

A. J. Uttam and Sindhi Literature

Mohan Gehani

A J Uttam was a true communist- Sindhi writer.

Here I would like to underline the words 'communist' and 'Sindhi Writer.'

These two words need to be explained in its proper context before I try to delve into personality traits of A J Uttam as a person and as a consequence his literary philosophy and contribution to Sindhi Literature.

In Marxist discourse two words that frequently find mention are 'bourgeoisies' and 'Proletariat'. These two words are part of class equation. Bourgeoisies is that section of landed gentry which comes at the tail end of landed gentry. It cherishes and aspires to all the values of upper class and tries to ape it. The upper landed gentry at times patronizes it and according to their convenience spurns it in turn. It was expected that in the aftermath of Industrial revolution this class will be alienated from the land and form the work force thus merge with working class and be a part of 'Proletariat'. This class will have capital of only their labour. They will realize that it is a surplus value which creates Capital. In this process the bourgeoisies will have to 'DE CLASS' itself and adopt the values of the working class. Due to its past experience and managerial skills this class will form the vanguard of the socialist revolution. In this way for every communist it becomes incumbent to 'De class' himself.

At Young age Uttam was drawn towards Freedom Struggle. He suffered imprisonment. He became communist and as a consequence in order to declass himself as required by his ideology he declassed himself. He abandoned all the vestige and Values typical to affluent 'Sind worki' mercantile family. The family which did not have even a distant connection with freedom movement let alone communist ideology.

According to Sindhi Poet Krishin Rahi 'from 1941 this scion of Uttamchandani family who have established Jaslok Hospital in Bombay, started his life devoted to public causes and literature.' (Sindhyat Jo Upasak Uttam Page,167.)

According to traditional values of expression it was a 'civilized' and courteous way of discourse to criticize opponent in a roundabout way and by way of using euphuisms. Civilized society has many wise and 'useful' proverbs for every occasion to express such sentiments as "Naang b mare Lath B na Bajhe" (You kill the snake and let not your stick break). While writing a Monograph of eminent poet Lekhraj Aziz for Sahitya Akademi, Uttam

himself quotes Aziz as saying, “In those days we used to hit out at each other but in such a manner that he would be happy instead of being infuriated.” In contrast the un-educated rustic or villager is more honest and transparent in his expression. He does not disguise his love or anger under fancy words of wisdom. He is true to himself and others he is forthright and blunt in his expression. A Villager follows the dictum of Great Sufi Poet of Sind Sachal Sarmast who has said, ‘ Sachu tha Marda Chawan- Khen Khe wane Na vane – Koori Dosti a jo dam hane na hane’. سچ ٿا مرد چون، ڪنهن کي وڻي ن وڻي. ڪوڙي دوستيءَ جو دم هڻي ن هڻي.

(Verily! Truth speaks brave men- someone may like it or not- May he not vouch for false friendship.) In the process of declassing himself, Uttam gave up the mannerisms of middle class hypocrisy and in expression of his views. It was his quality of expressing undisguised truth which remained his strength as well as weakness which cost him many dear relationships in the society unaccustomed to accept unalloyed – bitter truth where every word has to be sugar coated and sweet tongue is a big asset! In the same process he reduced his needs to existence essentialities. It is necessary for any revolutionary to focus only on the goal it does not admit any extraneous things or views in his thinking. This is apt to lead to rigidity of conviction. He had to adhere to these tenets while living a middle class life! It was this contradiction of his convictions and the society in that he lived were in often at odds with each other! It was tragic indeed but the question is whose tragedy? Was it a tragedy of an individual or society in that he lived!

Fourth decade of last century witnessed a fierce phase in India’s Freedom Movement. The call of Mahatma Gandhi “ Quit India” in 1942 proved to a catalyst in this long struggle. Many young people due to their activities were imprisoned and one of them in Hyderabad (Sindh) was **Assan Jethanand Uttamchandani**. When he came out of prison he emerged out as convinced communist. In Hyderabad Late Comrade Hyderbux Jatoi was a stalwart of Peasant movement. It was under his tutelage that Assan Uttamchandani got his early training of the communist struggle. In this way his upbringing as a communist was different and quite stern compared to figures Kirat Babani and Gobind Malhi who were to form ‘**Trimurti**’ of progressive literary movement of Sindhi literature and language in India. Uttam was trained to be a work on labour front or among peasantry. Unfortunately some time before partition of the country the communal virus had started inflecting the political climate in Sindh also and being the fact that there were no Sindhi Hindus in Labour or peasant class it fell upon Uttam to work among the Student wing. There he consolidated student power and established a group of writers where all forward looking and humanist writers could share a common platform. In this way he could attract some upcoming writers towards ‘Progressive’ thought. Eminent progressive Writers of that time Like Hashu Kewalramani and Sobho Gianchandani also often took part in the

discussions along with eminent writers of Sindhi Language at same time like Prof Lekhraj 'Aziz' N. R. Malkani and Hyderbux Jatoi in those meetings. He creditably handled the job as an Editor of College Magazine 'Phulely'. This way a committed communist worked on a literary field instead of labour front or among peasantry. All this lead to yet another anomaly. After partition of the country only this door was open to Uttam.

