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Viewing Ahmad Hammad's Poetry Through a Marxist Lens

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Abstract

This study explores the poetry of Ahmad Hammad, a contemporary poet, by examining the Marxist themes that shape his work. In his famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Karl Marx called for philosophy to go beyond simply interpreting the world and instead focus on changing it. Similarly, critical theorists like Herbert Marcuse highlight the transformative potential of art, describing it as a way to offer depth and meaning in a world often limited to superficial perspectives. However, Ahmad Hammad's poetry is rarely analyzed in this context. Critics often associate his ideological stance with right-leaning tendencies, overlooking other dimensions of his work. As a young poet, Hammad's work hasn't been extensively studied in academic circles. This research draws insights from interviews, articles in newspapers and literary journals, and his poetry collections, which serve as the primary foundation for this analysis. Additional sources also help deepen the understanding of his poetic vision. The study challenges the prevailing view of Ahmad Hammad as a poet with center-right inclinations, arguing that this perspective only tells part of the story. A closer reading of his poetry and prose uncovers distinct Marxist undertones. His poems go beyond mere reflection, serving as a call to action and a tool for societal transformation. Several of his works powerfully convey messages of change and social awareness.

Keywords: Marxism, Social Change, Poetry, Urdu Poetry, Ahmad Hammad

Introduction

Viewing Ahmad Hammad's Poetry Through a Marxist Lens

Ahmad Hammad is a young contemporary poet with a sublime expression. Unlike his contemporaries, he writes on wide range of topics such as romance, religion, democracy, dictatorship, economic imbalance and the impact of cyber age etc. and a philosophical tincture can be felt throughout his poetry. Before analyzing Hammad's poetry in the light of Marxist philosophy, it is necessary to know Marxist philosophy and Marxist philosophy of art.

Karl Marx had very little to say about art, so whatever is known about his philosophy of art is an extension of the basic principles of his philosophy. Marxism provides a materialist world outlook. It stresses that the structure of the world, where the poor have to suffer, needs to be altered. Marx clearly expresses this view in his eleventh theses on Feuerbach that, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it". (Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy, 1976)

Marx asserts in Communist Manifesto that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” (Marx & Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1948) and that initiates due to the economic imbalance among people. Marx motivates the proletariats to bring about a revolution, as, for him, it was the only solution to eradicate their exploitation by the bourgeoisie. He says, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!” (Marx & Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1948)

As Marxism is a revolutionary philosophy, it forces on the practical effect of art. Tony Bennett illustrates that a Marxist literature would be representing the economic, political and ideological relationships of a society from which they would be originating. Moreover, it would be an attempt to represent the interests of specific social classes and it should be revolutionary. (Bennett, 2003) Gordon Graham describes Gregory Lukacs’ perception about the genuine poet that “...the real poets play a part in social struggle; those who purport merely to ‘describe’ are in fact allying themselves with the forces of oppression” (Graham, 2005). So, for Lukacs, the truthful poets have a great role in bringing about social revolution.

Baudelaire defines poetry as “Poetry has a great destiny! As joy or as lament, it carries forever within itself a divine utopian character. As soon as it ceases to contradict the world of facts, poetry ceases to be poetry.” (Kearney, 1984) It is necessary for a poet to represent what contradicts the world of facts otherwise his poetry would go into extinction. Herbert Marcuse, in *The Aesthetic Dimension* says,

“Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance.”
(Marcuse, 1977)

Marcuse too thinks that art has the capacity to bring about revolution. Kearney says, “Marcuse contented that perhaps art is the last remaining refuge for two-dimensional experience in our one dimensional society.... Art is radical when it exposes the familiar as unfamiliar, challenges our preconceived assumptions and invites us to apprehend the world in a new way.” (Marcuse, 1977) Ira Shor, a Marxist critic, suggests a few questions to be inquired from the literary text to know whether the text depicts the Marxist concerns. Charles E. Bressler in *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* outlined the suggested questions by Ira Shor. A few of them are as follows: “Is there any outright rejection of socialism in the work? Does the text raise fundamental criticism about the emptiness of life in bourgeois society? ... What is emphasized, what is ignored?” (Bressler, 1994) Bressler further adds that a Marxist literature exposes dominant class and its tactics to oppress the working class. This type of literature has the capacity to motivate for action, social change and bringing about revolution.

