

Classic Poetry Series

Waheed Akhtar
- poems -

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Waheed Akhtar(12 August 1934 - 13 December 1996)

Syed Waheed Akhtar (Urdu: سید واہد اختر) was an Urdu poet, writer, critic, distinguished orator, and one of the leading Muslim scholars and philosophers of the 20th century.

 Life

Waheed Akhtar was born in Aurangabad in the erstwhile Hyderabad State of Nizam (present day Maharashtra), to a family which had migrated from Nasirabad - Jais (Jais-birth place of poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi), boroughs of Sa'adat inhabitants in Raebareilly (or Raebareli) district of Uttar Pradesh. His father's name was Syed Nazr-e Abbas, and mother's name was Syeda Aliya Begum. They had seven children. Waheed Akhtar was the second child, among six sons and one daughter. After spending his childhood in Aurangabad, and completing his early education, he went to Hyderabad, to enroll at Osmania University. He was in Hyderabad for eight years until he completed his Ph. D. and was appointed lecturer at Aligarh Muslim University.

It is thought that his years in Hyderabad were crucial for moulding his personality as a poet and writer. Although, after police action, Hyderabad acceded to the Dominion of India, it was still a very strong feudal society, dominated by the rich and elite. At that time, it was claimed that Muslims who had held previously held positions of importance had subsequently become defeatist, thinking they had lost their voice and authority in the conditions prevalent at that time. Hyderabad was still the only University in India to teach modern sciences, including medicine and engineering, in Urdu, which was the fruit of Allamah Shibli Nomani's hardwork.

Waheed Akhtar wrote prolifically in Urdu from very early age. During his initial years he adopted the pen name "Barq". He made his ideas and voice heard in his writings. He was an independent minded, freedom loving man, who was well aware of the political and literary movements of his times.

He married Syeda Mahliqa Qarai (who was Indo-Iranian) in Hyderabad in 1962. They had four sons: Hasan, Husain, Haider (who died due to polio in the fifth month of his birth) and Mohsin. Mrs Mahliqa Qarai was killed in the USS Vincennes attack on Iran Air Flight 655 - the civilian airliner on Sunday, July 3, 1988, over the Persian Gulf. After his wife's death Waheed suffered 5 heart attacks and 3 cardiac arrests, and became an alcoholic. He would deliver marsia for his wife in an inebriated state at many majlis ceremonies.

Waheed died on 13 December in 1996 at All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi one year after his retirement at the age of 61.

 Education

His early education took place at Chelipura High School, a government school in Aurangabad. He was educated at Osmania University, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh and received his bachelor's degree in arts, and master's and Ph. D degrees in Philosophy. He was appointed lecturer of philosophy at Aligarh Muslim University and went on to settle in Aligarh for the rest of his life, where he retired in 1995.

He passed all examinations from Osmania University, Hyderabad in first division with distinction. He completed High School in 1950; B.A. in 1954; M.A. (Philosophy) in 1956; Ph.D. in 1960 in Philosophy, on the thesis titled "Khwaja Mir Dard's Contribution to Sufism."

 Academic Positions Held

He was appointed Lecturer in General Education in 1960 at Aligarh Muslim University and Lecturer in Philosophy in 1962; became Reader in Humanities in 1970; Reader in Philosophy in 1975 and became Professor in 1979. He headed the Department of Philosophy at AMU from April 1987-1990 & 1992 till 1995 until his retirement and also served the University as Dean Faculty of Arts from 1990-92.

 Academic and Scholarly Contributions

He specialized in Sufism, existentialism, aesthetics, literary criticism and Muslim philosophy and Shi'ite thought. More than two hundred articles, besides eight books in Urdu and English published.

His research and creative work has been quoted and referred to by a number of scholars in philosophy, Islamic studies and literature, such as Annemarie Schimmel, Dr. Abid Husain, Prof. Aale Ahmad Suroor, Prof. Ehtisham Husain, Prof. Majnun Gorakhpuri, Ali Sardar Jafri, Prof. Muhi-al-din Qadri Zor, Prof. A.Q. Sarwari, Agha, Khaleel-Ur-Rehman Azmi, Prof. Mumtaz Husain, Prof. Qamar Raees, Prof. Mohd. Hasan, Prof. Gopi Chand Narang and many eminent literary critics.

