FLOWER IN FLAMES
An Urdu Poem on World Peace
Written By
HIMAYAT ALI SHAIR
Translated By
RAJINDER SINGH VERMA
HIMAYAT ALI SHAIR

1946

Himayat Ali Shair was born in 1920 in Aurangabad, (Deccan) India. Besides literary achievements he made his mark as a journalist, broadcaster, television commentator, playwright, film producer, director and song writer. Received awards in 1962, 63, 64 as “Best Film Lyricist.” Has toured U.S.A. Canada, UK, India and Middle East Countries on invitation to Mushairas and literary seminars. He is now teaching in Sindh University (Pakistan).

Among his published works are:

POETRY


PROSE

FLOWER IN FLAMES
(A Poem on world peace)
Entitled in Urdu
"BENGAL SE KOREA TAK"
By
Himayat Ali Shair
Translated by
Rajinder Singh Verma.
Panjab University Patiala
(India)
DEDICATED
To
The Living memory of
FAIZ AHMED FAIZ
with Love & Affection

Himayat Ali Shair
Rajinder Singh Verma.

Printers:
Mashhoor Offset Press Karachi.

Publishers
AL-MUŞANNEFEEN
C.B. 45 Al-Falah Society
(Defat Colony Karachi-25)
(Pakistan)
POETRY OF LOVE & PEACE

Mohammad Ali Siddiqui

Poetry is more than the composition of feelings. It reflects the moods of the times through the medium of words in a way which enriches one's own interactions. Modern Urdu poetry—ever since the thirties—has in its corpus the echoes of national and international events. Thomas Mann, the well-known German writer, was eminently right when he wrote that the destiny of the modern man was politics. It is true in the case of Modern Urdu poetry as well.

Himayat Ali Shair is surely one of those poets who are the product of the wave of internationalism in literature. Born in Aurangabad (India) in 1930 his youthful years in the '40s saw the twilight of British Raj. He saw the progressives lend their support to the Allies in order to fight Nazism and fascism. It was a strange lesson exhorting revolutionaries to fight imperialism at home and oppose Nazism along with the imperialists themselves. This is, in nuttshell, a paradox. Poetry also makes use of the paradoxes into a beautiful whole.

The war over, Himayat Ali Shair saw the dawn of freedom in the sub-continent in 1947 and the downfall of Hyderabad State in 1948. He migrated to Pakistan & found himself in a new matrix. His initiation into internationalism was not going to desert him. It has carried itself with renewed emphasis to the present times when he is recognised as an important poet in the lyrical tradition. Well, lyricism has to be somewhat didactic—somewhat discomforting for those who are wary of earnestness and viewpoint.

Himayat Ali Shair's long poem 'Bengal Se Korea Tak' (i.e. from Bengal to Korea) is an important poem. The poet himself says about the
poem. "This is not an autobiographical poem; probably this might be termed as one. The central character of this poem could be myself or you. Bengal became the graveyard for tens of thousands of people despite being far away from the theatre of war itself and Korea is the latest Hiroshima. The farther this Hiroshima extends itself the outer limits of (the famine stricken) Bengal would also increase by leaps and bounds. In the light of this background the central character of this story could be reckoned as an individual one as well as a collective entity."

Prof. Rajinder Singh Varma's translation of Himayat Ali Shair's poem is a labour of love. Prof. Varma has earned a name for himself for translating high class Urdu, Hindi poetry into English for a climate of opinion where nothing but the ideas of peace and freedom could flourish. He has acquitted himself well with it. Peace is, by itself, a noble sentiment. There are no two opinions about it. Even the ones who trade in death and promote tensions for the sake of raising their gross domestic product (G.D.P) find themselves constrained to use a confusing & confounding idiom. They are too shy of expressing their real designs. That's why all those poets & writers who have been holding aloft the banner of peace are unambiguously earnest in their expression. Himayat Ali Shair is surely one and he creates for this poem an architectural edifice starting from the blurred memories of his character's village in Bengal. The first images which dart on his mind at the time of the composition of the poem characterise injustice & inequality. The poet's sensibility carries the images still further. They become for him the stepping stones towards a new kind of awareness. They bring in new insights towards comprehending the exploitative character of the society which breeds flash-points of tensions locally and in conjunction with kindred exploitative forces all over the world, small or big conflagration. Himayat Ali Shair synchronises his childhood reminiscences. His sensitivity to seemingly obscure
details is so refreshing that he lifts up the whole landscape. He employs a dialectical sensibility for recording rural motifs while his contemporary Telegu poet Shishinder Sharma in his poem translated in urdu (Meri Dharti, Mere Log) has subsumed himself with Nature itself. It is nature speaking out to the poet. Himayat Ali Shair employs a different technique & idiom. He makes the centre-piece of his poem look in retrospect on the ghastly wars. He doesn't understand as to why Man allows himself, at times, to turn into Beast. He appears to be crystal-gazing - scene after scene—until the images of eventual sanity start leaping forth. Images of death & decay are superceded by those of life and rejuvenation.

