Projection of Hopelessness and Betrayal as Social Evils in the Poetry of Hamid Khan

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the theme of hopelessness and betrayal 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 bear the said foregrounded theme. The poems that foreground the evil are: Dark Age, The Walls, The Mist, Moon, Tomorrow, Fugitive, and Repulsed. These poems carry the theme of betrayal and hopelessness thereby making it clear that betrayal can lead to hopelessness as far as human trust and relationships are concerned. In the context of Pakistan this is very much realistic and it can also be generalized as well.

Key Words: Hamid Khan. Pakistani context, social evil, foregrounding, betrayal.

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

The poems, *Dark Age, The Walls,* and *The Mist* become part of the collection, *Velvet of Loss,* whereas the poems, *Moon, Tomorrow, Fugitive,* and *Repulsed* occur in Khan's collaborative work, *Three Voices* that contains Khan's portion titled as *Pale Leaf.* Following is the detailed analysis of the aforementioned poems.

The Walls

The speaker holds on to his dream (of good days). At present he is disappointed as the *bird* is caged and the old men are taken aback (by the circumstances) while *leaning against/ the crumbling walls*, though life goes on. The foregrounded phrase *cold iron* suggests war the devastation of which is supported by another phrase *crumbling walls*. Moreover, churning of the wheels gives the idea of continuity of the menace of war that is why the old man looks vacantly which further foregrounds that nothing of good will come out of war. The metaphor of bird and the cold iron aggravate the idea of war as it suggests imprisonment of the innocent people. The idea of going on of the war is also supported by the repetitive sound of /t/ that suggests shooting and /l/, /m/, /n/ that suggest smooth flow or continuous activity.

The Mist

The dream of the speaker is shattered. The centuries old pine tree is *mocking/ human advances*. It is chilly cold weather; there is thick mist; *and the mountain river/ moves aimlessly*. The personification of the pine tree foregrounds the height of the sorry state of humans. Moreover, the symbolic use of the *river* suggests the life of modern man spent aimless. The repetition of the /l/, /m/, /n/ sounds occur in reverse order, i.e. /n/, /m/, /l/ which indicates the reverse motion of the river thereby stressing the foregrounded idea of aimlessness. Moreover, the other repetitive sounds can also give us meaningful suggestions. The sounds /n/, /i/, /i/, /i/, /d/ and /n/, /i/, /i/, /t/ correspond to *need* to *neat* respectively. Putting together all this, it is concluded that the river of life needs forward movement, though it cannot do so.One of the meanings of the word *neat* is to be *in a pleasingly orderly and clean condition,* (http://www.dictionary.com) which, in turn, strengthens the view that the river of life is out of order, that is why the forest is *retreating*.

Dark Age

The poet is overwhelmed with human betrayal which he calls the *dark age*. In the world full of lies it becomes difficult for him to voice truth, though he tries to do some creativity that would bear truth but then he asks as to *how much/ truth/ and where/ to abandon it?* The first strophe avoids the normal syntax as it lacks the main/lexical verb thereby giving us the idea of reticence. Moreover, refurbishing of the age old lie of saying the truth is also foregrounded through the words, *ripping*, *rust*, and *exploding*. Keeping aside all the mistrust and lip services, the poet tries to compose poetry. This foregrounds the idea of reformation that can be brought through the intellectual experience got one gains from literature. The repetition of /g/ and /d/ sounds that pervades through the poem gives the idea of gloom and sadness. Moreover, the repetitive sounds /n/, /p/, /t/, and /i/ can be anagrammatized as *pint* that gives the idea of meager amount which in turn suggests little hope.

Moon

The poet's desires will end up with the end of the night when the stars and moon vanish away. The hopelessness of the speaker is foregrounded through the temporal adverb *soon* at the beginning of the poem. The stars and moon are put in sharp contrast with the earth (dust) with respect to distance thereby stressing the idea of impossibility of fulfillment of the speaker's desires. The sheer despondence is also foregrounded through the parallel structure of the sounds /d/, /uː/, /n/ which together suggests the word *down*, hence shows the absence of hope.

Tomorrow

This poem tells that life is so unpredictable that nobody knowsas to whether they would be alive or not till tomorrow. The fact that future happenings are not known to humans is foregrounded through the abrupt beginning of the poem with the temporal adverb *tomorrow*. There is a sense of departure from this world shown through the deviant verb *erased*. The deep feelings about leaving the world is embodied in the start and end lines of the poem, hence by putting together these two lines we get *Tomorrow, yes (they will be) forgotten forever.*(Parenthesis is mine). The current situation is drawn horrifying through the metaphor of *the desert of life*. The phrases in which the repetition of /n/, f/, /f/ sounds occurs foreground the hidden message that *next morning (is) forgotten forever on the desert of life* (putting the phrases into proper syntactic order).

