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Shah Jo Risalo (Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai): A Non-Political Source for Reconstructing the History of Sindh

Abstract:

Sindh, a province of Pakistan is as rich as its culture, its traditions, its language, its moral values, its social diversity and its civilization. The region of Sindh is known as the land of Sufi saints and sages who fostered the message of love, amity and brotherhood in Asia and beyond. Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689- 1752 CE) is a celebrated Sufi poet, philosopher and social reformist, who addressed every aspect of the human life in his poetry. The work contains great lessons for every segment of society. Bhitai's poetry addresses the people belonging to various walks of life, the marginalized segments of society, poor folks, and menial workers such as potter, iron-smith, washerman, fisherman, Shepherd, and cloth-maker. During the eighteenth century, when this poetry was compiled, the social conditions of Sindh were very critical. Different civil wars had been broken out due to weakening central authority of the Mughals, and struggle between petty landlords to gain power. Consequently, the common people of Sindh became victim of this entire deplorable situation. Bhitai lived among the common people, and since he had a sensitive soul, he felt the miseries and sufferings of the people. This poetry, which possesses unbounded charm and grace of the vernacular Sindhi language, reveals social status and cultural condition of the common people. Poetic expressions are also used to depict contemporary religious and socio-cultural life. Its mystic aspect expresses devotional ideas of the Sufi saints. This paper is an attempt to analyse Bhitai's poetry as an alternative source for revealing the socio-cultural aspect of the history of Sindh during the 18th century.

Introduction

Among other literary forms, poetry is supposed to have enjoyed a degree of popularity just beginning from the Samma period (1357-1521 CE), when Sindhi language had come to forefront. During the Kalhora period (1700-1783 CE), it was employed for the cultivation of mind. The poetry composed by Shaykh Hammad, Ishaq Aahangar and Qadi Qadan, the renowned Sindhi poets of the Samma and Arghun-Tarkhan period was revived. As well as the poetry of Shah Abdul Karim and Shah Inayat and finally Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689 – 1752 CE) is spec-

imens of chefs-d'oeuvre of the time. Sorely writes in this regard, "Nor is there in Sindhi literature either before or after Shah Abdul Latif's time, anything fit to be compared with the *Risalo*."⁽¹⁾ This poetry, which possesses unbounded charm and grace of the vernacular Sindhi language, reveals social status and cultural condition of the common people. Shah Latif's style was adopted by the later day poets and writers. Prior to it, during the days of Miyan Yar Muhammad Kalhora, Shah Inayat had composed devotional and in-depth poetry from the view point of meaning. He is considered as the earliest poet of the Kalhora period who sang love songs, suitable for melodious singing.⁽²⁾ Poetic expressions were also used to depict contemporary religious and socio-cultural life. The mystic poetry expresses devotional ideas of the Sufi saints.

In fact, no description of Sindh during Mughal and Kalhora period would be adequate without some accounts of the life and work of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, who has been the subject of almost innumerable studies and hymnal praises in Sindh. There are only few critical appreciations of his poetry.⁽³⁾ He is more homely, common-place; practical and some portion of his writings display an appreciation of domestic happiness scarcely to be expected from one of his order. His poetry is the delight of all that can understand it.⁽⁴⁾ Though, not only outstanding works of mystical poetry were produced in Sindh during the Kalhora period (1700-1783 CE). The year 1700 may be regarded as a decisive span for Sindhi literature as a number of poets such as Miyan Abul Hasan (d. 1711), Makhdum Muhammad Hashim (d. 1761), Muhammad Zaman Lanwari and Girhori etc. introduced a new dimension in terms of poetry in Sindhi language.⁽⁵⁾

The *Shah Jo Risalo* is a poetic compendium of famous Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit. In fact, it is many compendia, for Shah Abdul Latif's poetry in two genres; *bayt* (verse) and *wa'i* was compiled by many of his devotees during his lifetime and after his death. The devotees compiled his poetry and designated it as *Shah Jo Risalo* (Shah's Message). The *Shah Jo Risalo*, written in very pure and concise Sindhi verses, is regarded as *magnum opus* of Sindhi poetry. Shah Abdul Latif has hidden his mystical ideas under a thick layer of various symbols taken from all spheres of life as well as from the classical Sufi tradition, and particularly from Maulana Rumi's *Mathnawi*.⁽⁶⁾ Professor Syed Husain Nasr, described Shah Latif as 'direct emanation Rumi's spirituality in South Asia'.⁽⁷⁾

