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The Role of Proletarian Poetry in Peasant Movement of Pakhtunkhwa: A Critical Study of the Selected Poetry of Sayyid-Ul-Abrar Ghar



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Abstract: Sayyid-ul-Abrar (1948-79) alias, Ghar was one of the prominent proletarian poets of the former NWFP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Pakistan, who's poetry played a significant role in the evolution and growth of socialist realism in Pashtu literature. The historic Peasant Movement of 1970s especially the Hashtnagar Peasant's uprising and agrarian struggle elsewhere in other parts of the province, were directly influenced through the proletarian poetry produced by Ghar and his contemporary Master Sultan Khalakyar. This study attempt to engage the selected poetry from Ghar's two books; Sparghai [Embers] and 'Da Khwarikah Cheagha' [The cry of working class]as a case study to understand the links between poetry, art, and politics in a broader perspective of socialist realism. The important themes of these selected poetry, analysis of its contents with English translation, are also reproduced throughout this paper as evidence for better understanding of the subject interconnection of proletarian poetry with peasant's struggle.

Key Words: Literature, Maoism, Proletarian, Peasant, Progressives, Qitta, and Socialism

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Introduction

Although, the communist party of Pakistan (CPP) and its leadership faced massive repression and victimization under successive civil-military governments (Ali, 2013), however, it had managed to influence the class-based organizations, like literary front, the student's politics, the peasants, etc. for a long time after the party was finally banned in 1954(Ansari, 2015). Review of relevant literature clearly suggests that in its formative phase, the CPP developed close ties Pakistan

Trade Union Federation (PTUF), which was founded by Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim (1906-2000), a leading member of CPP. He was elected as its first President, while Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984) served as Vice President, Fazal Ilahi Qurban (d. 1960) as the Joint Secretary, and Prof. Eric Cyprian (1911-1996) as Secretary General. The PTUF had great impacts on the mobilization of the working classes in the 1950s (Malik, 2013).

Similarly, the Kisan Committee (KC) was another such organ which was established in every District, Tehsil and Union Council of

West Pakistan (Bacha, 2017). It was especially very strong in the NWFP, where Comrade Ziarat Gul launched a peasant struggle in the Hashtnagar Valley of Peshawar almost immediately after independence (Ahmad, 2009). The CPP, under the leadership of Zaheer, directed the KC in NWFP to mobilize peasants and workers in the province. Ziarat Gul, along with peasants of the Hashtnagar Valley were ultimately successful in staging major peasants' uprisings in 1950s in the Charsadda, Mardan and Malakand regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Ali, 2019). Syed Sher Ali Bacha (1935-38) and Abdul Sattar Lala (1942-96) dominated the KC politics in Hashtnagar in 1970s which had the support of progressive literary figures (Ayaz, Islam, et al., <u>2023</u>).

On the literary front, the important organization was the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), which was founded by Sajjad Zaheer and complimented by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ahmad Nadeem Qasami, Sibt-i-Hassan, Dr. Eric Rahim, and Prof. Eric Cyprian. The PWA led to the establishment of Democratic Students Federation (DSF), which was a popular socialist organization of student and intellectuals. Kakaji Sanubar Hussain, a progressive Pashto poet, was one of the prominent members of the PWA in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Jamal, 2020), who founded Olasi Adabi Jirga (OAJ) in the province. Besides PWA, there were several other progressive poets, including Ashraf Maftoon, Syed Sher Ali, Said-ul-Abrar Ghar, Salim Raz, and Sultan Khalakyar, who developed progressive literature in 1970s and 1980s. They reflected in their poetry socialist realism and thus art, and literature were made interconnected with politics (Ayaz, Afridi, et al., <u>2023</u>).

This research paper explores the selected progressive poems of Sayyid-ul-Abrar Ghar with special reference to socialist realism and the peasants' uprisings throughout 1970s. Selected poems from his books, are reproduced with English translation for understanding the links between peasants' movement, and progressive literature (Khalil, <u>2010</u>).

