

PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE URDU NOVEL: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This research article examines the close relationship between the novel and the philosophy of life, with special reference to Urdu novels. It argues that a novel is deeply rooted in the lived experiences, observations, emotions, and intellectual perspectives of the novelist. A writer cannot completely separate personal identity, feelings, and worldview from creative work; therefore, every novel reflects, directly or indirectly, a particular philosophy of life. Rather than preaching moral lessons openly, novelists present their ideas through characters, events, and situations, allowing readers to understand life's deeper meanings on their own.

The article discusses how philosophical ideas such as destiny and free will, the nature of time, life and death, good and evil, social justice, spiritual struggle, and human helplessness are repeatedly explored in Urdu novels. It traces the historical development of the Urdu novel from the post-1857 period to contemporary times, highlighting the contributions of major novelists such as Maulvi Nazir Ahmed, Abdul Halim Sharar, Mirza Hadi Ruswa, Premchand, Ismat Chughtai, Qurratulain Hyder, Bano Qudsia's Intizar Hussain, and others. Each writer is shown to represent a distinct philosophy shaped by social, political, moral, and cultural conditions of their time.

The study concludes that philosophy and the Urdu novel are inseparable. Every Urdu novel carries a reflection of its author's philosophical outlook and the spirit of the age. Through narrative art, the Urdu novel not only portrays life but also interprets it, making it a powerful medium for understanding human existence and social realities.

Keywords

Novel, Philosophy, Reflection. Inseparable, Spirit, Powerful, Experience, Observations

INTRODUCTION

The novel is related to life and the novelist tries to present some experience of his life in the form of a novel. This experience is deeply related to novel writing. Because this experience is the personal experience of the novelist, which he gains from various observations of his life. The novelist's own identity also has its place, because no work is complete without human emotions and feelings. Keeping these emotions and feelings in mind, the novelist presents his emotions and feelings from a particular perspective, forming the fabric of the story. The personality of a novelist is sometimes apparent and sometimes hidden in the world of the novel he creates. His art is a mirror of life. If an artist is expected to separate his personality from his art, this expectation is futile because this is impossible for a writer. He has a deep perspective on life, while this perspective he gains from observing life. This observation becomes the driving force of his experience. He cannot present a complete picture of his life, but he can definitely choose one aspect of it and express his opinion. This aspect can also be related to ethics, philosophy, politics, religion, spirituality, economics and psychology. While writing a novel, the role of a novelist is that of a thinker and commentator who tries to interpret life by thinking about it. The novelist does not come to the fore as a teacher of ethics who gives advice and advice to the reader, but rather acts as an interpreter who conveys the philosophy of life to the reader through the novel and makes the reader aware of deep philosophy in the very words he speaks. Salam Sandilvi writes: "The first method is that the novelist himself comes before the screen

and explains his point of view and presents his philosophy of life by shedding light on the characters. The second method is that the novelist presents his material and characters in such a way that we ourselves understand his philosophy of life" (1).

Philosophy of life is of great importance in the novel. This does not mean that the novelist wants to convey a moral lesson or philosophy like a philosopher, but he cannot protect himself from philosophy. However, it is certain that in some novels this colour is deeper and clearer, while in others it is dimmer. Regarding the philosophy of life, Dr. Ahsan Farooqi writes:

"Since the novelist's goal is to present life, it is impossible for his picture not to contain life, its general moral, philosophical, religious, etc. ideas. It is possible that there is no specific ideology implicit in the story of the novel, but still the novelist sees life from his own perspective. He likes some things and dislikes others, so in his novel we definitely get some hints about the philosophy of life. Every novelist presents a reflection of a philosophy of life. No matter how dim that reflection may be." (2)

When a novelist studies life in depth, he derives some philosophy from this observation and then presents it to the general reader by making a story. In a novel, the ups and downs of human emotions and the complexities of interpersonal relationships are described through the characters in such a way that the novelist's entire philosophy comes to light after reaching some conclusion. Every individual has his own unique thoughts and opinions, and these thoughts, when they reach the height of thought, become that person's philosophy. A novelist is more sensitive and aware than a common man, so his opinions on life's issues are equally effective and his philosophy is also profound. Dr. Hassan Farooqi writes in *What is a Novel?*: "The novelist is concerned with this life (which is) in the words of Lawrence, the hidden life that is hidden in this half-dead body that we call life. The novel emerges from the meeting of all those opinions, ideas, conclusions, feelings and steps that are filled in the novelist's mind. Not the events and characters, but the novelist's thoughts and feelings about them are the content of the novel." (3)