The traditional compilations of *Shah Jo Risalo* include thirty Surs (chapters) which were compiled by renowned researchers. The oldest copy of *Shah Jo Risalo* contains some thirty-six Surs, but later on the scholars discarded six Surs, which did not match the Shah's style according to their language and content. In recent times, Dr. Nabi Bakhsh Khan Baloch, has compiled and printed a new edition after thirty-two years of painstaking task of carrying out research on folk culture, language and the history of Sindhi language and literature. These surs are titled as Path to Pace, Have, King and Minstrel, Hope, Song of Dawn, Yogis, Wandering Ascetics, The Tune of Life, Rain Song, Sailing, Mariners, Love Dependent, Tribulations, The Native, The Mountain, Path, The Helpless, The Wailings, Leela, Moomal and Rano, Beloved, Desert, Shark-Hunters, Spinner, Calamity, The Swan, Marui and Sohni.

However, the literal meaning of word 'Sur' is 'a mode of singing'.⁽⁸⁾ In Indian classical music, its 'Rag and Raginis' are sung at different times of day and night. In *Risalo*, the Surs or chapters are named according to their subject matter. The underlying theme is how the individual is to cultivate the godly attributes, negate his ego so as to evolve to a better human being. These Surs contain *bayts* which Shah Latif sang in Enthusiastic stage. These *bayts* in the Surs concerning the life-stories of his heroines, such as Suhni, Sassui, Leela, Moomal, Marui, Nuri and Sorath are not in chronological sequences. For the Sufi Poet in his state of *wajd* (ecstasy), was concerned with the moments of denouncements in life-stories, which he used as allegories to express his mystical experiences.

There is no adequate record found for the life of Shah Abdul Latif. Most of what is known comes from oral tradition. The most competent authority of his life is Mirza Qalich Beg, who checked the quality of the oral tradition derived from the eyewitness evidences.⁽⁹⁾ Though many of the facts collected by Mirza Qalich Beg are prefaced by some such phrases as 'Men say that' or 'They write that'. The latest scholarship on Shah Latif and his poetry is Professor Gur Bakhshani. Some new research is also conducted by Daryaram Gidumal and Lilaram Watanmal.

He belonged to a notable elite Syed family of Mitari. He was the scion of the most illustrious religious house of Sindh tracing a connection to Herat. Many biographers of Shah Latif have mentioned about his love affair with a girl who belonged to an Arghun family. But the refusal of Latif's marriage proposal by

her father Mirza Mughal Beg broke Latif's heart and he left his home and joined the company of *jogis* and *sanyasis*.⁽¹⁰⁾ He wandered from place to place with these Shaivite mendicants. His travels provide him an opportunity to mingle with the masses and experience their problems and pains. His poetry reveals much about his travels. He met people from different fields of life and observed their manners. For the reason, his poetry depicts a real picture of the contemporary socio-political, religious, cultural and economic conditions of Sindh.

Political conditions during the life and times of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai

The exact dates of Shah Latif's birth and death are not known but most probably, he was born in 1689 and died in 1752 CE.⁽¹¹⁾ He witnessed the change of the power in Sindh from the Mughals to the Kalhoras. In 1707, when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb died, Shah Latif was a young man of 18 years. The death of the emperor caused the beginning of the decline of the Mughal Empire in India. This deterioration paved way for the rise of the Kalhoras and establishment of their independent rule in Sindh, who had been ruling on behalf of the Mughals yet. Shah Latif witnessed the rule of two Kalhora rulers: Miyan Yar Muhammad and his son Miyan Noor Muhammad Kalhora. In 1701, Miyan Yar Muhammad Kalhora was appointed as the Governor of Upper Sindh by the Mughals. Later on, he began to establish his control over the southern parts; as a result, Sindh virtually emerged as unified and independent kingdom. In 1737, during the days of Miyan Noor Muhammad Kalhora, Sindh was invaded by Nadir Shah and the Kalhoras were forced to accept the overlordship of the Persians. In 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani attacked and conquered Sindh, which became a vassal of the Afghan kingdom. After the death of Miyan Noor Muhammad, Sindh faced a terrible civil war among his three sons. Shah Latif witnessed all these events and died at the age of sixty-three, six years before the East India Company's factory established at Thatta.