Family Background and Brief Biography

Born in 1948 at Ziarat Kaka Sahib, a village in District Nowshera, Sayyid-ul-Abrar was a proletarian poet, who was associated with Mazdoor Kisan Party (MKP) throughout 1970s. He used *Ghar* as his pen name in his poetry work. He received his early education in his hometown. While he was reading at school, he would use to assist his father in farming as he belong to an agrarian Sayyid family. Ghar describes his family and poetic background in the following *qitta*:

> زه ابرار غريب منان کره پيدا ئم په نظر دکاکا خيلو کښي حقير ئم مارکس بللي کنکګال ټول انقلابيان دي د مارکسزم په اصولو عالمګير ئم

Translation:

I, Ibrar, was born in the house of the poor Manan

Loathsome in the eyes of the Kakakhel (landed elite of his village)

Marx's call is open to all destitute revolutionaries

Through Marxist ideology I am the conqueror of the world (Ghar, <u>1973a</u>)

Ghar was the elder son of his family and received religious education from his grandfather Sayyid Abdul Hanan, by learning the Holy Quran in translation and other elementary books of the *Dars-i-Nizamiyya* at a young age. He attended Government High School and achieved his secondary school certificate (10th Grade) in 1955. Because of his family's livelihood in farming, he would spend most of his time with his father in the fields and therefore did not show much interest in higher studies.

He went to Karachi in the late 1950s in connection with seeking a job, but he was also allegedly involved in a murder case so this may have also been to avoid possible arrest. During his stay at Karachi, it seems that he might have met the underground leadership of the CPP, particularly Ziarat Gul, Kakaji Sanubar Hussain, and Mohammad Hussain Ata. Special Branch reports confirm the travel of these communist leaders there at this time (Branch, 1975). However, due to lack of a concrete evidence of occurrence of such meetings, it cannot be established that these were leaders he met. It is almost certain, though, that Ghar was aware of the rising tide of trade unionism while working in a factory in those days in Karachi. It is confirmed from records and his polemic poems, at any rate, that he joined the Kisan Committee immediately after his return from Karachi in the late 1960s and was among the founding members of the MKP at the time of its formation in 1968.

Literary Contributions in Hashtnagar Peasants Uprising

As discussed earlier about this attachments with MKP and his association with peasants politics, played an integral role in the mass mobilization Hashtnagar of Peasant Movement of 1970s, where he would read his class poetry, and comic poems full of satire in social gatherings (Ayaz, Naz, et al., 2023). The four lines Qitta as his favorite genre of poetry, was proved very effective in mobilization of working-class listeners as well as popularization of the manifesto of the MKP in popular wisdom. He has written so many Oitta for the gatherings and meetings of MKP thought-out 1970s. Ghar was optimistic about the success of his party for bringing a dictatorship of the proletariat and called upon the working class to join MKP. In the following couplets, selected from his poem Da Mazdoor Kisan Partai Worker (the worker of Mazdoor Kisan Party) Ghar invites the peasants to join, using imagery that distills the material reality into a Platonic essence that is still nonetheless inserted into materiality at the outset:

نيال وي :Translation

The worker in this party is like its veins The worker is a light, like a torch His meaningful essence is a servant who serves the party

The worker is the ideal of the peasant, their thought and rationality and mental image

These literary works were so effective for popularity of his party, that he was arrested multiple times. To avoid possible arrest, he lived for quit a longtime as fugitive and wrote several poems. A collection of his *qitas* has been printed in his book *Sparghai* (Spark) which was published by the printing house of the MKP (Ghar, <u>1973b</u>). The book begins with the following couplets

"I am fortunate to be a worker-peasant Neither am I Gujar, nor Utmankhel; nor am I Mohmand"

The second book titled as "Da Khwari Khah Chigha (The Cry of worker) was the most celebrated work of Ghar, which was edited by Sayyid Sher Ali, Bacha. It was published in 1973 and consists of class poetry, and themes related to the daily problems of peasants and workers (Ghar, <u>1973a</u>). This book consists of twenty-seven nazms and nine qitas, and a couple of narrative charbeyta genera. Beyond these, and beyond his role in live events, Ghar was a regular contributor to the party's circulars and magazines. A poem Kah Chigha titled Khwari (English translation) is presented here to understand the themes of this book;

