

Revolutionary Idealism as Theme: An Analysis of Ajmal Khattak and Percy Shelley's Poetry

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to explore the poetry of two revolutionary poets Ajmal Khattak and Percy Bysshe Shelley paying special heed to “revolutionary idealism” using critical discourse analysis (CDA) as method of analysis. Ajmal Khattak was a 20th century revolutionary Pashto poet and Percy Shelley was a nineteenth century British poet who was a revolutionary and a romantic. Since both the poets were idealists of their own respective times, therefore this paper seeks to investigate the revolutionary idealism of both Ajmal and Shelley in their poetry. This study serves a twofold purpose. Firstly, this study compares two poets belonging to different social and political backgrounds however their poetry served for revolution and idealism. Secondly, the study utilizes critical discourse analysis as a method to explore the lexical devices in the poetry of both these poets which highlights the importance of CDA in analyzing poetry. The findings of the study indicate that both Ajmal and Shelley though belonged to different times, however, both served for the rights of common masses. This idealism made them the best revolutionary poets of their own times.

Keywords: Ajmal Khattak, Percy Shelley, Revolutionary Idealism, poetry.

Introduction:

Ajmal Khattak and Percy Shelley are two idealists and revolutionaries of their own time. Born on 15 September, 1925 in Akora Khattak, Ajmal composed his first poem when he was 13. He belonged to the 20th century and is famous for his modern idealistic tendencies in Pashto poetry. Being a revolutionary, he joined the freedom struggle during the twentieth century. Ajmal in his struggle in political activities, left his school and became a member of “Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) movement led by Bacha Khan. Redefining “Pukhtoonwali” with political consciousness was the main purpose of this movement. Besides, the main element of this movement was non-violence by serving people keeping their social status, race

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and creed aside. This movement later played its part in “Indian National Congress” to confront against British rule in India. Ajmal was the member of “Awami National Party”. He became Member of National Assembly in 1990 and served as a senator.

Percy Shelley was a British English romantic poet who was born on 4th August 1792. He was the son of a parliamentarian and was famous for his rebel nature. At his early age he was expelled from Oxford for writing the essay “The Necessity of Atheism” which made him a revolutionary rebel of all times. He is famous for his critical thoughts on the ruling classes and all kinds of injustices in society.

Critical Discourse Analysis:

This paper utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method to analyze the poetry of Ajmal Khattak and Percy Shelley since this method suggests “not only a description and interpretation of discourses in social context but also offers an explanation of why and how discourses works.” Besides, CDA takes text into its context therefore the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-historic contexts are taken into consideration during analysis and interpretation of the text. A discourse once becomes dominant enough to suppress alternative interpretations does not remain arbitrary and therefore is viewed as natural; a genuine way because that is ‘the way things are’. Fairclough alludes this procedure as “naturalization” (2000) through which a ‘Naturalized’ talk loses its ideological quality and is by all accounts impartial therefore speaking to its ‘story’ as ‘truth’. Moreover, CDA investigates “dark and additionally straightforward basic connections of strength, separation, power and control as explained in dialect”. CDA takes up arms against exploitation by stimulating them towards the predominant circumstance. Since discourse is an “opaque power object in modern societies” therefore CDA expects to make the discourse more straightforward.

Besides CDA, this paper also uses Karl Marx ideology of using language as the only way to grasp the diachronic of changing social circumstances. In this regard, Fairclough and Graham (2002) discussed the works of Karl Marx’s in which he established that ideas always co- exist with language. Abstraction, Dialectics and ideology, being three core elements of language are considered central to understand the discursive aspects of Marx’s critical method. Hence, Fairclough and Graham found that Marx analyzed social phenomena through discursive approach since he was a naturalist and humanist. His mode of language critique is like what we contemporarily refer to as “Critical Discourse Analysis”. He used language as a tool to criticize capitalism. Marx is considered as a critical discourse analyst by Fairclough and Graham since both these critics believe that Marx applied language critique to the capitalist order of his day.

“Critical language analysis is central to Marx’s method precisely because language is the only way we have of grasping the diachronics of changing social circumstances –

this is because language mutually determines the product of changing material circumstances and practices. Language plays a two-fold role, it thus processes externalized ideas as a producer, and reproducer of social consciousness, which in turn is in a mutually fundamental relationship with the overall human experience. Considering these vital aspects, CDA and Marx's method are identical". (Marx as a Critical Discourse Analyst: The genesis of a critical method and its relevance to the critique of global capital).

