

Dear Dr. Lee,

I am really sorry if I have offended you by my candid outburst against a piece of poetry that I find frustrating to read and absolutely impossible to understand.

Poetry (in any language) is supposed to give a profound idea, a deep thought, or a long story, in fewer words; words which are pleasing to the ear and satisfying to the intellect.

My frustration originated in the lack of all those elements in Yawar's poetry. Our friend, [REDACTED], may be right in saying that these are just pompous words conveying empty imagery without a proper message.

However, I have nothing against you (or anyone else) doing the research work of your choice. I will still be reading your posts with interest.

I would like to say here a few words on the chronological classification of Urdu poetry.

The line of great Urdu poets ends with DAAGH. But then it does not really end there because of poets like Jigar and Asghar Gondawi.

Two great poets appear on the horizon after that - Iqbal and Josh. Their appearance was long overdue due to the social and political conditions in India. They brought a new genre in Urdu poetry - Revolutionary poem and an element of reform, an awakening of the nation. While the classical poetry relied on the typical love poem which epitomised in Ghalib's she'r:

*Dil dhoondhta hay phir wahi fursat ke raat din  
bai the rahaiN tasawwur-e-janaaN kiye huwe*

The message of those two poets was that the *fusat ke raat din* were no more there and the nation had to rise in search of its destiny.

The Lucknow school of classical poetry had deteriorated to frivolous expressions and ideas. That brought Anis and Dabeer to divert the best poetical talents of the time to religious and devotional poetry. That gave a lot of respect to the Lucknow school and new ideas are still being found in that line of poetry.

Iqbal died prematurely in 1938, Josh lasted until 1983. India was liberated and Pakistan was created in 1947. The nations had been freed but Josh felt that they were still slaves - mentally, intellectually and in their thought process. So he continued with his call of "free yourself from the bond." A typical *qit'a* from Josh:

*tujh ko yaqiN na aye ga ay daa'imi ghulaam*  
*maiN maqbarON meN ja ke sunaa'uN agar kalaam*  
*khud mawt se hayat ke chashme ubal paReN*  
*qabroN se sar ko peet ke murde nikal paReN*

TRANS: *You will not believe O chronic slave,*  
*If I go and read my poetry to the graves,*  
*death itself will become the fountain of life (what a beautiful oxymoron)*  
*the dead would scream and come to life !!!*

NOTE: I am not too sure of my rendering of "chronic" for *daa'imi* here. I look to other readers for suggestions.

In parallel with the revolutionary call of Iqbal and Josh, another movement was underway in Urdu poetry and prose, both. This was a call to socialism as a response to worldwide hunger and misery. The tenor of this poetry was also revolutionary but it had a greater thunder with the young generation of 1920's and 1930's. It was also more secular in its nature. In this line we can count Majaaz, Saahir and Fayz. This poetry showed the

human side of life rather than beautiful stories of love, meeting with the lover and separation from the lover.

However, we cannot forget that in the classical period, poetry was considered to be the exclusive right of the elite of society. This was partly due to the fact that the king (Bahadur Shah Zafar) himself was a poet of the highest quality and assemblies of poetry recitals were held inside the great Castle of Delhi in which the king would preside. Even in those days, there was a series of poets who wrote the Awaami poetry -- the top of that list is Nazeer Akbarabadi, and others like Kabeer. Nazeer, even in those days of the stories of Rose and Nightingale talked about the poverty and misery of the human community, the class system and of course, at the same time about realism.

Those poets who came after the time of Josh and Iqbal (Majaaz, Saahir and Fayz) are known as the Taraqqi-pasand (modern poets). After them, there is a post-modernist era of Urdu poetry. The high point of this period is that the thinking process divided itself in two different directions: (1) The Urdu poets who remained in India and, (2) the Urdu poets who came to Pakistan or, who were born and have grown up in Pakistan. There is a great difference between those two lines. In India we have Jazbi, Fana Kanpoori and the young poets like Manzar Bhopali. In Pakistan we have Faraaz, Parveen Shakir, Qateel Shafaa'i and Iftikhra Arif. One of the more significant poets of this line is Mustafa Zaidi who began in India but his poetic career flourished in Pakistan. I find this period of Urdu poetry the most fascinating. Mustafa Zaidi died in a conspiracy murder and intrigue. He was found dead in his apartment and no one knows to this day who were his killers. In one of his own pieces he has said:

*MaiN kis ke haath pa apna lahoon talaash karoon  
ki tamaam shahr ne pahne huwe haiN dastaane*

TRANS: *On whose hands shall I look for my blood  
Everyone in this city is wearing gloves.*

Then in the latest line of Urdu poets are those who have settled in England and North America during the last 25 years.

All these lines of poets have their specific genre of poetry and that has to be explored by the scholars of Urdu poetry.

In the coming days, I will bring out some of that poetry in some of those periods and would also try to see how our readership comments on that.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Syed-Mohsin Naquvi



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