

A prominent Kohwar poet

By Sher Nawaz Naseem

REHMAT AKBAR KHAN REHMAT is a famous poet of Chitral who has rendered valuable services towards promotion and development of over the past 30 years. This Kohwar Chitrali language is spoken by 3.5 million people in Chitral, the Northern Areas and other parts of the country.

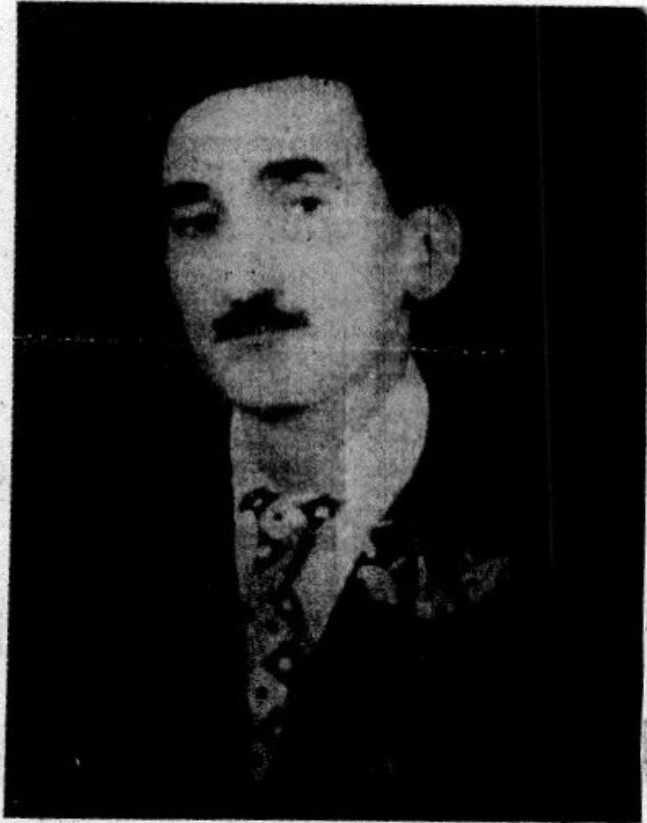
Kohwar is still at an early stage of its development, but during the period of its evolution it has produced a number of poets of high calibre with immense powers of imagination at their disposal. The more remarkable among them are Mohammad Siyar Mohammad Shakoor, Tajammul Shah, Mirza Mohammad Ghufan, Mohammad Nasirul Mulk, Mirza Firdous Firdousi, Baba Ayub, Rehmat Akbar Khan Rehmat, Prof. Israr-ud-Din, Wali Zar Khan Wali, Gul Nawaz Khaki, Mohammad Irfan, Ameen-ur-Rehman Chughtatai, Sher Wali Khan Aseer, Gul Murad Khan Hasrat, Inayatullah Faize and Mohammad Chengiz Khan Tareeqi.

Persian was the state language of Chitral (formerly a princely state) till its accession to Pakistan in 1952. In the mosques and schools, it was a medium of instruction throughout the area. Therefore, it greatly influenced the Kohwar language. As a result, Kohwar has derived 40 per cent of its vocabulary from Persian, with some changes in pronunciation and grammatical structure. Naturally, the poets and writers of this period were unable to escape the influence of Persian. Whenever they composed a poem, they preferred to write in Persian, because the Kohwar dialect was not on written records, in contrast to Persian, with its rich historical and cultural background.

Rehmat Akbar Khan Rehmat, born in 1936 at Dam Chappali, sub-division Mastuj, Chitral, is a man whose father, Hakim Farman Akbar Khan, was a close associate of the then rulers of Chitral state. Farman Akbar was awarded a vast amount of fertile land for his contribution and services to the state. Mohammad Iqbal Khan, the uncle of Rehmat Akbar Khan, was a famous poet in Persian—it is said that his verses were published in New Delhi.

