

POLITICAL IMAGINATION AND IDEOLOGICAL AMBIGUITY IN THE THOUGHT OF AK GADAI

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Abstract

Abdul Karim Gadai (1901–1978) was a Sindhi resistance poet whose political ideas were primarily shaped by, and articulated within, the postcolonial context of Pakistan. This paper examines in detail the foundational basis of Gadai's poetic thought by using the framework of major political creeds. The critical interpretive analysis employed in the study reveals the following findings: Gadai's political thought is evidently marked by inconsistencies and incoherences. His political views lack stability and continuity. Gadai was fundamentally a resistance poet who chose evolutionary and constitutional means to dismantle the unjust system. He was not strictly aligned with any particular school of thought. Democracy was acceptable to him, and he emphasized its essence more than its institutional form. Gadai embarked on a deeply felt quest for change. The methods used to achieve that change were of secondary importance; what mattered most was the change itself. If democracy could align with the aspirations of the common man, it was entirely in accordance with his inclination. If a system of governance other than democracy could ensure the desired transformation, he did not hesitate to embrace it. He could reconcile himself with any theory of governance; however, the poet could never compromise on the question of fundamental human rights and liberties. Gadai was inherently a democratic resistance poet who steadfastly stood with the oppressed classes of society. His political ideals are emblematic of the wretched of the earth.

INTRODUCTION

A writer is a mirror of society. He is the product of the very forces—socio-economic, cultural, historical, and political—that shape the settings he is born into and lives in. As a component of this assemblage of people having their own set of beliefs, ideas, traditions, tastes, vices and virtues, institutions, history and legends, and in brief, having their own distinctive *modus vivendi*, a poet as a person and as an artist is never impervious to his external conditions. As much by his external

environment as by his internal conditions, a poet's life is socialized. The age in which he lives has a deep bearing on his outlook. The problems and issues confronting his times play a decisive role in the formation of his socio-political thought. In fact, his own economic conditions penetrate deeply into his creative work. His ideological and philosophical musings are mostly shaped by his embedded sense of revisionism. In seeking to change the world, what a poet laments as anti-human or anti-social is, in fact, also a reflection of his attempt to revise his own status. A poet

committed to questioning the status quo is influenced, in some way, by his burning desire to break away from his existing living conditions. However, a poet never reeks of egotism to the point that he may fall slave to his own impulses; a poet is for humanity, not even for his society, let alone for himself.

Poetry cannot be considered in isolation from the milieu of its production. W.C. Williams views it as a genius emerging from the great movements of its people. Though not a politician as such, a poet's life and artistic output are drastically shaped against the backdrop of the prevailing political, economic, and social setting (Lenhart 35). Thus, a poet can never remain apolitical while claiming to be a poet. With this fact—that politics intimately honeycombs his poetry—having been established, we turn to the inference that a poet must subscribe to an ideology, a school of thought, or a particular philosophical strand within the purview of which he may question the dominant ideology, oppressive institutions, or tyrannical regimes, etc. Just as a person cannot claim to be a poet while simultaneously claiming to be apolitical, a political poet cannot claim not to be inclined toward a specific ideology while at the same time asserting himself as a poet or a political poet.

Having said that, there are reasons why in some cases it becomes a tricky exercise for a poet to be identified with a particular creed. Firstly, his philosophical/ideological commitment to a school of thought is superficial, with the problems of the day and their solutions holding paramount importance for him. He moves back and forth across the wide spectrum of political ideologies, selectively picking what he considers relevant to his conditions. Secondly, fluctuation in his foundational base may be due to his political consciousness not having fully matured or reached completion. Thirdly, moderate positions or right-left hybrids may account for a weakened ideological foundation.

Ideologically, a poet does not only need to dissect the dominant ideology/system, but also map out a clear-cut path to substitute it. He must present to his people a viable alternative. He must convincingly propagate that alternative, coherently telling the masses why this should replace that.

Research Methodology:

This paper rests on a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in close textual examination of Abdul Karim Gadai's poetry. His selected poems, selected on the basis of random sampling, are examined within their historical, socio-political, and intellectual contexts, drawing on relevant concepts from political theory and literary criticism. Rather than imposing a rigid ideological framework, the treatment foregrounds internal tensions and ambiguities in Gadai's political imagination.

1. Clearing haze off the sight:

In this paper, we attempt to evaluate the ideological underpinnings of Abdul Karim Gadai's poetry—the leanings that have shaped his political thought. The relevant ideological framework(s) will be employed for this purpose. We shall proceed by dissecting his views on concepts such as the state (its nature, function, and utility), government (type and scope, etc.), democracy, social and economic justice, rule of law, voting, reforms (land reforms, etc.), and so on, through a critical analysis of his poetry. This will be done in the light of various ideologies prevalent in those days. When inconsistencies emerge, the given ideology will be filtered out, and we will move to the next until we reach a point of saturation—an ideology or creed that we believe has influenced his political thought.

The political perspective of Gadai Sahab has so far remained a matter of pure guesswork and speculation; many have conjectured extensively about his thought and philosophy. While his thought has not undergone a scientific, methodical treatment, writers have displayed a clear lack of awareness in contextualizing his political orientations, the result being that non-value-free and untested assumptions have shaped their judgments. Some align him with the socialist creed, placing him on the left of the political spectrum. They regard him as a socialist poet “who calls for class struggle” (Mahar 123; Khatri 174). Others situate his thought within the historical context of peasant activism, thereby viewing him as a poet of the farmers alone (who wrote exclusively for them) (Abbasi 81; Chhlagari 102–

103). From most, if not all, of the literature reviewed, it becomes evident that his message is misinterpreted as an invitation to armed struggle, essentially revolutionary in the sense of overthrowing the government or the agencies of oppression. Even those who eulogize him as a resistance poet (Mazaahimati Sha'air) know little beyond the label that he is a resistance poet.

