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SYED ALI 'SAGHEER SONVI': A SELF-EFFACING VERSIFIER OF HUSSAIN IBN ALI

Dr. Farhat Fatima, Visiting Faculty in Communication Skills, School of Planning and Architecture, Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University, Mahaveer Marg, Masab Tank, Hyderabad

Abstract

Moulana Syed Ali popularly known as Sagheer Sonvi is considered to be one of the most well-known versifiers among his contemporaries. He wrote poetry in Urdu on Ahl Al Bayt (the household of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him) and on Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salam) in the Battle of Karbala. His father's name was Moulana Syed Mahmood Ali. He was born in the 19th century in the year 1836 in village Rasoolpur Soni, District Kaushambi (Allahabad). It was a small village that was two miles away from the town Karari Sadaat, near New Allahabad.

He learnt most of his poetry stances from the renowned poet Mirza Salamat Ali Dabir. Some of his contemporaries were Shaad, Sareer, Zahoor, Sawaab and Safeer. This paper aims to highlight some of the affirmative points of Sagheer Sonvi's verses of Urdu poetry about Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) and Ahl Al Bayt (Alaihis Salaam), family of Prophet Mohammad}

Keywords: *Battle of Karbala, Razmiya Shaiiri (poetry depicting war), Chehra (Introduction), Amad (entry of the Hero into the battle field), Bain (Lamentation), Alaihis Salaam (means 'peace be on you' in Arabic).*

Prologue

Versifier Moulana Syed Ali (Sagheer Sonvi); Taab-e-Sarah (Taab e Sarah means, an elegant person who brings happiness), His Takhallus or pen-name was Sagheer and he was from Navi or New Allahabad from a small Qasba or Town known as Karari Sadaat. He was born in the 19th century in the year 1836 in Rasoolpur Soni; which is a small village two miles away from Karari Sadaat in District Kaushambi. He was a Taqvi Syed which means he was a descendent of Holy Prophet Mohammad-e-Mustafa's (peace be upon him) ninth son Mohammad Taqi's son in progeny. It is popularly known as the descendents of Sufi Saint Khwaja Banda Nawaz; Syed Mohammad Gesu Daraz lived in this village. It is the Sufi Saint's fifth generation which lives here presently, which is the family of Poet Sagheer Sonvi. (Zaidi 77)

Major part of his life he has lived in Lucknow and Jaunpur. He was considered to be one among the superior poets of his era. He had many admirers in Faizabad and Jaunpur. Among poetry verses he used to write Marsias (elegiac poem in six-lined or Musaddas format), Salaams (a lyrical salutation) and Nohas (lyrical dirge). He had excellent memory and it is said that he used to recite Marsias throughout night and in the morning He used to recall the Verses and stanzas through his memory and Pen them down. He used to recite his own Marsias, Salaams and Nohas in a loud, clear and melodious tone and while reciting he used to cry simultaneously.

His father's name was Maulana Syed Mahmood Ali. His parents concentrated a lot on his upbringing and education. Till nine years of age his education was at his home and afterwards he was sent to Lucknow, as at that time Lucknow was the centre of spiritual teaching and all the legends of Urdu Adab (discipline) were present in Lucknow. He received religious knowledge under the patron ship of Hazrat Ghufraan Ma'ab and got a devout grade.

His poetry was appreciated amongst his contemporaries. Some of his contemporaries were Shaad, Sareer, Zahoor, Sawaab and Safeer. His poetry on Ahle bait was widely recited among his circles. He hails from an educated family and He along with his siblings was well-educated. Sagheer Sonvi developed interest in poetry by the influence of Mufti Mohammad Abbas who was not only an administrator but also a great scholar and poet. He initiated and taught Sagheer the basics of poetry and later introduced him to one of the greatest and leading poets of that era of Urdu Literature, Mirza Salamat Ali Dabir. Maulana Syed Ali Sagheer Sonvi became the disciple of poet Mirza Salamat Ali Dabir. (Abid, 14)

