

Poetry as a Source of Political Awakening and Mass Mobilisation during Dogra rule (1846-1947)

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Abstract: *In this paper an attempt is made to understand the poetry of Kashmir as a source of political awakening and mass mobilisation. During the Dogra rule, especially after 1920's and 1930's, Kashmir witnessed the democratic struggle for self-rule. In this struggle, various factors helped in making people politically conscious. One such factor was the role of poetry, whose value has been largely remained neglected. It has been valued as a mere part of literature, not as a source of political awakening and mass mobilisation. The poetry epitomised the struggle of Kashmiris against the Dogra rule. The poets of the time preached modern ideas among the people through the vehicle of their poetry. They preached about the need of social and political freedom, democracy, socialism and secularism. They provide intellectual leadership to the people during the freedom movement. Their poetry served as a source of resistance against the Dogra Raj.*

Keywords: Dogra Raj, Poetry, Political Mobilisation, Democratic Struggle, literature, oppression, Leadership, Secularism, Freedom

1. Introduction

After the Anglo-Sikh war of Subraon [1], the treaty of Lahore was signed between the British East India Company and Sikhs on 9th March, 1846. Among other things provided in the treaty, it was mentioned that Raja Gulab Singh would be declared as an independent ruler of such territories and hill districts as may be handed over to him by British through another separate treaty. [2]. To carry out this provision of the treaty of Lahore, a separate treaty was agreed upon by the British and the Raja Gulab Singh on 16th March, 1846, known as the Treaty of Amritsar. In the annals of Kashmir, this infamous treaty is known as a 'sale deed of Kashmir', because Kashmir and other hilly districts were handed over to Gulab Singh and his male heirs by British in exchange of seventy-five lakh Nanakshahis [3] rupees. [4] On account of this payment, Dogra rulers claimed themselves as sole masters of Kashmir, and "behaved as conquerors of Kashmir and treated the people as a purchased community". [5] The Dogra state was characterised by despotic, tyrannical and sectarian state. It put largely populated Muslim state under heavy oppression. Kashmir became "the scene of vile oppression, abominable misrule and it remained trodden down and trampled". [6]

In early twenties of the 20th century, political consciousness started flowering among the Muslim masses in Jammu and Kashmir. Now there was a growing need to launch an organised struggle against the despotic rule, which was indurated with the formation of Muslim Conference on October 17, 1932. [7] In order to secularise the aims and objectives of Muslim Conference, its nomenclature was changed to National Conference in 1939. [8] This organisation under the leadership of Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah and others played an important role in gearing the freedom struggle in right direction.

During this era of struggle and mass mobilisation, the contemporary poetry of Kashmir is replete with political and economic problems of the people. Although people of Kashmir fought against the despotic Dogra rule, it were the poets who inspired and emboldened them. They inoculated a

new energy into their souls and showed them the paragons of an ideal country. They lent intellectual leadership to the leaders of the political movement by discussing such themes as socialism, secularism and democracy in their poetry. [9] Their poetry represented the dissent against the aristocratic high-headedness. They provide the first hand information about the deplorable and oppressive conditions under which Kashmir Muslims were living. The different ideological undercurrents and political events brought the poets of that period close to the sufferings of the people of valley and in turn these poets found themselves in an environment where poetry of mysticism, love and didactic would cease to carry any impressions. Therefore, a new spirit was being infused in the poets of Kashmir. This new spirit was to express the inner urge of the laity.

Poetry is an important source for history writing and reconstruction of the past. The poets themselves have been acclimated by the socio-economic and political ethos in which they have lived. Poetry can't be separated from the society whose specifically human activity secrets it. [10] They can be, consciously or unconsciously, regarded as political activists and their poetic expressions leave a deeper impact on the readers as compared to any other literary form. [11]

