

## **Nationalism in Urdu Poetry**

### **A Special Study of Some Urdu Poems**

GH HASSAN WANI

#### **Abstract**

*Urdu literature in general and Urdu poetry in particular, always played its part in generating, shaping and mobilizing Indian public opinion, and defeated thereof all odds of time and space through India's progressive journey. Accordingly, Urdu literature resisted the British imperialism from its very beginning. However, during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, when British employed in full swing all political, military, ideological and Machiavellian tools to maintain their imperial permanence in India, thereby dividing Indians on different grounds, Urdu poetry performed well its moral responsibility of generating and mobilizing united public opinion against British rule. Urdu poets fought British Raj by inculcating among Indians spirit of harmony, unity, patriotism, and sacrifice. Urdu poetry, besides giving a wide space to all forms of anti-British resistance going on in India and abroad, also quickened the pace of freedom movement by mobilizing the public opinion against British Raj. This piece of research therefore, explores the dominant nationalistic trends in Urdu poetry during first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

**Keywords:** Urdu Literature, Urdu Poetry, Nationalism.

#### **Introduction**

Literature is a real mirror of a human civilization, reflecting its cultural heritage, evolutionary life, historical phenomena and thought process, because languages and literature is an essential ingredient in the makeup and formation of societies or nations. Indian vernacular literature is

also a storehouse of India's rich past. The role of Urdu language and literature in this regard is dominant, unforgettable and praiseworthy. Urdu literature is a living mirror of India's strong socio-civilizational edifice, rich national and cultural heritage, collective consciousness, and dynamic as well as secular thought process. While encountering the challenges, coming in India's progressive march, with time and space, Urdu writers, poets and journalists have often sacrificed a lot.<sup>1</sup> Although, the role of Urdu language and literature throughout its course remained constructive and appealing in every cultural process and nation building, but the active and effective part played by Urdu literature through its different genres in freedom struggle of India is memorable and inseparable.

From the very beginning of the British rule in India, Urdu literature remained anti-British and pan-Indian, although in its early stage the resistance was passive.<sup>2</sup> Among the Indian vernacular literatures Urdu literature was the first to smell the imperialist intentions of British traders in India. The Urdu poets observed the British attitude for a long time and cautioned the Indian people about the cunning nature of Britishers. They felt the pulse and read the psyche of British imperialists and exposed the same before the Indian people through literaryism. They alarmed the Indians about forthcoming imperialist threat and raised her voice against the same but unfortunately the innocent Indian public and luxurious ruling class could not foresee this threat about which Urdu literature had time and again warned.

Urdu gave a wide coverage to every form of anti-British resistance, pro-freedom aspirations and pro-unity efforts. Even some scholars claim that Urdu herself was a "Freedom Fighter" and Freedom Movement".<sup>3</sup> This literature kept its pace with national movement and contributed it by inculcating among Indians sense of unity, faith, sacrifice, bravery, self-reliance, patriotism, spirit of mature nationalism and generated anti-British feelings. The anti-British propaganda, appeal for unity, avoiding partition and sacrifice for freedom became a dominant trend in Urdu press and poetry during first half of twentieth century. Hence, to

explore, these dominant trends of Urdu literature viz. Nation Making and Freedom Movement of India in general and role of Urdu poetry thereof with reference to Urdu patriotic poetry is main focus of this paper.

### **Extend of patriotism in Urdu poetry during first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

Historico-analytical studies of the Urdu poetry reveals that the trends that dominated the Urdu poetry during first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century were anti-British temperament, countering British propaganda, maintenance of communal harmony, appeal for unity, avoiding partition and attainment of freedom. While Urdu press gave a full coverage to these trends, Urdu poetry gave these a full expression. A historical analysis of Urdu poetry proves this fact.

#### **1. Anti-British resistance**

A study of Josh Malliabadi's revolutionary poetry reveals Urdu poetry was much active against British rule. Josh honoured as revolutionary poet, raised his voice against British rule and mobilized Indian people against it through his patriotic poetry. He made overthrow of British rule his goal and was ready to sacrifice even his life for the sake of freedom. His call was "My job is to bring change, my name is youth. My slogan is Revolution, Revolution and Revolution." He vigorously inculcated revolutionary feeling in people and prepared lacks of people to destroy British rule. During and after Quit India Movement his poems were sung in public demonstrations by Indian people irrespective of caste and religion in many cities of India. Even his poems were broadcasted from Berlin Radio. However, many of his poems were seized and banned by the British Raj which, are now available in banned literature in national archives of India. But despite the fact, hundreds of copies of his poems were reprinted and distributed among people. "*East India Company kay Farzandon say khitab*" (*To the Sons of*

