

## **Post-modernist Elements in Javed Ihsas's Poetic Collection 'Ayina (The Mirror)'**

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### **Abstract**

*Javed Ihsas is a prominent contemporary Pashto poet, critic, and columnist. He writes poetry with the new spirit and style of the modern critical theories of literature and philosophy. In his verses, we can observe the elements of Modernism and Post-modernism as well. In this study, we explored the post-modernist elements in his poetry, especially in his Pashto poetic collection titled Ayina. The word 'Ayina' is a Pashto word that means 'The Mirror'. The very title of the collection gives a symbolic representation in the sense that it depicts a realistic picture of society. This study is an attempt to examine the Post-modernist elements in his poetry by using a post-modernist approach. The poet touches on the elements of post-modernism in his poetry such as the element of social construction; the notion that ideas, politics, and language are socially constructed, consumerism, postponement, etc. This study explores the post-modernist elements in Javed Ihsas' poetry which will prove a beacon light for the young poets.*

**Keywords:** Ayina, Contemporary Pashto Poetry, Pashtun Society, Post-modernism

### **Introduction**

In this study, the main focus is given on the post-modernist elements in Javed Ihsas' poetic collection *Ayina*. *Ayina* is his second poetic collection which is published in 2021 in Aaraf Printers Peshawar, Pakistan. Post-modernist elements have been part of his poetry from different angles.

It was the 1980s when different theorists started their full-fledged discussions and since now the post-modernist situation is continued. This theory is generally thought of as the reaction against Modernism but some theorists consider it as the further extension of Modernism. Both of the theories have some common elements while some elements are against each other. Generally, it is taken that post-modernism is the product of the political, social, and cultural environment of the western countries which is the main fact but nowadays, it has lost its originality and is considered as a theory of literature worldwide.

Many Pashto poets in the literary circles have tried to reflect society but Ihsas has gained momentum as he feels what is around him with a heart full of consideration. Ihsas' *Ayina (The Mirror)* is a collection of Pashto poetry. It contains 100 Ghazal in Pashto and each of the Ghazal has 9 couplets i.e. 18 lines. The publication of this poetry collection has proved to be the cause of more progress and improvement in Pashto Literature. Javed Ihsas is a modern Pashto Ghazal writer who writes mostly through the perspective of modern literary and philosophical theories.

Javed Ihsas, a well-known name of Pashto literature who has gained the public attention and the limelight of critics for his induction of fresh ideas and installation of knowledge-rich prepositions to the Pashto language and literature. He introduced Pashto literature to the Modernist and Post-modernist dimensions which is one of the most peculiar aspects of his contributions to Pashto literature.

Javed Ihsas was born on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1976, in the historical district Bannu. He had a keen interest in English literature along with Urdu and Pashto so he pursued his degree of Masters in English from Gomal University D.I Khan and also had a master's degree in Urdu Literature, afterward. Javed Ihsas penned different social, literal, and cultural themes in the Urdu daily "*Akhbar-E-Khyber*", with the pen name of 'Ihsas'.

Forth to his interest in English, Urdu, and Pashto language and literature, he also holds a deep insight into Arabic and Persian language and literature. Apart from linguistics and literature, Javed

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Ihsas' storming visual over philosophy, psychology, politics, sociology, religions and humanitarian studies, history, and civilization, and other modern fields of knowledge and ideology, is what attributes him the unique place he holds in the arena of knowledge and study. That is why the institution of his poetry stands firm upon these fields of knowledge and diverse form of studies and philosophies.

Till now, his only publication was "*Sarchina*". However, the poetic masterpiece "*Ayena*" is his second Ghazal collection. The ingredients for his new book are derived from the post-modern movement of thought. *Ayena* is the prelude to the inclusion of a higher philosophical and post-modern school of thought in Pashto poetry. He attempts to include life (as literature is all about life), civilization and culture, and other fields of academia in his poetry and to present a post-modernist oversight of the above-mentioned.

Ghazal has been one of the most popular modes of expression among Pashto poets. Ghazal is different from Nazam (poem) in that Ghazal embodies various themes as each couplet carries a separate theme, all the couplets are tied together through the end music of the lines. There is no such type of poetry in English, though lately a Pakistani English writer Shadab Zeest Hashmi has started writing Ghazals in English.

The next thing that differentiates a Ghazal from a 'Nazm' structurally is that a 'Nazm' carries a title that alludes to the central idea of the poem, whereas a Ghazal does not carry a title as it is not written centering on one idea rather every couplet carries a new message. Its uniqueness lies in its multi-thematic touch and unification of these variant themes through music. Ghazals embody themes that are related to love, social problems, economic uplifts or downward moves, domestic and national life.

