

The Bittersweet Entanglement of Love and Alienation in the Poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi

Rohit Malik

Research Scholar

Department of English, Indira Gandhi University, Meerpur, Haryana

Abstract

The present research paper explores the bittersweet entanglement of love and alienation in the poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi. He is one of the most celebrated poets of modern Urdu poetry. His poetry holds a different place where deep emotional longing intertwines with social and political disillusionment and personal alienation. Rather than presenting love as a source of fulfilment or enjoyment, he portrays it as an experience characterized by incompleteness. Thus, this paper is an attempt to describe how love in Sahir's works turns into a space where intimacy and isolation go side by side. This study also describes how alienation in Sahir's poetry moves on romantic, social, and existential levels. Love in Sahir's poetry emerges as a profound awareness of loss and injustice. He mixes personal emotions and feelings with collective suffering and transforms romantic expressions into social critiques.

Keywords: Alienation, love, poetry, Sahir Ludhianvi

Introduction

Talkhiyan is a poetry collection penned by the powerful versifier, Sahir Ludhianvi. The word 'Sahir' roughly denotes an enchanter or magician. As stated, Sahir's verses were more than enough to weave webs of magic which trapped the hearts and souls of the readers. Even Surinder Deol in Sahir: A Literary Portrait (2019) praised him as "a mystery wrapped in an enigma" (i). Despite his pathetic young age that was filled with poverty and pity, he worked hard and changed his fortune. He struggled to have access to basic needs, but he grew powerful to become a celebrated lyricist and poet. Irrespective of his background, he achieved worldwide fame when he wrote Talkhiyan in 1944 during his early 20s. This Talkhiyan is considered one of his most prominent literary works. Almost 23 Urdu editions were made and sold within two years after the publication of this poetry collection. Sahir's work revolved around romance, love, and so on, but his Talkhiyan spoke mostly about love and alienation with an underlying political dimension. Carlo Coppola in Urdu Poetry, 1935-1970: The Progressive Episode dedicates a chapter to Sahir's poetry in which he mentions, "Talkhiyan (Bitterness), occasionally passive due to profound uncertainties and contradictions in his thinking" (507). Talkhiyan is a poetry collection published in 1945, and the title denotes the word 'bitterness'. This work is often regarded as a classic work penned in the Urdu language. The verses featured in this anthology were penned when he was a student and when his talent was budding. This creative work became sensational so that it was translated into Hindi initially and then adapted into many languages. The poem collection explores the time when he was a student, and he viewed the world through the lens of a young man. This work can be paralleled to that of

Scholar Gypsy by Matthew Arnold where there are worldly observations and experiences through the perspective of a student.

The themes in poetry collection range from disappointment and despair to a sudden sense of hope. The book was filled with bitter memories as it was the time Sahir left Ludhiana, his native. It felt like eternal anguish leaving his motherland. It is mentioned by Surinder Deol about Sahir's separation from Ludhiana and alienation in the new land gave rise to the famous Talkhiyan:

Sahir, who had left his native town of Ludhiana filled with great disappointment and was simmering with agony of failed love relationships, felt a wave of optimism suddenly run over every nerve of his body, and he captured his feelings. (Deol 1)

His first poetry collection opens with a short poem titled "Reaction." The poem describes the short-lived joy that a meeting with the beloved brings. In the very opening lines of the poem the poet says:

After collecting
A few buds of cheerfulness,
I am lost in grief for a very long time.
Meeting you is a source of great joy,
But upon meeting you
I am overwhelmed with sadness. (Ludhianvi, trans. Deol 1-4).

In the present couplet, the poet conveys the message that sadness comes from being together. In traditional classical poetry, the union of the lover and the beloved is often seen as a joyful moment but here it does not bring any emotional satisfaction. This contradicts the traditional ways of romance and shows that alienation comes from within the individual. Therefore, love does not make the speaker feel complete.

There is a tone of bitterness in his poem Love and Longing. The poem shows personal; and emotional alienation. In this poem, his alienation comes from his own intense and unfulfilled longing. The speaker is cut off from his own longings, and what once described as paradise is now reduced to ashes. His journey of falling in love began during his college days. His happiness was short-lived as his lady love died due to sickness. Surinder Deol has recorded the event where Sahir went to the burial ground and saw her cremated body and the way he went through this process of agony is recorded:

The paradise of my longings
is now reduced to a handful of ashes.
The treasure of my love
is nothing more than these ashes.
These ashes belong to a virgin beauty.
These ashes are the cinders of the longings of my heart. (Ludhianvi, trans. Deol 1-6)

The primary reason for Talkhiyan becoming a widely successful work is due to the poem 'Taj Mahal'. Sahir entered and touched the chordal strings in the hearts of the masses through the publication of this work. The poem is narrated in a way that looks like a conversation between

a lover and his beloved. The poet states that the Taj Mahal stands still as an epitome of love only for some people, but it is a symbol of exploitation. In this poem, Sahir destroys the myth of eternal love and replaces it with a vision of love rooted in equality and mutual recognition. Sahir cleverly uses the folklore spun around the monument of love and suggests meeting in some other place with sincerity which was translated by Surinder Deol:

Taj is a symbol of love for you.
This valley of colors is something that you cherish.
My Beloved, you should meet me
at some other place. (Ludhianvi, trans. Deol 1-5)

It was Akshay Manwani in Sahir Ludhianvi: The People's Poet (2013) mentions, "He wasn't a vanilla character. His life story was full of dramatic elements" (n.p). Those melancholic elements found their spaces in the verses and writings of Sahir. As Roland Barthes mentioned in his essay The Death of the Author (1967), it is a herculean task to separate an author from his work. It was tragic that he did not find solace till the end as he was unable to find his soulmate. He was caught in numerous relationships, but it did not quench his thirst for true love. His relationship with Amrita Pritam was a burning sensation at that time as both were from literary backgrounds.