Neither had a lentils bowl, nor a water chalice

I didn't own an inch of land in this whole world

I am the son of Adam; But did not deserve his Heritage

I am the child of eve; But not amongst the heirs Remembered as belonging to Muhammads clan I was not an infidel or a Zoroastrian. I was not the owner of capital In this kingdom of GOD; I Lived my life for others Full of disgrace and humiliation Neither had a house nor a shelter neither a yard of shade over my head Neither had grass nor corn husks Neither any shrubs on my land Neither had a bowl nor a pitcher Engulfed by poverty and despair No one invited me to their happiness neither to their funerals nor charity Sitting in the place reserved for the shoe In hujras and mosques I was a biological animal With Everyone filling my saddle bags I Was an example of quadruped Chased day and night I was a tractor of flesh Roamed by khan in his fields I was used like a machine and a tool of bondage I was an important source of produce for the scroungers I am the still that son of Adam And still the child of eve relived from melancholy and despair Smile on my face and happiness in my heart Now I am not less then anyone Remembered and revered amongst a few people Bangash saib has made me an owner of my share of bushels Mazdoor kisan party has bestowed me the status of a man I became an owner of a shed And took back the lost ownership of dunghill Also got the ownership of calf and heifers And that is just like I own the whole world When I became a member of this party At last I became the owner of myself On the call of Bangash I rose and confronted

Croesus (oppressor) With 5 kanals of land I got the status of a socalled Pashtun Today No might can dare to To call for bondage; No one can oppress me No one can make me work Every worker is a friend of a friend (acquaintance) Who is going to deny this Bangash the father (of MKP) has freed me from slavery of the world From the oppression of the tenants as well as the cruelty of the khan If he is a thorn in anyone s eye But he is a garland crown on our heads Indifferent to the feudal And close to every individual worker A torch created by God Who has enlightened our gatherings? The statue of grace full of Lenin's thoughts That's why Abrar's poetry is full of commemoration for Bangash

Selected Socialist Poetry with English Translation

Along with the rise of the MKP's mass popularity in the 1970s, Sher Ali was able to resurrect the OAJ and progressive literature generally while giving it a new specific and partisan direction (Bacha, 1988). This was aligned with the internationalism that also characterized revolutionary Afghan poetry of the same period, and the internationalism of global south-oriented literary movements like the Afro-Asian Writers Association-in which writers like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mahmoud Darwish of Palestine, Ngugi wa Thiongo of Kenya, Sulayman Laiq of Afghanistan, and others were active. Building on this internationalism, proletarian poets and writers in NWFP also brought to life in their work the characters of Chairman Mao, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Vladimir Lenin, Patrice Lumumba, Martin Luther King, and others who were newly imaginable as allies,

martyrs, or forefathers in a socialist international world. We saw this above in Khalakyar work (Khalakyar, <u>1974</u>) and it is even more prominent in Ghar's. The nine *qitas* that Ghar published in his first book were a polemic display of socialist allegiance in exactly this mode. At the same time, they enact the history of socialism not only in the world, but in NWFP, and they link them together.

However, the majority of Ghar's work focuses on local conditions and on materialist-theoretical transformations of them (Dupree, 1992). In a poem *Socialist Nizam* (Socialist System) Ghar presented the characteristics and advantages of a socialist system, which is reproduced here with English translation;

Translation:

