

The Power Structures of the *Adviser*

A poetic text can be considered a product of the socio-historical reality of the poet (Mukařovský, 1977). While other material objects communicate a semiotic meaning only in the presence of an observer, poetry -- like all discourses that consist of language -- is already a sign at the time of its production. After it is created, a poetic text takes a form independent and autonomous of its author. It no longer remains a reflection of the socio-historical reality of the poet, but instead the reality of the poet embeds itself into the text as a signifier.

Readers reinterpret and recontextualize the language used in poetic texts based on their own socially determined reality. As a result of this reinterpretation, the text takes an autonomous form that is the product of both the social reality of the original author and that of the reader.

This decontextualization of poetic language dissociates it from its original social reality. Because of this, poetry has the ability to express sentiments and emotions that cannot be expressed with common linguistic usage (Abu-Lughod, 2016). This is especially true for societies which have restrictions on public discourse. These limitations do not cause members of such societies to lose the ability to exercise criticality in forming ideas and perceptions (Larson, 2013); instead they develop non-standard avenues to express their opinions and sentiments, including the use of poetry.

This essay explores how poetry has been used in societies which repress certain kinds of public discourse by limiting freedom of speech. In particular, this essay will analyze the Urdu poem "*Adviser*" (see appendix) by Habib Jalib and the signs and sign processes employed in the poem to express ideas and opinions that were politically or socially censored, at the time of its publication. This essay will also explore how the linguistic signs created by the poem have been reinterpreted and recontextualized in the subsequent replications of the text. Additionally, it will

analyze how the signs the poet has used vary in complexity to reflect the power difference between the poet and the subjects described in the poem.

In 1958, the chief of the Pakistani army Ayub Khan toppled the government of Iskandar Mirza in a coup d'état to become the country's second president. The coup was received positively by the general populace of Pakistan as the governments that preceded Ayub Khan's were considered unstable and politically inept. Ayub Khan ruled as the president of Pakistan for almost a decade, until stepping down in 1969. During his reign, in an attempt to muzzle dissent, the government banned all political parties and cracked down on what it considered to be anti-state publications, arresting political opponents and members of the intelligensia (Dawn 2011).

The Urdu poet Habib Jalib was also arrested for his leftist views in these crackdowns. It was during this period that Jalib published most of his poetry. His poems from this era are satirical in nature and mainly critique the establishment. However, the language used in the poems obfuscates the subject matter in order to avoid state sanctioned censorship. Jalib has been referred to as an "*Awami Poet*," a common man's poet, because his poetry is in a language that is accessible to the common man. This illustrates the dichotomy of Jalib's poetry, which even though uses language that is complex enough to avoid censorship, is still accessible enough that the common man can understand it. One of the poems that Jalib published during Ayub's regime is "*Adviser*"(Appendix).

In the poem, Jalib seems to be aware of the power difference that exists between him and the subjects he describes. When referring to authority figures- like the dictator, Jalib employs more complex signs while he opts for much simpler signs when he is referring to figures he considers to be less powerful, like the people of Pakistan.

1. *I said this to him*

Multiple voices have been used in discourses to create separation between the speaker and the text (for example Graham, 1993). Jalib in his poetry also makes use of multiple voices which, based on the context of the reader, dramatically change the meaning of the text. The existence of these can be seen by his use of pronouns in the first line. The use of the *I* and the *him* indicate that there is directed speech in the text with 2 participants: a narrator, the *I*; and the audience that the narrator is addressing, the *him*. However, the actual identity of either of the participants is not obvious from the first line. The entire meaning of the text is dependent on the identities of the participants in his poem. And these identities are dependent on the social context of the reader. It can be said that Jalib's unit of thought isn't only a word, or a sentence, but the entire text. His use of the words "*I*" or "*him*" in isolation does not describe the identities of the participants. The identities of the participants can also not be inferred with just line 1. Instead, the identities of both the addresser and the addressee is contingent on the entire context of the poem itself.

A reading of the poem reveals that there is a power dynamic between the two participants such that the addressee has more power than the addresser. One interpretation of this is that the addressee is the president and the addresser can be interpreted as the poet himself. However, based on the title of the poem, "*Adviser*", the identity of the addresser can also be interpreted to be that of an actual adviser to Ayub Khan. This multiplicity in meanings drastically changes the entire meaning of the poem. If the addresser is interpreted as an adviser, then the excessive praise for the leader comes off as servile flattery, and the entire poem can be interpreted as Jalib's satire of the president's sycophantic inner circle. If, however, the addresser is Jalib himself, then the poem's praise for the addressee can be understood as a tribute to the president. However, during Ayub Khan's regime, Jalib published other poems along with "*Adviser*", including

“Constitution”, which are more upfront in their satirical critique of the regime. A reader who is aware of the intertextual relation between Jalib’s works would interpret the commending tone as satire.