Here it needs to be reiterated as per value structure imbibed by Uttam historically all values were relative but as regards moral values and values of principles- they were Sacrosanct. They were not negotiable. The difference between Truth and Untruth was less than even razor's edge. It did not admit any ambiguity and shades of grey. The Truth and Untruth were not two banks of a river, a river on which one can swim or negotiate. In his value structure there was no middle path which wise people often recommend.

It is necessary to put the movement of Sindhyat in proper context. During the freedom struggle of India many ideologies contended under the umbrella organization of Indian national Congress. Some were of the opinion that future of India should be on Unitary basis on model of Moghul Empire. Hindu 'Nationalists' wanted to establish 'Akhand Bharat'. Some progressive groups recognized diversity of India, its languages and cultures and sought to divide on India along distinct linguist lines as British had sought to create provinces as per expediency of their conquests of parts of India which was quite illogical. In 1894 Delegates from Andhra had objected to they being lumped together with Tamils (Madrasis). After a long internal discussion through years Congress passed a resolution in favour of states being organized on linguistic basis in independent India. Unfortunately in the final years the question of Urdu and Hindi assumed centrality which became one of the moving factors behind the creation of Pakistan and the question of other languages remained on the backburner.

While framing the constitution all languages on which the linguistic states could be established were enumerated in the eight schedule of the constitution. Sindh had no region in India therefore it did not find any place in the eight schedule of the constitution of India. By 1955 the pivot of Politics had changed from religion to Language and as consequence of mass upsurge for the creation of Linguistic states had been created. At that Juncture Sindhi congress leaders who had remained apathetic to demand of Sindhi people for the inclusion of Sindhi language in the eighth schedule of the India constitution gravitated to this movement. During Jawaharlal Nehru's regime this demand could not be met because in his understanding the language and Land were intricately linked

The flow of life is unceasing. It is a continuous flow; if it meets any obstacles it breaches it at various places and makes its own pathways. At the time of partition though Sindhi leaders had

abdicated their responsibility and advised the community to merge among the local population but this was ignored because it was a living society, its dynamism and momentum could not be contained. It has Students, Teachers, Writers, Journalists and Social workers in its fold. They started to pick up the broken threads of life and life resumed its flow and Sindhi community maintained its distinct identity in the process language became core identity in the midst of prevailing sense of gloom.

Communists believed that after the independence the socialist revolution was round the corner. They promised the change of situation and herald of new dawn in which all pain, despair and disparities will disappear. They set about to bring a hope and message of cheer to depressed masses. They started creating literature of hope and bright future. The awaited socialist revolution somewhere lost its way but their commitment to cause of Sindhi community remained life-long. They believed that Sindhis have distinct identity which needs to be preserved. They formed the vanguard of the movement for inclusion of Sindhi language in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution thus a “ TRI MURTI” of young progressive writers **Malhi, Uttam and Kirat** emerged to lead this country wide movement.

After migrating to India Uttam realized that the only avenue open to him was to work on the literary front. He wrote an article in 1951 entitled “Adab ain Zindagi” (Life and Literature). This could be considered as his literary manifesto. It is on the basis of his understanding of role of literature that one needs to assess his success or failure. To accuse him of not measuring up to demands of other ideology will be doing injustice to him. At the same time one has full liberty to hold to contrary ideology and differ with him. The points of his ‘literary manifesto’ may be summarized as under:

1. Literature is intrinsically linked to life. According to Aristotle ‘Only beasts and angels can live without society.’
2. It is human mind that creates any art but the mind for its input does not depend on super natural power for inspiration. Thought is a product of experience, Education, traditions and social ethos. As the level of education increases and scope of his experiences widens his ideas grow accordingly. It effects his writings also. In that case how can his writing be without any purpose? Writer consciously or unconsciously knowingly or unknowingly aligns himself with progressive or orthodox- regressive values of his time. The question of his being neutral is meaningless.
3. There is always a struggle between progressive and regressive forces in society and a true writer has to be one with progressive forces which moves the society forward, in which he lives and oppose reactionary forces which seek to hold back the progress of society.

