

The Concept of National Unity in the Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai

Abstract:

The poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai abounds in verses indicating the need for national unity. He believes that unity is one of the major elements which strengthen the foundations of progressive and prosperous nations. In Sur Dahar of Shah Jo Risalo, the collection of Shah Latif's poetry, the collective flight of the flock of birds called 'Koonj' (crane) has been used as the symbol of unity. He has also used the 'Caravan of Camels' in Sur Hussaini in the same symbolic sense. Shah Latif prescribes 'Unity' to his people as a formula for obtaining a high position among the nations world over.

This research article is a textual analysis of the selected verses of Shah Latif highlighting his concept of National Unity.

Keywords: national unity, progressive, symbol, Koonj, textual analysis .

Introduction:

Unity means accord; the state of being in full agreement. It implies living together and trying to work for a mutual cause. All achievements in the world are the result of some united actions. When men started progressing at first they founded families, later they started living in groups and then in villages and cities, finally they formed kingdoms and countries. All this social development was possible only because of unity. The whole universe follows a unifying system; we can see such a system working in our very own solar system. Animal kingdom is teeming with groups operating under the principle of unity such as when bees work together they produce sweet honey in abundance. Human body or the body of any other creature is made up of some systems functioning together. Societies work on the basis of collective efforts of individuals; consequently we see bridges and buildings, roads and railways, firms and factories, and rockets and robots. All this advancement and infrastructure has been the ultimate product of unity. The nations which possess this

quality of unity are at the peak of progress and with every passing day they develop even more. On the contrary the nations without unity lag behind and languish in the chains of social and political slavery in this era of ruthless competition. Unity is an essential element for the stability of a society; as progress, prosperity and peace of a nation largely depend on it. A society inflicted with the malady of disintegration always remains susceptible to the domination of foreign powers. Unity is the only protective shield of a society against all exploiting elements in the world at large. United societies and nations achieve a very high position in the world. The idea of Unity is in line with natural and social human needs. Though, naturally the temperaments differ from person to person, every man has different liking and disliking, but despite such differences of opinion and approach of the people, the members of society rise beyond their personal differences and get united for the collective cause of their nation. That is why a developed society values unity very highly for its survival. Unity is the basis of collective life of a society. The purpose of unity is to get together for a positive cause and in that case it is the sign of a healthy society whereas getting together for a negative cause is a sign of malaise. There is a common maxim in English that 'Unity is Strength' and an oft-quoted proverb that 'united we stand, divided we fall'. History of the world is full of many examples of unity which led to great revolutions. When the down-trodden and oppressed sections of society get united they can compel the high and the mighty to kneel down. Danish (2016) argues that Shah Latif knew how the disintegrated state of a nation results into the collapse of a society and Sindhi people were in a weakened state in his times, so Bhitai gave his scattered nation the message of unity and solidarity (p.446). His verse inspires all to be united for the collective cause of peace and progress and infuses the spirit to march ahead on the path of societal welfare. Jaskani (2010) believes that Bhitai was a great proponent of human progress and prosperity that is why he has stressed on unity and unanimity in his poetry (pp.419-20). Shah Latif, like all great poets, values unity as a formula to flourish as a people. According to Abro (2016) three common factors

for national unity and chosen by Shah are: music, pathos and language (p.252). Latif tried to unite his people through popular forms of music of his era and through his poetry, he highlighted the problems and troubles of the masses and used both rustic and literary language to encourage and inspire them. Shah Latif uses symbolism to put forth his idea of national unity. Arp, T. & Johnson G. (2006) explain that a literary symbol is something that means more than it suggests on the surface. It may be an object, a person, a situation, an action, or some other element that has a literal meaning in the story but that suggests or represents other meanings as well (p.274). Shah Latif has used symbols like *Koonj* in *Sur Dahar* to illustrate his idea of unity. Even in the present age the verse of this renowned poet touches the hearts of the readers and induces them to be united and hard working. It is not only *Sur Dahar* of *Shah jo Risalo* which has lines projecting his views about unity but also *Sur Hussaini* contains a number of verses which highlight the importance of unifying factors in society. In this *Sur* (Melody) Bhitai has used the symbol of *Caravan of Camels*. I have done, in a way, a comparative study of the text of Latif's verse on the subject of national unity as I have quoted different compilers and translators of his poetry. This article analyses some of the selected lines of Bhitai to understand his message of unity. Some of these lines have become the stock sayings in Sindhi and common men are very much familiar with the meaning and message between the lines. This research study is in fact the deconstruction of the selected text of Latif's sublime poetry to elaborate on its myriad meanings on a literary level so as to pave the way towards decoding of his rich verse that may prove to be the panacea, a real remedy for all ills including social, political and spiritual problems.