After having a detailed overview of Marxist philosophy and literary criticism, now it is legitimate to discuss the tinge of Marxist inclination in Hammad’s poetry. As he is a young poet, not much has been written about his poetry, however all that which has been written proves him a center-rightist poet which is the half truth about his poetry.

Shamim Manzar reviewed the first book of Hammad named *Shaam Bechain Hai* in *Books and Authors*, Daily Dawn. He says, “Hammad is a poet of existing era, who lays emphasis on a contented life, also commenting on how the competitive society enslaves humans, leaning them stranded on the platform of materialism.” (Manzar)

Anwar Sadeed, a columnist, while giving the reference of a free verse of Hammad, writes in *Nawa-i-Waqt* that Hammad’s poetry carries the fragrance of flowers yet it represents sobs too. He talks about the problems of modern man but his approach is regressive. Anwar Sadeed writes:

”غزل ہو یا نظم ہو وہ آج کے انسان کے ساتھ جو بحرانوں کے گھمسان میں زندگی بسر کر رہا ہے اور عافیت سے محروم ہے۔ ہمدردی کا ظہار نہیں کر رہے بلکہ رجائیت آمیز انداز میں یقین دلا رہے ہیں“
(Sadeed)

He says, at the moment of depression, Hammad prays to God to look into the matter and solve it. He quotes from one of his verses:

”میرے خوشیوں بھرے دن غار میں سوئے پڑے ہیں۔۔۔ میرے مولا۔۔۔ انہیں بیدار کر دے۔“
(Sadeed)

However, in this very verse, a few lines earlier, Hammad talks about Marx and Mazdak and asks the reader, the deprived, to see the dreams to change their life as the dreams may develop the urge to grow and give the courage to change the fate. The excerpt is as follows:

”کشتگان سرمایہ۔۔۔ خفتگان محرومی۔۔۔ یا تو رات خوشیوں کے۔۔۔ دیکھ دیکھ کر سینے۔۔۔ جاگتے ہیں، سوتے ہیں۔۔۔ یا پھر آسمانوں پر۔۔۔ جب طلوع ہوتا ہے۔۔۔ روشنی بھرا سورج۔۔۔ یہ الم فزا پیکر۔۔۔ انقلاب کا سپنا۔۔۔ آنکھ میں لٹے ہر دم۔۔۔ شہر شہر جاتے ہیں۔۔۔ اور دن کے آخر میں۔۔۔ اپنے خواب کے بدلے۔۔۔ ملٹی نیشنل تھپکی۔۔۔ لے کے لوٹ آتے ہیں۔۔۔ مارکس ہو، کہ مزدک ہو۔۔۔ چومسکی ہو یا بو ہرمن۔۔۔ کوئی بھی نہ کام آیا۔۔۔ ان کو کون سمجھائے۔۔۔ خواب بیچنے والے۔۔۔ کل کی چاہ میں اپنا۔۔۔ آج بیچنے والے۔۔۔ اپنی کم نصیبی کے۔۔۔ دن بدل نہیں سکتے۔۔۔ تیز رو زمانے کے۔۔۔ ساتھ چل نہیں سکتے۔۔۔ خواب قیمتی موتی۔۔۔ آج، بے بدل مالا۔۔۔ جس نے آج ہمت کی۔۔۔ وقت اس کے ہاتھوں میں۔۔۔ بخت اس کے ماتھے پر۔۔۔“

(Hammad, Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle)

In ‘Family Magazine’, his critic while highlighting Hammad’s inclination towards bringing up the socio-political problems invokes other writers to talk about the issue. Moreover, he says that whether the poet chooses to write in Urdu or Punjabi, his message remains the same. (Family Magazine, 2013)

In his first book, Shaam Bechain Hai, Hammad accentuates that the Muslims rely on prays rather than working something worthwhile. In the following lines, Hammad spotlights the adverse impact of capitalism. He, rather, makes capitalism synonymous to Satan. He used the word Iblees both as capitalism and Satan. The representative. See the following:

”کیا پڑی ہے کوئی جھانکے درون ابلیس
ارض امریکہ پہ طاری ہے فسوں ابلیس
چشم نیویارک کی پتلی میں جڑے ہیں سکے
اور بدن بھر میں سمایا ہے جنون ابلیس“
(Hammad, Shaam Bechain Hai)

In ‘Mere Naqshgar’ the poet primarily invokes God in the moments of misery but in this ghazal too, he is sure that it is the capital whose absence is the reason behind his downfall.