4. Society is divided into classes on basis of mode of production. Society has progressed as the mode of production has progressed. The section of the society that leads the society to progress has been all along present in society and that has to be identified as a progressive force.
5. Common life produces all the wealth and sustenance for a writer and he with his creative ability produces literature and it becomes incumbent on writer to meet the demands of his time. It is absolutely essential to guard against his literature being degenerated to mere propaganda. Any worthwhile thought not well expressed or expressed clumsily will lose its efficacy.

(Above quotations are taken from his article Published in Naeen Duniya in 1951. The selection and numbering has been mine)

His Literary life was multifaceted and he contributed to growth of Sindhi literature in many ways.

- As an activist
- As a Editor and Journalist.
- Essayist.
- A critic who wrote on the literary contribution of various writers.
- As a creative wrier.

As a dedicated person he devoted all his best abilities to all he did to achieve.

Uttam as an Activist

Uttam did his post graduation in Economics soon after migrating to India while for some time he was settled at Baroda. He came to Bombay and started working in the Secretariat of Government of Bombay. At the same time he re-established contacts with his old co Sindhi Writers and established 'Naon Sahit Mandal' which after some time was changed to "Sindhi Sahit Mandal". This organization under the guidance of veteran writer M. U. Malkani was to play a very important role in perseverance and furtherance of Sindhi literature in Post partition India. It proved to be pioneer of the movement which in time to come is known as "**Sindhyaat Movement**". It was this organization that initiated a movement for inclusion of Sindhi Language in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. Initially conferences at the local level at Bombay were held. Uttam remained a leading figure and secretary of this organization for many years. In year 1956 a delegation of Sindhi writers was led by Prof. M. U. Malkani at Asian Writers Conference held at New Delhi. This activated Sindhi Samaj of Delhi and in the year 1957 a convention of Sindhi writers and other sections of the society was held at All India level. In the second convention held in 1959 at Nagpur, it was decided to give a shape to permanent body to highlight the

educational, literary and cultural concerns of the community while main demand remained the inclusion of Sindhi language in the eighth schedule of the constitution. Uttam was elected general secretary of the provisional committee and when in 1960 Sabha came into existence as a registered body, Uttam continued to be General Secretary for many years to come. During that period the working of Sabha used to be in the hands of General Secretary and the role of President was mainly confined to presiding over meetings. In this period Uttam laid healthy foundation of conventions of working of Sabha and he dedicated all his energies to nurture this Institution. Uttam rose to occasion whenever the circumstances demanded. In the History of Sabha, came a phase when Gobind Malhi was General Secretary and Prof. B. H. Nagrani was president and no Samellan could be convened for many years. At that time Uttam came to fore and Volunteered the responsibility to organize Samellan which he did successfully at Alwar (Rajasthan). There have been many such instances of his commitment and dedication to the movement. He was a part of Progressive writers' movement of India and he was honoured for his role at Lucknow.

Uttam as an Editor and a Journalist.

Speaking about the editor of a literary magazine one does not speak about the editor as a journalist but his is considered as a literary contribution. If Uttam were simply to be an Editor of 'NAEEN Duniya' a literary magazine it would have been quite in order but apart from Naeen Duniya he edited 'Sindhu Dhara', 'Sindhu Samachar', and 'Jhulelal' for quite some years. They all were a part of broad movement of Sindhyat.

In 1949 Naeen Duniya as a progressive Socio literary magazine was restarted in India. Till 1957 it continued to have a collective Editorial board as per Marxist credo and Uttam all along continued to be its member. In 1957 when the editorial board faced with financial difficulties and decided to discontinue this magazine, Uttam volunteered to take the responsibility of running it as an individual without compromising its ideology on personal basis, which he continued successfully till his untimely death in 2005. Same was the case with 'Sindhu Dhara'. When Friends associated with it decided to discontinue it, Uttam came to fore and enthused friends and took responsibility to run it with whatever help in any form that they could offer. This magazine also continued to be published till 'Sindhu Samachar' (Daily) came on the scene.

Due to unfortunate accident of Late Mr. Dayal Motwani who was spirit behind running of Jhulelal Published from Ahmedabad, Uttam continued to edit the same from Bombay.

Naeen Duniya has played an important role in the History of Sindhi Literature. It was considered by writers coming of age as a matter of prestige if their writing was published in Naeen Duniya. More than 500 Short Stories, 200 Essays and over 1000 poems have been published in Naeen Duniya. It was Naeen Duniya which started the practice of offering token payment to writers for the first time. Special issues of Naeen Duniya are even today an important resource material for research scholars. Some of the special issues of Naeen Duniya which merit attention and mention are :

1. Shah Sachal Sami –year 1962.
2. International Literature Issue- year 1964.
3. Jawaharlal Nehru Issue- year 1964.
4. Short Stories of Krishin Khatwani- year 1964.
5. Short Stories of Sundri Uttamchandani- year 1964.
6. International Short Story Issue- year 1965.
7. Sheikh Ayaz Issues (2) years 1966- 70.
8. Lekhraj Aziz Issue- 1971.
9. Sindhi Women Writers’ issue- 1981.
10. Sindhi Drama of Sindh and India- 1982.

