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**Representation of Women as a Symbol of Courage
in Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai’s
Sur Sassue: A New Historicist approach**

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Representation of Women as a Symbol of Courage in Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's Sur Sassue: A New Historicist approach

Abstract

Bhittai's significant portion of poetry, Sur Sassue is a remarkable representation of women as a symbol of courage. In Sur Sassue, the poet depicts endeavor of a woman that she does to bring stability in different cultures. The poet speaks about a steadfast lady having controversial birth, raised by Sindhi-laundrer at Bhanbhor named Sassue. A man of Katch-Makran, Punhoon visits Bhanbhor for trade purpose and marries Sussui secretly. Afterwards, not informing Sassui, Punhoon's brothers bring him back. Knowing this, Sassue runs bare-footed in vain to search Punhoon, her unconditional love. This research paper attempts a Textual Analysis of [Sur Sassue \(1866\)](#) with New Historicism as a theoretical Framework. Greenblatt's theory of New Historicism (1980), as an evaluative exercise, tries to join a literary work with the period in which it was composed. The theory denies that the literary work always remains a work of Literature. The paper attempts to analyze the social and cultural context of Sur Sassui and at the same time the textual analysis of text in the form of history. Specially, it explores the representation of women (Sassue) in discursive manner. The study argues that through the poetry with respect to New Historicism, Shah has asserted woman a sign of determination through his poetic genius.

Keywords : Symbole of courage , Shah Abdul Latif ,Poetry , Sur Sassue , History , Women-Love Mysticism

Introduction

This research is conducted to critically evaluate a chapter from Shah Jo Risalo (1958), Sur Sassue. The poetic Collection of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittae, [Shah Jo Risalo \(1958\)](#) is a compilation of local folk stories that lack narrative techniques but possess rich plot-[Allana, 1991](#); [Shaikh, 1991](#); [Sorley, 1989](#). All the surs have a different story to retell in poetic style. Moreover, all the surs have a universal motivational message to deliver. Every sur bears a distinct name after a prominent character of the story, most of the surs are sub-divided in multiple 'Dastans' , may be called Cantos in English. Furthermore, the surs end with 'Wayee(s)' may be called Epilogue/s. [Hotechand, 1991](#); [Iqbal, 1991](#); [Shah, 2014](#)

One of the chapters from Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai's poetic collection, Sur Sassue, is named after a courageous and loyal lady 'Sassue'. It is basically a folk tale of Bhanbhor, a coastal village in district Thatta, Sindh. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittae had remained the center of investigation for many researchers. The current research has been done to evaluate and textually analyze Sur Sassue. For Research purpose only one Sur has been selected to investigate through the lens of New Historicism, a theoretical framework given by Stephen Greenblatt in his critical series of essays [Invisible Billets \(1988\)](#). New Historicism arose as a literary theory that emerged in the 1980s, primarily through the work of Stephen Greenblatt. It emerged as a reaction against Formalism, a literary theory that focus on the form literary work. New Historicism emphasis on literature's importance in relation to the culture and history surrounding it [Greenblatt, S. 1989](#). It views literary works as influences and products of their contemporaneous socio-political and

economic conditions. New Historicists study the relationships between literature, the arts and how they are employed and consumed in the politics of power and belief of a particular time. [Hutcheon, L.1988](#)

The appeal of love is supernatural. In taking water innumerable times a day, does not satisfy the thirstiness of a thirsty. Love desires loyalty and selflessness. Steadfast people like Sassue can accomplish their love. It is a well-known fact of Latif's world that beloved's abode is Lover's heart. [Ali.M, 2012](#). The imagination of beloved gives consolation to lover's heart forever. In Sur Sassue Mazori, the poet says that:

As they travel toward Hot Punhun
Many false women become exhausted
Rocks become level ground for those who
roam in search of the beloved
All friends on this journey of desire are
purlblind and confused.
Oh Brahman girl, turn into bits of met for
the dogs of Katch to feed upon.'