*East India Company*) was one such banned poem. Historical analysis of this poem helps us in measuring the extent of patriotism during 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A historical analysis of the poem shows that Urdu poets were true lover of freedom and staunch enemies of the British rule. As this poem greatly provided moral and emotional support to Quit India movement its analysis is worth mentioning. Josh wrote this poem at a time when world war second was in its full swing and Allied powers claimed themselves the greatest champions of humanity and projected Axis powers a big threat to human peace and security. Josh criticizes Britishers for pretending to be guardians of humanity and forgot their own criminal past. Josh negates British propaganda and exposed hollowness of their false slogans in this poem:

Didn't you ashamed to cry oh traders,  
 Humanity should be at the apex.  
 You all say Hitler is a wolf and,  
 That wolf should be killed for the sake of peace and eternity.  
 You feel a wind of autumn thwarting the garden of humanity  
 And cry the humanity is in suffocation  
 I extremely wonder to hear it in your quarters,  
 That you worry about the future of the human race.  
 When you came here as traders,  
 Where you not aware about the future of humanity.  
 Was not in Indians the spirit of liberty,  
 Tell honestly, was that not the population of humans.<sup>4</sup>

Then Josh repeats their black past and reminds them of their criminal doings in India. In this poem Josh reminds Britisher's the extortions, the exploitations, the loot and plunder, the massacres and the innocent killings they did in India. Josh again reminds them the destruction of Indian industries and crafts, atrocities on peasantry, craftsmen, weavers and commoners. He also refers to their policy of divide and rule, intrigues against Indian princes, suppression of

nationalist feelings, atrocities committed, murder of Mughal princes, exile of Bahadur Shah Zaffar, Jallanwala Bhag massacre and other killings:

Did you remember the story of your extreme cruelties,  
 Did you remember that criminal times of the company.  
 ...                    ...                    ...  
 Oh God how much seekers of truth they are now,  
 Was Shiraj Duala enemy of eternity.  
 Did you remember your extortions on the Begums of Oudh,  
 Did you remember the times of Rani Jansi.  
 Did you remember the scene of exile of sultan of Delhi,  
 And the times of the bloody story of the loin hearted Tipu.  
 You came to hold a hungry trembling man,  
 Whose heads did you brought before Bahadur Shah.<sup>5</sup>

Josh says that actually British suffered heavily due to this war and their position weakened. They were now unable to hold their colonies. They therefore, in order to gain popular support, gave call 'humanity is in danger and save humanity'. Josh warns British not to pretend to be guardians of human future, but to introspect their black past. He advised them to bow before the call of time and the call of the time is end of the British rule. The poem was actually written with an objective to counter the British propaganda and expose their hallow claims, as well as to sabotage the ideological tools used by Britishers for maintaining their imperialist permanence and befooling the people in the name of humanity and democracy:

Now you sail the boat of peace on sea wave  
 I very much worry why you teach lessons of truth.  
 The men of strength do not auction truth,  
 They do not endanger the justice.  
 Now you stress on morality,  
 Perhaps you are not in a strong position now.  
 Right men are enlightened and fallacious are blind,  
 These are the words of weak nations.  
 Today you are not perhaps strong enough,

So why don't you say might is right.  
 Why do you say justice is prior duty of man,  
 Have you not now the capacity to divide and suppress  
 Now you stay under the shades of righteousness,  
 God forbade did you feel sprain in your feet.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Encouragement of freedom fighters

Although, hundreds of patriotic poems were written, to reinforce freedom fighters and increase the pace of freedom movement but it is not possible here to analyze all of them. However, an effective analysis can be drawn from the revolutionary poems of Ali Javad Zaidi. Some of his worthy mentioning patriotic poems are; *hayat*, *siyasi qaidi ki rihayi*, *manzeelean*, *kaidi ki laash*, *holi*, *bagawat* etc. Here, a critical analysis of his poem “*manzeelean*” (stages) can give us better understanding of how Urdu poetry encouraged freedom fighters and increased the pace of freedom movement.

*Maanzelean* (stages) is a revolutionary poem composed by a great nationalist and revolutionary poet Ali Jawad Zaidi. The poem is divided into four stanzas, each comprising eight verses. This poem is full of revolutionary patriotism. The author has employed in this poem all the poetic techniques likes' similes, metaphors, imagery, irony, ambiguity, symbolic language, to instigate revolutionaries for a full scale revolution. Hence the poem has a deep meaning and is very difficult to understand. However after a critical and comprehensive study one is able to catch the theme.

