

book makeover teams, marketing strategists, marketing events and marketing machines. In this marketing process is it wonder, that writers have also become 'brands?'

It depends on us....there are questions and more questions, from whose tentative answers more questions arise? Can there be any final word in the sphere of ideas and creativity!

(Presented at The Sahitya Akademi Seminar, Mumbai 2014)

Chapter 7

THE REGION AND THE NATION IN THE INDIAN FICTION PERSPECTIVE - SINDHI FICTION

Dr. Radhakrishnan once observed that, "*Indian Literature is one, though written in different languages.*" This continued to be believed as truism for quite some time till Mr. Nihar Ranjan Ray and others made it clear that the literature of Indian languages have their own distinct identity, their own unique literary traditions and they exist as individual entities in their own right. Therefore, to club them under one umbrella-term of, 'Indian Literature', would be untenable.

Mr. Umashanker Joshi tried to tread a middle-path by saying, when speaking about 'Indian Literature', the literary traditions of all Indian languages will have to be taken into consideration.

This discussion can be understood in the backdrop of the multilayered and multi-faceted book, 'An Idea of India' by Dr. Sunil Khilnani, a professor at Kings College, London.

It is a fact of history that political boundaries have been constantly changing, but linguistic and cultural territories have remained somewhat constant. The

political and geographical entities of India remained clearly defined during the Freedom struggle, but the cultural and linguistic boundaries were defined with the creation of states along linguistic lines. It should be noted that even the linguistic states were created on the basis of over one-hundred-year-old linguistic surveys.

Language is like a flowing river and the regional language itself including sub-regional dialects during this period have evolved and are asserting their identities. Nevertheless, this subject is beyond the scope of our current discussion and need not be elaborated upon at this stage.

At a national level the cultural and literary identities remain amorphous, while at state level it assumes visible shapes and contours.

While speaking about 'region', the Sindhi language finds itself in an unenviable position i.e. India's Sindhi language does not own any 'region'. This situation makes it even more important to delineate the peculiar limitations in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Sind was the last part of India to be conquered by the British in 1843. Sind was immediately annexed to Bombay's presidency and its separate political identity was lost. The Sindhi script was standardized by the board of the East India Company in 1853 and modern education started only after, mostly in big cities and towns. As it happened everywhere else, the majority of the Muslim population went into a sulk and shunned modern education for a long-time. Hindus' who were a religious minority till that time in Bombay presidency, became a majority overnight and took to modern education in a big way.

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They consequently emerged as an educated middle-class, with professionals and sprinkles of landlords in its fold.

Sindhi students had to go to Calcutta or Bombay for higher-education and they were influenced by the social reform movements that were sweeping across the country. On their return, they tried to emulate these movements, which as a result started a spate of social reform movements in Sind.

This had impact on Sindhi literature as well and the first phase of prose in Sindhi literature was closely linked to social reform movements, followed by movement of the Freedom struggle in India.

During this period, many literary books were translated and adapted. The first original novel, 'Zeenat' in Sindhi language appeared in the year 1885, written by Mirza Kalich Beg.

During the Freedom struggle, three 'All India Congress' sessions were held in Sindh, Karachi, apart from numerous provincial conferences. Shewak Bhaojraj produced two novels during this period, 'Ashirwad' and 'Dada Shyam'.

The milieu and characters was Sindhi, but the thought, content and treatment were not different from the novels written in other Indian languages. 'Itihad' (Unity), a novel written by the first woman writer, Guli Sadrangani, stands out for its bold contemporary theme of inter-religious marriages between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy espousing the cause of communal harmony.

Under popular pressure Sind was separated from Bombay presidency in 1937. And the Partition of India into the two respective states, of India and Pakistan was done in

1947. Thus in the 20th century, the independent existence of Sind was for merely a decade.

Just before and during the Quit India movement, many young students came under the Marxist influence, which made the progressive trend of literature strong in presence in the Sindhi language as well. We do have short stories and poetry but we do not have any novel of that period reflecting that trend till the Partition.

After the Partition of India, a band of Hindu-Sindhi population, mainly consisting of middle-class professionals and traders with some landowners, migrated to India and settled across the length and breadth of the country. However, they settled in some clusters in various states with a variety of languages and traditions.

It would be pertinent to observe that in India, the Sindhi community does not have any peasantry or working-class of any significant number. The present endeavour will be to examine the literature produced in those Sindhi speaking clusters and how Sindhi fiction mirrors this change and varied reality.

After the Partition of the country, the progressive trend of literature continued with full force for more than two decades. The trauma of the Partition and grim struggle for survival was material for many fictional works produced at that time.

In this grim situation, with the struggle for mere survival, writers found hope in changing the social structure, which could be possible only through revolution. With this, the changed geography and breakup of the social-fabric was

depicted in a context which is unique only to the Sindhi population. Simultaneously, the interaction with the people of that particular region was also depicted.

Sundri Uttamchandani's novel 'Kirandara Deewaroon' (Crumbling Walls), in 1953, was the first significant novel after the Partition. The narrative of the novel was along the progressive trend, that was dominant at the time but it also emphasized the changed, liberated and economic empowerment of women, which was the need of the hour in the wake of the country's partition.

When Sindhis reached India as refugees, they were stuffed into barracks that were left vacant by the British Army after the Second World War. The most favoured ones were in the Kalyan area near Bombay. At that time, they were called Kalyan camps.

Now this is called a thriving town of Ulhasnagar. Here the condition in which people were forced to live was sub-human. Life in this town bereft of human dignity, stark poverty and unemployment forms the backdrop of the early novels of Mohan Kalpana.

He has penned nine novels depicting the struggle of unemployed youth, the consequent rejection in his love-life and changing values. Novels by other writers also depicted a similar reality but with a changed geographical background.

In 1952, the Constitution of India was promulgated and later discovered that the Sindhi language was not mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Non-inclusion of the Sindhi language led to a rampant

discrimination against it. Educationists, writers, artists and Sindhi people of India were enraged, and a strong movement began all over India, demanding the inclusion of the Sindhi Language in the Indian Constitution.

Sindhis felt that they had sacrificed their land for the freedom of the country but they were not prepared to sacrifice their rich cultural and literary heritage, which constituted their distinct core identity. Later on, this came to be identified as the 'Sindhiyat' movement and was mainly led by writers and artists.

Many writers and artists were thrown up by this movement, who today are eminent names in their respective fields and many Sahitya Akademi Award winners came into the literary field at the time.

It is a fact it is during the Partition of India, that Sind witnessed the least bloodshed. They left Sind for safety, and the loss accrued by the property left behind was perhaps the most. There were no widespread riots in Sindh. And there were also many instances after the influx of refugees from India, when Sindhi-Hindus were attacked but rescued by their native Muslim neighbours'. Hindus and Muslims had shared weal and woe together for centuries. The Hindus of Sind misread their situation, and thought they left their land because the Partition would prove temporary and they would return to their homes and hearths after the 'bad winds' blew over.

When the realization dawned and it sunk in their psyche, that the Partition was permanent and the doors to their homes were closed forever, the loss of inheritance and all that they held sacred and dear was immense. This

led to more than just nostalgia for the land, people and friendships they lost, which is illustrated with ample expression in many fictional works. This nostalgic trend has now changed into struggle to explore and maintain a separate identity. These issues form the main thrust of fiction of that time.

Gobind Malhi's novel, 'Pakhiara Valran Khan Vichriya' (Birds Lost from the Flock) published in 1953, is about a village life being left behind. The narrative is about the life led by Hindus and Muslims like members of a joint-family in rural Sindh, except for the last one or two years, when the atmosphere was vitiated by a bigoted political fringe. However the protagonist of the novel stubbornly refuses to leave the land of his forefathers.

Gobind Malhi's novel, 'Jin Suri Bhanyeen Sej' (Who Took to Gallows As to A Bed), published in 1959, is a quasi-historical fiction based on the first original short story of the Sindhi language, written by Lalchand Amardinomal in 1914.

It is an account of an armed uprising of Hurs, who at the time were called 'dacoits', but after the Independence, this was viewed as an anti-British crusade and a neglected part of the war for Independence.

Hurs had a unique ethos, wherein they did not harm the poor because their loot was mostly distributed amongst the poor and needy. The locale of this novel was at Makhi Lake in the Sanghar district of Sindh, spread over 1150 square-miles with dense forests around, giving this novel a strong flavour of the soil.

The novel, 'Desi Sena Kajan' (Natives Be Made Kin) published in 1982, takes the fisher-folks colony at the Khar-Danda area in Bombay as its locale. It narrates an intense love story between a Sindhi cloth hawker and a girl belonging to the fishing community. Thus in this novel, the element of nostalgia about Sind and the Sindhi life is absent and the acceptance of a changed reality is portrayed, reflecting the changed reality of life and its dynamism.

As Sindhis in India were struggling to maintain their distinct identity through language, literature and culture across the border, Sind suffered a heavy blow to its existence as a geographical entity, as all the provinces in Pakistan were merged into one unit as West Pakistan.

This created a popular upsurge and the 'Jiye Sindh' movement to free Sind from Pakistan came to the fore. In this way the Sindhi language and land itself were under threat and this common threat echoed across the borders. Mohan Kalpna's three novels 'Jala Watan' (An Exile) written in 1974, 'Maa' (Mother) written in 1979 and his novel, 'Kaaon ain Samundu' (Crow and the Sea) written in 1981, used a technique of flashback which he employed to alternate between his childhood and his early youth in Karachi and Ulhasnagar, where he lived all his life in India. So, his novels touch upon the travails of the Sindhis across the border and the 'Jiye Sind' movement.

Lal Pushp calls his trilogy, the 'Autobiography-Novel and History', as it also contains memories of his childhood in Larkana, Sind and his days of struggle in Kalyan Camps (Ulhasnagar) as a backdrop, although the treatment of the work is fictional. In his narrative, he often lapses from

present to past keeping with his avowedly modernist style. Krishin Khatwani's novel, 'Tarandar Badala' (Floating Clouds) published in 1998, seriously deals with the future of language without land. While intellectuals of the community were battling to retain their distinct identity, the Sindhi Community fell in pursuit of economic security, making money as its one-point agenda, in the process of leaving their language, way of life and old values behind. Globalization has hastened this process in all other languages as well. While, in the case of Sindhis, they do not have their villages and this factor becomes critical. The writer is conscious of this situation and the dilemma of confronting the community.

In one story, Sujata, a Marathi journalist from the western costal region of Maharashtra and Hem, a Sindhi intellectual and a journalist are in a relationship. The novel contains captivating pictures of lush green hillocks spread along the western coastal regions of Maharashtra during the monsoon season. Ultimately, the quest for his moorings leads him to a village in a Sindhi speaking area in Kutch, where he learns that on moonless night people cross the border, so with a connivance of authorities from both sides, he slips into his native soil.

Sindhis have spread all across the globe and this fiction tale also transcended the national boundaries of the nation and region. Kala Prakash's novel, 'Arsee a Aado' (In front of a Mirror), won her the Sahitya Akademi Award. With Dubai as the story's background, her novel 'Pakhan Jee Preet' is about a love affair between a Sindhi Muslim boy and a Sindhi girl, who go and settle in Sind at a fictional place called 'Mohabat Dero' (Abode of Love).

As it is often said, that the concept of India as a nation is still 'work-in-progress' in the cultural and literary sense, the interaction within the languages has remained constant throughout the ages and at a deeper level many currents and cross-currents are evident. In fact, historically the concept of a nation state as it emerged in Europe in the wake of the post-political- cultural and Industrial Revolution, currently with the emergence of the common European market, this has been to a great extent quite diluted. It exists almost as a hangover.

The 'Space Revolution' ushered within the last years of the twentieth century has lent a new and significant dimension to the entire scenario. The Internet and modern technology has rendered all borders meaningless. In social-media, every participant is a writer and a reader at the same time. This has led to the democratization of the medium of expression. Cyberspace recognizes neither borders nor distance.

All this time, the relationship between a region and language has remained intimate but does it matter in cyberspace? Soon we will have e-libraries and other platforms to have access to a plethora of cultural treasures. So, in time to come will this entire discussion about region and nation be redundant?

(Presented at a Sahitya Akademi Seminar on 'Region and Nation Fiction', New Delhi, 2015)

Chapter 8 ABOUT MY CREATIVE PROCESS

Let me begin with the confession that I do not know about my own creative process. Like the processes of the creation of this universe, this is also shrouded in some sort of mystery. A flash comes from somewhere and from thereafter the weaving process starts. All of this is a conscious process.

Every craft calls for some kind of training, the same is true for literature as well. I don't believe that it is a God-given gift, as one does need to put in some effort to master the technique. At the same time, it is also true that mastering the technique alone is not sufficient to create a good work of art. The master craftsman endowed with creative faculties and imagination is able to elevate his work to a position of 'Art'. It is a complex phenomenon indeed and as it is often said, "*Genius is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration.*"

On that note, I shall begin narrating my journey. My first short story was published in the year 1955, in the prestigious progressive literary magazine, 'Naeen Duniya'. At the time, I was merely 17 years of age and were very difficult times.

In the aftermath of the Partition of the country, as a

displaced community, Sindhis were passing through the harrowing phase of their personal history. The word 'despair' would not be adequate to describe the situation prevailing then. The community needed to be infused with hope in a 'hopeless' situation. It needed to be inspired with the prospect of impending change.

It was thought that a 'Socialist Revolution' was around the corner, and that thought offered some hope. In such a situation, it was natural that writers were drawn to the 'progressive' trend in literature. But how the promised revolution lost its way somewhere along the way is but another story.

From progressive literature, we gravitated to Marxist philosophy but had a very rudimentary understanding of its complexities, the multi-layered dynamics of society and the historical perspectives it encompassed.

At that time everything was either black or white. It did not admit any shades of grey in between. It took us quite some time to understand the multi-dimensional character of an idea, incident, event or even a personality.

At that time the question for Art's sake seemed to be decisively settled in favour of 'Art' for life's sake. During the Freedom Movement and many social reform movements, literature was perceived to be a vehicle of social-change and a progressive trend in literature, which is a point of view that was fully subscribed to. At that time, the pen was truly considered to be mightier than a sword.