The ideologies/philosophies with which contemporary poets/writers identify themselves fall under the following headings. We will examine them through their lens to trace the foundational creed around which not only the political perspective of Gadai Sahab is "supposed" to have been built, but which is also said to have manifested through his poetry. Their juxtaposition will help us discern contrasts and similarities between a particular school of thought and Gadai's political ideas, and ultimately allow us to build our case.

- 1) *Socialism/Marxism/Communism;*
- 2) *Progressivism;*
- 3) *Democracy; and*
- 4) *Anarchism*

2. Irrelevance

Socialism/Marxism/Communism to Gadai:

The socialist thought is as old as human history. It traces its origin in the seminal work of Plato, *The Republic*. Plato suggested not only the abolition of private ownership of property, but also a form of communism of wives (Plato 153–155). It evolved through various stages until it was systematized by Marx (known as the father of modern socialism) and Engels. Before them, it emerged as a sentimental or utopian socialism initiated by Robert Owen. It positioned itself as an ideology for all segments of society, advocating evolutionary rather than revolutionary tactics (Bhandari 519). Charles Fourier, Proudhon, Thomas More, etc., were among its prominent proponents.

Karl Marx, a German sociologist-economist, derived the structure of his dialectical materialism from Hegelian dialectics. Unlike Hegel, however, Marx considered economic determinism as the driving force governing social, political, and cultural institutions, as well as social relations, laws, art, morality, and religion in a given society.

He termed these the superstructure. The conditions of production, means of production, and relations of production determined everything within a society. He referred to these as the base (Russell 750; Gaarder 392–395; Baradat 163–165).

The two antagonistic classes—the workers (proletariat) and the moneyed class (bourgeoisie)—have remained in constant opposition, caught in the vortex of class conflict throughout history. The class struggle, according to Marx, would culminate in the victory of the proletariat, achieved through a violent, bloody revolution (Marx and Engels 12). The Marxism/ modern Communism thus stipulates:

1. There have existed two historical classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat, entangled in a struggle to extirpate one another.
2. Dialectical materialism functions as the propelling factor. It essentially suggests that a creative tension is constantly at work, which ultimately leads to progress.
3. Everything—from artistic pursuits to culture, from religion to morality, and from social relations to even our thought processes—is conditioned by the economy and economic relations. The chief human concern is "economic." The social existence of people conditions and determines their consciousness, not vice versa (economic determinism).
4. Inequalities and injustices would reach a boiling point, and thus would ensue a highly violent conflict that would culminate in the total annihilation of the wealthy, exploitative class. Consequently, the dictatorship of the proletariat (workers) would be established.
5. The state, with all its apparatus, is by nature inherently oppressive. The government, with its machinery, is essentially an instrument of exploitation. The state symbolizes a form of domination; hence, it must be dismantled. Thus, socialism conceptualizes a stateless, classless society.
6. It calls for direct, forceful, and violent action. A bloodbath is seen as a necessary stage leading to transformation. Thus, Marxism is inherently revolutionary.

Viewed through its lens, Gadai's political credo shows little affinity with socialism or Marxism. Not even a veiled insinuation about instigating a violent movement, let alone a bloody class struggle, is put forward by him. In fact, Marxist concepts such as class struggle and dialectical materialism are unfamiliar to him, so to speak. He never interprets history as the theatre of war between two classes. Furthermore, and most importantly, hardly do we find in his poetry any reference to the industrial class of oppressors; rather, it is the landed gentry that he castigates so severely that at times he seems to have composed every other verse against this class.

ڪچهري ۾ ڊاڪو ۽ ڀڙوا رهائي.
اکاڙن ۾ ڪتا ۽ سونڙ وڙهائي.
شب و روز چڪن ۾ ڪچريون نچائي.
ڪمائي غريبن جي هر دم لٽائي.

وڏيري جي هيٺت به آهي نرالي!
تمنچو گچي ۾، ڪلهن ۾ دونالي!

Translation:

*Pimps and Dacoits are his courtiers!
He takes pleasure in the blood sport between pigs and dogs.
Haunting brothels daily,
He amuses himself in the company of dancing courtesans,
Squandering away the wealth of the poor!
Such a bizarre appearance a landlord makes,
Carrying a pistol around his neck,
And
Lifting a rifle to his shoulders!*

Gadai extends equal regard to all depressed strata in society without any prejudice in favour of any particular class. He appears deeply compassionate toward labourers sweating in industries, farmers toiling in fields, vendors earning their livelihood in the heat of the day, and women being subjected to maltreatment in their homes. Whoever is vulnerable finds Gadai genuinely empathetic with him or her. A victim, whatever his caste, class, creed or religion, becomes the hero and heroine in Gadai's poetry. Gadai Sahab rushes to his/her assistance without differentiating who and what he or she is, and where he or she is from. Abdul

Ghafoor observes that Gadai possessed profound empathy for his fellows. He was highly attuned to the excesses perpetrated against Sindhi Haris and the vulnerable strata. He consistently defended their rights and, until he breathed his last, remained iron-willed in his mission (46). He stands by humanity at large, as he says:

مان غم انسان جو ڦاٿل، تون غم جانا سنڌو،
منهنجي دل ۾ ڪجهه نه آهي، درد انسان کان سواءِ!

