



The Ongoing Conflict between the Common Folk and the Prevalant Status-Quo in Ashfaque Ahmed's the Shepherd

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Abstract— The literature of the pre-partition era will remain incomplete without the mention of the word conflict as it defines that bloody period of history. Much has been written on the themes of the pre-partition and post-partition period. Among the domineering themes of that era, bloodshed, slavery and poverty stand out. During this period, a whole galaxy of stars was ever present as far as the artistic landscape of the Indian sub-continent is concerned. Especially the role of the Progressive Movement was note-worthy as they provoked the masses for independence. With the tragedy of the event, thjs fervour declined as folks and members of the establishment were locked in an ongoing tussle for control which remained the focus of post-partition Pakistani prose. Given these outlining details, the paper aims to excavate and probe into the conflicts qqqqbetween the common folk and the existinvg establishment or status-quo in Ashfaque Ahmed's famous short-story *The Shepherd*. For this purpose, the paper would make use of textual references and critical articles. Historical record would also be utilised as the research has its roots from the on-going capitalist-communist struggle. The research would help us understand the theme in **depth** and would explore new avenues for research.

Keywords— Conflict, Sub-continental common, folk, Establishment

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Over the course of centuries, South-Asian literature has offered a variety of themes which are still open for discussion. Among the dominant themes, the themes of self-determination and partition have stood out and these themes still remain a smoking gun even in this age of globalisation and the twenty-fjrst century. Especially the literature of the Indian subcontinent highlights these themes¹ now and then. The development of this literature may have taken place in an atmosphere of conflict which is the reason for this hostility in authorship In this section, we shall attempt to draw a brief map regarding the development of such hostile nature of writing observed in Indo-Pak and the latter Pakistani prose.

As far as the development of prose in subcontinental literature is concerned, evidence points out that the early signs were found in the middle of the eighteenth century. Q1Although exquisite poetry was

already being produced since the incision of Urdu in the seventeenth century. The tradition continued and poetry got the lamlight up until 1857. After the War of Independence, we observed a sudden outbreak of exquisite prose. Some famous stallwords of Urdu fiction and prose like Praem Chand, Rashid Ahmed Siddiquee to name a few were showing their craft on the literary stage up until the first quatrain of the twentieth century.

The second quatrain of the twentieth century marked the birth of the Progressive Movement which consisted of revolutionaries hailing from Punjab, Bihar and Bengal

The prose of these famous writers acted like a double-headed sword as it was lively and addressed the issues of the masses and moulded their ideological framework against the British Raj which gave immense momentum to the Pakistan Movement

However, on the other hand the seeds of conflict and contention were sown from the onset as ethnic differences were capitalised

As a result peaceful neighbourhoods where Muslims and minorities or other ethnic groups coexisted for centuries turned into helacious battlegrounds as both parties tried to do a number on one another. This conflict had turned into a deep-rooted tree till the partition of the sub-continent.

After partition, the literature of the Progressive Movement became the talk of town as it was still fresh and could act as an influential tool in giving direction to a new-born nation. It was eminent that the lights of Manto, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi and many others were producing great prose which mobilised the public which the establishment saw as an act of direct confrontation as their aspirations of leading the public according to a set design qseemed going down the drain.

Towards the start of 1970s and 1980s, a strong fervour for Marxism and Socialism developed which added fuel to fire as the masses and the establishment grew apart as writings of that era display. This conflict escalated as the establishment tried to adopt the Soviet model of tight control and censorship which worked to some extent but failed miserably as the masses now mobilisdd by these writings were charged and could not be contained any longer despite all measures. This now divided a nation into two parties i.e the common folk and the prevailent status-quo.

1.2. Statement Of Problem

From the available background, the problem of misunderstanding the masses on part of the establishment is highlighted in Ashfaque Ahmed's famous short-story Gadaryia which was translated as **The Shepherd**. There are people who accuse the author of siding with the establishment and this misinterpretaton of the central character is another problem of this research.

