

Things Fall Apart: A Postmodernist reading of the novel "*Ghulam Bagh*"

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Abstract: *Mirza Athar Baig's novel "Ghulam Bagh" originally written in Urdu was first published in 2006. Within thirteen years, six editions of this novel have been published due to its popularity and incongruous themes. The novel reflects various issues of modern age through imaginary and fictional characters. Postmodernism has created an atmosphere of disintegration and degeneration to approach various themes, including education, class struggle, exploitation, cafe culture, downtrodden mentality, inferiority complex, and sexual violence in a philosophical manner. The central theme of this novel is to seek pleasure and provide catharsis through dialogue from a disintegrated and degraded society community.*

Keywords: *cafe culture, class struggle, decentralization, disintegration and degeneration, exploitation, myths of degraded generations, sexual brutality, postmodernism, realism*

When Mirza Athar Baig's (1950) first novel "Ghulam Bagh" was published in 2006, it was well received due to its philosophical context. The novel consists of 30 chapters and 878 pages and it covers numerous themes that modern Western novels characterize. The novel has not been written in a traditional Eastern style. It deals with certain religious, moral, and social themes with specific synthetic elements and peculiar diction. Implicitly, due to its unusual writing style and conversational style, it discusses deep psychological problems. The novel begins with "Cafe Ghulam Bagh" in which the protagonist is found in conflict with the eternal moment and is seemingly enjoying the internal and external conditions:

”اگر لمحے سے تمہاری مراد یہی لمحہ ہے تو اس میں کیا ہے ابھی دیکھ لیتے ہیں۔ تم یعنی کبیر مہدی قلمی نام ابن بشر ایک رہے ہو۔ میں اُس کھڑکی کے ٹوٹے شیشوں کی مایوس و نامراد مصنف میرے سامنے بیٹھ ہو، اور اب میری بک بک سن راہ سے باہر برستی بارش کو دیکھ سکتا ہوں جو مارچ کی درمیانی تاریخوں میں برسنے کی وجہ سے لوگوں کو بے وقت سی لگتی ہے اور ساتھ ساتھ میں سوچتا جا رہا ہوں کہ عاشق علی میرا پتا نہیں کہاں جا کر مر گیا ہے۔“ ا

*"If the 'moment' you were referring to, is this moment, then let's see what lies in it." You, Kabir Mehdi, with the pseudonym, Ibn Bashir are sitting before me as an unsuccessful and frustrated writer. You are now listening to my pointless conversation. I can see the rain falling through the holes of the broken glass of the window, which seems to be untimely as it hardly rains in the middle of March and at the same time, I'm thinking about where my son, Ashiq Ali, went and disappeared."*ⁱ

Ghulam Bagh Cafe is haunted by a symbolic, metaphorical and mythical world in which through the retrieval and retelling of moments different subjects are explored. Since the human mind is an eccentric concept, its currents of thought flow at different ages. Characters emerge on stage, play their part and then vanish from the scene. By using wordy phrases, an attempt has been made to embellish situations and events. However, like everything, the variety of words is also limited. They only put marks on the pages but fail to communicate the inexpressible conditions that befall human beings. Kabir Mehdi expresses some of the conditions:

”یہ محض بکواس ہے۔ ایک ابکائی ہے۔ فضلہ ہے۔ سستے نمائشی جملے ہیں جن پر صفاتی لفظوں کی کھیاں بھنبھنارہی ہیں۔
اُمڈتی سیاہ رات، تیرگی کا مہیب سمندر، تاریکی کا بو جھل غبار، رات کا کالا لہو، سیاہی کے آسیب رقص کناں، ہات تیرے
کی! لعنت! کیبر مہدی یہ تیرا کام نہیں۔“^۲

*"It's just nonsense. This is senseless. It's a waste. There are cheap flashy phrases on which the bees of qualitative words are buzzing. Dark night, the majestic sea of turbulence, the heavy dust of darkness, the black blood of the night, the demons of ink dance, your hand! Damn it! Kabir Mehdi, this is not your job"*ⁱ

Mirza Athar Baig has presented the established facts of this novel in the form of assumptions in the context of post-modernism and later also refuted the same assumptions.

