

RESEARCH ARTICLE



MENDING GAPS: A STUDY OF SELECT POEMS OF ALI SARDAR JAFRI

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ABSTRACT

In the Urdu literary world, Ali Sardar Jafri's works occupy an enviable position. Renowned for his experimentations with different forms of poetry, Sardar Jafri is a distinguished personality in Urdu literature. Jafri began his literary career with revolutionary themes and mellowed with age to create poetry which is compared to the works of great poets in other languages like English and Sanskrit. In the times of colonial rule and partition of the country, his works refreshingly stand out for their exuberance encompassing humanity, love for nature and compassion.

Jafri is a pivotal spokesman of progressive movement and stood steadfast to his ideals throughout his life. His optimistic thoughts on humanity and verses on nature's radiance call to attention the oft neglected principles of equality and values and urge the readers to unite and work towards building a better nation.

As an editor he proved his dexterity with his critical analyzing skills on the works of Mir Taqi Mir and Ghalib. Also he proved his versatility and liberal nature by collaborating with the great Urdu literary woman personality, Qurratulain Hyder on a book in English, "Ghalib and his Poetry."

In the conventional Urdu literary world, Jafri's poetry is striking with revolutionary themes and modern views. Jafri's poems also take a different path compared to the poems of his contemporary poets. At the same time, he professed his love for the traditional poetry of Urdu masters like Mir taqi Mir and Ghalib. His poems are also an embodiment of the religious movements like the Sufi movement and the Bhakti movement.

The present paper concentrates on select verses of Ali Sardar Jafri to bring out the moments of radiance deftly composed in a few lines. At the same time, the study also reflects its awareness on Jafri's impact on Progressive Movement and the intense criticism regarding his later poems. The themes of Jafri's poems are not only modern but also eternal. Another important theme of Jafri's poems is the consequences of the Partition. The present research paper attempts to analyze the beauty of Jafri's poetry and place the spirit of Jafri's revolutionary poems in the context of his contemporary poets' poems. The paper also would look into the pain still felt by secular people of our country as evidenced by the deep wounds left behind by the Partition of our country which have not yet healed.

Key words: Urdu literature, Sardar Jaffri, sarhad

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With the beginning of his literary career itself, Ali Sardar Jafri earned the reputation of a rebel writer. In fact, his writing was so powerful that his first anthology of short story collection, "Manzil" (1938) managed to rouse the British rulers into imprisoning him in the district jails of Lucknow and Banaras. For another five decades he would continue to storm the Urdu literary world with his remarkable poetry and created a niche for himself in Urdu poetry. In fact, Sardar Jafri's poems' relevance is truly felt in the present day also initiating deliberations on present and past.

Phir Koi Nahien Ye Poochheygaa
Sardar Kahaan Hai Mahfil Mein
Lekin Main Yahaan Phir Aaongaa
Bachon Ke Dahan Se Bolongaa
Chidyon Ki Zabaan Se Gaaongaa

- Mera Safar [5]

The above verses from Ali Sardar Jafri's poem "Mera Safar," are perfect to initiate a dialogue on the immense impact of Sardar Jafri's poetry on the Urdu literary world. Jafri's verses are noteworthy today as we see history repeating itself time and again and yet human emotions and perceptions persist with unflinching accuracy.

Ali Sardar Jafri (1913 - 2000) was eternally inspired by the ideals of Marxism when he was at a very impressionable age. Hence, his poetry is heavily laden with notions of equality and yearnings for liberty and self-esteem for the common man. Unfortunately, the world witnessed two world wars in the period he was writing and moreover one of the leading countries, America, was facing the infamous McCarthy turmoil at that precise time. In these times, Sardar Jafri's intense verses made quite a stir which led him to be expelled from Aligarh Muslim University on political grounds [2].

His works like *Nai Duniya ko Salaam* (1948), *Khun ki Lakeer* (1949), *Amn ka Sitara*, *Asiya Jag Utha* (1951), *Pathar ki Divar* (1953), *Pairahan-e-Sharar* (1965), and *Lahu Pukarta Hai* (1965) have chiselled his name further in the annals of Urdu literature. In fact, *Pairahan-e-Sharar* heralded another significant phase from politics to humanistic ideals in Sardar Jafri's poetical journey. *Paighambharan-e-Sukhan* which is a comparative study of Kabir, Mir, Meera Bai and Ghalib, focusing

on the Bhakti-Sufi traditions is another important milestone in his career.

He produced a serial "Kahkashan" based on the life and works of eminent Urdu poets Hasrat Mohani, Josh Malihabadi, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Jigar Moradabadi, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Makhdum Mohiuddin and Majaz. *Mehfil-e-Yaaran* is another popular serial of his in which he introduced and interviewed people from diverse occupations. He also made a mark with his editing skills of his Urdu literary magazine, *Guftagu*. A multitasking person, Sardar Ali proved his versatility in prose, poetry, editing and literary criticism. In poetry alone, the themes he covered ranged from one extreme to another, i.e., an individual's love to universal equality [2].