[Baloch, p 155](#)

Sur Sassue is designed to motivate those who believe in their passiveness. Those who consider themselves idle. Sassue has set an eternal example of never ending struggle to accomplish the love. The struggle that she attempted for has become immortal. Though she could not meet Punhun, yet she became exemplary character in the world of love. Punhun (Matloob-desired) was symbolically characterized as God. Sassue (Talib-seeker) is characterized as worshipper. And the bond of love between Sassue and Punhoon is Talb (Need) that enforces worshipper to run in the search of God. [Akhund H.A. 1993](#) The poet, Hazrat Shah Abdul Latif Bhittae has presented a world of triangulation in this Sur. Matloob (Desired) that is God, Talib (Seeker) that is Sassue and Talb (Need) that is love

between Sassue and Punhun. In the same way as Sassue searches Punhun, a worshipper searches God.

Much of Latif's poetry is distinctly his own. The verse he composed is exceptional in various ways: poetic representation of culture. Tales from Sindh and the surrounding area, his uniquely tailored vocabulary. The universality of subject matter and rhythmic essence can be identified as a unique creativity. [Kothari 2009](#)

In spite of this notable uniqueness, Latif's poetry is shaped by various social, political, literary, and religious influences. Quranic ideas and expressions have significantly impacted the content of his poetry. He has truly borrowed terms, expressions, and at times entire lines from the content of the Noble Quran. [Brohi, 1996](#)

Eliminating these Quranic terms from Latif's poetry would result in a significant decline in the coherence of ideas. Elimination of Quranic phrases such as (الست) Am I not?) Or

أو (كل إنسان سيذوق الموت) g الموت طعمه مثل
إن الله مع الصابرين حقاً

persevere) would make the entire poetic line nearly void, conversely these terms provide his poetry an a hint of magnificence. These phrases can be considered a fundamental component. A section of his poetry that carries a profoundly spiritual tone and quality as it symbolically signifies God's Love in comparison to Human Love and Affection. His poetry expresses a spiritual message with remarkable energy. That an individual experiences a heightened sense of blissful joy. [Paleejo 2012](#)

Latif has skillfully combined the folk tales

and popular figures infused with Divine Love and in this blend the Quranic scripture holds a significant position. Nearly all the Surs (Melodies) as sections of his Risalo are clearly shaped by the text of the Quran, especially Sur Kalyan, Sur Sassue Aabri, Sur Marui and Sur Aasa. Overall, the spiritual essence of Latif's poetry is Quranic preaching [Baloch 2010, p 51](#)

Worn off what she did so take that steps did make her nearer twisting tore she asunder the distance to the land of Love. [Baloch.p 159](#)

Background of the Author and the Sur

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai was a sufi saint, born in 1689 in modern day Hala, district Matiari. He was a well-known Sufi poet of Kalhora Dynasty (1701-1783) of Sindh. He used to compose poetry based on common themes of everyday life. His devotees collected the poems but did not organize into book form. His poetic Collection "Shah Jo Risalo" was published posthumously by [Ernest Trump in 1866 in Leipzig, Germany](#). [Hussain 2021](#)

Sur Sassue of the Shah Jo Risalo is a folk tale told in poetic style. Sassue was a beautiful girl born into a Hindu family. According to some traditions, at the time of Sassue's birth someone predicted that Sassue would elope and will lead her parents to disgrace. Therefore, her parents put the newly born baby along with some gold coins in wooden box and threw into River Indus. The wooden box was taken up by a washer-man at Bhanbhor. He opened the box with excitement and could not believe that he had found a newly born

baby. As he was a childless father, he started to raise the girl with great affection considering her as his daughter. [Baloch, 2010](#)

Introduction to the Sur

The story of Sur Sassue composed in poetic style has two major characters: Sassue and Punhoon and few minor characters including the brothers of punhoon, a goat herder and a train of camels. With the help of this Sur, the poet has tried to deliver the message that Man himself is a copy of Natural Rules. Sassue was mistaken otherwise she was Punhun herself. It was the grave mistake of Sassue that she fallen asleep and her brothers-in-law got Punhun escaped. Moreover, the poet says that Sassue was erroneous in the sense that she searched Punhun in Jungle and mountainous area. Actually, Punhun was inside her sou and body. Sassue and Punhun are one and signify oneness. Erroneously, they have considered themselves two separate entities. There is no separation between God and Man It is a delusion to think God away from manhood. God lives in heart. Symbolically, Punhun was in the heart of Sassue and she was finding her vaguely.