However in retrospect, we now realize how naive we were. I continued my association with the Sindhi Sahit Mandal,

a nursery for upcoming writers. A forum was arranged for young and upcoming Sindhi writers, where veteran writer and literary historian, Prof MU. Malkani, presided and mentored a new generation of Sindhi writers.

I continued as joint secretary continuously for three years. Every Saturday evening, writers would meet and present their creations for collective criticism and evaluation. This proved to be a very useful learning ground and a source of inspiration for those who would like to present their new creations often.

At that time, I used to write short stories and satires, which would regularly be published in 'Naeen Duniya'. Soon a weekly magazine called, 'Sindhu Dhara', acted as a mouthpiece for the movement. Consequently, a 'Sindhyaat' was started and I became a part of it and contributed articles for it.

As one knows now, the Sindhi language which was not included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution hence being denied its rightful place. So, a mass movement to include the Sindhi language began and I became a part of it and acted as one of the ideologues of this movement to provide that ideological thrust.

As an activist, I contributed many articles. In time, I was attracted to literary criticism and research, which I had published in 'Naeen Duniya' and later on was published as a collection titled 'Ja Chitayam Chita Mein'.

At some point in time, I realized that, '*If people ignore their history, history also ignores them*'. I stated looking for a cohesive timeline for the history of Sind and requested

many known scholars to write such a book.

Ultimately, I decided to this job myself and came up with 'A Brief Introduction to History of Sind', which was published in Hindi and English as well. This book has been well-received and was awarded by the Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language and Literature.

Then, I realized that the prose had become heavy with superfluous verbiage. So, I gravitated to poetry, where an idea or emotion could be expressed with the utmost economy of words. Thus, two collections of poetry have been published which have received a critical acclaim.

In this age of globalization and market economy, the affluent and aspiring sections of society, whatever be their language, is deserting their mother-tongue.

At the same time, language does not fear the prospect of extinction when it possesses a landmass, geographical entity and villages. This is not the case with the Sindhi language in India. The fact that this tiny community of less than half a percent of the total population of the country is scattered across the length and breadth of India, combined with the fact the its economic visibility makes it most vulnerable, and Sindhi education has become almost extinct, is a cause for concern.

This has created a situation that, in order to reinforce our linguistic and cultural identity, we have to take recourse to audiovisual media. Electronic-media being an economically un-viable proposition in present time is the only option available to us.

It is with this background, the collection of plays called, 'Ta Khaban Jo Cha Thindo' (What Shall become of Dreams) was written. While 'Sindhu Dhara' is a multi-art fusion which combines dance, music, drama, and documentary visuals, which brings episodes from the history of Sind before the audience.

This has been brought to stage by the internationally renowned dancer Anila Sunder and has been performed at most of the places where Sindhi-language speaking people live in a sizable number in India and abroad.

Another feminist ballet which deals with gender issues as its core, is written by my Zala Kadhen Zeva – Kadhen Zabera also has been produced by her and is enjoying success.

The one act play, 'Ta Khawaban Jo Cha Thindo', deals with the difficulties and frustrations of amateur stage artists, who in spite of all the odds stacked against them, follow what their hearts' dictate. The same is true of all art forms and even literature. Every artist or writer or poet has a dream which impels them to follow their calling, pay a heavy price for the prime reason that languages and art is not considered a vocation from which one could make a decent living, in our society. It is a life full of struggle merely to chase a dream.

Friends, as stated earlier in India, my language is facing a difficult time, but across the border in Sindh, live more than 30 million Sindhi-speaking people of various ages, tastes and persuasions, where a great body of literature is being produced and read. Only if a

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free-flow of literature was allowed across the border, it will usher in an era full of friendship and confidence in the future thus freeing us from prejudices.

I am sure people of both sides are ready to embrace each other, but are either respective governments ready? I am an incorrigible optimist and I am sure that day is not very far.

(Presented at the Sahitya Akademi Award Ceremony, in March 2013)

Chapter 9

KIRAT BABANI: LIFE AND LITERATURE

Kirat Babani was born on 3rd January 1922 in a small village of the Nawabshah district in Sind, and took his final breath on 7th May 2015 in Mumbai.

His life encompassed nearly one century of staggeringly fast changes ever witnessed in human history. The last century was multilayered with the time and space concept. So as a result, we are living simultaneously in many time-warps, from the bullock -cart to the mythological to the space age.

Kirat Babani's life was intricately entwined with the main issues of his time. In this brief note, only an important few could be mentioned about his life, struggles and his literary contributions. His life was the stuff of which legends are made and for this passage, will be illustrated in two phases:

One, before the Partition of the country and the second, after the Partition. While he was studying in a school at Nawabshah, the Freedom Movement was sweeping across the country. His teacher, Mr. Rochiram Thawani, imbued him with the patriotic sentiment at a very tender age, which enabled his leadership qualities to come to the fore.

He started organizing processions for students of the school for the Freedom marches, organized protest strikes in schools, led the protest marches and eluded the police that chased them. Being a bright student, after his Matriculation he had to go to Karachi for his university education. In 1942, when Gandhiji gave the call for "British Quit India", it was almost as if the entire country was seized with a patriotic frenzy.

Some youth even abandoned the path of non-violence and indulged in revolutionary activities. Kirat Babani was one of those who were drawn towards such activities. Due to his role in the Freedom Movement, he had to undergo a prison sentence by the British Government.

At that time, jails were crammed with the Freedom fighters who cherished many contending ideologies and it became a fertile ground for in-depth discussions and self introspection.

While in jail, he came under the influence of the charismatic, Sobho Gianchandani, who initiated him to the study of Marxism and when he came out, he was a convinced Marxist and one of the few early youth who joined the Communist Party in Sindh.

At the same time he remained active in student politics. He remained the General Secretary of the 'All India Sind Congress Students Union' (1942-46) and the Vice-President of the 'All India Students Congress'.

After 1947, as a member of the Communist Party, he plunged into the Trade Union Movement. He had a literary bend of mind and was also one of the founders of

the Progressive Writers' Organization of Sindh, as well as editor of the socio-literary periodical 'Sadaqat'.

For his trade-union activities, he was imprisoned by the Government of Pakistan for about 11 months. After being released from prison, he joined the leader of the Peasant Movement in Sindh. All throughout this period he was being shadowed by government agencies. Finally, as a way of getting rid of this 'menace', he was deported from Pakistan in 1950.

After coming to India, the formal association with the Communist Party of India was for a brief period, but all his life he remained a committed Marxist and party sympathizer.

Sindhyat Movement

Here it is necessary to give a brief account of this movement in India. As stated earlier, during the Freedom Movement, people from various ideologies came under the umbrella of the Congress Party.

Ideologically, it was sought to be pulled into various different directions by leaders who all had different leanings. But the Partition of India was a repudiation of the basic principle of the Unity of the Indian people, irrespective of their religious allegiances.

Partition was a political reality which was based on the primacy of religion rather than a concept of a secular nation.

At that time, the leaders of Sind who were at the helm thought that India's political pivot will also shift to religion

and being of a majority of religions, it would reap the political benefits at a national level, therefore they did not want to be perceived merely as 'Sindhi leaders'.

In this situation, they advised the Sindhi population which was displaced in India, to merge with the local population and erase their distinct identity.

They felt that the promise for the future of India was based on the linguistic provinces, remaining only a historically irrelevant piece of paper, but this did not happen. While the Constitution was being framed in the Constitution assembly, the question of language assumed great importance. Hindi could be declared as the 'official language' only through casting votes.

In order to assuage the feelings of non-Hindi speaking representatives, the Eighth Schedule was inserted to enumerate the languages on which 'official Hindi' would draw on, so the speakers of one particular state did not get undue edge over another.

However, after the implementation of the Constitution for all practical purposes, only languages included in the Eighth Schedule were considered for promotions and safeguarding. Sindhi did not get a place in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, which led to discrimination against Sindhi-teaching institutes.

This anomaly was considered a wilful default by the Sindhi representatives and was resented by educationists, writers and intellectuals, who considered the preservation of a language as a means to preserve their distinct identity. At the same time, the clamour for linguistic states gathered

momentum and the importance of language as an issue came to the forefront of political discourse. The young trio of Gobind Malhi, AJ Uttam and Kirat Babani emerged to lead this movement and remained in the vanguard. Strangely the leaders who had opposed this movement, after the reorganization of India on the basis of linguistic states, found themselves completely isolated and tried to usurp this platform.

Initially, conferences to demand the inclusion of the Sindhi language in the Eighth Schedule were held in Bombay, but with the passage of time after 1957, the conferences were held on an all India-level from which the 'Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli ain Sahitya Sabha' emerged.

It is needless to stress that Malhi Uttam and Kirat remained the important driving force behind this organization. He was the President of the Sabha from 1972 to 1997 for a full twenty-five years, the period during which the Sabha crossed many milestones.

Movement for retention of the Sindhi script

In the aftermath of the Partition and the mass-exodus to India, the Sindhi leaders advised the community to merge with the local communities and forget about their separate, distinctive linguistic and cultural identities.

In this context, the present Sindhi script which evolved from the Persio-Arabic characters became an eyesore for those leaders. In fact, they derived their ideological inspiration from a Hindu communal faction in the Freedom Movement that had raised the slogan, '*Hindi- Hindu- Hindustan*'.

They stood for a Hindu theocratic unitary state, envisaging

the Devanagari script for all Indian languages. In this way, even as the influx from Pakistan was continuing, a group of about 30 people petitioned to the Government of India at the time, to change the script of the Sindhi language to Devanagari script.

Without applying any thought, the government obliged the leaders in the ruling dispensation. Thus, the Sindhi language was made the first casualty in this thoughtless move and this act outraged the entire community. So educationists, writers and public figures came out against this wanton move which would potentially destroy all existing literature and rupture the entire process of education.

The government retracted against the ill-advised move, by taking the stand that it was an internal matter of the Sindhi community and hence allowed the use of both scripts.

The Partition of the country was made by politicians but the Partition of language, culture and history was not acceptable to writers and the enlightened intelligentsia of the community, so they started a vigorous move against the Devanagari script for the Sindhi language.

Kirat Babani was the first flag-bearer in this movement and brought out the first pamphlet with cogent arguments against the imposition of the Devanagari script for the Sindhi language.

He continued to lead the protest innumerable times at various occasions and remained committed to this idea of composite culture literature and language all his life.

Having rejected this move for nearly half a century and seeing that this question had become redundant in the face of the community, he opened the doors of 'Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli ain Sahit Sabha' to writers who due to personal reasons had to support the Devanagari script, but continued to write in the traditional Sindhi script to avoid continuing schism within the writers' fraternity.

His Commitment to the Jiye-Sind Movement (Sind)

Kirat Babani had a historical sense and knew that the linguistic and cultural borders would more or less remain constant, but the political borders kept on changing. He was convinced that the present Partition of India was unnatural and Sindhis on both sides of the border compromised on 'nationality' in the same way. But, he was not prepared to sever the connection with his native land. After Bangladesh came into existence, the theory of religion being the basis of a nation came to the fore, which was the *raison d'être* of Pakistan.

Sindhis in Sind had suffered cultural and political alienation and were (and are) considered as second-class citizens. This gave rise to the 'Jiye Sind movement' led by the legendary Sindhi leader, G M. Sayed.

This movement sought freedom from the shackles of the state of Pakistan. He became a strong supporter of this movement and all the books of G.M. Sayed which could not be published in Pakistan were published by him in India. He worked virtually as a secretary to G.M. Sayed, when he was invited by Rajiv Gandhi for parleys in India. He was closely associated with the publication of the periodicals: 'Sind Rises' (English) and 'Sind Sujag', for 17 long years, which focused on the alienation of Sindhis of Sind and

their discrimination at various levels. It also reflected their struggle against the present unjust regime.

He had a brief formal association with the Communist Party of India, but he remained active in all progressive and socialist forums and organizations.

- He was associated with the Indo-Soviet Cultural and Friendship Society and remained the Vice-President of that organization for quite some time. He also wrote a book on Lenin and won the 'Soviet Land Nehru' award, which enabled him to visit the Soviet Union in 1980.
- He was the secretary of the Bombay unit of the 'All India Peace and Solidarity Movement', and visited Czechoslovakia in that capacity.
- He was the President of the Bombay branch of the Indo -Polish Friendship Association.
- He was associated with the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association and had many distinguished personalities as friends, some of them being Mulk Raj Anand, Khawaja Ahmed Abbas, Balraj Sahani, A.K. Hangal and many others.

Before the Partition of the country he was one amongst the socially conscious writers, who had just started as a creative writer.

In India, after the Partition the community life was in shambles and despair reigned all around. At that time, it was imperative to infuse the community with hope and courage and it was this band of young writers who came forward to shoulder this responsibility through their creative writing work.

Thus writers started meeting each other and regular literary sessions came into existence, which were formalized as 'Naon (New) Sahit Mandal', later named 'Sindhi Sahit Mandal'.

Those meetings were attended by some old writers, one of them was, Prof. M U Malkani, who became a mentor to young writers and continued to inspire them for many years. Writers needed a platform to publish their writing and thus the progressive literary publication magazine, 'Naeen Duniya' was resumed. In the initial years, keeping in with the credo of the collective workings of Marxist philosophy, this magazine had an editorial board and Kirat Babani from the year 1950 -55, till it was taken over on private basis by AJ Uttam.

Kirat Babani has 18 books to his credit. His three collections of short stories are named 'Hoo a' (That Lady) in 1956, 'Na Laila Na Majnu' (Neither Laila nor Majnu) in 1987 and 'Awhan Sabu Nanga Ahiyo' (You all are Naked) in 1993.

One of his early short-stories, 'Chunu Munui' has proved to be very popular till this day. In this story, a sense of deprivation is shown of an employee paid a low-wage by a businessman, which is juxtaposed in bold relief against the ostentatious living-style of his employer, who spends extravagant amounts of money for the wedding of his child's dolls.

In feudal society, some people acquire a status of being divinely inspiring (Malang). One such story is written by 'Mohmed Ram' depicting a character that has immunity to say anything while being divinely intoxicated. Such characters have played a role in history as the safety valves of their period. Mohmed Ram in his characteristic way

completely exposes the duplicity and hypocrisy of the local feudal lord.

