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Patriotic Element in the Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai

Abstract:

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, the greatest of Sindhi poets, has very impressively portrayed human feelings and emotions in his poetry. He has particularly depicted patriotic spirit in his sublime verse. Shah jo Risalo, the collection of his poetry, contains a number of verses underscoring his deep love for his motherland, Sindh. Many Surs (Melodies), as the chapters of his Risalo, have lines presenting his patriotic feelings. Especially in Sur Marui Latif expresses his love for his native land through his mouthpiece Marui, a historically significant folk character of Sindh.

This research article presents the content-analysis of the verses from *Sur Marui* of *Shah Jo Risalo*, highlighting Latif's patriotic passion.

Keywords: patriotic spirit, sublime, content-analysis, folk character.

Introduction

Patriotic spirit has always been a very important element of poetry. Poets, through their poetry, play different social roles, sometimes they act as teachers of ethics and focus learning and educative aspect of life, and sometimes they tend to be religious preachers. Often they encourage and inspire their people to defend their motherland. At times they emerge as spiritual leaders. Very often they have been the advocates of worldly love. Most important of all, they are always full of patriotic feelings and proudly express their love for their native land. They poetically project the landscapes, mountains and meadows, and praise the rivers, lakes and fertile fields of their homeland.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai has comprehensively covered many aspects of society. He has very eloquently elaborated the inspirational aspects of patriotism, and his poetry has perhaps excelled in beauty all the epics of the great poets and speeches of the brilliant orators of all times. He has very beautifully illustrated many a gem of wisdom in the fewest possible lines which others take thousands of pages to describe.

There are different dimensions of patriotism, for instance love for the people, the landscape, the mountains and meadows and the products of the homeland. It is this multi-faceted love which has been highlighted by poets in all ages, right from the time man started composing poetry. Latif's verse is replete with the love of land, as all his similes and metaphors, his diction and settings are highly native to his motherland, Sindh. Unlike the general portrayal of flowers and nightingales, material beauty, wine and bistros, as is done by modern poets, Latif paints a true picture of Sindh in his poetry. He mentions for instance: cactus, wild bush, the desert of *Thar*, *Neem* tree, fishing net, pottery, sand vipers, camels and so on. Every word of his poetry emits the aroma of Sindh. This indicates that he is deeply in love with his native land and language. Khalil (1962) believes that 'the comparison of Latif's poetry to that of some Hindi, Persian, Urdu and Arabic poets in the context of their influence on his verse is irrelevant and unnecessary because everything he touched turned to glistening gold. Every idea he projected became uniquely his, because of his highly individual style.' Shah Latif deliberately incorporated the ideas of other poets into his verse so as to present his ideas, including patriotic feelings, parallel to theirs. He did it to introduce those foreign ideas to his own people in his highly personalized style of folk tales and folk characters. He communicated his thought in both refined and rustic Sindhi diction and idiom which was quite understandable to common man of his times. Even to the present day reader his portrayal of the native land is deeply patriotic, fascinating and delightful. He has retouched the ideas not only from non-Sindhi poets but also the poetry of a number of Sindhi poets e.g. from Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri's verse and from that of Qazi Qadan. Many researchers have tried to study the influence of their poetry on his verse. One might say that such material has been mistakenly mixed with Shah's verse by the compilers of his poetry. In contrast, if the verses with borrowed ideas are expunged from *Shah jo Risalo* the coherence of his thought will certainly be disturbed. It is something natural that Latif's verse is partly influenced by the thought and content of other poets, yet his own

ideas stand out as naturally soothing and deeply spiritual.

Shah Latif is a brilliant exponent of patriotism. He has particularly chosen the tale of Umer and Marui to give vent to his ideas against cruelty and coercion. Umer Soomro, a tyrant, takes away Marui, a poor girl, by force from her relatives. He keeps her at his royal palace as a captive and offers her regal pleasures and comforts to accept his proposal of marriage. She rejects all his tempting offers. Despite all his tactics he miserably fails to persuade her. She pines all the time for Malir, her native place in Sindh and longs for her reunion with her relatives, the shepherds. Danish (2016) argues that 'Marui is the greatest example of both resistance and love in Shah's poetry. She never surrenders to cruelty and never forgets her relatives. Latif found an ideal Sindhi woman in her. He retold her tale to project the bold and patriotic nature of her character making her a role model for the downtrodden (p.407).' The symbolic importance of Marui paves the way for Latif to communicate his patriotic ideas very forcefully. On the other hand, he has immortalised Marui in his majestic verse.