”میں اسی لیے تو زوال ہوں ترے دہر میں
میرے پاس ہے نہ زمین نہ زر، میرے نقش گر“
(Hammad, Shaam Bechain Hai)

T’ray Khayal Ka Chaand is Hammad’s second book on poetry. In the preface of the book named ‘Surmaii Diary Say’, he shared his views about dictatorship. This is not the only place where wrote against the military coup. As this book was being written during the dictatorship of a General, Hammad, being against this system of governments shows his anger and laments over this rule. In ‘Richard Gabriel say ek Mukhtsar Muqalma’ he talks against the military coup and ‘Kab Aaye Ga Sultani-e-Jamhoo ka Mausam’ is dedicated to the rule of democracy.

In the following lines Hammad uncovers the truth that the king’s court gets things done as they want to by any means...

”تلوار کے ساتھ اور کہیں پیار کے ساتھ
داستان ایک ہی منسوب ہے دربار کے ساتھ“
(Hammad, T'ray Khayal Ka Chand)

Descartes Say' is a conversation with a modern western philosopher Rene Descartes. The presence of this poem shows his great inspiration and inclination towards philosophy. Bored of dogmatism, he exclaims with agony that when 'Lahore' would produce dynamic minds who would bring change. He says:

”کب تک نہیں اٹھے گی نئے دور کی آواز
کب تک یونہی خاموش رہے گا میرا لاہور“
(Hammad, T'ray Khayal Ka Chand)

Ay Meray Naqshgar', 'Raaz hai, Raaz Hai' and 'Sargoshiyaan' of this book can be considered to have rightist tinge. The rest are the romantic verses. Thus in his second book too, Hammad proves himself a poet with balanced vision. Moreover, the number of verses which are about the social change, bringing up awareness and economic difference is exceeding.

In the following poem from his third book Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle, Hammad reminds talks to the 'Just' God while highlighting the segregation among people due to financial differences and his delayed justice in this regard.

”میرے عادل خدا
میری دنیا میں طبقوں کا اندھیر ہے
اور ترے ہاں وہی مستقل 'دیر' ہے۔“
(Hammad, Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle)

Hammad's poem "War on Terror" is an example of bringing out the issue of terrorism imposed by the Super Power on the countries with oil reservoirs. The poem in a sublime and heart touching manner, not only highlights the issue and gives awareness but also tells the powers that the same can happen with them as well. (Hammad, Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle)

In these lines of Hammad speaks against terrorism and asks the countries who claim to be the loving that they killed millions of people to take the revenge of three thousand.

”تین ہزار کے طیش میں آ کر مار دیے
تم نے دس سالوں میں پندرہ لاکھ انسان
اب بھی دہشت گرد انہی کو کہتے ہو
جن کے شہر بنا ڈالے تم نے شمشان“
(Hammad, Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle)

The poem named "Friends, not Masters" also brings into light that the 'friends' are actually the 'masters'. The poem starts with the poet's intension to color the map of his land, but as soon as he could decide which color should he opt his 'friend' push him towards the canvas in such a way that the 'red' color spread on the map... and his 'friend' was smiling. (Hammad, Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle)

Hammad point outs that the 'free' media of his country does not let its people know the true information. The couplet is as follows:

”مرے وطن کا ہوا جب سے میڈیا آزاد
کسی کو سچی خبر کا پتا نہیں چلتا،“
(Hammad, Mohabbat Bheegta Jungle)

