PROJECTION OF SELFISHNESS AND HYPOCRISY IN THE POETRY OF HAMID KHAN

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the themes of selfishness and hypocrisy that are foregrounded 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 carry the foregrounded theme of evil. The poems that foreground selfishness are: Robot, Isolation, In a Ghost Town. Likewise, the poems that foreground the theme of hypocrisy are: The Sin, Hypocrisy, and Dualism. Selfishness and hypocrisy are the root causes of the down ride of our society and need to be eradicated. This is what is projected by Khan indirectly through the elements of foregrounding.

Key Words: Selfishness, hypocrisy, Abdul Hamid Khan, Pakistani Literature in English

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, Jacobson'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 Jacobson (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 categorisation is mentioned by Martindale (2007), quoted in Lesley Moss (2014) which is also supported by Van Peer and Hakemulder (2006), and Shen (2007).

Analysis

Selfishness

The theme of selfishness is foregrounded in Khan's poems, *Robot, Isolation,* and *In a Ghost Town. Robot* occurs in Khan's *Pale Leaf* that is part of the collaborative collection, *Three Voices,* whereas *Isolation* and *In a Ghost Town* become part of Khan's collection, *Velvet of Loss.* Following is the analysis of the mentioned poems.

Robot

Man has to become and is a robot nowadays. Like a machine man is always busy. This robotic act sucks up life as a whole. Even the dogs fight each other for *dry bones*. The first strophe does not carry a verb despite the fact that two sentences are there. This foregrounds tiredness due to busyness of today's man as is suggested further through the words *sweat* and *mechanical*. This is not good for man as it is *poisonous* that destroys the very *embryos* and *saplings*. The embryos and saplings encompass the whole food chain thereby foregrounding that the robotic life does not yield any good rather it destroys everything. The words *robot* and *mechanic* suggest lack of feelings and emotions that leads to unending competition on human part which, in turn, creates negative energies such as jealousy.

The last quoted strophe stresses the idea of being a robot, though it is not known as to who is speaking thereby suggesting that if one tries to compete with others than they will have to become robot keeping aside all their feelings and emotions; only then they can race on the modern road of advancement, but it will ultimately lead to complete destruction which is also foregrounded through the only consonance in the phrase *to the roots*. Moreover, a robot is controlled from the outside; hence a robotic man will surrender their authority and will follow the instructions of avarice, greed, and jealousy.

All the strophes of the poem are not connected thereby foregrounding the idea of the mechanical life of man which does not have any emotional attachment towards each other.

Isolation

The *Isolation* depicts individualistic and self-centered approach of the modern man; it is a situation when one fails to find the other for sharing feelings, thoughts or experiences. This loneliness creates boredom as it is monotonous. Life goes on as the streets are busy but it makes a sensitive man *bewildered* due to materialistic approach. The very title is deviant as it relates to isolation in noisy and busy streets. There is economy of words as the whole poem ends up on the fifth line but at the same time provides us with four repetitive phonemes of /t/, /n/, /s/, /d/ that foreground the idea of tensed life because there is no one to share your thoughts and feelings. This lack of mutual communication is clear from the alliteration of /t/ that occurs thrice thereby giving the notion that the phonemes are not culminating into words and sentences that would give some sense. Moreover, the first two lines do not carry any verb.

In a Ghost Town

The *In a Ghost Town* opens with the statement that dreams are denied by the *mushrooms* that suggests the intensity of the situation as most types of the mushrooms are poisonous. The second strophe unites the innocent butterfly with the cleverest bird, the crow and the night master, the owl. The owls are jealous of the butterfly that is why they *chide/ the skill of a butterfly/ kissing a fresh water pond*. The third strophe discusses the replacement of humans by ghosts and pigs. The repetition of /s/, /g/, /i/, /l/ sounds suggests *skill* that corresponds to the phrase *the skill of the butterfly* which is not welcomed by the owls. It elaborates the idea that doing something decently and nicely may not necessarily be welcomed by owls that represent people who are active at night with dark designs in their minds. As it happens in the ghost town, so the butterfly can be taken for a person that does something good. This idea is further strengthened by the foregrounded phrase *mushrooms of denial* as the word mushroom suggests poison (we know that most of the mushrooms are poisonous). That is why the poem urges for

dreams that suggest visions and innovative approach; and discourages denial that is deadly and takes the world to a stand-still. Such a society will lack humanity and the old and miserable condition will return in the garb of ghosts.