CDA methods disentangle the economic and social conditions which are built upon exploitation and dehumanization of some by some others by analyzing and interpreting the linguistic forms (Dijk, 2015). Besides, language in Marxist thought is a social process which is dialectically connected with different paces of life.

Unlike discourse analysis, CDA focuses on the necessity of utilizing social and economic resources for the sociopolitical and economic prosperity of the entire society. Fanon (as cited in Wilmot, 1986) advised the masses to show resistance since "The future would have no pity for those men, who possessing the exceptional privilege of being able to speak words of truth to their oppressors, have taken refuge in an attitude of passing, of mute indifference and sometimes of cold complicity".

Revolution Idealism in the Poetry of Ajmal Khattak and Percy Shelley

The theme of revolutionary idealism and change pervades through the poem "Faisala" (Decision). Throughout the poem the poet tries to encourage the common masses to hold revolutionary thoughts and opt for a change in society. Ajmal Khattak specifically motivates to mobilize them against the form of governance in Pakistan. In this poem the major focus of the poet is to highlight the elites who impose their fake ideology on the layman of the time. Thus, the poet provokes the innocent people to raise their voice against such exploitative system and he takes a decision in the end of the poem. The poem Faisala is a profound reflection of the dissolution of many Asian nations which is the result of arising mal governance, insatiable greed and exploitation in all façades of life. Ajmal begins the poem with a direct address to the addressee who belongs to the elite class,

"sta da" "khan kaka" pa kor kizar ambar v

Your rich uncle house in gold pile is

(Your rich man's house is piled with gold)

aao zama bachidi khawri satikhwar v

And my children will mud suck poor is

(And my children will suck (eat) mud as they are poor)

sta bankona kho di wraaz pa wraaz parsegi,

Your banks let day by day swollen

(Let your bank accounts are swollen (with money) day by day)”

“ao zama vena didrang pa drang ochegi

And my blood let time to time dry

(And let my blood be dried time to time)

Wazday weele pa patokime zama she

Fats melton fieldsinmybe

(My fats melt in the fields)

Tre na jora sta bangle ki sta ranra she

From make your banglow in your light be

(From that the light is produced in your banglow)

tazamapagataaishkawi jwanday ye,”

“You my on profit debauchery do live is

(You do debauchery and live on my profit)

zada sta qarzoki gharq warsham gorta

I your debts in doomed go grave to

(I reach to grave doomed by your debts)

tazama haqda pradaidami inamkri,

You my right of stranger dancer prize do

(You give my right to stranger dancer in prize)”

“za marrai warkaway na sham khpali morta

I morsel to give not can my mother to

(I cannot give a morsel to my mother (for eating))”

The whole poem reflects a comparison between the higher forces and lower forces of society. There is a rich and magnifying tone of distrust towards the bourgeois class.

The living of the bourgeois class is shown as “their houses piled with gold”, their banks swollen with money”, “the lights in their big banglows”, the comfort of their lives”. Besides, the proletariat class is indicated through certain images the like: “their children eat mud”, “their blood drying”, “their fats melting due to hard work”, “deprivation of their rights”, “less food for their family”.

Ajmal attacks the dominant class by portraying the miserable condition of the working class. The poet directly addresses the unjust system and asserts that the working-class work day and night to earn their livelihood however, their children do not get enough food. This wealth, however is the output of the working class. To portray this exploitative system elucidately, the poet makes use of certain words like “khawre sati “suck/eat mud” , wena ochegi “blood drying”, wazday weely “fats melting”, sta qarzo ki gharq, “doomed in your debt” and marrai warkaway nasham “cannot provide a morsel”. These words indicate the severity of the suffering of the working class and define our socio-economic order.