He edited special issues of Jhulelal also which are as under;

- Ayaz and Narain Shyam Poetry Issue- year 1994.
- G. M. Sayed Issue- year 1996.
- Stories of Sindhyat- year 1996
- M. U. Malkani Centenary Memorial Issue-1997.

In year 1972 He Edited ‘Jiye Sindh’ issue of Hindi periodical ‘ Dharma Yug’.

He helped Kamleshwar to bring out an issue on Sindhi Short Stories of Periodical ‘Sarika’ (Hindi)

He has contributed some books that strictly do not fall within the realm of creative literature but are of informative nature. They could be said to somewhere in between literature and journalism.

They are; 1. Soviet Surg (Soviet Heaven), 2. Nao Chin (New China), 3. Bhara Roos DostI (India-Russia Friendship)4. Mahatma ain Lenin (Mahatma and Lenin) 5. Bharat Jo Dost Lenin. (India’s Friend Lenin). For his Book India- Russia friendship he was awarded and visited soviet Union.

Uttam as a Literary Critic.

Uttam is known as robust literary critic. Apart from books on criticism he wrote Monographs for Sahitya Akademi on important contributors to Sindhi Literature. These include Monograph on Mangharam Malkani, Lekhraj ‘Aziz’ and Kalyan Advani.

His books of literary criticism are: Tagore a Glimpse, Sindhi Literature Criticism and Research, Sahit ain sahitkar (Literature and Writer) Sujag Sindh (Criticism) and Sindhi Kahani Natak ain Tanqeed (Sindhi Short Story, Drama and Criticism).

Here It would be once again essential to reiterate his opinion on literature that in any era there is a struggle between progressive and reactionary elements. Accordingly he has assessed many writers of the past like Kalidas, Mirabai, Guru Nanak and Sindhi poets Shah Abdul Latif, Sachal and sami (all are Classical Poets). This is an important contribution of Uttam in the genre of Sindhi literary criticism from this new point of view.

Uttam had historical consciousness and he realized that the dates of events are sacred source material for future historians and he would not tolerate any date wrongly mentioned by any writer he would publicly refute it with the exact date of the event. This did not endear him to many writers.

Uttam as a Creative writer.

Uttam has two collections of short stories to credit. "KASHMHASH" (Struggle) 1972 and HOO JAHAN HI MANU (This World and This Heart) 1991. In his essay 'A Unforgettable Story' of the world literature he gives example of masters of Short Story writers like O Henry, Chekov, Turgnev, Tolstoy, Galsworthy, Munshi Premchand, Tagore and Sarat Chandra. It all amply goes to prove that he had well grasped the essentials of the craft of Short story writing. He was well aware of the requirements of this genre of literature. According to him A short story should be focused and a easily flowing narrative. He did not believe in short story being a teaser and exhibition of mental acrobats or record of talk at the Psycho-analysts couch.

Most of his Stories could be called 'Feminist'. He believed in gender equality as a part of his socialist conviction. For him a woman is not a riddle shrouded in a veil. He considers her as comrade in arms as a equal participant in ushering in social change and being a part of it. His story 'Nindinko' (A person who has lost his home) is a metaphor for rootless existence of Sindhi community in India. Some stories written in aftermath of Indo China war are full of Patriotic fervor while his story "ROSHNI MOTI AAE" (Light has Returned) speaks about loneliness of a character and his insecurity and return to security of social living. His short story RAJA is crafted in the classical mould of 'Progressive ideology'. It is story about a poen whom lower middle class abhors as low class but who has right perspective of society and upholds right values. This story has been translated in many languages like Bengali, Marathi, Malyalam, Urdu, Oriya, Russian and German.

He also translated some books into Sindhi which include Amrit Rai's Kedarnath, Bela, Pyar ain Vasna (Love and lust) of Tolstoy, 'Insaan Jo Nasseb' (fate of a Man) Sholokov, Chawiha

Manhoon ain Hika Chokri (Twenty six people and one girl) of Gorky and Roop BahRoop (Beauty- Hypocracy) Khawaja Ahmed Abbass.

It would be necessary to reiterate once again that such dedicated souls, who are true to themselves and the causes they uphold, are rare to find and he was such a rare person.

HE WAS A TRUE COMMUNIST- SINDHI WRITER.

(This was presented as a paper in Seminar Of Akhil Bharat Sindhi Boli ain Sahit Sabha held At Jabalpur- Bedagaht)

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