His short story 'Ain Goth Ghum Thee Wyo' (A Village that was Lost) is about the cruelty of the military operations in the villages of Sindh, where some suspected sympathizers of the 'Jiye Sind movement' were rumoured to be in hiding. The entire village was destroyed by the military in that wanton operation.

His short stories move along a simple narrative without indulging in post-modernist intellectual acrobatics. It requires great maturity to be simple.

In the immediate aftermath of the Partition, when the community was confined to a 'camp life', writers would go to them and organize literary meets where they would read their short-stories and poems to instil a sense of hope in the atmosphere of hopelessness.

Singers like Shivo Ramnani would lend their melodious yet intense voices to sing inspirational songs of the 'Ipta', which would then be translated by the budding poets of the time: Krishin Rahi, Moti Prakash or any other poet.

Plays were staged under the auspices of the 'Sindhi Sahit Mandal'. Sticking to the Marxist credo of collective workings, the plays were collectively written, directed and enacted by the writers themselves.

Kirat Babani was the leading spirit behind all such cultural activities. Half-hour Sindhi programmes used to be broadcast every Sunday and Kirat Babani wrote many radio plays during that period.

In 1972, his collection of plays 'Soori a Sadu Kayo' (Call of the Gallows) was published. His play on the martyr of 1942, Hemu Kalani, has been staged many times, all over India in settlements where Sindhis reside. His full-length play 'Dharti a Jo Pyar' (Love for Land) won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2006.

In one column 'Before a Mirror' he asserts:

"I am a proud inheritor of the ancient heritage of the Mohen Jo Daro (Indus Valley Civilization) but the Mohen Jo daro is not just an ancient monument".

This multi-layered statement clearly spells his attitude towards life and his positive value-structure. In literature, one also questions the values that occupy a prime place and in his book of literary criticism which was aptly titled 'The Question of Values in Literature' in 1974, he reaffirms his 'faith in the dictum of literature for life and rejects the principle of art for art's sake'.

He believes that literature has a social role to play and it should be infused by positive and progressive values. His heroes have the capacity to challenge their times and do not crumble under the weight of the circumstances. His book of literary criticism 'Okha Dokha' (Critical Appraisal) was published in 1980.

While, his book of criticism on the short story 'Pehi Manaj Pattar' (Going Deep into the Roots) was published in 1985. He believed folk-literature to be a parallel history of the masses which depicted their hopes, dreams, aspirations and victories of the weak against the powerful tyrants.

In the flow of time and change of place, something is

lost and something else is found, depending on the circumstances.

His consciousness impelled him to look into the realm of Sindhi folk-stories and he collected folk-tales published under the title 'Abol Rani' in 1982. He edited a book of Sindhi folk-tales on behalf of the Sahitya Akademi in 1990. His auto-biography was divided into four parts 'Kuju Budhayum Kuju Likayum' (Reveal Something and Conceal Something) published in 1997-98 and has been reprinted in Sind (Pakistan) in one volume by the Sind Prachar Publication in Karachi.

A foreword written by the eminent Sindhi Nationalist leader, Abdul Wahib Areesar, and an introduction by Sheikh Ayaz was included. In the beginning, a verse by Tajal Bewas was given, which reads:

*"Kirat Tuhinjo Kadu- Hekando hallar Jiyan
Ijho Una Jo Adu - Kando Chanw Karar te."*

This translates to:

*"Kirat your height is as high as the pinnacle of Halar- Soon,
and its half is going to cast shadow on Karaar"*

Being editor, thinker and leader of the movement, Kirat also had the heart of a poet and wrote short stories and literary criticism. He published his book of free verse 'Likyo Likyum Piye' in 1999.

He used to get many letters from important persons who were active in the Sindhi movement in India and also from Sindhis in other parts of world.

He collected those letters for posterity and published a

volume called 'Parado So Sadu' (Echo is Same as Call) in the year 2004. He penned historic memoirs of the Sindhyat movement and about his role in the 'Sindhi Boli ain Sahitya Sabha' in the volume titled 'Sindhyat Jo Safar' (Journey of Sindhyat) in 2006. I feel privileged to be one of the co-writers for this venture.

His book on the great personality, Lenin, and his history may not be counted as a piece of literary/creative literature, but it is still an important contribution in that specific genre, similar to his book about world peace 'Aman Je Ufaq Dahan' (Towards Horizon of Peace).

He also has some important translations to take credit for, which include Mulkraj Raj Anand's 'Coolie, Gorky's Malwa' and the History of Marathi Literature written by Kusmavati Deshpande and MV Rajyadaksha.

He was forcibly exiled from Sind by the Government of Pakistan in 1950. So, all his life he yearned to touch the sacred soil of his native land: Sind.

As for his death, he proudly defied the mighty government and his remains were immersed in the Sindhu River by the Writers' Fraternity, thus asserting the unity of Sindhi life, literature, culture and history, a conviction he stood by all his life.

The Sind assembly created a history when it mourned his death. Thus, he left a legacy in the irony of politics and for the existence of Pakistan. I was privileged to be his comrade in arms for nearly six decades.

(Paper translated into English and presented in Sindhi at Sahitya Akademi Seminar, 2015)

Chapter 10

A J. UTTAM AND SINDHI LITERATURE

A J Uttam was a true Sindhi communist writer. Here I would like to underline the words 'communist' and 'Sindhi writer'. These two words need to be explained in their proper context, before I try to delve into the personality traits of A J Uttam, as a person and as a consequence, of his literary philosophy and contributions to Sindhi Literature. In Marxist discourse, the two words that are frequently mentioned are 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat'. These two words are part of a class equation. Bourgeoisie is a section of landed gentry, which comes at the tail-end of landed gentry. It cherishes and aspires for all the values of the upper-class and tries to ape it.

The upper-landed gentry at times patronize it and according to their convenience spurn it in turn. It was expected that in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, this class will be alienated from the land and form the work-force thus merging with the working-class and become a part of the 'Proletariat'. This class will have capital of only their labour. They will realize that it is a surplus value which creates capital. In this process the bourgeoisie will have to 'declass' itself and adopt the values of the working-class. Due to its past experiences and managerial skills, this class will form the vanguard of

the socialist-revolution. In this way, for every communist it becomes incumbent to 'declass' himself/herself as well.

At a young age, Uttam was drawn towards the 'Freedom struggle'. He suffered imprisonment and became a communist. As a consequence, in order to declass himself as needed by his ideology, he did just that. He abandoned all the vestige and values typical of an affluent 'Sind working' mercantile, the family which does not even have a distant connection with the 'Freedom movement', let alone a communist ideology.

As said by the Sindhi poet, Krishin Rahi, *"from 1941 this scion of the Uttamchandani family, who established the Jaslok Hospital in Bombay, started life devoted to public causes and literature."*⁶

According to the traditional values of expression, it was a 'civilized' and courteous way of discourse to criticize the opponent in a roundabout way and through the usage of euphemisms. Civilized society has many wise and 'useful' proverbs for every occasion to express such sentiments such as, *"Naang be mare Lath Be na Bajhe"* which means *"You kill the snake and not let your stick break"*.

While writing a monograph of eminent poet, Lekhraj Aziz, for the Sahitya Akademi, he himself quotes Aziz in saying, *"In those days we used to hit each other in such a manner that he would be happy instead of being infuriated by it."*

In contrast, the uneducated, rustic villager was more honest and transparent in his expression than anyone else. He does not disguise his love or anger under fancy words of

6 Sindhiyat Jo Upasak Uttam, Page167

wisdom. He is true to himself and others and is forthright and blunt in his expression. A villager follows the dictum of the great Sufi poet of Sind, Sachal Sarmast, who has said, "*Sachu tha marda chawan- khi khe wane nanvane - Koori dostia do jo dam hane na hanè*", which translates to, "*Verily! Truth speaks of brave men- some may like it or some may not- but may he not vouch for false friendship.*"

In the process of declassing himself, Uttam gave up the mannerisms of the middle-class hypocrisy and in expression of his views. It was his quality of expressing undisguised truths which remained his strength as well as weakness. As it cost him many close relationships in a society which was unaccustomed to accept unalloyed -bitter truths, but preferred every word to be sugar-coated and spoken with a sweet-tongue.

In the same process, he reduced his needs to the mere essentials for existence. It was necessary for any revolutionary to focus only on the goal and not to admit anything extraneous or views of his thinking. This aptly leads to rigidity of conviction. He had to adhere to these tenets while living a middle-class life. It was this contradiction of his convictions and the society he lived in, which were often at odds with each other. It was tragic indeed but the question is whose tragedy? Was it a tragedy of the individual or society in which he lived!

The fourth decade of the last century witnessed a fierce phase in 'India's Freedom movement'. The call of Mahatma Gandhi for the 'Quit India motion' in 1942 proved to be a catalyst in this long struggle. Many young people, due to their activities were imprisoned and the one in

Hyderabad (Sindh) was Assan Jetanand Uttamchandani. When he came out of prison, he emerged as a convinced communist. In Hyderabad, the Late Comrade Hyderbux Jatoi was a stalwart of the 'Peasant movement'.

It was under his tutelage that Assan Uttamchandani got his early training for the communist struggle. In this way, his upbringing as a communist was different and quite stern compared to the two figures, Kirat Babani and Gobind Malhi, who were to form the '*Trimurti*' of the 'Progressive Literary movement' of Sindhi literature and language in India.

Uttam was trained to work on the labour front or among peasantry. Unfortunately, some time before the Partition of the country, the communal virus had started inflecting the political climate in Sind and since there were no Sindhi-Hindus in the labour or peasant class, it fell upon Uttam to work among the student wing. There, he consolidated student power and established a group of writers who were all forward-looking and humanist writers and could share a common platform.

In this way he could attract some up-and-coming writers towards the 'progressive' thought. Eminent progressives of that time such as Hashu Kewalramani and Sobho Gianchandani also often took part in the discussions along with the eminent writers of the Sindhi language at that time like Prof Lekhraj 'Aziz', N R. Malkani and Hyderbux Jatoi, in those meetings. He credibly handled the job as the editor of the College Magazine 'Phulely'. This way a committed communist worked in a literary field, instead of the labour front or among peasantry. All this led to yet another anomaly. After the Partition of the

country only this door was open to Uttam.

Here it needs to be reiterated as per the value structure imbibed by Uttam, that historically all values were relative, but in regard to moral-values and values of principles they were all sacrosanct and non-negotiable. The differences between 'truth' and 'untruth' was less than even a razor's edge. It did not admit any ambiguity or shades of grey. The 'truth' and 'untruth' were not two banks of a river, but a river on which one can swim or negotiate. In his value structure there was no middle path which wise people often recommend.

Therefore, it is necessary to put the movement of the Sindhyat in proper context. During the, 'Freedom struggle' of India, many ideologies contended under the umbrella organization of the Indian National Congress. Some were of the opinion that the future of India should be on a unitary basis and on the model of the Moghul Empire: Hindu 'nationalists' wanted to establish 'Akhand Bharat'. Some progressive groups recognized the diversity of India, its languages and cultures and sought to divide India along the distinct linguist lines as the British had sought to create provinces as per the expediency of their conquests of the various parts of India, which was quite illogical.

In 1894, delegates from Andhra had objected to being lumped together with Tamils (or what they called Madrasis). After a long internal discussion along years, the Congress passed a resolution in favour of states being organized on a linguistic basis in independent India. Unfortunately, in the final years, the question of Urdu and Hindi assumed centrality, which became one of the moving factors behind the creation of Pakistan and the

question of other languages remained on the backburner. While framing the Constitution, all languages on which the linguistic states could be established, were enumerated in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Sind had no region in India and therefore it did not find a place in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

By 1955, the pivot of politics had changed from religion to language and as a consequence of a mass upsurge for the creation of linguistic states, it was finally done. At that juncture, Sindhi Congress leaders who had remained apathetic to the demands of the Sindhi people for the inclusion of the Sindhi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution slowly gravitated towards this movement.

During Jawaharlal Nehru's regime, this demand could not be met because in his understanding, language and land were intricately linked

The flow of life is unceasing. It is a continuous flow; if it meets no obstacles, it breaches various places and makes its own pathways. At the time of the Partition, though leaders had abdicated their responsibility and advised the community to merge with the local population, it was ignored because it was a living society, with a dynamism and momentum that could not be contained. It had students, teachers, writers, journalists and social-workers in its fold.

They started to pick up the broken threads of life and then life resumed with its flow. The Sindhi community maintained its distinct identity and in the process language became the core identity amidst the prevailing sense of gloom.

Communists believed that after the Independence, the

socialist-revolution was around the corner. They promised a change in the situation and a herald of new dawn in which all pain, despair and disparities would disappear. They set out to bring a hope and message of cheer to depressed masses. They started creating a literature of hope and a bright future. The awaited socialist-revolution lost its way somewhere, but their commitment to the cause of the Sindhi community remained life-long. They believed that Sindhis had a distinct identity which needed to be preserved. They formed the vanguard of the movement for the inclusion of the Sindhi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, thus a 'Trimurti' of the young progressive writers: Malhi, Uttam and Kirat, emerged to lead this country-wide movement.

After migrating to India, when Uttam realized that the only avenue open to him was working on the literary front, so he wrote an article in 1951 entitled 'Adad ain Zindagi' (Life and Literature). This could be considered as his literary manifesto. It is on the basis of his understanding of the role of literature that one needs to assess his success or failure. To accuse him of not measuring up to the demands of other ideologies will be doing an injustice to him.

At the same time, one has the full liberty to hold a contrary ideology and differ with him. The points of his 'literary manifesto' may be summarized as under:

1. Literature is intrinsically linked to life. According to Aristotle, *'Only beasts and angels can live without society.'*
2. It is the human mind that creates any art. But the mind for its input does not depend on supernatural power for inspiration, but the

thought is product of experience, education, traditions and a social ethos. As the level of education increases and scope of his experiences widens, his ideas grow accordingly. It affects his writings as well. In that case, how can his writing be without any purpose? Writers consciously or unconsciously, knowingly or unknowingly, align themselves with progressive or orthodox-regressive values of their time. The question of this being neutral is meaningless.