By Profession he (Sagheer Sonvi) was an Imam e Jamaat in the Masjid of Jaunpur. Poetry writing was his favorite hobby which he did in service of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and his household. He has written 500 Marsias in his life which are in ten volumes and are present in Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, Patna, Bihar. (Abid 15) Twenty three (23) of his Marsias are still popularly recited throughout the world. Most of his Marsias depict, Prophet Mohammad's (peace be upon him) Grandson, Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) in the Battle of Karbala. He also wrote Marsias on Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Cousin and Later Son in Law of Prophet Mohammad). His Marsias portray the combat of Karbala, the torture inflicted on Hussain Ibn Ali's Family and the return of the Caravan's of Hussain's family back to Madina. He portrayed magical realism at some situations in his verses while writing Marsias. He also elaborately portrayed the inflictions done on the ladies of Hussain Ibn Ali in Damascus and Kufa. He also wrote Marsias on Prophet Mohammad's (peace be upon him) eldest grandson Imam Hasan Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) and great grandson, Ali Ibn Musa-Al Raza (Alaihis Salaam)

Exploration of verses

In the months of Moharram and Safar (the mourning period of Hussain Ibn Ali, Grandson of Prophet Mohammad) he was invited in his neighborhood villages and suburbs known as Qilapur, Imampur and Kajgaon to recite Marsias. He has written this fact in the verses of his poetry.

Transliteration

Gada Hussain ka Hazir Imampur mein hain (Abid, 15)

A Beggar of Hussain (Alaihis Salaam) is in attendance at Imampur (translated by Fatima, Farhat) Marsia Nigari or Marsia Writing in the era of Sagheer Sonvi was on the archetype of Razmiya Shaiiri (poetry illustrating war). Marsia is a melancholic epic written to observe the martyrdom of Hussain Ibn Ali (the youngest grandson of Prophet Mohammad, Peace be upon him) and his 71 devoted Companions in 'The battle of Karbala'. When Yazid, the son of Mawviya unlawfully acknowledged himself as a self-governing ruler over the Islamic State he demanded Hussain Ibn Ali's allegiance. Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) discarded him completely and rejected Yazid's rule, for Yazid represented all that was against the Laws of Islam. Consequently Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) was brutally martyred famished, desiccated and parched on 10th Moharram by the cruel and troublesome armed forces of Yazid Ibn Mawviya. Thus, 'Kerbala tragedy, for it certainly is the greatest of all tragedies, the most momentous of all catastrophes that befell the Progeny of the Chosen One.' (i.e., Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon Him.) (Yasin, 15)

The subsequent lines of his Marsia are written in Musaddas format (six lines of poetry) in praise of Prophet Mohammad's Cousin and later Son-in-Law, Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Alaihis Salaam) and they portray the first element of Marsia i.e. Chehra or Introduction.

Transliteration

*Maujuznuma hai naam janabe Amir Ka
Kare Khuda hai kaam Janabe Amir Ka
Har Jaah hai Faiz e Aam Janabe Amir Ka
Azaad hai Ghulam Janabe Amir Ka
Haami Sabhon ka woh Asad e Zuljalal Hai*

Qabl Az Wajood Wa Baad Wafaat Ek Haal Hai (Zaidi, 204)

Miraculous is the name of his Excellency Amir

Accomplishing the obligations specified by God; is the job of his Excellency Amir.

Everywhere is the glory of the generosity of his Excellency Amir.

Free is the slave of his Excellency Amir

He is a strong supporter of all people, the Lion of Allah (The most glorified)

In Pre Existence and after demise he is in the same condition i.e., helps people (Translated by Fatima, Farhat)

The above lines portray the position of Ali Ibn Abi Talib {(Alaihis Salaam), Cousin and later Son-In-Law of Prophet Mohammad, Peace be upon him) He is also called Amir which means 'Commander in chief' in Arabic. In the above lines the poet portrays the miraculous status of Amir and that his work was to do Charity. Everyone knows about his generosity and the poet professes that he being the slave of Amir is a freeman. As he (Amir) is the lion of God he helps people not only before their birth but also after their demise.

