

Humour and Satire in Urdu Literature

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Abstract

Humour & Satire are an integral part of all forms of literature; & when the tragic part of a drama/story becomes unbearable, humour/satire provide a much needed diversion & relief. This article examines the effect of humour & satire with reference to some of the leading men of letters of Urdu literature.

Keywords: Humour, Satire, Urdu, Literature

It is difficult for human beings to always lead a solemn and glum life. They require amusement, mental relaxation and recreation of some sort. Humour is the most suitable & innocent option for this purpose. Humour can be verbal, visual or physical. Non-verbal forms of communication for example – music and art can also be humorous. Since literature is the replica of life it produces not only serious, subtle and delicate literary pieces but also the need for mild, mature and mellow compositions has always been longed for to coax and cajole the readers. To maintain the regularity and steadiness of life the elements of humour and satire are always needed. Prevalently humour and satire are used as a compound genre but they are two different words having two distinct meanings. Simon Wiesenthal is of the opinion that humour is the weapon of unarmed people: it helps people who are oppressed to smile. In fact, humour succeeds where wisdom fails. Stephen Leacock asserts:

“Humour may also be defined as the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life and the artistic expression thereof. I think this is the best I know, because I wrote it myself.”¹

This classification demonstrates three important aspects, which are the ‘irregularities of life’, ‘kindly contemplation’ and ‘artistic expression’. The first point explains that a humorist does not look at the irregularities

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of life disdainfully rather gets amused with them, the second is that he deals up with comic situations and gruesomeness of life and the third point explains that a humorist adopts a very skillful manner of portraying such funny situations instead of presenting them in a blunt and boring way. Moving on to the better half of humour that is satire, sarcasm and gibe as defined by the encyclopedia Britannica;

“Satire in its literary aspect, may be defined as the expression in adequate terms of the sense of amusement or disgust excited by the ridiculous or unseemly, provided that humour is the distinctly recognizable element and that the utterance is invested with literary form without humor, satire is invective; without literary form, it is mere clownish jeering”²

Abual- al-Ejaz Hafeez Siddiquee defines satire in the following words:

“The comic situations of life which can be pointed out and the contemptuous aspects of life which can be opposed and humorously criticized are termed as satire”³

The process of sarcasm shares a lot with surgery. As a surgeon dissects and opens up the human body in order to extricate it by the infected portion, similarly a satirist identifies the follies of the society and extricates it of the corruptive matters. Although it is true and admitted that a satirist definitely has the gusto and ardor of elatedness and supremacy present in him. Whatever a satirist targets he shows his soreness towards it and is desirous to modify and aspire it. Perhaps the element of sympathy is absent which is considered to be the spirit of humour. Abu-Al-Khair considering, states:

“Those satirists who extract amusement and laugh at the helplessness of people can never reach the heights. A good satirist is a merciless surgeon and ruthlessly dissects but in his satire there are no signs of personal revenge or hollowness. His sole purpose is constructive and to bring forward a positive change. The objective of his art is to point out the hideousness of life and to beautify society.”⁴

Whether it is satire or humour both require sincerity and fidelity, whereas, prejudice, priggishness and ego are all considered injurious for them. Making somebody a subject of humour or satirizing someone on the basis of personal grudges is a complete violation of the rules and is

extremely cheap in itself. That is the reason, why in every literature it is considered to be the humour and satire of the lowest degree.

Contrary to this, the earnest pleasure or displeasure of mind and thought gives vitality to humour and satire. Then the most difficult aspect of this skill is to criticize your own self. To ridicule others and make them the target of buffoonery is comparatively easy but to mock at oneself jovially is most difficult thing in the world. It is therefore rightly said by Shabi-ul- Hassan that only those nations are considered to be civilized who can make fun of their weaknesses.⁵ Satire can only grow and develop in such societies where people have prudent and practical approach towards life. Only those people give space to satire who have the patience and will for change. Rasheed Ahmad Siddiquee says that humour and satire can only develop in those countries and nations who are independent and value independence. But this genre cannot build up among the nations who are bound in the shackles of slavery. Among the people where gods and monarchs are worshiped only abusive language vulgar pranks can be found but not decent and quality humour and satire.⁶

Sarcasm exposes before the readers the personal folly and humiliation of others which can only be handled by a mature mind of decent taste and disciplined attitude. In short, it is a genre whose reader is not only able to see the faults of others but their own misdeeds as well. The element of humour makes this genre light hearted, jovial, intimate and infectious. It is therefore necessary that it should not be cheap and vulgar but should rather be meaningful, far reaching, universalized and enduring.

