

## **Resistance in Punjabi Poetry: A Case Study of Zia Regime**

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### **Abstract**

The resistance literature throughout the world has always been taken as a force that may drive and shape the minds of the readers to resist the oppression of the cruel forces of the society. The poets with themes of resistance feel the pulse and palpitation of the society, try to diagnose the intensions behind the cruel minds that ruthlessly suppress the helpless masses and while focusing on the remedies, prescribe the resistant passion and energy to the readers. This resistance poetry may help the readers to build a consciousness against this oppression, cruelty and social injustice. The Punjabi literature especially the Punjabi poetry since the epic age of Mahabharata and Ramayana has always been remained critical to the oppressive forces whether local or foreign and focused to develop a temperament of resistance among the readers against these undesirous forces. This paper traces the elements of resistance in Punjabi poetry and critically analyzes resistant themes of the Punjabi poetry which was written during the martial regime of Zia-ul-Haq. It also investigates the factors that enforce the poets to write with resistance themes and unearth the feelings of the oppressed against these breath-halting forces. The present study examines all the readily available Punjabi resistance poetry of Zia Regime and explores

the various strains of resistance and tries to align it with the historical tradition of resistance in Punjabi literature.

**Key Words:** Resistance, Literature, Poetry, Martial Regime, Oppression,

### **Resistance in Punjabi Poetry: A Case Study of Zia Regime**

Resistance means the ability to stand against and to oppose something un-desirable. It is the part of human consciousness that one resists against unwanted things. On the other hand literature anticipates life. It talks about man in interaction with man and society. So resistance literature is the exposure of man's this very opposition towards oppression, cruelty and social injustice. It is an obvious fact that a poet is always close to the heart of the general masses. He can communicate positively what none other can. Out of this reason Vladimir Mayakovski says,

Only one thing to me is important:

That there be poets,

Many excellent, different poets! (Rosenberg, ed. 1966, 3)

Alexander Pope, the renowned poet of the 18<sup>th</sup> century England in his popular work *An Essay on Man* says,

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,

The proper study of Mankind is Man (Grant, ed. 1950, 121).

The history of literature shows that it has always been taken as a tool by the creative minds of the time to reform the follies and frivolities of the society. Renaissance literature may be taken as a relevant case of resistance literature in Europe. It revised the social, political, economic, cultural and religious phenomenon almost of the entire Europe. That's why 'the men of the Renaissance thought of their time as one in which mankind changed fundamentally (Hale, 1965, 11).' In addition to this, Geoffrey Chaucer, the social historian of Medieval England, in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* unmasks the corruption of the religious class in a resistant tone when he says, 'if gold ruste what shal iren doo (Pollard, ed. 1960, 18)?' One of the classic works of literature in West is Homer's *Iliad* in which he depicts the story of resistance on part of Troy. Hector- the brave heart of Troy-chooses to die with honor than to live with the shame. He spoke to Achilles;

Then welcome Fate!

'Tis true I perish, yet I perish great:

Yet in a mighty Deed I shall expire,

Let future Ages hear it, and admire! (Pope, tr. 1965, 500)

Besides, the resistance of Spartacus in south Italy (73-71) (Grant, 1992, 120-123) influenced a strong slave uprising against the Roman Republic and gave the hope of freedom to his fellow gladiators. Socrates, the renowned Greek philosopher, also resisted the injustice and opted for the bowl of poison than life. He told to the jury, ‘as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy (Grube, tr. 1975, 32).’ Euripides-the Greek tragedian-was the one who was always resistant to the established discourse. To him ‘the ancient and the modern critics view as the iconoclastic and unconventional dramatist.’ (Storey & Allen, 2005, 131)

The Punjabi poetry since ages is replete with the theme of resistance. The songs of resistance in Punjabi literature, date back to *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and then comes the legends of *Raja Rasalu* (VI-V centuries) which were succeeded by Nath Movement (VIII-X Centuries) and the *Var* literature of the time, then come the *Bhakti* poets with the voice of resistance. This voice was further carried by the Sufis of the Punjab from Baba Fareed to Mian Muhammad Bakhsh along with Baba Nanak and Sikh Gurus’ poetic work. The *Vars*, *Kissas* and *Satire* from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the advent of British Raj conceded this tradition and promoted it among the poets of the Colonial era. The folk literature of the Colonial period celebrates the heroes of the Punjab as the resistant souls against the cruel authority of their time.

Shafqat Tanveer Mirza in his book *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature* confesses the reality that, ‘the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh shook the whole of the sub-continent

and the resistance put up against the Rowlatt Act by the Punjab was unprecedented during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mirza, 1992, 42).’ Hafizur Rehman in the introduction of his book *Resistance Literature* says, ‘the exercise of inhuman control over a section of people.....gives birth to a literature of defiance (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 18).’