Life is a cyclic movement. The poet sees in the marriage rites of his imaginary character's daughter the triumph of the will to overpower death. The forces of destruction appear finally reeding in the shade, he concludes. It is a case of complete identification—intermingling of the thought-processes of the two-the poet himself & his created being.

Life is also a ritual. The wars & pestilences are.
It appears, parts of symbolism illustrating the ailments attacking human body. As there is always a moment to grieve, there is not very far behind the moment to feel a bit optimistic. It is like joy & grief alternating themselves in perfect rhythm.

The poem ends with the apocalyptic lines.
"Hid in a single sun's demise is the death of many rays". Himayat Ali Shair's poem is soul-lifting. In a world which breeds feelings of alienation and exile it is a poem which seeks involvement & interaction, placing utmost faith in human destiny. Prof. Varma has translated Shair's poem as a tribute to the mainspring of poet's philosophy of life—humanism itself. Prof. Varma has got hold of most nuances—the remaining few are destined to bypass or step aside. This is the minimum price which every transaction has to pay. Fortunately this translation does full justice to the poem.
I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uè chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad again.
Shantih shantih shantih

T. S. ELIOT
(From “THE WASTELAND”)

FLOWER IN FLAMES
This story is not an autobiography but it can be one. The central character of this story may be 'I' as well as 'you'. For during the last world war Bengal despite being away from the theatre of war turned into a graveyard for hundreds of thousands of people; and Korea is a fresh Hiroshima and as fast this Hiroshima will go on spreading, the boundaries of Bengal will go on expanding accordingly. Seen in the light of this background the central character of this story is individualistic as well as collective. And today in the heart of every man of the world the dreadful concern for a new world war has turned into a question mark.

Will our new generation also serve as the fuel of war?
IN THE DUST OF REMINISCENCES

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
That village, my native land
Paradise and hell of mine
Surrounding a few mansions
Burial place of living dead
Amid lush and leafy fields
Mart of famished bare life
Mirroring every lovely trick
Of lowness of world advance
Simple guard of nature’s charm
Greedy people’s masterpiece.

In this heaven, in this hell
Blossoms into roses bloomed
In dim heat of this very shade
Atoms heated into Suns
Youth - a wave of surging flood
Youth - a loud cry of gales
Seething fire in pebbles' veins
Boiling point of life's blood
Wit akin to craziness
Frenzy to wisdom allied
Assuaging restlessness.
Composure so turbulent
Silence in its noise lost
Clamour full of perfect calm.

How lovely were days N nights!
How winsome was life's charm!
To me it was all the same
Light of moon or sizzling noon
Thought and feelings folly-born
Took pebbles for precious gems
Cheated by a sacred trick
Looked on firmament as earth
Reckoned bowing at the sill
Of every delusion, faith.
Wrapping life in shreds of shrouds
Looked on it as elegant
Sipped on tears smilingly
Looked on gall as honeyed drink

Who does know, who understands
Who has looted life’s lot
And what gods have ensnared
Fate of Laila of the world.
A JOY AND A DEATH

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge.
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse
Eventide - My tawny love
Happy eve of solitude
When at its own pulsations
Life intially blushed
To my panting urges flute
Lilted lovely lullabies
In my dreams deserted fields
Crop of smiling ditties waved
Into empty dim hut burst.
Wedding team of milky ways

How lovely those moments were
How even, how divergent
How silent, how turbulent
How pentup how care free
Day N night a wakefulness
Dipped in sleep I underwent
In the sleeping rooms of youth
Lingered ever light of Moon
Saqi mine and tavern mine
Life was ever sunk in cups
Evening was as morning sweet
And at sun-up evening fell
Indifferent to lapse of time
Life flowed at even pace

Who thinks in such flower beds
Thorns and blossoms co-exist.
Joy N grief on life's bed
Wake and slumber side by side.
Crumbled with a sudden jerk
Drunken dreams of self-deceit
Raging tempests tore to shreds
Cloak of roses dipped in dew
With a whiplash shattered all
Roses dancing on the waves
Night hadn’t yawned as yet
Face of Moon began to pale
Flame of hunger whetted so
That the youth of pebbles waned.