In another situation humour and satire can be made the basis for estimating standards of the literature of any language. Humour and fun are cultural and represent the customs, traditions, beliefs and norms of a particular society. In fact, the types of humour vary from people to people and society to society. The comic gestures and funny situations which can be a laughing stalk for us may not be humorous at all for a Britisher or an American.

On the other hand, according to Muhammad Alam Khan humour and satire together can create the history of the mentality of a nation and also are its heritage. Also it can be agreed upon that humour and irony of any community or civilization can be used as an absolute scale to test the glee, perception, temperaments and feelings of them.⁷

Now we have to observe whether humour and satire are correlated or not. Norman Forlong in this connection states that for literary satire two components are worthwhile; one is criticizing and satirizing an odious incident or thing and the other humour.

Rashid Ahmad Siddiquee's opinion is contrary to that of Norman Forlong's. According to him satire is implicit in humour, whereas, humour should not be a part of satire. He considers humour superior to satire and a form of arts which is difficult in execution. For humour, he says: complacent attitude and conformation is required, whereas, for satire energy, sorrow, anger and assertion all are required simultaneously.⁸

In comparison to Rasheed Ahmad Siddiquee, Sayed Ahtesham Hussain's notion is comparatively more steady where he writes that the sour feeling that people develop while reading a satirical work is the very reason why people separate it from humour. Hence, Thekrey and Meerdath both have accepted the vitality of humour but not of satire. The reality is that the existence of satire is impossible without the presence of humour, whereas, humour can exist without satire.⁹ Anyhow, it is important to observe the several techniques of humour and satire.

- i). The first technique is that of comparison in which humour is created by the sourness which arises while comparing the similarities or conflicts of two things simultaneously.
- ii). The second technique is "the use of language". Developing humour by creatively using the human speech and expression in which Takrar (repetition), Riayat-e-lafzee (pun) and Bazla Sanji (wit) are included.
- iii). The third technique is that of a humorous situation.
- iv). The fourth technique is the use of a humorous character.
- v). The fifth technique is that of parody.
- vi). The sixth technique is that of irony.

No doubt there are other techniques like Qol-e-mohaal (paradox), Mubalagha (exaggeration) etc. but the ones given above are universally known and popular.

After observing the general aspects of humour and satire, we switch on to the art of humour and satire in Urdu literature. When we throw a cursory glance at it we learn that the early onset of it can be found in some ancient Dastan (legends). But the quality of humour and satire in some places is quite inferior while at others the jazzy effects of naturally pleasant and amusing humour and satire are visible. In Urdu literature humour and satire are conspicuously observed for the first time in the letters written by Ghalib where frank humour and offhandedness are quite domineering. Ghalib was blessed with dual attribute of being a poet and a prose writer. Humour was a part of his nature, that's why Hali called him "Hewann-e-Zareef" (humourous animal). His humour is pious and pure. He smiles at the occasions when people are whining and crying. He is capable of laughing at himself not only on others. In his

letters we find soft smiles instead of whole hearted laughter. In his letters, instead of using loud and sharp colours, he uses a beautiful blend of light colours of humour. Besides Ghalib, humour and wit are also observed in the writings of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Shibli Naumani, whereas, the elements of satire are more specific in the literature contributed by Deputy Nazir Ahmad. Sir Syed's work was serious, constructive and persuasive but in reaction the humour and satire of demeanor was introduced in the form of *Owad-e-punch*, which swathed the irregularities, serration and jaggedness of the society. But the quality of humour and satire of this newspaper was below standard. Sajjad Hussain, Machu Baig Sitamzareef, Tarbhon Nath Hijjar and Jawalla Parshad Barq etc. are the eminent figures of this age. After this, there were seen several different kinds of humour and satire in Urdu literature and it gained a lot of popularity, some were self evident while others were mellow and mild. The names of Mullah Ramuzi, Rasheed Ahmad Siddiqui, Farhatllah Baig, Azeem Baig Chughtai, Patras Bukhari, Shaukat Thanwi and Falak Pema, etc. are worth mentioning here. In Farhat Ullah Baig's style, there is a wonderful fusion of seriousness and humour. His purpose is always serious but style of expression is pleasant and witty. His choice of diction is the main reason of his successful writings and he is an expert of using idiomatic and flowery language of Dehli. He loves antiquity and traditional people and is considered a conservative person. His style is productive and he talks about the improvement of society but never becomes dry and stringy. Wazeer Agha says that liveliness and vivacity are the main features of his style. In his writings certain happenings, characters and comparison are not used as tools to create laughter but words and sentences are constructed in such a pleasant way that they pleasantly touch the sensations of mind and heart. Such expressions automatically create smiles and one feels fresh and lively.¹⁰