This article particularly focuses on how Shah Latif has expressed his patriotic feelings through the folk tale of Marui, largely referring to the verses from *Sur Marui*.

Shah, Patriotism and Marui:

In *Sur Marui*, Shah Latif maintains that Marui's moods constantly keep changing but she is never forgetful of her native land, not even for a single moment. If she dies in a foreign land she wishes to be buried in her homeland. She believes that occurrence of her death while recalling her native country is as good as life itself.

It is said that in a foreign land one yearns a lot for one's own homeland. They say the soil of one's motherland miraculously heals wounds like some magic ointment. Shah Latif conveys his patriotic thoughts in the following verses through the unyielding character of Marui.

وَرُ سِي وَطَنَ ڄاڻيون، صحرا سترُ جنَ:
گولاڙا ۽ گگريون، اوچڻُ اباڻنَ:
ويڙهيا گهمَنَ وليين، جهانگي منجه جهنگنَ:
مُونَ ڪي ماروڙنَ، سڄَ گڻائي سيجَ ۾!
(شاه جو رسالو، نبي بخش، سرمارئي، ص. 362)

Khamisani (2012) has translated the above lines of Latif as:

Blessed are those desert maids whose honour desert protects,

Gum trees and forest fruits keep my people safe,

Creepers surround them from all sides

This desolation, me the unfortunate one, in dower received. (p.210)

Marui believes that the culture of her native land is pure and undefiled, and its natives are free souls; peace-loving, truthful and sincere. They truly follow the maxim 'live and let live'. They are not arrogant nor greedy nor selfish. They are fearless and strong yet humane and harmless.

پهي سڪ! پيرن ڪيه! ڪو نيھن نياپو ماروڙين؟
ات اڪندي آهيان، تنهن آڻڻ، تنهن ڏيه،
سندي جا ساڻيه، ڪه ڪتوري پانڻيان.
(آڏواڻي، سرمارئي، ص. 370)

"Welcome messenger! covered with native dust,

for me any loving message

I long for Malir and my spinning place,

The dust of my native land I prefer to ambergris."

(Khamisani p.223)

Marui says that the soil of her homeland is like musk to her. She has been exhausted by the effort of chanting the name

of her country and finds no way to ascertain whether she will be able to go to her native land the next day. In this state of despair she consoles her heart in the following words:

ڪو ڏينهن آهين ڪوت ۾، لوئي هڏم لاه
ڪامن آ منهنجي ڪر جي اي آڏ وڌائي آه
هت م پاڙجي هيڪڙو، پائر جي پساهم
ستي سيل ناهم، ملير ويندين مارئي.
(دائوڊپوٽو، سرمارئي، ص. 152)

Agha (2016) has translated above verses of Latif as ‘O Marui! You are in Umerkot only for a short period. Hence do not discard your blanket i.e. chastity for that brief space of time. O damsel! Balanced is the symbol of your family’s prestige. Hence do not flirt with it. Do not evaluate the time you pass at Umerkot equivalent to a single moment that you passed in the desert. O chaste woman! You shall surely return to Malir. Hence preserve your virtues (p.722). In the state of yearning to see one’s homeland nothing serves as a solace. No desire can be more pressing than the desire to be back in the sweet motherland.

مينيا ڏوڙ نه مارئي، ٿيس ڪرڻون وار
ستي سيئي ساريا، جي پائر جا پنهار
عمر انهن ڌار، مور نه وهي ماڙين.
(گريخشاڻي، سرمارئي، ص. 320)

Kazi (1996) has translated the above lines as follows:

Fair Marui does not wash her hair,
clotted it is, ugly
The nomad folks of desert land
live in her memory –
Omar, part from them, unfree
I’ll never in forts reside.