Translation:

*I acknowledge having racked with my people's anguish,
Whereas thou art given to the woes of the beloved!
Nothing resides in my heart, O my fellow, except for the pain of humanity!*

In Maulana Grami's view, Gadai is undoubtedly in today's age a common man's poet. He is the poet of this soil [of Sindh], peasants' poet, workers' poet, students' poet, and the poet of the youth. He is the poet of those oppressed in the dialectical vortex of class conflict. He is the poet of paupers and nomads, and that of the wretched of the land. He functions as a mouthpiece for persecuted humanity. He is a poet of Sindhi language and stands as the life and soul of the art of verse-making in Sindhi. And he is the poet of veritable pre-eminence (26-27).

In fact, the greatness of this humble man lies as much in his universalism as in his deep-seated empathy for the problems of his own class; as much in his thought as in the lucidity and simplicity of his poetic expression; and as much in his actions as in his preaching. It becomes quite difficult for an ordinary reader to ascertain and assign his inclination to a particular school of thought without situating his universalism in his or her analysis. Otherwise, without a comprehensive reading of the context in which he wrote, the audience he addressed, and the atmosphere he lived in, locating the exact position of Gadai becomes all the more elusive. Because, at times, he appears to manifest democratic leanings. At other times, he seems more disposed toward Marxism and socialism than any other creed. The fact of the matter is that Gadai wrote for a wide spectrum of audiences, ranging from students to nationalists and from peasants to workers. Above everything, he voiced on behalf of every class being

sacrificed at the altar of the luxuries of a handful of elements. Nevertheless, what school of thought he truly subscribed to needs to be cautiously traced.

Even though he is at war with the system breeding oppression, and feels antagonized toward the oppressor, he does not in fact incite vandalism to break into the houses of the exploitative classes, hold them hostage, seize their possessions, eliminate them, and establish the domination of a certain class (proletarian as in Marxism). Gadai never endorses arson or genocide. Instead, he proposes striking at the institutions and the system at large that generate the exploitation of one person by another.

هڪ ٻني لاءِ حقارت ڇاڃي!
انسانن کان نفرت ڇاڃي!
ڪينو ساڙ ڪورٽ ڇاڃي!
ڇا جو هي تڪرار!
ٻٽايون سک جو ڪو سنسار!

Translation:

*There is no point in being disdainful of each other!
No point either in holding humanity in contempt!
Jealousies, rivalries and malice are all pointless!
Give up trivial quarrels!
Let us build a peaceful society!*

At another place, he says:

هن سڙندڙ ٻرندڙ ڌرتي تي،
ڪا رحمت جي برسات ٿئي،
ڪو سک جو سج اڀري پارو،
ڪا امن و سکون جي رات ٿئي!

Translation:

*May the blessed rain extinguish the fire of hate on this soil!
May a sun rise someday bringing peace to it!
May our eyes see a night of peace and tranquility!*

Contrary to one of the foundational principles of communist ideology, Gadai affirms the importance of the state as something essential to civilization. Not a single verse of his refers to the abolition of the state. Far from even weakening the state apparatus, he places complete trust in it. His conception of the state is not that of a necessary evil, let alone an unnecessary evil. All he interrogates is the legitimacy of those occupying the reins of the state. As such, he does not

denounce the state as an institution. Rather, the political elites—the men in power, the power brokers—come under his critique. He urgently calls upon the masses forming the electorate to remove them from the corridors of power.

ٿيون ڪاش! اڄ پي جي بيدار ساڻي!
زمانو ٿئي پنهنجو غمخوار ساڻي!
هٿن ۾ آ ووتن جو هٿيار ساڻي!
ڪريون هاڻ گڏجي جي هڪ وار ساڻي!

نه لاريب آهي حڪومت اسان جي!
رياست، رياست جي دولت اسان جي!

Translation:

*If only we would wake up from slumber!
The world would empathize with us!
The weapon of vote lies in our hands!
If only we make a judicious use of it collectively!
Not only government, but also the state with its entire treasury is ours!*

Gadai Sahab cautions and equips the poor against the duplicitous foxes emerging unexpectedly during elections, luring and pressuring the ignorant masses into casting votes for them. In order to secure votes, they repeatedly promise to do this and that once they are elected to assemblies. All they do is merely engage in empty rhetoric. However, once elections are over, they never follow through on their promises. Instead, they render the lives of those whom they are elected to represent miserable. Gadai is rigorously critical of electoral deception and manipulation. His appeal to the uninformed, innocent masses to exercise wisdom during elections runs chiefly through his poetic oeuvre.

Gadai recognized the significance of a vote for a society like Sindh in dismantling the colonial vestiges of feudalism and tribalism. The ballot, and not the bullet, he believed, was the instrument through which society could be transformed. A revolution through violent struggle could hardly ensure a much-needed durable order. Thus, Gadai emerges more as a gradualist, constitutionalist, and democrat. He rejects only the figures at the helm of the state. Elections, to him, are the occasion to rid oneself of these old, unsightly faces.

اُٿو هاڻي گڏجي نصيب آزمائون!
 وطن جي ترقي ۽ طاقت وڌايون!
 صحيح ووٽ ڏيئي مقدر بڻايون!
 ڪريون دشمنن جون چڱيءَ پر صفايون!

