



THE IMAGERY OF EYES AND CONCEPT OF MALE GAZE IN SHAH ABDUL LATIF'S POETRY

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Abstract

Poetry in the intellect of poetical arrangement is the proficient examination from two varied points of view of exoteric (external) and esoteric (conceptual/confidential) traditions. The first is concerned with form and expression as a simple practical achievement in the explanation of language, whereas the second deals with poetry as a source or vehicle of thought and meaning. The present paper is an attempt to explain such exoteric and esoteric concepts in the poetry of sufi saint Shah Abdul Latif Behtai, whose poetry is considered to be the depiction of golden age of Sindhi literature. The paper discusses the “Sura Asas” present Shah’s poetry and its connection with human aesthetics and emotions which cannot be measured through common rational understandings. A discourse analysis and deconstruction approach is applied and the primary book of Shah-Ju-Risalu is taken.

Key words: Sura Aasa, exoteric, esoteric, Sufis, Dervishes, Sindhi folk literature.

Introduction:

Poetry in the intellect of poetical arrangement is the proficient examination from two varied points of view of exoteric (external) and esoteric (conceptual/confidential) traditions. The first is concerned with form and expression as a simple practical achievement in the explanation of language, whereas the second deals with poetry as a source or vehicle of thought and meaning. The poetic language has its own levels of expressions. The first is the investigation of external form, language, words subject matter, rhythm, and musical composition and the second is the intellectual verdict to the meaning and significance of the thought expressed in this external form. The last, in the list is the emotional attitude



called up by the artistic effect of the poetry on the mind and that could not be gauge by general understanding of reason and or rational of thoughts process (Sorley, 1966). Shah Abdul Lateef beautifully expresses this relation in the following lines of Sura Aasa chapter one verses 8:

*There is neither the, beginning nor the end of bondman,
The transcended transcendence who had true perception of the beloved (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa
1;8).*

In the above connection the first level is the exoteric point of view. The second establish the esoteric point of view. The first element can be isolated and made an external object which could scientifically be proved with certain set standards for recognition. The subsequent is an isometric of rationality and a psychological activity. This is predominantly due to the notions of the aesthetic sensitivity that so many conflicting opinions are held on the merits of any poetical composition. It follows from this argument that in order to understand any piece of poetry fully must be able to examine it as a material construction in language and rhythm, to grasp the ideas it seeks to convey, and to experience the pleasure which it is intended to communicate. It is this argument allows in order to understand or make sense of a piece of poetry one must be able to scrutinize the material construction of the rhythm. In order to under the hidden mean, idea, emotions expressed, and pleasure conveyed through feelings ought to be comprehended (Sorley, 1966). This argument could be understood in Shah's following verses:

*They discarded obeisance and gave up yearning,
They reached the stage where there is no limit (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 1;9).*

Literature Review:

The limits and reaching to point of no return are something that could be understood in terms of rational philosophical scheme of understanding rather it transcendence the real of ideas, thoughts and common understanding. Mysticism is an emotional attitude of human towards God or the divine who created human. Such expressive defiance takes various forms, but two certain forms are the following. First, is the emotional human quest to get unit with his creator as 'union' and the second is the communication or called as 'communio'. The whole order of Sufiya's or Auliya's (Mystics) could be divided among these two different but inter-relatable themes. This is the reason the language of mysticism is difficult for the commoners to be understood. It is why the language expressed deals with the most subtle and least perceptual subject matter and this is the reason it engagement an unconventional and hypostatized form of imagery not easily comprehensible to anyone who have not experienced such esoteric emotions and those who have exercised their minds in an effort to understand the nature of ideas (Seesemann, 2017).

Spirituality that lane through the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif is the sweetheart of mysticism with a rich religious worth and zeal. The imagery, symbolism and metaphors used in Shah latif's Shah Jo-Risalo is not ordinary rather it comes from the whole lot of diverse Sufi traditional order. Shah's



poetry stretches a very inclusive idea of the extravagance of Sufi symbolism. These imageries, symbols, instances, anecdotes, folklores and metaphors used in Shah Jo-Risalo will introduce us with the depth and honesty of thoughts expressed in the gorgeous melodies of Shah Abdul Lateef's poetry (Dr. Ayaz Hussain Qadri & Dr Syed Waqar Ahmed Rizvi , 1993).

The historical portion of Shah Jo-Risalo work has given a picture of the rural condition of Sindh in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that is why the background of every poem is not much sophisticated and represents a common rural milieu of Sindhi society. While reading Shah Abdul Lateef poems one can get a very glowing picture of daily life in Thari society and it presents a very deep insight of religious mysticism which one can't understand until a deep knowledge of spirituality. There are complications about defining the language of mysticism as it because of the subject matter of mysticism which is commonly not found in the ordinary language sphere (Lalwani, 1978).