Jalib has used multiple voices to separate himself from his poetry and this dissociation obfuscates the relationship between his own self and the content of his poetry. Due to the distance between the poetic text and the poet, the text no longer possesses any legal authority (Weber, 1954). In Pakistan individuals who express censured ideas and opinions critical to the establishment have been abducted(BBC), imprisoned (Deutsche Welle)or even killed (Dawn 2015). By producing texts with no legal authority Jalib is able express similar censured ideas while avoiding accountability for the actual contents of his poetry.

As Jalib does not concretely identify the subjects of his poem, the poem has been re-released and replicated multiple times in the history of Pakistan, to critique subsequent dictatorships. In the 1980s, during the dictatorship of another army chief, General Zia ul Haq, during a poetry recitation Jalib himself used the poem to satirize the regime(karachiluvrs21). In 2008, the poem was released by the band Laal as a protest song(WIDEi). Each one of these reproductions reinterprets the identity of the addressee. For example, it can be seen from the music video that accompanied the song by Laal that the subject of the text was no longer Ayub Khan but instead General Pervaiz Musharraf, the military dictator who was in power in 2008. And the poem was used by the band as a reflection of the political situation at the time.

The phrase “*I said this to him*” is repeated multiple times throughout the poem in lines 13, 25, 33, 45. Based on Jakobson’s theory of poetic language (1960), the use of this phrase serves three different functions. Along with the conative function that has been discussed earlier, the parallelism created by the repetition of the lines serves a poetic function; the lines act as markers

that divide the poem into four thematically separate parts. Moreover, these repetitions also serve a referential function. By referencing the ambiguous subjects of the poem, Jalib reinforces the identities of the participants that the readers have created using their own social reality.

14. You are the light of God

19. You are the light of a new morning

Throughout the remainder of the poem, the narrator praises the dictator. In lines 14 and 19 Jalib's narrator praises the dictator by describing him as "*the light of god*" and "*the light of a new morning*". In isolation, "*light*" can be interpreted as a symbolic sign that represents the moral good of the dictator. However, by using indirection (Riffaterre 1978), Jalib distorts the original meaning. Light in this context no longer means good and instead refers to the dictators' hyperbolic perception that they are good. Because of the use of this distortion in the poem, the signs Jalib has used lose their original meaning and are no longer complementary and instead take the form of satire.

Jalib uses a similar indirection to describe the ironic contradiction in Ayub Khan's foreign and domestic policies. During Ayub Khan's rule, most of his critics were labeled as communists and arrested. Moreover, during the same rule, the country's relationship with China, a communist country, greatly improved and it became Pakistan's biggest trade partner.

Jalib's narrator describes the relationship of the regime with the domestic communists in lines 31 and 32 and connects it with the relationship with foreign communists by repeating the line "I said this to him" and creating a parallelism between the two ideas.

31. On their own expense

34. China is our (good) friend

32. Are people in prison, under your rule

35. (We'd) give our lives for her

33. I said this to him

36. But the system that's there

37. Steer well clear of that

38. *(only) greet it from far away*

In line 34, Jalib's narrator describe the foreign relationship with China by calling China a "(good) friend." However, in the subsequent line he follows this by warning the dictator to stay away from the system of governance that's in place there. This warning is used by Jalib as sign that represents communism. The meaning of the word "system" shifts from representing any general system to a specific system: communism. Jalib was aware of the censorship against communism; in Pakistan, as he himself had been jailed for his communist leanings. In order to bypass the censorship, he does not actually mention communism in the text of the poem but instead relies on this sign shift to describe the contradictions in the regime's relationship with the ideology.

2. *These hundred million*

39. *These Hundred millions asses*

3. *are the epitome of ignorance*

40. *They are the masses*

4. *Their consciousness is asleep*

41. *They can never become rulers*

Jalib in line 2 and line 39 uses the phrase hundred million as an indexical sign to refer to the people of his country, since at the time the population of the country was one hundred million. Whereas Jalib had obfuscated identity of the dictator by relying on indirection and by making use of multiple voices. He uses no such indirection to refer to the population and instead uses the word "masses"; in line 40, to reinforce the relationship between the sign and the population. It can be seen that Jalib uses complex signs to refer to the dictator, however, he employs less complex signs to refer to the advisors who, even though have less authority than the dictator, still have more power compared to Jalib. However, while describing subjects who possess comparable power to his own self, Jalib uses much simpler signs. This can be seen in his critique of the population's unchallenged acceptance of the rule of a dictator. He represents the complicit

behavior of the population by describing them as “asses”. The simpler signs that Jalib uses can be interpreted by just the contents of the sentence in which they appear, while the complex signs require intertextual knowledge of his entire body of work.