وڃايون نه ووٽن تي ايمان پنهنجو!
 نه پئسن تي وڪرو ڪريون شان پنهنجو!

Translation:

Let us rise and try our luck!

Build the strength and power of the nation!

Let us be masters of our own destiny by voting the right person!

And chase the enemy away!

Do not sell thy soul to the devil on a vote!

Do not trade thy honor for money!

Some of the vague verses such as the following indistinctly utilize idioms typical of Marxism, consequently steering readers toward invalid, impulsive conclusions. Marxism, for example, projects that the living conditions of the poor working classes will deteriorate due to relentless exploitation (for instance, through the extraction of absolute surplus value and relative surplus value), eventually to such an extent that the social structure collapses. The exploitative capitalist mode of society is rooted in a self-destructive mechanism. Once injustices and exploitation reach a boiling point, they erupt into violence, revolution, and bloodshed. Gadai similarly says:

هي گرائي، هي بڪون ۽ اضطراب!
 هم نشين! آ اهتمام انقلاب!

Translation:

This inflation, starvation and stress

O fellow, portends the revolution!

Needless to say, it is hardly a revolution as expressed in Marxist parlance. Even if we are led to interpret it as the eruption of a class conflict implied in the above verse, in the face of the plethora of verses explicitly suggestive of a democratic, constitutional revolution through vote, the former carries little or no argumentative weight.

Gadai does recognize the necessity of such reforms as land redistribution, that is to say, the enactment of a land tenure system and the dismantling of

large jagirs, with far-reaching consequences for the people. What truly distinguishes Gadai Sahab, and draws him closer to socialism, is his emphasis on class stratification in which one class feeds upon the other. He is deeply disturbed by the operation of feudal-peasant relations in his surroundings, where a farmer is almost reduced to starvation. He labours from dawn to dusk to sustain thousands, yet himself remains deprived of even a loaf of bread to provide for his wife and children. He lives under extreme conditions. Even the dignity of his women is at the mercy of landlords whose lands he brings under cultivation. Consequently, exploitation in Sindh appears more severe than in many other parts of the world. Farmers capture the poet's attention more than any other class. In fact, his engagement with this segment invites comparison with Mao Zedong, the legendary Chinese ideologue. Mao too focused extensively on the rural peasantry. Nevertheless, we must not be misled by the striking resemblance Gadai Sahab appears to bear to communists/socialists. To situate Gadai within the framework of communism would be an error of judgment.

3. The Question of Progressivism:

The progressive writers operated within a five-doctrinal polygon, with pragmatism, Marxism/leftism, anti-imperialism, Western orientation, and humanism as the cardinal nodes of their philosophy (Nomanul Haq). Karl Marx, whose writings constitute a powerful protest against the existing socio-economic structures employed for exploitation, was hailed as an apostle and messiah of humankind. Similarly, the progressive writers, appalled by severe human suffering, set out to infuse a new spirit into literature, shifting its focus toward social evils such as hunger, poverty, exploitation, subjugation, injustice, and social backwardness. They sought, through their writings, to inspire people to rise and struggle. The progressive writers, influenced by egalitarian ideals, stood firmly for equality among all human beings. In a way, progressivism aimed at breaking away from the status quo.

According to Kumar (56), progressive literature rejected, partially if not wholly, the empty songs of

love and romance. More than this, believing that mere diagnosis of the malaise was insufficient if no remedy was prescribed, the progressive writers collectively sought ways and means to heal the wounds of the oppressed class. To that effect, they turned toward socialism for intellectual refuge.

Progressive Movement first penetrated Urdu literature before Sindhi literature came under its influence. In the opinion of Sobia Kiran, prior to the advent of progressivism, literature remained largely indifferent to social issues. She further adds that progressive writers drew ideological inspiration from communism, thereby presenting it as a remedy for the ills afflicting society (177). Likewise, Dr. Saleem Akhtar remarks that before the importation of progressive ideas, literature was never regarded as a vehicle for launching a movement, nor was creativity considered relevant for articulating and disseminating a manifesto (221). In contrast to classical literature, the new breed of progressives employed simple and colloquial diction best understood by the common man (Kiran 178; Sindhi 186). They adopted the framework of Marxist criticism in analysing society and its institutions.

Munshi Prem Chand (166) sees the revolutionary role that literature can play in championing the rights of the depressed class and in advocating the cause of the downtrodden strata. He believes that through realism it is possible to address and remedy the ailments of society.

Abdul Karim Gadai is today regarded as one of the pioneers of progressive Sindhi literature. To a certain extent, this holds true. Gadai is insistent on change. He desires change. He is a revisionist. The existing system does not sit well with him; hence he dreams of breaking with the status quo. His anguished soul finds itself displaced within the prevailing conditions of society, which he perceives as chaotic and brutal. He attempts to disengage the present from the lingering vestiges of the colonial past, while simultaneously urging that the post-colonial society be significantly restructured, and that institutions of service delivery be overhauled to meet the aspirations and needs of the people. He aspires for equality, rule of law, and the affordable delivery of justice, in addition. He dreams that the poor fully reap the

fruits of Azadi. For these aims to be realized, he turns to poetry as a means of resistance. He has scruples about remaining a bystander, silently witnessing powerless pigeons being torn apart by vultures. As Luther stated, passive resignation to an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and in turn, to participate in its evils.