"The essence of postmodernism is that it is an organized movement against fundamentalism, realism, and humanism that undermines the discussion based logocentric expressions. This movement, along with the evolution of social and intellectual sciences, fully ignores the evolutionary journey of individual existence. In addition to its given semantic scheme, this movement lists other semantic and cultural systemsⁱ ."ⁱⁱⁱ

The novel "Ghulam Bagh" has been attributed as "In the name of Arzal generations" in which Khadim Hussain is the first and last postman of Mangrajati. He is admired for his honesty, devotion to his duties and courage. People of noble lineage are amazed at his qualities and say:

”عطر گندی نالی میں بھی بہہ جائے تو تھوڑی بہت خوشبو پھر بھی دے دیتا ہے۔“^{iv}

"Even if the perfume flows in the drain, it still gives off a little fragrance."ⁱ

It is as if a person from the Arzal race suddenly had uplifted his racial graph a little from time to time and even had reached a small government job, his honor does not increase but his self-deception becomes resentment. Among these Mangrajati races, the graph of Khadim Hussain's lineage came to light after centuries of hard work. Then his son Yawar Hussain completed his education and went on step up with this graph. But his father Khadim Hussain, shortly before his death, unveiled the reality of the Mangrajati race and said:

”عزت دار لوگوں میں رہنا سیکھا۔ نہیں... یہ جھوٹ ہے۔ آج میں تمہیں یہی بتانا چاہتا ہوں۔ یہی جھوٹ ہے جو ساری عمر میں اپنے آپ سے اور دوسروں سے بولتا رہا۔“^v

" I have learned to live in the company of the honored people. No, that's a lie. That is what I want to tell you today. This is the lie that I kept telling myself and others throughout my life."^v

Six decades have passed since the creation of Pakistan and the same issue of caste and creed is still fresh. People from lower caste make use of their skills and merge with the people upper castes. However, they succeed to a bit of a degree. They are destined to come across a disgraceful condition. It is now clear that Khadim Hussain confesses his sense of inferiority to his son Yawar Hussain in these words:

”میں ساری عمر عزت دار بننے کے لیے کوشش کرتا رہا۔ ایسا جو اپنی روزی خود کماتا ہے اور اس کی اولاد پہلی صف میں سب کے برابر نماز پڑھ سکتی ہے... مگر یہ سب جھوٹ تھا۔۔۔“^{vi}

"I've been trying to be honorable all my life. The one who earns his own living and his children can offer prayers in the first row, but it was all a lie."^v

Before death of the father, the dialogue between father and son became meaningless. Since life is absurd, you have to conceal your identity to fill it with sense. As it is reflected through different characters nowadays. Throughout his life, Khadim Hussain remained a postman and kept his son content by telling stories of honesty. Suddenly, he recounted an incident of his betrayal that the nobility of Inamgarh used to buy medicine from a quack, Ihsan Ilahi for male sexual power and one day he brought their parcel to his house and this is how he started realizing the meanness and sexual obsession:

”ذہلیق عمر کے عیاش مردوں کو اپنے آپ کو برقرار رکھنے کے لیے کچھ خاص نسخوں کے سہاروں کی ضرورت ہوتی ہے۔
بس ویسے ہی نسخے بڑے بڑے مہنگے وہ حکیم دیا کرتا تھا۔ وہ جو ضرورت اور مال رکھتے تھے۔ وہ اُس کے پاس جاتے تھے۔
اس کی غلامی کرتے تھے۔“

"The middle-aged men, obsessed with sexual gratification need some special prescriptions to maintain themselves. In the same way, he used to give prescriptions which were very expensive. Those who needed and possessed wealth. They used to visit him, and flatter him."^v