3. There is always a struggle between the progressive forces and regressive forces in society and a true writer has to be one with the progressive forces, which move the society in which he lives forward and oppose reactionary forces which seek to hold back the progress of society.
4. Society is divided into classes based on the mode of production. Society has progressed as the mode of production has progressed. The section of society that leads the society to progress has been present in society all along and that has to be identified as a progressive force.
5. Common life produces all the wealth and sustenance for a writer along with his creative abilities.
6. The literature that has been produced makes it incumbent on the writer to meet the demands of his time.
7. It is absolutely essential to guard against his literature from being degenerated to mere propaganda.
8. Any worthwhile thought, which is not well-expressed or expressed clumsily, will lose its efficacy.

(The above quotations are taken from his article published in the Naeen

Duniya in 1951. The selection and numbering are of my own order.)

His literary life was multi-faceted and he contributed to the growth of Sindhi literature in many ways:

- As an activist
- As an editor and journalist
- Essayist
- A critic who wrote on the literary contribution of various writers
- As a creative writer
- As a dedicated person, who devoted all his best abilities towards all he did to achieve it.

Uttam as an activist

Uttam did his Masters in Economics, soon after migrating to India but for some time he was settled at Baroda. He came to Bombay and started working for the Secretariat for the Government of Bombay. At the same time, he re-established contacts with his old company of Sindhi Writers and established 'Naon Sahit Mandal', which after some time was changed to 'Sindhi Sahit Mandal'.

Under the guidance of the veteran writer, M U. Malkani, this organization was to play a very important role in the perseverance and furtherance of Sindhi literature in post-Partition India. It proved to be a pioneer of the movement, which in time to come was known as the 'Sindhyaat Movement'.

It was this organization that initiated a movement for the inclusion of the Sindhi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Initially, conferences at the local level at Bombay were held. Uttam remained a leading figure and secretary of this organization for many years.

A GATEWAY TO SINDHI LITERATURE

In the year 1956 a delegation of Sindhi writers, led by Prof. M U. Malkani attended the Asian Writers Conference held in New Delhi.

This activated the Sindhi Samaj of Delhi and in the year 1957, a convention of Sindhi writers and other sections of the society were held at an all-India level.

In the second convention, held in 1959 at Nagpur, it was decided to give a shape to the permanent body to highlight the educational, literary and cultural concerns of the community, while the main demand remained the inclusion of Sindhi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Uttam was elected the General Secretary of the provisional committee and in 1960, the Sabha came into existence as a registered body. Uttam continued to be the General Secretary for many years to come.

During that period the workings of the Sabha used to be in the hands of the General Secretary and the role of the President was mainly confined to presiding over meetings. In this period, Uttam laid a healthy foundation of conventions for the working of the Sabha and he dedicated all his energies to nurture this Institution.

Uttam rose to the occasion whenever the circumstances demanded. In the history of the Sabha, there came a phase when Gobind Malhi was the General Secretary and Prof. B.H. Nagrani was the President, and a *samelan* could not be convened for many years. At that time, Uttam came to the fore and volunteered the responsibility to organize the *samelan*, which he did successfully at Alwar (Rajasthan).

There have been many such instances of his commitment and dedication to the movement. He was a part of the 'Progressive Writers' Movement' of India and he was honoured for his role at Lucknow.

Uttam as an editor and a journalist

When speaking about the editor of a literary magazine, one does not speak about the editor as a journalist but as a literary contribution. If Uttam were simply an editor of the literary magazine 'Naeen Duniya', it would have been quite in order, but apart from 'Naeen Duniya', he edited 'Sindhu Dhara', 'Sindhu Samachar', and 'Jhulelal' for quite some years. They all were a part of the broader movement of Sindhyat.

In 1949, Naeen Duniya as a progressive socio-literary magazine was restarted in India. Till 1957, it continued to have a collective editorial board as per the Marxist credo and Uttam continued to be its member. In 1957, when the editorial board was faced with financial difficulties, the magazine was discontinued but Uttam volunteered to take the responsibility of running it as an individual without compromising its ideology on a personal basis, which he continued successfully for many years.

It was the same case with the 'Sindhu Dhara'. When friends associated with it decided to discontinue it, Uttam came to the fore, enthused his friends and took responsibility to run it with whatever help they could offer in any form. This magazine also continued to be published till 'Sindhi Samachar' (a daily) came on the scene.

Due to the unfortunate accident of the Late Mr. Dayal Motwani, who was the spirit behind 'Jhulelal', published in Ahmedabad, Uttam continued to edit the same from Bombay.

A GATEWAY TO SINDHI LITERATURE

Naeen Duniya played an important role in the history of Sindhi literature and was considered by writers as-a-coming of age matter of prestige, if their writing was published in the 'Naeen Duniya'. More than 500 short stories, 200 essays and over 1000 poems have been published in 'Naeen Duniya', which was also the magazine responsible for starting the practice of offering token payments to writers.

The special issues of 'Naeen Duniya' are an important resource material for research scholars, even today. Some of the special issues of 'Naeen Duniya' which merit attention and mention are:

01. Shah Sachal Sami -year 1962.
02. International Literature Issue- year 1964.
03. Jawaharlal Nehru Issue- year 1964.
04. Short Stories of Krishin Khatwani- year 1964.
05. Short Stories of Sundri Uttamchandani- year 1964.
- 06. International Short Story Issue- year 1965.
07. Sheikh Ayaz Issues (2) years 1966- 70.
08. Lekhraj Aziz Issue- year 1971.
09. Sindhi Women Writers' issue- year 1981.
10. Sindhi Drama of Sind and India- year 1982.

He edited special issues of 'Jhulelal' which are also under;

- Ayaz and Narain Shyam Poetry Issue- year 1994.
- G M. Sayed Issue- year 1996.
- Stories of Sindhyat- year 1996
- M U. Malkani Centenary Memorial Issue-year 1997.

In year 1972, he edited the 'Jiye Sindh' issue of the Hindi periodical 'Dharma Yug'

He helped Kamleshwar to bring out the issue on Sindhi

short-stories of the periodical 'Sarika' (Hindi)

He has contributed some books that strictly do not fall within the realm of creative literature, but are informative in nature. They could be said to be somewhere in between literature and journalism.

They are: 1. Soviet Surg (Soviet Heaven), 2. Nao Chin (New China), 3. Bhara Roos Dosti (India- Russia Friendship)4. Mahatma ain Lenin (Mahatma and Lenin) 5. Bharat Jo Dost Lenin. (India's Friend Lenin).

For his book, India-Russia Friendship, he was given an award and even visited the Soviet-Union.

Uttam as a Literary Critic

Uttam is known as a robust literary critic. Apart from books on criticism he wrote monographs for the 'Sahitya Akademi' on important contributors to Sindhi literature. These include the monograph on Mangharam Malkani, Lekhraj 'Aziz' and Kalyan Advani.

His books of literary criticism are: 'Tagore: A Glimpse, Sindhi Literature Criticism and Research', 'Sahit ain Sahitkar' (Literature and Writer), 'Sujag Sind' (Criticism) and 'Criticism on Sindhi Short Stories and Drama'.

Here it would be once again essential to reiterate that his opinion on literature and that counts for any era, there is always a struggle between progressive and reactionary elements. Accordingly, he has assessed many writers of the past like Kalidas, Mirabai, Guru Nanak and Sindhi poets such as: Shah Abdul Latif, Sachal and Sami (all classical poets). This is an important contribution of

Uttam in the genre of Sindhi literary criticism from this new point of view.

Uttam had historical consciousness and realized that the dates of the events are a sacred source of material for future historians and he would not tolerate any date wrongly mentioned by any writer or he would publicly refute it with the exact date of the event. This did not endear him to many writers.

Uttam as a Creative Writer.

Uttam has two collections of short stories to his credit: 'Kashmhash' (Struggle) from 1972 and 'Hoo Jahaan Hi Manu' (This World and This Heart) from 1991. In his essay 'An Unforgettable Story' of world literature, he gives example of the masters of short-stories such as O'Henry, Chekhov, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Galsworthy, Munshi Premchand, Tagore and Sarat Chander.

It all amply goes to prove that he had well grasped the essentials of the craft of short-story writing. He was well aware of the requirements of this genre of literature. According to him, a short story should be focused and of an easily flowing narrative. He did not believe in short-stories being a teaser and exhibition of mental acrobatics or record of talk on the psychoanalysts couch.

Most of his stories could be called 'Feminist'. He believed in gender equality as a part of his socialist conviction. For him a woman is not a riddle shrouded in a veil. He considers her as her comrade-in-arms and as an equal participant in ushering in social change and being a part of it. His story 'Nindinko' (A Person Who has Lost his Home) is a metaphor for the rootless existence of the

Sindhi community in India.

Some stories written in the aftermath of the Indo-China war are full of patriotic fervour, while his story 'Roshni Moti Aae' (Light has Returned), speaks about the lowliness of the character, his insecurities and returning to the security of social living. His short story, 'Raja' is crafted in the classical mould of 'Progressive ideology'.

It is a story about a poet whom the lower-middle class abhors as low-class, but who has the right perspective of society and upholds the right values.

This story has been translated in many languages like Bengali, Marathi, Malayalam, Urdu, Oriya, Russian and German.

He also translated some books into Sindhi, which include Amrit Rai's, 'Kedarnath Bela', 'Pyar ain Vasna' (Love and Lust) of Tolstoy, 'Insaaan Jo Nasseb' (Fate of a Man) 'Sholokhov', 'Chawiha Manhoon ain Hika Chokri' (Twenty-six People and One Girl) of Gorky and 'Roop Ba Roop' (Beauty- Hypocrisy), 'Khawaja Ahmed Abbas'.

It would be necessary to reiterate once again that such dedicated souls, who are true to themselves and the causes they uphold, are rare to find and he was such a rare person. He was a true Communist- Sindhi writer.

(Presented in Sindhi at a Seminar of Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli ain Sahit Sabha, Jabalpur- Bedagaht, 2010)

Chapter 11

LIFE AND TIMES OF THE LATE POPATI

(Born: 17.9.1924 – Passed away: 17.12.2005)

With the release of Popati Hiranandani's autobiography, 'Muhinji Hayati a ja Sona Ropa Warq' (Golden and Silver Pages of my Life), it would be apt to delve into it and present some glimpses of her life and upbringing. In her formative years, she lived in historically turbulent times.

Thus, her self-image emerges as she narrates:

"The climate of Sind was so bracing that roses would sprout on the faces of lasses. Unpolluted fresh breeze would keep the body fresh and the nutritious food would make it healthy. As I was good-looking, it made me carefree and self-confident. Neighbours would often call me 'Pavan Futi' (A wave of fresh breeze though etymologically it is derived from Prah Phuti- Dawn). I had rather fair and ruddy in complexion. In our society and among relatives, my beauty was a topic of conversation."

Her upbringing was according to the norms of her social-status and the conventions of the community in which she was born. She writes, "I am born in Hyderabadi-

Amil' family. In our community, the girl can afford all opportunities for her mental and physical development."

She was given the best education and was groomed in all household duties, like cooking, sewing, knitting and social etiquette etc. She was perfectly equipped to run an efficient household and being enlightened. After marriage she made an ideal partner for her husband and he also treated her equally with dignity and respect. She shared his concerns, aspirations and hopes, equally contributed to fulfilment of his dreams and allayed his apprehensions. But when a girl got married, it was incumbent for her parents to put a bag full of money and goodies of all sorts on the head of their daughter. It was as if a girl was simply a mare, which was to be decorated with all the finery, without which she would not be accepted by her husband or without which, he would see it as a heavy 'burden', through his perspective, an undecorated wife would feel slighted or rather insulted.

The parents of the boy would consider it as a matter of prestige. Bargains would be struck for thousands in cash, gold and diamond ornaments, bedspreads, bed-sheets of expensive types, expensive clothes for the girl and gifts for the parents and relatives of the bridegroom.

'It is surprising that the bridegroom is called 'Ghot Raja' i.e. a king. When in fact he is treated as a beggar who owns nothing of his own and expects to get everything from his in-laws. This man flaunts his degrees and figures of his income and invites a sort of auction.'

7 Hindu educated families who have served rulers of all the times and consider themselves a shade above ordinary mortals.

'One important defect of the Hyderabad-Amil community is that they are arrogant due to the high position they occupy and because of their educational qualifications.'

'In the Feudal era, Amils were land-owners and in the British Raj they occupied important positions. If due to any misfortune, any family slides down their pre-determined social scale they are looked down upon with contempt by the rest of the community. They assume their airs of being British, after they become collectors and commissioners.' Popati's father was a forest officer. He was stationed at Karachi. It was a happy household of doting parents and seven siblings with enough to live a comfortable life. Popati was their second child. Her father did not have any vices like drinking and gambling in which his brothers would often indulge. He was a thrifty person and liked his money to be given on interest or invested into buying land.

Popati lost her father at the young age of 10. She recounts that while on his death bed, her father called her and her elder brother. He told them to look after their brothers and sisters, provide them with education and settle them in life. He particularly told Popati, "*Your elder brother is a soft person, whereas you are strong and courageous, so whatever I have said, my last wishes, will be your prime duty to fulfil.*"

And Popati remained true to the promise she gave to her dying father. It is amply borne out by her life. In fact, she achieved greater heights than dreamt by her father.

After the sudden and untimely demise of her father, their entire life changed. Soon they had to leave Karachi and settle at Hyderabad where her maternal family was settled.

They became a part of that joint family. It is in Hyderabad that she made those cherished and fond memories.

Those happy times in an extended joint family, with a number of children who were happiest as described. At the same time, all this 'happiness' was not without the turbulence that her father's demise brought in its wake. She recounts that her father had invested in a large piece of land in partnership with one of his friends. He fraudulently sold that land and pocketed the amount. When he was caught for this fraudulent act and brought before her mother in chains he pleaded with her saying, "*Sister, we have eaten from the same plate as family members, I beg you to pardon me.*" The brave lady in all graciousness granted him a pardon, thus being deprived of all the savings of her late husband. This incident goes to show the values of those times and greatness of her mother which speaks more volumes than one can describe. This was followed by another terrible blow, financially.