He identified self with the beauty of the universe in the sweet songs of birds, musical laughter of dry leaves, dancing crops, golden rivers and blue lakes. *Haseentar* and *Hamare Naam* are two romantic poems that received critical acclaim.

Wherever there is beautiful poetry on love would cynicism be far away? Putting his mind before heart, Sardar Ali struggles to escape from the loving gaze of his beloved. He says that he would rather trust the mind rather than the fidelity of a human being's heart.

Pyar Ki Ye Nazar Rahey Na Rahey
Kaun Dasht-E-Wafaa Mein Jaltaa Hai
Terey Dil Ko Khabar Rahey Na Rahey
Tu Mujhey Itney Pyar Se Mat Dekh [8]

Unlike some of his contemporaries who only vent feelings like love and affection, his verses are remarkable for their solidarity with the progress of mankind. One of his free verse poems, "Sar-e-Toor" is an example of his wisdom and skill in weaving verses with the present day facts. He understands that "[P]erhaps we have learnt some secrets of nature/Yet many remain unexplored." At the same time he is proud that "[w]hen mountains loomed up in our way/We turned into quick flowing streams" [6]. He empathised with the proletariat and rooted for their upliftment in his verses. Sardar Jafri's love for the motherland is revealed in the following verses:

Main Jail Mein Baithey Baithey Aksar
Ye Sochta Hoon

Jo Ho Sakey To Avadh Ki Pyaari
Zameen Ko God Mein Uthaa Loon
Aur Uski Shaadaab Lahlahaati Jabeen
Ko

Hazaaron Boson Se Jagmagaa Doon
The following verses elucidate Jafri's
knowledge of diverse cultures and
languages:

Ghareeb Sita Ke Ghar Pe Kab Tak
Rahegi Ravan Ki Hukmrani
Draupadi Ka Libas Uske Badan Se Kab
Tak Cheena Karega
Shakuntala Kab Tak Andhi Taqdeer
Ke Bhanwar Mein Phansi Rahegi
Yeh Lakhnau Ki Shiguftagi Maqbaron
Mein Kab Tak Dabi Rahegi

- *Awadh ki Khak-i-Haseen* [2]

Like many of his compatriots Sardar Ali felt cheated by the partition of India into two subcontinents. He accuses the Partition of dividing the Sun into two and in the process dividing humanity. He laments that the partition is not of land but is a proof of separation, alienation, hatred, bloodbath, death, and wounds yet unhealed. Victims still exist in both the countries who cry out to meet their separated kith and kin. The anguish to be united with their motherland still kindles fire in many a heart. For many, time, the proud healer, stands with a bent head, as it was unable to wipe out the recollection of the massacres. For no fault of theirs, the hurt still cringe at the label "refugees" or "mohajir" in their own motherland. The stench of blood and pus and the visuals of inhumane horror are impossible to wipe out from the psyche of those who suffered the aftermath of Partition. What or who can wipe out the blood embedded deep in every niche and corner of the Sarhad? This is Sardar's voice bemoaning the dawn of bloodbath in the motherland:

Isi sarhad pe kal dooba tha sooraj ho ke do tukade
Isi sarhad pe kal zakhmi huyi thi subh-e-azaadi
Yeh sarhad khoon ki, ashqon ki, aahon ki, sharaaron
ki
Jahan boii thi nafarat aur talwarein ugaayin thi
Main is sarhad pe kab se muntazir hoon subh-e-
farda ka [7]

The distress of many secular Indians is still fresh and can be felt in the above lines of Sardar

Jafri. In the minds of intellectuals just questions arise seeking an explanation for the true reasons behind Partition. People irrespective of religion, gender and age were traumatized due to politicians' decision. It was the common man who suffered the most, it was the child who lost his parents, it was the spouse who lost a life partner, it were the parents who lost their children, it were the brothers and sisters who lost their siblings, it was the common man's psyche that took a permanent beating.

Still, poets like Sardar Jafri and his contemporaries sing of their love for their beloved land and their willingness to sacrifice for her.

Ai watan khake watan woh bhi tujhe de denge
Bach raha hai jo laho abke fasaddat ke baad
- *Awadh ki khak-i-Haseen* [1]

Sardar's contemporary, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, another member of Progressive Writers Movement laments in *Subah-e-azaadi*:

Ye daagh daagh ujala ye shab gazida sehr
Voh intezaar tha jiska yeh who sehr to nahi
Unfortunately, the dawn of freedom turned out to be a nightmare for many innocent citizens.