Life all its beauty aids
Put off and left at a shop
In my orchard every bud
Fell off twigs as spring arrived.
WOE OF HARVEST

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
Ah! the sweating dawn N dusk
Punishment of sins of youth
Every breath in pain engulfed
Every glance in search of bread
Worrying for dawn at night
Seeking night’s loaf at dawn
Urges thronging in the soul
Prick of penury wounding heart
Youth - a wave of surging flood
Youth - a breathing cadaver

In my sensibility’s dark
Many lamps were lit and quenched
So many milestones on path
Not one fit to guide me
I whose conscience is a slave
I whose mind and heart are serfs
I don’t know how lofty is
Place of Man in nature’s court
My each morn’s life’s dawn
Every evening’s life’s eve
Since my life is but death
Why should I not salute death
For a tiny bowl of rice
I did barter all my life

At the sound of bugle danced
My insight, thought and brow
I was mighty happy but
I had no rapport with life
Holding civilisation’s flag
War was going round the globe
Bitter-hearted, lips asmile
Ever kept on shedding blood
In the name of coming dawn
Dark of night intensifies
Putting out lamps of huts
Swallows town after town
Swearing by the peace of world
Goes on obliterating life

I, a yeoman, witless, poor
What secrets of life I know
Only I was certain that
I would get what was in store.
ADIEU

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse
That depression, hush N calm
Curbing cries 'neath the throat.
Touching lips and turbing words
Trembled out of fear unknown
Awe inspiring shadows grind
Bloody teeth at every mote
Anguish stirs with din of cries
Reaching lips become a sigh
Fluttered throbs beating hard
Sip on tears silently.

How horrid that sight was
What fantastic thought I had
In sad, awful nooks of house
Life wouldn't dare peep
And when quivering lips of mine
Lowered to kiss mother’s feet
Din of many laments rose
Many lavas did erupt
Cries ‘gainst the cries struck
Sisters, Brothers clung to me
Mother hugging me to breast
Kept on hitting firmament
And a youth did cry hoarse
Clinging to a pillar quiet

I did calmly bear hurts
Piled stones on my breast
For the joy of house mates
Lancets in my heart I thrust
I did leave but my tears
Accompanied me all along
Cries echoed in my ears
None could cheer up my heart
If I get a moment quiet
House shrinks into my eyes
Seeing a woman full of years
On the way my soul’s upset
While musing who knows why
Eyes flood and heart’s aquake

And I holding heart of mine
Drinking venom journeyed on
Motherhood as pure as milk
Kept on crying silently
IN THE WAR THEATRE

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse
In those lashing, leaping flames
Racing, crying, cracking heads
Roaring giant aircrafts
Dusky, smoky spectacle
In the blood of rotting grime
Cadavers each passage dipped
Heart to self and others blind
Drunken each and every glance
Even lacerated and sore
Morning wet-eyed and mute

Wherever the eyes turned
Gaping death was marching on
And it trampled on the way
Life’s roses ‘neath its feet
All around men galore
And an awful solitude
Fears waving snaky hoods
Eyes glazed and mind aghast
Shaking hearts at every step
Who will suffer what who knows
Echoed in the air a cry
Death before the eyes danced
Lurking in the crannies was
Life puzzled, horrified.

Life force in throes of death
Is how intense in the heart
They don’t know whose every hour
Is a happy news of life.
I did muse at every step
Where am I, Where's my life.
Hid in bosom of my Bride.
Is the pride of motherhood
Reveries of my sister dance
In what heavens no one knows
For whom mother has preserved
All the dowry of her own
How their hearts'evernew
Urges should be drinking gall

And in a jiffy with a bang
Shook the world of my heart
Every faith of life snapped
And death overpowered life
BLOSSOMS IN FIRE

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse
O my dawn and my eve
Since the even seeking dawn
Din of wards killing hush
Betraying gusto for life
Pulses sinking momentarily
Every moment soaring thoughts
None a friend and none a foe
Life harking all the same
Crying bowls of seared lips
God or devil, friendly none.

No one knew in such a clime
Life could put on a smile
Facing lashing gales of death
It could kindle little lamps
Far beyond my solitudes
In my house entered spring
Life did its lovely heights
For a woman sacrifice.
Seeing me in throes of death
Novel image it had stirred
Life burning in its flames
Had its loveliness enhanced
Seeing here a waning world
It had decked a newer one.

Can't say at that time at once
How many lancets pierced me
How many buds to flowers turned
How many orchards dried up
With a total calm and poise
I was at my wits' end
On the one hand, fear of death
On the other, longings new
Methought after all for what
We were thus at daggers drawn
What's the bitterness for which
War theatre spouts blood
All are devotees of life
I'm human, so are they.

To what savageness to-day
Human race has climbed down
Selling for some coins, life
Whither have you come to-day?
WHEN FLAMES WERE QUENCHED

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
O in gentle morning wind
Outburst of chirping dawn
Every moment shrinking dark
And sprawling twilight
Shouldering the flag of light
Every ray's triumphal march
Waving at the night's front
Clear flame of morning's heart
Prints of feet in dark astray
At the cherished goal arrived

From the lap of time life's
Pride came in world's court
Failing pulse of sobbing did
Frame of evolution stir
Topsy turvy dreams of youth
Started stirring in the eyes
Zest of life began to breathe
In the sighs and cries again
Glittered lamps of sunny smile
In abbeys of fading eyes
Panting throbs began to dance.
In the showplace of desires
Rambled so the youth as if
Flowerbeds all lined the paths

In pulsations of my heart
As if somewhere flowers bloomed
And beyond the sight’s bound
Wandered somewhere my eyes.
In the silver gloss of coins
Morning of my dreams smirked
Grace of many rising days
Spangled stars in night's hair
Clank of many anklets coy
Lilt of many songs enshrined.
Waving youth of smiling fields
Humming clime of reaping crops
Swung in beatings of the heart
So many urges yet unfelt.