1.3. Research Questions

The research tends to explore some important questions which continue to appear time and time. They are as following.

- (a). Does the work of Ashfaque Ahmed truly represent the masses?
- (b). Is this work the result of a pre-existing conflict?
- (c). Are the allegations on Ashfaque Ahmed as being pro-establishment concrete, is there any sound evidence of this?

1.4. Research Objectives

The research revolves around a number of key aims and objectives drawn from the above mentioned discussion. They are as following.

- (1). The research aims to explore the historical context of the themes of conflict in the work under observation.

- (2). It aims to prodd upon the development of this conflict between the masses and the prevailant status-quo.

- (3). It also intends to work upon the developing fragments of arguements against and in favour of our author Ashfaque Ahmed with respect to this work of his.

1.5. Significance

The question of the post-partition atrocities became the centre of debate in the 1990s and it also tried to understand the adverse effects caused by the prose of the Progressive Movement

One such problem was that of intolerance which instead of being used positively went the other way. Keeping all this in mind, our research would contribute its intelect to comprehensively understand the dynamics of the ongoing conflict between masses and establishment

It will also try to clear the dust regarding this controversy if pro-establishment authorship and would finish all sorts of sensationalism regarding the work of Ashfaque Ahmed under observation.

II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The historical landscape of post-partition Pakistani fiction invites the reader to prod upon the historical context working behind such exquisite works. Here we shall be focusing upon the development of post-partition fiction based in Pakistani settings. We shall also be focusing upon the prevailing concerns of these works up until the 1980s. The fiction of this era is based upon the philosophical ideology of the Progressive Movement which was still strong after partition. Although it had lost some of that early enthusiasm after the preceeding circumstances of the conflict resulting after partition.

The initial reservoir of creative genius revolves around the tragedjes of partition as the wounds were fresh and the early writings of authors hint at a grim reality. The most renoued piece which would help to understand the early period of fiction writing is **Toba Teig Singh** by Manto which highlights the concept of seperation which remained a dominant theme in the 1950s and 1960s

The works of other authors like Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi and other like-minded authors herp on the same subject. Qo the other hand subjects of silence aqnd secularism were also associated with post-partition fiction as mentioned in Dandekar[2019).

After this early fervour of the Progressive Wtitors, a period of inclinations towards translation was developed and the trend was initiated after the fall of East Pakistan in 1971 as most of these torchbearers hailed from this region. It was benifitial as the concepts working behind the fiction of that era were now appearing to the international community. Perhaps an associaton with the fabric of Urdu poetry which was eminent in works of fiction.

Herberth(2011) has highlighted the fact in Kamila Shamsie's case as she was able to adapt to writing in English. The same was found in Anderson's(2008) analysis of the Pakistani English literary tradition which remains incomplete without the mention of Ahmed Ali who is a founding stallwort in the domain and the work also hints the use of translation as an early technique which brought Pakistani fiction in front of international scholars.ⁱ

The trend of building a post-partition narrative continued till the 1960s. From herein, we see the initiation of a narrative built around conflict was put in place. This attained the status of popular narrative as it gave life to culmination of thought which seemed enlightened. This influx of creative genius was influenced by Marxist and Socialism which became important in understanding the dynamics of conflict. At this point in time, Ashfaque Ahmed's writings became the focal point of discussion as his famous story *Gadaria* which was translated into **The Shepherd** burst on the scene. After initial reviews, a sudden wave of outrage by the Marxist school

In the following sections we shall see the prevalent themes of Pakistani fiction leading up to our analysis of the target text.

2.1. The Struggle between Capitalism And Communism

The conflict between capitalism and communism has always been the focal point as far as Pakistani fiction of the 1960s is concerned. Especially authors from the right-wing criticised both capitalism and communism but the leftists did not hesitate to launch a swift reply. This situation is eminently understood by an essay from Saed(2021). The essay highlights the nature of this struggle

It points out the huge reservoir of literary genius at disposal. The problem of fulfilment is explicit in the text.