Sagheer Sonvi's poetry revolves around his brain-storming thought process, his striking band of interconnected lexis which he fits with his thematic ideas. The following stanza of Marsia portrays a scene of Amad (entry of the Hero into the battle field and at times it has elaborate descriptions of the Hero's Horse or Sword) of Hussain Ibn Ali in the battlefield. It portrays how he took his sword out of its scabbard to start the war. How majestic he appeared holding his lightening sword.

Transliteration

Jo Sheh Teigh Shola Fisha Khaichte Hain

Toh Ek Aah Dono Jahan Khaichte Hain

Rakham karte Hain Dasaf Qasre Shahe Deen

Shabihe Riyaaze Jahan Khaichte Hain

Nahin Dhoopki Qasre Momin Ko Parwa

Malak Noor ka Saiibaan Khaichte Hain

Imame Do Aalam Ke Matam Mein Naale

Wa Hosh wa Taiwar Inso o Jaan Khaichte Hain (Farooqui, 474)

When Sheh (also known as Hussain Ibn Ali) was pulling the flaming Sabre

Then both the worlds were drawing an Aah! (Sound expressing joy)

The King (Hussain Ibn Ali) of the fort of religion was writing tenfold (in history)

And He was drawing an imitation of Universe with land, beautiful grass and flowers

The pious believer (Hussain Ibn Ali) of palace does not care about sunlight

(But) The angels were pulling a cover of light (and)

Both the worlds are lamenting for the Religious leader (i.e. Hussain Ibn Ali)

(And) the humans and Jinn's are drawing their senses and frowns (translated by Fatima, Farhat)

In the above lines the versifier Sagheer Sonvi skillfully pens a picture of Hussain Ibn Ali (the youngest grandson of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him) in the battlefield of Karbala when He took out his sword which was flaming as if it was on fire and seeing it both the worlds were drawing a sound of awe. The poet poetically praises this action and says, the king (Hussain Ibn Ali) appeared to sketch a tenfold picture of Universe with its beautiful garden comprising of attractive land with grass and flowers. In the next lines the versifier depicts that, Sunlight was falling on Maula Hussain Ibn Ali and he did not care about it, and it appeared as if the angels were pulling a sunshade upon him. In other words, the versifier wants to say that the above action of Hussain Ibn Ali has been written by him in the history of universe in tenfold. In the last two verses versifier Sagheer Sonvi says till today both the worlds are mourning the martyrdom of Hussain Ibn Ali and in this process they (humans and Jinn's) frown and cry through their senses.

Grief is a feeling that is primarily linked with experience of loss. It is apparently seen as the human response that is associated expressly to the irreparable loss of another person. The following lines of Marsia written in Musaddas format (six lines of poetry) by Sagheer Sonvi portray the irreparable loss the womenfolk and children of Hussain Ibn Ali had on his martyrdom and their Bain (The most heart-rending laments of the survivors, especially the women whom the hero left behind.)

Transliteration

Woh Bain Bibiyon ke woh bacchon ka shor o shain
 Charon taraf tha shor ke mare gaye Hussain
 Be sar padha tha khaak pe zehra ka noor e ain
 Jalte thay khaima e haram e Shah e Mashraqain
 Chaya Huwa Dhuwa' tha Gharibon ki aah ka
 Ghar Luth raha tha Sibte Risalat Panah Ka (Zaidi, 206)
 That lamentation of ladies, (and) that shouting and crying of children (of Hussain Ibn Ali)
 All around was noise that Hussain was slain
 Zehra's light of the eye or her bringer of happiness (her son) was lying down on ash headless.
 The tents of the womenfolk of the King of the east and west (i.e. Hussain Ibn Ali) were burning
 Smoke was spread like a gloom by the grieving sound of the strangers (women of Hussain Ibn Ali)
 The house of the grandson of the Prophetical Shield (Prophet Mohammad) was being robbed
 (Translated by Fatima, Farhat)

In the above lines on the tenth day of Moharram after the martyrdom of Hussain Ibn Ali, his womenfolk were grieving for him and children were mourning his death and the enemies were rejoicing that Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) was no more. The light of Zehra's (daughter of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him) eyes, her youngest son was lying on ash with his head severed. Yazid's army has burnt the tents of Hussain Ibn Ali's womenfolk, the king of East. Environment was gloomy and smoke-filled with the sad moaning sound 'Aah' of the strangers as the house of the grandson of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) was being robbed.

