Chapter-2

AHMED ALI
CHAPTER-II

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INTRODUCTION:

The present chapter aims at studying Ahmed Ali’s life and works in detail. Ahmed Ali was a poet, novelist, dramatist, short-story writer, translator, critic, diplomat, businessman and social worker. He was a sort of public figure. K. A. Abbas, Sajjad Jaheer, Raja Rao and E.M. Forster were some of his close friends. Ahmed Ali’s was a versatile career. He is known for his activities during the socio-cultural movements of the 1940’s India. Though Ahmed Ali left for Pakistan after partition, he lived as an Indian. Critics say he wrote about Indian cultural heritage. That way he is inseparable from the pre-independence Indian literary scenario.

The year 1940 is said to be the beginning of a new era in the history of Indian English fiction. A great number of novels have been written from this dateline. The two important Muslim novelists, Ahmed Ali and K. A. Abbas started their writing in the 1940s.

Ahmed Ali’s first novel *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) is considered his *magnum opus*. It is a classic Indian English fiction. *Twilight in Delhi* is
about the new era of social revolution, communal harmony and the celebration of past glory. Alamgir Hashmi remarks, “The book was rated a classic in Asia; its author was recognized as the first Muslim novelist of any consequence.”¹ Great writers like E. M. Forster and Edward Muir liked it very much. In fact, E. M. Forster encouraged its publication. Another writer of the period Bonamy Dobree considered it “poetic and brutal, delightful and callous”²

Thereafter, Ahmed Ali was considered a pioneer novelist of the group of Indian English Muslim Novelists. As so he has drawn the attention of the reading public.

AHMED ALI’S LIFE AND WORKS:

Ahmed Ali was born on 1st July 1912 in a genteel family of New Delhi. His father Sayed Shujauddin was an Assistant Commissioner in Indian Civil Service. Ahmed Ali’s mother, Ahmed Kaniz Begum was a great lover of literature. Ali was the first child of his parents. He started his formal education at the age of five with Quranic recitation. However, Sayed Shujauddin died in 1919 when Ahmed Ali was too young. So the young boy spent his early days of education in the house of his father’s elder brother Sayed Bahauddin who was a man of different taste and attitude. Ali started his study of English in 1922 at Wesley Mission High School, Azamgarh. He became a student of
Alighar Government High School in 1923 and completed his matriculation in 1926. There he met Mohsin Abdullah, the son of dynamic and liberal Shaikh Mohammed Abdullah.

Ahmed Ali's ancestral history is rich culturally and historically. Shaikh Abdul Qadir, a great Muslim mystic poet is the ancestor of the Alis in India. In fact, the mystic poet came from Baghdad in response to the request of Hamida Banu, the Mughal emperor Akbar's mother. Shaikh Abdul Qadir was a courtier teaching the Ulemas lessons in religion. Ahmed Ali had a great respect for his ancestors. He says,

The homes I belong to were among the most cultured people of that age. My ancestors on my father's side had come from Baghdad at the end of the seventeenth century. They were directly descendants of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Gaylani and were given lands and villages in the east Panjab. My mother's families were the Sayeds brought over by Humayun.3

1921 was an eventful year in Ahmed Ali's life for two reasons—firstly for the introduction of Ali to the literary world with the publication of his Urdu short story, *Mahavatan Ki Eik Rath*; and secondly for his meeting Sajjad Jaheer in Lucknow and Mohamuduzzafar in Mussorie. These young writers, in collaboration with one another, published a collection of short stories entitled *Angare*. The collection had
Ahmed Ali's two stories. One of them was "Our Lane." Angare has some historical importance. Firstly, it started a new phase in the history of South Asian literatures; and secondly, it made the beginning of the history of Progressive Writers' Association. It was a challenge to the British Government in India as it contained offensive matters. But Ahmed Ali said, "the authors of the book do not wish to make any apology for it, they leave it to float or sink of in itself."4

In 1927 Ahmed Ali attended English Poetry Classes of Eric C. Dickinson. Here he came in contact with Raja Rao. In the same year, Ali's first English poem appeared in an Aligar magazine. Ahmed Ali passed his B.A. in 1930 from Lucknow University with 'White Memorial Gold Medal.' Now his first English short story "When the Funeral was Crossing Bridge" was published. A few years later Ahmed Ali passed his M.A. standing first class first with Jawaharlal Nehru Gold Medal.

The establishment of All India Progressive Writers Association is one of the important movements of the Indian socio-literary history. All India Progressive Writers Association was established in 1933. Ahmed Ali was a co-founder of the movement. He played a vital role in the historic meeting of these progressive writers conducted at Lucknow on 9th and 10th April 1936. Ahmed Ali presented a paper entitled, "A Progressive View of Art." Describing his views on art, he writes,
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.\textsuperscript{5}

Critics say Ahmed Ali's devotion to art and culture was unquestionable.