Similar sentiments were opined by Josh Malihabadi in his poem *Matam-e-Azadi* (1948)

Ai ham nafas! Fasana e Hindustan naa
pooch
Apna gala kharosh e tarranum se phat
gaya
Talwar se bacha, to rag-e gul se kat gaya
[1]

Known for his lyrics which are full of joie de vivre, Majaz strikes a poignant tone with his verse:

Hindu Muslim Sikh Isai aman ke moti ro
lenge
Khoon ki holi khel chuke hain rang ke
dhabbe dho lenge [1]

The celebrations of the first independence could not submerge the emotional verses of the poets like Sahir Ludhianwi in *Chhabees January*:

Aao ke aaj ghaur karein iss sawal par
Dekhe the hamne jo, woh haseen khwab kya huye?
Bekas barehngi ko kafan tak nahi naseeb
Voh vaada haa e atlas o kamkhwab kya huye?
Jamhooriyat-nawaz, basher-dost, amn-khwaah

Khud ko jo khud diye the, who alwaab kya huye? [2]
Urdu women writers were also participating with more or equal fervour which can be seen in Kishwar Naheed's Aey Meri Qom! Meri Binti Sun!

*My Nation, Listen to My Entreaty / Aey Meri Qom!
Meri Binti Sun!*

My country came into being through a law,
the law of the British
British – whichever line they drew
and gave it the name of two countries,
we just accepted it.
O my nation!
Seek shelter from these merchants of
Islam
Else in the harems of tribal leaders and
landlords
our futures will be nurtured
These people will not issue fatwas against
them
And when our future children
won't be able to tell the names of their
father then even flocks of swallows will
not come to their help. [4]

Naheed's defiant voice resonates the prayers of the ordinary men who request for nothing but compassion and brotherhood. She further spells out that the unnecessary wars would end in nothing but orphaned children who would be totally unaware of their roots and would have to live a life of total anonymity. Using the metaphor of swallows, she alludes to the story of Abrahah Al-Ashram who foolishly proposes to annihilate the Kabah at Mecca but the merciful Lord thwarts his plans by sending flocks of swallows to the rescue of the faithful. [9]

Sardar Jaffri's contemporary, the eminent poet Gulzar dreams for a better tomorrow as seen in these verses:

Subah subah ek khwaab ki dastak per
darwaza khola,
Dekha, sarhad ke us paar se kuch
mehmaan aaye hain
Aankhon se manoos thay saare, chehre
saare sune sunaaye
Paaon dhoye, haath dhulaaye, aangan
mein aasan lagwaaye

aur tandoor pe makki ke kuch mote mote
roti pakaaye
potli mein mehmaan mere pichle saalon ki
faslon ka gur laye thay
aankh khuli to dekha ghar mein koi nahin
tha
haath laga kar dekha to tandoor abhi tak
bujha nahin tha
aur honthon per meethe gur ka zaiga ab
tak chipak raha tha
khwab tho shayad khwab hi hoga
sarhad per kal raat suna hai chali thi goli
sarhad per kal raat suna hai kuch khwabon
ka khoon hua hai [10]

Gulzar recalls that in spite of the passing time, the memories of the Partition bloodbath still haunt him. He compares it to the terror of the world wars which could be diminished in thoughts with fruitful discussions and a true yearning for solutions. He identifies that the memories of Partition could not be erased only because of our refusal to talk about the horrors in the open. He ultimately says that talks and working towards a solution wholeheartedly would definitely heal the wounds of Partition.

Eventually, Jaffri and his contemporaries had hoped for a secular country without borders dividing the motherland, the brothers and the memories. They comprehend that history has a way of repeating itself and caution people of repeating mistakes to avoid a life full of regrets. Ali Sardar Jaffri pens his hopes and desires for a new world through his critically acclaimed verses.

The pain felt deep in the hearts of people are echoed in the resonating lines from "Kaun Dushman Hai?" Yet, Sardar Jaffri comprehends that it is high time to make amends, to start life afresh and to understand that men are not men's enemies but politics, power and greed are.

"Tum Aao Gulshan e Lahore se chaman
Bardosh
Hum Aayein Subh e Benaras Ki Roshinin Le
kar
Himalaya ke hawaon Ki Taazigi Le kar
Aur us ke baad Yeh Poochein Ki Kaun
Dushman Hai."
Kaun Dushman Hai? [5]

Sardar Jafri is a visionary poet who could see beyond the differences a beautiful world where everybody could exist in harmony.

CONCLUSION

Man dies but words have the power of immortality. Ali Sardar Jafri lives through his verses in the present world which is in much need of a visionary like him. His vibrant verses are apt in the modern world as times change but history repeats due to man's unwillingness to learn from history. Life is short but art is long. Visionary and idealistic poets like Sardar Jafri pass on from earth to the eternal abode but their immortal verses are a reflection of prayers of the common man and songs of every learned man's heart of equality, love, compassion and living without fear in their motherland.

Main Sotaa Hoon Aur Jaagtaa Hoon
Aur Jaag Ke Phir So Jaataa Hoon
Sadyon Ka Puraanaa Khel Hoon Main
Main Mar Ke Amar Ho Jaataa Hoon

Sardar Jafri lives in our ideals and our efforts to exist without sarhads or borders.

In Sardar Jafri's own words,

"Guftgoo band na ho
baat se baat chaley
subh tak shaam-e-mulaaqaat chaley
hum pe hansti huee
ye taaron bhari raat chale"

Let these discussions not end here; let these eternal poems spread their beauty and wisdom throughout the world for a new peaceful dawn.

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