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Sahir Ludhiyanvi: An Iconic Literary Poet

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Duniya ne tajurbaat-o-havaadis ki shakl mein

Jo kuch mujhe diya hai, lauta raha hoon main

Whatever the world gave me

In the shape of experiences and calamities,

I am giving it back.

- Sahir Ludhianvi

Sahir Ludhianvi was born on eighth March, 1921 in village near Ludhiana. He was born in a very wealthy family. His father Chaudhari Fazl Mohahmmad had married ten times but Sahir was his first child. Sahir's father was having all those bad habits of spoilt landlords of that time. His mother, Sardar Begum has taken a bold step and left her husband's house. Sahir completes his education at Ludhiana's highschool and college. From his school time he has started writing poems, in his college he was famous for his ghazals and nazms (poetry forms of Urdu literature).

After partition of India, initially he was living in Lahore. His first work 'Talkhiyaan'(Bitterness) is published there. Afterwards, due to his controversial statements, Pakistan government issued an arrest warrant. Then Sahir fled from Lahor to Delhi. After some time, he got settle in Bombay and lived there till his death.

The form of Sahir's poetry was very much unique in his time as well as in today's time. There is simplicity in his tone. He can transfer that simplicity into complexity when he wants to address major issues. He was having great sense of aesthetic along with finesse and skilfulness. He has written revolutionary poems as well as love poems and prayers. Sahir entered in literary world like a storm, and after that he was appointed as editor of prestigious Urdu magazine. He achieves success as a film lyricist at Bombay.

One can call Sahir a poet of 'bittersweet', as he himself given this title to his first poetry collection. Weather he writes a poem or a ghazal, he wrapped it like a piece of confection, but underneath that sweetness he camouflaged bitterness. He wrote long and short poems, ghazals, and lyrics but essentially, he was poet of the nazm. It was only through the medium of the nazm that he was able to convey his revolutionary



messages and romantic hues. To write a ghazal was comparatively an easy task for him.

Love and Longing in Sahir's poetry

Sahir's romantic life started in the first year of his college. After becoming famous poet his love affair started with Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam. Even in Pritam's autobiography she has confessed her love and meetings with Sahir. After that as per the news the name linked with him was, Sudha Malhotra. Sahir has faced several failed relationships and he never got married or got a stable relationship. One can observe his romantic life's up down in his poems.

Tumahaare ahad-e-wafaa ko main ahad kya samjhoon?

Mujhe khud apni mohabbat ka aitbaar nahin

(How do I believe your promises of fidelity?

When my own ability to love remains in doubt)

Through this couplet we can observe that Sahir was much confused with his own feeling and emotional state. Contemporise of Sahir, like Gulzar and Javed Akhtar¹ noted that he was very much afraid of being committed. His poetry directly reflects his inner state. He was having that art in which he can put his demits in a beautiful poetic way; above lines reflect his art truly.

taaj tere liye ek mazhar-e ulfat hi sahi

tujh ko is vaadi-e rangiin se a'qiadat hi sah

meri mahbuub kahiin aur mila kar mujh se

(This is a symbol of love for you.

This valley of colours is something that you cherish.

My Beloved, you should meet me at some other place.)

¹ Gulzar and Javed Akhtar are two famous poets of Urdu and Hindi, also lyricists of Bollywood.



This couplet is from his famous poem 'Taj mahal'. This poem reflects his growth as a poet. As a sensible person he was not willing to forego his compassion for the struggles of millions of poor, hardworking labourers for the warmth of love in his beloved's arms. He has moved away from the conventional approach of looking at the Taj Mahal as a symbol of love. He has decried the vanity of an emperor in using the wealth at his disposal to create a structure that will forever mock the love of ordinary people. Through this poem he has used a powerful rhetorical device to turn our attention from appreciation of this structure towards the blood, sweat and tears of workers who slaved in order to create it.

He has written great love poem like 'Kabhi kabhi mere dil me khayal aata hai' (Sometimes this thought crossed my mind). Just like his poem 'Taj Mahal' the poem 'Sometimes' is also one of his master piece. A film director liked this song very much and by keeping it as a central theme he has created a movie 'Kabhi Kabhi'. It is a visible proof that his poetry has that power to create whole new cinematic story. In the same film has given another lyrics which was titled as 'Main pal do pal ka shayar hun'(I am a poet of the moment). It was written before the film was conceived, and has an autobiographical aura of his life.

War and Peace in Sahir's Poetry

khuun apna ho ya paraya ho nasl-e aadam ka khuun hai aakhir

jang mashriq mein ho k maghrib mein amn-e aa'lam ka khuun hai aakhir

(Blood, our own or someone else's, after all is the blood of human beings.