Ahmed Ali was appointed a lecturer in English in Lucknow University and he served there until 1941 for ten years. By the way he inculcated a good writing skill. He became a co-editor of Iqbal Singh's literary journal \textit{Indian Writings}, a director of the BBC New Delhi and co-editor, with Raja Rao, for \textit{Tomorrow} and an editor of \textit{Pakistan Pen Muslims}.

Ahmed Ali served in various capacities. He was an English Professor at Agra, Allahabad and Calcutta during World War Second. He worked as a visiting professor of the British Council and visited China in 1947. After Independence he went to Pakistan and joined Pakistan Foreign Service. He was, for sometime, an ambassador to China and Morocco. Ahmed Ali retired in 1960. He represented Pakistan at the Eighteenth International Meeting of Writers at Belgrade. He was a businessman too.

One may say Ahmed Ali began his literary career as a Protestant. Of course, literature was his life long passion. He expected literature to
serve man’s interests. He dreamt the progress of society through it. Madhusudan Prasad says, “Still he does not consider the word ‘Progressive’ to be synonymous with revolutionary.” Ahmed Ali thinks progress means the betterment of social life. It means the banishment of mysticism and ignorance. It is an acceptance of realism as the basic structure of art and literature. Ahmed Ali, through his writings and lectures, declared a war against slavery, poverty and exploitation. He was a reformist.

Prof. Ahmed Ali married Bilgees Jehan Begum, a barrister’s daughter in 1950. She was a famous painter and writer. Though she never published any of her work, she was an inspiration to Ahmed Ali for his achievements. Bilgees Begum translated Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* into Urdu. Finally she died in Karachi in 1985 leaving Prof. Ahmed Ali in bereavement.

Ahmed Ali was one among many intellectuals, who left for Pakistan, after partition. He was clever enough to accept Pakistan Foreign Service. As he was a great lover of freedom of expression, he established a branch of ‘PEN’ in Pakistan. He encouraged a number of young Pakistani writers and artists. He brought out a collection of Urdu poetry into English that begins with Wali and Mir and ends with Gaalib and Dagh. Begum Shaista, a critic from Pakistan, is of the opinion that “Ali’s translation of these chosen Urdu verses can also claim the
distinction, that is to say that one reads them with pleasure, and is not conscious of the fact that one is reading a translation from another language." Ahmed Ali, as a founder of Pakistani literary movement, enriched the culture of that country through his novels, short stories, plays and poems. Actually he was a bilingual writer. His Urdu writings are as good as his English writings. Even he translated the Quran into English.

In addition to these multidimensional activities, Ahmed Ali is remembered for his humanism. According to Tariq Rahman,

Nothing can create Ahmed Ali, the man, the scholar, the poet, the novelist, the short story writer, the diplomat etc again. Death is only partially transcended by the work one leaves behind but it is never fully transcended. Let me conclude with one of his poems,

Across the Vast, unending sky
A pigeon plies its way
Towards the setting sun
I stand and watch it fly
Alone. 

Ahmed Ali lived a long life of eighty-four years. He gained experience in different fields like literature, politics and business. Ahmed Ali's
dedication to nationalism, humanism and socialism is remarkable. Yet critics in both India and Pakistan did not estimate him seriously. Though all of his novels deal with pre-independence Indian society, Indian critics listed him as a Pakistani writer, for he went to Pakistan. Likewise Pakistanis did not ascribe him any credit as he wrote on India. But in reality Ahmed Ali is beyond the limitations of his community and country.

AHMED ALI’S FICTION:

Ahmed Ali has written more than fifty books in both Urdu and English. “Our Lane,” was his first famous English short story. *When the Funeral was Crossing Bridge, Morning in Delhi, Before Death* and *The Prison House* are his other famous prose writings in English. *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), *Ocean of Night* (1964) and *Rats and Diplomats* (1986) are his novels. Social commitment is a hallmark of his literary output. Opposition to feudalism and imperialism, women’s emancipation, criticism of blind faith, caste, untouchability and communalism are the common themes in his writings. It is said,

In his writings, Ahmed Ali focuses mainly on slavery, poverty, misery of the mass and the exploitation of the poor by the rich of Indians, by the British and also of the uneducated by the educated and sophisticated class.9
Prof. Ahmed Ali was a progressive writer of a different kind. He believed that art has its root in life. So he expected a kind of change in contemporary Indian art and literature. Ahmed Ali writes,

Our literature, so far, has been of an individualist type, sentimental, unrealistic and irrational. Mystical conditions demand an uncompromising realism, looking the problems in the face. On the other hand, it should lay great emphasis on the truth of content, be more comprehensive and universal and insist on the naked facts and realities of life.10