There is a Gadai, completely incapacitated; financially constrained and physically weakened, who, heeding the call of his conscience, refuses to be trampled upon. He has his household stove unlit for days. He has his pockets empty. Despite all that, somehow, he keeps the ball rolling, sustaining the momentum of struggle for change. He resists the reactionary camp, and resists with even greater fierceness with each passing day. He desires change. Hold on, change he wants for whom? For himself? Nay, he wants that for every single mortal suffering in the vortex of oppression. He knows little of the umpteen ideologies dominating the political spectrum. He has no concern with the cold wars between the superpowers. He does not revel in gossip about communists and capitalists standing at each other's throats. It does not amuse him. He is a lesser poet of a society of lesser significance. He dreams no dreamy dreams of the dreamland. He wants no wonderland to retire to. And he lives in no never-never land. Because he wants a change—a change in the rotten system to cater to the most rudimentary necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. He wants nothing more!

اُتو ته سائيو بدلايون هي نظام ڪهن،
جهان ۾ ڪجهه ته بشر جو به احترام ٿئي!

ڪر سٿايون ٿين ديس ۾ گدائي شل،
اجهوه، لٿو ۽ اٿو ان جال جام ٿئي!

Translation:

*Let us replace this rotten system of oppression,
With the one in which human dignity may not be
desecrated!*

May the fortune smile on us, O Gadai!

*So that no mortal remains deprived of abode, clothes and
food!"*

Coming back to progressive thought, Gadai shares with the progressives a considerable degree of

similarity. Like them, he advocates a qualitative and effective transformation. In line with them, he firmly holds that poetry must be politicized and tied to ground realities, and that it should function as an expression of dissent and a vehicle of propaganda. The outdated structures sustained by erstwhile colonial masters must collapse so that society may be reorganized in accordance with the principles of egalitarianism. He calls for an end to social evils such as poverty, misery, famine, epidemics, unemployment, and social scourges like honour killings, domestic violence, and the like. However, this convergence does not endure for long. He departs from the progressives in their espousal of socialism/communism as their ideology. In his poetry, nowhere do we find an explicit mention or hint of socialism advanced by him. It remains a matter of debate whether he was even fully acquainted with the much-demonized socialist creed, or whether, considering socialism distant from reality, he kept himself detached from it. As stated in the foregoing paragraphs, Gadai cannot truly be placed within the creed of socialism, for he scarcely fits into its framework. Judging by this, Gadai may be considered a progressive poet in a limited sense. In the opinion of Murad Ali Noor, although Gadai was ideologically associated with the Progressive Movement/literature, he could not evolve into a fully-fledged progressive poet. The progressives essentially speak out against the sarmayedaari system and the sarmayedaar class. Contrarily, Gadai praises certain landlords who were sympathetic toward the poor (205). More than that, he rendered his services to one of the prominent local landlords of Thul tehsil, tutoring his son. Having said all this, his commitment to the cause of the wretched of the earth cannot be called into question. His fidelity was above board and stood the test of time. His ideological inconsistencies may be debated, but his intention and the goal he set out to achieve stand firm and supreme.

اُتو اُتو، هي زمان و مڪان بدلايون.
 هلو هلو، ته هي ڪون و مڪان بدلايون.
 ملو ملو، ته زمين و آسمان بدلايون.
 اچو اچو هي سڄو خاڪدان بدلايون.

Translation:

Rise! Let us change the time and space [which we are stuck in]!

Let us change the entire universe!

Let us unite to change the earth and the sky!

Let us change all the state of affairs!

4. Gadai's Democracy:

Democracy is a contraction of demos and kratia, denoting rule by the people. No other concept than democracy remains enmeshed in the intricate maze of mind-boggling and often conflicting definitions and disputations. To this day, it remains a strikingly contested concept. For different people, it carries different social, political, economic, and moral connotations. It is an intriguing subject of discussion among political gurus worldwide. Even those who hold a very low opinion of it invariably fail to propose what should replace it. Sir Winston Churchill said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others that have been tried." Thus, the fact now remains that we really cannot do without 'democracy'. The most satirical articulation of this democratic irony has been offered by Bernard Crick: "This most promiscuous word" as if a Greek or Roman nymph—or say Democratia, an Athenian minor deity: "She is everybody's mistress and yet somehow retains her magic even when a lover sees that her favours are being, in his light, illicitly shared by many another" (1). Democracy is something when stated; it becomes something else when operationalized.

Democracy owes its origin to the city-states of ancient Greece (Roper 14). The Athenian democracy now symbolizes the remarkable avatar of a successful polity. Democracy emerged from the ashes of old feudalism. It then underwent evolution through a number of stages, transforming into monarchy, then aristocracy, and finally into what it is today. Voltaire and Rousseau were among the harbingers of this transformation. As Will Durant observes, "They publicized those vital shibboleths, Liberté, égalité, fraternité, to the music of which the middle class marched to political supremacy" (288). The French

Revolution marked a turning point in the evolution of democracy, as the bourgeois middle class rose, rejecting monarchical absolutism in favour of political rights.

There is no denying that democracy holds people spellbound. It offers what seems perfectly the essence of human liberty.

1. **Putting a check to tyranny:** A democracy stipulates that the government instituted should encompass the will of the majority, thereupon, the untoward penetration of a select few in the decision-making process/allocation of goods is discouraged. It provides a counter narrative to such concepts as monarchy (despotism of an autocrat) and Aristocracy (despotism of a few).

2. **Freedom:** Democracy stands firmly for the provision of all liberties and freedoms indispensable for a civilized life.