In a society where women are made to be invisible, the ability to see and be seen is exceptionally impactful. Eyes serve as the ultimate testament to experiences and as a vital means of social commentary in a particularly misogynistic culture. Firdaus emphasizes eyes to reveal the emotional depth they hold, indicate the significance of relationships within her life, and stress the gender disparity she experiences throughout her life, but also in vision's relation to man's other senses, to his fantasies, anxieties, and transcendental occupations, to his sense of space and, indirectly, time (Bensimon, 1972).

The imagery of eyes is developed throughout the novel from a symbol of comfort to a statement of possession and dominance. The concept of male gaze in feminism has been introduced by Laura Mulvey (1975) but, Shah Abdul latif's poetry has highlighted male gaze (i.e. his Seven queens, and the representation of women in his poetry) in the 18th century where no European or American writers or poet has idea of patriarchy and classical male domination in society. The eye, perhaps because it serves the most important sense, vision, occupies a significant place among the few essential symbols of man. And it is true that any poem speaks for all readers who wishes to claim its words as their own (Mulvey, 1999).

Although some poems may be chosen for such ceremonial occasions because they communicate directly and fairly explicitly, at other times poetry is selected because its figurative language has the capacity to persuade itself into an intimate relationship with readers or listeners, and also to register the complexity of human feeling and thinking with particular subtlety. Such language requires interpretation and application in order to be understood. In this connection Sur Aasa of Abdul Lateef Bhitai would represent the concept of eye symbolism and oneness/unity with God.

In Sur Aasa Shah Abdul Lateef has intricately spelled out his philosophic thoughts of oneness of being or in other words of Ibn Arabi 'Unification'. The melody of hope (Sur Aasa) opens with Shah Lateef's view of the absolute:



*I search in limitlessness, and find not limit of the Guide,
Beloved's beauty has no shape,*

On our part yearning is limitless and on his part is the indifference (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 1;1).
In Sufi's practices God is the core of all being and human needed him for his survival and God need human for exhibition of thyself to thyself. Human soul before coming to existence were part of God and therefore it is eternal. Shah Latif puts his view of the above concept in the following view:

*'That' is not without 'this', 'this' too is not without 'that'
Man is my secret, and I am his, think over it,
All the saints and scholars have been saying this (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 1;7).*

With the presentation of self to God and God's manifestation to Thyself, the Unification of S/he with God reaches to level where there is no return to duality.

Gaze/male gaze has been under serious criticism in poetic discussion various authors in contemporary feminist scholarship. Male Gaze has been defined as 'the act of observation on the on hand and the internalization on the other hand' (Clark, 2018). Lura Mulvey elaborates Male Gaze as 'the gaze is directed at the female body, commonly by a male and it actively projects man's fantasy upon women's body. Within this relationship, women are both an object to be gazed at showpiece to be displayed (Mulvey, 1999).

Research Question:

How Shah Latif's poetry challenges the notion of male gaze and uses Eyes symbolism as source of spiritual unity?

Methodology:

This study employed desktop method of using primary date from Shah jo-Risalo in the shape of Sur Aasa. In the next phase secondary date (Journal articles, books, interviews and reports) published on the work of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai life, work and poetry was thoroughly explored to make sense of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai message in his original text of Shah Jo-Risalo. Due to language barrier help from Urdu and English translations were consulted in order to have clear idea of Sindhi text in Shah Sain abiyats and Vaees. A common method of interpretation of the poetic language and comparing with some renowned poets has been done with the help of secondary and tertiary data.

Sur Aasa (The Melody of Hope)

The earlier definition, explanation and about gaze, seeing, eyes and poetic diction on the subject matter is quit okay with non-spiritual or non-Sufi poetry while discussing and objectifying women through male subjective sense of seeing (eyes). This objectifying of passive female by a subjective



active male gaze give rise to the continuous construction of women in non-spiritual poetry since ages. The beauty, body and other aspects of women has been constructed and disseminated by male fantasy of perfect or the desired women could be vividly seen throughout fictional and non-fictional literature and poetry of various times and spaces. In this connection women became an object controlled by man through his poetic phraseology that came from his mental ideals. In this view men acts both as the producer of knowledge on women objectivity of she should look and subjectify her behavior in a manner of male idealism.