To Him she struggles, strives says Latif
Though forsaken and alone;
and cry she would to the One
who is the Lord God of all hosts.

Seek not Him away from you
Sit not yet Sassui! Here also;
Forsake though going by your feet
Forget, yet sitting on the path so;
What are the creature comforts here

O let you but all these forgo
Only by the inner spirits go
That distance to Him, all be undone

[Baloch. P 151](#)

Sur Sassue is divided into 5 following sections on the basis of different Scenography.

1. Sur Sassue Abri.
2. Sur Mazoori.
3. Sur Desi.
4. Sur Hohyari.
5. Sur Hussaini.

Each Section of the Sur is re-divided into different Dastaans, exposing imagery with full detail of Sassue's travel and the hardships she faced from Bhanbhore to Ketch-Makran in the search of her spiritual love, Punhoon. [Joyo 2013](#)

Story of the Sur:

Sassue was raised and grown up by a washer-man named, Muhammad. Sassue was so beautiful that her beauty became the talk of town, Bhanbhore. She was very dear to washer-man. He got her built a Mahal at Bhanbhore where she used to frolic with her friends.

Worn off what she did so take
That steps did make her nearer
Twisting tore she asunder
The distance to the land of Love.

[Baloch. P 150](#)

During the time of Dilo Rae, a king of Birhamin Dynasty, Baloch traders used to visit Sindh and especially coastal regions. Bhanbhore was one of the trade centre in those days. Punho, son of Jam Ari, a Baloch tribal chief from Ketch-Makran visited Bhanbhore for trade purpose. Someone told Punhon about Sassue's beauty. Somehow, Punhon managed to see Sassue. He was impressed by her beauty

and wanted to marry her. But, the washer-man denied their marriage on the basis of other caste marriage. It was told to washer-man that Punhon is basically a washer-man and he can work with your subordinates at your Dhobighat to prove his identity. In this way, they managed to get married. Punhon did not inform neither his father nor his brothers of Ketch-Makran about his marriage with lower caste girl (washer-man). When his brother Chunri came to take Punhon back to Ketch-Makran, he got the news of Punhon's marriage at Bhanbhore with Sassue. Due to caste difference, Punhon, being a prince and son of a Baloch tribal chief and Sassue, the daughter of a washer-man, the union could not live together for long time. Chunri informed his father and planned to take Punhon back to Ketch-Makran. Jam Ari sent Hoti and Noti, two younger brothers of Punhon to Bhanbhore for Chunri's help. One night, three brothers (Chunri, Hoti and Noti) got Punhon drunk massively. The same night, Punho was secretly ridden to Ketch-Makran on camels which were specially brought for Punhon's fast delivery to Ketch-Makran. Early morning, as Sassue woke up from deep sleep, she found Punhon missing from bed. She started to seek him vainly but wherever she went, she could not find him. All of sudden, she saw the foot marks of camels that led to out of Bhanbhore. [Ali.M 2012](#)

Literature Review

Sur Sassue in Shah Jo Risalo has presented the lesson of struggle with historical perspective. It highlights the sufferings

and hardships faced by the main character “Sassue” in order to attain her spiritual love. Many poems have been composed in this context in different languages such as: Heer Ranjha by Waris Shah in Punjabi, Shirin and Farhad by Nezami Ganjavi in Persian, Johar-e-Moazzam by Natic Makrani in Balochi etc. which reveal similar point of view.

[Bibi R. & Lodhi A. \(2021\)](#) in their Research Article: Parallelism and Metrical Patterns in the Selected Poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai explore that Latif’s poetry bears various themes. At the same time he talks about Love as well as Disgust. He skillfully uses words which give repetitive sounds. Moreover, a significant part of his poetry is composed in free verse pattern. Poet has used syntactic, semantic and phonological structures in his poetry. Due to a variety of techniques and patterns used by poet in his poetry, the poet shows innumerable subjects and themes. Though composed in 17th century, it can be found that the poetry yet depicts 21st century. With the help of different Surs incorporated in his poetry, poet advocates various daily life issues faced by a common man.