Literature Review:

The idea of national unity in Shah Latif's poetry has been discussed at length by Danish (2016) and Jaskani (2010) in their respective doctoral dissertations both published by Culture and Tourism Department, Government of Sindh, Pakistan. The former in particular has dedicated more space to this subject hence

his treatise gives a detailed explanation of Latif's theory of unifying elements for a nation and his symbols regarding the depiction of union and unanimity in a community, the latter researcher has devoted less space to this topic but he does quote some of Latif's verses which carry his key symbols on national harmony.

Research Methodology:

This study has been carried out according to Qualitative Method and 'close reading' has been used as a tool, to analyse Latif's verses on the subject of national unity. Boyles (2012) explains that close reading uncovers layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension (p.37). Moreover, Latif's verses have been properly categorised according to the symbols of unity and disunity used by him and the translation of the verses in English by some prominent translators follows them. Finally this study gives the brief yet comprehensive interpretation of the relevant verses making it a thorough analysis of Shah Latif's idea of communal concord.

Shah Latif's Concept of National Unity:

Latif considers unity a significant factor for the growth of collective life of his nation. The symbolic use of the bird, *Koonj*, does the trick for him to elucidate his idea of Unity, as he has portrayed in the following lines:

وڳر ڪيو وٽن، ڀرت نه چينن پاڻ ۾:
پسو پڪيڙن، ماڙهنٿان ميٺ گهڻو.

(داؤد ڀٽو، سر ڏهر ص: ۱۹۹)

The cranes fly off in gathered flight:
Their bonds of love they do not sever.
For lo! within the gathered wisp
For them aboundeth sweetness ever. (Sorely p.498)

Staying with the flock symbolises the purpose of keeping the society together, the act which leads to positive changes in community. Unity and the sense of mutual well-being bring the shattered elements of society together guaranteeing its survival.

This couplet of Latif has been a special favourite with many translators who have done the selective translation of his verse. Ansari (1983) has translated it both in prose and poetry, his prose version is: 'See how they fly about in flocks, see how love unites them. No one breaks the bondage. The birds have a better goodwill for one another than men. A feeling of sweetness and light guides them and keeps them together. (p.107)' and his poetic version is:

'See how in love they fly in flocks,
See how the convoy liked doth sail,
Sweet symphony they diffuse in rocks,
Unlike men who 'gainst each other rail (p.210).

Kazi E. (1996) has translated the same verse as:
They in conveys travel ever,
their connections never cut-
Not like man their kinship sever,
Oh, behold the loving birds (p.163).

Allana G. (1983) has also translated the above verse as:
The birds in flocks together fly;
Comradeship they do not decry.
Behold, among the birds is more loyalty
Than among us, who call ourselves humanity (p.96).

In the same vein Latif has put forth the idea of unity in the following verse:

وَجَرِّ وَثَا وَهِي، كَالِه تَنْهَجَا كُونَجْرِي!
كَنْدِينْءَ كُوهُ رَهِي، سَرِ ۛر سِپِيرِينْ رِي؟
(نبي بخش، سر دهر ص: ۱۴۱)

Oh my crane! Yesterday your flock left,
What will you do in the lake without them? (Khamisani p.344)

Agha (2016) has translated the same verse as: 'O crane! Yesterday your flocks passed by. What will you do in the lake without the dear ones? (p.277). Latif in the above verse addresses Koonj which is sadly separated from its flock. Here Koonj symbolises the unarmed, isolated and downtrodden person who has no one to stand by him. When a united group of supporters for

change suddenly gets disunited their movement is badly affected, their enemy succeeds in their goal to shake their foundations. It is then a peace loving man finds himself out on thin ice alone.

Latif has projected the idea of Unity in Sur Hussaini, as in the following verse:

چِج مَرَّ قَطَارًا، سَاثُ چَرَهَنَدُو لَكِيِينِ؛
مِچِيٓ تَتِيْنِ پُتَا، وَگِ وَاتِ ئِي نَه لِهِيْنِ.
(گر بخشائي، سر حسيني ص: ۲۴۲)

Separate not yourself from your caravan, lest they cross,
And you be left behind unable to trace their path. (Khamisani

p.177)

Agha (2016) has translated the above verse as: 'Do not get detached from the group of your companions as they have to journey through (the mazy) passes. Else you may fall behind and miss the road which your companions might take' (p.1012). Latif does not like indiscipline, disunity and deviation from the path of solidarity. When Sasui does not find anybody on the way, the poet urges her to stay in line with the caravan of camels. Man is a social animal; he enjoys staying in company of his own species. This gregariousness of humankind leads to unity. When man finds himself in some deserted place where there is no one to keep him company instinctively he seeks company of the animals. That act serves to dispel the feeling of loneliness but Bhitai has not advised Sasui to stay with the caravan of camels to avoid the sense of solitude but because staying with caravan will help her to get to her destination. In this couplet 'the line of the caravan' is the symbols of unity. Bhitai has told that persons out of the line or a disunited group face many trials and tribulations.