Repulsed

The speaker of the poem is lost in the world of hopelessness. His desires are not fulfilled; hence he feels he is surrounded by dark. No grammaticality is followed throughout the entire poem which foregrounds the bungled up passions and emotions. This senselessness leads to sheer hopelessness that yields to destruction. This is further aggravated through the deviated phrases: deathly ache; the night moves through me; swallowing me. The speaker of the poem stands alone amid this darkness which suggests that it is only he who is conscious of the current evil forces that pervades the earth.

The unfulfilled desires are kept hidden but they are, at the same time, foregrounded through their personification thereby giving the idea that they are leaving the speaker of the poem alone as they are not actually suited to him which further suggests the message that one should hold on to the possibilities and forget about the unattainable. Unneeded resolution will lead to emotionalism which is foregrounded through the repetitive sounds of /l/, /f/, /d/, and /ʃ/ which can be anagrammatized as *shuffled* thereby suggesting the bungled up emotions.

Fugitive

The poem opens with the desolate heart of the speaker of the poem as he has lost his dear one. This feeling of sheer loneliness during the winter and rainy night aggravates the speaker's hopelessness. Through the oxymoron *uneasy silence* the helplessness of man is foregrounded that no matter what happens one is subservient to the laws of Nature that has the power to hush them. Night is depicted as ocean (by combining *night* and *waves* into a noun phrase) and through this

death is foregrounded as normally sea or ocean is taken for life as well as death. The noun phrase *obscured walls* foregrounds the mystery of life and death; there are walls that prevent one to explore the great puzzle of death. It is a life-in-death situation where on one side one cannot do away with the harsh realities of life and has no strength to bear the brunt of the untoward situation on the other; hence one feels as if their own life is being dragged to death to meet the departed soul. This is also foregrounded through the simile *like a ragged-fugitive*.

The overall mood of the poem is tense as is foregrounded through alliteration and consonance of /n/, /s/, and /t/ thereby suggesting the word *tense*. These same sounds further foregrounds the hard breathing if uttered several times as are repeated in the poem.

Discussion and Conclusion

When betrayal sway, hopelessness will permeate in the very hearts of the affected. Betrayal and selfishness are interrelated. It is the modern individualistic trends in our society that humans have lost faith in their aged-long values set by their ancestors to ensure a carefree life watered by mutual cooperation and love. Khan has dedicated a big portion for spreading such current issues. They occur in *Dark Age, The Walls, The Mist, Moon, Tomorrow, Repulsed,* and *Fugitive.*

Through the *Dark Age,* Khan wants to dawn upon us that Dark Age is that in which humans betray each other for selfish motives and which has led to the sheer disappointment on part of those who are good and sensitive. The absence of the lexical verb foregrounds reticence. That means that those who want to say something of value or of advice get disappointed and shun creativity as it becomes difficult for them to weigh the truth in a time where lies are given royal importance and are considered as key to success. In addition, the words *ripping, rust,* and *exploding* highlights the fact that it is difficult to open up your mouth freely for fear of being cut into pieces. Hence, those who think their responsibility is to say a spade a spade are also silent. Amid all the feelings of mistrust and betrayal, the sensitive and reformative creative artists try to venture on giving the readers the intellectual experience. So in this way they try to reform the society. This also shows that under every circumstance, the artists try to bring about change in the society in their own fashion, though it is a difficult task to come up to such expectations in a society that is replete with all sorts of social and cultural issues.[1] This sadness is foregrounded through the parallel occurrence of the voiced velar, /g/ and voiced alveolar, /d/.in addition, the repetition of the phonemes /n/, /p/, /t/, and /i/ gives the anagram *pint* that projects little hope.

The theme of hopelessness is also foregrounded in the poem, *Moon.* The dejected mood is projected through the contrast that is maintained by bringing together the stars and moon with the earth. The distance between the earth and the other heavenly bodies highlights the impossibility of the coming true of all the dreams and wishes of people during their life time. The parallel occurrence of the phonemes also gives us the sense of disappointment as they suggest the word, *down,* that foregrounds the absence of hope.

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[1] The poet's despondence is apt as there is nothing so discouraging a thing as betrayal. I have seen parents who betrayed their own daughters while giving away their hands in marriage and also buying necessary household items for them as dowry.