References of Historical Events in *Shah Jo Risalo*:

It apparently seems that the foreign rule and destructive civil war must have compounded the sufferings of the common people, who were already groaning under the tyrant situations. Shah Abdul Latif expressed such a dismal situation and his sym-

pathetic feelings with the suffering masses in the *sur* titled *Hussani*, as he portrays a picture of the oppressed masses in the following words:

سِرِ جِي تَان سَوَرِ، سَامَائِي تَان سُكَّ وَئَا،
اهي ٻئي پورِ، مُونِ نِمَائِيءِ نَصِيْبُ تِئَا.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٻٽو، سُرِ حسييني، داستان 2، بيت 5، ص: 285)

Translation: I received sorrows at the time of my birth; they multiplied when I became an adult. Only the sorrows and agonies are my fortune.⁽¹²⁾

In the chapter entitled Mazoori, Latif complains:

دُڪِيءِ دَمَرُ نَاهِي، بُڪِيءِ ڪَلِ نَه اُجْهِي،
اُگھاريءِ وهانءِ، وِئُو وروھنُ وسريءِ.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٻٽو، سُرِ معذور، داستان 2، بيت 1، ص: 74)

Translation: I am grief-ridden, how can I show any anger. I am famished, how can I smile. How can I think about my marriage, when I do not have a piece of cloth to cover myself?⁽¹³⁾

Portraying the misery of the poor people during winters, Latif says:

اُتَرَ ڏني اوتِ، نه مون سوڙ نه گبرو،
چارِيءِ چُنِيءِ پوتِ، ريڙهي ندي راتِ گئيءِ.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٽيون، سُرِ رپ، داستان 2، بيت 9، ص: 309)

Translation: Northern wind blew strong. I did not have quilt or mattress. My whole night passes in struggle to pull four corners of my head-covering (*chunni*) to cover myself (to keep myself warm).⁽¹⁴⁾

Such miserable conditions created sense of insecurity among the common people. They became indifferent to the prevailing political affairs of the region out of sheer helplessness. They were unaware of their rights. They accepted this oppressive situation as the will of God. The minorities were subjected to religious persecution by the rulers.⁽¹⁵⁾ In these circumstances, Shah Abdul Latif raised his voice for unity of the people of Sindh without any religious discrimination. He urged them to initiate a struggle for a noble cause of achieving political freedom and so-

cial justice. In this regard, he warns:

چُچُ مَرِ قَطَارَانِ، سَاڻُ چَرَهَنَدُو لَڪِيِنِ،
مَچُئُ ٿِيِنِ پُئَانِ، وَگَ وَئُونِي نَه لَهِيِنِ.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٻيو، سُرِ حسييني، داستان 12، بيت 12، ص: 344)

Translation: Do not detach yourself from the group of companions when they pouch through mazy passes. Otherwise, you would fall behind and miss the path, which, your companions might take.⁽¹⁶⁾

As a strong supporter of pantheism, Shah Latif believes not only in equality of human but also in the equality of all religions. According to his theory, religion could not basis of nationalism. Likewise the other Sufis, he believes in Islamic teachings which advocate that there is no compulsion in religion and that 'for you, your religion and for me mine.' For this reason, his poetry includes several verses criticizing Hindus and Muslims for their religious sectarianism.⁽¹⁷⁾ For him, an individual or a group could not be judged on the basis of their religious believes, but only on the basis of their deeds which meant selfless service for the humanity at large.⁽¹⁸⁾

On the other hand, Shah Latif also describes various accounts which had been remained part of oral history of Sindh, Kuch, Gujrat and Kathiawar. His *Risalo* may rightly been considered as a book, which in real sense includes multiple dimensions as the study of races, ethnology, anthropology, history, geography, linguistics and culture of Sindh and adjoining regions.⁽¹⁹⁾ Shah Latif describes different periods of the history of ancient Sindh and other regions by mentioning the names of their kings, queens, heroes, heroines, princes and warriors about whom he had heard from local bards, poets, sugars and common people at the time when he visited different villages far and wide, even in the remote areas. He recorded these oral testimonies in his *Risalo*. Some of such folk heroes are Sahir, Dam and Jam Mehar (in Sur Suhini), Jam Chanesar, Jakhro, Dasaro, Hamir, Sodho and Mendhro (in Sur Leela-Chanesar), Samo and Tamachi in Sur Kamod, etc.