Ahmed Ali’s aims and objectives of writing are enshrined in his first novel, *Twilight in Delhi*. The novel which was first published in 1940, saw more than eight editions and is considered one of the most popular novels of the period. It is translated into several languages of the world. It is an important novel of the late forties. Compared to Raja Rao’s *Kantapura* (1938) and K. A. Abbas’s *Tomorrow is Ours* (1943), Ahmed Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* is simple in plot-construction, epical in scope and structure and limited in characterization, but vast in meaning and appeal. It is observed,

The technique which Ahmed Ali uses in the novel is not only to be widely inclusive of details and tell
everything but also to depict life with complete and
objective honesty to show things - as they really are.¹¹

Twilight in Delhi is the story of a middle class Muslim family of Delhi. Mir Nihal, a middle-aged man is a typical feudal gentleman. He lives like a rich man. Flying pigeons, puffing Hukka, keeping a mistress for pleasure and the like are his habits. His family is overcrowded with wife, children, grandchildren, in-laws, his widowed sister-in-law and her children. Mir Nihal is in touch with national events like partition. Not to speak of he has witnessed Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58 in which he lost many of his family members. The British had demolished his ancestors’ houses making them paupers. Thereafter Mir Nihal became a British enemy. Even he hated Indian Muslims who imitated the British. He did not like his son Asghar wear English clothes. Once he told him, “I don’t like them (clothes). I will have no aping of the furangies in my house, throw them away.”¹²

No wonder, acquiring English education was the fashion of the day. But Mir Nihal thinks it is a kind of slavery. When Asghar wants to go to Aligarh for higher education, Mir Nihal opposes him, because, he believes, the British education will allure youngsters to Christianity. Mir Nihal, the protagonist who represents the first generation of Indian Muslims hates the British Empire for many reasons. He has a bitter
experience, in fact. At the tender age of ten, he had witnessed the deposition of Bahadur Shah and the British atrocities on Muslims. Ahmed Ali projects Nihal as a nationalist Muslim. He is depicted to be longingly engrossed in the memories of the past connected with the glories of Muslim rule.

Twilight in Delhi has four parts covering the period from 1910 to 1920, each chapter beginning with a popular stanza from Urdu poetry. The Urdu epigraphs suggest some thematic significance. The epigraph given at the beginning of the novel symbolizes the abject condition of India under the foreign yoke and envisions a stifling atmosphere. It is an extract from one of the poems of the last Mughal king, Bahadur Shah:

Delhi was once a paradise,
And great were the joys that used to be here;
But they have ravished the bride of peace;
And now remain only ruins and care.\textsuperscript{13}

As the plot of the novel develops Asghar reaches the age of marriage. He marries but his life does not run smooth. His wife dies while delivering a child. Asghar is a man with a desire to enjoy life. So he decides to marry his wife's younger sister. He appears to be a more
romantic character. He wants to break away from the traditional family pattern. But his father cannot put up with all this. So there is a conflict between the father and son. It is a sort of cultural antagonism, emerging out of generation gap. Besides, Asghar establishes a kind of relationship with the British that his father cannot like. Mir Nihal is a true Musalman and his life and beliefs are deeply planted in Indian culture. Ahmed Ali presents Asghar as a representative of a later generation of Muslims.

Bilquees is Asghar's wife who lacks a thorough moral fibre. She represents the modern trend of Indian Muslim womenfolk. She imitates the West. She makes a laughing stock of herself by wearing English shoes. The traditional Indian Muslim women do not respect her. The womenfolk are unhappy to see her in English dress. One of them remarks, "She looks as good as dead Farangees." Of course, the comment disheartens her Bilguees narrates this to her husband. Still Asghar does not take it seriously, because he has declared himself a champion of the modern way of living. Bilquees, a major woman character in the novel, reveals the fact that even the womenfolk of the period were averse to the idea of cultural change. Asghar's house is western in look. A traditional person like Syeed Hasan wonders to see such a great change in contemporary life-style. Syeed Hasan notices western furniture there. It is strange for Syeed Hasan, because his
people never sat on such furniture. When he looks at Asghar’s home he
feels his people are forgetting their culture because of their imitation of
the west. But Asghar does not agree with Syeed Hasan. He is of the
opinion that new things must be welcomed

Twilight in Delhi stands for the purity of blood. Mir Nihal,
Asghar’s father, is ready to disown his son for maintaining purity of
life. He even hates the Saiyyeds’ superiority complex. He is scarred of
life too. So he spends most of his time with pigeons and Unani
medicinal practice. As he gets old, he receives emotional shocks one
after another. First his wife dies, secondly his daughter-in-law suffers
from tuberculosis and thirdly he himself is struck by paralysis. At the
end, a widow of his brother leaves his family and one of his sons dies.

Twilight in Delhi is about Mir Nihal’s physical and psychological
problems. He becomes old. The new era opens a new social order for
him. Mir Nihal feels he is unfit to live in modern days. Another thing is
that many families migrate to cities.