The idea of hopelessness is also foregrounded by Khan through various linguistic choices he has made in the poem, *Tomorrow*. The very temporal adverb *tomorrow* throws light on the mysteriousness of future which in turn creates horrifying effect – this is no hope for the better in the terror. Moreover, the verb *erased* foregrounds leaving of this world forever, this sense of leaving your near and dear ones makes one disappointed. Thus this devastating effect is maintained through the *desert of life.* In addition, The deep feelings about leaving the world is embodied in the start and end lines of the poem, hence by putting together these two lines we get *Tomorrow, yes (they will be) forgotten forever.* (Parenthesis is mine). It highlights that the disappointment one gets is because of the indifference shown towards them by the people who are benefited by them.[2]The current situation is drawn horrifying through the metaphor of "the desert of life". The repetition of /f/, /f/, /n/ phonemes gives us the anagram, *fana,* which is anUrdu word meaning annihilation or end of life.

Khan stretches the theme of hopelessness and betrayal to the poem, *Repulsed.*The lack of grammaticality throughout the poem foregrounds mismanaged passions and emotions. Together with this the very title word *repulsed* projects the cause of this despondence, i.e. betrayal. Thiseffect is also furthered through the deviated phrases, *deathly ache; the night moves through me;*and *swallowing me*. The speaker of the poem stands alone amidthe prevailing darkness thereby foregrounding that it is only the sensitive and creative people who are conscious of all the evils around them especially betrayal of others on one pretext or the other.This also shows that unnecessary resilience will lead to emotionalism which is highlighted through the repetitive phonemes which yield the anagram, *shuffled.*

Fugitive is another poem through which Khan gives us the message of how one becomes hopeless in time of trial and tribulations. He foregrounds this human weakness through the oxymoron *uneasy silence*. The ocean is put parallel and in equal footing to night thereby foregrounding death which is mysterious and obscure as is reflected through the noun phrase *obscured walls*; there are walls that prevent one to explore the great puzzle of death. It is a life-in-death situation where on one side one cannot do away with the harsh realities of life and has no strength to bear the brunt of the untoward situation on the other, hence one feels as if their own life is being dragged to death to meet the departed soul which is further supported by the simile *like a ragged-fugitive*. The tense mood is foregrounded through the repetition of the phonemes that

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[2] Take for example the plight of the singers who were once admired by millions and who are unable to sing songs due to ailments or old age and who are not given any importance by the people or by the governmental machinery. These singers are well-known. For instance, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan), Khayal Muhammad, Zarsanga, QamarGula, to name a few, are living in poor condition. One day, I was watching a youtube video in which GulzarAlam, another pashto song legend, sheds tears as he was threatened by militants to stop singing, hence he has left Pakistan for Afghanistan where, according to him, there is comparatively more peace and honour.

gives the anagram, *tense.* Thus, the helplessness of man is projected that ultimately leads to hopelessness and despair.*[3]*

Moreover, Khan through deviation and parallelism projects the sorry state of affairs of the modern world in his poem, *The Mist.* The very word highlights the idea of confusion and uncertainty, because the dream of the poet is shattered. Through the personification of the tree, he foregrounds that Nature mocks the human scientific advancement as they have succeeded in making the material things better but spiritually and morally they are touching the nadir. The aimless movement of the river too projects the idea that life of the modern man is spent without anything done of value. This is befitting to the current situation of Pakistani youth who spent their time by sticking to modern technological gadgets but doing nothing of any importance that could go in favour of their moral and social uplift.

In addition, the reverse occurrence of the phonemes /l/, /m/, /n/ highlights the reverse flow of the river water that furthers the idea that our youth are going in opposite direction to prosperity and better life. The sounds /n/, /i/, /i/, /i/, /d/ and /n/, /i/, /i/, /t/ sounds like *need* and *neat* respectively thereby projecting the idea that the river of life needs forward movement, though it cannot do so *in a pleasingly orderly and clean condition* (para, 1. www.dictionary.com) which, in turn, strengthens the view that the river of life is not active, that is why the forest is *retreating* which, again, gives us the idea that life is going to an end. This overall cynic approach toward life is carrying the realistic picture on one side and a message of alertness to reformation and uplift of the society for the youth of the age on the other.

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[3] In our part of the world the bereaved ones often chants the sentences, at the death bed of the dead ones that carry the message that they have been betrayed by the deceased by leaving them alone and by disconnecting him/herself from the routine life of the bereaved.

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