(p.182).

Latif says at another place:

مينيا ڏوڙ نه مارئي، مَحَلين ماڙنئا ڌار،
پايو ميٿ ملير ري، مُنڌ نه ويڙهي وار،
جا هُتيجن هار، سا ڪين وهندي ڪوت ۾.
(شاهواڻي، سرمارئي، ص. 268)

Sorely (2012) has translated the above lines of Latif as:

Marui doth not wash her hair,

Imprisoned in the upper-rooms

Without her Marus. On her head

She puts no soap, nor to her hair

Incense applies. Within the fort

How will she stay, accustomed

To company of folk from there? (p.604)

When a fellow countryman of Marui gets pricked by a thorn she feels as if a spear pierced through her heart making it bleed profusely.

آءُ ڪين سوڙئين سمهان، مون ور گهارج سچ
ور ابائن سين اُچ، ڪوڙ سربت تنهنجو سومرا.
(نبي بخش، سرمارئي، ص. 322، 321)

Ansari (2003) has translated the above verse as: ‘How can I find comfort in royal bed when my comrade is passing his days in misery? I prefer thirst with my own people to royal cocktails in your palace, O King (p.51).’ To Marui the ways and means of her compatriots are more charming than the highly expensive and chic costumes of the foreigners.

Shah Latif says:

آئين ڪي چاڙهين، ڏٺ ڏيهائي، سومرا!
ستا ڪو، سيد چئي، سائون سڪائين؛
منجهان ڪنڊ لطيف چئي، چاڙ ڪيو چاڙهين؛

پُلاءَ نه پاڙين، عُمَر! آرھائڙيءَ سين.
 تِن وَنھين ويڙيچن ۾، سدائين سڪار:
 چونڊيو، اُٿيو چاڙھين، سندا ڏونرن ڌار:
 جن جو ويڙن سين واپار، سي ڏوٿي هون نه ڏبرا.
 (نبي بخش، سرماڙي، ص: ۳۶۸)

Soomra! Maru gather forests' fruit and grain for daily use,
 Stalks of grass they gather to dry,
 From *Lumb* grass they extract rice and cook,
 Umar, they will not exchange their dish made of
 White flowers for your *Pullao*
 Always abundance find with these contended folks,
 "We select and bring full of wild berries many a branch,"
 Those who frequent thick forests are never in need.

(Khamisani, p.216)

Marui's relatives are simple men and are contented with whatever food they find. Memon (1993) explains that 'Marus are so poor that they get only forest herbs and grass for their food but they prefer it to having royal dishes (p.127-28).'

Shah Latif prays for the prosperity and fertility of the homeland in the following words:

سانئيم! سدائين ڪرين، مٿي سنڌ سڪار
 دوس! منا دلدار! عالم سڀ آباد ڪرين!
 (ص. ۲۸۴، آڏواڻي، سرسارنگ)

O Lord! let Sind ever prosperous be,
 Make all the worlds thine Mercy see.

(Ansari, p.186)

Another example of patriotism is Marui's wish to be buried nowhere else but in the soil of the homeland.

واجهائي وطن کي، آءُ جي هت مياس:
 گور منهنجي سومرا! ڪڇ پنوهارن پاس:
 ڏج ڏاڏائي ڏيهه جي، منجهان ولڙين واس:
 مياڻي جياس، جي وڃي مڙهه ملير ڏي.
 (آڏواڻي، سرماڙي، ص. ۳۵۵)

Longing for my native land, if here I die,
 Make my grave beside my folks, oh Soomra!
 Let me be placed near climbers fragrant,
 Though dead, I will live if my body is sent to Malir.

(Khamisani, p.214)

The idea in the above verse is really fascinating; Marui believes if her dead body is sent for burial to Malir her native land, it will be like getting a new life.