Bhitai says:

جَتَانِ وَا رِي وَگِ، اَوْنِي تِيَا چُلَنگِيُونِ
مَتِي تَنْهِنِ مَارگِ، پَتِي پرواز نَه تَتِيْنِ؟
(کليان آدواني، سر حسيني ص: ۱۸۱)

Agha (2016) has translated the above verse as: 'wherefore did you place yourself on the road along which the

camel-men later trotted in groups, so as to not be broken into bits by them? (p.1012).’ In the above lines of Latif ‘the caravan’ or ‘a group’ has been used again as a symbol of unity and concord. As he felt the sense of disarray and dissension in his society, so he used in his poetry the symbols of ‘Koonj’ and ‘Caravan of Camels’ to advise the people to get united for the collective cause of peace and progress.

Directly addressing the crane Latif says:

ڪُونج! نه پَسِين ڪَڪَ، يَبُ جَنهن سِين يَبِيو:

مَارِيءَ مَارِي لَڪَ، وَگَر هَڻِي وَيچُون ڪِيَا.

(شاه جو رسالو، مرزا قليچ بيگ، سر ڏهر صفحو: ۵۰۳)

Khamisani (2012) has translated the above couplet as:

Crane! see you not the straw that camouflages the hunter’s trap?

So many he has killed, scattering their convoys. (p.345)

Shah Latif presents Koonj as a symbol for a person who stands against injustice in society and feels the pain of his people. Such men who play the role as a catalyst for change through unity in society always face troubles. Particularly in a society under foreign domination raising voice for change and unity is like asking for some serious trouble. Men on a unifying mission always remain on the hit list of exploiting nations. Agha (2016) has translated the same verse of Latif in simple prose as: ‘O Crane! Do not fail to distinguish the straw which the hunter uses to camouflage the trap beneath it. The fact is that he has disintegrated lots of flocks through his deceitful murderous trap.’ He has further quoted the translation of verse number 17 of Surah Al-Airaf of the Quran in which Satan says, ‘Then will I surely come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right and from their left’ (p.279). Here Latif has pitched two opposing symbols together; the flock of ‘Koonj’ the symbol of union among community members against the ‘hunter’ the symbol of coercion and oppression in society.

Indicating the careless stance of the crane Shah Latif says:

ڪُونج نه لَڪِيو ٻَانُ، مَارِيءَ سَندي مَن ڀر:

اوچتي پَريَانُ، وَگَر هَڻِي وَيچُون ڪِيَا.

(شاهوائي، سر ڏهر ص. ۲۳۰)

Crane perceived not hunter’s arrow aimed at it,
By its sudden shot, the flock got scattered. (Khamisani p.345)

Bhitai has suggested unity as a safeguard against traps and snares of the enemy. When an enemy of the state succeeds in putting into practice his sly plans the whole nation gets divided into groups and millions of people get affected by the poison of dissension. Shah Latif has alerted the true believers in unity against the treacheries of the enemy because lack of vigilance results into disintegration and ultimately the collapse of society.

Crane has been repeatedly used by Bhitai as in some of the following verses:

روه رامانا ڪَن، اُج پڻ هَلتَهاريُون:

ڪَر ڳَل ڪُونجَرِيَن، راتي ڀر رات ڪِيو.

(دائود پوٽو، سر ڏهر، صفحو: ۱۱۰)

In the mountains the departing cranes are chattering,
Last night they came to this decision after much commotion. (Khamisani, p.343)

Shah Latif says that cranes are leaving today and their chatter can be heard from far away. Last night they made a lot of noise in the mountains and finally decided to move. Here the unanimous decision to leave can be deemed an example of unity.

وَگَر اُڪيري سَر ساريو، سُوَر چَري:

جُهري جهجندي ڏي، سَنِيهاڪي سَجَڻين.

(دائود پوٽو، سر ڏهر، صفحو: ۱۹۹)

The lone crane left behind, longs for water and its flock,
Remembering its dear ones, she suffers with a distressed heart. (Khamisani, p.344)

Shah Latif says that the crane yearns for her flock and the pond. She is really in pain. She pines for her loved ones and sends them messages. Latif points out that far away from the nearest and dearest life is unbearable for her. Only thing she

wants is reunion and longer the wait the more miserable her plight.

وڳڙ وَساري، وينينءَ ڪئن ماڻ ڪري،
ڪِ تو نه ماري، رڻ جُهڻ سَندي سَڄين؟
(دائود پوتو، سر ڏهر، ص: ۱۹۹)

O my crane! How did you from flock detach yourself?