Her mother had ornaments and was persuaded to sell those and keep the proceeds with some 'trustworthy' person, therefore earning an interest and eking out a living for her family. That 'trustworthy' person soon betrayed their trust. When her mother pleaded with him that the interest paid by him was just like grass for cows, he nonchalantly replied, "*There are many more persons to feed cows.*"

Hearing this something snapped within a young Popati and trust gave way to caution as she said, "*I judge the persons honesty and integrity on the basis of his attitude towards money.*"

Popati, being a bright student, was promoted to the next class twice a year. This made her complete her matriculation examination at the age of 14 and she started her life by earning and learning. She was a teacher and studied at the same time, but remained a teacher all her life.

She was appointed as a music teacher in her own school: Kundanmal Girls' High School. There she set an example of rare courage. The salaries of teachers had recently been revised, but the school management did not comply with that order on the plea that the finances of the school could not afford such a burden. Soon, the Education Minister Mr. Peer Illahi Bux was to visit the school and teachers were eager to submit a memorandum to him. The big question was, who would do it? Popati, though a recent appointee, volunteered to speak to him instead of submitting a memorandum and she did exactly that. As a result, all teachers got a raise. It speaks volumes of the ethos of those times and even the headmistress proceeded to go on leave for about a month after she appointed Popati as an acting headmistress.

Courage and daring were once considered qualities that, were rewarded rather than ruthlessly suppressed.

With the passage of time, her mother wanted her to be on her own and they moved into 'their' home. That house was adjacent to the home of the 'Great Seer of Sindh': Sadhu Vaswani. The windows of their terrace abutted the house of Sadhu Vaswani.

Here he used to preach and had started St. Mira's School, which was soon shifted to a new place near Hyderabad jail.

Thus, it proved to be a boon for young Popati as the formative influence in her life was none other than Sadhu Vaswani and his lectures. Her mother had made it incumbent for her children to attend those discourses in order for them to inculcate those moral values amongst them.

In fact, Sadhu Vaswani was a great scholar and an eminent educationist. He was the Principal of a college and had represented India at the Conference of World Religions, held in Berlin. Popati writes,

"Sadhu Vaswani would explain his point through interesting stories and parables. In his narration, when he would reach the climax of the story he would say, 'Now I rest the thread of the story here and shall move forward tomorrow. At that time, we would be disappointed and to hear the complete story would hasten to hear his discourse the next day post-haste. In this way, I was attracted to understand its underlying philosophy. His eyes sparkled with something 'divine'. While speaking his eyes would be shut but while smiling they would sparkle. He would combine humour and dialogue in his discourse... During summer nights we would be sleeping on the terrace and often his melodious voice would waft with the breeze singing 'I am spinning the thread of love/ Weaving delicate threads of cotton.' At mid night who is he yearning for? Who is he wooing with his anguished heart! His discourse was for everyone. He had a storehouse of stories for children and profound philosophical ideas for the intellectuals. He would speak about Tulsi, Mira, Surdas, Kabirdas, Namdev, Tukaram, Gyaneshwar, Sadhno the Butcher, Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Chaitainiya. He would speak about all religions and give example from all religious texts and explain the same at length. He was a scholar of English

and Sanskrit yet so humble that he would bow before even a mere child...His quest 'Asatoma sat gamamya/ Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya/ Mirtuma a mirtu gamamya' - Lead from false to truth/ Lead me from darkness to light/ Lead me from death to immortality/ It has become my life long quest also."

Another influence which lasted lifelong was that of Prof. Bathija. Popati had taken Persian as a second language till school-level. But in college, she preferred to opt for Sanskrit as Prof. Bathija was teaching Sanskrit at St. Mira College. He opened the vast treasure of Sanskrit literature and philosophy to her and she was hooked.

Soon Professor Bathija left teaching in the college but continued to teach her Sanskrit privately at his home, without any remuneration and she as a private student in Banaras Hindu University, took Sanskrit as a main subject. She also opted for Hindi and other languages for her graduation courses. She had already passed her Hindi examinations of 'Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti' and had started teaching Hindi in a Hyderabad school.

After the Partition, she had a disagreement with her mentor Prof. Bathija on the issue of the script for the Sindhi language, but that disagreement did not result in a break-up. She recalls that after many years when his son returned home from abroad to get married in India, he called her up and said that his father had instructed him that for choosing a girl for marriage he should seek Popati's approval. So great was his faith in Popati, those mere disagreements would not shake it. Again this brings us to the question of values which have undergone a sea of change in living memory.

In Hyderabad, her residence was surrounded by 'teachers'. Mr Hasomal, Mr. Lilaram, Mrs Chandra, was all teachers and besides Miss Hari Vaswani and Miss Khemchand were headmistresses. Mr. Ladharam Mohandas was the headmaster and Mr Daryani Hasomal and his wife were all freedom fighters as well and were active in the 'Freedom Movement'.

In spite of her ardent wish to participate in the 'Freedom Movement' she could not do it because she had to teach, study and tend to all the sundry household chores as well. But she did help her brother, Hashoo, in his patriotic activities and had to be satisfied with her passive participation.

Popati had six siblings, two sisters and four brothers. One of her sisters died before the Partition of the country, but the six other siblings remained very close to each other. From their very inception, there was no gender discrimination in the family. She remembers that in her early childhood, she was taken on hunting expeditions by her father.

She remembers only one incident when she was scolded by her brother, when she was singing a love-song in her bathroom. She was told to sing only Bhajans and that also only at home in a low-voice. On another occasion, she was keen to learn the rules of Sindhi prosody, through the well-known poet, Lekhraj Aziz who was related to her mother. Her elder brother Dharmu was very soft, gentle, trusting and an introvert whereas Popati was assertive, strong-willed and courageous.

Her younger brother, Hashoo, was tough, aggressive, a keen sports-person and an extrovert. He was the leader of his peer group in his neighbourhood and was always

surrounded by like-minded friends. All her brothers and sisters were well-educated and did well in their lives.

As they grew up, the girls of the household were keenly under watch. One of her uncles' had embraced Islam under certain circumstances. In those times, even if anyone wanted to revert back, they were not accepted by the Hindu community, thus all doors for coming back to the original fold were closed.

They were called 'Sheikhs'. It was considered a matter of honour if a male cousin married his female cousin and converted her to Islam. In her case, such a danger of conversion was very real and always lurked. Even otherwise, in a feudal male-dominated society, a 'girl' is sought to be kept 'under control'. Even her sight is controlled with any roaming eye being an invite for the 'death' penalty.

It is also a fact that in spite all the constraints and restraints imposed on her, the seed of 'love' would find a way to sprout in her heart. Leaving her childhood home is when any girl blooms. The throbbing heart yearns to find its echo in another heart. It is at that time that she is transformed into a song.

She is in search of an instrument as an accompaniment to lift the song into a vibrating and loud echo. She becomes just like water flowing endlessly in search for a container. At that time, a shadow of a young 'prince' hovers over her dreams and seeing every youth, she wonders if he is actually 'him'.

Popati confessed that in her sprouted a youth which

enabled such an experience. She recounts that at that time, girls would move in groups, so no girl thought it was proper to walk alone. In spite of that, while going to her school as a teacher she would encounter a person who would be waiting at the street-corner to see her. First, it was acknowledgement of each other's presence through their eyes only and slowly a small streak of a smile would dance on their lips. She went so far and no further as that 'person' had to go to Karachi for further studies. She said it was an exhilarating experience of both first and last 'love' of her life.

She never regretted remaining single all her life, though she had to face many difficulties and challenges in her voyage as she bravely and happily faced them. In fact, her uninhibited and roaring laughter became a 'trade-mark' of her personality which she retained till the end of her life, in spite of the pain of undergoing many surgeries and facing the loss of near and dear ones, which rendered her forlorn. Was her 'trade-mark' laughter a mask to hide her innermost insecurity and vulnerability?

She writes, *"In mature age, love could be a many a splendored thing. With the passage of time, love becomes deep or becomes shallow due to personal factors. The vital difference between love of man and a woman is that for a man it is mainly sexual satisfaction, therefore literature is replete with references to youth and beauty, where as for woman love has different connotations and meanings, her standards are quite different."*

There was a time when her maternal grandmother used to drink water in a silver glass and her mother used to eat in silver plate and bowl. When at a later stage, her

brother earned enough that he wanted to send a golden glass to their mother. Their mother told him, "Do not send a golden glass for me to drink water from. The quality and function of water remains the same to quench the thirst. It may be taken from earthen glass or golden glass, it will not change. You should instead try to show your gratitude to those who have helped you to reach this position." Needless to say that Popati inherited some of her noblest qualities from her mother.

In her autobiography she gives an endearing pen-portrait, which would reveal the true picture of the times before the Partition.

"Mr. Bharwani was the Principal of the college. Although, when he used to teach Shakespeare the students of faraway places like Sukkar and Shikarpur would know about his lecture and they would rush to Hyderabad to listen to him. When he spoke about the character of 'Portia', the students as well as professors present would be spellbound."

"Principal Bharwani was unmarried and he spent all his income on giving scholarships to poor deserving students, purchasing latest books and on his drinks. He was educated in England and obtained a first rank in English literature. In his personal life he was a 'failure'. He loved a girl. I have already stated that in Amil communities, a girl had no right to love. He was told by the girl's parents that he should go to England and prove himself to be a suitable match for their daughter, fulfilling that condition they could marry. Relying on their word, he left for his further studies in England. In his absence, the girl was married off to someone of an equal status and settled in Calcutta. Soon after the marriage, that person was murdered due to a business rivalry. That

girl gave birth to a child and returned back to Hyderabad. When he returned back from England, he was devastated. Yet, once again he pleaded with her parents to give him their daughter's hand and he was prepared to accept the child as well. But how could the parents who committed a lying 'sin' allow their widowed child to re-marry? Music, books and wine were his night-long companions. In the morning, as if the soul of Shakespeare seized him, his plays and characters would burst forth as though through his flesh and blood, to everyone's astonishment! He was a heavy smoker and due to excessive drinking, his eyes had bulged out, yet when this tall and impressive man would enter the class-room, he would radiate a light of knowledge and learning. Anyone who would hear his lecture once would not be able to forget." This passage does not pass any value judgment and is very tender and endearing in its treatment. In Popati's creative literature, this trait stands out in bold relief.

For the people of this country, 15th August 1947 may be the day of Independence, but in the collective psyche of the generation, who actually suffered the trauma of the Partition of the country, it is etched as the day of the Partition. It was a watershed for the community, which had to be uprooted ruthlessly, leave behind all that was precious to them and bring only the fond memories of those times to cherish in their hearts, along with the deep sense of suffering and loss. Nostalgic literature has emerged as one of the strong currents in the post-Partition Sindhi literature of India.

Popati's first-hand account of the times is unique in its intensity and suffering. This poignant account requires to be reproduced here, for its sheer emotional intensity.

"It was announced on the radio that the country would be partitioned and entire Sind would form a part of Pakistan. Soon five thousand refugees from India descended on Hyderabad. This created a panic in the entire Sindhi community as they proudly boasted now the 'Houris' of Hirabad' would also come into their possession (beautiful girls of Hirabad – a newly constructed colony of rich Amil-Hindus). This panic situation led to an equally knee-jerk reaction. Girls were told that in the event of any attack they should put their fingers in electric plugs, switch it on and get electrocuted, many distributed poison sacks to their women-folk to save their honour."

"In the evening at about six, police vehicles announced in every street that riots would be controlled and even military was kept as a standby. All this instead of allaying fears added to the anxiety. Lights and radios were switched off, so as not to attract attention. All members of the family were at home except my brother Hashoo. The youth of the neighbourhood had organized themselves into self-defence squads. He was the leader of one such squad. He did not return even at nine p.m. At that time, there was an eerie silence all around. Normally this place would be bustling with activity till early morning hours. He came late at night. He told us that the refugees have slaughtered a cow in middle of the road in a busy market. Hirabad has been surrounded by refugees. It has been decided that today very soon unmarried girls would leave for the safety of India. A truck would arrive at night which would take girls to Mirpur Khas, from there they would board a train for Jodhpur in India. My mother protested, 'But where would they stay?' He assured her that the matter was already taken care of. He had already dispatched someone to Jodhpur who would rent a house there. He said initially Popati and Kamla

would go. He told me to get ready and collect only a few essential clothes."

"I was taken aback! What not was essential for me? Fine-embroidered saris, note-books on which I had committed my innermost feelings, many books some of them beautifully illustrated. My writing table with a marble top! What would I carry and what would I leave behind? I tossed all night in bed without even a wink of sleep! Only yesterday a friend had said, 'My brother is not in town in case of any emergency, I would come and take shelter in your house?' Shall I not inform her and betray her trust?

"Except my elder brother who was working in Karachi, we all were in Hyderabad. Even in this critical time, we went and took out a photograph so that in the eventuality we got separated, we should be able to recognize each other if and when we meet."

Her mother broke down and cursed all those who were responsible for the Partition of the country and their banishment from their own land.

"In the evening we went to our aunt's house (mother's sister) and found them packing. At that juncture, it was decided that all ladies and children would leave together. That evening my mother also packed some bare essentials. During all this, as if a dam burst from her eyes. No one slept or ate that night".

"That night we visited every room touched every piece of furniture. I bid goodbye to that part of sky which was above my courtyard. I remembered all the walls of my neighbourhood, they were so familiar, nest of sparrows on a

tree, cold breeze of the hillock, white street-dog, a water tub for horses to drink from, a place where pigeons were fed! It was 17th September, my birthday and on the same day I was condemned to a life sentence."

"At night we boarded a truck with whatever little luggage we could carry. We were stealthily leaving our land as if we were thieves. We reached Mirpur Khas by the next day's sunrise. My uncle (mother's sister's husband) who was settled at Mirpur Khas was an influential person. He booked an entire bogey, as the next day many more relatives joined us. He also booked a goods bogey for the foodstuff to be sent which was to follow later. We left Mirpur Khas at 3 am. Within half an hour, the officials boarded the bogey and took away all our bags and belongings saying, 'You are not supposed to carry anything.' Next morning we reached Jodhpur. We were about 50 persons. All comprising women and children! We did not know where to go. We waited in a waiting room (railway platform). In the afternoon one boy came and took us to a bungalow. Now the question arose what we would eat? Two ladies approached the nearby household. They agreed to provide food only for the children. Thus children were made to sit in a queue and served food in the evening on papers. All adults had to remain hungry."