As far as literary texts are concerned, a considerable pattern is observed leading up to the works of Ashfaque Ahmed. The labourer and the working class seems to enjoy a privileged status in the 1970s and 80s. The short-fiction of Ghulam Abbas and his contemporaries seem to depict such instances. If we observe these texts in detail, it is found out that these texts were based in an informal urban setting. Urban informality according to Nichola(2019) has become an effective strategy to consolidate a certain viewpoint. On the other hand its influence on analysis is integral as scholars do not often use this tool.

- (1) Saed(2021), *AntiCommunism And A Hundred Million Victims Of Capitalism, Literature Nature And Interpretation, Volume 27, Issue 2.*
- (2) Kadir(2020), *Politics and Family India Pakistan Two-Nations Theory and the Familial Reconstruction of Political Ideas, India Review, Volume 42, Issue 3.*

- (3) Svenson(2021), *Curating the Partition the Dissonant Experience and Indian Heritage, International Journal of Heritage Studies, Volume 27, Issue 3.*
- (4) Charolette(2010), *Book Reviews, Journal of Post-Colonial Studies, Volume 46, Issue 2.*
- (5) Gautum(2011), *Witnessing Narratives, RSA Journal, Volume 14, Issue 2.*
- (6) Bhattaacharya(2015), *The Indian Partition Of Literature, Music and Film History, Politics And Aesthetics, Routledge, ISBN 9780376122199*

An important element in this domain which cannot be ignored is the nature of political ideologies. Since India was closer to the Communist block and Pakistan strung their knots with the Capitalist block in this period of the Cold War. This Cold War politics seemed to have influenced such glorification. An article by Kadir(2020) hints at this situation by highlighting the impact of such polarised politics on family structures which were far more solid as compared to the Modern era. Therefore this struggle between two ideologies now turned into an ethnic issue which brings us to the question of public conditions after the partition. Keeping in mind we already discuss the building of post-partition narrative earlier, we shall restrict ourselves to the depiction of condition of masses after the partition of the subcontinent.

2.2. The Condition Of The Masses After Partition

Much has been said and written regarding the helacious conditions of the masses after partition. Once an influx of emigrants crossed the border, a chaos was always on the cards. The full extent of this tragedy cannot be explained as words are hard to come by to express one's opinion on the matter. However, our authors and poets have put their hand up in this aspect to a certain degree. The extent of this tragedy is often perceived in Manto's last works in which he mentions the tragedy in depth. The question of recreating experiences from the tragic past has always enticed interest among literary circles as mentioned in a work by Svenson(2021). There are reminiscences of the dissonant and painful heritage but it might be utilised to create a much peaceful experience as violences of that era are still read and remain fresh even after seven decades. Similarly, it is worth noting that the nature of the post-partition narrative is built on the spatial setting as I mentioned in a book review by Charolette(2010) which sheds light upon the dynamics of post colonial narratives in two newly created states who had experienced colonial imperialism for two centuries.

There are numerous instances in literary texts and films that highlight the concept of the catastrophic nature of this partition

To further our understanding regarding the narrative of that period, we must look at an article by Gautam (2011) which blames the spread of ethnic and political divide as the root cause behind the atrocities of the events after partition. Similarly the literature and film in those days also laid emphasis on this as mentioned in Bhattacharya (2015). These soft powers became tools of war as two sovereign states were drenched in hatred for one another and ideological differences were being capitalised upon.

It would be an understatement to say that the post-partition narrative created the momentum needed to proceed further and resulted in fiction built around the mechanics of differences based on ideologies which sew the seeds of contentions and thus an air of discord was created.

2.3. The Conflict With Establishment

The concept of conflict occupies a central position in Pakistani literature whether written in Urdu or English. Perhaps the political turmoil and the existence of a dictatorial regime could be held responsible for this hostile literary environment. It is evident from the writings of that period that the regime did not allow for any medium of expression and adopted a policy of censorship and tight control to suppress any criticism. But the bold poetics of that era backed by enlightened Marxist thought did not hesitate to take their shots which sometimes backfired. This ongoing tension resulted in the mobilisation of the masses against the Establishment who of course did not take it kindly. This situation can easily be understood by reviewing some literature.