On that day I came to know
Meaning of each dream of mine
On a dark deserted hut
Prided fate of paradise.
In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge.
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
O my country, my Bengal
Land of constant mutinees
Land of folk sayings N songs
Blazing in the paddy fields
Land of workers gay N blithe
Camping amid swelling waves
Land of amours breathing in
Taj Mahals of clay unbaked
Land of prayers innocent
Taken in by lovely tricks.

More and more I neared goal
More and more the distance grew
In my heart a surging flood
Of perturbing urges rose.
I had hoped to welcome me
Scented breezes would arrive
Shaking prayers of wet eyes
And of quivering lips would come
With the gifts of Moon N stars
Dancing houris would arrive
For the washing of my wounds
Juicy clouds would advance
Humming lyrics evernew
Fife music would present.

Who knows war theatre gives
Blood to universe of whom
And whose universe it roasts
Fully in its fireplace
I was in my land and it
Was abode of rotting bones
Land of inert arid ribs
Hugging to its neck its heart
Land of daughters and the sons
Selling for a bowl of rice
Land of dusty cereal mills
Hushed at emptiness of house
Land of leafy fields in which
Famines were the only crop

On the land of my Tagore
Rose a World of cadavers
Sordid all the scenes as if
Vomited by burial place.
BY OWN HOUSE

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge.
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
O my primal step in the house
Sight of sudden heart break
As if with a sudden bang
Fell to pieces our world
Hush of door N roof N wall
Shaking out of dread unknown
From each corner horrid form
Stares at me open-eyed
Peeping out of jots, death
Ridiculed its latest prey.

Palming off a little cash
Hunger had beguiled want
Flinging me in sorrows’ mouth
Hunger ate up total house
Only my sister survived
Caressing her cadaver
For my little daughter’s milk
She did sell her chastity
Patting her sensation snakes
In the hope of my advent
Dumping in her bosom’s grave
Every call of modesty
Fruit of uncommitted sins
Lifting heavy load of a sin

As I came I don’t know when
She too left me quietly
Rupees jingled in my purse
Silently perished my world.
Dryed was I but
Scething feelings knew no base
Silence of my quivering lips
Shouted secrets of my heart
What is that diabolic God
Who gifted this thing to life
Man accepted what a world
In which he is less than worms
What a sorry scheme of things
It sucks itself life’s blood

I wanted to cut all bonds
And step out of every Jail
Life a formidable sword
Hit all gods and helmsmen.
Harvest of Grief

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
Silent caravan of time
Burning in its inner flame
'Neath eyelashes burning coals
Soul aflush in every vein
Remembrances pricking heart
Poise crying helplessly
Tears mute N molten flame
Looking after and before
Far and near loneliness
Carrying a load of grief.

Methought what my poverty
Got after it wasted all
In the hope of affluence
What did death in war achieve
My village—a heaven on earth
Sad and silent like the grave
Life a plain of agony
Not a sound far or near
Fears danced in every lane
Terror stuck at every jot
Momently is eating mine
Heart, premonition of death
With each passing hour of life
Every hope is cracking up

I did muse but what's the use
My Kaaba was shade of mine
Who will tell me perished why
My village though out of way
Land of Bengal that day was
Funny playhouse of death
Perished not only my house
But all civilization died
Womb of holiness was lewd,
Core of each relation black
Mothers sunk in sons’ embrace
Sisters, brothers’ paramours
Countenance a broken glass
Sins emerging from the laps

In this living town of graves
Buried was my total World
In this heaven’s gentle flames
Day N Night, sizzled life.
SECOND LIFE

1. Then of itself does immerse
2. In the mirror hall of thought
3. Every image does emerge
4. For a while it vibrates
Ah! the sweating days N Nights
Sin of living penalized
Every moment woe-begone
Every move a quest of bread
Ache of yearnings in the soul
Thorn of sorrow pricking heart
Way of life that day same
As it was till yesterday
Body did encumber soul
And today it does the same

Wondered I what Lords of war
Got out of this holocaust
Mehmud is what Mehmud was
What did we Ayyazes get?
In every nook of the world
Everything was business-like
Houses did entomb the crops
Still was famished human race
Kaaba shop or temple shop
Everywhere money reigned
In each coffer like a grave
Tender brook of death did flow
Though the war had ended yet
It was on in every house.