Does not the memory of loved ones' sweet talk make you sad?^(Khamisani, p.344)

Shah Latif addresses the crane asking her how she has forgotten her flock and how she can sit back and relax. He asks her how she does not die remembering her loved ones. It is surprising for Latif how people get separated from those who love them and still survive. To Latif separation is as good as death.

ڪُونجڙيءَ ڪاله لئي، سَڄڻ وڌم چت؛
آءُ جنهن رءُ هت، گهنگر گهاريان ڏينهڙا.
(دائود پوتو، سر ڏهر، ص: ۱۵۳)

Crane's warbling within me my love's memory refreshed,
He without whom my days in misery I spend.^(Khamisani, p.344)

Shah Latif says when the lover heard the sweet song of the crane she remembered her beloved with such intensity that it made her realize how sad her life was without him. Here the simple yet meaningful message of Latif is that separation results into sadness and union is all comfort.

اتر ڏي آلاپ، ڪالهنڪر ڪونج ڪري،
پرين پسي منجه خواب، وهائيءَ وايون ڪري.
(دائود پوتو، سر ڏهر، ص: ۲۲)

Turning to north the crane produces sweet strains,
For she about her loved one has dreamt.^(Khamisani, p.344)

Shah Latif says that in the north the crane has been warbling since yesterday. She has dreamt about her loved ones and the desire to see them again does not let her relax. Here the basic idea is that the desire to get reunited makes us restless.

Moreover, sweet dreams sometimes make us more anxious and impatient for we want them come true without any delay at all.

ڪُونجون ٿيون ڪيئن، جڪس هلتهاريون؛
بچا پوءِ آتن، وڃن واندا ڪنديون
(دائود پوتو، سر ڏهر، ص: ۱۵۳)

Cranes cry out, per chance they are about to leave,
They leave their young ones behind, hence their sadness deep.^(Khamisani, p.344)

Shah Latif says that cranes are crying as if they were about to leave for a far off place for food. The problem with them is that they must leave their chicks behind. This plan to be separated from their young ones, no matter how short that period of separation may be, makes them sad. It can be observed that Bhitai has used the same symbol of Crane in two different senses that is unity and separation. Crane with the flock symbolizes unity and without it conveys the idea of hardships of separation. In both senses it very much drives the message home.

Shah Latif has expressed his hatred in the following verse for the 'hunter'; the one who shatters unity and destroys societies.

ماری! مَرین شال! دِبَ وَيَحْنِي دِبيون؛
جئن تو اچي ڪال، وڌو وڃ وڙهن ڪي.
(دائود پوتو، سر ڏهر، ص: ۱۶۰)

Hunter, may you die, may your hunting tools be blasted,
For yesterday the loving pair you separated.^(Khamisani p.345)

Agha (2016) has also translated the above verse as: 'O you poacher! May you die and your secret traps be blasted! Yesterday you poached among lovers and caused them asunder through a deliberate design (p.280).' For Latif 'the hunter' is a disgusting character because it is he who has separated 'Koonj' from its flock. Latif being a harbinger of peace, love and unity never supports the killer, as the killer deserves to be hated and not supported. The whole *Shah Jo Risalo* is interspersed with many prayers but not many curses. If Latif curses someone that person really deserves to be hated and such cursed men include this cunning hunter who disperses the flock and creates disunity.

Conclusion:

Unity is the soul of society that keeps it on the path of progress and leads it to the ultimate destination of peace and prosperity. Shah Latif has explained, through symbols and signs of 'Koonj' and 'Caravan of Camels', that on one hand there is such an exemplary unity and love among birds that they fly in the formation of flocks and on the other hand humankind despite being blessed with wisdom and capability of reasoning is disunited and disintegrated. Man has greatly developed in terms of material growth but they have failed to grow from ethical point of view and with respect to unity, in fact there has been a constant and serious decline in this regard. Now is the time man needed unity and ethical values more than ever before. Latif has highlighted the significance of unity in his poetry because Islam, being the religion of peace and mutual respect, has emphasized on the social and political importance of unity. Latif has urged to be with others in the line of solidarity and fraternity as leaving the security of a group is tantamount to getting exposed to dangers and treacheries of the enemy. One who gets detached from an organised unit is likely to lose his way and be misguided by some conspiratorial elements. Latif's message of national unity considered from a religious and spiritual point of is that get united on the path of Islam as it embodies peace, love and unity.

All symbols of Shah Latif regarding the idea of national unity are uniquely pregnant and pragmatic. The symbols of 'group' as a united community and 'hunter' as anti-group are simple enough to follow even for a common countryman.

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