

PROJECTION OF RESTLESSNESS AS A SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE POETRY OF HAMID KHAN

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Abstract

This paper focuses on projection of restlessness as a socio-political issue in Khan's poetry. For this purpose, both the collections of Khan, "Velvet of Loss" and "Pale Leaf (Three Voices)" are used for the data understudy. Only those poems are selected that bear the foregrounded theme of evil. The poems that foreground restlessness as a socio-political issue are: Load Shedding – I and Load Shedding – II. Here, Khan has dexterously pointed to the harsh life Pakistanis are going through. The poems foreground the psychological trauma caused by the lack of basic amenities of life. In a time when the whole world has been squeezed to a palmtop and every smallest or biggest household chore is subject to electricity, the people of Pakistan are groping for facilities in the dark. This, in turn, creates great panic and disappointment in human life. Khan has tried to attract the attention of the responsible people of Pakistan in this connection.

Introduction

Pakistani Literature in English has become a separate subject of interest for young scholars. This was made attractive by the epoch-making venture of Tariq Rahman in the form of writing the *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* in 1990. It covers all the known literary works by the writers of Pakistani origin both inside and outside of Pakistan. It gives special attention to poetry, though it contains lists of dramas and novels as well. Moreover, it provides a guideline to young scholars for searching an area of exploration of their choice. Wilma Blue (first para) comments on Tariq Rehman's book, *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* that it is like an encyclopedia. One can learn a lot from it. In the same line of review, Mary Tobin (first para) states the Tariq Rehman's *History* gives you useful facts about the nature of Pakistani literature in English.

Omar Tarin, Ilyas Khan, and Majied (2015) trace Pakistani Literature in English to the 1920s. It was the time when the sense of nationalism was getting strong foothold. They discuss the notable writers of the sort, such as Chattopadhyay, M.A. Rashid, Raja Rao, Sarojini Naidu, and Mumtaz. Besides, there were a travelogue by Sake Deen Mahomet, and translations from Bengali into English of Rabindranath Tagore by himself. In this connection, Hamid Khan, too, needs proper attention, as he, like many other local writers, tries to attract our attention towards the problems of the modern man, especially those of Pakistanis.

Hamid Khan is a local poet writing in English. He did his PhD in English. Khan writes poetry in English centering both local and worldwide issues and human failings such as war, oppression, women rights, corruption, and hypocrisy, to mention a few. He does so through the tools of foregrounding, i.e., deviation and parallelism. His poetry is very terse and stenographic and, more often, grips the reader's attention through unusual usage of linguistic choices. Moreover, his poetry carries deviation on various levels, such as syntactic, semantic and graphological. As far as parallelism is concerned, he maintains it through phonemes as well as repetition of certain words that connote socio-cultural implications especially in the context of Pakistan and generally elsewhere in the world. It is needful to explore the hidden messages, in such type of poetry as Khan's, through the tools of foregrounding.

Method

Toolan (1990) states that stylistic analysis that it can be used even for the teaching of language and of literature. He further avers that it helps in exploring the diverse reading of similar texts and

It can be used to assist in seeing features that might not otherwise have been noticed. It can shed light on the crafted texture of the literary text, as well as offering a productive form of assistance in completing interpretations, making them more complex and richer. Stylistics can thus be used both as a descriptive tool and as a catalyst for interpretation.
(42)

In this connection, Fauconnier and Turner (2002) opine that despite the fact that both poetic and conventional languages integrate conceptually on the basis of certain principles, they are different at the same time. For instance, the divergence in the grammar of a poet is based on the poet's perception of the world around them.

Likewise, Leech (1969) states that without going back to linguistic notions and concepts much of the terms of literary criticism cannot possibly be explained such as metaphor and irony, etc. Stylistic analysis can be carried out through various levels, such as at the level of: graphology, phonology, morphology, and lexico-syntax. About lexico-syntax level of analysis Tallerman (1998) quoted in Imran Hussain & Sana Mansoor (2017) states that "Lexico-Syntactic choices are obtained through devices such as piling of usual collocates, unusual collocates, archaic words, particular parts of speech, metaphor, simile, oxymoron etc" (P. 1) It depends upon the choice of the researcher whether they choose one, two or more levels to look through a piece of literature. In this connection, Leech and Short (1981) states that there are four ways to analyze texts: syntax, phonology, semantics and graphology. Alabi (2008) explains that graphological features include the foregrounded punctuation marks, italics, spacing, and size of print, etc.

Again, I. A. Richards (1929) points out four types of textual functions and meanings that are, sense, feelings, tone, and intention. In addition, Jakobson's (1961) six functions are more elaborate in this connection. They are: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, poetic, and meta-linguistic. Among them the poetic function stands out which according to Jakobson (1960: 358) "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination". On the other hand, Halliday's (1967) describes three major functions viz., "ideational, interpersonal and textual" (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 30), though Fairclough (1995, p 4) explains that written texts are "multi semiotic" and exploit various forms of graphic designs apart from sound effects, diagrams and photographs.

In this paper, the poems are analyzed on the basis of foregrounding. The main tools of foregrounding are deviation and parallelism. This categorization is mentioned by Martindale (2007), quoted in Lesley Moss (2014) which is also supported by Van Peer and Hakemulder (2006), and Shen (2007).

Analysis

The poems, *Load Shedding – I* and *Load Shedding – II*, occur in Khan's collection, *Velvet of Loss*. The mentioned poems foreground the issue of restlessness. Following is their analysis.