Many times tired heart
Gave up fellowship of breath
But a little girl undid
All my intents with a smile.
All I had was looted but
Life did offer a gift
Single jot around which
All my days N nights turned
Cares toughened day by day
Time pestered more and more
Kept on facing ordeals
Moments of my tired life.
From a bud the autumn hit
Flowerbed got sustenance

Out of many bloody floods
After delving life emerged
This cadaver for a girl
Through every ordeal passed.
SECOND JOY

In the mirror hall of thought
Every image does emerge
For a while it vibrates
Then of itself does immerse.
Once again the tawny eve
Happy eve of solitude
Calm hour of sorrow same
Fruit of life impatient
Agonised place of mirth
Get-together fond of grief
Desolation beating charm
Of a hundred paradise
Fruit of faith in human life
Approbation of new age.

After several years passed
Same hour has come again
For a laggard like me
Dream of destination brought
My daughter is bride today
Queer is the joy indeed
Every hour causing bloom
Plunges in your hearts thorns
Heavenly looks house but
Life cries hiding face
When a lady makes a wreath
Out of blossoms, I do shake
Through recital of the flute
I can hear bugle’s sound.

Once again the lords of earth
Are effacing signs of life
They are busy crucifying
New Bengals N Korean lands.
War has broken many buds
Ere they could fully bloom
Widowed many eventides
Bled so many mornings white
Several bodies stiff and young
Like the dry twigs it broke
Many dreams of coming dawn
It left in the dark astray
It diverted pressing steps
Of progress to other side

Think awhile why wails
Nature’s Bride day N night.
Hid in a single sun’s demise
Is the death of rays.

MANY A RAY
A POET OF BRIGHT FUTURE

Yunus Ahmar

During the current century alone, millions of precious lives have been sacrificed on the alters of famine, hunger, disease and war. Societies have been torn apart, fertile lands made barren, rich economies ruined and many of the countries laid waste by the retrogressive forces. What mankind has witnessed all through is a grim tale of miseries and tears. The man-made famine of Bengal that struck the entire province in 1943, still appears a nightmare, a horrifying spectacle of living corpses of men, women and children lying on the pavements of Calcutta with bowls of alms in their hands. The dogs and vultures smelling them as dead, were around them having a good feast, and people unmindful of the tragedy were busy in their day-to-day lives. The whole atmosphere was charged with sobs and cries, tears and shrieks for food to save them from the hands of death.

When my memory goes back to that grim period of the history of Bengal, I shudder to recall it. Because I have seen small babies dying with their mouths sucking the dried nipples of their mothers on the footpath of Chowringhee, one of the most fashionable areas of Calcutta. I have also seen the crowd of hungry people, walking slowly crying for food. These were the dreadful scenes that aroused the conscience of our writers, poets and artists. Zainul Abedin was one of them who felt his conscience tortured with the sceptre of death hanging over his head. He could not sit idle. He made a series of paintings of those hungry men, women and children badly mutilated by vultures and dogs. The artist earned fame for his rational approach. His paintings stirred the feelings and emotions even of those who remain unconcerned with such gory scenes.

Zainul Abedin expressed his sentiments through paintings while Himayet Ali Shair articulated his poignant expressions through a long poem titled “Bengal Say Korea Tak”. The difference between the two upholders of truth is that Zainul Abedin was present on the spot while Himayat Ali Sha’ir observed the game of death through his inner vision. Although he could not witness the holocaust of the worst famine of Bengal, yet he could feel the pain and pathos of the hungry people. His sensibilities were so sharp that he wrote this long poem at the age of only 22. Very few poets, at least in Urdu, attempted to come out with their emotions. Jigar Muradabadi who was purely a poet of Ghazal, however, felt pain in his heart and thus he wrote a Ghazal on the famine of Bengal.

The famine struck the province of Bengal in 1943 while war in Korea started in 1950. There is a gap of nearly seven years between the two catastrophes when humanity remained at stake throughout this period. At the back of both the events reactionary forces were very active to strike at the very root of progressive trends working for the welfare of the masses. Famine and the powder-keg of Korean war struck heavily on the dreams of mankind. As the poet says:

Wherever the eyes turned
Gaping death was marching on
And it trampled on the way
Life’s roses ’neath its feet,

Howsoever he envisions the mighty hand of death
Destroying the hopes and expectations of mankind, he
do not fall victim of despondency and frustration.
He always cultivates in his heart the bright prospects of tomorrow. Because he knows that:

"Life burning in its flames
Had its loveliness enhanced
Seeing here a waning world
It had decked a newer one.

Himayet Ali Sha’ir needs no introduction. He
A man of progressive movement playing the flute of love and life, peace and progress. He is one of those poets of his age who has always yearned for the betterment of mankind. His poetry is the harbinger of truth, which invites trouble and problems. But in speaking truth, he keeps before him the tragic end of the great Greek philosopher, Socrates. He is conscious of the fact that manifestation of truth has in store both physical and mental torture yet he is prepared to face the reality. Come what may, he says, but he will not break the mirror of truth. The doctrine of truth which he embraced in the early period of his poetic life, he is still adhering to it. The revolutionary thought that he cultivated in the flush of youth, continues to reinforce in him the same vigour and vitality. His emotions and images are still fresh and reinvigorating. He ardently believes in the force of love which triumphs destroying the power of evil.

