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Post-colonial sentiments in poetry of Shaikh Ayaz

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at discussing and exploring the sentiments of revolution, aggression, nationalism and hatred against the mighty elites during and after the colonial rule through selected, translated verses of one of the most renowned Sindhi and Urdu poets Shaikh Ayaz. The study finds that Ayaz is a popular voice during colonial rule, partition and the events emerging after independence mainly martial laws, political chaos and anarchy and ban on freedom of speech. The major source of translation was 'Songs of Freedom' - a translation of four books of Ayaz by Asif Farrukhi and Saleem Noonari published by Sindh Culture Department.

Keywords: Shaikh Ayaz, Injustice, Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, Revolution, Nationalism

Introduction

Shaikh Mubarak Ali, popularly known among the literary circles of Pakistan with his pen-name Shaikh Ayaz, is the most prolific poet, short story writer, thinker and philosopher in Sindhi language. Born in 1923 in Shikarpur, Ayaz has authored 63 books – 39 being only poetry books – besides short stories, plays, autobiographies, biographies and non-fiction (Shaikh 2020). His works are translated in English by late Asif Farrukhi and in Urdu by Fahmida Riaz (Naeem, 2021). It was due to strong companionship with both that Ayaz published his two books in Urdu language- *booye Gul*, *Nala-i- dil* and *Neel Kanth aur Neem ke patey*. He was the popular voice of the progressive movement in Sindh and emerged to be the most prominent poet of post-colonial age -considered greatest poet of the Sindhi language second only to Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. After World War II, the gradual decay of colonialism began which roughly lasted till 1980, and hence many new countries emerged on the map of the world with rights of self-government and freedom of political set up to run the administrative affairs of the country. Owing to colonial mindset and philosophy towards the colonized which Russell (1954) calls a 'While Imperialism', a wave of anger and hatred simmered in the hearts and minds of the people whose land was occupied by the western colonizers on pretext to moderate and civilize them. This resulted the growth of nationalism- the key sentiment in anti-colonial literature. This hatred took a fierce dimension as dissenting voices from across the world were heard against the occupation. On literary front, the writers played their tremendous role in reflecting anti-colonial sentiments which could be considered as the move of liberation. This gave a fresh impetus to the literature of the time as new wave of anti-colonialism, modernism, and structuralism grew immensely

popular among the colonized authors and their countrymen. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Wole Soyinka's plays, *A Quality of Violence*, *A Strong Breed*, and *The Play of Giants*, [Sol T. Plaatje's *Mhudi: An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago*](#) (1930), [Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*](#) (trans. 1925), Salman Rushdie's *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing*- few to name- can be cited as example who wrote in the period which is refereed in literature as postcolonial literature. The postcolonial literature was created in almost all continents except Antarctica and all colonized nations which includes Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and India.

This study presents the unsung fact that Sindh has produced quality literature in postcolonial era, and the works of Shaikh Ayaz through this study validate the reality. That's why the translated verses of Ayaz's poetry speak the volumes of anti-colonial sentiments. Though the Sindhi writers wrote against colonials and the adverse political upheavals, unfair treatment of federation against Sindh, and exploitation in all spheres of political and social set up. Few such to name are Sobho Giyanchandani, G.M. Syed, Rasool Bux Palijo, Jamal Abro, Ghulam Rabbani Agro, Rasheed Bhatti, Amar Jalil, Ustad Bukhari and Qamar Shahbaz. However, due to untranslated material, the sources of information like Wikipedia and others do not reflect the anti-colonial literature produced in Sindh which highlights the incompatibility of the Sindhi writers who could not pace with the important phase of human history. Hence through this study, it aims to discuss that Ayaz has remained a very prominent voice of Postcolonial literature in Sindh who revolted against all anti-human and inhumane acts.

After analyzing post-colonial literature, it could be classified in two groups: one deal with anti-colonial struggle, resistance, revolt, freedom, cultural identity and the prevailing effects of colonization, while the other discusses the general themes and the existing social, political and economic issues not in accordance with anti-colonial sentiments. Salman Rushdie's two books stand as example in this regard: *The Satanic Verses* (1988) discusses magical realism with religious background, while *The Midnight's Children* (1981) reflects loose allegory to discuss the transition from the British Raj to independence with protagonist Saleem and others like Shiva, Padma etc. who take birth at the very moment of independence (Wikipedia, 2021). He also discusses the post-independence Indian society in multifaceted manner.

Foster & Nwiyor (2017) discuss the deep rooted anti-colonial situation in the novel Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and its lasting effects on the marginalized community of Umuofia. The researchers discuss that it was because of exploitation of colonizers which led towards the financial setbacks and social poverty of the community. Further owing to this, the community largely remains male chauvinistic in nature and thus the novel poses to be anti-feminist as well. But the authors present the view that the novelist has pronounced the reality in the community amid the existence of mighty colonizers.

Chae (2015) presents his point of view about Roy's *The God of Small Things* where the novelist talks about environmental exploitation in India in as the factors of British colonial system. Such exploitation and social deterioration are based upon gender, race and class. The research believes that environmental exploitation is masterfully handled by Roy through her ecofeminism. Thus, Roy's post-colonialism can be refereed as postcolonial ecofeminism.