When the novelist establishes a philosophical thought about the world through his experience and observation, he then describes it in the novel. Therefore, in novels there is sometimes optimism, sometimes despair and hopelessness, sometimes the experiences of centuries, sometimes the effort to maintain the observance of moral values and traditions. The philosophical topics that are most discussed in Urdu novels include the instability of the world, the short span of human life, the problem of compulsion and destiny, how forced and helpless a person is in this world and how independent and free he is, what is the reality of destiny? Does destiny really exist or not? What is time? How much control does a person have over time? To what extent can the compulsion of time make a person forced and helpless? What is good and evil? What is the soul? When does the soul begin and end? What is death? What does the internal struggle of an individual mean? To what extent do human psychological confusions affect his character? What is the nature of existence? What is life and death? The decline of civilization and society, these are the questions that have been written about in Urdu novels so far, and all these topics are related to the basic discussions of philosophy. Therefore, it can be said that Urdu novels are inseparable from philosophy. Dr. Mumtaz Ahmed Khan writes:

"Where does the novel take us? The insight we gain from understanding this removes the fog of despair and disappointments and teaches us that seemingly understanding that we have no control over events is a setback, but by internally considering life as a challenge and fighting against suffering, patience and tolerance over the consequences reveals the greatness of man." (4)

The event of the 1857 rebellion is of great importance in India. This event did not only revolutionize politically, but also shook social and moral values. Literature, which is related to any land, when there is change there. If so, then it is impossible that there has been no change in literature because when the earth changes, the sky also changes. Before the 1857 rebellion, most of the Urdu literature was composed of parables, stories, tales, and legends. The imaginary world and supernatural elements were more involved and the familiarity with reality was less. There was a lot of talk about the lamp of Allah-e-Din and the air carpets of Alif-e-Leila. In their place, electric light and air travel became possible because the incident of the 1857 rebellion had made it clear to every intelligent person that our greatest weakness is our distance from real life. This was the period when the trend towards serious and real topics began to increase in literature.

The writings of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and his colleagues began to show the nation the mirror of reality. During this period, the novel began and Maulvi Nazir Ahmed started writing stories for the reform and education of his daughters, which were later published under the name of *Marrat-ul-Arus*. Although the Urdu novel began as a result of a coincidental situation, Maulvi Nazir Ahmed laid the foundation of a genre of literature through the allegorical technique that is of great importance today. Today, if world literature is studied, then there is a glimpse of philosophical issues and contemporary issues in the Urdu novel. And many sciences have been described in it, due to which the formal, stylistic and thematic canvas of the novel has become very wide. And what Maulvi Nazir Ahmed had sown has today become a tall tree. Sometimes an artist presents a model, as a result of which some purpose comes to the fore, and sometimes it happens that the purpose is determined in advance and the art is created later. In the case of Maulvi Nazir Ahmed too Objectiveness was predetermined and he created art later. As a result of this objectiveness, he expressed the philosophy of upholding moral values in his novels. His characters in the novels *Asghari*, *Akbari*, *Taubat al-Nusaa* and *Ibn al-Waqt* seem to express his philosophy. Since he was a staunch Maulvi and a preacher, this very discourse of his temperament became a philosophy and continued in his novels. His novels have won awards and were also included in educational institutions as

textbooks of that time. Despite having all the powers in this universe, man is often helpless and helpless in matters and if he wants to do something of his own free will, circumstances turn his back. Dr. Hasrat Ka Sajanji writes: "We see that there cannot be a human being who, at some point or another, does not fall into a compulsion and say that if he had such and such a thing, he would definitely overcome this compulsion. Therefore, we can say that virtue is a philosophy of character and to this extent, "Fasana Azad" is a philosophical novel." (5)