War, whether in the East or in the West, is slaughter of world peace.)

Writing a war poem, highlighting its destructive impact on society as a whole, was a favourite topic among the progressive poets, Sahir was one of them. In this poem he argued that war itself is a problem. Further poem talks about 'Pro-war', a war against poverty and hunger and the inequities of the capitalist system. Farmers of the country were struggling long for decent livelihood. Schools in rural areas were poorly equipped. In spite of massive progress on several fronts, much remains to be accomplished. So that, to paraphrase the poet, there is enough to fight for good of the people and that should remain the focus all the time.



Melody and Meaning in Sahir's Poetry

sansaar ki har shai ka itna hi fasana hai

ik dhundh se aana hai ik dhundh mein jana hai

(Everything around us has a story to tell.)

We come from a cloud of fog and then disappear into another cloud of fog.)

Sahir has written this ghazal in 1971 for one film. This ghazal narrates that the world is full of illusions. Everything in this world is without any essence. He narrated that we have come from fog and disappears into another cloud of fog. And no has ever succeeded in resolving this mystery. Sahir knows how to put meaning and melody in single poem.

He was a poet of the nazm form. He has attained excellence in this form at very early age. Reading his poem, one gets the feeling that the nazam came to him naturally. The flow of words was like water gushing from a mountain, and thoughts were clearly expressed using innovative similes and metaphors.

jurm-e ulfat p hamein log saza dete hain

kaise nadaan hain sho'alon ko hava dete hain

(People punish us for the crime of love.)

How innocent is those who fan the flames?)

This ghazal is another fine example of his creativity with revolutionary thoughts. The thought pattern in this poem is very traditional and typical of Urdu poetry. In this poem lovers were unabashedly declaring their love for each other and face of all kinds of censure. In terms of lyrical quality, every poem he wrote contains some flavour of ghazal. Ghazal writing is restrictive, whatever poet has to say, he has to say in two short lines. Those short lines should be well rhymed and contains a thought that is significant in itself. Sahir was very well known for two qualities, one is 'ghazliat' means the quality of lyricism traditionally associates with composing and ode. Second is 'taghazzul' means the art of verification.



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Prayers Written by Sahir

Sahir was a staunch secularist and there for he has always spoken against religious fanaticism and separatism. He has never associated himself with narrow interpretations that used religious as a diving factor among people. He has written some of best prayers or Bhajan ever written for Hindi cinema. This genre, with its emphasis on the spiritual or religious, is very different from the ghazal form. By studding his prayers, we can say that he has acquired a mastery over this form too.

Allah tero naam Ishwar tero naam sabko sanmati de Bhagwan

Is dharti ka ruup najre, pyaar ki thandi dhuup n ujre

sab ko mile sach ka vardaam sab ko sanmati de Bhagwaan

(Allah and Ishwar are your names.

O Lord, give the gift of right thinking to all!

May this land sustain its beauty.

May the cool sunshine of love stay forever. May everyone get an offering of truth.

Lord, give the gift of right thinking to all.)

This prayer is written in true Gandhian sprit, it is one the marvellous piece of his writings. It celebrates the core of humanity that transcends all religious denominations. On the name of religion in India countless people died, at the very dawn of freedom. By composing such prayer, he has played a very imperative role by giving the message of communal harmony is of supreme importance. This prayer reminds people of the oneness of god, though the customs of worship might differ from one to another. He has written so many popular prayers like, Man re Tu Kahe na Dhir Dhare (Stay Steadfast), Ishwar Allah Tere Naam (Ishwar Allah are Yours Names), Prabhu Tero Nam (Those Who Thinks of You).



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Relevance of Sahir's Poetry in Today's Life

Sahir's poetry never lost its relevance. He touched upon issues like poverty, inequality, gender gap, surroundings, the threat of a war and many more. Some of the challenges are even bigger today than in his time. India's secular tradition faces its most significant test. Religion, which was our high strength, is being used to tear us apart. Sahir's poetry is a beacon of hope. After the dark night, there is dawn. Things may look dreadful, but the future is always sunny and bright as long there are men and women of goodwill who aspire to create a better future. "Woh subah kabhi to aayegi" (that dawn will arrive some day) his poems can never lose its magic.

Sahir's epic line was, "*Jo bhi hai, bas yahi ek pal hai*" (Whatever is there is this very moment). Wise words from a person who had a troubled childhood and a turbulent youth; one who reached the peak of popularity but wondered what lay ahead; one who was feeling alone among the people.



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