Load Shedding – I

Load Shedding – I states the local problem of load shedding and suggestively clarifies as to how it disturbs the very routine of our people. The speaker gives personal experience which

can be generalized by referring to the word under quotation *Chowkidar* when he *lights the corridor* for the speaker. The night is unfriendly as it is cold and the speaker gets out of his house for a *tiny walk*. It is a walk that does not give pleasure. The deviant word *dislocated* suggests that life without electricity is miserable as without it everything is bungled up. The same idea is elaborated through the next deviant phrase, *load-shedding is sadder*. This transferred epithet foregrounds the sad feelings of the people due to load-shedding. There are repetitions of the consonant sound only, i.e. /d/, /f/, /n/, /m/. All these sounds create feelings of restlessness and sadness.

Load Shedding – II

Load shedding – II continues with the standstill situation caused by load shedding. The importance of power can be viewed with reference to the time when the poem was written – no UPS, no solar plates, etc. Even the songs do not give one the pleasure attached to it; it is *prosaic*. On one side the speaker keeps *on dreaming*, but on another he seems disappointed and asks, *How many more years/ Of discontent?* The foregrounded candle light that is waving give us the idea of welcoming people with the note that they would go to the past practices of lighting candles, hence their life will spend in listlessness and inactivity that is shown through the deviant syntactic structure of the interrogative sentence in the third strophe that lacks verb. The same idea is strengthened through another deviant syntactic deviation of lack of verb in the fourth strophe, hence instead of doing something of value people will *keep on dreaming* which is not a conscious effort. Moreover, the quantitative deviation in the form of repetition of the sounds adds to the severity of the situation. These sounds are: /l/, /g/, /z/, /m/, /n/, /t/. By putting them together, they can give us the words such as *no light*, which means that there is no light except the sounds of the insects as is suggested by the /g/, /z/, and /m/ sounds.

Discussion and Conclusion

The well-known socio-political issue in the context of Pakistan is load-shedding that creates an alarming restlessness among the poor of the society. This restlessness and disturbance of the routine life is expressed through the poems titled as *Load-shedding – I* and *Load-shedding – II*.

Load Shedding – I suggests the routine disturbance created by the interrupted supply of the electricity in Pakistan. Khan, in this poem, shares his experience of load-shedding and through linguistic choices foregrounds as to how it compels someone to get out of home in the late hours of the night. Through the word, *Chowkidar*, the problem of power breakdown is generalized. The deviant word “dislocated” foregrounds that life without electricity is miserable. Moreover, the plight of the people due to load-shedding is highlighted through the deviant phrase, *load-shedding is sadder*. Through the repetition of the consonant phonemes (no vowel phonemes occur in repeated form) the restlessness and disturbance are foregrounded; as without vowel sound there is no concept of meaningful words, so the absence of it shows that the melody of happiness cannot be finalized without electricity.

Likewise, *Load shedding – II* highlights the problem of load-shedding, in the context of Pakistan, at a time when there was no alternative to electricity such as solar plates and UPS, etc. the situation is made gruesome through the choice of words and repetition of sounds. The *prosaic* songs foreground the disinterestedness shown by people due to lack of basic facilities of life. The mood becomes very serious when the statement of *dreaming* is preceded by the question of discontent: *How many more years/ Of discontent?*

Through the deviant lack of verb in the third strophe Khan has foregrounded the lack of activity on part of the people who face load-shedding. This is furthered by the foregrounded candle light that the modern man in Pakistan will go to past practices of lighting candles. Here is criticism on the governmental planning about the growing need of power and their lack of vision for coping with the situation. In addition, through the repetition of phonemes the idea of *no light* is foregrounded (when the sounds are grouped together, they are anagrammatized as *no light*), hence during night the insect sounds (the phonemes /g/, and /z/occurring in repetition) can be heard only not the sounds that are supposed to come out of, *per se*, TV, AC, or fans, etc.

In his article, *LOADSHEDDING CRISIS IN PAKISTAN AND ITS SOLUTION*, Sultan Zafar (2015), a consultant thermal power generation, expresses his views with facts and figures on the problem of load-shedding in Pakistan. He maintains:

Low productivity and the shutting down of industries are having an adverse effect on the GDP of the state as it is significantly declining. The government has taken several actions which have done no good for the respective cause. Millions of Dollars are being spent on the import of power generators on rental basis has made conditions worse. Still the short fall is about 7000 megawatts. (Fifth para)

He further clarifies that most of the electric producers have shifted their business to Bangladesh, Iran and China where their business is more lucrative which, in turn, sabotage the already wobbling economy of Pakistan. Zafar (ibid) says that the production of the electricity is 13000 MW and the consumption is 20,000 Mw, hence load-shedding is caused by the deficit 7000 MW.

Load-shedding has become a serious social and political issue in the context of Pakistan. There is much hue and cry against the governmental machinery throughout the country in the shape of road-blocks and stoning of the WAPDA colonies. But apart from the layman's view about the cause of shortage of power in Pakistan, Zafar (ibid) thinks that

...it has become a Power Politics among the politicians and everyone is putting blames on the Technocrats, rather than taking responsibility of their own Ministry, which has failed to resolve the Issue with a permanent and consistent policy. This will result in run out of the Technical Masses and Middle Classes. (Seven para)

Though the problem of power breakdown is highlighted in the poem during the last years of the 20th century, it is still looming large. Despite the fact that people are using solar systems to cope with the situation, the shortage of electric supply still hinders the smooth running of the day to day affairs. It has turned, now, more a psychological problem than social one.

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