As far as contemporary fiction is concerned, the notions of conflict started after the fall of Dhakka in 1971. A book by Cara (2011) highlights these notions as contemporary fiction of that period painted the events of 1971 as national tragedy but for one side it was an accomplishment or independence. After the debacle of 1971, we observed a wave of ideological conflict which is visible even in the works of Ashfaq Ahmed.

III. ABOUT THE TEXT

The text under observation in order to understand the mechanics of conflict is Ashfaq Ahmed's famous story *Gadaria* which was translated as **The Shepherd**. The story has attained canonical status as far as South Asian literature is concerned. Scholars tend to show a liking for this story as it offers a variety of aspects. On the other

hand, this might also hint at a key limitation of the work. Upon inspection, it is observed that the conflict

between the masses and establishment appears as the central theme of the story. The story is set in a typical rural middle class setting and plot suggests that the clerk who is in opposition with the Shepherd ideologically does not wish to see his son with this man of working class. Our antagonist tries all within his powers but it is not known whether the antagonist succeeds in his efforts or not. But this theme of conflict has been left open for interpretation and through character representations we would be able to understand the crux of the matter in detail with ease.

3.1. Character Representations

Character representations in a story play an integral role. On one hand it provides strength to the story and on the other hand it makes room for the creation of schools of thought which are necessary for the flow of scholarly knowledge. In this section, we shall understand the character representation in this work of Ashfaq Ahmed through available literature.

Upon close inspection, the character which fascinates the most is that of **Daojee**. He seems to represent a far more traditional outlook. He plays the role of a hard task master which is visible in the beginning of the text. Another character that seems to draw interest is that of **Umichand** who becomes a barrister through sheer hard work and initially is a shepherd upon which the entire story is based. This one here shows the makings of an ideal Socialist but that is not always the case and then there is a usual feminine character who plays a docile role in such fables. However, these character representations spell the makings of a traditional and exquisite work, it does not look appealing to those belonging from a Socialist school who judge these developments as allegories of capitalism. On the other hand the shepherd's rise to nobility is also indigestible to these people as he also becomes part of a capitalist macro economy.

The shining light as far as the story is concerned goes to the character of Daojee who shows a different side

He represents that section of the weak common folks who get hammered for their just questioning of the manipulative practices of the ruling elite. All in all the character is a just representation of the sociopolitical fabric of the subcontinent.

3.2. Similar Instances In Texts Contemporary To The Shepherd by Ashfaq Ahmed

Despite the presence of a strong liking to Socialism in the fiction of the 1970s and afterwards, similar instances are quite hard to observe as the canvas of Pakistani fiction had expanded vastly. We find religious fiction, there are

instances of nationalist fiction, detective stories and children's literature also gets a mention here as they were like hot commodities at that time. But the closest one may get as far as similar instances is concerned is the humour of Patras Bukhari. Especially his satire, **Lahore Ka Geographia** translated as **Lahore's Geography** might have some instances like referring Lahore's roads to the scars of Mars and preempting the selling of horses/donkeys for meat. His writing style would have put him in conflict with the establishment but thankfully that's not the case. Another instance could be found in the works of Intzar Hussain but apart from that instance, the nature of conflict might be restricted to the diaspora as far as Pakistani fiction in English is concerned and those conflicts revolve around nationalism and representation.

Therefore we can safely say that the instances of Capitalist -Communist conflict are hardly visible in contemporary works similar to this text. Although a conflict between fundamentalist and liberal ideology became a topic of discussion after the 1980s. On the other hand the character of Daojee as an Omniscient teacher comes to the forefront highlighting the strength of the pedagogy taught in Paatshaalas and mosques at that time.