Although Patras Bukhari has less contribution (in volume) but whatever he wrote gives him a prominent place in Urdu literature. His study is very vast and he has a great appreciation & understanding of international and especially English literature. There is a touch of delicacy, liveliness and good taste in his humour. He creates humour with situations more than words. He is good at parody writing but repartee is his special technique. He does not laugh at the individuals but at the groups and classes. Sayed Abdullah writes about him that the essence of his humour is based on integrity, uprightness and sincerity more than sympathy and kindness. He dislikes and hates absurdities. He is a misanthropist and sometimes mocks himself.¹¹

Rasheed Ahmad Siddiquee's name is also mentioned along with Patras Bukhari. Rasheed Ahmad was an alumni of Aligarh and taught there as a professor of Urdu literature. His essays are not easily comprehensible and intelligible because he keeps on referring to specific incidents and only those people can enjoy his writings who have deep knowledge in history, politics and literature. He quickly mentions one thing and the mind keeps on collecting segments into a single whole. The delicacy and fore-sightedness of his thoughts is quite different from other humourists. Alle-Ahmad Saroor writes about him that Rasheed Ahmad Siddiqui is different from Patras and Farhatullah Baig. He is among those people who are neither considered conservative nor modern rather he belongs to both the categories. He is an expert in paradox as well as repartee. Because of this dual quality he is considered Chesterton and Bernard Shaw of Urdu literature.¹²

Alle Ahmad Saroor gives a very good comparison of these three humour and satire writers,

*"Patras takes the raw material for his humour from the living beings where as Farhatullah Baig from the dead ones and Rasheed Ahmad Siddiquee from poetry and literature."*¹³

Some of the literary writers were those who were not basically humorists but their writings reflect the sweetness of humour and satire. Some salient names of such writers are Mehdi-ul-Afadi, Abualkalam Azad, Mehruz Ali Badauni, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Qazi Abdul Ghaffar, Khawaja Hassan Nizami, Abdul Majeed Salik, Majeed Lahori, Ibrahim Jalees and Abdul MajDaryabadi etc. The eminent names among modern humour writers are: Colonel Muhammad Khan, Shafeeq-ur-Rehman, Kanhaiya Lal Kapoor, Ibne Insha, Mashkoor Hussain Yaad, Attaul Haq Qasmi, Sadique Salik, Yousaf Nazim, Khawaja Abdul Ghafoor, Mujtaba Hussain, Younas Butt and Mushtaq Ahmad Yousafi. The most prominent name among them is Mushtaq Ahmad Yousafi who is a natural humourist. His writings are adorned and decorated with special formalities but his sentences are smooth, pleasant and abrupt. He is witty and derives meanings out of meanings and deduces deep hidden meanings from apparent descriptions which seem to be an extempore conversation of a scholar. Most of his topics are taken from our day-to-day life but even from these common topics he seeks out some strange and amazing aspects of humour. Shahid Mashqi says that the foresight of Yousafi penetrates into human psyche and makes observations...He sometimes talks about such things which are not real but seems to be a reality and sometimes presents such things which are not apparently real

but are based on sheer reality. Both these ways are the techniques of paradox which are found in abundance in the writings of Patras and Rasheed Ahmad Saddiquee. The pleasant form of such paradox is found at many places in the writings of Yousafi.¹⁴

This journey of humour and satire is still on and many new writers are striving to make their names in this field. Only time will decide as to whether or not they will be able to make their place or be lost in the flow.

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