The poem is actually an appeal to freedom fighters of the time to fight till they liberate the country from British rule. The poet makes aware the freedom fighters about all the possible stages that a freedom fighter may encounter during the process of fighting the British Raj. In the first two stanzas the poet cautions freedom fighters about the cunning nature of British Indian rules. The poet awakens the freedom fighters that the British rulers can offer him everything in the form of comforts, joys, amenities, wealth, power, governance and anything

he may wish for abandoning the ongoing freedom struggle which at that time was at a decisive mode. But the author warns him not to be deceived by them and not to stop the struggle.

Thousands of such stages will come,	where buds will bloom on every step.
Where summers would be full of love,	where there would be fountains of joy.
Where coquetry postures,	will show, will teach sincerity.
Where there will be twisted movements,	where the sight will be the that of colorful tides.
Where you will be shown picturesque scenes,	where your eyes will seduce you.
Where manifestations will sing every movement,	where waves will rise in every heart.
But you should not be deceived by them,	passenger do not stop in the way.
...	...
You will receive a benevolent patronage,	where every law will support you.
The goddess of wealth will kiss your feet,	the goddess of your conscience will enjoy.
Do not be their target,	passenger do not stop in the way. <sup>7</sup>

In the poem the poet calls up on the freedom fighters, that during the course of freedom struggle they will also have to suffer and face such stages or valleys where they will see death and destruction, gallows and snares, fear and tyranny, swords and guns, ambushes and massacres i.e. all means of fear and harassment. Where they will find themselves alone, despair, helpless, broken hearted and destroyed. But he advises him not to stumble out of fear and not to stop his struggle till they attain the freedom:

You will come across such valleys,	where you will find only devastation.
Where destroyed houses will be weeping,	where perished doors will be sleeping.
Where youth will be restless,	where every story will be painful.
The smoke will rise from colorful houses,	the flames will cling the skirts.
Where your companions will leave you,	where your heart will break you.
Where catastrophes will ambush you,	misfortunes will search you like a wild fire.
Where hearts will be decaying in prisons,	where there will be traps of gallows and snares.
Do not stumble due to fear,	oh passenger do not stop in the way. <sup>8</sup>

In the last stanza the author encourages the freedom fighter in a requesting manner that the country is under deep darkness, which the country is suffering due to tyranny, exploitation, humiliation, discrimination, slavery, injustice and mass killing. He now requests freedom fighters; the future of the country is in your hands. Your courage and determination is the only hope for the country. Therefore, you should proceed towards the goal of freedom and not to stop till independence is achieved from the foreign rule. Therefore this poem was an encouragement, a guide or a roadmap for the freedom fighters of the time.

Your goal is the goal of freedom,	the goal of fulfillment of dreams,
You have to cement the broken hearts.	to break the skinners of slavery.
The shadow of darkness began to increase,	go ahead do not stop your steps.
The atmosphere is dark lit the torch,	enlighten the dark pathways.
Your country is in trouble, friend,	now victory is in your courage.
Not only country but the world is in darkness,	but it is about to dawn.
New construction is in your hands,	your fate is in your hands.
Go forward do not hesitate,	passenger does not stop in the way. <sup>9</sup>

### 3. Pray for freedom fighters

Our Urdu poets always prayed for our freedom movement and freedom fighters. Let us take the poem “*Azad Hind Foj*” (*Indian National Army*) written by, one of the great Urdu poets, Trilok Chand Mehroom as a symbolic representation. Mahroom wrote this poem in praise of and for benedictions of *Azad Hind Foj*. Indian National Army or *Azad Hind Foj* was India’s Army of Liberation raised out of Indian prisoners of war by Subash Chandra Bose in Germany and General Mohan Singh in Singapore during Second World War. This army fought shoulder to shoulder with the Axis Forces but for freedom of India:

Oh adventuresome army, courageous youth,	you have sword of strength on your shoulders
You proved your bravery in misery;	other nations praise your courage
May you succeed and your enemies disappoint,	India’s victorious army live long
Your soldiers who died in foreign lands,	are your treasures, buried their
In the forests of Burma are your blood marks,	these are your eternal signs beneath the sky



Till doomsday will they remain in peoples memory, India's victorious army live long.  
There was complete dominance of English witchcraft Indian wisdom was downcast for two hundred years,

You showed even in foreign lands, that the men of courage do destroy the devil

Then what even if the devil like a huge mountain, India's victorious army live long.<sup>10</sup>

Jaganath Azad also wrote a poem with the same title "*Azad Hind Fouj*" seeking blessings for Indian National Army.