"Bengal Say Koren Tak" may be described as a drama of love and hate, war and peace, hope and delusion, defeat and success, and so on. And this drama revolves round only one main character and that is the poet himself. He passes through many episodes, through many experiences, and through various ordeals. He observes different characteristics of life and death; he beholds the agony of famine and war; at times he feels frustrated but then controls himself. We find the elements of both ardour and anguish in the poem. We find the poet in Bengal when he says:

O my country, my Bengal
Land of constant mutinies,
Land of folk saying N songs
Blazing in the paddy fields
Land of workers gay N blithe
Camping amid swelling waves
Land of amours of clay unbaked
Land of prayers innocent
Taken in by lovely tricks.

Born in 1930 in Aurangabad (Hyderabad-Deccan), Himayet Ali Shair travelled a long way to
poem titled, "Tashnagi Ka Safar (The Journey of Thirst)." He says:

One moment (which is)  
the whirlwind in the desert of hope  
and the mirage,  
the circulation of blood in the desire to touch  
And the silent pain of burning solitude  
Under the shades of broken stars  
I desire that this fire be put out!

Each moment for a poet like him brings with it the lamentation of unfulfilled desires and the cries of wounds which are oozing from the afflicted heart. This is the tragedy of a modern poet, who is saddled with various problems ranging from social injustice to political upheavals. Each incident of his life directly affects him. He is forlorn in a wilderness.

Thus, Himayat is a poet of modern sensibility, of progressive feeling and bright future. His poetry demands a careful study.

Mr. Verma has translated this poem with dexterity and skill. He has tried to keep the same tempo and tenor as is in the original. His full grasp in both Urdu and English has made the translation close to the original. Mr. Verma deserves all praise.

---

A POET OF LOVE AND LIFE

Professor Azhar Qadri

The first conscious attempt at modernizing Urdu Literature was made by Maulana Hall. In this regard his achievements can hardly be overestimated. After Hall Iqbal is the most prominent poet to welcome the new trends in Urdu Literature and to give it an impetus which has gone a long way towards shaping it on the most modern patterns of life. In fact modern poetry has drawn much of its inspiration from him. In the wake of all this modernity was launched the next great and meaningful movement in 1936, by some grown up writers which led to the introduction of the progressive tendency in literature and the formation of the Progressive Writers’ Association. The Progressive movement provided the writers with an exhaustive manifesto which set out to relate literature to the realities of day to day life in all its phases. It especially laid great emphasis on the socio-economic aspect of human life and aimed at treating man in his social environment. Obviously enough this movement had a profound effect on the minds of the younger generation of writers among whom Himayat Ali Shair occupies a pride of place.

Right from his youthful days Himayat appears to have adopted a sort of rebellious attitude towards the existing socio-political order throughout the British regime. His personal experience and minute observations played a considerable part in shaping his mind and in moulding his thinking. While fully agreeing with the aims and objects of the progressive literary movement he never lets slip any opportunity of learning much from stark naked and brute realities of day to day life. And these are the realities of human life which have gone to make his poetry what it is.
Himayat Ali Shair has successfully tried his hand at most of the forms of poetry. Hence it is that his poetical works, besides containing the popular forms such as ghazals, ruba‘iyat and qat‘at, consist of blank and free verses, sulasi (triplet), fictional, dramatic and national poems, songs and poetic dramas. This goes to show his multifarious poetic achievements and to point to his versatile disposition.

It is the love of man which invariably gives birth to good poetry. This love of man plays a great role in designing and planning the themes and subject-matter of Himayat’s poetry. Consequently it can safely be said that humanism is the base on which he builds the main structure of his poetic thinking. This enables him to keep his feet rooted to the soil and provides him with an opportunity to understand his environment and his fellow beings. Thus his poetry gives enough proof of his being wide awake to the problems of man as a social animal.

All great poetry from classical to the modern age has been inspired by the love of man. Hence it can be said with great truth that good poetry is always born of humanism. Humanism both philosophical and literary has passed through different phases in different ages. Right from the classical and the Renaissance humanists down to the eighteenth century mechanical materialists and the upholders of individualist philosophy of the nineteenth century such as John Stuart Mill and his followers, humanism has played a role quite different from what it is today. In the past humanism had a religious tinge and concerned itself chiefly with the moral man and paid little attention to his social and economic character. In the modern age the progressive literatures and thinkers have come to treat man dialectically and to regard him as a being largely governed by socio-economic conditions. This view of humanism has given it a meaning quite different from what it used to be in the past. It is this modern aspect of humanism which plays a major part in shaping the poetic thinking of Himayat Ali Shair and establishing his relation with the dynamic progressive literary movement of today. This has enabled him to look at the human situation in its true perspective and to distinguish the oppressor from the oppressed.