واجهائي وطن کي، ساري، ڏيان ساهه:
 بُت منهنجو بند ۾، قيد م ڪريجاهه:
 پرڏيهائي پرينءَ ري، ڌار م ڏريجاهه:
 تڏي وسائجانءَ ٿرن جي، مٿي مٽيءَ مٿاهه:
 جي پويون ٿئي پساهه، ته نجانءِ مڙهه ملير ڏي.
 (آڏواڻي، سرماڙي، ص. ۳۵۴)

If I die, longing for my native land,
 Free my body from these chains.
 Keep no more this stranger away from her love,
 Over my dead body, spread Malir's cool earth,
 When I die, send my body to Malir, my native land.

(Khamisani, p.214)

In both of the above verses the simplicity of language, delicacy of feelings, the impact of melancholy, sublimity of ideas and the charm of Latif's style are no less than a wonder.

Marui expresses the yearning for her homeland even more forcefully and wistfully in the following verse:

واجهائي وطن کي، ساري، ساهُ ڏيان؛
هي سُر ساڙيه سامهون، منهنجو نچ، ميان!
مقاميائي ماڙئين، وڃي ٿر ٿيان!
مياڻي جيان، جي وڃي مڙهه ملير ڏي.
(آڏواڻي، سرمارئي، ص. ۳۵۵)

Longing for my native land, if I die,

Send my corpse to my native land, let it there lie.

Let me be buried beside my Marus in Thar,

If my dead body goes to Malir, I will, revive again.

(Khamisani, p.214)

In the above verses a pregnant point is eloquently and impressively made as Marui, remembering her native land Malir, wishes her head to be sent to her homeland after her death. Since she knows that she has no one at Umerkot, the country of her captor, to have enough sympathy with her to arrange a funeral service after she is dead therefore her entreaty is that only her head may be sent to Malir, if not her whole dead body. It will be a great solace to her only if her head finds some place for burial in the graveyard of her ancestors in her homeland. She believes if her head finds peace there, it will be like her whole body finding tranquillity. Here Latif very articulately expresses that the peace of body largely depends on the peace of mind. Latif's poetry is teeming with such words of wisdom and touching comparisons.

Here is another brilliant example of patriotic element in Shah Latif's poetry:

سنهيءَ سٽيءَ سبيو، مون ماروءَ سين ساهُ؛
ويني ساريان سومرا! گولاڙا ۽ گاهُ؛
هنٿو منهنجو هٿ ٿيو، هٿ مٽي ۽ ماهُ؛

پڪن منجه پساہ، قالب آهي ڪوٽ ۾.
آڏواڻي، سرسارنگ، ص. ۳۵۹)

To Maru needle joined my breath,
a needle, oh so fine,

My heart is there, my earthy flesh
must here to force resign;
My breath is in the thatch divine
my body's to mansions bound.

(Kazi, E. p. 184)

At another place Latif says:

چرن چٽڪن ڇت ۾ هرن منجه هنئين
لطف ٿيو، لطيف چئي مهرڪي منئين
ڏکي کي ڏئين، سراهيون ساڙيه جون!
(دائوڊپوٽو، سرمارئي، ص. ۱۹۰)

Agha (2016) has translated above lines as: 'They are ever present in my mind. In fact they live there permanently. Latif says: the Lord has shown mercy to us (in the form of rainfall). This afflicted woman has received very good news about her native land (p.711).'

In the following lines of Latif, his spokesperson Marui puts her heart out to express her love for her compatriots and her native land. The metaphor 'my fellow countrymen are the dwellers of paradise' is simply touching. The idea truly deserves appreciation.

زمر زخرف سومرا، مارو مون مهندار
اولاٽڪ اصحاب الجنه، ماڳ سندن موچار
وسقاهم رهبر شراباً طهورا، پين پوچ پنوهار
ويرو تار وجود ۾ پرين جي پچار
سباجها ستار، مونکي مارن ميڙئين!
(نبي بخش، سرمارئي، ص. ۳۶۹)

O Soomra! So what if you have wealth and convoy?

Far better are my sweet *Marus*, my own

Paradise is their abode, divine drink they enjoy

My heart always evokes my loved one

O Lord! Reunite me with my *Marus*. (Saeed)

Marui believes that her native land Malir is a paradise; its natives are the inhabitants of paradise; its water is the pure drink served in the paradise. These comparisons give a spiritual touch to Latif's idea of patriotism and make him a saintly poet in the true sense of the word.