"Next day a hawker came along to sell fried daal. All purchased some daal and tried to satisfy their hunger. After some time a lady gathered some courage, and collected some amount from everyone, found a grocery shop, made the necessary purchases and other ladies also joined her in preparing food. Children were given one roti and a spoon of vegetables and adults got two rotis and a spoonful of vegetable. This started the struggle for survival. We purchased some soap and started washing our clothes, but two garments could not be washed

simultaneously therefore one day we would wash the blouse and on the next day, the sari."

"All along we were very worried about the men-folk who were left behind. After some time my maternal cousin reached there. The news that he brought was more worrisome. He told us about the riots having erupted in Karachi in a Sikh Gurudwara hundreds of Sindhi-Sikhs were massacred and wide-spread looting had been instigated. After two days my cousin left again for Sind to retrieve anything that he could. All women pleaded with him to persuade their men-folk to leave everything and come here to safety. After 12 days the wagon of food grain purchased at Mirpur Khas arrived. With this some clothes also arrived. Now, in that very bungalow there were 66 persons under one roof! Soon her brothers also joined them. In this way, the life started to pick up threads again. At night they would tell stories, jokes about children, and sing songs in this way they would try to alleviate the misery of their existence. In those days if they came across any Sindhi, a current would pass through them."

"This way two months passed and every day we would wake up with the hope that a message would come that now everything is normal and we would head back to our homes. This 'news,' has eluded all our life. From Jodhpur we went to Baroda, as my two brothers were still studying and Bombay University had an affiliation to Baroda."

Eventually from Baroda, the family had to come to Bombay and she started working as a teacher in the girls' section of the Sind Model High School. In 1960, she joined the National College and then KC College, teaching Sindhi and she ended up being a PhD guide for Sindhi in Bombay University. In Bombay, her family had to change

their residence quite often from Mahim to Andheri and Andheri to Colaba, where she eventually settled. Her three brothers went abroad and settled there, however only one brother was settled in Bombay. In the course of her own life-span, she lost all her siblings leaving her distraught and with an emotional void, which she carried all along.

Popati wielded a pen in her teens while still at Hyderabad, one of her essays was already published and after the Partition she continued to write for 'Sansar Samachar' and 'Hindustan' daily papers, but when the Hindustan group started their weekly 'Hindvasi', she became its regular contributor which garnered her popularity and earned her the regard and affection from her readers, which so far remained unmatched.

She wrote continuously. Writing was not a mere hobby for her but it was her all-consuming passion. A list of her books is given at the end of this monograph in chronological order and literally shows that each year witnessed one of her new publications.

She tried her hand at all genres of literature. She wrote essays, literary criticism, dramas, short-stories, novels, and poetry and has about 60 books to her credit. In the preface of one of her books published in 1961, she mentions having written 150 articles for the 'Hindvasi' weekly paper. Apart from the creation of literature, it is her contribution as an activist in the movement of Sindhiyat, to which she was dedicated with all her heart and soul.

Popati has penned more than 20 books which could be categorized as nonfiction. These books include the books written by her as literary essays of a personal-discursive

nature, some are of her literary criticism and some tend to be academic in nature, while the bulk are as an activist in the Sindhyat movement. Some focus on the status of women in Indian society. Though some of her essays as an activist dwell on the concern of the 'roots' and the necessity for making the younger generation aware of their rich legacy and heritage.

This obviously has entailed painstaking research into history and literary traditions. They retain their importance of academic scholarship and contemporary relevance. Her history of Sindhi literature written in English is of great significance and acts as important reference material.

(Taken from the monograph on Popati Hiranandani, published by the Sahitya Akademi under the series: 'Makers of Indian Literature')

Chapter 12

LIFE AND TIMES OF PRABHU 'WAFI'

(Born in 1915 and Died in 2012)

Prabhu Jotumal Chugani 'Wafi' was born on 19th September 1915, at Larkana (Sindh) and left for his heavenly abode from Mumbai, on December 12th 2012, at the ripe age of 97 years.

He graduated with a degree in History and Economics in 1938, from D.J. Sind College in Karachi. He came to Bombay to pursue his post-graduate studies in Law, which he had to abandon due to the demise of his father. He wanted to take up law, as his father was a renowned lawyer of his time and he hoped to take the mantle from him.

He started writing poetry at the tender age of 13 years in the year 1928. Hari 'Dilgir', his maternal cousin was practically the same age. They both learnt the poetic meter from their teacher Janab Nawaz Ali 'Nayaz', who was also a prominent poet of his times and used to organize and participate in '*mushairas*' (public poetic meets).

Hari "Dilgir" mentions that during the initial period, when they were initiated into the intricacies of rhyme and meter, they would often carry on even their normal conversations in meter, which afforded them a sufficient

drill. On being encouraged by their teacher, they started participating in local *mushairas*, where they were appreciated by senior poets. The first poem of Prabhu Wafi was called 'Gautama Buddha', published in the prestigious 'Sindhu Literary magazine', while he was still a school student studying in 6th std. Thereafter, he wrote poems on subjects related to nature, like rain, moon, sun etc. which were also appreciated by the prominent poet, Kishinchand 'Bewas'.

Subsequently, as far as poetic sensibility and content is concerned, they accepted him as their 'guru' along with other emerging poets, who were to play a prominent role in the literary field in future.

About his pen name, 'Wafi', he narrates an interesting back-story. He mentions that, 'Wafi', meaning sincerity and loyalty, are traits of his personal character. Loyalty has remained the hallmark of his life. Another factor that weighed with him while choosing a '*takhalus*' (pen name) is that it should be short and should be easily inserted into poetic composition. He confesses that at the time, 'Wafi' was a pen name of an Urdu poet who appealed to him.

At the same time, the son of the famous Sindhi poet Janab Ali Gohar Saheb, who was his fan, sent him a famous book by Iqbal called 'Baang-e-Daraa', as a gift with a couple of *ghalibs* on the front page:

*"Hum ko unke wafi ki hai umeed
Jo nahin jante wafi kya hai."*

He said, "In this way I adopted 'Wafi' as my pen name. Even in my personal life I am a contented person and have

never faced any kind of deprivation, therefore I avoided pen names which reflected negativity or want such as 'Dukhayal' (Tormented), 'Dilgir' (Disappointed), 'Sikayal' (Deprived) or 'Zakhmi' (Injured) etc."

Prabhu Wafa candidly spoken about his teenage infatuations and said,

"At that time, I was about 14 or 15 years of age. I was studying in 6th or 7th std⁸. Dada Shewak Bhojraj organized a conference of 'Balkan Ji Bari' (Nursery of Children) at Larkana, where children from all over Sind had gathered. I was in-charge of the section that looked after their food and other needs. At that time, I was attracted to a girl who had come from Hyderabad. She was fond of poetry and had started writing some poems herself. She used to dress as a boy and looked awesome. When I escorted her to the station on her way back to Hyderabad, She told me, "You have very delicate features. Had you instead been in a girl's dress I would have eloped with you."⁹ Urdu poetry of those times and popular poetry in Sind echoes such sentiments. She told me to be in touch through correspondence. She used to learn poetic meter from the renowned poet, Lekhraj 'Aziz' and gave me her address for the purpose of future correspondence. We remained in correspondence for some time, but with passage of time the affair did not lead anywhere. For her I composed a song which later on became very famous and used to be sung by many singers in Sind. Remembering those times much later I expressed my gratefulness to Dada

8 talking about it when he was in his 9th or 10th

9 When Prabhu Wafa was younger, he was of a fair-complexion with delicate and sharp chiselled features. In those times due to strict segregation of sexes in social life, many well-to-do people would take pride in having young boys as their friends and therefore many would vie for his company at Larkana.

Shewak Bhojraj in the following Haiku.

*'Obligations of 'Dada'
In 'Balkan Ji Bari' came
Some beautiful people.' "*

"After this, I was attracted to another girl in my school, who was my junior by three standards. Her name also started with 'S'. Remembering those times I have composed some Haikus. Even at that age I was attracted towards beauty and I will not deny that even now at this age, beauty still attracts me. But those fleeting days are like chasing butterflies. My mature love resulted in my marriage, her name also incidentally started with 'S'. It was also a really turbulent affair."

In one of his television interviews, he graphically describes the situation. As they both were closely related and shared the same surname, the proposal of marriage was not acceptable to the parents and elders of the society. He could prevail over his parents, but the parents of the girl would not yield. At last, they decided that the girl would elope with him. The time and place was fixed.

He says, 'I waited at night with a horse carriage tucked away and hidden in the nearby lane. Time whiled away and the girl did not emerge for three hours. I was very disappointed and was about to give up when I saw her sneaking from her house. We were welcomed at my house and were immediately married according to rituals. I have enjoyed the marital bliss with a person whom I have cherished all my life with love, affection, loyalty and dedication at the same time she has also more than equally reciprocated.'
After this turbulent marriage, as the dust settled down,

they enjoyed a lifelong happy marital life. He has left behind three beautiful and loving children named Viju, Belle, and Raj and is survived by his wife Sudha. Remembering those days he wrote a song, which was to become a hit song in a film:

*'So long as life lasts
Will the pain of separation remain?
I will keep watching till the end
I will burn the lamp without oil
'Wafa', keep on moving wick
Door will always remain open for you
So long as life lasts.'*

Mohen-Jo-Daro of the Indus Valley was one of the oldest civilizations of the world that came into existence at Larkana. Till the Mogul period, the capital of Sind was Bakhar, not very far from this region. The land here was fertile and bountiful. The people of this region were prosperous, given to luxury, culturally cultivated and fond of fine arts. It is a common saying in Sindhi language: "*Huje ee Nano ta Ghum Larkano*" which meant, "If you have money then you go and visit Larkana".

Even in the recent past, the feudal lords of Larkana like Bhuttos' and Khuro's hold their sway on the politics of Sindh. This region has witnessed many upheavals in its 5000 years of history.

Considering the years of his life, it is not difficult to visualize the changes and influences that shaped his personality. Beyond any doubt those changes witnessed in the last century, have been unprecedented in human history. The twentieth-century has seen two world wars

ending with an atomic holocaust, at the same time the advent of the 'Socialist Revolution' in Russia.

The emergence of contending ideas and philosophies have been very acute, starting from when the British conquered Sind in 1844. The formation of modern education brought winds of the 'Social Reform movements' across the country to Sind as well.

Sind had sent delegates to the first session of 'The Indian National Congress' in 1885. In 1915, Mahatma Gandhi returned to India and at that time the 'Freedom movement' had not yet found its direction and organization for fully expressing the Independence of India. The pace of life was leisurely and modern comforts were rare.

It is said that in the beginning of the last century, Larkana and its environs did not even have basic facilities such as electricity. With the passage of time, 'Social movements' and 'the Freedom movement' passed through many phases and gathered momentum among the emerging educated middle-class.

Sessions of 'All-India Congress' were held at Karachi at two different times, in which Sindhi Hindus and Muslims actively participated. At that time, at an intellectual level, the questions that were being debated were rationality versus faith, social-reform and ritualistic-conformism, accepting modernism or tracing every good thing to old wisdom of Vedas as the 'Arya Samaj movement' propounded.

The 'Freedom movement' was torn between the question

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of ends and means, non-violence and armed revolution, in political discourse and in the economic sphere, whether future India would accept the hopes and aspirations raised by the 'Socialist Revolution' of Russia or if it would hold on to the Capitalistic mode or be modified humanely, as advocated by Gandhiji with the 'Trusteeship' by the 'Capitalist class'.

The land was full of young people with zest, ready to sacrifice everything for the ideal that they held dear to their hearts. All these ideas were in the atmosphere as Prabhu Wafa was passing from childhood to maturity.

When he was a robust young man of 32 years, the Sindhi-Hindu community came under a sudden unprecedented thunderbolt, namely, the Partition and things were never to be the same again.

Here some pertinent facts need to be mentioned while considering the Sindhi literary scene prevailing at that time in Sindh. Modern Sindhi education could commence only when standardization of the present Sindhi script was done in 1854.

The prose forms in Sindhi literature came to Sind as it did in other parts of India. They were all directly under the influence of English literature and all modern prose forms owe respect to their origins, which are the teachings of English Literature. The tradition of poetry in Sindhi literature was quite old and attained its zenith with the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif, followed by eminent poets such as, Sachal 'Sarmast' and Sami.

According to the ethos of those times, their poetry was

infused with Sufi and Vedantic philosophical traditions. Their poetry remained at the very core of the Sindhi psyche. The father of Prabhu 'Wafi' was a disciple of the Sufi saint poet, 'Ruhai', settled in 'Kandri' in the Sukkur district and the family used to visit him twice a year. Thus, in childhood itself, Prabhu Wafi was exposed to Sufi influences which he cherished throughout life. Even today their poetry is recited by educated and uneducated masses of Sind as a part of everyday expression.

Over the period, many Sufi saints have blessed the soil of Sind and sung songs filled with the pain of separation and divine ecstasy. Thus, at a popular level composing and singing poetry, called 'Kafi', continues even today.

At an elite level, the situation was different. Till the British conquered Sind the court language was Persian¹⁰. It is recorded when Shah Abdul Latif was writing his immortal poetry in the Sindhi language, simultaneously, more than 20 poets were busy at the rulers' court rolling out Persian poetry. Sindhi language poets could muster the courage to venture into Persian forms of poetry only 200 years ago when Khalifa Gul Mohmed wrote his first, '*Diwan of Ghazals*'.

Apart from *ghazals*, all Persian forms like Musnavi, Rubai, Qita and Musadas were also adopted for expression in Sindhi poetry. The subjects also remained hackneyed, such as the admiration of beauty of one's beloved, complaints of indifference on the beloved, conspiracies of rivals for the beloved, *Saqi and Maikhana* etc.