Hypocrisy

The theme of hypocrisy is projected in Khan's poems, *The Sin, Hypocisies,* and *Dualism.* These poems occur in his collection, *Velvet of Loss.* Following is the analysis of the mentioned poems.

The Sin

The Sin binds the religiosity of one beautiful widow and the true religious spirit of another old woman having *two orphaned grandchildren*. On seeing the stranger in the house of the young widow the old lady quits teaching the Qur'an to her and seeks some other house for the same service through which she gets food for the family. The whole twenty-one line poem carries only one pause which foregrounds the continuity of the sin on one side and restlessness that comes from committing the sin on another. Moreover, the urge to feed the little ones by hook or by crook is foregrounded through the parallel phonemes, /i/, /l/, /t/, /t/, /n/, /f/, /d/, /d/, /i/ which can be grouped together as *fid d littl n* thereby anagrammatized as *feed the little ones*.

Dualism

The sky and the earth are in conflict (showing religion versus man). Man is restless because of the *captivating circle* (concerts etc.). Meanwhile, a *deodasi* – a dancer performing in a temple – is trying to fulfill her dreams. The personified sky and earth correspond to the relationship between man and God which is foregrounded in the code-switching of deodasi. *Devadasi* or *Devaradiyar* means *servant of God*. These women were considered to be given in marriage to God, meaning that they could therefore not marry any *mortal*. Nevertheless, they were free to choose human partners.(First para,*YourStory.com*),https://www.google.com.pk. Hence, this dual sexual relationship with God and man (in Hinduism) appropriates the title with the subject matter of the poem. The dance of the *deodasi*, in relation to the title of the poem, tells the sad story of these women as they were sexually exploited. (ibid). The capturing of the dream gives the idea that the ideals of the *deodasi* are difficult to be attained by her through her performance rather her exploitation will continue as long as this cruel society is there. This is also foregrounded through the syntactic deviation where the whole poem does not carry any verb thereby strengthens the idea that no movement in materialization of her dream is possible. Moreover, through the repetitive sounds the impossibility of achieving her goals is foregrounded as if these sounds are put together, they give us the effects of haphazard and mismanaged movements as is clear from their occurrence i.e. *tmtnd*

Hypocrisies

Man *suffers/ by his choice* as his dealings are hypocritical. Through the use of binaries of *Truth, Falsehood/ Love, Hate* the overall human life is described, though the phrase *mixed up* suggests that people do not care to judge as to what is good and what is bad. The separation of the above mentioned dichotomies through punctuation foregrounds the idea that it is not difficult to distinguish between good and bad but humans do not try to do so. This idea is strengthened through the only consonance of /z/ sound which gives the idea of zoo thereby suggesting that we

lack senses and are ruled by sensibilities. The generalizing effect is maintained through the word *man*.

Discussion and Conclusion

Selfishness is deeply rooted in greed and sense of competition for material gains. This social evil has embedded in our society which is projected in the three poems, i.e. *Isolation,* and *In a Ghost Town* and *Robot*

Ghost Town opens with the deviation where dreams are denied by *mushrooms* that foregrounds the poisonous attitude of the people. They carry dreams or thoughts in their brain that are deadly to others and beneficent to them. Through the unification of the *butterfly* with the *crow* and *owl* Khan highlights the conflict between innocence and cleverness. They jealous are the destroyer which is suggested by the chiding of the owl towards the butterfly. Moreover, *the fresh water pond* projects the blessing which is bestowed upon the innocent of the society and of which the prejudiced are jealous.

The theme of selfishness is further foregrounded by the exaggerated statement that, on the earth, humans are replaced by pigs and ghosts. In addition, the selfish approach of the people is projected through repetition of phonemes /s/, /g/, /i/, /l/ that sound like *skill* which furthers the idea that whenever some skillful man does something good, the selfish and narrow-minded people puts hurdles in their way.

The theme of selfishness is also foregrounded in the poem, *Isolation* that portrays the individualistic and self-centered approach of the modern man. It is a world of growing problems mostly resulted due to competition for material gain which ultimately leads to selfishness. Thus, nobody cares about the sufferings of others. Through the deviant title of the poem, the message of selfishness is foregrounded that in such busy streets of the city man is suffering from the disease of isolation.