Abdul Hakim Sharar used novels to revive the ancient history of Muslims and prove that Islam is better than Christianity. Sharar tried to explain the philosophy of life through famous historical figures. His novel Firdous Bareen is a representative novel of the philosophy of Jabro Qadr, which will always be remembered in Urdu literature. In his other novels Malik Aziz Zоргina, Husn Angelina, Filipana and Fateh Andalus, while describing history, Sharar has tried to revive the greatness of Islam through these novels by representing Islamic philosophy. After Sharar, Mirza Hadi Raswa is an important novelist of Urdu literature who gained immense fame due to his novel Amrao Jaan Ada. In this novel, he has painted a true picture of society. In it, he depicted the society, civilization and then the decline of Lucknow. The character of Ada is an incident that is at the mercy of circumstances. In which direction does the circumstances take him, he is forced and helpless. Hadi Raswa has depicted destiny in this novel. The philosophy of Ada is described. Ada is a prostitute but she is a representative of the civilization of Lucknow, how this civilization declined and how fate turned the tables, this character is a representative of this declining society which comes under the philosophy of social class. Hadi Raswa has tried to describe Ada's selfishness, her analysis, her philosophy of life, all in the form of Ada but is unable to reach her soul. In the early twentieth century, the names of Premchand and Rashid Al-Khairi are prominent. Rashid Al-Khairi also wrote reformist and moral novels like Maulvi Nazir Ahmed, but for him, the welfare and betterment of women was the priority. Sayyida Ka Lal, Johar Qasim Manazil Asairah, Bint Al-Waqt, Subh Zindagi, and Sham Zindagi are his representative novels. The philosophy of social and moral values is the main theme of his novels. Social exploitation of Indian society, injustice, rebellion against the ancient customs and traditions of Hinduism, and exploitation of the lower classes are the themes of Premchand's novels. His novels Biwoh, Bazaar Hassan and Nirmala represent these themes. The rise of the freedom movement and revolutionary trends are expressed in Gaudan and the field of action, while the struggle between modern and ancient society is reflected in Gosha Aafiat and Chogan Hasti. This was a time when life was subject to uncertainty and lack of protection. Social and moral values were declining. Along with the welfare and survival of society, recognition of the individual's individual status was also necessary. Premchand They represent the philosophy of life in their novels. Dr. Ahsan Farooqi writes.

"If there is any flaw in Premchand, it is that spirituality seems to be dominant in his novels. Although spirituality is a special part of Indian life and spirituality is certainly an important part of the Hindu philosophy of life." (6) Sajjad Zaheer has described the philosophy of economic justice, freedom and equality in One Night in London and has tried to convince through different characters to what extent economic justice is necessary for every individual. Ismat Chughtai believes in the individual's personal freedom. His novel Tedi Lakir talks about philosophy while not liking anyone's interference in the personal life of an individual. He believes that an individual is born free and is not bound by any social and societal restrictions. He considers the modern man to be free from temporal and spatial restrictions. Like Ismat Chughtai, Krishna Chandra also believes in the personal freedom of the individual. His novel Shekta is full of sexual pleasure but his aim is reform. Krishna Chandra uses observation and deep study and we cannot see the strangulation of the soul. Aziz Ahmed's novels Lust, Murmur and Blood and Avoidance allude to sexual and class oppression. The characters in Aziz Ahmed's novels also sacrifice their lives for the revolution and do not hesitate to make any sacrifice to bring their dreams to life. In his novel Aag, he awakens the spirit of freedom of the Kashmiri people and shows them enthusiastically participating in the revolution. Any revolution is related to the philosophy of this society. There is always some philosophy working behind the revolution. In such highs and such lows, the struggle, dedication, enthusiasm and aspiration of the freedom movement are present. The author has left the ending of the novel with the question mark of which society the individual will find a place in. Before independence in the subcontinent, Aziz Ahmed, Krishna Chandra and Ismat Chughtai were writing novels. After independence, Qiraat-ul-Ain Haider's novels Mere Bhi Sanam Khana and Safin-e-Gham Dil Mein have a rich thematic diversity. In Qiraat-ul-Ain Haider's novels, the feeling of anti-stylism, the breakdown of social values and culture as a result of the partition of India, fear, fear of death under various fears, the fear of death that overwhelms the senses, and how the terrible form of time changes individuals and societies, the author expresses her thoughts around all these philosophical themes. Her third novel is Aag Ka Darya, in which she describes the character of time, the fear of death, migration, pastism, feelings of patriotism, historical catastrophes and the impact of different philosophies on human thought. Dr. Sohail Bukhari writes:

"According to Qaratul Ain Haider, time is a reality that connects the ends of eternity and eternity. There is no need to determine it because everything passes like a dream. It is also a river that continues to flow at its own pace and which man has no power to stop, stop or dam." (7)