 Works

His published collections of poetry comprise mainly ghazals and nazms, but he also mastered other forms of poetry, like Marsia- elegy in the musaddas format; Qasida (Panegyric), [Hajv] (lampoon), Manqibat, Salaam, Rubai (quatrain). He was one of the few to tread his own path independent of "tarraqipasad tehreek" (Progressive Writers' Movement) and questioned revolutionary ideals of the progressive movement, when most of the writers of subcontinent were looking towards communist Soviet Union for inspiration and guidance. He argued and predicted that a system which is devoid of individual, political and creative freedom is bound to fail. These ideas were penned down in late 1950s in 'Saba'- a literary Urdu journal edited and published by Sulaiman Areeb from Hyderabad. This article evoked a harsh criticism from founder of the Progressive Writers' Movement, Sajjad Zaheer. Impact of the article was such that controversy raged for years in the literary journals of the sub-continent. His following verses from one of his ghazal is a satire on that era.

"Jisko mana tha khuda khak ka paiker nikla, Haath aya jo yaqeen waham sarasar nikla."

Waheed Akhtar was a strong proponent of freedom, and stressed for the commitment to ideals rather than adopting them as 'fashion' or a 'cliché' for creativity. His poetry is classical as well as modern. His poetry has elements of Islamic mysticism or Tasawwuf, existentialism, contemporary issues related to the problems of man, politics etc. His poetry is more revolutionary and freedom inspiring than poets considered revolutionary in Urdu, another couplet from the same ghazal is an example of this,

Kal jahan zulm ne kati theen saron ki faslein, nam hui hai to usi khak se lashkar nikla

According to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi,

"Wahid Akhtar, regarded by many as a Modernist and by many others as Progressive, wrote that Modernism was really an extension of Progressivism".

Waheed Akhtar is also considered to be among the few successful modern Urdu poets who took Marsia to new heights and gave new direction to it in this age.

"Waheed Akhtar, Professor of Philosophy at Aligarh Muslim University, had been crucial in keeping the tradition of marsiya dynamic in present-day South Asia. His marasi rely on the images, metaphors, and nuances inherited from nineteenth century masters like Anis and Dabir, and on the values invested in this genre by

socio-religious reformers like Josh. On the back cover of his recently-published marsiya anthology, for example, is the famous Arabic saying: "Every place is Karbala; every day is Ashura." By positing a similarity between Hussain's historic battle and the present day struggle of human kind against renewed forms of Yazidian oppression, Akhtar deflects the interpretation of the martyrs of Karbala as mere insignia of Islamic history; they are instead posed as the sinews for the revival of an ideal Islamic state of being"

** Awards and Honours **

1960: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy Award

1967: Ghalib Award of the Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy – for the best Urdu Book

1972: Uttar Pradesh & Andhra Pradesh Urdu Academy Awards on Khwaja Mir Dard's Sufi Doctrines and Poetry.

1973: Uttar Pradesh & Andhra Pradesh Urdu Academy Awards, on Philosophy and Literary Criticism

1974: Uttar Pradesh & Andhra Pradesh Urdu Academy Awards

1983: 'Makhdoom Award'-the Highest National Award in India for Literary Criticism in Urdu by Andhra Pradesh Urdu Academy Hyderabad

Khalifatahun Fil Arz

Ya khuda-e-Zul Jalaal

Khaliq-e-maujood-o-na-maujood, zaat-e-La-yizaal

Arsh-o-kursi, salsabeel-o-kausar-o-lauh-o-qalam tera jamaal

Jinn-o-naas, Iblees-o-Jibraeel-o-malaik teri qudrat ka kamaal

Jannat-e-mauood-o-jalwahhai na mash-hood ke pahloo raqs karta khak ka nanha
sa zarra yeh zameen

Tu ne is zarre ko dee hai arsh-o-kursi ki bulandi asmaan ki wusa'atein

Tu ne Adam mein mujassam kar diye apne kamaalat-o-sifaat

Az karaan ta be-karaan pheli khalaan mein banaya khaak ke putle ko tasweer-
e-hayaat

Dee use takhleeq-o-azaadi pe qudrat ruh ko uski banaya sho'la-e-irfan-e-nafs-o-
kaai'naat

Adl-o-sidq-o-haq ka hai ma'yaar yeh mahdood zaat

Ek nanha sa sharara aur us per kul khudaai' ka hai baar

Ek wajood aur usko halqe main liye hai har taraf se zulmaton ka bahar-e-na-
paida kinaar

Nur mub-ham aur zulmat aashkaar

Zindagi majboor aur marg-o-adam ba-ikhtiyaar

Yeh amaanatdaar-e-takhleeq aadmi

Ya adm, zulmaat aur andhee khala

Kaun hai na'ib Tera

Mere Khuda?