Even the expressions, similes and metaphors employed were

¹⁰ Hence the popular saying "Farsi ghode charsi" which means "If you learn Persian, you will be able to ride a horse"

mostly borrowed from Persian poetry and therefore alien. The tradition of holding Mushairas also became a popular pastime of literary activity at various places in Sindh.

At Mushairas, a prominent poet would set the *Misra Tarha*, the first line of a couplet and the last rhyming syllable, thus laying the metric pattern for other poets to base their ghazals on.

This would offer an opportunity to every participating poet to showcase his technical expertise in craft, his imagination and creative ability. Though the language adopted was Sindhi, it leaned heavily on the Persian-Arabic vocabulary and even metaphors and similes were adopted from Persian literature.

This activity excluded the vast population and only experts would vie to win admiration or scorn of their peers. All poets were expected to rise through this rung. This was the case when Prabhu Wafa, Hari Dilgir and his other contemporaries started their poetic career.

As mentioned earlier, the modern education in Sind started only after 1854 and the educated middle-class in Sind emerged later compared to other languages. By the early 20th century, this class had come to its own. The prose forms in Sindhi were in the ordinary spoken language by the urban educated class, but the traditional poetry of the *Mushairas* became practically alien to them. They had been exposed to the English poetry of romantic poets¹¹, which had already impacted the poetry of other

11 The principal objective, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of

Indian languages and Sindhi poets had already acquired its taste from Hindi and Urdu poetry, which had begun to be used as a common language and subject for everyday life. This way, educated and mostly the urban middle-class was in need of poetic expression, which would cater to their sensibilities and mode of expression. That would address their concerns and reflect the reality as they lived and perceived, in a language intelligible to them.

At this stage, Kishichand 'Bewas' (1885-1947), a prominent poet of his time was to prove to be a catalyst in the field of Sindhi poetry and ushered in this new era of common language and common subjects of nature and other relevant subjects. He was a primary teacher who rose to be a headmaster. He practiced native medicine, also to tend to the needy and poor. He was humility personified, God-fearing and a person of innate goodness with a positive attitude.

The main characteristics that distinguish his poetry and poetry of his numerous followers are:

- Use of simple and common language
- Faith in God yet shunning orthodoxy.
- Embracing broad humanistic values.
- Taking on poetry about the common people, depicting everyday situations and nature.
- Robust optimism and belief that poetry should reflect positive values.
- Poetry and art are for life's sake and not 'art for art's sake'

He was greatly influenced by the 'Freedom movement'

language that was really used by men yet threw over them a certain colour of imagination...- (*Preface to 'Lyrical Ballads' of William Wordsworth, Edition 1850*)

and was sympathetic to the poor and down-trodden, the values that his followers also shared with him. He was essentially a reformist and not a revolutionary. In his poem, '*Allah! Juhre na shaal Garibhan Ji Jhupdi...*', that is, '*God! May not let the hutment of poor crumble...*' he romanticizes poverty.

For his radical departure from the prevailing classical school, he was often criticized by puritans of the old-order for flouting established rules of prosody. He believed in the primacy of the content over mere technical expertise. It is in this context that Prabhu Wafa was to write:

*'First see if couplet has a life or not,
You start speaking of rhyme and meter!'*
(Parvaz 1962)

He attracted many young poets from his region as his disciples. The prominent ones among them, who left undeniable marks on the Sindhi poetic scene are Hundraj 'Dukhayal', Hari 'Dilgir', Prabhu 'Wafa' and Ram Panjwani, all from Larkana. Later on, Hundraj 'Dukhayal' emerged as a poet of Nationalism and was the bard of the 'Freedom movement' in Sindh.

He was close to Mahatma Gandhi and in India, in the initial stages he greatly contributed to the 'Bhoo-daan movement' along with Vinobha Bhave. He remained an iconic figure of the 'Freedom movement' in Sind and the last days of his life were devoted to Sindhi Education at Adipur (Kutch). Hari 'Dilgir' remained an eminent poet and a prominent personality in public life, holding an important position in the literary academies of the state and was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his

book of poetry 'Pala Pala Jo Parlao' (Echoes of Moments) in the year 1979

Prof. Ram Panjwani's contribution to poetry remained meagre but he emerged as a mass folk-singer and played a historical role in awakening the sense of Sindhi identity among the Sindhi masses scattered throughout India.

He encouraged them with a positive message to overcome the tragedy of the Partition of the country. He contributed in prose to the genre of drama, short-stories and Nnovels. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book of short-stories. This and many other achievements were eventually rewarded with the 'Padma Shree' award by the Government of India.

Prabhu Wafi left Sind at the mature age of 32 years. During that time, he continued to contribute his work to many prestigious journals. After graduation, while in Karachi, he worked as a teacher in a school for some time but soon joined the Shops and Establishment Department, as an inspector, which was a job he continued till the Partition.

In India in 1948, he joined 'All India Radio' as a secretarial assistant in New Delhi and eventually settled at the Bombay Central Labour Ministry to retire as an administrative officer in 1973.

His literary output was:

'Jhankar' (Resonance) in 1958, 'Parwaz' (Flight) in 1962, 'Surkha- Gulab Surha Khwaba' in 1980, which was the book that got him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981. He was further awarded by the Government of Maharashtra

with the 'Guarav Award' in 1990. 'Toon Sagar Maan Lahar' in 1993, 'Aeena aen Aksa' in 1994, 'Siju Lahan Te aahe' in 2000 and 'Luche Peaee Yaktare ji Taara' in 2010, would be some of his other work.

In 1993, a special issue of 'Sipoon', the literary magazine was published in dedication to three eminent poets of Bewas School, namely, Hundraj 'Dukhyal'- Hari 'Dilgir' - Prabhu 'Wafa'. In that issue he writes about his contribution to various genres of poetry as under:

Ghazals-146, Geet-130, Wais- 5, Bait-52- Nazam- 50, Lada- 7, Rubais- 223, Panja kada¹²- 304, Kafis- 20, Haiku- 253.

It is to be remembered that these figures were given by him are in 1993 and thereafter he published three collections in 1994-2000 and 2010.

• About his poetry he asserts:

*"Till my language has not become the voice of masses
My poetry is all useless and my craft of no use."*

It will be observed that Sindhi poetry has a variety of forms. Bait and Wai are traditional forms, Ghazal, Rubai, Qita are Persian forms in origin, Geet, Doha and Sortha have come through Hindi language and Nazam is an inspired influence of Urdu poetry, while the Sonnet came to Sindhi poetry through English and Taraail (Triolet) which is of French origin and Haiku which is a well-known Japanese form of poetry.

Prabhu Wafa has covered practically the entire field of

12 Special form innovated by him and subsequently followed by other poets

poetic forms with considerable success. He also holds a distinction of adding one or more forms to Sindhi poetry such as, Pankada.

It is a form where four lines of traditional Rubai and Quita are modified to give a clinching effect to the thought or feeling expressed. He has been followed by many other noted poets who have adopted this form of poetry. He has even adopted the folk-form of wedding songs (Laaddas) as well.

Hari 'Dilgir' observes,

"While reading his poetry we come across a shy nightingale and his poetry has an onomatopoeic effect."

His compositions are sung on various occasions by eminent singers and continue to enthrall listeners. He loved his people with all his heart and they also loved him by singing his songs on various occasions and continue to sing them.

(Taken from the monograph on Prabhu Wafi, published by the Sahitya Akademi under the series- 'Makers of Indian Literature')

Chapter 13

LONDON PAPERS:

SOME STRAY THOUGHTS PRESENTED BEFORE THE WORLD SIND CONGRESS'

Thinking about Sind, its antiquity and medieval periods conjure up many images in my mind. In ancient books and references, Sind precedes Hind and more often than not Sind and Hind are taken together to refer to a particular geographical area.

Shah Abdul Latif was undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of the world. His unique contribution in forging Sind into a special and distinct cultural entity has not been acknowledged much, with sufficient research-work, yet it remains to be done in this domain. It needs to be borne in mind that the cultural and linguistic boundaries have remained constant over the centuries, while the political boundaries have been changing frequently with the times. It should be understood that the cultural and linguistic Sind is much bigger than the current political boundaries as annexed by the British during the Talpur period, which is the case of the inherited boundaries through the British period. In fact Sind covers the districts of Kutch, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Saraiki linguistic areas as has been delineated by Grierson in his 'Linguistic Survey of India'. During the 'Freedom movement' itself, the separate

political identity was emphasized when Sind's separation from the Bombay presidency culminated in 1937. It is only just before the Partition that the idea of the 'Free Independent Sind' as a nation was reinforced by Saeen G M Sayed and by the seminal work of Mohamed Ibrahim Joyo to 'Save Sind and Save the Continent' which made this idea explicit.

It is a great service that any individual can render to his motherland. Saeen G M Sayed not only propagated this idea and gave a unique historical dream to Sindhi-speaking people but also by his actions motivated generations of Sindhi youth to achieve that ideal. It does not matter that this ideal was not achieved in his lifetime. Life is short and Man is but mortal, however the ideology and dreams that he has left behind will continue to inspire generations to come and I am sure in one of the turns and twists of history, the reality of 'Sindhu Desh' will unfold itself.

In History 'if' and 'but' are mere speculations, 'How' and 'When' also fall in that domain and would not hazard a speculation on that score. However a present road-map for action can be charted, which I shall discuss at a later stage.

Whatever the tip of the iceberg may reveal as 'historical facts' through archives that are released, they do point to some very interesting facts. When Saeen GM. Sayed said that Mohamed Ali Jinnah was being encouraged by the British rulers of that time, some thought it was just a doubtful veracity. The same fact has been brought to light in the recent book under titled, 'Under the Shadow of Great Game', written by Captain Sarila¹³ who was

13 A Scion from a ruling family from Punjab

the ADC to the last Governor General of India, Lord Mountbatten. He wrote that, in order to continuously protect the strategic interests of the British Empire, the map plan approximating the present size of Pakistan as it exists today was sent to the Prime Minister of UK, Winston Churchill, in the year 1944 by Lord Wavell

It also disclosed a direct channel of communication between then Prime Minister of UK, Mr. Churchill and Mr. Mohamed Ali Jinnah. Inspired by idealism and his straight-forward nature, Saeen G M. Sayed believed in the ideals set by the Muslim league and earnestly and ceaselessly worked to achieve the goal of Pakistan. But soon the disillusionment set in, due to the duplicity of the practice and ideals preached by the Muslim league, he beat a hasty retreat. What followed is known history.

A very significant aspect about the creation of Pakistan has not been sufficiently studied by either social or political analysts, which would throw light on the fact that Pakistan was, metaphorically speaking, born with congenital defects.

- Two wings of Pakistan were separated by all other ways except religion. If religion would have been the cementing force, the number of Muslim states across the globe would not have existed. It did not take much time for this unnatural marriage to come to an end. Unfortunately with the great blood bath of Muslims themselves at the hands of their own Muslim brethren.
- The demographic composition of the western part of Pakistan (modern-day Pakistan) is flawed. The population of one province i.e. Punjab outweighs the population of all other provinces put together. This even in an ideal democratic condition is apt

to work against the interests of all other provinces and thus it is likely that one province will exploit all other provinces, mostly due to defying the canons of equity and hence denying the rights of people of all other provinces, leading to a sense of alienation. This imbalance is inbuilt in the creation of the state of Pakistan itself.

- The *raison d'être* of Pakistan is a fear-complex against the big a.k.a. the Hindu country, India. The defence policy and foreign policy of Pakistan therefore is India-centric and the establishment is obsessed with the doctrine of military parity with India. This is neither possible nor desirable for a country the size of Pakistan, as the resources would not permit them or their economic development, making it continuously impeded. This in turn results in unwieldy and flabby military establishments, which are not possible without Pakistan turning into a client state of one super-power. The military establishment which is redundant compared to the size and resources of the country temptation to usurp civil-power. Hence, even the façade of civil rule is not tolerated. Thus Pakistan is condemned to being a client state of super-power and the size of its military establishment rules against any real democratic functioning. One can easily draw the conclusion that the common people of Pakistan are destined to live without the fruits of freedom and economic development.

Needless to say that Saeen G M Sayed, saw through this web of deception and saw that the only way to improve the quality of life for the Sindhi masses was through the establishment of a free, independent and sovereign Sindhu-desh. Through his writings he proved its historical legitimacy and economic viability. He devoted all energies

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to build a movement to achieve this ideal, which attracted many youngsters and intellectuals of Sind who lent their youth and energies to this movement.

No hardship could deter him. For most of his life, he remained in the prisons of Pakistan as a 'prisoner of conscience'.

With this background and with this legacy, it is pertinent to ponder where we stand today. Are we sufficiently prepared to face the challenges looming before us today?

A very serious challenge is staring us in our face. This challenge to the Sindhi nation emanates from its new-found wealth. This statement needs to be elucidated further. In our memory, we have seen the pivots of power dynamics making those grand paradigm shifts. Once it was a military power, which was used to shape the history of nations. After that, the Second World War, which was a period of cold war and in this phase, it was an ideology which acted as the driving force of politics.

Now in times of a uni-polar power equation, it is economics which is the driving force and in a geopolitical equation, oil and fossil fuels are its source of energy. In this phase of globalization and the role that multinational companies have come to play all around, the only sustaining relationship between consumer and producer has brought about ramifications which cut across countries, languages and cultures.

In this entire process the control of energy resources have remained a corner-stone of foreign policy for the United States of America and its European allies. The case of war on Iraq and arm-twisting of Iran are to be viewed in this

context. Even the control of Afghanistan has its strategic importance to exploit and control the energy resources of landlocked Turkmenistan, to have access to warm waters of Arabian Sea.¹⁴

In this context finding deposits of coal in the Thar Desert of Sind are found to be of greatest quantity ever in the world. It will not take long for all the powers to make Sind (Pakistan) a snake pit of dirty power politics and international intrigue. This new-found wealth of the Sindhi nation is wrought with grave consequences and challenges.

Are we alive to these challenges? Are we thinking of safe guarding our wealth? Do we have any clear, coherent and effective strategy?

All these questions will not wait, therefore it is of utmost importance that we rise to the occasion and seriously think about the emerging situation, which may soon overtake us faster than expected. Various forces such as the co-relation of forces at an international, national and ground level will have to be seriously assessed and correspondingly, a strategy will have to be fashioned to safeguard the interests of the Sindhi nation.