جُهران جِهڄان تي، جِئَن پَسَٿان پَري ٿيا؛
 آلا! اونِي آڻين، جو کينءَ جي خَبَر ڏي!
 مَن مَنهنجي کي، واڪو لهي ويڙه جو!
 (آڏواڻي، سرمارئي، ص. ۲۳۸)

I mourn, I weep for my dear ones out of view,

Oh God! Do send a camel man here to give me good news,

That I may give up weeping and mourning for them.

(Khamisani, p.221)

Marui pines away in the desire to see her relatives again. She is in such a state of mind that even a messenger with the news of their safety may make her feel better. Kazi (2015) explains that 'she is not sure whether the day of her freedom will come and she reunites with her loved ones. So someone from her native land with the message, 'all is well', may soothe her and her aching heart might find some peace (p.71).' Marui's yearning for her homeland and her compatriots has been portrayed with such intensity that Latif literally makes our hearts melt with her agony.

Marui, a helpless captive in the castle of the cruel king Umer Soomro, is truly a symbol of defying bondage and Latif a real champion of freedom and patriotism.

Conclusion:

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, in his poetry, has uniquely depicted a number of passions, perceptions and values. He has touched the universal subjects like love, labour, truth, courage, struggle, unity, generosity, sacrifice, tolerance, awareness and particularly patriotism. His highly personalized style of communicating his ideas through folk tales and folk characters makes his thought very impressive and gripping. Latif expresses his patriotic feeling chiefly through the tale of Umer and Marui. Signs and symbols in *Sur Marui* are very captivating. Some scholars have emphasised spiritual aspects of this *Sur*, others have highlighted the patriotic and nationalistic message in it. The beauty of Latif's poetry lies in the fact that scholars of different schools of thought can interpret it according to their own theories and thought patterns. Latif has created a symbolic connection of Marui's tale with his society to give a patriotic message to his fellow countrymen. His message is not to kneel before an oppressor like Umer Soomro but be bold like Marui who withstood all worldly pressures exerted by the obstinate ruler. The individual character of Marui represents the whole Sindhi society. Through this tale Latif has put forward his views about traditions, customs and values of honour and love and made Marui say that she belongs to a society in which honour is not considered a commodity. That is why she does not want to set some bad example in the castle of Umer. She can never love Umer's palace as much as she loves Malir, her native place. Latif's idea of patriotism is not abstract at all. By the love of land he means to have the love for the trees, herbs and shrubs, grasslands, creepers, mountains, streams, rivers, and the people of the land. All through Latif's *Sur Marui*, the central character of the tale; Marui, keeps remembering her husband, home and relatives. Latif makes us feel her pain and yearning in her sobs and cries. She keeps worrying about her relatives; the have-nots and therefore it is out of question for her to accept Umer's offers of comforts. Her chastity, self-esteem, contentment with poverty, unbreakable link with her relations and her love for her native land

make her character truly adorable.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai has expressed his patriotic feelings in many ways he does so even when he borrows themes from the literature in other languages. He actually enriched his own language and literature, particularly Sindhi poetry by putting his own ideas parallel to borrowed ideas as examples. This again shows his love for Sindhi language because he took Sindhi to new heights through his poetic excellence.

Latif's study was truly extensive. He knew a number of languages that is why he was able to present in Sindhi the characters and stories from Arabic, Hindi, Sanskrit and Persian literature including the religious anecdotes and folk tales. He was highly learned and his deliberate effort to enhance his own language through the stories from foreign lands makes him a true lover of Sindh and the language of the land; Sindhi.

The kind of commitment Marui has with her native land and her native folk is very rare to see in any other character in the world literature. The well-being and security of her countrymen and her homeland is the question of life and death to her. She believes that when she dies and if her dead body is sent back to her native land for burial, it will be as good as she is alive. No other heroine of Latif has such a sublime approach towards the love of native land. Shah's Marui is not only an exemplary character for Sindhi society but also an inspiration to the whole world.

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