The subsequent stanza of versifier Sagheer Sonvi also portrays Bain (lamentation). It very beautifully reveals the melancholy of Zainab Bint Ali (peace be upon her) the elder granddaughter of Prophet Mohammad, peace be on him and his family.

Transliteration

Abbas andheri raat hai khuch sujhta nahin
 Marte hain mare khauf ke namoos e Shahe Deen
 Chaye huwe hai khaima ke chaugird ahle kee
 Iss dum toh lijiye khabare khuahare hazeen (Zaidi, 207)
 Abbas it is a dark night and I cannot comprehend anything
 Women of the King of Religion (i.e. Hussain Ibn Ali) are dying of dread
 People of the enemy have encircled the tent from all four sides
 At this moment at least enquire about the well-being of your unhappy sister (Translated by Fatima, Farhat)

Nothing in the Universe is as agonizing and deep as the loss of a treasured one, another unique individual whose loss could not be filled in your life. The poet sketches a picture of this agonizing loss of Abbas Ibn Ali {(Alaihis Salaam), younger brother of Hussain Ibn Ali} by his sister Zainab Bint Ali (peace be upon her).

After tormenting, humiliating and inflicting pain on the family of Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) after his martyrdom, the army of repugnant Umar Ibn Saad, The commander of Ubayd Allah Ibn Ziad's Army (Umayyad Governor of Basra, Kufa and Khurasan under the reign of Yazid Ibn Mawviya) finally left.

Zainab bint Ali (peace be upon her) the sister of Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) took a broken spear in her hands and began moving around the camp making sure that the small group of distressed, howling women, tired kids and the sick son of Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam), Zain Al Abedien (Alaihis Salaam) were not further disturbed during the night by the scheming and unpleasant armed forces of Umar Ibn Saad. Till today it was Zainab Bint Ali's (peace be upon her) Chivalrous, Brave younger brother Abbas Ibn Ali, (Alaihis Salaam) who used to take care of the Caravan. He used to guard the tents of the womenfolk of Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam). Now he was sleeping in the lap of death, martyred, badly injured, hands severed, sodden in his own blood. Zainab Bint Ali (peace be upon her) was anguished by losing her dear brother, she was tormented that the children and womenfolk might be terrorized again by the evil soldiers of Umar Ibn Saad. She could hear them in jubilation, celebrating their victory. They were in a desert and the night was pitch-dark.

In the above lines the poet portrays the soliloquy of Zainab Bint Ali (peace be upon her) as she laments and calls her brave brother Abbas Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) and requests him to come to her aid as it was dead of night and she is not able to comprehend anything, the womenfolk of Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam) are dying of fear, the vile soldiers of Umar Ibn Saad are spread

around the tent. At this moment of distress, she cries, come to the aid of your grieving sister oh! Abbas.

Conclusion

Sagheer Sonvi's profound, affluent and sensible scenarios in his poetic verses touch the reader's heart. He was a warm and open hearted person and was friendly and cordial with everyone around him. It is because of his gentle and kind demeanor he had a lot of visitors and guests in his house. It is heart rendering that such a great poet was not bestowed the recognition which was his right. Unfortunately, His own kith and kin did not preserve his works. His grave is in front of his house in the courtyard of the Masjid where he served Allah (s.w.t). His poetry will always be counted among the anthologies of Hussain Ibn Ali (Alaihis Salaam.)'s versifiers.

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