Undoubtedly, time is an era and Allah Almighty Himself said that do not blame time for I am time itself. Time is such a big philosophy in the novel that one goes deep into its depths and gets countless information regarding the history and science of mankind. Along with time, there is also a deep philosophy of the instability of the world and man in Qaratul Ain Haider's novels. Because time is very cruel and no matter how much a person has power and freedom, he is ultimately helpless and helpless. He has never been granted complete freedom. Many novelists

have written on the philosophy of force and destiny. Dr. Mumtaz Ahmed Khan writes in "Some Aspects of Urdu Novels" Here are:

"Thinkers have written extensively on the issue of coercion and destiny. Absolute human freedom is impossible. Where things do not work, where the results are completely opposite, there is the intervention of destiny. A person thinks something and something happens. There is hardly a novel where the intervention of destiny is not involved." (8)

Dr. Hassan Farooqi's novels *Sham Awadh* and *Sangam* contain the same philosophy. Ahsan Farooqi in his novel *Sangam* immediately states that the life of the world is nothing but a game and spectacle. The real life will be the life of the hereafter, which will be eternal and immortal. *Sham Awadh* points to the decline of civilization, how civilizations are formed and deteriorated. This process of change in the world, whether individual or collective, always shows its color. In his novels *Dara Shikoh*, *Ghalib*, *Shab Ghazida* and *Shekht Ki Waqar*, Qazi Abdul Sattar negates unified nationality and common Hindu-Muslim culture. Every nation and every religion has a different philosophy and ideology, and even if these nations remain together for millions of years, their ideas and philosophies are never the same. In his novels, he has expressed the same position that Hinduism and Muslim civilizations, traditions, values, culture, religion, philosophy can never be one. Abdullah Hussain has told in his book *The Helpless and Helpless Existence of a Man in Prison, Bagh*, to what extent oppression exploits the individual under the shadow of dictatorship. The hero of the novel *Bagh*, Asad, represents the philosophy of existentialism. And the hero of *Udas Gensin*, Naeem, represents a restless soul. The novel is the first war. It reflects the historical background from the great to the Partition of India. Khadija Mastoor's novel *Aangan* was also written in the background of the Partition of India. The author has described the political conflict between two different families with different political and social philosophies. Dr. Ahsan Farooqi writes:

"In addition to the interest in the events of a family, there is also a philosophical and allegorical impression." (9) Fazl Karim Fazal, in his novel *Khone-e-Jigar Hona Tak*, has talked about the revolution that emerged as a result of the partition and independence in the subcontinent. How when a revolution occurs, countless lives are sacrificed. Jamila Hashmi has talked about the rise of women's rights in *Talash Baharan*. She considers women as complete human beings and raises her voice for their rights. Just as Plato gave women the status of complete human beings and considered women capable of running the state system of any state. In her other novel *Dasht-e-Sous*, she talks about the historical role of Hussain bin Mansoor Hallaj. Realistic depictions have been made and the philosophy of the historical character Hussain bin Mansur, Inna-ul-Haq, has been promoted. How an individual has the courage to clash with authoritarian forces for the sake of his personal thinking and philosophy. Dr. Mumtaz Ahmed Khan writes:

"Jamila Hashmi has a unique place in presenting mystical characters. Reviving such characters of the past from their various human dimensions and academic, philosophical and social references is a distinctive and memorable part of her novels." (10)

Shaukat Siddiqui has depicted the exploited society in his novel *Khuda Ki Basti*, how poverty and destitution compel a person to commit crimes by making him helpless. How the suffocation, misery, economic and social inequality of society, depression and social oppression compel a person to do work in any way. Infringing on the rights of others, taking the fruits of others' labour, and taking away their wealth and resources is happening at both the individual and the collective levels. The same philosophy is found in his novels *Char Divari* and *Janglos* that the oppressors are not dead, they are gaining strength. Intazar Hussain began his evolutionary journey with *Chand Ghan* and *Aur Aye Samudra Hay*. Nostalgic tendencies are common in his novels. When there is darkness and hopelessness everywhere, there is good news. His novel *Tazkira* expresses the state of fear, desert, dissatisfaction and restlessness. Man does not know where his end will be after the beginning. Man is born somewhere and buried somewhere. Man wanders around in search of new roots, but he does not forget his old ones. Even the roots cannot be chased away. Hijab Mumtaz Ali Taj's novel *Madhouse* analyzes the possible disasters of the Third World War (nuclear war). Despite the countless inventions of science, man does not have much peace. The fear of death reigns everywhere, where to go if he wants to escape, in the present era, human life faces hundreds of dangers. The characters of the novel are helpless and helpless. The subject of the novel is still a living subject today. Bano Qudsia's novel *Raja Gadh* has become the center of attention in many respects. Dr. Muhammad Haroon Qadir writes:

