South Asia would write their memoirs on similar lines, giving the events more authenticity. No similar noteworthy book was published on any South Asian languages before independence. In the late 60's, when G.M. Syed's “Janab Guzarium Jin Seen” or, “With whom, I spent my life time” came out. It consisted of 177 bio-graphical sketches of his contemporaries of all walks of life. He had taken enormous pains to collect the informations on each biography covering birth date and place, marriages, children, education and other events in the life of the person, whom he knew personally and he describes the various events of interaction between himself

and the person of biographical sketch. It is creditable that he had been very generous to his political opponents under discussions and had highlighted their achievements and opinions in contradiction to his own. Being primarily statistical and quantitative the qualitative statements which normally are used in fine literally artistic approach, are missing, but it does have enormous authenticity.

The second book "Uhay Denha, Uhary Sheenha", on similar lines was written by Pir Ali Mohammad Shah Rashdi in three volumes. In the life sketches of his contemporaries, he has limited himself to the discussion the character of the individuals or the incidences, he is directly involved in the company or the opposition of these men. It covers the period from 1917-1967 and reflects on the political situations and socio-economic circumstances in Sindh. By taking relevant extracts from the three volumes a political auto-biography of the author could be built.

A third book on contemporary events was written by Karim Bux Nizamani in early eighties. It is impel and plain autobiography wherein he has projected his love for music and dancing and described events of his coming in to contact those meritorious artists of his coming in to contact those meritorious artists, during the life time. In the day to day literature no one before him in whole subcontinent had devoted his autobiography to the art of music and dancing. There are scores of artists whose names and works would have not come to the focus of posterity but for this author. He has given many events not directly connected with an art of music, dancing or screen, but he makes them equally interesting in his light-mood.

Rabani's book is the fourth one of the contemporary lives series in Sindhi. The personalities selected by the author are outstanding for their ideals, goals, principles and way of living that life. They all had shone in their life which they had lived as example for others. The life sketches are in any way not complete biographies, but are only an event or two or causal events of contacts with the author. Within each life sketch, the author refers to many other persons of similar virtues, thus it becomes life sketches within a life sketch.

The title translated in the English means "Those Flowers of Roses" and within each of their species, these are hundreds of cultivar hybrids e.g., wild roses, old garden roses, climbing roses, ground-cover roses, miniature roses, and floribunda and rambling roses. Thus each one of the characters is a different type of rose and within each sketch; he describes other lives e.g., hybrid roses of each species.

There is an introduction of 112 pages to the book. The introduction gives his own moral, social and religious beliefs and inclinations. The introduction itself clarifies, what the author is looking for, in ideal life of a man, from whom he expects, politeness, humbleness, frankness, truthfulness, hospitality, self sacrifices self respect, boldness to tell the truth, pride in poverty, dignity in behaviour, happiness in difficult times, and taking a stand on principles against the un-reasonable, hardship and tyranny. All his seventeen heroes have stood the taste of time in their ideal living.

Surprisingly most of his heroes have their formative period before 1950. The personalities that they developed were peculiar under the circumstances which can not be created again. It is true that their formative phase had occurred during the British Rule, which had roots in Victorian standards of morality and equality in the eyes of State and justice but the real fact is that values develop among the Sindhis had little character development of the British era.

It is known that for the past 4,000 years Sindh had remained in the economical turmoil. Economy based on agriculture was governed by irrigation, which was based on level of the water in the river Indus. There are statistics available that in every five years, there were two crops failures due to either water rising in the river too-late in the season or receding too early, and thereby causing crop failures. Of the balance three years, there was an average crop in two years and only in one year above the average. Thus there was continuous fear of crop loss, and famine. Added to this was annual flooding by the river of vast areas and people had to abandon their settlements. A major change in the river course would occur, every century or two, causing abandoning of vast area, change of dynasty and reduction in population by starvation and diseases. Since there was nothing that man could do, the population in general believed in fate, superstition, regard for saints, Sufis and learned man and above all faith in him, who controlled every thing. Since every body was expected to be affected at one time or other people developed befitting ideals of hospitality, sympathy for every one, helping each other, not caring for wealth, not accumulating wealth and etc. Sindh's literature also developed special patterns, based on mutual help, sacrifices and religious tolerance, leanings towards secularism, Sophisms, equality of mankind and etc. This Socio-economic pattern continued up to opening of three barrages in Sindh from 1932-1962, when crops were not based on hazardous fluctuations of the river water but assured water was available as per annual time table. This economic advantage, changed the mentality of the people from spiritualism to materialisms, travels to other areas, education, struggle to better of one's own future, search for opportunities and quick gains by socio-political contacts. The old moral values thus changed under these circumstances. The people, who had matured before 1950, are at loss to adjust to themselves to the behaviour of young folks. Mr. Rabani time and again, is

frightened in the new environments and asks himself: "Who am I", "What am I?", "Where am I?" And "Where am I going here after?" The fact is the old traditions in Sindh are dying and would keep doing so till new adjustments are made, to fit the new circumstances.

Mr. Rabani has used quotation, phrases, proverbs, famous poetic versions, and sayings of wise-men and saints, many times on each page and throughout his book. These have given the text enormous linguistic beauty, appeal and touch. It thus has become a rare piece of literature. Forty six years ago when Abdul Kalam Azad's, "Ghubar-e-Khathar" came out, its superb language and quotations made me to read it six times. Soon opinions on it were heard: "it is not prose, it is poetry". "It is neither prose nor poetry but is hypnosis" Rabani's phraseology, quotations, poems and sayings have given me the same sense of beauty of the language. In my opinion the book is worth reading, keeping and preserving.