First with knife let your head be severed,
Like an organ let your body vibrate with love's secret sadness,
Since you seek Lord's love, on iron bars roast your flesh.

[Baloch, p 148](#)

In her article [Farwa, 2020](#) explore that Shah has depicted woman beyond storytelling. He has not merely depicted woman as a courageous one but his depiction has immortalized woman. The character he selected to praise woman, have become universal characters. Like other poets of the world, Shah Latif has got his characters immortalized. He selected seven Surs to name with woman. Sohni, Sassue, Sorath, Marui, Leela, Moomal and Noori. Since they are only characters in Latif’s poetry but these names have earned a high reputation in Sindhi culture. These names are taken with great reverence. In these seven Surs the poet has declared woman the mark of courage and bravery. Due to these characteristics, he, the poet seems more feminist than revolutionary. His characters are being called Heroines replacing Heros. There are many poets in Sindhi Literature who tried to walk on Latif’s footprints. Many novels were written and dramas were telecast on various TV channels based on the stories composed by Shah Latif.

Sasui's heart breaks from pain's torment
and rends all hearts around;

Immaculate Sasui, her eyes are e'er
on Punhu bent;

her virtuous mind on Beauty of the
glorious one intent;

Faithful up to the last... all spent
the maid in mountains dies. [Baloch, 149](#)
Bhittai's portrayal of Sassui transcends
traditional gender roles, presenting her as a
paragon of strength, resilience, and
unwavering devotion. Her character
challenges societal norms, embodying the
struggles faced by women in patriarchal

societies. Sana Amjad's research highlights how Sassui's narrative serves as a clarion call for women's empowerment, inspiring them to overcome societal constraints and assert their agency. [Ansari 2003](#)

Research Methodology

In this Non-empirical research based investigation, a Sur from shah jo Risalo by Shah Abdul Bhattai has been selected to analyse text by applying New Historicism, a critical theory put forward by Greenblatt. This research is based on Qualitative research. Textual analysis of the text of the poem has been done with the tools of close reading. Political, cultural, social and religious background of the poem has been analyzed. Print as well as Media sources were used to collect material for this research. Primary Sources and Secondary Sources were utilized to get results of the research. In this research work, Textual Analysis of the poem, Sur Sassue was done with the help of Close reading. Few tools of Close Reading were used to highlight the text. New Historicism was applied as a Theoretical Framework.

New Historicism: After [1960s](#) New Historicism emerged as a new vein in world literature to judge the text of literary pieces of Literature. Stephen jay Green blat has the credit to invent and popularize the term new criticism. It is the only theory in literature that tells a reader about the critic's history and author's history. An author is judged by his social, political and religious bent of mind. The theory emphasis upon the history of author how it impacted on the mind of author while writing the work. Author though discusses his own bent of mind yet he shows contemporary issues." The New Historicist also acknowledges that his examination of literature is "tainted" by his own culture and environment. The very fact that we

ask whether Shakespeare was anti-Semitic — a question that wouldn't have been considered important a century ago — reveals how our study of Shakespeare is affected by our civilization.

New Historicism, then, underscores the impermanence of literary criticism. Current literary criticism is affected by and reveals the beliefs of our times in the same way that literature reflects and is reflected by its own historical contexts. New Historicism acknowledges and embraces the idea that, as time changes, so will our understanding of great literature."

A critic who is New historic judges the text with political and social aspects of the author. He analyzes the text, not the bend of author's mind. Author's influence in the text is also observed by the critic with historical perspective. New Historicism came out of Marxist criticism, therefore, social perspectives in the text are certainly helpful. These critics believe that power does not reside in the hands of upper class people, lower class people are also themselves responsible for corruption and social injustice.