Among these poets the most eminent one are Bulleh Shah, Shah Muhammad, Mian Muhammad Bukhsh, Khawaja Ghulam Farid, Bhai Vir Singh, Kripa Sagar, Dhani Ram Chatrik, Kartar Singh Kalaswalia, Diwan Singh Kalepani, Giani Gurmukh Singh ‘Musafir’, Mohan Singh, Avtar Singh Azad, Darshan Singh ‘Awarā’, Harinder Singh ‘Rup’, Ustad Daman and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Amrita Pritam, Harbhajan Singh, etc. Along with, these poets much folk literature was produced during the colonial period in eulogizing and honoring the freedom fighters of the War of Independence (1857).

This spirit of resistance in Punjabi literature seems to be enlivened during military regimes in Pakistan. Rasheed Amjad starts his introduction to *Mazahmati Adab:Urdu* with the words,

Resistance is the central tradition of Pakistani literature . . . The third martial law was immoral, unconstitutional, and unreasonable rather was a rebellion against the Constitution of 1973. It was the reason that the reaction against this martial was really intensive. (Amjad, 1995, 21)

This study intends to analyze the Punjabi resistance poetry which was written during the Zia Regime. The researcher tries to unearth that how Zia regime particularly saw the height of this literary resistance. Fakhar Zaman in his foreword to *Resistance Literature* writes, 'The imposition of martial law in 1977 and the martyrdom of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto are two tragedies which have influenced our national life at every level.' (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 15) These two tragedies not only changed the political atmosphere of the country but also stirred a hefty reaction among the literary circle of the time. Their writings carved a new pattern of thoughts. They consciously took it as their historic responsibility to document the oppression and cruelty of military government for the future generations. The poets of the time thought, 'the crusade for freedom and egalitarianism and the new awareness to stand steadfast against repression constitutes the manifesto of our future.' (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 15)

The literary creativity of that time, 'marched shoulder to shoulder with those protesting politically against violence, cruelty and oppression.' (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 18). An analysis of the Punjabi poetry of Zia regime explicitly highlights the themes of oppression, suppression, fear, women's emotional suffocation, check on freedom of thought and expression, control over all resources etc. Saleem Jahangir in his poem, *Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto* says,

*Na tun jaane na mein jana*

*Kaihdī maūt aey kaun aey moyā* (Arif, ed. 1995, 34)

Only we didn't know about it: You and I

Who died there? (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 355)

Saleem Jahangir is questioning that who died with the death of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto? Is it the death of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto or General Zia ul Haq or the death of democracy in the country or the death of trust, confidence or personal freedom? He further says,

*Akhan wale sachīyan gallan*

*Lokaan nu na cha'nge lagan* (Arif, ed. 1995, 34)

The people who tell the truth

Are seldom liked by men (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 355)

He means that it's the future that would decide who died at that particular time. There is a Chinese proverb, 'The flowers of all the tomorrows are in the seeds of today.' (Mansoor, ed. 148) Jahangir in another poem extends the theme in this way,

*Kha ge sooraj pa ge raat*

*Jammi janj gernail jamaat*

*Bandian di bhal ker na murshte talash ker* (Arif, ed. 1995, 35)

They have swallowed the sun, and brought about the night.

In the wedding has arrived the General with the men!

Look for real men

And don't go for the puppets, (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 358)

They would search for the puppets now because true men do not compromise on their freedom. John Milton in his masterpiece *Paradise Lost* says,

To reign is worth ambition, though in hell:

Better to reign in hell than serve in heav'n. (Bush, ed. 1966, 218)

Shuja Nawaz in his book *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within* writes, 'The imposition of martial law by Zia was meant to be short lived. Swearing by the Muslim credo of *La illah illallah Muhammadur Rasul Allah*, he promised elections within 90 days.' (Nawaz, 2008, 359) Later on he gave up his promise in these words,

It is not in the Quran nor has it been revealed to me that elections will be held on October 18 and nothing will happen thereafter (Nawaz, 2008, 359).

Yusuf Hassan, another Punjabi poet, goes ahead in protest. In his poem *kabitt* (A Sorrowful Song), he says,



*Kinna piya nera ethe*

*Kehra such jooth mithe*

*Chaok vich chor jithe*

*Sa 'ad sadaaonda*

*Sukh da na sa 'ah liya*

*Khola hoya ghar keihya*

*Mur murk on piya*

*Annhiyan machaaonda*

*Deenh saade vehre dhukke*

*Raat da haner mukke*

*Zaaliman da hath rukke*

*Shehr kurlaaonda* (Arif, ed. 1995, 70)

It is pitch dark all around, we can neither find falsehood nor truth.

In darkness the thieves have

Become honest men.

We haven't heaved a sigh of relief

In our house, who has raised these despicable cries?

When will the day appear and bring

An end to the dark night?

When will the hand of tyrants come to stop?

The city has become a fearsome cry! (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 383)

The same idea of 'thief' is used by Nasreen Anjum Bhatti, another Punjabi poetess, in her poem *Kaafi* as 'uninvited guests'. She writes,

*Laghre ander kon prohna*

*Wasde kothe ka'an* (Arif, ed. 1995, 67)

Who is the guest in the room?

The crow is on the roof!<sup>i</sup> Come, let us dance! (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 330)

Then she proceeds ahead and says,

*Okar das karor, dise doori doori*

*Doori ain hazoori nakayye dham po.* (Arif, ed. 1995, 67)

How long is the journey!