"This novel has highlighted the stature of Bano Qudsia's novel writing. Here, one has to believe in Bano's art that she has covered countless life experiences, incidents, gatherings, sciences, her subtle discussions, Sufism, the life of students, civilization and religion, philosophy of life, moral values, in other words, a wide range of life." (11) The author Through Islamic philosophy, an attempt has been made to trace the triggers in the human body that arise from lawful and unlawful sustenance. The effects of madness and madness that arise within a person are actually caused by eating unlawful sustenance. The novel shows the nameless quest of a person, he himself does not know who he is looking for, himself or God. In this era of materialism, a person has forgotten even the purpose of his existence. The author has tried to find a cure for this emptiness of a person in spirituality and Sufism. Razia Fasih Ahmed has said in her novel *The Chain of Centuries* that a free individual and society cannot be chained, the national and individual cannot be given the death penalty, while many men are exploiting women, while others are ruthlessly violating the rights of individuals. It is not necessary that someone will bring chains from outside, chains are around, and imprisonment is a force that has bound man for centuries. Rahim Gul tells in *Search of Paradise* that man is always in search of the best. He wants to go to the same paradise from which he once wanted

to escape. This is the story of a restless soul who is restless in every journey and is in search of his origin. The author has expressed his views on topics such as religion, politics, society, economy, ethics and values, civilization and civilization. Anwar Sajjad's novel *The Garden of Happiness* highlights the problems of the inhabitants of the third world. There is no escape from ignorance and lies under any circumstances. Mustansar Hussain Tararbhai I give women a place equal to Mother Earth, just as the earth gives fertility and water. Similarly, a woman brings up her offspring. Mustansar Hussain considers the foundation of the rise of Adam Khaki to be a woman, who confronts all situations with great patience. Mirza Athar Baig's novel *Ghulam Bagh* is considered a beautiful blend of fiction and philosophy. Dr. Muhammad Haroon writes.

"There is philosophy in *Ghulam Bagh*. Athar Baig even goes so far as to say that philosophy is in every novel. If philosophy is being expressed in the text and is guaranteeing its survival and development by being enriched and dissolved by the central thought, then it is excellent, and if it is floating up and down in a stagnant and dull manner, then it will become a weakness of both the novel and the novelist." (12)

Recently, Hassan Manzar's novel *Al-A' a Suffah* Manzar has come to the fore in which the author has described topics like Arab civilization, oil wealth, and the occupation of the West. In this novel, Hassan Manzar has highlighted the helplessness, suffocation, and culture of Arab society through the main character Zaid bin Saeed. Man possesses immense creative abilities and what a colourful uniqueness there is in his feelings and emotions. Every human being's observations and experiences within the universe are different. Human nature is a surprisingly complex and mysterious collection of knots. No matter how much one tries to understand someone, some aspect will still remain elusive. His humble effort is presented in the novel to unravel these tangled knots. Examining philosophical concepts in Urdu novels, it can be said with great confidence that philosophical concepts and Urdu novels go hand in hand. There is no novel that has been written without philosophical concepts. Every novelist expresses his thoughts according to his own thoughts and in the coming centuries, the spirit of the age will be interpreted in this genre of literature.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the Urdu novel is deeply rooted in the philosophy of life and that philosophy and fiction in Urdu literature are inseparable. The novel does not merely narrate events or depict characters; rather, it serves as a thoughtful interpretation of life shaped by the novelist's personal experiences, observations, emotions, and intellectual awareness. A novelist cannot detach his or her personality from creative expression, and therefore every Urdu novel, whether consciously or unconsciously, reflects a particular worldview and philosophy of life.

The article has shown that Urdu novelists present philosophical ideas not in the form of direct moral instruction, but through narrative structure, characterization, and social situations. Themes such as destiny and free will, the passage of time, human helplessness, moral conflict, social injustice, spiritual quest, and the rise and decline of civilizations repeatedly appear in Urdu novels. From the reformist and moral narratives of Maulvi Nazir Ahmed to the historical and ideological novels of Sharar, from Premchand's social realism to the progressive emphasis on freedom and equality by Ismat Chughtai and others, and from Qurratulain Hyder's philosophy of time to Bano Qudsia's spiritual and ethical concerns, each novelist articulates a distinct philosophy shaped by the socio-historical conditions of their age.

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