When George V’s coronation takes place in New Delhi, the
whole city is jubilant. But Mir Nihal does not involve in the imperial
cultural celebration. While the procession is going on the streets of New
Delhi, Mir Nihal closes his eyes, painful thoughts haunting him. He
recalls the days of his ancestors who struggled against the British
Empire during the Sepoy Mutiny. A picture of the past and present hovers around him. He says to a grandson heroically,

Those are the people who have been our undoing, will be yours too, but you will be brave my child, and will fight them one day, you will be brave, and drive them out of the country.\

Ahmed Ali says things change rapidly in Nihal’s life. When he gets old, he suffers from a sense of alienation. That way he represents the contemporary human anguish. Others of his period echo the feelings of helplessness. They feel they are out of time and place. Mir Nihal is unhappy about the state of affairs and he is unmoved by the Home Rule movement and terrorist activities. He retires to bed rather. The writer says:

His days were gone and beauty had vanished from the earth. But life remained over which men had no command and must go on. He was weary and tired, limp like a shaken hand. His world had fallen to pieces all around him, smothered by indifference and death.\

Critics think the death of Mir Nihal’s wife is the main reason for his pessimistic attitude towards the world. It is remarked:
Death is a commonly recognized symbol of change and destruction. But the untimely death of Babban Jan, the young mistress of Mir Nihal is more a symbol of the end of an era, a break with a period in time. Her death marks the end of a tradition, a way of life, which bespoke of a culture and social pattern spurned by younger generation. With her death, Mir Nihal loses his resilience. He is not defeated but he accepts the fact of time running out on him.\textsuperscript{17}

The novel besides being the study of a pre-independence socio-political Indian culture is a description of various Muslim customs, socio-religious programmes like Baqreed, Id, Moharum and the like. It throws ample light on blind beliefs, superstitions, charms and the practice of Azaan for five times a day. Like K. A. Abbas's \textit{Inqilab} it alludes to a number of historical incidents of the age such as Home Rule, Non-Cooperation Movement, National Congress Meetings, \textit{Sepoy Mutiny} and the Royal Coronation. However, the plot-construction is not compact. Harish Raizada says, "Following the tradition of the great masters of novel Fielding, Thackeray and Tolstoy, Ahmed Ali has patterned his work on epic tradition."\textsuperscript{18} The novel has more than hundred major and minor characters. But the story of cultural degeneration moves around Mir Nihal, Bilgees and Asghar. It is observed, "\textit{Twilight in Delhi}, which actually lamented the fall of the
Mughals and the advent of the British, is a work which will never grow old as long as the walled city exists."¹⁹

Ahmed Ali's fiction reflects his personality. That is to say there is a psychological co-relation between the development of the novel and Ahmed Ali's temperament of mind. For instance, Mir Nihal shows his pessimistic mood. As the hero of the novel, he is the mouthpiece of Prof. Ahmed Ali. In one of his interviews the author himself had commented that,

It actually depicts the factuality of feudal life faithfully, and the Delhi of those days was, in reality, feudal. My purpose for writing the novel was to depict the decay of a whole culture and way of life which we lived factually.²⁰

One cannot imagine the existence of the novel without the famed Mir Nihal, who is Ahmed Ali's alter ego.

The old Mir Nihal does not fit anywhere in the process of socio-cultural developments. This, the novelist thinks, indicates the Indian problems at its final stage of the British reign. Not to speak of every intellectual of the period faced a great problem. Ahmed Ali was not an exception. Explaining the reason for writing the novel he says,

I remained an exile in search of what I had lost. India won her freedom. The British found an escape and left in a
hurry, degrading the East to the Third World, bearing
behind a series of intangible ethnic, social, political,
economic and geographical problems, a crisis of identity
into local and refugee, and a burden of hatred that will
keep the writers of South, South-East and Far East Asia
involved for generations to come.21

In a way, the novel, along with innumerable characters, contains
innumerable themes. The communal crisis, identity crisis, freedom
movement, imperialism, East-West encounter and partition are the
dreams under the shadow of a tree that is the novel. Therefore, the
novel is an epic of the pre-independence Indian life.

_Twilight in Delhi_ is lyrical as Prof. Ahmed Ali was a poet basically.
Sometimes it is mystical. The novel is compared with Virginia Woolf’s
_The Waves_ and Hermann Hesse’s _Demean_. According to Anitha S.
Kumar,

_Twilight in Delhi_ is concerned with time, life, the ‘still
point’ of the moment, the happiness which is just beyond,
while death and pain engulf the protagonists, blinding
them with their cudgels. Like these novelists, Ahmed Ali
makes abundant use of symbolic metaphors and images,
exploiting the phonological level of language; he probes
deep into the subjective world of vision and dreams. But
unlike them he focuses attention on the action, the event. He has a tale to narrate and it is through the narrative he achieves the lyrical mode.\textsuperscript{22}