Shah Latif's poetry also gives evidences about the contacts of Sindh with its adjacent areas such as Kutch, Gujrat, Jesalmir and Jodhpur and some areas of Balochistan like Lasbella from the time immemorial. Sindh-Kutch relations have also been

described in detail by Rushbrook William in his book entitled *The Black Hills, Kutch in History and Legends*.⁽²⁰⁾ It tells us that during the periods of Rai dynasty (499-640 CE), the boundaries of Sindh extended towards the east up to Kanoj and towards south up to the port of Surat. When Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh in 712 CE, many Lohanas and other tribes migrated to the neighboring Hindu States including Kutch.⁽²¹⁾ They gradually took over the state of Kutch and began to rule.⁽²²⁾

Furthermore, Shah Latif also writes about Sindhi sailors (Samundi) their navigation techniques, voyages as far as to the Malabar Coast, Sri Lanka and the island of Java. His poetry contains the adventures of Samundis (Sindhi Sailors) and their voyage to Lanka and Java, in Sur Surirag and Sur Samundi, which feature various accounts on cultural, social and economic outlook on people of Thatta and the port Debal in present day Karachi.

In quest of religious truths, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai traveled to many parts of Sindh and also went to the bordering lands as far as Multan, Lasbella, Jesalmir and Bhuj. He became well known to the rulers at height of the power and rule of the Kalhoras in Sindh. However, he traveled unilaterally in the company of *Jogis* and *Samis* and sometimes alone visiting towns and cities, to understand the true message of Islam contained in nature. Throughout his travels he went to hills, valleys, riverbanks, fields and mountains where he met the ordinary simple people. He also traveled to the Ganjo Takkar (Barren Hills) in the south of Hyderabad-Sindh.

Supported by his faith in the 'spiritual unity of human beings', he emerges as the proponent of equality among different countries of the world. He does not believe in any fascist doctrine of national chauvinism. He links the prosperity of his homeland Sindh with the prosperity of the world at large. He not only pray for the prosperity of his beloved motherland Sindh but also wishes good fortune for Istanbul, China, Samarqand, Rome, Kabul, Qandhar, Delhi, Girnar, Bikaner, Jesalmir, Bhuj and Umarmkot. In *Sur Sarang*, he prays:

موٽي مانڊائڻ جي، وري ڪٿائين وار،
وڃوڻ وَسَنَ آيون، چوڏس ۽ چوڏار،
ڪي اٺيون وڃي استنبول ۾، ڪن مٿو مغرب پار،
ڪي چمڪن چين تي، ڪي لهن سمرقندين سار،

ڪي رمي ويڻن روم تي، ڪي ڪابل ڪي قندار،
ڪي دلي ۽ دکن، ڪي گڙن مٿي گڙنار،
ڪني جنبي جيسلمير تان، ڏنا بيڪانير بڪار،
ڪن اچي عمر ڪوٽ جا، وسايا ولهار،
ڪن پڇ پڇاڻيو، ڪن ڌت تي ڍار،
ڪي لڙيون لاهور تي، ڪي هلن مٿي هالار،
ڪي پريون پنجاب ڏي، ڪن چڪل تي چمڪار،
سانيم سدائين ڪرين، سنڌي ۾ سڪار،
دوست تون دلدار، عالم سڀ آباد ڪرين.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد پهريون، سر سارنگ، داستان، 3، بيت 1، ص: 324)