This was all from the poetry of Hammad. He has written two books also which are based on his reflections and columns published in newspapers. In Parchhaaiyaan, at various places, he wrote against the status quo. He, following critical theorists of Frankfurt School, considers that it is the duty of the artist to speak for the people. In "Pakistani Drama Shadi Byah kay Bakhhairron mein Ulajh kr Reh Gya Hai" he says:

”فن، فنکاروں پر معاشرتی ذمہ داری بھی عائد کرتا ہے۔ ڈرامے کے لکھاریوں اور پروڈکشن ہاؤسز کو چاہیے
کہ ان کے مسائل کو اپنی تخلیق کا موضوع بنائیں جو پاکستانی معاشرے کو دیمک کی طرح چاٹتے جا رہے ہیں۔“
(Hammad, Parchhaaiyaan, 2014)

In another column named Tarraqi-yaafta Media mein Such Bolna Mushkil hota hai and Sahaafi... Hoshyaar-Bash he points out that the capitalists determine what to broadcast on media as either they are the owners of the media houses or give heavy sponsors that the owner of the media houses cannot afford to broadcast that which may offend the capitalist. In this scenario, it is almost impossible to follow media ethics. (Hammad, Parchhaaiyaan, 2014)

Taj Mahal Saint Valentine nay Banwaya tha is another column in which Hammad speaks against the capitalists. He says, a capitalist needs market for whatever he produces. If there is no market, he creates one to sale his products. (Hammad, Parchhaaiyaan, 2014)

Hammad, in Jeera Blade, Majboor Talba o Talibaat ki Jaibain Kaatnay Waalay University Maalikaan Say..., points out that our private educational institutes are not more than money making machines for the capitalist. The capitalists, when they want to get more money, they open a school/college system or university and take fees from the students in millions in different capacities. This subject has also been discussed in his 2nd prose book “Khayaal Aata hai” in a column named Ek Nayi University ki Zroorat.

”ایجوکیشن مافیا کی روز افزوں ترقی دیکھتے ہوئے بعض چالاک تاجر یونیورسٹیاں بنانے کی طرف متوجہ ہوئے۔ ریاست نے اس سلسلے میں بھی مناسب قانون سازی نہیں کی۔ معاملہ یہیں ختم ہو جاتا تو شاید اتنا خطرناک نہ ہوتا۔ مگر یہ مافیا رفتہ رفتہ قانون ساز اداروں تک رسائی حاصل کرنے لگا بلکہ قانون سازی میں یا بلاواسطہ شریک ہونے لگا یا پھر سرمایے کے زور پر لائی میکرز پر اثر انداز ہونے لگا۔“

(Hammad, Khayaal Aata Hai, 2014)

In a column named Kali from Khayaal Aata hai, he talks about the misbehavior of the policemen and wardens and asks the people to raise their voice through any means. He says:

”ایسے غریب کا حکومت نہیں، فطرت بھی خاتمہ کر دیتی ہے جو اپنی کمزوری اور غربت کے خاتمے کے لیے آواز اور باتھ کی طاقت نہیں آزماتا۔“

(Hammad, Khayaal Aata Hai, 2014)

Althusser says, “the peculiarity of art is to ‘make us see’, ‘make us perceive’, ‘make us feel’ something which alludes to reality.” (Althusser, 1971)

It is not the case that those who consider Hammad a rightist poet is at fault. In his first book Shaam Bechain Hai, there are some poems, ghazels, and couplets such as ‘Bata Maalik’, ‘Kisi Be-Imaan kay Sog per Mere Naqshgar’, ‘Khaaki Shaam_A Spirit’s Mellow’ and ‘Meri Shab ne Na Din Hona Jana’ and at some places poem ends where the poet invokes God to help him in distress.

As the critical theorist believe that art is a major source to bring social change, Hammad is rightly using this tool.

Collingwood believed that proper art demands the expression of feelings with imagination. Thus, accepting Collingwood’s dictum, poetry, as a form of art, demands the same. The poets need to imagine and fantasize to see what others cannot. They perceive what other cannot even imagine. Create the world which does not exist. Thus they may take the liberty to invoke God and other super natural beings to look upon the matter where the physical beings fail. Their poetic excellence demands such imagination. Therefore, if a poet take such liberties, it does not make him a centre-rightist poet.

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