Anitha S. Kumar says that even though the whole story of the novel develops along with the development of characters like Mir Nihal, Asghar and Bilquees, none of these characters is the central concern of Ahmed Ali’s \textit{Twilight in Delhi}. ‘Time’ emerges as an abstract character in it. Time seems to be the cause and effect as well as the character and constitution of the novel. She is of the opinion that,

\begin{quote}
The strain of symbols and images drawn therefore bear out the texture of time more than anything else. Time becomes the destroyer. But time is also the healer, time is also the avenger.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Apart from giving a pre-independence picture of Indian Muslim community, Ahmed Ali has made an attempt to strengthen the confidence of Indians by detailed descriptions of India’s past glory and highlighting the positive aspects of Indian Muslims in particular and Indian culture in general. However he has tried to write a socio-historical novel, he has failed to achieve his goal, because the characters of the novel remain uninspiring and his presentation is not so powerful as to achieve the desired effect. It is believed that no one could produce
a work like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anand Math*, a patriotic novel, which filled the Bengalis with patriotism and love for the motherland.

There is about twenty-five years gap between Ahmed Ali's first novel *Twilight in Delhi* and his second novel *Ocean of Night*. Once there was Partition, Ahmed Ali went to Pakistan where he was appointed an ambassador to Morocco and the People's Republic of China for nearly a decade. Ahmed Ali did not get enough time to think of his second novel which was written in the pre-independence period. Therefore, his next novel *Ocean of Night* was published in 1964.

Some critics think *Ocean of Night* is not as powerful as Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. But the author does not like the comparison. Surprising enough, the themes of both the novels and the sources of inspiration for them are the same. Some of the things like life between the wars, the harshness of feudalism, the growing modern spirit and the environment of Lucknow are the things dealt with in both the novels. Ahmed Ali himself writes,

The novel lay buried among my papers for almost twenty years, when it was published in 1964 at the request of British publishers. I had hardly any time to work at its revision. Its title was changed from *Mermaids of Lucknow* to *Ocean of Night*. It had been out of print for many years but I
have withheld it from publication in order to give the story a historical frame.\textsuperscript{24}

*Ocean of Night* has a limited number of characters. As for the characters and incidents, it has a different treatment. Besides, *Ocean of Night* is a document of Indian life between the two World Wars, exploring the existence of modern spirit within a feudal structure. The novel contains a blend of political, traditional, intellectual and mystical elements, which has undergone a great stress in regard to Muslim civilization. The work is a tragic love story of Huma. Still the novel is about feudalism. Interestingly K. A. Abbas's story *Evening in Avadh*, develops upon the same theme. To recall the history, Lucknow and Avadh were two important cities where feudal aristocracy reigned supreme.

An interesting thing about the novel is that the city of Lucknow emerges as a major character here. This reminds us the geographical phenomenon of Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy's pastoral novel *The Return of the Native*. Ahmed Ali starts the novel with a stanza written on the city:

May Lucknow last beyond all harm?

It still is better than many a place,

For you can often here behold

A lovely and enticing face. - ('A Lucknow Poet') \textsuperscript{25}
The heroine of the novel Huma is a courtesan. She is the daughter of a civil servant of a high family. Huma is well-versed in music and dancing and inherits many other qualities from her mother. She knows courtesans have no social status. They have to live by selling their body and art. They cannot enjoy the benefits of love, marriage and womanhood. Like *Twilight in Delhi, Ocean of Night* begins with a stanza from Gaalib's poetry, highlighting the courtesan's futile existence:

The steed of life is galloping fast,
The hand no longer holds the reins,
Who knows where it will stay?
The stirrups torn away.

Huma has accepted her fate as a mistress of Nawab Sajid Ali Mirza. Although she is not happy with him, she is grateful to him for his magnificent gifts like money, jewelry and security. Nawab is a man of taste. When he feels bored with Huma, he goes to a new prostitute Kesari Bai. The latter is a bewitching lady attracting men. Of course, she is a professional woman. The novelist describes her picturesquely. He says Kesari Bai,

...was the herb which the alchemist, in search of the philosopher's stone, had found and which, he believed, would turn the base metal of his body into gold. She gave
more pleasure to his aging cells than all the virgins he had known. She knew the pleasure of the flesh, and what was more could enliven his being with her art, which she knew to perfect mastery. She kissed his body in hundred enchanting ways; played the sporting faun and made him the excited hunter. She behaved like a cat that, by her witchery rouses the tomcat to caterwaulls. She coiled like a snake round his body and bound it in her possessive arms.

It is because of Ali Mirza’s distraction of mind Huma falls in love with Kabir whom she met in Nawab Sajid Ali Mirza’s parties. Kabir is like Arjumand, Huma’s first lover. Huma tries to get Kabir at any cost with her melody and dance.