### **Literature Review**

We have notable names whose dexterous hands have so far produced volumes of ghazals reflecting the society in various shapes and forms. The poet, Javed Ihsas is one of them whose poetry reflects modern society. Javed Ihsas not only bound himself to the Pashto poetic tradition but also has a deep relationship with the Eastern languages and civilizations found in his poetry. In other words, he followed tradition as well as modern eastern languages and civilization in his poetic career.

Khalil (2021) asserts that linguistic conscience, philosophical ideas, and societal intellect are found side by side with that of the romantic and love subjects in his poetry. Javed Ihsas made all these things as part of his soul with full aesthetic beauties, and through his poetic craftsmanship, Ihsas lays bare his feelings to the readers. We find a lot of such unique words and terminologies in his poetry for the first time that nobody has used before, and which gives distinction and individuality to his poetry.

Similarly, in his Pashto book '*Tarqeed*' Ramzan (2021), analyzes Ihsas' poetry through the lens of 'The Agony of Consciousness' and through which he explores the elements of consciousness and feelings towards the society he lives in. The idea "the Agony of Consciousness" is first of all introduced by Ramzan through which he based his analysis of Javed Ihsas' poetry. It is an idea through which we can explore the agony of a poet's consciousness of various difficulties and problems faced by society and the world. Through this idea, he explored the poet's inner feelings, mental and psychological conflicts, and his consciousness towards the issues faced by humanity.

Arman (2020) views Ihsas' poetry as the mirror of the contemporary world. He writes a critical essay on Ihsas' poetic collection '*Ayina*' titled "contemporary poetry, standards of writings and readings of the contemporary text, and *Ayina*". In his critical comments, Arman praises Ihsas' poetry as modern poetry and the true mirror of the contemporary Pashtun as well as Pakistani society. Moreover, he asserts that Ihsas has discussed the contemporary literary and philosophical theories in his poetry.

In his essay titled "dh Saqib Ghazal" in Saqib's (2019) poetic collection *Saragh*, Ihsas says that if we study the different ages of Pashto Ghazal we may easily reach the conclusion that Pashto Ghazal has mirrored and represented every institution of life, the ups and downs of contemporary society, and various trends of society.

In this regard, being a modern poet, Javed Ihsas represents and constructs the psychological, economic, social, political, cultural, and intellectual situations of society.

### **Methodology**

Post-modernism theory came forth in the 1960s. In 1971, Hassan wrote a book named '*The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a post-modern Literature*' in which he used the term post-

modernism. Then him Jencks (1977) wrote a book named '*The Language of Post-modern Architecture*' in which he presented his theory of Post-modernism. Similarly, Lyotard (1979) publish a book named '*The Post-modern Condition: Report on the Knowledge*' in which he discussed his theory of Post-modernism. Later on, this book was translated from French into English in 1984 by the University of Minnesota.

The difference between modernism and post-modernism would seem indisputable. In other words, Postmodernism and modernism are considered the same thing because both have some similar features. Both of these schools discard the differences between high and low art. Post-modernism gives no value to high art over low art and mixes the past with the future and one genre with another. Mambrol (2016) asserts that both Modernism and post-modernism employed pastiche, which is the imitation of another's style. He further says that;

“Parody and pastiche serve to highlight the self-reflexivity of Modernist and Postmodernist works, which means that parody and pastiche serve to remind the reader that the work is not “real” but fictional, constructed. Modernist and Postmodernist works are also fragmented and do not easily, directly convey a solid meaning” (Para 3).

According to Anjam (2018), the task of literary criticism is to explore the plural aspects of a literary text, idea, or the writer's experience. He says that regarding modern criticism, the basic task of criticism is to lay bare the otherness of the words of a literary text such as similes, metaphors, symbolism and imagery, and structure and terminology. That is the purpose to highlight the suggestiveness of its meanings.

Postmodernism rejects the modernist approach towards grand narrative. It rejects Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution, Karl Marks' 'Dialectical Economic Theory' and Sigmund Freud's 'Psycho-Analytical Model of Human Being' for its claim of universality and integrity. Modernism favors the unity as well as the center of life and puts forward that works of literature and art can provide the unity, continuity, coherence, and meaning that is lost in the modern world. Mambrol (Op.cit) asserts that Post-modernism and Post-structuralism meet in recognizing and accepting the impossibility of having a coherent center. Postmodernism favors fragmentation as there is some underlying belief in Derrida's notion of difference; a belief that coherence, unity, and meaning are constantly postponed.