It should be borne in mind that any force is not static, it is always dynamic to change, so we shall have to come up with suitable short-term tactics as well as long-term strategies. It is in this evolving scenario that we have to find a window of opportunity and use it to our best advantage. All this needs is a penetrating vision and steadfast political

14 'Taliban- Islam- Oil and The Great Game in Central Asia' by Mr. Ahhmed Rashid

will, which needs to be urgently worked upon by the think-tank of the 'Sindhi Nationalist Movement'.

No doubt the challenges are complex and call for multi-pronged and multi-faceted approaches and courses of action at various levels. It should also be borne in mind that we are in the midst of an 'information revolution' and age of super-specialization.

In my opinion it is of utmost importance that a 'think-tank' is constituted to draw the best minds from various disciplines to enable Sindhi nationalists and Sindhi community leaders to formulate short-term and long-term programs.

Needless to emphasise, this is the time for Sindhi nationalists' to sink all their differences and come together. Of course this is the most important challenge. Shall we rise to the occasion? Only time will tell.

Before the following note is placed before my Sindhi nationalist friends, I hope this will give a boost to the movement and bring about a much desired unity among the leadership and ranks of nationalist forces. This is placed with a view to initiate a discussion. It is only an outline.

It is quite a distressing situation to see that the Sindhi nationalists', who owe their allegiance to the legacy of Saeen G M. Sayed, are divided in many groups and even factions. As an outsider and objective observer, who has only an intellectual/emotional stake in the movement, I find this situation very distressing. We do not find any fundamentally sharp ideological differences between various groups, the differences at the most could be only

nuances or semantic differences and it is mostly the ego clashes of personalities that loom at large.

I do concede, after removing myself from the nitty-gritty grass-roots political compulsions, that the real politic compulsions from the above statement may seem to be too generalized or sweeping. But the fact remains that it is the absence of joint mass action and support that leads from one split to another.

In this situation, in order to bring all groups together, the following idea is placed which merits serious consideration. This idea needs to be fleshed out and all relevant details need to be studied microscopically.

If we go through the history of Indian Independence, we find that Gandhiji's Salt Satyagraha was the catalyst in that movement. It galvanized masses. Taking inspiration from that event, when we see the Sindhu river as the mighty lifeline of Sind for ages, it has now been reduced to a mere trickle by building the 'Kala Bagh Dam', which will mean doom and disaster for Sind, so a program of action needs to be launched to save the mighty Sindhu river.

This will touch an emotional chord in every Sindhi heart. A peaceful and non-violent protest may be launched. This will consist of five volunteers from each district of Sind entering the border of Punjab, at the point where the Sindhu River enters Sind. Walk a few miles inside Punjab along the river course, fill five small pitchers with water and come throw that water into the Sindhu at the border of Sind.

This symbolic action will send a clear message to Punjab that Sindhis will not allow Sindhu to be robbed of its

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water and Sindhu will not be allowed to run dry at any cost and if necessary Sindhis will enter Punjab to prevent it from stealing Sindhu's water. They are prepared to fight for their Sindhu River if necessary.

The reaction from the Punjabi establishment will determine further and natural course of developments. It should be planned that this relay, 'Satya Graha' should be able to sustain for six months.

Needless to say the entire action has to be non-violent and peaceful, in spite of provocations. I admit that such logistic preparations call for gigantic preparations at a managerial level. The media coverage at an international level will also have to be deftly managed. It is the media coverage that will determine the success or otherwise of this action.

(Presented while receiving the Saeen G M Sayed Memorial Award, in 2005, World Sindhi Congress Meet, London)

Chapter 14

SINDHI: LITERATURE OF RESISTANCE- A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In any attempt on formatting a historical perspective of the literature of resistance, one cannot escape the inevitability of dwelling on the heroes of the Sindhi people, that continue to inspire them. The martyrs of Sind who laid down their life for Sindhi soil are too numerous to recount but some outstanding ones need a special mention. They were rulers of the land and glorious personages who laid down their lives at the altar of honour for their motherland, those who preferred to live a life of dignity, freedom and made a supreme sacrifice of their lives.

There are others who although did not belong to ruling the elite-class are in themselves great personalities who have given a positive value-structure to the people of the land. They lived, suffered and died for their convictions. They have taught the masses to distinguish right from wrong. Sind has been blessed to have both types of heroes and can legitimately be proud of them. On the one side, we have a hero in King Sambas, who challenged the might of Alexander the Great. Emperor Dahir, who laid down his life for the Freedom of Sind. Brave Dod, who did not yield before the might of Allaudin Khilji, Doulaha Darya Khan who challenged the might of the Argon invaders. Hosh

Mohamed who raised a cry saying, "*Marsoon Marsoon Sind na desoon*" i.e. *We will die fighting but will not give up Sind*, against the invading British army. Revolutionary leader of the Hur movement, who rose against the British occupation and youngest freedom fighter, Hemu Kalani, who faced the gallows at the hands of the British during the 'Freedom struggle'.

On the other hand we have the martyr Sarmad, who was the teacher of Prince Dara Shokh, Shah Mukhddom Bilawal, Shah Inayat the leader of the 'Great Peasant uprising', who during the Mogul rule established a first ever commune in history.

At this juncture, it will be pertinent to peep into a crucial phase of history of the subcontinent to have a clear understanding of the context, in which many changes took place. The period between the reign of Akbar and Aurangzeb's time of coming to power, witnessed unprecedented intellectual activity and debates about various religions, which brought about a sense of synthesis for all humanistic traditions for the spirit of tolerance and understanding.

Dara Shokh, the heir apparent to Emperor Shah Jahan was steeped into the liberal humanistic traditions and progressive traits of society, which he intended to continue as a legacy during his rule. However, Aurangzeb eliminated him and usurped the throne to become emperor; this is known to all students of history.

After Aurangzeb became emperor, the entire Islamic establishment was passed onto orthodox and bigoted Islamist clergy. At that time Sind, was considered as a far-

flung territory and was not considered part of the main stream Mogul Empire. Therefore, impact of the ideological shift in the Islamic establishment was not as severe and the Sufi philosophy of 'Whadat Al.Wajjod' ¹⁵ continued to flourish and the masses cherished those values with the exception of some bigoted instances by the mullahs.

The confrontationist stance and acute forms of religious persecution were rare phenomena in Sindhi life. Thus, only in exceptional elite levels do we find stray cases of bigotry in Sind, which was otherwise rampant in the rest of India, after the Islamic establishment. On the level of the masses, the Sufi ethos propagated by Dara Shokh prevailed.

In this situation Shah Abdul Latif had no compunction in visiting Hindu places of worship like Devi Mata Hinglaj and other places in the company of yogis who professed Hindu faith. Thus the genesis of creation of Sindhi literature lies at the very root of this contradiction of the two value systems.

In mainstream India, the Mullahs were trying to spread an exclusive version of Islam whereas in Sind, it was a humanistic version of Islam that held sway. In this way the humanistic and liberal values became a core part of tradition in Sindhi literature. In a way, this was in a total contrast with the atmosphere prevailing in the rest of India, at the time.

The very beginnings of Sindhi literature can be characterized as born out of resistance. In poetry, Shah Abdul Latif with his unique Sufi traits emerged and found

15 Presence of divine in every particle of existence

his pinnacle of the beauty and profundity thus creating a watershed of Sindhi ethos and Sindhi Nationalism. This can truly be called as a literature of protest against fundamentalism, narrowness and divisive philosophy.

Another factor to be borne in mind is that the court language was Persian, but these poets chose to write in Sindhi, the language of the illiterate masses were against the language practiced by the elite and it added another facet to the protest of Sindhi poetry.

Taking the example of 'Maruee', Shah Abdul Latif created a character from the common-folk of the soil, rooted to land, totally dispossessed but full of love for native-people and her native 'Malir'. Thus, Maruee became the embodiment of resistance and patriotism.

In history we find many rulers who have sacrificed their heads to save their country, which was their duty as rulers, but in the case of Maruee, it was the love for the common-folk, her native soil, which makes it unique and very important. This character has been accorded with an iconic status and is invoked whenever there is oppression and demand for a time to love one's land rather than power or pelf.

Sachal 'Sarmast' stands out as an eternal rebel and stormy petrel of his times. It is a small wonder, how he escaped torture and gallows. Shall we again attribute it to strong Sindhi ethos of tolerance?

The tradition of protest was carried into recent times too. During the 'Freedom period', many voices of dissent could be heard. Jethmal Parsram had to face imprisonment for

quoting a couple of Shah Abdul Latif verses. A Sindhi daily paper, 'Hindu', was banned and its editor imprisoned, but the next day it would bring out another editor, who would also face imprisonment and this sequence of events for just publishing a daily paper leading editors to be jailed, continued for about a month.

It was all unprecedented in the history of the 'Freedom struggle' in India. It is difficult to get a matching example anywhere else.

The first female writer of Sindhi fiction, Ms. Guli Sadrangani, wrote a novel 'Itihad' (Unity). In this novel, she writes a love-story of a Muslim boy and Hindu girl and their marriage. All this in face of the rising communal hatred.

Hundraj 'Dukhyal' continued to write and sing patriotic songs and face imprisonment. Progressive writers started giving voice to poor-uncouth and downtrodden marginalized sections of the society. These are only but a few highlights.

The Partition of the country and creation of Pakistan brought Sind into headlong collision with the new reality of a political entity called Pakistan. It is a fact of history, that during the British period the religious establishment of Muslims in mainstream India continued in the hands of those who had professed their ideology for Islam, as it emerged during the period of Aurangzeb and the ideology of Pakistan rooted on that ground.

This version of Islamic ideology had never been accepted in Sind and as a consequence the Sufi ethos

had prevailed throughout. The ideology of Pakistan was an antithesis of all that was Sind, or what it stood for throughout its history. It is a fundamental clash that has to be answered by future history.

So, can Sufistic Sind be contained in the narrow straitjacket ideology of Pakistan? Will the two antagonists' value structures come to terms? Or can they? Will this bear-hug last?

After the Partition, when India was carving out states based on the language and culture, bowing to the demands of its people, with the hope that the distinct languages and cultures of various states will flourish, in Pakistan, the government moved to create one unit thus seeking to obliterate the centuries of history, languages, cultures and various parts of Pakistan.

Sindhi-speaking people of Pakistan did not take this wanton move meekly and unchallenged. A volcano of protest erupted and this period gave Sind, the unprecedented gems of literature that came to the surface in the last century.

Writers were imprisoned and flogged, but they did not give up. Guided by Saeen G M Sayed, as the 'Jiye Sind movement' for a 'Free and Independent Sind-state' started and gained popular support, many were tortured and imprisoned. Saeen G M Sayed interpreted the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif in the Sindhi nationalist context in his book 'Paigham Latif'. This was in contrast to the hitherto interpretation of Shah Abdul Latif only in mystical terms.

I will name only a few writers who rose to the occasion to redeem the debt to mother 'Sindhu', and in doing so, I do

not want to belittle others who also made sacrifices for the cause:

Sheikh Ayaz, Usatad Bukhari, Ibrahim Munshi, Noor Mohamed Palijo, Mohamed Ibrahim Joyo, Tanweer Abassi, Rashi Bhatti, Hameed Sindhi, Mohamed Usman Diplai, with his new interpretation of the Hur movement as a part of the 'Freedom movement' in his novel 'Sangahr'. This glow of poetry of protests continues to inspire writers and Sindhi scholars till this day. Badar Abro in his book 'Shah of Sind' has portrayed the 'Peasant uprising' by followers of Shah Inayat, as guerrilla wars by his followers, 'Kahoris'.

After the Partition of the country, the situation facing Sindhi-Hindus who left their homes and hearths was quite grim. It was a challenge between life and death. Some politicians, thinking along communal lines, advised the community to merge with the local population in the vast country, wherever they got the space to live.

In their short-sighted enthusiasm, they advised the government of the day, incidentally in which they had some reach and voice to change the Sindhi script to Devanagari (Hindu) version, thus seeking a division of the language and culture and at some point in time, to abandon it altogether.

It was a protest against these moves, which enabled a powerful movement which came to be called the 'Sindhyaat', launched by young Sindhi intellectuals, educationists and writers. Young writers, namely Gobind Malhi, Kirat Babani and A. J. Uttam became a vanguard for this movement.

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Though a period literature has traversed through many phases from progressive to post-modern periods, at the base of Sindhi literature remains a commitment to retain that distinct Sindhi identity and nostalgia about Sind, the strong sense of loss of their land and exploration of their roots, all flowing as the main undercurrent of Sindhi literature produced in India.

The movement even of protests has cultural undertones, as against the political overtones that characterize literature produced in Sind. In India, the Sindhi population is less than half a percent scattered in the vast landmass and in the democratic set-up it has virtually become apolitical.

(Presented at the World Sindhi Congress meet, when awarded the Saeen GM. Sayed Memorial Award, 2005, London)

Mohan Gehani is a noted Sindhi scholar, playwright, translator and poet. Born in Karachi (Sind) in 1938, he belongs to a select community of writers who have lived through the Partition of India. Gehani, whose first short story appeared in 1955 in Naeen Duniyan, a progressive literary magazine, is the author of numerous books. He has also played an active role in the successful campaign to introduce Sindhi in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. He is the recipient of several awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2011 and the Saeen G.M.Sayed Memorial Award from the World Sindhi Council in London. He has also received awards for his contribution to Sindhi literature from the Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language and Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli Ain Sahit Sabha. He was a member of the Sindhi Advisory Board for Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, from 2007 to 2012.

With his latest compilation of his previous speeches, he discusses the Sindhi literature and how the various historical influences gave rise to a series of genres, expressions, trends and more. This book expresses the changes in literature both in Mohan Gehani's own words and through the words and biographical accounts of famous Sindhi personalities in literature such as Popati Hiranandani and international names such as Marx. Some iconic parts of the book include, the injustice of Sindhi being excluded as one of the languages in the Eighth Constitution during the partition, the greatness of Shah Abdul Latif and the rise of Sufi poetry or even the personal tales of horror during the Partition.

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