Many critics and translators tried to analyze his love poems and ghazals assumed that most of them might be influenced by Amrita Pritam. Amrita Pritam was also well known for her burning desire to find true connection. Unfortunately, he never acknowledged his love explicitly, but one can trace the traits of longing, aching, and passion in his poetry collection. His writings were at their peak during the post-Independence era. It was a reign of chaos and confusion. There are lines from his poetry that depict the never-ending struggle in the world and his interest in leaving the world as he had none to endure his burden. In his poem Rajat Pasand (translated by Khawaja Tariq Mahmood) there is mention of his sufferings caused by alienation:

I am grief-stricken, from where I will bring the songs of joy.
I only possess the songs of sorrow,
because that is all that this life has given me. (Ludhianvi, trans. Deol)

"Yesterday and Today" is a short poem found in the poetry collection which is both rewarding and creative. The poem paints the picture of a poet contemplating nature and life's philosophy. This poetical piece prompts the readers to understand that people change just like seasons and nature alters. Irrespective of these changes and chaos, life must move on. This short poem proves that the poet feels alienated and aloof in this world, and it is disappointed in these changes. Fortunately, the poem looks at the sky, clouds, trees and the cosmos and understands that his broken heart and dreams will once again mend themselves and will progress in life thereby symbolizing hope after heartbreak. Surinder Deol beautifully captures the words of the versifier:

There was a drizzle yesterday
Clouds, too, gathered yesterday.
And the poet thought about it

...

Seasons will change, flowers will bloom

...

In the mango groves Strangers will open up their hearts. (Ludhianvi, trans. Deol 53)

This earth, these flowers, this sky, these stars, they will transform themselves into dreams. (Ludhianvi28)

Sahir uses nature as a tool to weave a tale about love and passion. According to him, lovers find solitude in nature, and they spot a comforting home to share their feelings and emotions. Even the pain of a man after being alienated is expressed in his verses. Sahir gave a different dimension to alienation. Dharmendra Kumar traces the presence of alienation in the poems of Sahir, “Capitalism produces alienation in human beings. Marx has talked about four types of alienation -from the product, from production, from workers and self (Marx). Self-alienation produces loneliness and anxiety in human beings. This alienation has been especially talked about by Sahir through his poems” (61). Sahir’s “Teri Awaaj” describes the fourth type of alienation is explained:

A desolate night and the sighs of the surroundings were heavily burdened,
There were nameless silhouettes of grief hovering over my soul,

...

You far away sitting in some voguish assembly,
Even then I feel that you have come
Hiding my lost dreams, in the bundle of melodies,
Bringing back my lost sleep. (Ludhianvi, trans. Deol 48-49)

In the poem “Kuch Baatein” published in Talkhiyan there is a depiction of suffering and sadness in the world that we live in: “Let us not talk about life in the next world, / But about the hell, we are living in now”. Though this work was connected to the concept of undivided India and the way people are divided that make his life a living hell. Thus, it is evident that the traces of irrevocable love and alienation run throughout the poetry of Sahir. His poetry collection Talkhiyan discusses bittersweet moments such as happiness and sadness as far as life is concerned.

Conclusion

Therefore, like a coin possessing both sides, Talkhiyan is bittersweet entangled with love and alienation that elevates emotions to a higher order. Thus, the present research paper has successfully demonstrated that the poetry collection of Sahir chosen for study is an exploration of human life. The study proves the powerful feeling of love and dejection that can both uplift or devour any human being irrespective of their power and fame. It replicates one’s own strife and struggle, chaos and confusion thereby making these adorned verses a timeless classic that has led to various interpretations and transliterations.

Works Cited:

1. Coppola, Carlo. "Sahir Ludhianvi: The Progressive as Lyric Poet". *Urdu Poetry 1935-1970: The Progressive Episode*. Oxford UP, 2017.
2. Deol, Surinder. *Sahir: A Literary Portrait*. Oxford UP, USA, 2019.
3. Kumar, Dharmendra and Binod Mishra. "Rectification of Love: Select Poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi." *International Journal of Research- Granthaalayah*, vol. 12, no. 3 Apr. 2024, <https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v12.i3.2024.5551>.
4. Ludhianvi, Sahir. *Talkhiyaan*. Rajkamal Prakashan, 2004.
5. Mahmood, Khawaja Tariq, translator. *Selected Poems of Sahir Ludhianvi*. By Sahir Ludhianvi. Star Publication, 2016.
6. Manwani, Akshay. *Sahir Ludhianvi: The People's Poet*. Harper Collins Publishers, 2013.