When we view the plays of Tariq Ali, Gamal (2010) brings forth a novel dimension of his works like *The Leopard and the Fox* and *The Shadow of Pomegranate Tree* by discussing his metafictional strategies. The researcher opines that the author rewrites the history through a political lens in

which Leopard (Z.A. Bhutto) and the fox (General Zia) encounter each other, besides revisiting the western conspiracy through Zia to eliminate Bhutto. In this way, Tariq Ali possesses a great art of rewriting history- the cornerstone of postcolonial literature.

Helendra (2017) brings forward her views about hybrid identity of Changez- the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's novel *A Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Such identity is seen to be a reconstructing process after colonization experience. However, the researcher argues that the novel narrates the resistance against European- especially American domination. In wake of this, a common Muslim is made a fundamentalist who never thought to be so, but falls victim of colonial mindset. All papers discussed above suggest a significant uniqueness of the authors in their dealing of postcolonial themes. Achebe discusses **occupation and aggression besides anti-feminist notes**; Arundhati Roy discusses **environmental exploitation in the backlash of colonialism** which she prefers to call ecofeminism, and Tariq Ali upholds his greatness by rewriting history saying that colonizers' view of history largely remains biased and unauthentic as they attempt to justify their invasion, aggression, exploitation and occupation. Same attempt is made by Hamid through his lead role Changez.

Ayaz stands unique among all the authors in dealing and handling the postcolonial themes. He is a popular voice against all forms of racism, extremism, aggression, occupation and imperialism. Humanism is a chief characteristic of his poetry besides revolt, revolution, love and reawakening. Hence, humanity stands atop and can be called as leading theme of Ayaz's poetry. He can be quoted as under in this perspective:

Whomsoever, wherever oppression is done, I feel it upon myself.

Whenever the sanctity of a home is perished, it hurts as if it were my home.

Oh you! The oppressed and enslaved people of the world,

If anyone among you sets free from slavery and oppression,

I feel the burden lowering from my neck. (The Songs of Freedom, p.15, 2010)

Here we can find the open declaration of standing with all enslaved and oppressed people of the world beyond any discrimination of race, color or creed. He is deeply hurt to see the people living life under illegal occupation of mighty empires. He feels himself at ease when liberty is granted to anyone anywhere in the world.

Ayaz was booked by Ayub Khan regime on the charges of treason and inciting youth for revolt through his poetry. He was imprisoned at Central Jail Sahiwal. This could not prevent him from creating the ferocious poems which were popularly sung by the people of Sindh to express their anger against the military dictatorship in which the basic rights were all curbed. One of his masterpieces is presented below:

I accept my crimes

Isn't it crime that I have left the lofty sky,

And instead loved the beloved motherland?

Isn't it crime that I have built the temple of love on Earth?

And I demolished the wall of hate you erected for us,

And sang the songs of love. (Songs of Freedom, p.224, 2010)

Here we find Ayaz the universal messenger of love who subverts the deliberate moves of mighty elite to bring hatred among the hearts of men so that they could continue delve deep into their problems at subjective level and never to ask for freedom or could raise their voice against suppression and occupation. For this purpose, he told those among the power corridors that it

was his big crime that he has willingly left the loft sky to love the land, and his great crime being building the temple of love on earth and demolishing the wall of hate. The same continues with another powerful stroke:

Isn't it crime that I sang for liberty,

And removed the iron collars from the necks of slaves?

Those magical songs of mine broke the arch-old chains.

Therefore, all people now pick my tears considering them precious pearls.

Yes, I accept my crimes.

Nationalism is another feature which got powerful boom in wake of colonialism. The colonized applied this popular slogan to oust the imperials and to achieve liberty. Gandhi's 'Quit India Movement' can be set an example in this regard. Nationalism soon transformed into patriotism and aimed at freeing the land from outsiders. The movement of Bhagat Sindh can be cited as example here. Ayaz was also the product of same age, and thus his poetry is heavily loaded with the nationalism- though it was directed toward Ayub Khan's One Unit policy. Owing to his adherence to the progressive ideology, humanitarian values, secularism, rebelliousness, and revolt, Ayaz stood as a catalyst during the tenure of political chaos and anarchy and his verses brought masses on streets to stage demonstrations against the governments. He has closely witnessed anarchy, bloodshed, colonialism, and autocratic governments, and this all turned him cynical towards dictatorship. His poem was fervently read, sung and published:

Who will carry the blot on his character?

Who will not sacrifice himself for Sindh?

When Bhattai would beg for motherland,

Thousands would offer their lives. (Songs of Freedom, 2010)

The poem's broadcasting was banned from participating in public; Ayaz's books were collected from bookstores; their publishing was banned; the publishers and sellers arrested, and Ayaz was again behind the bars. The contemporary conditions contributed much to shape the personality and poetic flight of Ayaz. He has seen many upheavals before him: From secular, peaceful Sindh to religious extremism, death of Bhagat Kanwar Ram, death of Allah Bux Soomro, partition, mass migration, massacre, religious fanaticism, bad governance, One Unit, military coups, MRD movement and much more. Yet he composed verses against injustice, suppression and all prevailing evils. His poem 'Truth is a high felon' stand a powerful voice against freedom of speech and its consequences:

Truth is a high felon.