Work is compulsory in a socialist system; those will eat who labor Table, chairs, shoes, cigarettes, pen, ink pot; the son of Adam needs them all Be it clothes, houses, or a needle and thread; young and old, all of them need these That's all produced by man's labor; through a hard work, toil, and hardships Whoever uses these products of labor; toil is mandatory to produce it Mind and body in a socialist system; Shall be used by every man and woman National wealth increases through work; everyone will live a dignified life Adolescent will be exempted from labor; they will be given good education The old and disabled will not work: it will be only mandatory for adults A landlord's biggest labor is playing cards and chess; Or fighting birds But a landlord is supported by first the Army, second, Police, and third, Courts Notorious institutions like jails; where advocates, and judges of courts prevail Patwari, gardawar, and tehsildars; have become a hurdle for hard-worker This class has turned the society filthy; with the support of capitalists and feudalists The national wealth dries up through them; The socialist system condemns them An honorable person in a socialist system is a worker, laborer, with character That person is labeled thief and plunderer; who eats without any labor of their own There was a division among the Marxist political parties in Pakistan, because of the

political parties in Pakistan, because of the two camps: pro-Moscow and pro-Peking. Like others in the more radical tendency of the NAP in NWFP, that which attracted more peasant support eventually, Ghar supported the Pro-Chinese camp and visualized Mao and communist leadership as a role model for

the proletariat of Pakistan. In a poem '*Prolitaria*' (Proletariat) Ghar gives explanation to workers and peasants, few stanzas of which are reproduced here;

Translation:

The landlords and capitalists cannot bring the revolution

Don't befriend the decadents and rich people (drawing room revolutionaries)

Workers and peasants are real and trustworthy friends

Submissive heads support imperialism covertly

If landlords want to befriend you, don't be fooled again

These people (peasants) recognize only the Chinese leadership

In yet another poem 'Cheen'

(China), he praised the leadership of China as an exemplary role model for Pakistan;

Translation:

It's an ancient country of peasant movements The homeland of Mao Zedong is a revolutionary country It is the abode of the brave, the gallant, and the warriors of liberation It is the abode of honorable, just fighters You are a model of the thoughts of Engels and Karl Marx

That is why you are discussed everywhere in the world

Your redness is coloured with blood of your enemies

In your heart lays a historical guerilla war The philosophy of dialectical materialism of capital and labor emerged

The system of guns and clubs is gone, and a change emerged

Oh! China, Salam to all your children, young and old people

Convery once more Salam (salutation of Abrar) to Mao Baba

This was part of Ghar's broader internationalist awareness. Salim Raz, in an interview with the research was of the view that Syed Sher Ali Bacha was adored in several poems as comrade Ernest Che Guevara of Pakhtunkhwa", due to familiarity in the between the two leaders and because of this Ghar penned a poem on the theme of "Comrade Che Guevara" Raz himself, a proletarian poet, wrote many poem on the miseries of peasants and working class (Salim, <u>1980</u>).

Ghar explained that the world is divided into two classes: one is the ruling class and the other is the working class. In a poem on how to demolish the class system, Ghar penned a poem *Dwa Tabaqe*, (Two Classes), selected couplets from which are reproduced here:

دوؤ طبقو کښي تضا د مارکس په ګوته کړے ده مارکس نوم ته، ابرار ځکه په سلام دے

Translation:

This system is divided into two classes;

The landlord is the master and the peasant is the slave

On one side are the troublemakers' tyrants

On the other, a naked, starving, and oppressed populace

One class has controlled the whole world

The other class is just alive on the face of it Without any work, the rich secure private ownership of lands

In socialism personal property is prohibited

If you want to get rid of poverty and desolation

The better way is to finish Khanism

One human wouldn't be beholden to another This Mao Zedong's philosophy is Islam indeed!

The distribution of wealth has illegally been made

That's why one is in pain while the other enjoys

Marx has raised the conflict between two classes

That's why Ibrar pays a salute to Marx

This is an example of socialist realism in his poetry that the class struggle which he deemed necessary against the rich class, are reflected in the above poem. Thus, it can be established that (Coppola, 1974) and (Caron & Dasgupta, 2016) the international ideologies, like in this case Marxist-Leninist thoughts impacted the literature of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Being aware of the role of students in the development of Southa Asia literary movement, Ghar was optimistic about the students of his times to work for the uplifting of Peasant conditions. Thus, he had written so many poems for students in order understand make them their to responsibilities. One such poem (English translation) is reproduced here from his book, Sparghai with the theme, "In the name of student"