The approach of postmodernists was the uncertainty of the claims of any kind of totalizing explanation. The proponents of Postmodernism reacted to this view partly for the good reason that by doing so they could side with those who did not 'fit' into the larger stories i.e. the inferior and the marginalized, against those with the power to circulate the grand narratives. "Many postmodernist intellectuals thus saw themselves as avant-garde and bravely dissentient. This heralded a pluralist age, in which, as we shall see, even the arguments of scientists and historians are to be seen as no more than quasi narratives which compete with all the others for acceptance" (Butler, 2002). Butler further says that they have no reliable fit to the world as well as no certain correspondence with reality. They are just another form of a literary piece.

Ihsas' poetry expresses the inner thoughts and feelings of his mind. The current study explores the elements of postmodernism in his poetry through the perspective of Derrida's (1973) concept of deconstruction and difference as well as through the rejection of meta-narratives. The scholar will also take into consideration the postmodernist elements in mind. The researcher explores from the poetry understudy that if postmodernism represents fragmented culture then there is no need for meta-narratives to continue to exist in modern society. Similarly, Foucault's idea of knowledge and power is also kept in mind.

### **Analysis**

The postmodernist elements are not only part of literature but also have their roots in every field of life such as art, culture, media, history, architecture, linguistics, human activities, and every kind of knowledge. Ihsas' poetry is replete with such kinds of postmodernist elements as we see in this couplet from his *Ayina* (2021),

**“Khudaya Kher Ma baad Jadid Suratehal de,  
Muhabat Kho hum maha bianya da”**

(Ayina, 2021)

**O, Allah! Be kind as there the postmodernist situation prevailed,  
Though, love is also a grand Narration as I tend.**

The proponents of modernism put stress on the notion of the Grand Narrative. They consider Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution, Karl Marks' 'Dialectical Economic Theory' and Sigmund Freud's 'Psycho-Analytical Model of Human Being' as universal and unique. They favor the unity as well as the center of life and put forward that works of literature and art can provide the unity, continuity, coherence, and meaning that is not found in the modern world anymore.

In this very couplet, Ihsas wants to say that as modernists consider all the mentioned elements as universal, therefore, love should also be considered as a meta-narrative. He thinks of love as a meta-narrative and universal as the other above-mentioned theories are considered as Grand Narrative. Grand narrative stresses upon one meaning or the dictatorship of a notion.

The proponents of postmodernism consider all the ideas, politics, and language as culturally and socially constructed (Ashton 2006). It says that everything is not naturally constructed but socially constructed. So in this regard, we take Ihsas' couplet. This couplet is in the form of a direct address to his own heart as he personified his heart as something hears his voice. See the couplet taken from his *Ayina*,

**“Zarrgiya tha hum paidawar dh sarmaye dh Samaj,  
Sta Armanona hum dh mine paidawar nh lagi”**

(*Ayina*, 2021)

**My heart! You seem to be the product of society  
As your longings do not seem the product of love**

In this couplet, the poet considers his heart as socially constructed. He considers all his emotions and feelings as the product of society. Means to say that as being a part of the society, his feelings and emotions shape themselves not from his inner voice of love but takes its color from the society in which he lives. In this couplet, he addresses his own heart and its longings and desires as not the product of love. Here, in this couplet, the poet, is a postmodernist, rejects the traditional or classical conception, and depicted his emotions and feelings in the light of postmodernism, and called them socially constructed.

Similarly, the postmodernists consider the fact as temporary, surfaced, and additional. They consider facts as many and changing with different situations and places. They say that these facts change from time to time with different situations and in the light of social prospects (Butler, 2002). As we see things presented to us through social media or media, all these things are constructed i.e. they are not a fact but are constructed through images, news, or through voices. So to say, that all these things are not facts but are shown to us as facts. There is a couplet from *Ayina*,

**“Sa Khabar de, Sa Awaz de, Sa Tasweer de,  
Zindagi sa da? Tashkil de ka Taabir de”**

(*Ayina*, 2021)

**It is somehow a call, a voice, and an image  
What is life? Construction or interpretation**

In this couplet, the same situation has been depicted as the poet wants to convey through putting a question. The poet, here, points towards the facts as they are not natural but constructed. In this very couplet, the poet seems to be a postmodernist who defends his theory in the pretext of his poetry. Here is another couplet of the same idea in his *Ayina*, in which the poet asks that why someone asks about my love as to whether it's material or platonic. The poet further going on the say that anything which has the name love is socially constructed. Being a postmodernist poet, Ihsas views love as constructed and not a natural thing.