Yet what's far off is nothing less than his presence; face to

face come, let us dance (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 330)!

It's hard to challenge the ways of the dictator but still she is in hope that despite of the length of the journey someday one would achieve the goal. Here she seems to follow the diction of Khushal Khan Khattak that,

The night traveler should look for the dawn hour

There may appear the morning star

One should never lose hope

The rain falls ultimately upon a dry pasture (Rehman, tr. 2016, 19).

Shaista Habib, another Punjabi poetess, strengthens Nasreen Anjum Bhatti's above said idea that oppression and check on freedom leads to resistance. She in her poem, *Meri Hoond* (My Being) raises her defiant voice in this way,

*Mein neri mitti nh haan, jhide oper her koe per rakh k tur jave*

*Mein ta'an uggi ghaah haan, peran heith madholi javaan fer v sar ucha rakhaan*

*Mein te hawa haan*

*Her than ute upper eder uder, her aik sa 'a de ander jeevan*

*Mein koe bacha nh haan, jinhood chand mar k maan piyo chup kra den*

*Meriyan do wadiyan eadiyan akhan ni, te sochan lai damagh v ae*

*Mein tali te lakeeri hoe kismat di rekha nh haan*

*Mein te aap kalamkar haan, apna nizam khud tayar ker sakdi haan*

*Mein te Hubba Khatun aan, Jameela Bohri, Laila Khalid haan*

*Apni hoond, apniyan likhtaan vich azaadi de geet gaondi haan*

*Jithe v koe zulm kamae methu bach k na javae (Arif, ed. 1995, 40)*

I'm not dust which everyone can trample and walk away

I'm grown grass, even if I am rumpiled under feet

I keep my head high.

I am the wind,

Everywhere, above, here, there

I live in every breath.

I am not some child whom mother and father slap into silence

I have two large eyes, very large eyes---and for thinking, a mind.

I am not a line of destiny drawn on the palm.

I myself a writer, I can create my own way

I am all the heroines this world has known

My own being; in my writings I sing songs of freedom

Wherever anyone indulges in tyranny, cannot escape me. (Zaman & Rehman, 2009, 370)

The idea is being a poetess she believes in the power of the pen and resolute enough to express herself boldly without any dictation. Amjad Ali Shakir, a well-known resistant poet of the time, very aptly uses the image of 'Boot' in his poem with the title *Boot da Tasma*.

*Char chufere hanera ghup*

*Te her passé ae doohngi chup*

*Bas ik bhare boot da tasma*

*Khir khir hasda*

*Gallan karda*

*Nazreen aave*

*Sunya jaave* (Arif, ed. 1995, 16)

Deep darkness is everywhere

Followed by deep silence

Only

A heavy shoe's lace is

Smiling

Talking

Seen by everyone

Listened by everyone

Fakhar Zaman, in his poem, *Aeih Kon?* very critically questions the role of military.

*Aeiy kon ae jehra adhi ratien*

*Saada booha kharka rea ae?*

*Aeiy koe rahgeer te nh?*

*Aeiy koe chor ten h*

*Aeiy koe gawaandi te nh?*

*Jaan per aeiy aes basti da*

*Saanjha chokidar te nh*

*Jinu assaan lishkani banduq*

*Le k diti si*

*Par jehra saade hi seene te*

*Banduq rakh k*

*Saahnu gharon kadhan lae aaya ae* (Arif, ed. 1995, 51)

Who is this? Who at midnight

Is knocking at our door?

Is this a traveler?

Is this a thief?

Is this a neighbor?

Or is this the watchman?

Of this town

To whom we have given

The shining gun

And now he

With the same gun

Pointing to our chest has come

To drive us out of our home

Sara Shugufta, a rebellious voice of the time, in a taunting way pens down the distrust in her poem, *Mein Nangi Changi*.

*Mein nangi change*

*Mein tere waste lahu de deeve bale nien*

*Te apniyan poran de saare raaz*

*Lokan vich vand dite nien*

*Mein apniyan poran vand vand k*

*Tere sang meil banae nein*

*Fer v mere badan di dalali karn wale*

*Tenu mera naan nh dasde* (Arif, ed. 1995, 36)



I'm fine being naked

I lit the flames of blood for your sake

Then the whole secrets of my bosom

I shared with the people

By sharing my bosom

I made my relation with you

Even then the people who sold my body

Don't tell you the name of mine

To conclude, it may be suggested that the bulk of literature which was written by many Punjabi poets in resistance to Zia regime somehow in one way or the other highlights the common themes of resistance. This is because resistance literature has a direct link with the soil and the people living on that soil. It can never be created in an unreal world. It might have a touch of imagination but it is always beached on reality because it comes to life with words coined in the mintage of society. The purpose of the writers in writing resistance literature is to inspire the masses to celebrate their indigenous traditions, identity, liberty, nationalism, racism, ideology and religion. For these poets, literature is

not only apolitical but a significant political phenomenon and it has a strong relation with power and politics.

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