Despite the sheer economy of words in the poem, Khan has used the tool of repetition of the phonemes that makes the anagram, *tensed* thereby furthers the idea that selfishness is an evil and will destroy itself. This lack of mutual communication is clear from the alliteration of /t/ that occurs thrice thereby giving the notion that the phonemes are not culminating into words and sentences that would give some sense. Moreover, the first two lines do not carry any verb which foregrounds that life has become stagnant due to the narrow-mindedness and selfishness of people towards their fellow beings.

Similarly, Khan projects selfishness through linguistic choices in the poem, *Robot,* the very title of which speaks volumes of mechanic life of humans. Through the phrase, *dry bones* that the dogs are fighting for foregrounds the idea that man has become so selfish that they are pulling legs of their fellows just for petty gains.

Moreover, through the syntactic deviation where there is no verb in the two consecutive sentences in the second strophe, Khan highlights the standstill in human relations, as they do not bother about someone else's grievances or worries rather they are busy with their machines, in whatever form it is, in order to gain their selfish designs. It is the machines that does everything for them; apparently they are sitting idly as is shown through the lack of verbs, but actually they have become robotic who do not carry the essential emotions and feelings the maintenance of which is necessary for the wellbeing and uplift of the society. This idea is strengthened through the words, *sweat* and *mechanical.*

In addition, through the foregrounded words, *embryos* and *saplings,* Khan points to the uselessness of such a busy life where one cannot find time even to enquire about someone's health, this approach, in turn, leads to complete destruction which is also foregrounded through the only consonance in the phrase "to the roots". Keeping in view the controlling management of robots, it is highlighted that the modern man is being controlled by his selfishness, avarice and greed.This idea is also furthered through the disjointed strophes of the poem that implies that modern man has failed to live like a normal human being.

So, the overwhelming selfishness and its destructive outcomes are foregrounded through the linguistic choices and structural abnormality by Khan in a convincing manner.

Hypocrisy

The theme of hypocrisy finds space in the poems titled as *The Sin, Hypocrisies,* and *Dualism. The Sin* relates the story of an old lady who supports her family by teaching Quran to a widow. She ultimately leaves this job when observes a stranger in the widow's house. It is a nun-stop 21 lines poem that carries implications of an unending sin and the restlessness. Khan has chosen words which produce repetitive phonemes that resulted in the anagram, *feed the little ones.*The grandma of the young orphans is depicted as a great lady who earn legally and morally and support the children. Thus, the good and bad are juxtaposed for giving us the sense of whole life.

The false religious practice by the widow is surfaced by the poet, as it is forbidden in Islam to have illicit relations with strangers. Her double game is exposed when she is being observed by the old lady teacher of the Holy Book. The mask she is wearing is that of a good lady but behind it there is a face that carries pimples of a whore. To think less cynically, one can say that she may be paving way for a new life to start with a new husband and that is not that much bad, but again she could do so through her family keeping in view the societal patriarchal norms (to take it in the Pashtun context).

The same message is foregrounded in the poem, *Dualism* where the Hindu religion is exposed for its cruel treatment of the young girls married to their supreme deity. Through the code switched word, *deodasi,* Khan takes us to the diabolic nature of man that wears a religious mask but in reality takes delight by snatching joy of the normal life from the innocent girls on the pretext that it is religious obligation and someone must be fit for that. *Deodasies*are supposed to performreligious dance in the temple and sexually exploited by the temple men at the same time. Thus, the sadness in the eyes of the *deodasi*is highlighted through the repetition of phonemes (tmtnd) which cannot be translated to words thereby increasing the mystery round the practice as well as stressing that the desired ideal of the poor girl cannot be materialized.

The poem, *Hypocrisies* too supports the message of diabolic nature of humans who are mostly lead by their whims and emotionalism as is highlighted by the only repeated phoneme /z/ that gives us the sense of zoo or animals. Moreover, Khan's choice of punctuation while mentioning of the dichotomies foregrounds that good and bad are cleared to humans; it is they that jumble up things and create havoc to the peace of the world.

In a nutshell, in all the above mentioned poems, Khan has very skilfully manipulated his choice of words and place of the repetitive phonemes for bringing to surface what is desired to appeal to the readers' attention.

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