We find a lot of postmodernist elements in Ihsas' poetry. There is another element of postmodernism in his poetry that is the element of the search for cultural roots. We find this element of postmodernism in some of his Ghazals which are part of his first poetic collection '*Sarchina*'. In the same way, when we look at the modern world as there is globalization prevailed everywhere, there also prevailed consumerism in the world. That is, things are produced in the light of their consumption i.e. how to be purchased products. Everything is built as a commodity; so to say that there is commoditization in the world. Even a person's feelings and emotions are also purchased. Ihsas says in this couplet as,

**“Dh Ihsas ye hum qimat muqarar krre,  
Ph Narrye sumra hawi Sarefiat de”**

(*Ayina*, 2021)

**They have, also, fixed the price of their feelings,  
Consumerism has dominated the world so deeply.**

In this couplet, Ihsas asserts that everything has become a commodity in the modern world. The poet goes to such an extent that he feels or observes people who sell all their belongings, even their feelings, and emotions as we observe some of the people who purchase their talent and their creations.

Postmodernists do not believe in the classification of things as long, short, beautiful and ugly, good or bad, etc. They think that this classification of things is not natural but socially constructed and there is a power behind it. They think that all these things are equal and have their existence. They think that nobody has allowed considering something as high and something as low in its price or place. Javed Ihsas also discussed this element of postmodernism in his couplet in which he says that I have crossed the limits of my feelings to such an extent where ends the difference between high and low, deep and surfaced. Here, the poet used a postmodernist approach to equality.

There is another postmodernist element in Ihsas' poetry that is pleasure-seeking. We are passing through such an era where we receive pleasure from different phenomena and events. We can say that all those high ideas and imagination have lost their essence and existence, and are viewed as pleasure. See the below couplet from *Ayina*.

**“Za ye da Kofer aw Imaan muamela nha Ganam,  
Zh ka butam matawm, zh trena mazaAkhalam.**  
(Ayina, 2021)

**I don't take it as the matter of Kofer<sup>i</sup> or Imaan<sup>ii</sup>,  
If I break the idols, I take pleasure from them.**

Here, in this couplet, the poet wants to present this element of postmodernism i.e. the element of pleasure-seeking in his poetry. He says that the present is such an age where everything is done under the consideration of pleasure. This couplet gives us the picture of the present age where if someone breaks the false idols, it is not for the sake of someone's high spirit but for the sake of taking pleasure from it. Here, the poet laments on the fact of the modern age that if we see good deeds which someone performs are not for the sake of his truthfulness towards his faith but everything he commits is for the sake of pleasure or showiness. The poet wants to say that there was a time when idols were broken in the light of belief but now everything is different.

Mambrol (2016) asserts that in Post-modernism, disorientation and fragmentation are no longer awful but it celebrates fragmentation. It considers fragmentation and de-centeredness as the only possible way of existence and does not strive to break away from these conditions.

This is where Postmodernism meets post-structuralism where both of them recognize and admit that it is not possible to have a coherent center. He further says that in Derridean terms, "the center is moving towards the periphery and the periphery constantly moving towards the center. In other words, the center, which is the seat of power, is never entirely powerful. It is continually becoming powerless, while the powerless periphery continually tries to acquire power. As a result, it can be argued that there is never a center or that there are always multiple centers" (Para, 7). Moreover, he says that this kind of postponement of the center acquires power or preserves its position is what Derrida called the difference. There is thus an underlying belief in the celebration of postmodernism, indifference, a belief that unity, meaning, coherence is continually postponed.

Here, one of Ihsas' couplets explains this very element of meaning postponement of post-structuralism.

**"Dh Muhabat Take Kha har soo Matrook shawe nh de,  
Kho sa nha sa ba ye mafhoom Multawi shawe wi oss"**  
(Ayina, 2021)

**If the word love has not been postponed,  
But its meaning may be abandoned to some extent.**

In this couplet, the poet points towards the meaning postponement of words and says that as the word of love has not been postponed yet, but its meaning has been postponed in the modern age. As we see that love has lost its previous meaning that was sincerity and faithfulness. Today's love is physical and a material having no relation to spirituality.

### Conclusion

Javed Ihsas is a well-known name of Pashto literature who has gained a reputation in the field of Pashto poetry. He introduced Pashto literature to the modernist and post-modernist dimension which is one of the most peculiar aspects of his contributions to Pashto literature. In his verses, we analyzed the elements of Modernism and Post-modernism. In the present study, it is explored that the post-modernist elements are constructed and represented ideologically in his poetry, especially in his Pashto poetic collection titled *Ayina*.

We also found a lot of postmodernist characteristics in Ihsas' poetry. After the analysis, it revealed that the postmodernist elements in his poetry such as the element of fact, search for cultural roots, the element of pleasure-seeking, consumerism and the rejection of grand narrative, etc. The researcher pointed out these elements of postmodernism in the analyzed chunks of his Ghazals which are part of his first poetic collection *Ayina*. In the same way, when we look at the modern world as there is globalization prevailed everywhere, there are also prevailed consumerism in the world.

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<sup>i</sup> . Unfaithfulness

<sup>ii</sup> . Faith in God