You have won every race of politics in all eras; Oh son of the soil you are the warrior of

politics Your blow is violent as Ayub khan received on his head

Politics will not be mentioned by his tongue for the rest of his life

Only then the deserving will appear in the political horizon

When they see in your hand the flag of politics

Blood has been shed in The cities of Dhaka,

Pindi, and Nowshera

You deserve reverence, as courteous to politics

You are also the heir of the future of our nation

You are the present-day king of political narrative

Oh son of the soil, you are an example of the sun shining in the morning at 8

A remedy for removing the darkness of

ignorance in the arena of politics

I hear rummers that the upholders socialist are infields

Dollars have made the leadership of the mainstream politics crazy

For Abrar, two loafs of bread are more worthy than reading 'Firdos e Barin'

He likes the younger generation in politics more than his brother

I have supported socialism in a very overtly fashion

I am a worker, and I burn as my heart smolders

What will I lose if socialism emerges

As I own neither bungalows nor keep gold in Banks

What will I lose that will aggrieve my heart There is no loss and a lot to gain and that's why I have made this decision

The socialist's philosophy is the philosophy of worker

Which is not utopian but it is philosophy of rationality and deduction

It is a war against the tyrants and its the philosophy of the oppressed.

That's why I have cursed the lavish feast of the decadents

Socialism does not support dog eat dog world

In socialism the decadents will deprived of their favourite meals

Khans will plough his fields and will not scrounge our shares

MAO has forced the elite to work in the fields with hoe

I wander starved while I am the creator of produce

Naked, barefooted and bare headed I wander For a loaf of bread I wander nooks and corners

That's why I have encroached the bungalow of the landlord

Feudalism is like a mountain over my bent shoulders(back)

The fertile fields are uncultivated because of khan

And because of khan my belonging are kept outside the house

That's why I intent to set the house of khan and on fire

According to Marx narrative khans are digging their own graves

Khan is preparing their hollows in graves because of their oppression and cruelty The eat the flesh of the workers but

contented with their bones

I have saved myself from tyranny through socialism

This world is a place for hard working and poor people

For Vietnamese young and brave people For Karl Marx and Lenin loving people All other ideologies are obsolete and only their philosophy dominates

I am a worker my alliance is with peasants The pen of Ghar is my sword and my fight is with khan

And the strand of my leadership is in the hands of young Bangash

I have said yes to whatever Afzal Bangash has said

Meanwhile, his advocacy of violent Maoist tactics as a means to materialize this theory emerges in the poem '*Inqilab*' (Revolution) which was published by the party printing house, Shahin Barqi Press, in 1974. The following are selected couplets from this poem;

> جاګیردار که لکه دروزه غوبل نه کړي معیشت به یه خبر و بدل نه کر ے دا لوئے لوئے عمارتونه سرنگو کړه بر د ډانګه او کوتکه به ئر شل نه کړئ که دي سر په جاګيردار ګرزولے نه وي مشکلات د يو ے خيت به حل نه کړئ جاگیردار نه دئ په بل څه خلاصے نشته سره اورونه که به کور ورته بل نه کړئ ورانه خله بغير د سوک کله سمير ئ نو بيا ول_ به غټانو توکل نه کړئ يه قل هو أو يه الحمد نه خلاصير ئ که په ډزو په کوتکو عمل نه کړئ انقلاب د تشدد او جبر نوم دے په ګفتار ګفتار به لنډ دا مزل نه کړئ که یه دا څوک خفه کیږئ ز ږه یئ اوچوه ابر ایه ر ښتیا و و ایئ کنځل نه کرئ

Translation:

Unless landlords aren't threshed out, like the chaff from the wheat,

It will be impossible to grow the economy through words

Tear down these tall buildings; it will not accomplish without bangs and sticks

If you have not bothered landlords; You cannot solve issues of hunger of one person