Rehmat, under the patronage of his father, received his early religious education at home. He began to study Persian literature, when Mulvi Mohammad Nasir Shah tutored him. In a short period of time he gained command over the language. He wrote an elegy (marsia) on the death of his uncle Mohammad Iqbal when he was only 12, thus entering a world he had discovered for himself. One of his early poems, in which he has recorded a dialogue between the lover and the beloved, is reproduced below:

گفتا کہ چہر علیکی گفتم کہ آہ کشیدہ
گفتا کہ جیت آہ گفتم کہ درد مجھ کو شستہ
گفتا کہ حالت بدن گفتم کہ جیلہ نازک
گفتا کہ آخر قدرت گفتم کہ نیم مرده
گفتا کہ پوہ پزیراں گفتم کہ تیغ زوان
گفتا کہ جیت ملائی گفتم کہ کلام خندہ
گفتا کہ چہر پشیدہ داری گفتم کہ عشق بازی
گفتا کہ تا بکے گفتم کہ ہستم زندہ



Rehmat Akbar Khan Rehmat

Along with Persian, he also began to write poems in Urdu. But the right sort of environment, literary circles, encouragement and incentive were lacking. At the same time, Persian was losing its grip over the minds of the people, with the introduction of Urdu as a means of education and correspondence. Rehmat Akbar Khan Rehmat, therefore, decided to bid farewell to Urdu and Persian for ever. According to the advice of some of his friends, he selected Kohwar, his own native language, as a means of expressing his power of imagination, and if he could reach the public and become known as a poet of high standard.

When *Jamhoor-e-Islam Kohwar*, the government-sponsored monthly journal in Kohwar language began to appear from Peshawar, his writings appeared on its pages and received tremendous appreciation from the people. His wide (unpublished) collection of poems touches various aspects of human lives and reflects the poet's own talented genius.

It is unfortunate for him that lack of financial resources has shrouded his collection in obscurity, and all his good work will face oblivion unless it is published by the government or some other organisation. Such a positive step would make his poems a source of guidance to the people on the one hand, and preserve a big portion of Chitrali culture on the other.

Like many others, Rehmat Akbar Khan is not a traditional poet. His talent presents a variety of pictures and societal situations. He has a close insight into society. He disdains exaggeration and puts the facts before the people. It is the main feature of his poetry that what he saw, felt and observed, he recorded faithfully. He writes:

سروش ایفرین برار گیان ضلوع پریشام
زردادب نوسنے آہیگر جوڑان پریشام
تو چھا خریکریچے ژاؤدہرست ہن پریشام

(How unfortunate) that I saw brothers who thirst for each other's blood. When the daughter offered respect to her mother, she used to pinch her ringlet. It is a matter of shame the son has a stick in his hand to beat his father with.

From the very beginning, Rehmat developed a love for nature. The stars, the moon, the sun, the mountains, the streams, the clouds, the rose, the sea and the green fields are the components without which his poetry would be incomplete. He records his feelings in such a manner:

بلو شیرین ہوازا، آہر فغان بکولو
کیچہ بے دم کلاب برہموشاؤ پنهان بکولو
نہ پچورتان ودلیا، گبور سی مفرودیا
گلان کی ہانی خورودیا، یو چھوری جیلان بکولو

In the sweet voice of the nightingale, there lies an episode of sorrows. How those roses are unkind to us which disappear after giving short-lived pleasure. The flowers, perhaps, are proud of their temporary beauty, but unaware of the wind that is expected to come in the autumn to take the beauty off.

He uses a simple language, and readers have no complaints against him. He is proud to say that Kohwar has a rich vocabulary. Therefore, he avoids borrowed words in his writings. With his pleasing countenance, he gets words of appreciation from everyone. With a soft-spoken and mild temperament, he is famous for his traditional hospitality. Nobody visiting Mastuj could think of returning without enjoying his hospitality and sharing some moments of pleasure with him.

His life is full of social activities. He is president of the Anjuman-e-Tarraqi-e-Kohwar, sub-division Mastuj, Chitral.