Translation: All signs of downpour have appeared. The skies are covered with clouds and there is a lot of lightning all around. Some of these clouds and lighting have left for Istanbul, others turn to the west. Some shine bright over China and others take care of, Samarqand Some wandered to Rome, to Kabul and Qandhar, some lie on Delhi, Deccan, Girnar, Jesalmir, Bikaner and Bhuj. Some clouds trekked to Umarmkot for the purpose of bringing prosperity to the people of that area. My beloved Allah! May you always make Sindh a land of abundance, and may you make prosperous the whole universe.⁽²³⁾

Regardless of his love for all countries, Latif uses bitter language for the kingdoms that intend to colonize other regions. In a verse of *Sur Sariraage*, he predicts the arrival of the *Firangis* (the British) in Sindh.⁽²⁴⁾ His remarks seem as the 'prophetic warning' against the consequences of Mughal ruler Farrukh Siyar's order of 1717 CE, which made the East India Company's trade custom free throughout the imperial territory for an annual tribute of the paltry sum of three thousands besides other concessions. In this regard,⁽²⁵⁾ Latif says:

دنڱي منجه درياه، ڪي ٻڏي ڪي اڀري،
هو جي وايي واڻڻا، سونهن سڀ سرتا،
معلم ماڳ نه اڳين، فرنگي منجه ڦرتا،
ملاح تنهنجيءَ مڪڙيءَ، اچي چور چڙهڻا،

جتي ڏينگَ ڏرڻا، تتي تاري تهننجي
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد پهريون، سر سُرراڳ، داستان 3، بيت 14، ص: 151)

Translation: My bark in mid-stream may sink, may sail. What was thought so perfect now doth fail? The guides are not being seen in rightful place. The prowling pirates (*Firangis*), up and down do pace. My Lord! My modest craft protect, when proud vessels have been cruelly wrecked.⁽²⁶⁾

During Shah Latif's period, there were two significant political powers existing in Sindh. The first comprised of the Syeds, the Pirs and the Sufis while the second dominating power was the Persian language. Sorely, referring Alexander Barnes states that "there is no country in Asia or on earth that is so perfectly priest ridden."⁽²⁷⁾ He further elaborates that "the Syeds and Fakirs began to be treated with great respect, which the taxation system acknowledge, while the ordinary cultivating and pastoral class, the true Sindhis, the Jats and camel men and hunters were fully exploited."⁽²⁸⁾ Shah Latif also strongly condemns the clergy and other religious groups who exploited the masses in general and the religious minorities in particular. On several occasions, Shah Latif bitterly slates the role of *mullahs* and so called holy men who use religion as a tool of exploitation. He says:

جو ملن کي ميهڻو، سو ئي مون سردار،
(قاسمي، علامه غلام مصطفيٰ، شاهه جو رسالو، سر بلاول، فصل ٽيون، ص: 551)

Translation: My lord and master puts; The *Mullahs* to their shames.⁽²⁹⁾

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai not only depicts the conditions of the masses but also disseminates information about various aspects of culture and literature. As in the days of Shah Latif, Persian language was regarded as the official and court language of Sindh. Persian was the language of the elite and a sign of pride. It was a common Sindh proverb that "Proficiency in Persian language would enable you to ride on the horse back. According to a common practice, only the elite classes (Pirs and Syeds) were allowed to ride on horses. Latif strongly condemns this discriminatory and humiliating practice. He says:

گولو توءَ غلام، جي فارسي سڪو،
ٻڌو جو ٻن ڳالهين، سو کيئن چائي ڄام،

اچيو ته اب گهري، بڪو تان طعام،
ايءَ عامين سندو عام، خاصن منجهان نه ٿيو.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٽيون، سر آسا، داستان 7، بيت 19، ص: 358)

Translation: If you have accepted the supremacy of the Persian language, it means you have accepted slavery. One who believes in two doctrines cannot find an honorable place. If you are thirsty, then food cannot quench your thirst. If you are a commoner, then merely a proficiency in Persian language cannot make you elite.⁽³⁰⁾

During the days of Shah Latif, the Sindhi language could not be used as a medium to express sophisticated ideas among the intelligentsia of Sindh. Falsifying this notion, Latif chose the Sindhi language as an instrument to express sophisticated and subtle ideas related to philosophy, religion, love, patriotism and universalism. In such a way, he tries to eliminate a sense of inferiority among the Sindhi masses, which had been internalized owing to the hegemonic notions of the alleged superiority of Persian.