3. **Protection of Rights:** The fundamental rights – those seen as having been inscribed by the Nature – are essentially safeguarded in a democracy. People have unrestricted, unconditional right to life, dignity, profession, etc.

4. **Self-determination:** People may be enabled to live by the standards of their self-determined conduct/ rules of conduct as long as they do not infringe upon the corresponding right of self-determination of others.

5. **Human development:** It seeks to create conditions to facilitate the full-fledged development of human personality.

6. **Equality:** It ensures to maintain to a relatively possible degree the political equality. (It may not be mistaken for *absolute equality* as proposed by the Marxists).

7. **Creation of prosperity:** It should strive for bringing prosperity to the state (Hendricks 20-21).

Democracy rests on the paradigm of rule by the people. That rule may be exercised directly by the people themselves (Direct Democracy), or it may operate through their will via a group of representatives acting on their behalf (Indirect or Representative Democracy). It may assume various forms and structures. However, the underlying idea that the people alone are sovereign and hold ultimate authority remains intact. If a system claims to be a democracy, its essence continues to

rest on the same spirit—the people as the touchstone of government—regardless of whether it is parliamentary or presidential in form. A government founded on the principle of democracy is one in which the people and the government concur on the manner in which the state is to be governed (Ansari and Asifa 1).

Corry and Abraham (26) set forth a list of indicators integral to a democracy:

1. Respect for individual dignity
2. Respect for individual freedom
3. Equality
4. Rule of Law
5. Justice
6. Constitutionalism
7. Belief in rationality

Abdul Karim Gadai harbours an inherent inclination toward democracy, to which he has given forceful expression in his poetry. In fact, a perusal of his verses discloses his steadfast belief in democracy and in a polity structured on democratic lines. Gadai yearns for a stable democratic order to take root in a system corrupted by imperialism and authoritarianism. He looks forward to the emergence of a dawn when the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, may prevail, and when the wrongdoer receives his due recompense. If we take note of the parameters of democracy listed above, all, or nearly all of them, can be traced in the political thought of Abdul Karim Gadai. In fact, they recur prominently in his poetry. Many of his poems clearly and vividly project concepts such as rule of law, equality of all, dispensation of justice, and political participation of the masses. Democracy, he believes, would put an end to the question of subordination and superordination. It would ease the sufferings of the poor. On this account, he has no reservations about a democratic government. He has composed numerous poems in praise of freedom, the cardinal pillar of democracy. Without resorting to exaggeration, we can state that Gadai's poetry stands as a hymn to democracy writ large.

اٿيئي وقت هاڻي، جي هوشيار ٿيندين،
۽ خطري کان ساڻي، خبردار ٿيندين،
جي خود ووٽ پنهنجي جو مختار ٿيندين،

يقينن حڪومت جو حقدار ٿيندين،

ڏيئي ووٽ پنهنجن کي، ڪر بادشاهي،
وگر نه قريب آه ساڻي! تباهي!

Translation:

It is now or never. It is about time thou took heed of the exigency.

Be on vigilant against the imminent disaster.

If thou exercise your vote at thy own discretion [in favor of thy genuine representative],

Certainly, government would be thine.

Reign sovereign in thy country, O my fellow!

Or else, thy nemesis is upon thee!

For Gadai, in the vote lies the panacea. A vote cast for the right person can effect change. It is only through the judicious exercise of the ballot that the mess created by colonial and post-colonial modalities could be brought to an end. One of the ignoble legacies of colonialism was the sordid policy of exclusion whereby over half of the population was ostracized from the politico-economic mainstream. Elections mark the occasion that opens a window of opportunity to elect altruistic, selfless men to take the helm. The masses should reap the harvest of hard-earned freedom, and that can materialize only if a thorough clean-up is carried out.

Gadai is shrewd enough not to fall for political humbug. Politics is a dirty game of deceit and fraud. Politicians know, or rather master, the art of the possible. Niccolò Machiavelli rightly observed in *The Prince* the tendency of people to allow themselves to be deceived by deceivers. The tall pledges politicians make arise from the necessity of putting a hoax on people. The same they break stems from the compulsions of their political expediencies. Gadai Sahab debunks the claims that everything in the garden is rosy. Quite the contrary, nothing is rosy, he laments.

It warrants attention here that Gadai appears far less concerned with its form, the exterior of the political system, than with its essence, its substance. The worst tyrants project their regimes as democracies, and so do self-styled democrats or public representatives. The worst kind of democracy is in no way superior to a dictatorship in the eyes of the poet. Whatever form a polity

adopts, if its quintessence is democratic—that is, if its underlying spirit is sufficiently responsive to satisfy the benchmarks of democracy—it is likely to gain acceptance with Gadai Sahab. He is not inclined toward rigidity when it comes to establishing a government. Even if it is a dictatorship on the surface, but it delivers results, Gadai appears to welcome it with open arms.

That is why he hastens to bestow praise on Ayub Khan, a military dictator who seizes power and brings the republic under his control. But since he takes prompt initiatives under Martial Law ordinances—initiatives that appear to bring much-needed relief to the people from corruption, cronyism, crippling inflation, grinding poverty, and deteriorating law and order—he is glorified as a king, idolized as a messiah, and elevated into a legendary figure.

ڪئي صدر ايوب اهڙي صفائي،

جو نڪري وئي ديس مان هر برائي!

Translation:

With President Ayub's clean-up operation, the country was purged of all its evils!