It's made captive from day one; it's enchained.

It's brutally murdered in result of constant search and thrown down from highest peak.

Sometimes, it's dropped into boiling oil,

And sometimes it is sent to gallows.

But yet, it carries and continues a magnificent tradition:

It makes one restless and fearless when it finds its way in the heart.

Have you ever thought who do you befriend?

Truth is a high felon. (Self-translated to support the idea)

In 1946, Royal Indian Navy revolt took place when HMMS ship was at Karachi and the mutineers took control of it. The revolt later proved to be a flop but it gave encouraging impetus to the youth who wished to liberate India from the powerful British. The mutineers were communist

leaders Sobho and A.K. Hangal (famous Indian actor). Here an important dimension of Ayaz is yet to discuss. Comrade Sobho Giyanchandani, who was a graduate from Tagore's Shantiniketan, and Ayaz very good friends, and it was under influence of the former that Ayaz grew to be a Marxist and believed that the Marxist philosophy would play a better role to lessen the miseries of common folks. Thus, during revolt, Ayaz as a revolutionary sang the poem:

'Hila do samaj ko, gira do samraj ko

Lao naya nizam, jo pasand kare avaam

Inqilab, inqilab, gao, gao inqilab'

Shake society, sink imperialism.

What the people prefer, bring that new system.

Revolution, revolution, sing revolution sing revolution (Naeem, 2021)

The same spirit is seen when I.K. Gujral calls upon Ayaz to request him reading his Sindhi poem so that he could feel the flow of words and beauty of their rhythm. Ayaz here reads 'O Baghi, O Raj Drohi'. Gujral, who later became Prime Minister of India happily told Ayaz, "You are Chandar Shekhar Azad of poetry." (Naeem, 2021). So, we find Ayaz as the child of Marxism as well.

Ayaz's natural mood of resistance and revolt does not stop here. He attempts to awaken the masses through his poems. His struggle for liberty and human values does not end at freedom from the British Raj, lifting of martial laws, restoration of democracy, rights of freedom of speech or the slot of vice chancellor University of Sindh, but it continues till all chains of imperialism and the remains of colonialism are not perished and mutilated. He violently criticized the feudal lords, extremist clerics, exploiters, profiteers and all those who add to the miseries of the common, innocent masses. He warns the people of such enemies:

O my nation! Yesterday I narrated to you tales of destinies.

Today the head of every rebel is crowned with penalties.

Today, my land dances and flutters on the rhythm of blood,

Heads lowered of those shameless traitors, Mirs and Pirs.

'Ayaz' today everyone says, 'you have kept your words'

And sung of freedom and have exposed many consciences' frailties. (Naeem, 2021)

After analyzing the translated verses of Shaikh Ayaz, we find him loathing capitalism, imperialism and all forms of human exploitation. He sings human equality and raises his voice on injustice, intolerance, extremism and sufferings of human beings all over the world. The post-colonial sentiments like resistance, revolution, nationalism and aggression and occupation frame the core themes of Ayaz who is also called the romantic revolutionary by Zia Mohyuddin during a seminar 'Ayaz hai Shaer e Mohabbat' organized by SLF and Art Council Karachi. (The Dawn, 2019)

Conclusion

The literary journey of Shaikh Ayaz serves as a definitive testament to Sindh's vibrant and defiant contribution to post-colonial literature. Far from being a localized poet of mere regional interest, Ayaz emerges as a global intellectual who synchronized the Sindhi experience with the universal struggle against imperialism, social stratification, and human rights violations.

Ayaz's poetry transcends borders, positioning the plight of the "enslaved people of the world" as his own personal grief. This humanism places him alongside international figures like Chinua Achebe and Salman Rushdie. In the face of political censorship and imprisonment, his verses functioned as a catalyst for social reawakening, challenging the One Unit policy and military dictatorships while advocating for the restoration of democratic values. The study underscores

the necessity of translation; it is only through the efforts of figures like Asif Farrukhi and Fahmida Riaz that the "unsung" anti-colonial sentiments of Sindh have reached the broader academic world, correcting the historical oversight of digital archives like Wikipedia. By blending Marxist philosophy, Sindhi nationalism, and secular humanism, Ayaz created a unique poetic landscape—one where the "temple of love" is built by demolishing the "walls of hate." Ultimately, Shaikh Ayaz remains the "Romantic Revolutionary" of Sindhi literature. His legacy ensures that the voice of Sindh is not one of passive victimhood, but of active, artistic revolt. He remains a bridge between the classical mysticism of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and the modern quest for a just, post-colonial world. Ayaz's work proves that as long as there is oppression, his "magical songs" will continue to break the "arch-old chains" of history.

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