The love scene of Huma and Kabir is dramatically portrayed. When both of them walk in a garden, a snake terrifies her. Suddenly she embraces him. The event leads to their love-making. On the other hand, Kabir has loved his cousin Zeb. Of course, he forgets her as he forgets many others.

One day, Kabir with his friend Raj Ali Khan visits Huma’s home. Huma becomes ecstatic. Thus they start taking liberty with each other and spend their time together. Though Bandu Khan, Huma’s music master warns her against her affair with Kabir, she does not budge.
That is to say Kabir and Huma enjoy life for many days. Finally they cannot continue their relations, as Kabir’s family does not permit his marriage with her. Huma realizes life’s harsh realities when she thinks “We are born in the world, we love, dream, build beautiful castles in the air-found empires and dynasties, lead conquering armies to extend our dominions only to die and leave no trace behind.” Gradually the hard facts of life make her mellow and she emerges a guardian of female class. Now she has become old. Nawab Chakkan uses her some years. Huma wonders herself for having crossed such a long period of slavery as a prostitute. She observes,

    It seems that ages have passed. How long ago it seems, and yet it was only yesterday. It was but last night that I had put on my bells and danced, and sang the song, he loved, -

    Gently walk, O fairest one,
    Lest your comely waist is sprained.

Ultimately Huma realizes the glamour of her body, decaying. The fortune that she had in her whole life has become fickle as the moon. What remains is sincerity in life. The other things turn temporal. Gradually she grows old. She feels she does not have courage to face old age and death. She knows money will not rescue her in crisis.
Actually what she needs is love and kindness. Perhaps the society will not give her these things. This makes her hate the rich who just use her and throw her. Ahmed Ali says, Huma “had grown not only in years, she felt, but also in experience. She was mistress of herself and would not allow anyone to lead her.” What we notice is that feudalism victimizes people like Huma and Kesari Bai.

*Ocean of Night* projects the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity. Ahmed Ali tries to say that the two old cultures of the country can co-exist with peace and harmony. The novel depicts the religious conflicts between Sia and Sunni sects of Islam. The Moharam festival which stands for an inter-religious harmony, turns into a conflict. Not to speak of the novel depicts the change in Indian society, especially Hindu-Muslim relationships.

*Ocean of Night* is a novel about social change. For instance, Roza Ali Khan though illiterate, dresses and behaves like an intellectual. He drives a Mercedes Benz. He uses European drinks. He wants to marry a modern woman, of course, at the cost of his old fashioned wife who wears purdah. There is also a contrast to this. Azizan, Huma’s mother regrets for the change in society. It is observed

There were so many patrons of art. Now there were other things to attract men’s attentions; the Radio and the Cinema. The emphasis was shifting to the patronage of a
different kind of dancing, where in society women learnt a few turns and gestures from the ancient books and old masters and danced on the stage charged a high fee for their performances.\textsuperscript{31}

Azizan likes tradition. She thinks the revolt against tradition is a revolt against life itself. Like Mir Nihal, she opposes English ways of entertainment. It is observed:

Woman had come out of Purdah and moved about freely in the streets. Western dancing was growing popular and cinema had popularized jazzy tunes... Very few patronized the courtesans... The Nawabs and the Rajas went in search of perverted emotions or exotic European beauties. The courtesans had become the dancing girls, the dancing girls, common prostitutes... Everything is cried for hurry and more hurry. Love was but flirtation, for there was no time for memory, for the contemplation of the charms of the beloved which alone gave colour to passion, intensity to desire, tenderness to the call of sex for sex.\textsuperscript{32}

*Ocean of Night* may be compared with K. A. Abbas's *Reflections in a Mirror* which depicts the so-called social rigidity of feudal order. Accordingly, "The daughter of a prostitute, even if she were the
prettiest and the best dancer in the town remained a prostitute to be kept the permanent mistress of a rich young handsome Zamindar.”

Ahmed Ali’s writings reflect social commitment. According to some critics, *Ocean of Night* is not only a social novel but also a romantic love story of Huma and Kabir. These two characters are the symbolic representatives of love, humanity and freedom. “The novel marks a significant shift from naturalistic to the extra-rational and lesser known realities of human life.” The rigidity of social rules and voluptuousness of feudalism are the basic causes behind the tragic end of Huma and Kabir’s sentimental love. It is said feudalism negates secular life. Ahmed Ali appeals the readers to reconsider social practices. He wants the rationalists to create a new social order of life, which will foster happiness and peace to one and all.

*Rats and Diplomats* (1986) is Ahmed Ali’s third novel. Actually it is an Urdu translation into English. Prof. Ahmed Ali has used a fable-technique in the novel. *Rats and Diplomats* is a kind of document about his life as an Ambassador in China and Morocco. Critics think the novel is not well-written.