The poets who assimilated the socio-political upheavals and modern influences and took the burden of disseminating it through their poetry were Abdul Ahad Azad (1902-1948), Gulam Ahmad Mahjoor (1888-1952), Abdul Satar Ranjoor (1916-1962), Beigh Arif and many others. Until now contemporary poetry of Kashmir has been largely interpreted by the historians on the basis of literature but not as a source of political awakening and mass mobilisation. Poetry has been just valued in terms of the contribution to the literature of the period. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to present poetry as a source of mass mobilisation. The poets of the time were aware about the historical realities. The treaty of Amritsar by which people of Kashmir were sold like anything. The worst part of the treaty was that the people of Kashmir were not consulted. Therefore, this 'business like transaction' itself became the central of their

criticism. They challenged the very existence of the treaty on the grounds that neither freedom nor people could be sold for a mere sum of seventy-five lakh of rupees. [12] Expressing his disapproval about the treaty, Mahjoor says:-

“My Grand papa was sold body and soul for copper coins, coins were repaid, life they demand what a bargain”. [13]

Mohammad Iqbal, the renowned poet, also reprobated the treaty of Amritsar. He tried to invoke world opinion on the eve of the formation of the League of Nation. [14] He condemned the treaty as the sale-deed. He says: -

*Badisaba agar-ba Geneva Guzarkuni,
Harfi Zama bi Mjlisiakwambazgo,
Dehqanwakishtwa jo wabayabanfarokhtmd,
Quomayfarokhtandwachuarzanfarokhtand.
(O Morning Breeze, if thou passeth by Geneva,
convey an appeal from us to the League of Nations;
they sold the farmer, the field, the rivulet and the
vale; they sold a people and how cheaply.) [15]*

The people of Kashmir were living under many disadvantages during the Dogra rule. One of the noxious methods of oppression under which many people toiled and suffered was the system of *Begar* or forced labour. Though *begar* was officially abolished in 1893 on the recommendations of Walter Lawrence, but in practice it continued throughout Dogra age. [16] Abdul Ahad Azad has described *begar* system as:-

*Pakun chum kar-i-begars
Barun chum genis sarkaras3
Yeyamvograibiaparai
Bae nazarehishbemari !. [17]
(I can't escape from begar, paying revenue in kind
and facing the merchant who would come to clear the
debt. How can I afford romance)?*

Apart from *begar*, peasants were also exploited due to heavy taxation and corrupt officialdom. People were heavily taxed. Everything was brought under taxation. [18] The treatment of the people by the officials too was inhuman and cruel, who appropriated every hard earned penny from the poor people. These poor people had to beg before the same official whom they feed through their hard labour. Therefore, common people were reduced to abject poverty and were chained by a number of oppressions. About it, Mahjoor says :-

*Me`onneith nun bachrozidethnawaanprethaikis,
Aathdarantchegareebanraatdohrazdarme`on.
(My poor and naked children toil and feed the rich.
The same poor beg their livelihood before the rich).
[19]*

Abdul Ahad Azad also echoed this in the same tone when he says :-

*Se`onmaazwaradaanansaalanzeyafchankuth,
Masoom khan-e-malenso`entehaalaasya.
Aeschokladjigrehethvedhvedhtchekhoonharan,*

*Tem khoonsoenikatill rang rang dushalaasya. [20]
(Look to our innocent children and their plight, see
our bodies they are feasts for the rich.
They (rich) have robes coloured in our blood, we
with injured heart weep like flood)*

Abdul SatarRanjoor too bemoaned about the very unhappy life of Kashmiri people. He lamented about their slavery in his poem “Gulamoo-ki-Duniya” as :-

*Kya gulamooki ye duniyathijalanaykiliye,
Kyunhuwaypaidagulam ye ranjuthanay kay liye.
Khoonpanikomilakarreat din kartayhaikaam;
Roti bi un konahimiltehaikhanay kay liya,
Zulum k sadmayguzartayhaigulamoo kay upar.....
Kashmir haijanatmagarmerayliyedoozaqsageer,
Aaytayhailoghadorsaiaarampainay kay liye,
Naamazadika jo laytahai us kolathiyaa,
Umerphirhotehaiuski jail Janay kay liye.....[21]
(Was the world of slaves meant to be burnt? Why
slaves were born to burden the woes? They work very
hard every day and night by mixing their blood with
the sweat, yet they don't have bread to eat. It is the
atrocities that rules their life. Kashmir is paradise
but for me (author) it is hellfire out there, those who
talk about their freedom have to bare the burnt.)*