As far as the latest themes of the new Urdu novel are concerned, "it can be said with great confidence that in new Urdu novels of today, there are elements of building one's moral character, improving one's economic condition, improving one's life in life hereafter, strengthening the world, exploring the truth through imagination, presenting a true picture of life, presenting new branches of knowledge, benefiting from modern scientific advances, stating universal facts, interpreting internal and external conditions, reflecting elevated ideas and emotions and reforming society"^v. "*Ghulam Bagh*" isⁱ not a novelⁱ that fits into a fix template, it is an interesting novel, presented realistically, written in a philosophical style. When it comes to description of setting, it does not cultivate an imaginative environment, but it also takes into account realism. When Zahra and her father Yawar Hussain walked on the dewy grass in the morning and saw the duck floating in the pond, Zahra held the duck in her arms and looked at her chest to see if it looked the same as it had been before swimming. It is as if the circumstances of aesthetics were portrayed in a metaphor. It is as if the circumstances of aesthetics were portrayed in a metaphorical way by Mirza Athar Baig that beauty is the name of pleasure. In aesthetic waves, the flow of consciousness is more attractive, just as the water of a river and a spring, when it hits sharp rocks, turns milky and moon-like in color. Aesthetics is a source of pleasure for everyone and where there is beauty, happiness is possible, but kings, princes and ministers tried to get the same pleasure by wasting their

"Lawrence's artistic works, in fact, underscores the disintegration and deprivation of sensitivity that besieged human society after World War II. His most important novel, Lady Chatterley's Lover (1959) more or less made its mark on the world literary stage. It is true that Lawrence is more obsessed with sex, but this obsession is actually a form of avoidance, a reaction to his contemporary age anxieties, political turmoil and economic inequalities."^x

Mirza Athar Baig has tried to make Kabir the central figure and hear the inner voice of all the characters around him. Kabir asked Half-man:

”تم کرنا کیا چاہتے ہو ذلیل گورکن؟“

”میں جنوبی ایشیا کی تہذیب کی... میں اتر جانا چاہتا ہوں پورے کا پورا... آہ میں دھرتی ماتا کی..... میں ننگا افلاطون ہوں..... نہیں..... میں..... افلاطون کا مردانہ عضو ہوں۔ افلاطون کا..... ہاف میں نے چرس کے سنگریٹ کا آخری کوشہ ورت تک اندر کھینچا اور خوفناک تہقے لگانے لگا۔“^{۱۱}

"What do you want to do, humiliated gravedigger?"

"I want to delve deep into the South Asian civilization. I want to go all the way to Mother Earth. I am naked Plato. No, I am male organ of Plato." Aflatoon's. ... I smoked my last puff of Hashish in the distance and started laughing terribly."^x

"Ghulam Bagh" presents a world of complex psychological issues that the reader finds himself stuck in a complex fabric. When one character begins to reveal its inner world, suddenly another character emerges and begins to evolve with its own psychological complexity. The Arjal races do not shy away from showing their essence. It is the art of Mirza Athar Baig to present the character with all its features and try to take the reader to the real facts. What does this novel actually convey with the suggestive title of "Ghulam Bagh" and what is the cafe or Catharsis House? As an archaeologist says:

”اور یہ جو غلام باغ۔ یہ کیا غلام باغ ہے کیا یہ غلام باغ ہے؟ بکو اس باغ کیسے غلام ہو سکتا ہے؟ نباتات کسی کی غلام نہیں ہوتیں۔ حیوان؟ حیوانات میں پالتو ہوتے ہیں غلام نہیں اور غلام پالتو ہو سکتے ہیں؟ مگر پالتو غلام نہیں۔ یہ منطق کا مسئلہ ہے تمام غلام پالتو ہیں مگر غلام باغ نہیں ہو سکتا۔ تو یہ جگہ متعین نہیں جگہ ہی سے ہر چیز کا تعین ہوتا ہے۔ اگر جگہ کا تعین نہیں تو کھدائی کیسے ہوگی۔ اگر کھدائی نہیں ہوگی تو آ کر کیا لوجی کیسے ہوگی؟ غلام باغ کا معمر۔ غلام کا معمر اور باغ کا معمر نہیں ہے۔ جنم کھنڈر کا معمر؟ خواتین و حضرات یہ معمر مجھ پر کھل گیا ہے۔ میں تمہیں بتاتا ہوں۔ اب چھپانے کی کوئی ضرورت نہیں۔“^{۱۲}

"And this slave garden! Is this a slave garden? Is this garden, a slave? This is pointless thing to say. How can a garden be slave? Plants are not slaves to anyone. Animal? There are pets among animals. They are not slaves. Can slaves be pets? But