In another poem, he compares Ayub Khan with a star that illuminates the earth calling him a “Mard e Musalman”:

مگر غيرتِ حق ۾ طوفان آيو.

ورق هڪ مجاهد مسلمان آيو.

دڪي ديس پنهنجي جو درمان آيو.

هي آخرش مرد ميدان آيو.

افق تي جو چمڪيو ستارو "ايوبي".

اچي گلستان ۾ ويا حسن و خوبی.

Translation:

But when it came to a climax,

A holy knight marched ahead!

A physician came to the rescue of the wounded nation!

Ultimately, the lord of the battle set foot in the arena!

A star suddenly flashed in the sky!

With whose light the garden sparkled with charm and color.

The interesting part of the argument is that while Ayub himself justifies the coup d'état and the events of October 1958 as a revolution, a poet of Gadai's stature cannot help but produce an extended paean in his praise, describing the illegal military takeover and Martial Law as a revolution. For composing panegyrics in honour of a dictator,

Gadai had to face consequences and ultimately attract the wrath of his colleagues and fellow progressives. For instance, once passing by him, Comrade Ameen Khoso, himself a renowned socialist and freedom fighter, lashed out at him:

“Do not throw dust in the nation’s eyes. It is Ayub you have symbolized in the shining star” (Shaikh 196).

After the dismemberment of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was sworn in as President of the state. Shortly after, he assumed office as Prime Minister. It marked the dawn of a new era—an era secured by the people at great personal cost. The longest farce of Basic Democracy, staged under the euphemistic cover of authoritarianism, came to an end. Ayub’s one-man rule was replaced by Bhutto’s slogan of Islamic Socialism. Apparently, it was democracy. After all, the people had voted a Berkeley- and Oxford-educated, charismatic Bhutto into power. Himself originating from a prominent landlord family, he captivated the masses through his eloquent oratory and revolutionary slogans of Roti, Kapra, Makan (Food, clothes, and house)—which, as we shall see later, proved to be a fleeting illusion.

Gadai Sahab, who had earlier welcomed Martial Law as a revolution, later disillusioned by the further decline in the living conditions of the common man under the new order, greeted Zulfikar Bhutto with an optimistic tone. He turned to his poetry to compose verses of praise for him.

صدر ڀٽو وري هن قوم جو اڳڙو ٿي آيو.
انڌيري رات ۾ هو چنڊ جي چانڊاڻ ٿي آيو.
افق تي هڪ نئين سج جي، اهو ڳاڙهاڻ ٿي آيو.
عوامي راڄ جي هن ساٿ جو سرواڻ ٿي آيو.

مٿاڻو جنهن اچي هت مارشل لا جي نشانن کي.
زبان بخشي وري جنهن ديس وارن بي زبانن کي.

Translation:

*Lo, comes President Bhutto to pilot the nation!
In the darkening night, he appears like moonlight!
Like the red sun on the horizon!
He emerged to spearhead the marching caravan of the masses!
He purged the remains of the Martial Law!
And
He empowered the hitherto speechless masses!*

It must be clarified here that Gadai’s approval of a dictator or a politician was never meant to obtain personal favours or to secure a place in the good graces of the rulers of the time. Sycophancy was not even in his nature. A highly critical reading of him also fails to demonstrate that he ever wrote anything to curry favour with politicians and men in power. He remained, until his last breath, a man of unquestionable integrity. No more compelling evidence (which must be taken into account in our evaluation) than his lifestyle, his poverty, and his homelessness is sufficient. Logically therefore, labelling him a court poet would amount to a gross injustice to him.

What is truly open to debate is the fluidity of his thought. Gadai’s political thinking, like that of most of his contemporary modern poets, from a critical-scholarly standpoint, contains little substantive content in terms of modern -isms to qualify as a systematic political theory. From the standpoint of ideology or philosophy, it may appear to some as superficial. It leans more toward poetic critique and denunciation. It functions more as a political commentary on the existing society. Reading him at first glance raises the question of whether Gadai Sahab truly possessed a coherent body of thought. His ideas on “who, and in what manner to run the affairs of the state” are too ambiguous and inconsistent to make sense to a lay reader, who may easily be inclined to classify him as a socialist poet, a democrat, or a revolutionary. Gadai Sahab searched for the most appropriate system. Therefore, he may be considered a democrat insofar as the protection of unrestricted fundamental liberties and freedoms is concerned.

5. Refutation of Anarchism:

It is a political doctrine advocating the abolition of government and the state, and consequently the abolition of all corresponding laws, rules, and regulations, as well as anything that restricts or limits human freedom. It promotes a society structured on voluntary cooperation among individuals. Anarchism has been described by Will Durant as a religion of liberty (280). According to it, the state is an unnecessary evil. It functions as an instrument of enslavement, as it advances and

protects the privileges of the powerful. Authority and political power are regarded as illegitimate. It may also be understood as a fusion of liberalism and socialism (Ward 1; Baradat 132–135).

Anarchism in its entirety stands in stark contrast to what Gadai seeks, demands, and envisions in a society. Far from advocating the dismantling of the state, he holds a high regard for what a state, when entrusted to the right hands, is capable of achieving. The state is not an unnecessary evil in his view, nor does he imply the overthrow of government. He pleads for liberty only to the extent that basic human rights are not violated. He calls for neither lawlessness nor disorder to that end. He seeks change, but only through constitutional means, particularly the vote.