According to Ahmed Ali, *Rats and Diplomats* is a satire on the perversion of human values. He says,
Reality is not what it seems or is made out to be; the bestial in human nature glares in the task of culture like a raw wound. The minds of the mighty are wrapped by corruption, greed and power, and have distorted the face of humanity into grotesque shapes. Think of the self-styled emperor Bokasa or Idi Amin, the racist perpetrators of apartheid of Auschwitz, Vietnam, the Shatila refugee camp. Human beings have turned human beings into rats and pigs. Do not forget that this novel is a satire. Jonathan Swift made regional feuds, the war, the emperor, ridiculous; inhabitants of the island, pygmies or giants or yahoos; George Orwell turned them into pigs. When Pandora's box is opened, the grotesque shapes multiply and abound. Today's world is an apt subject of satire, for good sense has failed to prevail.35

When asked about the relevance of the novel Ahmed Ali said that life itself is full of absurdities. The novel, in fact, reminds us of the modern absurd drama or the literature of post-structuralism. The people are unhappy and restless especially in the East. Art is the result of a struggle in life. The author feels evil succeeds in changing man's destiny. Ahmed Ali writes,
The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would pale into insignificance in the face of horrors that may be unleashed by the secret weapons developed by the atomic and technological revolutions and the star wars threatening the world, especially the less developed for so-called developing countries with their own terrifying experience of unrelenting dictatorship and mounting squalor, disease and ignorance, the worst exploitations of man by man, which is the subject of this new novel.36

*Rats and Diplomats* begins with two quotations—one from Amaury de Riencourt i.e., “in the world of politics, there are no ethics, no morality, no divine guidance or spiritual sanction,” and the second is from the *Mahabharata* i.e., “the last word of social wisdom is never trust.”

Ahmed Ali worked on the novel after World War II. *Rats and Diplomats* opens with the picture of a newly created nation. It develops through the fable structure. Finally it proves to be a profound commentary on one of the most influential political philosophies of the post-war situation. It is a book both for the youngsters and elders. Ahmed Ali narrates the story vividly.

*Rats and Diplomats* begins with the dismissal of a General who is appointed as an Ambassador of Bachusan, and, later posted to Micea,
the capital of Ratisan. This recollects us the division of India into India and Pakistan.

The hero of the novel was born in Pischewanbur. This imaginary city sounds like Peshawar in Pakistan today. Now the hero lives in China and he is addicted to opium. Here Ratisan is an imaginary country. The Ambassador is fond of architecture though he lives in an unattractive quarters. There are many other ambassadors staying with him.

*Rats and Diplomats* reads interestingly. Mr. Ambassador is voluptuous and arrogant. Still he wants to lecture about culture and the norms of co-existence in Ratisan. It is a formality that every Ambassador has to follow him. The Vice-Foreign Minister of Ratisan, who is a young and beautiful lady, has eloped with Tauchle Beau, the Ambassador of Samia. The latter is not handsome and he is a rascal womanizer. We come to know that he has already deceived Madame Chiang.

In Ratisan everything is out of control and order. For instance, the Ambassador of Philippines had to wait for a month to present his credentials. The Vice-Minister of Ratisan made him wait. Tauchle Beau’s girl friend Chiang is bewitching in look. He used to take her out to nightclubs and bars.
When Mr. Ambassador starts his speech, it is 11 o'clock night. In fact, the time given for the presentations of credentials to Mr. Embassy is 10 o'clock night. He is tired of waiting. But finally he delivers a lecture successfully, and his lecture earns an appreciation from other ambassadors. Burmese Ambassador congratulates him while Serpentine Ambassador feels jealous.

Meanwhile the Ambassador of Bachusan falls in love with a Ratisanian beauty. She is extremely beautiful and she lives as his neighbour. However, she is not suitable to him socio-politically. Still Mr. Ambassador tries to rape her and she creates a scene. Not to speak of Mr. Ambassador does not feel shy. Finally when an enquiry starts, he rejects her complaints and goes scot-free. Even CDA defends him.

Once an important meeting takes place in Ratisan. The subject of the meeting is the discussion of the problems of fast-growing rats in the country. The Director of Foreign Trade of Ratisan says,

We understand you have cats that are capable of eating rats and wiping out the menace we are faced with. We have tried various remedies like traps, pesticide etc., but the rodent population has only increased instead of diminishing. We have avoided the use of poison for fear of destroying other useful life. If you think your cats are capable of destroying the rats, we would like to know at
what rate they would be able to kill them off...that our rats are not mice. They are bigger, much bigger, both vegetarian and carnivorous. They can eat up birds, alike green finches and budgerigars and even pigeons. From your opening remarks, I feel that your cats would prove inadequate against our rats. They are capable of attacking civets.37

Every Ambassador visiting the country shows great respect for Ratisan. Already Samia has started to give 3.2 million tons of foodgrains to Ratisan every six months. But the problem of Ratisan is so horrifying that it has nearly 650 million rats that are four times more than Ratisan’s population of 160 million people.