#### 4. **Uniting India**

British rulers employed in full swing all political, military and ideological tools to divide Indians on different pretexts and to stop the ongoing struggle, for the sake of maintaining their imperial permanence. As a result whole Indian was in chaos and the socio-cultural fabric of India was being torn into pieces. However, Urdu poets countered this move by working for unity, harmony, freedom and spreading the message of patriotism with love, honor and peace. See how the poet appeals for unity and united struggle in these lines,

Awake oh companion let us change the scenario, let us change the earth; let us change sky  
The doctrine of universe is oneness, let us change the concept of profit and loss  
If we have this enthusiasm, come together friends let us change this childish disposition<sup>11</sup>

#### 5. **Avoiding partition and opposing Pakistan**

Similarly we have hundreds of Urdu poems on such themes like criticizing Pakistan and avoiding partition, here only one poem has been taken as a sample. This poem "*Pakistan chahnay walon say*" (*To those who want Pakistan*) written by Shamim Karhani would make us understand the part played by Urdu poetry for freedom struggle, uniting India and avoiding partition,

Tell us? What do you mean by Pakistan, Is the place filthy, where Muslims do live today?  
Those who were our guides in Islamic faith, are their graveyards in non-Pakistan

The fire of imputation has burst your chest,                      tell us; is the land of Ajmer impure  
 Has jewel of Islam lost in the valley of infidelity,    oh; is shah-he-meena buried in impure land  
 May this eternal green garden live long,                      is this sacred soil filthy;<sup>12</sup>

The poem “*Pakistan chahane walu sa*” written by shamim karhani criticizes as well as warns those who want Pakistan, about the dark consequences of partition. Because he knew Britishers were aptly using religion as a strong weapon for dividing the nation, and trying to derail the freedom movement which at that time was at its peak. It was the time when country was burning in communal riots, and the common masses were suffering. The loot and plunder, rapes and murders, intrigues and counter intrigues were the hallmark of the time. At the same time Britishers were engaged in dividing India and Indian leaders were busy in power shearing. However the Urdu poets were crying for unity and trying to avoid the partition.

The poet ironically questions those who want Pakistan that what do you mean by Pakistan. If Pakistan means pure land, then is India an impure country. The poet reminds them that their Muslim saints, Islamic guides and their forefathers are born and buried in the same soil! Is this an impure land? See how in these couplets poets reminds them

Those who were our guides in Islamic faith,                      are their graveyards in non-Pakistan  
 The fire of imputation has burst your chest,                      tell us; is the land of Ajmer impure  
 Has jewel of Islam lost in the valley of infidelity,    oh; is shah-he-meena buried in impure land  
 May this eternal green garden live long,                      is this sacred soil filthy; dust in your mouth.<sup>13</sup>

The poet again reminds those who want Pakistan, that if the people will get divided the English will re-establish their tyrant rule and if the country got divided, the people will become slaves of England,

If the country will get divided into small states    think; the English rule will get re-established  
 The Europe is under heavy constraints,    still, every Arab nation has become slave of England  
 Do you mean we should get deprived of freedom,    and remain divided and slaves like Arab  
 Should the sons of Islam wonder from door to door,    and begging the streets of England

Should they bent before English their esteemed head, who do not prostrate except before Allah,  
 Should the devil play with the esteemed turban, which is the symbol of Prophet of Islam  
 Whom the Prophet has given honor, should they beg in other countries<sup>14</sup>

The poet also foretells that the future of Muslims would perish forever and they would become wonderers and baggers, “The disheartened Muslim will get scattered, the migration of Muslim will become inevitable.”<sup>15</sup> The poet warns Muslims not to fell prey of British trap and fight for united India. Hence Urdu poets tried to unite all the for united India and avoid the partition

### **Conclusion**

Urdu language and literature has played an active and positive role not only in cultural processes and in nation building but also in freedom struggle of India. Similarly, the part played by Urdu poetry during freedom movement is unforgettable and inseparable. This piece of research work was therefore conducted with a view to impress upon the researchers and historians to explore hitherto unexplored Urdu sources for proper and holistic understanding of freedom movement of India. Therefore, to bring forth the role played by Urdu literature and the sacrifices offered by Urdu writers, poets and journalists to freedom struggle of India is aim of this research work.

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## About the Author

The writer is a research scholar, Department of History, School of Social Sciences, IGNOU, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi. He may be contacted at wanihassan1@gmail.com