The Industrial Revolution put an end to feudalism and paved the way for capitalism which is the rage of the modern age. In the evolution of society capitalism is a step forward in that it has done away with serfdom and other evils connected with the feudal period. It has indeed given a dimension to science and technology unique in the history of mankind. The fruits of the progress and advancement of science and technology have no doubt been reaped by the paymasters of the world and it is they who have largely benefited by the scientific inventions. It is, however, fair to admit that science has completely changed the face of the world today and enabled man in general to subdue and bring the brute and naked forces of nature under his control to an extent unknown in the past. And now man is out to conquer the space and has made great strides towards this direction. To this astonishing scientific and technological progress of man capitalism has made great contributions. But despite all this capitalism has created great problems dividing mankind into haves and have-nots. Today because of capitalism the exploitation of man by man is so widespread that past history can hardly cite any example to compare with it. This has quite obviously resulted in two antagonistic classes, the oppressor and the oppressed.

Himayat Ali Shair is fully conscious of this situation and by virtue of his progressive ideology sympathises with the oppressed class. It is in this context that his humanism should be viewed and his creative activities evaluated.

Society today is beset with multifarious problems which are so acute, confused and complicated that it needs a well-informed mind to understand them in their true perspective and to suggest a solution.
to them. Himayat’s belief in going through life with eyes wide open keeps him in contact with his environment thereby enabling him to see things for himself. His association with the common people around him gives him ample opportunity to look into their day to day affairs and to understand their problems. Their wide experience thus gained forms the basis of his creative activities and gives realistic shape to his art and craftsmanship. While actual observation of surrounding objects and practical acquaintance with facts have given him an insight into the brute forces of contemporary society his deep study of classical and modern literature and his wide knowledge of the philosophical trends, both old and new, have also largely contributed to his historical consciousness. He has learnt a great deal from tradition and his own good use of its healthy elements. From the rhetorical style of tradition he has carved out his own diction which is quite in keeping with the modern demand of the linguistic norm. By assimilating the metaphorical beauty of the classics he has not only enriched his own style but has given it the grace and flavour of modernism.

Right from the beginning the use of Talmeeh (allusion to some famous past events) is very common and popular in Urdu literature. Himayat Ali Sha’ir has also made use of Talmeeh in his poetry. But contrary to the traditional and common practice he has used it to elucidate his points in a way which gives it freshness and renders it ‘nouveau riche’. Since the subjects and issues dealt with in his poetry are modern in their context he has taken good care to see that the use of talmeeh has also a modern colour. This method of the application of Talmeeh to modern ideas is his own and can hardly be traced in the poetical works of his contemporaries. In this he is quite adept and excels others.

Rationalism and naturalism, which remained in vogue during the first part of the nineteenth century gradually gave way to other movements, literary, social, economic and political. Among these surrealism, pragmatism, symbolism, imagism, dadism, vorticism and impressionism found their way into world literature. Freud’s psycho-analytical views have also equally influenced the thinking of poets and prose writers.

During the past fifty years Urdu literature has also imbibed some of these ideas. Pragmatism Freudianism, imagism and symbolism of Mallarme and Velery brand have especially held fascination for some Urdu writers. But since these idealistic and rosy movements lack the necessary vigour and potency to meet the economic, social and political challenge of the modern world, Himayat Ali Sha’ir and the poets belonging to his class will have nothing to do with them.

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed two very important movements in biology and economics. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) in his world famous books, On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection and ‘The Descent of Man’, put forward the theory of evolution based on scientific investigation. James McFarlane in ‘The Mind of Modernism’ has very ably commented on Darwin’s work and Ideas. He says,”A special and outstandingly influential role attached in the nineties to the work and ideas of Darwin. By offering a new, exhaustively documented and entirely plausible pattern of cause and effect, based on the slow process of sexual and natural selection and the reductive effects of environmental factors, Darwin stimulated a search in a great many other areas of intellectual endeavour for similarly long-term and slow-acting casual chains in the explanation of natural and social phenomena. The theory of evolution took its place alongside the earlier Newtonian theory of gravity and the “uniformitarian” theory of geology as one of the seminal ideas in the history of thought.” The theory of evolution and the theories of political economy enunciated respectively by Darwin and the leading economists of the late nineteenth century brought about revolutionary changes in the general outlook of man. These ideas
made man think and take stock of his beliefs and opinions afresh. They profoundly influenced the course of social, economic and political events and led to fresh inquiries into science, arts literature and philosophy on empirical and dialectical grounds. The progressive elements in literature, philosophy and other disciplines have also profited by these ideas.