Under the socio-economic slavery

You cannot fill your bellies with spinach and stale bread

There's no other way to get rid of landlords; unless smoulder their houses into ashes

Big mouth cann't be silenced without a punch; Then why don't try it on decadents

Reciting Qul Ho and Al-hamdo will not work;

Unless you use guns and batons

Revolution is name of violence and coercion; This won't be achieved through debates Disparity behold them If someone feels aggrieved by this; Oh Ibrar you speaks truth not cursing anyone

Ghar's work shows influence of preexisting Pashto tradition, both classical and popular, and is an attempt to argue the ongoing politics of his branch of the MKP within that tradition. This is not always forced but can feel stylistically natural at times. For instance, see Watana Zaar Watana, in which he paid tribute to his dear homeland and provided hope to the workers and peasants in the form of a local genre, tarana, to be performed; this injects internationalist feeling into immediate local materialism:

جنګ په ويت نام کښي وي قحط دلته راشي وطنه زار وطنه وطنه تا باندے چه سخته وي په ما سخته وي په مزدورانو کسانانو د دنيا سخته وي لکه په تن د يو مريض چه د وبا سخته وي نه په نواب سخته وي نه په خان بابا سخته وي خانان اخته وي په څپل ډول اؤ په سنګار وطنه وطنه زار وطنه ما که دا ستا په سر انګريز سره بدي غوښتله ما که دا ستا په سر انګريز سره بدي غوښتله ما د غټانو په مرئ کښئ تيزندئ غوښتله غټان غټان پاتے شو، مونږ شو په دار وطنه وطنه زار وطنه

Translation:

Oh, homeland oh my Dearest homeland

A war erupts in Vietnam and famine in my lush green homeland; oh homeland

Oh homeland when you are under hardships then so am I

The workers and peasants of the world are under hardship

These hardships feel like the body of a patient affected by pandemic

Neither nawab nor the khan is bothered by these hardships

While Khans kept busy in lavish grooming and adornment; Oh, beloved homeland

Through the strength of my arms; I have built canals on your scarred soil

And built dams in some places; dams and ponds in others

And built abundant orchards and lush green pastures

And built roads through the forests and mountains

But today I don't have a bit of entitlement oh homeland

If I wanted liberty from the British imperialism (colonial India)

If I wanted to be the enemy of the English on your behalf

I wanted prohibition on these leeches too, feeding on humans

And I wanted a noose around their necks But decadents were left decadents while we faced the gallows

Conclusion and Findings

In conclusion, it can be said that Marxist-Leninist ideology influenced Pashtu literature, by presenting examples of Socialist realist perspective in reproduced selected poetry by Ghar. Although leftist political parties were banned in Pakistan including PWA for a long time, but however, the in contemporary poetic work by proletarian poets such as Ghar, and Khalakyar etc, have recorded public debate on the need of leftist political program as an alternative.

It is a noted fact that through literature we can see the processes by which leftism itself drew its moral weight from preexisting Pashto tradition in NWFP, as well as processes through which it was transformed by ongoing movements. It turns out that not all of its content was foreign after all, and to the extent that leftism succeeded, it did perhaps because there were preexisting local ideas and vocabularies with which it could have a conversation, such as in Ghar's use of Rahman Baba's skepticism of authority.

Therefore, the selected poetry as discussed above is an ethnographic intervention to understand the ideological and material background of progressivism and its social history in Pakistan and especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan. This study of the role of proletarian

poetry in the evolution of leftist politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa' concludes that Marxist trends in art, literature, and politics, was the product of a long process of transformation.

In a dialectical manner, it had preexisting roots in Pashto knowledge and in the inequalities of colonialism, in which anticolonialism often meant conflict against the class system and other divisions that empire used as part of its rule. As Ghar's use of Rahman Baba illustrates, and as the early lives of people like Fazal Mehmood Makhfi, Haji Sahib of Turangzai, and others illustrates, there were already precedences for thinking about these things critically, as well as for resisting them, in local Islamic modes. When formal nationalism arose, nationalist sentiment took on revolutionary

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