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USTAD Nirale Alam a character in Ibne Safi novels, is a chowkidar-turned palmist in real life.

'I knew him', Ibne Safi said, with a faint smile. 'I brought him to book. Swell guy, you must meet him'.

But the Ustad is an exception. Ibne Safi does not remember having any real life Colonel Faridi, Captain Hameed, Imran and a host of other immortal characters which have been emerging from his novels over the fifties and sixties.

"I did know a Qasim (the millionaire duffer youth genie in search of love)", Ibne Safi said. 'But, of course, he was much shorter'.

Faridi? Oh, he is my ideal', Ibne Safi said solemnly.

But, Ibne Safi knows, too, that almost each of his popular characters has been made an ideal by one reader or another.

His writing has been habit-forming, one might even say an addiction. All too many people have tried to imitate the inimitable.

This must always have given Ibne Safi a creator's price. But this has now set him thinking, thinking furiously, for he must make his characters imitable to get the cameras rolling. The entry into the film industry is a serious affair.

About two years ago Ibne Safi refused a producer's offers on the grounds that he wouldn't let his popular characters be distorted in film. He told the producer they could not be picturised.

Ibne Safi still says that. But, he says, this should not be taken to mean he belittles the artistes and technicians of our film industry. 'It's just this', he says. 'The job is terribly tough'.

Understandably, the story

given by him to **Dhamaka** does not have any of the popular characters of his detective novels. He can't simply risk it. Not now at least.

Q. It is said that the characters such as Faridi, Hameed and Qasim in your novels have so vast dimensions that it has been found impossible to picturise them. Now about those new characters in **Dhamaka**, do you think they would emerge on film as you wrote them in the screenplay?

A. I would say that picturisation of my novels has not come about only due to my objections. About three years ago I had signed a contract with a producer on the understanding that I should create new characters for his film.

The project fizzled out when the producer asked me, instead, to base the story on the popular characters of my novels, that is Faridi, Imran and Hameed.

I refused to meet his demand as I knew that it would be too much of a risk.

I knew if the characters did not emerge in the story, they would be distorted forever in the minds of my readers.

The characters in **Dhamaka** have very little to do with my novels. The roles being played by Maulana Hippiie (the young producer) and Javed Iqbal, a new face, are as a whole new to my readers. I created them exclusively for the film.

As I told you, the deal with the producer was cancelled because I did not let him have my popular characters for his film. I had then created the two characters now being played by Javed and Maulana Hippiie in the Imran series novels.

Jameson, now characterised by Maulana Hippiie, first appeared in my novel **Taboot Men Cheekh**. The other char-

acter also made its first appearance in this book.

They were of course just two of the many characters. Their importance developed after Maulana Hippiie met me and asked me to develop some of his own ideas.

When we were talking, I felt that Maulana Hippiie very much 'resembled' Jameson. I told Maulana Hippiie what I thought.

Maulana Hippiie started at this. Meanwhile, I told him I could not really do what he wanted. I said if he could play Jameson then I would write a film story featuring Jameson and the other character Zafar-ul Mulk. Maulana Hippiie readily agreed and the work on the film was started.

Q. Your novels are read throughout the subcontinent and in Pakistani communities in the Middle East and United Kingdom. When the film is released, many people will be eager to see it just because the title will carry your name. Have you thought of that?

A. I would say that **Dhamaka** is an experiment. I want to see what happens to my characters on film. The characters in **Dhamaka** are, one might say, guinea pigs.

If these characters and the moviegoers—a large majority of whom would have read my novels—get along well together, I may ultimately bring in Faridi, Hameed and Qasim in the next film.

Q. For the present you wouldn't run the risk of putting your characters through the test of picturisation which may distort them for good.