The French ambassador and his wife have their own experience about rats. There is a difference of opinion between the French husband and wife about the eradication of rats. Mr. French Ambassador is of the opinion that human beings themselves should eat rats. He thinks it is a better remedy. In another instance he says humanity is a meaningless philosophy. But his wife disagrees with him when she says, “How bad you are to lump rats and human beings together.”38 She tells the story of a counsel’s daughter. The girl was nineteen years old and pretty. The two black rats backed her. She ran inside a room though they followed her. Then she ran to a dressing room and bolted the door. Again the rats appeared there through a window. She was horrified and began crying.
The people had to break open the door to reach her. After hearing this, the Ambassadors in the meeting came to the conclusion that somehow a common path should be followed in the eradication of rats in Ratisan.

Ahmed Ali brings in some romance in the novel. Here the theme of love is balanced with the theme of politics. Mr. Ambassador of Bachusan falls in love with a beautiful lady from Zoroastria who has recently come to Ratisan. Though she is married, she is not happy. So she loves Mr. Ambassador. Meanwhile, there is a clash between Ratisan and its neighboring country Sacerdotia. The international organizations and media support Ratisan. But the government of Ratisan recalls Mr. Ambassador.

However, the Government of Ratisan fails to control its rats, because its citizens turn into rodents. One fine morning everyone of the nation finds a tail behind his back. Mr. Ambassador says,

When I woke up in the morning I had a peculiar sensation of something moving at the end of my spine, something stiff and long, yet elastic like a cord. A strange fear came over me. It ran through each nerve and artery, and tingled through my being. It was a feeling of something horrible I had seen but could never imagine in my wildest dreams would happen to me, which had transferred itself to my person. I lay still in bed, afraid of
moving lest the impossible proved to be real, holding my
breath, unable to shut or open my eyes, something
whispered in my ears it was a nightmare, and God
Almighty had come and was saying. 'This in truth is your
semblance, and verily of all men. How long can you escape
your destiny?'... Then suddenly I cast fear out of mind and
pushing the blankets aside, jumped out of bed. There
indeed was a tail dragging behind me. I looked into the
mirror and was horrified. Interestingly the cat-Ratisans turn into human beings at the end of the
novel. The change implies the Marxian philosophy that all the ordinary
and insignificant characters will turn into major characters and the
major characters will turn into minor characters. As Ahmed Ali was
associated with progressive movement for a long time, he was well
aware of Marxian philosophy. So Ali satirizes mankind here.

A fable is a story which, with the help of animals, illustrates
human nature, passions, feelings, success and failure. Long back it was
the Buddha, who successfully used the fable-technique to convey his
doctrine of peace and co-existence. But among the pre-and post-
independence novelists, K. A. Abbas and Prof. Ahmed Ali are the two
important novelists who have used fable-technique in their works.
There are a number of similarities between Abbas's Cages of Freedom and
Ali’s *Rats and Diplomats*. As rats are the major characters in *Rats and Diplomats*, sparrows are the major characters of Abbas’s *Cages of Freedom*. K. A. Abbas has used difficult words like Quit Jungle Movement, which means Quit India Movement, Parrotistan, meaning Pakistan and Birdemocracy meaning democracy in India. Similarly Ahmed Ali uses the same in the novel.

The ultimate aim of the novelist is to combine the high seriousness of political philosophy with the humour of romance. Ahmed Ali shifts the tone from the seriousness of philosophy to the farcical confusion that results in the image of cats chasing human beings. It is a very sarcastic and funny situation as it is animals’ predictable behaviour. Really the fable is a critique of human society. *Rats and Diplomats* is both profoundly serious and delightfully light. It achieves a remarkable success in conveying a message. It throws light on the contemporary national and international politics. In order to understand Ali’s *Rats and Diplomats*, one should know the post-war political developments in the world. One may say *Rats and Diplomats* is a serious political allegory. In order to understand it one must know the political views of Ahmed Ali and the differences between Socialism and Communism and Bureaucracy and Democracy.
CONCLUSION:

Ahmed Ali was mainly a novelist. His fiction is about Muslim community and Indian culture. Though he went to Pakistan after Partition, he wrote on Indian life. In most of his writings, Ali speaks of fundamentalism, cultural degeneration and westernization. He writes about the past. Most of his characters are modern men and women. Some of them are gloomy and pessimistic. Indeed, they suffer from a sense of alienation
REFERENCES:


23. Ibid., p. 32.


26. Ibid., p. 4.

27. Ibid., p. 136.

28. Ibid., p. 123.

29. Ibid., p. 147.

30. Ibid., p. 149.

31. Ibid., p. 65.

32. Ibid., pp. 65-66.


36. Ibid., p. 95.


38. Ibid., p. 58.
39. Ibid., p. 150.