Himayat Ali Shair, drawing heavily on these ideas, has introduced into his poetry a delicacy of apprehension and acuteness in analysis of social problems unencumbered by any distorting dogma. He does not seem to agree with W.H. Auden that “a poet must have no opinions, no decided views which he seeks to put across in his poetry” or that “the subject of a poem is only a peg on which to hang the poetry.” Himayat believes that it is the opinions and decided views of the poet which go into the making of his poetry and accordingly ascertain his place in the history of literature. Similarly he attaches great importance to subject matter which he very discriminately selects from his surroundings. He does not give free rein to his imagination nor does he allow his intellect to lead him where it will. Similarly he does not believe in going into a surrealistic trance, pouring out incomprehensible unconscious material or in the role of the poet withdrawn into a world of wishful fantasies interpreting and creating dreams. He is conscious of the concrete facts of life and knows what he is talking about. He speaks from experience and here, we feel, is a poet with flesh and blood like our own really involved in what he is saying. His thoughts are well disciplined and has immediate relation to the realities of social life so that we do not find it difficult to identify ourselves with the situation out of which he is writing. He stands for peace, social justice, economic freedom and universal brotherhood of man and these, he believes, can be achieved only by defeating the nefarious designs of the paymasters of the world.

In conclusion it may be said that Himayat Ali Shair represents the man in the street and knows how his intense private world can be brought right out into the open and pegged down to every point of everyday interest and life. His commitment to literature is total and his creative output is a brilliant commentary on our contemporary social and cultural history.

Himayat Ali Shair published his first book of poems, Aag mein Phool in 1956, which contains nazms, ghazals and rubaiyat. Since the poems in this book are the productions of his youthful days, they evidently are marked by the vigour, enthusiasm and passion of youth. No doubt lyrical and emotional in tone, Aag mein Phool nevertheless shows signs which clearly point to the line the young Shair was to take in the future.

His next selection of poems, Mitti Ka Qurz, appeared in 1974. It is based on sulasi (triplet), ghazals and nazms. A production of adulthood and matured thinking Mitti Ka Qurz shows its poet at his best. The rudiments of ideas met with in Aag mein Phool are fully developed here, sharp, sober, acute and balanced. Tashnagi Ka Safar (1981), Haroon Ki Awaz (1985), Shaikh Ayaz and Shakhs-o-Aks are the titles of his recent publications. “Tashnagi Ka Safar” contains longish fictional and dramatic poems. Haroon Ki Awaz consists of his recent ghazals, nazms and hykos. This work is dedicated to Yasser Arafat and shows not only the regret and appreciation of the poet for freedom fighters but also his mental attachment to liberation movements the world over. Shaikh Ayaz and Shakhs-o-Aks are based on his prose writings. In Shaikh Ayaz, as the title suggests, Himayat has taken account of the poetry of the most prominent poet of modern Sindhi literature. In this book he has made a critical and thorough study of both Urdu and Sindhi poetry of Shaikh Ayaz and has tried to do justice to it ably and skillfully bringing out the salient features of his creative efforts. Shakhs-o-Aks is the collection of his articles written during the
last thirty years. It is based on critical writings, reviews and opinions of books and his replies to unjust and unfavourable criticism levelled against himself and others. It gives a thorough account of the controversies that raged in those past days. The book makes interesting reading and is a document of what took place in literary circles in the recent past and for that matter can provide any intending historian of literary movements and trends of the period with adequate and lively materials.

Himayat Ali Shair’s long poem, Bangal Se Korea Tak (Bangal to Korea) has gained wide reputation and needs special treatment. This poem is a sort of reminiscence. The technique employed in it is very rare in Urdu poetry. The poet here reviews past events in retrospect and though he speaks in the first person singular and seems to be the central character of the poem, yet it can well be the story of any person anywhere in the world. Thus it is as much individual as collective.

The poem deals with peace, the most important issue of the modern world. War leaves a trail of destruction and ravages behind it. It brings famine, hunger, poverty and disease and renders millions of people homeless. The memory of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki still makes one’s hair stand on end. Conscious of the fact that war is a device by which the privileged class and the paymasters of the world want to keep their economic dominance over the toiling mass of the people, Himayat hopefully looks forward to an order and social system in which war can be abolished and peace is allowed to reign supreme. Today when the most deadly weapons are placed at the disposal of warmongers peace has become the most desired object of the people in general. The poet dwells at length on this theme of war and peace, earnestly hopes that the new generation does not have to face any war in future and thus brilliantly and effectively makes his point for the establishment of peace all the world over.
Prof Rajinder Singh Verma of the Punjabi University, Patiala, India has proved his refined and cultivated taste for literature by selecting Bangal Se Korea Tak for translation into English. The difficulty of translating verse into verse from one language into another may well be imagined. But Prof. Verma had accomplished this task with an adroitness, skill and dexterity which show his command of both the languages. He has kept the beauty, force, elegance and spirit of the original. The ease and dexterity with which he handles this difficult job point to the fact that he knows how to play his cards well. The credit of introducing such an important and beautiful poem to the English reading public enormously belongs to him and his efforts in this respect need be adequately recognised and duly appreciated.

AZHAR QADRI