Ghair maujoodat per hai mushtamil yeh kaai'naat
Tamtaraaq-e-nuqra-o-zar, la'al-o-gauhar ka sabaat
Tashnagee ka regzaar, aasuda kaamee ki faraat
Khwahishon ke dasht-o-sahraa, aarzoo ki kaai'naat
Hasraton ke sard laashey, justuju ke garm haat
Jism ke masroof din aur rooh ki be-chain raat
Darmiyaan mein waqt ka kuchh faslaa rakh lo to sab na-bood hain
Shama' bujh jaye to yeh saare manaazir halqahhai dood hain
Hast per na-bood haakim
Waaqa'ee per waham-e-na-maujood hakim
Aadmi ya aadmi ki shakl ke na-bood-o-na-maujood halqahhai dood
Kaun hai naayab tera
Mere Khuda?
Laa-o-lashkar, tabl-o-aurang-o-alam, naqqare hajib choobdaar
Bum, missile, aasmani lab, rocket aur khalaabee shahsawaar
Qahat-o-sailaab-o-waba, ghusse se shaq hoti zameen, aatish ba seenah-e-kohsaar
Khurdani na-khurdani ajnaas ke masrooqah godaam
Zulm-o-istehsaal-o-milkeeyat ke hafiz shara'-o-dastoor-o-qawaneen-e-tashadud
aashkar
Qatil aur saariq ke khanazaad hain nazm-o-nasq ke ikhtiyaar
Mazhar-e-shaan-e-khudawandee ki hain majbooriyaan na-deedani, na-guftani

Faaqaah-o-beemaari-o-iflaas ke raunde huey insaan chichaurhi haddiyon ke waastey

Bhaunktey ek doosre per, nocte ek doosre ki botiyaan

Mahnat-o-imaandaari hai sag-e-shahr-e-hawas

Aadmi ya aadmi per hukmraan qanoon ka zaalim hisaar

Kaun na'ib hai Tera

Mere Khudaa?

Har taraf aadmi hain baalishtiyon ki bastiyaan

Baans ki tango pe chalti qadd-e-aadam pastiyaan

Baunepan ki hain talaafi oonchee oonchee kursiyaan

Pahlu'on mein zewaron se soney chaandi ki lade na-mardumee ki daastan

Masnad-e-kam khwaab-o-deeba per saji kaldaar aankhon ki nachaati putliyaan

Karhkarhaatey kaghzon aur chamchamaatee dhaat ke rangeen khiloney ke liye kilkaariyaan

Shahr main baalishtiyon ke sar ba-zanoo aur kamar se hain khameeda aadmi

Sar utha kar gar khadaa ho jaye poora aadmi

Adl ki masnad bichhaa kar, kamtaree ki girha ko meezan banaa kar

Hukm denge qatl ka balishtiye

Aadmi ya aadmi ki shakl ke baalishtiye

Kaun na'ib hai Tera

Merey Khuda?

Ya Khuda-e-zul-jalaal

Jannat-e-mau'ood tere barish-e-anwaar rooyat ka Jamaal

Teri is maujood duniya mein hai na-bood hukm

Zulm-o-istehsaal ka qanoon hakim

Aadmi per aadmi ke shakl ke baalishtiye hain hukmraan

Kya teri mau'ood jannat mein bhi hai na-bood ke andhe qawaneen

Aur insaan shakl baunon ka muqaam?

Kya hamein hoga wahan bhi sirf apne khoon-e-dil per ikhtiyaar?

Kya wahan bhi karna hoga, hamko har lamhah sawaal

Kaun na'ib hai Tera

Mere Khuda?

Waheed Akhtar