3.3 Ashfaq Ahmed and the Poetics Of Islamisation

A salient feature of the fiction and poetry produced between the 1970s and 80s revolves around the policy of Islamisation which became a hot cake especially in the 1980s when Zia's military regime took over and pledged to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Although these geo-political scenarios hyped the issue, the use of Islamisation as a political tool has been witnessed many times in recorded history and has excited controversy and discontent among literary circles regarding its ethical grounding. It can be understood that the right and left wings heatedly held their positions on the topic. Putting pen on this topic is like the meeting of irresistible forces with the immovable objects which is eminent in the literature of that period.

As far as the work of Ashfaq Ahmed is concerned, there might not exist a clear argument in favour or against the policy but like a good artist he has foreshadowed the use of religion to strengthen a propaganda which was actually the case.

In his story **The Shepherd**, there are glimpses especially in the closing stages when a mob of people surrounds Daojee and pressurises him to testify his true identity but the teacher is well equipped with the knowledge about Islam. His reply upon being asked for the Kalma is a resounding one. It testifies the fact that due to illiteracy and distance from their religion, these innocent villagers are manipulated and that is what kicked started an age of

militancy which is causing rift among people sharing the same land.

Perhaps this section of the story prophesied the early flames of discontent which was to engulf the whole nation upon the start of the new millennium. We can understand what Ashfaq Ahmed was trying to explain with reference to some literature.

After exploring the dynamics of conflict on the basis of religion, it can be established that the ruling establishment was aware that religion is the softest and most sensitive part of the social fabric and they used it to their advantage.

This story depicts the dynamics on which the policy of using religion to divide the masses into factions and rule over them has worked the trick for ages. Therefore by presenting the dirty game, our author has redeemed himself in front of the public. This might be a bold statement but has its basis from close reading of the story.

IV. ALLEGATIONS AGAINST THE TEXT

Now that the text has been read in depth, it is necessary to quell any allegation or reservation against the text which requires a Herculean effort as everybody cannot be kept satisfied and the text shall continue its trial one way or the other. Since this story was written at a time when Socialism was at its peak in Pakistan and traditional narrative would have resulted in negative connotations. Let's examine the prevailing allegations or reservations made by the Socialist school as they consider the text as Anticomunist which is the root of the conflict.

One reservation that is often raised is regarding the misrepresentation of the

of Umi Chann who was initially a shepherd but becomes a lawyer which marks his ascension. This would have been a perfect foil for a Marxist hero but the latter does not consider it and due to their prejudice put the blame on the author even though there is no conclusive evidence of misrepresentation in the text. Another one of these reservations is the fact that Ashfaq Ahmed was a traditional author who maintained a soft tone in all his works which hinted at a decent enough relationship with the ruling establishment. Furthermore he wanted to distance himself from the politics of Cold War and wished to focus his works on familial and social issues. This distancing from mainstream politics and having an anti Socialist ideology as depicted in this work made him a soft target of these verbal assaults by the Reds. Despite all this mayhem and chaos, these topics are still open for interpretation and must be termed as grey areas. The majority of scholars hint at the ethnic Hindu Muslim conflict as we see Daojee being

persecuted by a band of folks who call themselves Muslims. This narrative of conflict seems to overpower the prior Anticommunist narrative.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up our discussion on the topic of conflict, we tried to map a brief history of Pakistani fiction and this overview was linked with the poetics of the folk-Establishment conflict in *The Shepherd* by Ashfaq Ahmed. It was found out that the post-partition narrative of early authors became the source of the conflict. Though the text appears traditional but the Marxists are unwilling to accept it. It must be admitted that the claim of misrepresentation is there but, on the contrary no conclusive evidence in support of the claim exists after a close reading of the text leaving it open for interpretation which would result in a steady flow of scholarly knowledge and would give rise to healthy debates. It is requested that before raising any reservation, it must be kept in mind that creative genius gives rise to grey areas so some leverage must be given to the author keeping in mind his traditional set of values.

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[11] Fiction, Routledge, ISBN 9781138829626

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