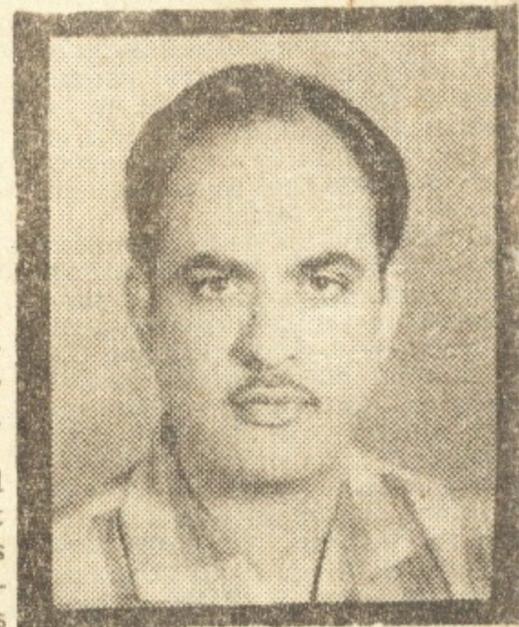
A. You're right. As you know, the readers are so familiar with these characters. The whole personality of each of them resides in their minds. I don't want to give the readers any unpleasant shocks.

Q. It is said that a large number of people have actually

learnt Urdu by reading your novels.

A. Well, you must believe me when I say there are people who have learnt Urdu just to read my novels.

Q. Your novels have been notable for the absence of eroticism and violence. But these



'I couldn't simply risk it.'

very things are instrumental to a very large extent in making a film successful. How do you deal with this problem in **Dhamaka**?

A. Avoiding sex and violence can of course create problems for a film maker. But successful detective films have been made in English, too, without an overdose of either sex or violence.

In the books. I keep up the momentum by strong narrative. I am trying to do the



The Biggest Bundle

YEARS after a silent fight with a mental illness which threatened to destroy his talent, Iqbal, the giant of Urdu thriller novels, has come to the film industry with a probing, and probing, pen. He has given the story and screenplay for 'Dhamaka' (Explosion). But Iqbal is careful not to term this a start. 'It's an experiment,' he says with emphasis. Interviewed by SAJID RIZVI.

same in the film by with a strong story line and crisp dialogue.

The rest is looked after by Qamar Zaidi (director), Lal Mohammad Iqbal (music) and Madan (camera). In fact, at places I have satirised sexualism.

Q. Some of the main features of your writing have been the light humour and the restrained approach to so many apparently awful things and the grandeur of style. Does your strong story line have anything of the sort?

A. Of course, I think I have retained the humour and other factors which go to build up novels. But, you know, in a film so much is beyond my control. So much depends on performance and technical effects.

My books never sell because of any graphic bedroom stories or a lot of bang-bang. And I hope the films which I make will be seen because they will be devoid of these features.

Q. Are you satisfied with the quality of acting?

A. As you know, the cast includes Shabnam, Rehman, Arsh Munir, Qurban Jilani and Tamanna besides Maulana Hippiie and Javed Iqbal.

About half of the film is complete. I must say that although I am a newcomer in the field, my advice on various aspects of the production was heard by artistes and technicians alike. Director Qamar

Zaidi has been very helpful.

I do not agree with those who put our artistes' capabilities into doubt. It is wrong to say that they can work nothing but stereotype roles.

I am trying to belie this contention by the results achieved in **Dhamaka**.

There is nothing wrong with our artistes. They themselves admit they have never been made to work as they should have been.

Q. Your books have served a purpose, in that they took the Urdu language to new territories. As you rightly remarked, some people even took the trouble of learning Urdu merely to read your novels. Does your film, a detective film at that, have a purpose.

A. I think detective films, too, can be made so as to educate people to sharpen their intelligence. Everything, however, depends on how to go about the thing.

Detective films should not teach new ways of committing crime. They should, instead, introduce the masses to new ways of combating crime.

I have written the story for **Dhamaka** with a deep awareness that the film will be seen by a far wider spectrum of people than the one which has had access to my books. A great number of illiterate people will be seeing the film. Naturally it becomes all the more of a job for me.