They cannot be pet slaves It is an issue of logic. Slaves can be pets whereas Gardens cannot be slaves. The place is not fixed. Everything is determined from the place itself. If the location is not determined, how will the excavation take place?" If there is no excavation, how will there be archeology? The mystery of Slave garden! The riddle of the slave is not the mystery of the garden. The mystery of birth ruins? Ladies and gentlemen! this mystery has dawned upon me. Let me tell you - there is no need to hide it now."^x

In fact, the whole universe is a mystery. Human existence itself is a set of wonders. Change takes place and thoughts also undergo change every moment. The transcend the boundaries of body and soul and reside on different worlds. thought causes internal and external conflicts in human life and result in psychic confusions. Only body exists in sexual confusions and soul feels lost. Begum Yawar Atai stumbles on the back of "Siraj Din" when he falls due to a slap in the face and says in a loud tone:

”حرام زادے کتے۔ تجھے لگایا تھا اُس کجبری کی نگرانی پر کہ اس بات کی خبر دے کہ کن یاروں سے ملتی ہے اور تو کتے اس کے ساتھ مل گیا۔ بول کتنے پیسے دیتی تھی وہ تجھے۔“^{۱۳}

“You, Dog...bastard. You were directed to keep an eye on that bitch and report about friends she meets. However, you partied with her. Tell me how much money she owes you for the services you give.”^x

Now this style of addressing is crude and emotional, but it reflects the the whole society that those who are caretakers seem to be more involved in the acts of corruption. In an atmosphere of suffocation and decay, everyone becomes suspicious, and the creative essence is replaced by slavery and eroticism. The novel also has a post-colonial environment in which the progress and prosperity of any other civilization becomes impossible. In a slavish environment, everyone lives and dies for his own interests. Degraded people give birth to immoral ideas and, thus, propagate their inferiority. The literary atmosphere of "Ghulam Bagh" also includes political, economic and social issues in which everyone talks openly and unveils secrets. Kabir's words emphasize the meaning of the novel:

”فلکشن کے خالق کو خدا بننے کا اختیار کس نے دیا ہے۔“^{۱۴}

"Who gave the right to be God to the fiction writer?"^{xiv}

Everyone claims to be an earthly god. Whatever, he looks on the outside, on the inside he is determined to strengthen his government and power. *Ghulam Bagh* was written in the first decade of the 21st century in the background of post-colonialism, post-modernism, and colonialism. It was an era engulfed by exploitation, monetary system, intervention of world powers. The novel reflects a world with expressions of dialogue, and presents a more imaginative atmosphere than reality. It reflects the inner state of characters, feelings of love

and affection. It also hints at sexual orientation, and philosophical themes. This novel is a new literary milestone for the new century. The novel is devoid of plot and spatial and temporal boundaries. The novel is not a set of ethics and it doesn't convey a didactic purpose. It is an endeavor to bring scattered and broken thoughts to a central point. This novel gives a perfect example of the way postmodernism has disintegrated a coherent system of life. Kabir Mehdi continues to expose all the characters in various ways whereas Zahra seems intent upon revealing the humiliation of her family through sexual deceit.

ⁱ Athar Baig, Mirza, *Ghulam Bagh*, Lahore: Saanjh Publications, 2018, p.10

ⁱ *ibid*, p.38 ⁱ

ⁱ Muhammad Ali Siddiqui, *Nakat*, Lahore: Peace Publications, 2013, p.11

ⁱ *ibid*, p.66 ^v

^v *ibid*, p.71

^v *ibid*, p.74 ⁱ

^v *ibid*, p.79 ⁱ ⁱ

^v Shaie Ali Shair, *Jadeed Urdu Novel, Asloob o Fan*, Lahore: Aks Publications, 2019 p.83

ⁱ Ghulam Bagh, p.84

^x Mohammad Azeem Ullah, *Urdu Novel per Angraizi Novel k asraat*, Lahore: Dar-ul-Shoor, 2015, p.190

^x Ghulam Bagh, p.188 ⁱ

^x Ghulam Bagh, p.547 ⁱ ⁱ

^x Ghulam Bagh, p.549 ⁱ ⁱ ⁱ

^{xiv} Ghulam Bagh, p.550