In the context of the poem, this description of the masses can also be interpreted as Jalib’s reinforcement of the obsequious attitudes of the advisors who try to gain the dictator’s favors by showering him with excessive praise and accept his governance with servility. By making use of such polysemic signs, Jalib is able layer even his simpler signs with more complex meanings. It can be said that Jalib is aware of the power difference that exists between him and his subjects. He employs multiple voices to obfuscate the meanings of his signs. The use of these multiple voices is more prominent when the poem refers to subjects with more authority, and less so when referring to the subjects with equal or less power. His satire is highly reliant on his extensive use of indirection, which creates distortion and shifts the meanings of the signs. The complexity of the signs he employs is also magnified by the intertextual relationship between his texts. Due to context dependent nature of his poetry, Jalib’s readers interpret his texts based on their own social reality. The use of polysemic signs also lets Jalib distance himself from his work and avoid political and social censorship to publish texts that are both satirical and critical of figures in authority.

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Appendix

- مشیر
Musheer
Adviser
- 1.
- میں نے اس سے یہ کہا
2. main nay us say yeh kaha
I said this to him
- یہ جو دس کروڑ ہیں
3. yeh jo dus crore hain
These hundred million
- 4.
- جہل کا نچور ہیں
5. jehel ka nechoor hain
are the epitome of ignorance
- 6.
- ان کی فکر سو گئی
6. In ki fikr so ga-i
Their consciousness is asleep
- 7.
- ہر امید کی کرن
8. har umeed ki kiran
every ray of hope
- 9.
- ظلمتوں میں کھو گئی
9. zulmatoon mein kho ga-i
is lost in the darkness
- 10.
- یہ خبر درست ہے
10. yeh khabr durust hai
This news is true
- 11.
- ان کی موت ہو گئی
11. in ki mout ho ga-i
They are the living dead
- 12.
- بے شعور لوگ ہیں
12. Bay shaour lough hain
These people are ignorant
- 13.
- زندگی کا روگ ہیں
13. zindagi ka rog hain
A disease of life
- 14.
- 15.

Key:
Urdu
Transliteration
Translation

16. اور تیرے پاس ہے
aur teray pass hai
And you have
17. ان کے درد کی دوا
In key dard ki dwa
18. *The cure to their ills*
19. میں نے اس سے یہ کہا
main nay us sey yeh kaha
I said this to him
20. تو خدا کا نور ہے
tou khuda ka noor hai
21. *You are the light of God*
22. عقل ہے شعور ہے
aql hai shaoor hai
Wisdom and Knowledge (personified)
23. قوم تیرے ساتھ ہے
qoum teray saath hai
The nation is with you
24. تیرے ہی وجود سے
teray he wajood sey
25. *It is only through your grace*
26. ملک کی نجات ہے
mulk ki najaat hai
The nation can be saved (The nation has relief)
27. تو ہے مہر صبح نو
tou hai mehr subh nou
28. *You are the light of a new morning*
29. تیرے بعد رات ہے
teray baad raat hai
After you there is only night
30. بولتے جو چند ہیں
boltay jo chnd hain
The few who speak out
31. سب یہ شر پسند ہیں
sab yeh shar pasand hain
32. *Are all mischief makers*

33. ان کی کھینچ لے زباں
In ki kehnc^h ley zaban
(You should) tear out their tongues
34. ان کا گھونٹ دے گلا
In ka ghoont^h day galaa
35. *(You should) strangle their necks(throats)*
36. میں نے اس سے یہ کہا
main nay us sey yeh kaha
I said this to him
37. جن کو تھا زباں پہ ناز
Jin ko tha zaban pey naaz
38. *Those proud of their eloquence*
39. چپ ہیں وہ زباں دراز
Chup hain who zaban daraz
Their tongues are completely silent
40. چین ہے سماج میں
Chain hai samaj mein
There is calm in society
41. بے مثال فرق ہے
Bey misaal farq hai
42. *There is an unexampled difference*
43. کل میں اور آج میں
Kal mein aur aaj mein
Between yesterday and today
44. اپنے خرچ پہ ہیں
Apnay kharch pey hain
45. *On their own expense*
- لوگ قید تیرے راج میں
Loug qaid teray raaj mein
Are people in prison, under your rule
- میں نے اس سے یہ کہا
main nay us sey yeh kaha
I said this to him
- چین اپنا یار ہے
Cheen apna yaar hai
China is our (good) friend

اس پہ جاں نثار ہے

Us pey jaan nisaar hai
(We'd) give our lives for her

پر وہاں ہے جو نظام

Par wahan hai jo nizam
But the system that's there

اس طرف نا جائیو

Us taraf na ja-io
Steer well clear of that

اس کو دور سے سلام

Us ko door say salaam
(only) greet it from far away

دس کروڑیہ گدھے

dus crore yeh gadhay
These hundred million asses

جن کا نام ہے عوام

Jin ka naam hai awaam
They are the masses

کیا بنیں گے حکمراں

Kya banain gay hukmaraan
(They) can never become the rulers

تو یقین ہے یہ گماں

tou yakeen hai yeh gumaan
You are the truth, they're an illusion

اپنی تو دعا ہے یہ

Apni tou dua hai yeh
My prayer is that

صدر تو رہے سرا

Sadr tou rahay sada
You remain the President forever

میں نے اس سے یہ کہا

main nay us sey yeh kaha
I said this to him