Shah Abdul Latif composed several verses that convey a message of unity to the people of Sindh. These verses also emphasize the need of a ceaseless and untiring struggle for the purpose of reaching one's destination. There are several *surs* (chapters) in *Shah Jo Risalo* such as *Sur Surirag*, *Sur Sassui*, *Sur Mazoori*, *Sur Desi* and *Sur Hussaini* which lay emphasis on unity and constant struggle. However, he was a strong proponent of the theological concepts of pantheism (*Wahdat-ul-Wajud*). He tried to transform it into a political theory based on the spiritual unity of human beings. In this perspective, he wished to see the reconstruction of Sindhi polity. He desired to build a Sindhi society on principles of equality of human beings, social justice, an exploitation-free economic system, dignity of labor, respect for women folk, religious tolerance, peace and unity.

The progressive attitude of a common man of Sindh is gleaned from the context of the tragic incident of Jhok in 1718 CE, when Shah Inayat, an eminent Sufi, a reputed poet and above all an unmatched social reformer was assassinated. The deceased had a great influence on Latif, who used to visit the former.⁽³¹⁾ Shah Inayat established a commune-based society in Jhok, which was not obviously a threat to the existing power structure. Consequently, he was assassinated by a united alliance comprised of the

Kalhoras, the Governor of Thatta, Nawab Azam, and several other influential persons. Shah Inayat's tragic death agonized Latif and he composed at least eight verses in Sur Ramkali to express his feelings.⁽³²⁾

Woman in the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai

The *Shah Jo Risalo* may rightly be considered a significant source that portrays a very good picture regarding the status and character of the women in the society. The heroines or Soormis of Shah Abdul Latif's poetry, who are known as the Seven Queens of Sindhi folklore, have been given the status of royalty. These Seven Queens known as are Marui, Moomal, Sassui, Noori, Sohni, Sorath, and Leela, who are celebrated for their positive qualities: their honesty, integrity, piety and loyalty. They are also valued for their bravery and their willingness to risk their lives in the name of love. In his poetry, Shah has alluded in elaborate way to these characters of Sindhi folktales and used them as metaphors for high spiritual life. Perhaps what Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai saw in his tales of these women was an idealized view of womanhood, but the truth remains that the Seven Queens inspired women all over Sindh to have the courage to choose love and freedom over tyranny and oppression.

Though, the poetry of Latif is inspired by the folk-lore of Sindh provides an image of the social setup of that era. This poetry is considered as the semi-historical work and an alternative source to bring historical facts to lime light. This poetry is so important that it implies a socio-cultural corpus specific to a particular ethnic group, and includes folk-behavior or the study of the specific customs and beliefs of a social group and folk life or the study of folk-traditions in Sindh. The poetry of Shah Abdul Latif is a result of an interaction of cultural, geographical and religious factors which offers valuable historical evidence of cultural influence. These poems were preserved orally for centuries by local *Bhats* and *Charans*.

Women in poetry of Shah Latif were given the status of royalty. They are featured in the Sur Marui (Marvi), Moomal Rano, Sohni-Meehar, Leela Chanesar, Sorath-Rai Dyach, Sassui-Punhu and Kaamod. These women are respected for their positive qualities: honesty, integrity, piety, and loyalty. They are also valued for their bravery and willingness to risk their lives in the

name of love. Their social status and consciousness can be gleaned from these stories. However, the most significant aspect of their life was to keep their prestige and pride higher. Purity of woman is dignified through these stories. Patriotism, protest against tyranny and an unbreakable desire for freedom constitute the fundamental elements of Latif's poetry. In sur Marui, Latif symbolizes Marui as a person of unwavering resolve, uncompromising royalty, firm commitment to freedom and ever ready for sacrifice. Latif says:

واجھائي وطن کي، ائون جي هت مياس،
تہ گور منهنجي سومرا، کج پنوهارن پاس،
دج ڏاڏائي ڏيه جو، منجهان ولڙن واس،
تہ ڪر مياڻي جياس، جي وٽو مڙهه ملير ڏي.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٽيون، سُرمائي، داستان 6، بيت 22، ص: 421)