The poets also preached communal harmony, through their poetry, at a time when communalism found its way in the Kashmir freedom movement especially after the event of 13 July, 1931. [22] The religion of Abdul Ahad Azad was humanism and he preached the same throughout his life. He expressed his belief of religious tolerance in the following couplet:-

*MandranteMashedanDharmshalanchounKhudaKhush,-
Lol ne kunras Dard-e-dilasrahziKhudamoun. [23]
(your god is the god of mosques and temples, my god is
the god of unity and love).*

Abdul Qadoos Rasa Javidani (b.1901), another Kashmiri literary genius, also preached the same themes of religious toleration and humanistic love among his fellow-beings. In one of his *gazals* [24], he uttered :-

*Kath nashayeechhu chon nooraanalolo,
Kaaba baasaanchummobutkhaanalolo. [25]
(show me the place where your light isn't seen, the Kaaba
and the temple are the same to me.*

Gulam Ahmad Mehjoor (1885-1952), the nationalist poet of Kashmir, also refused to be fanatic. He echoed the same familiar themes of human love and religious harmony at a time when communalism had found its ways in the body politics of Kashmir. He exhorted his people to be one and united and preached to them the religion of humanity. [26] He exhorts :

*Who is the friend and who is the foe of your land?
Let you among yourselves thoughtfully make out...
The kind and stock of all Kashmiris is one;
Let you mix milk and sugar once again.
Hindus will keep the helm and Muslims ply the oars;
Let you together row (ashore) the boat of this country. [27]*

The poets also inspired people to fight against the injustice. They filled them with the energy to free their land from oppression and exploitation. Abdul Ahad Azad prompted the youth for the struggle of freedom. He sung:-

*Tulkadambhaduroo, karhamashajoostojoo,
Jawanjawandilawaro, thavumeedteharizoo,
Samtehwatanwatankaroo, taran-e-watanparoo. [28]
(Oh young brave youth, Bravo advance ahead,
Struggle perpetually ahead, then alone hope and desire,
The song of your Country.)*

He also wanted people fight against the tyranny and high headedness of the Dogras. It was his cherished dream to accomplish the task of freedom for his mother country. He has said :-

*Azad banun, zulungallun, wahamkaran door,
Yee moan hawayeechusadahyeechumudah moan. [29]
(To end the tyranny, to become free, and to abolish
superstitions,
This is my cherished dream, this my desire and this my
slogan.)*

Gulam Ahmad Mahjoor also urged the people to fight against the tyranny and despotism which according him turned people weak and feeble.

*Faqfarehshongh mat mazooro, travgaflat gas hoshyaar,
Wathuspanehistadhezulmanchuschekurmuthnabkaar. [30]
(O you starved labourer! Get up and leave inadvertence
Wake up, tyranny has turned you weak and frail).*

During the Quit Kashmir movement of 1946 in which Maharaja Hari Singh was asked to leave Kashmir [31], Abdul Satar Ranjori composed a poem entitled 'Kashmir Choddo' (Quit Kashmir), in which he exhorted the people of Kashmir to wake up from the slumber.

*Jagooaaykashmirwaloaabzamanaaaygaya.....
Dogrukoyehkahookikashmirko ab choddo
Choddokashmirko ab choddo. [32]
(The time has come, woke up Kashmiris,
Tell the Dogras to quit Kashmir)*

2. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that poetry of Kashmir during the Dogra rule is replete with political and economic problems of the people and served as a source of resistance against the autocratic Dogra rule. The poets inspired and emboldened the masses to fight against oppression and injustices. They inoculated a new energy into their souls and showed them the paragons of an ideal country. They also provide intellectual leadership to the leaders of the political movement by discussing such themes as socialism, secularism and democracy in their poetry. The poets provide voice to the oppressed masses and exposed the oppressor rulers, thereby by inoculated a new hope for transformation. Thus the sayings of Percy Bysshe Shelley that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world' holds some water.

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