Shah Abdul Latif's poetry is spiritual in nature. His poetic expression works on certain levels in rural Thari society of Sindh. His work highlights various themes of spirituality journey, oneness, materialism love, hope, universalism, and the concept of seeing or the eyes of the beloved. Shah Latif use of eyes is verily distinguished from that other literary or poetic symbolism of eyes. His image seeing and use of eyes as sensing organ is not worldly or a human lover rather it is looking for the divine love, oneness or the spiritual being of his creator. Shah in his melody of hope (Sur Aasa) very gracefully elaborates the divinity and unity of him with his creator.

Sur Aasa literal meaning is wish or hope which was sung by Princess Aasa early in the morning to dedicate the start of the day to beloved creator. In Sur Aasa Shah Latif discusses various levels and themes of seeing the beloved. Shah deliberates the concept of love, Hajj, peace, wickedness, attraction, affection, hope, suffering/grief, trust, sacrifice, unity and human inability to comprehend the reality or the existence of his creator. He further differentiates between the eyes of lover and the beloved. A novice or a commoner eye would be unable to see the true face and beauty of the creator, because s/he is having a veil, distraction or barrier in his sense of seeing. The beauty of the creator lies beyond the conjecture of human limits of seeing. The one who have true affection and love for the beloved could see beyond the inference and would see the unimaginable beauties of his/her divine creator.

Shah's Abdul Latif poetry circles around finding of the answer to his quest of his relationship with his creator. Therefore, his poetry is in continuous search for the eternal truth rather than the existent or external one. Sur Aasa of Shah latif is themed on different level/stages of human spiritual journey of self-realization, deconstruction and unifying it with creator and his will. This is how Shah latif's poetry ought to be understood and interpreted for common understanding.

Morning and the seeing of beloved:

Shah Abdul latif's Shah Jo-Risalo consists of 30 Sur (melodies) arrange in music order which are sung/recited during different times of the day and night. Shah specifically wrote different Surs for the elevation of soul, mind, and body to get free from the world corruption of negative thoughts and dedicate oneself to service of humanity and his creator's good will. Sur Aasa (Melody of hope) in this connection is sung/recited early in the morning to praise the creator and be hopeful for his love, mercy, and peace for the rest of the day. Sur Aasa comprises of four dastans (Chapters). Each chapter further



consists of different Baits and Vaees and the number of baits is odd, and the number could be odd and even both in each chapter. The overall 120 baits and 6 Vaees in Sur Aasa and chapter wise composition is as follow:

Chapter1: 17:1 Chapter2: 23:2
Chapter3: 31:3, Chapter4: 49:1

Every chapter starts with the praise of God the creator of the universe. Sur Aasa first dastan (chapter) revolves around the praising of creator and thyself. The second chapter starts with the following lines:

*If Eyes don't perceive beloved first at sun rise
Pluck them and give them to crows (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 2;1).*

Shah Abdul Latif after praising the creator expresses his feelings early in the morning. He says in the above lines that the first one he wants to see is his beloved, if he didn't see him, he would want to pluck out his eyes and would throw it to the crow to eat it. This state of feeling and urge arises after severe attachment to the creator and consistent transformation of self. Shah further goes in detail in the following baits to express his love and affection for God.

*Offer your eyes before breakfast to the beloved,
It would be like seventy delicious dishes in breakfast (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 2;5).
Those eyes had breakfast by seeing the beloved early in the morning,
It would be like my body and soul performed Hajj (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 2;6).*

Lateef Sain expounds the joy and relief he would get after seeing his beloved before sun rise. The concept of hunger and the availability of food is beautifully connected to the first and only glimpse of the lover in the morning. Shah elaborates that having sight of the lover in the morning is equal to eating of seventy dishes and is equivalent of performing hajj. Hajj here is symbolizing to fard (Farz/obligation) which is among the five-primary obligation for a Muslim to complete his/her faith (Emaan). The level of importance given to eyesight of the creator is due the dedication of self and dissolution of the ego into the beloved wishes. Shah Abdul latif doesn't stops his vision of the beloved only to morning and his comparison with the best food and Hajj he goes on to give us a glimpse of the transformative cycle of oneself with thyself. In the following baits Shah Sain connect seeing with the concept of uncertainty and grief that comes when one is wondering to search to for the creator and the beloved.

*Eyes perceived something somewhere,
The frenzied and were stricken with love,
Then after, Sayyed says they did not sleep peacefully (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 2;9).*

Once you seen the sight of the creator there is no return to peace and sleep. Sayyed (the lineage from Prophet) here symbolizes the reliability of the argument. It also refers here to the concept of spiritual



teachers who would usually belong to the lineage of Prophet and would be the most reliable source of spiritual teachings. Comparing Shah latif's verses to William Shakespeare's verses from sonnet one can vividly see the difference between the eternal and worldly lovers and can differentiate between their concept of seeing the beloved.

*Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war
How to divide the conquest of thy sight;
Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right... (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 46)*

Shakespeare describes his own absurdity of feelings where his heart and eyes are in consistent war after seeing his beloved, whereas Shah latif is also describing his situation after having sight of his beloved. Similarities between English and Sub-continental poets could be found but the lines of symbolism they are using are addressing different beloveds. The spiritual lover of Shah Abdul Latif is eternal where that of Shakespeare is human. Shah latif continues his irony of grief that when his creator show mercy his eyes turned red and red is the sign if grief and in the following lines Shah Latif expresses in this way:

*Eyes perceived something today,
Beloved showed kindness they are reddened with raptures, say Lateef (Saleem, 2009,
Sur Aasa 2;10).
Eyes have strange habits,
They gather suffering of others,
And entangle in love their weapon is not required... (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 2;16).*

Trust and mistrust follow human feelings and relationship with humans and his creator. Trust is the essence of human relationship. Islamic spirituality and religion teach Muslims to trust their creator and be hopeful and consistently thankful for whatever good or bad is happens. Muslim should wait for right time and should surrender him/herself to good will, Shah in this connection draws lines that my eyes have got a strange habit of gathering suffering of others and he is feeling hapless that he can't have control over them for this act. Shah latif says that he doesn't trust his eyes anymore because they are unable to see the beloved because his eyes stop at a conjecture and from that inference the real beauty of his creator starts. These feelings are beautifully illustrated in the following lines:

*Your eyes will get you entangled and then will withdraw,
Hence don't trust your eyes (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 3;2).
O mother, these my eyes whom I consider faithful,
O naïve, I mad mistake in comprehending the real beloved (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa
3;3).*

Delusion, wickedness and human limitations are part of human nature and Shah Abdul latif explains



them in the following like this:

*This is the human conjecture that there is neither isness nor nothing,
The beauty of beloved is beyond all conjecture (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 3;8).
Stupid fellows could not discern the paradox and talks absurd,
How could they see the beloved who have cataracts in their eyes (Saleem, 2009, Sur
Aasa 3;12).
Expose not my love to the wicked people, my beloved,
May the short period of our union become long in giving explanations (Saleem, 2009,
Sur Aasa 3;16).*

In the above baits Shah Sain talks on multiple layers of human understand of creator, his limitation of seeing beyond what is real according to him or her and the human wicked nature. He further on elaborates that when I talk of my lover (the creator) those who are bound by their eyesight limitation would scold him and would try to disturb his union with the creator, that is why Shah is continuously addressing his self not to intensely express his feeling because the non-believer or the immoral ones will try to end their relationship by spreading false information and that is what happened to previous Sufis and dervishes.

He continuously talks of human confinements of eyes in Sur Aasa that human have certain level of limits and only those who dissolve themselves in the eternity of the creator could go beyond that limits and that is the ultimate reality of the beloved. In order to conclude is to restrict the scope of the study and argument but one must do that to a reach a common debate and further discussion. Shah Sain ends his sense of seeing through the following lines in exceptional way by spiritually uniting himself with the creator. According to Shah latif this is the ultimate stage of removing your cataracts and here the journey of spiritual self with God starts and from here there is no return to plurality. Here only one thing exists that is singularity and oneness of him the beloved.

*The divine Knowledge has separated life from the body,
I cannot take a single breath without beloved,
Now it is only God that is in my soul (Saleem, 2009, Sur Aasa 3;6).*

Shah latif says that his body is being has been strapped from his life and it become so aligned with the beloved that even taking a single breath no impossible without thyself and it only God that is now residing in his soul.

Conclusion:

Symbolism and metaphors are commonly defined as a direct comparison between two or multiple apparently items or objects. Metaphor denotes to any symbolic expression and fundamentally has two purposes. One, is the referential purpose which is cognitive and the second is the practical purpose, which is related to the visual patterns (Sedighi, 2012). Symbolism and metaphors are and could be



discussed in depths and lengths with great detail in different works of various poets and literary scholars, but Shah Abdul Latif's work stands at a stark difference and depth from the rest. Shah Latif's use of the sight symbolism in the shape of the eye and seeing his beloved is not like that of Shakespeare, Shelley, Milton or Pablo Neruda that addresses that worldly beloveds of human nature rather than Shah Sain's beloved is his creator. His way of reaching the beloved is the most difficult of all, where one must unlearn him/herself, learn thyself and then dissolve him/herself in thyself. The conjecture from where limitation ends is where the limits of God begin and that is oneness. Shah Latif has always strived for that. The gaze in the shape of seeing and looking at your beloved is not the one of male for women in common poetic diction rather of a lover for the beloved creator that is without materiality and selfishness of human greed. Shah's love is pure and refined in every aspect with his creator.



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