Ajmal has also used some words to portray the elites. These words include, “zar anbar , “gold piled”, bankona parrsegi, “ bank are swelling(with money)” , bangle ki ranra, “light in banglow” and aish kawee, “ live luxuriously”. The choice of the words makes Ajmal one of the most profound poets in the Pashto literature. The poet highlights different working classes in the society including the labors who are exploited by the bourgeois. This exploitative system with unequal division of wealth sucks the blood of the layman as Ajmal explains in the following lines,

“ta zama khona ki humzama malak ye,

You myhouse in as wellmyownerare

(You are the owner of my house)

za khpal kor ki hum sta stargo kidarghal yam

I mine house in as well your eyes in fraudulentam

(In my house you consider me as fraudulent)”

“ta ka taki tori wayi hum tak speen ye,

You if very black say also very white are

(Your false words are also taken as truth)”

“za ka speeni speeni wayam gunahgar sham

I if white white says inner become

(If I say truth, I become a sinner)”

“Ta ka tol na haq na haq kawi aqaye,

You I fall undeserved do master are

(If you do undeserved things, you can because you are master)”

“za ka haqchariowayama padar sham

I if truth any day say on gallows

da manama che nan sta da zorkhanida,

This I agree that today you of power richness is

(I agree that today you are powerful because you are rich)

damanama har sa sta di ma ba khwar ki

This I agree all things yours I will poor make

(I agree that all things are yours and I will make me poor)”

The system of justice is poor, and all the rights are for those who hold the power as explained in the above eight verses. Althusser in “Marxist tradition states that the state is a Repressive State Apparatus”. The State is a ‘machine’ of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the ‘class’ of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation)”.

There are different tools which the state uses to impose its power and suppress the common masses. These include judiciary system, police, legal courts, army and prison. Such institutions are therefore termed as Repressive State Apparatuses which “defines the State as a force of repressive execution and intervention ‘in the interests of the ruling classes’ in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat, is quite certainly the State, and quite certainly defines its basic ‘function’.” In Ajmal’s poem “Faisla (Decision), the poet frequently makes use of certain words for the upper class such as, “Aaqa” and “malak” (master) for the landlord and “ghal” (thief) and “darghal” (fraudulent) for himself. The choice of such lexical words shows the interpolation of ideology. Hence, the elite is accepted as the owner and the producer (proletariat) is called “ghal” and “darghal”. Besides, this kind of suppression is accepted by the masses with any question which is one of the dilemmas of the working class. This situation is accepted without any challenge by the masses.

Like Ajmal Shelley too held revolutionary thoughts. One of his poems “The Mask of Anarchy” is quite similar to Ajmal’s poem “Faisalrah” considering thematic similarity. For instance, Shelley criticizes anarchy in all its forms and personifies it as a murder,

“I met Murder on the way--
He had a mask like Castlereagh--
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven blood-hounds followed him”

England is shown to be ruled by “Anarchy” and leads the armed forces through England. The common masses are scared and later the “seven bloodhounds” occupy England, where they massacre the innocent public. As they travel through the land, they continue to butcher the innocent, eventually reaching London, where the “dwellers,” who are “panic-stricken” due to these masked tyrants are running away to save their lives.

“Last came Anarchy: he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse.
And he wore a kingly crown;
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;
On his brow this mark I saw—”
“I AM GOD, AND KING, AND LAW!”
With a pace stately and fast,
Over English land he passed,
Trampling to a mire of blood
The adoring multitude.”

Besides, hypocrisy, fraud and cruelty “Anarchy” claims to be “God, King, and Law”, and therefore does not accept traditional sources of power. Anarchy has some followers however during this process of destruction “Hope” cries out in desolation. As the poem ends, there emerges a mist of hope with positive thoughts. Finally, this kills anarchy and resuscitates “Hope”.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Ajmal Khattak and Percy Shelley are the revolutionary idealists of their own specific times. Both belonged to different eras with different social political and cultural backgrounds. However, the theme in the poetry of both the poets is same. Both the poets wrote for the betterment of society, for the common masses and served as the voice of the unheard. Besides, Shelley is found to be blunter in his expression against the injustices than Ajmal Khattak. Here we can find the role of culture. Since Shelley was the son of a parliamentarian and England was ruling the world in the 19th century therefore he had less fear to express his disappointment against the evils of society. However, in case of Ajmal the situation was opposite. He belonged to the era when expression of any kind was banned (Khan, 2005). There were two martial laws and

the voice of the pen was completely suppressed. However, the purpose of both the poets was to raise the voice against injustice whether through active or passive resistance. Keeping in view this spirit of the revolutionary idealism and thematic similarity in the poetry of both these poets, it can be concluded that art is universal in all its forms and therefore is free from national boundaries.

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