Data Analysis and Discussion:

Sur Sassui is crafted in the form of a "sur," a musical mode in classical Sindhi poetry, designed to be sung with specific melodies and rhythms. This musical structure enhances the emotive power of the narrative, allowing listeners to experience the depth of Sassui's longing and devotion. Bhattai's use of music and poetry creates a multisensory experience that continues to resonate in Sindhi culture through performances and recitations.

No .	Name	Topic	Narratives
01	Sassue: Abri	Weakness of Sassue	11
02	Sassue	Heplessness	7

	Mazori	of Sassue	
03	Sassue Desi	Love of Bhanbhore	7
04	Sassue Kohyari	Sleep as an Enemy	6
05	Sassue Hussain i	Melancholi c walk of Sassue	12

Discussions

Sur Sassue from Shah Jo Risalo represents the importance of struggle done by a woman to come through her terminus. [Dr Nabi Baloch; 1995](#). In this piece of poetry, the poet motivates all women regardless of their religion and creed that the spirit of seeking something should not let to sleep the traveller. Bhattae says that “Seek him in mountains leaving behind artificiality, so that beloved in person to you appears.”

1. Love leads to divinity: The love that Sassue has for Punhon is eternal in nature. The longing Sassue symbolizes that seeking something with true intentions will never goes missing. The whole journey of Sassue through mountains and forest signify the quest of her longing for destination. “Many suns have set, longing for him I remain. Years have passed without Him whose minutes separation is hard to bear”

According to New historicist perspective, text of the poem delivers intrinsic meaning of cultural context. It was culture of that time, once a lady is married to a man, she never wanted to get separation at any cost. Her husband was everything for her. Sassue tries to fulfill social demand of that time.

2. Devotion: Sur Sassue is a perfect example of devotion without any interest. Sassue becomes devotee and starts

walking bare foot towards her destination. She never feels disappointed during her journey. She only longs and aspires for Punhoon (her destination). Through this piece of poem, poet warns those who love their feet than that of destination. He reiterates that those who walk barefoot show more passions for their destination rather than their feet.

New historicist approach in the sur, explores that context of the text represents historicity of the text. Sassue walks to achieve her destiny. Historically, princesses were devoted to their princes. The verses of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, the iconic poet of Sindh, has been shaped by various religious, social and literary works, a few of which are particularly notable. The majority of scholars think that Shah Jo Risalo specifically shows the impact of three of these religious and literary texts sources, though some suggest a fourth one as well, like [Khamisani \(2012\)](#) clarifies that the Holy Quran, the Hadith, and the Masnavi of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi and the collection of Shah Abdul Karim’s verses were the perennial companions of Latif, with numerous mentions made in the Risalo. [Kalyan Adwani p18](#)

3. Historicity of the text

Sur Sassue is apparently a love story of a Baloch from Katch Makran and a Hindu turned Muslim Sindhi girl from Bhanbhor. They get married but due to cultural and social norms, they are departed from each other. According to new historicism, culture is the set of certain norms which changes according to social circumstances. [Raymond Williams 1988](#) Brothers of Punhoon, did not want Saasue, a girl from minor caste in Bhanbhor, to be their family member. There is a difference of culture and social norms between Baloch and Sindhi society. Therefore, Punhoon was

secretly taken away from his wife by his conspirator brothers.

Conclusion

The Theoretical Frame work selected to apply in this research is New Historicism, a type of modern criticism, given by Stephen Greenblatt, it states that a critic judges the work with historical importance of the text. Analyzing the text of the poem, Sur Sassue, we came to know that the perspective of New Historic critics is quite different from other critics. The character of Sassue has been interpreted through the lens of new historicism. Love leads to divinity and Devotion; these two discourses were found in the sur. Moreover, new historicism, interpreted the text of poetry in cultural context. It was the culture of that time; a prince like Punhoon (son of a baloch king) could not marry a girl of low status (daughter of a launderer). Sassue was fortunate that a hasty marriage of Punhoon, bestowed her status of a queen. To maintain the status of queen ship, Sassue wanted to be his wife. Therefore, she strives and struggles to search Punhoon, her husband and sole lover.

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