Translation: O Soomra! If I die in Umarkot, remembering my native place, kindly send my corpse to my people. I believe that the fragrance of the plants of Malir would resurrect me.
(33)

In such a class- based society, Latif depicts woman of the poor class in the guise of Marui, Sassui, Ganga and Nuri as virtuous ladies while the woman of the upper class like Leela, Moomal and Kaunro are shown as arrogant, self-centered ladies who turned a blind eye to their duties and swerved from their real path. The woman of the lower class, in spite of being suppressed, played a vital role in the society. By participating actively, she retained the equal share in the economy, too. Shah Latif proves the importance of her existence through her hard work and struggle. However, the tragic ends of some stories spread optimism and hopelessness. The entire structure of all these stories has been developed on the foundation of chastity and honor of woman. In *Sur Marui*, Latif says:

ايءَ نہ مارن ريت، جيئن سيٺ متائين سون سين،
قضا آنديس ڪوٽ ۾، ڪنديس ڪانه ڪريت،
پکن جي پريت، ماڙيءَ مور نہ متيان.
(شيخ، ٻانهون خان، جلد ٽيون، سُرمائي داستان 7، بيت 15، ص: 429)

Translation: We poor people do not barter our kinsmen for gold. I will not do anything unconventional in Umarkot. I love my shades. I will not exchange them with luxurious buildings.⁽³⁴⁾

The status of woman narrated in Latif's poetry cannot be separated from the society. The phonetic world of ritual myth or drama expresses social truth. A socio-cultural analysis of these characters helps to arrive at an opinion about the status and character of woman in the society. The information generated adds substance to the interpretation of the empirical realities based on concepts. It serves as one of the mechanism of social control. It provides support for social institutions and behavior patterns of a culture. It serves to instruct and remind the members of society of the sagacious codes of conducts. Ancestral legends mock the idle and improvident. It exalts individuals who exemplify the admirable virtues attributed to cultural heroes in ballads and legends and reflects those dominant values of society whose observance is rewarded by success.

The women of this period became a symbol of loyalty, purity and virtue. The message of freedom and patriotism is found from the story of Marui. The importance of this feeling is felt more when the country faces problems during the Kalhora regime as war and other difficult situations were spread out. Obviously such a situation won't be found in the recorded official history but after a careful study of economic, political and social conditions of Sindh in that era, Latif purposefully tries to provoke the feelings of patriotism among the people and gives them a message to love the poor, hungry and distressed people of their own class. In a feudal society under the Kalhoras, people's minds were so suppressed not to have any collective idea of nationality.

Here a question arises that why so much stress is laid on the chastity of woman? And why she is being elevated to the highest rank of purity and grace? The purpose of this myth was to raise the low status of woman in a feudal based society during the Kalhora period in which this poetry was composed and to train them for playing a satisfactory role in a tyrant married life to keep society going smoothly. These characters were symbolically expressed to give a message to the weaker classes by giving them the examples of the courage, struggle, sacrifice, determination and perseverance of the heroines of these stories. Furthermore, in order to make them realize that if these innocent, tender and weak girls could achieve their goals by crossing all the difficult obstacles of the way, then why they couldn't do so?

Conclusion

The *Shah Jo Risalo* (Latif's poetry) may rightly be considered as an important non-political source which enables us to understand the socio-political, religious and economic conditions of Sindh during the first half of the eighteenth century. It needs to be studied and interpreted for reconstruction of the contemporary history, would have certainly provided a great deal of authentic information about the various aspects of history and culture of Sindh. However, woman constitutes a significant role in Latif's poetry. Each of this poetic character is distinct, having different attributes and qualities. These qualities are loyalty, patriotism, endurance, fearlessness, steadfastness and intellect. Her natural flaws and weaknesses are also exposed from these stories; provide a complete picture of her individuality which provides help in understanding her role in the society.

However, the socio-political conditions influenced Shah Abdul Latif and other contemporary poets to compose poetry on such humanistic issues. Perhaps best of all, by using *Shah Jo Risalo* as a source, people particularly the historians will participate in the process of history. We will be able to reinterpret and reconstruct the history of the first half of the eighteenth century Sindh, which may challenge previous conclusions drawn upon from political chronicles and seek out evidences to support the new aspects in history.

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