ووٽ حڪومت کي ٿو ٺاهي، ووٽ وزارت کي ٿو ڏاهي،
ووٽ ۾ ساري طاقت آهي، ووٽ نه ڪر بيڪار!

Translation:

It is on the strength of a vote that governments are made and unmade!

Power lies in a vote. O fellow, do not squander it away!

6. Gadaiism Summed up:

Gadai's political ideals are representative of the wretched of the earth. His philosophy is not heaven-derived. It is grounded in the earth. It does not linger over the philosophical questions of ontology, epistemology, and cosmology. It is not preoccupied with metaphysics or ethics. It centres on the unambiguous question of bread and butter. It contemplates the need for a roof over one's head and a piece of clothing to cover a naked body. It engages with no spiritual matters. It is purely temporal in orientation. Thus, it is a philosophy of every other mortal crawling through life. Gadai is thoroughly a materialist (ماده پرست) in the sense that the complexities of the temporal world, not those of the cosmos, trouble him. He does not indulge the romanticised disposition of immaterialists and idealists toward the world. His ideas are somewhat comparable to those of naturalists, Epicureans, and dialectical materialists (in a limited sense). The necessities required to sustain material existence preoccupy him more than those of spirituality.

هر ڪو پنهنجا واعظ ٻڌائي،

پنهنجو پنهنجو مطلب پائي،
مانيءَ منتر ڪو نه ٻڌائي،
ڪير ڪري ڪٿراڳ؟ الا او!

English Translation:

Everyone is all talk!

Acting in their own interests!

But none tells the incantation for bread!

Who can sing Khatraag?

Elaborating on the central motif of what we term here “Gadaiism”, Ghalib Latif (52) maintains that Gadai's poetry carries no fragrance of nightingales or song of flowers, nor does it narrate tales of tresses and eyebrows [of Jana/beloved]. Its verses weave no accounts of the beloved's beauty or anxieties. Rather, it embodies the laments and cries of thousands of impoverished masses and destitute peasants. It is a voice of protest. It stands as resistance against the oppressive class structure. It conveys a message of survival for the common man.

Abdul Karim Gadai opened his eyes and lived through an era of continuous political upheaval. He witnessed two of the most devastating calamities befalling humanity in the form of World War I and World War II. He lived in colonial India, observed the mechanics of imperial rule, and saw the cruelties of landlords in his immediate surroundings. While all of this unfolded before him, it steadily and gradually shaped what he was to become in the years ahead. He could not remain untouched by those influences. The post-colonial period came as a double shock to him. Man became a slave in a supposedly free society, still struggling for a loaf of bread. Psychologically, all this left a deep impact on his mind, and ultimately the burden of the past played a major role in transforming a man who would later earn fame as Gadai.

We find Gadai wavering painfully between competing theories of government. Gadai's political thought is evidently marked by inconsistencies and incoherences. His political views lack stability and continuity. Born into an illiterate, impoverished family, he somehow succeeded in passing matriculation. When the responsibility of supporting the family fell upon his shoulders, he abandoned formal education.

His exposure to contemporary Western political thought was minimal. Alternatively, it is doubtful whether he ever truly engaged in political theory in depth. This may explain why his political thought did not develop into full maturity.

The foremost contribution of Gadai to Sindhi literature is his infusion of new life into it. He revived Sindhi poetry from the ruins of Partition and rejuvenated it. Above all, he redirected the course of poetry. With his verse, it assumed a revolutionary character. If not the sole pioneer, he was among the early figures of progressive Sindhi literature who brought poetry down to the level of the common masses, and with whom Sindhi verse shifted from themes of love and romance to those of human suffering and anguish. He facilitated the growth of national consciousness among the Sindhi masses.

In a conference on “October Socialist Inqelab Ja Adab te Asar”, Manzoor Thahim said,

سنڌ ۾ ادب ۾ مزاحمت ۽ آفاقيت جا بنياد جيٺ مل پسررام، خان
ڪنواڻي، ڪيرت! چنڊ درياڻي، لعل چنڊ، لعل پشپ، اتم ڪرشن
پاپاڻي، عبدالڪريم گدائي، جمشيد مهتا، سائين جي ايم سيد ۽
محمد عثمان ڏيپلائي رکيا

“The foundation of ‘Resistance’ and ‘Universalism’ in the Sindhi literature was laid by Jeth Mal Pursaram, Khan Chand Daryani, Lal Chand, Lal Pashap, Atam Krishan Khatwani, Keerat Babani, Abdul Karim Gadai, Jamshed Mehta, Sain G.M Syed, and Muhammad Usman Diplai” (Meghwar 108).

In the Same fashion, in the opinion of Zaib Un Nisa:

جڏهن ته تنوير عباسي، شيخ اياز، عبدالڪريم گدائي، اُستاد
”بخاري، نياز همايون ۽ ٻيا سنڌ جا باغي شاعر آهن

“Tanvir Abbasi, Shaikh Ayaz, Abdul Karim Gadai, Ustad Bukhari, Niyaz Hamayun are the revolutionary [resistance] poets of Sindh” (Meghwar 113).

To put in a nutshell, Gadai is Kahlil Gibran’s ‘Today’ whence the dawn of ‘Tomorrow’ will take birth. He is that autumn that preludes to springs upon springs. He is that fallen leaf which, once it reverts back to dust, will reincarnate eternity upon eternity as a flower full of fragrance (Baloch 36).

A man exists in a perpetual state of flux. Permanence is not even a defining feature of the world he inhabits. A man continually strives to create and recreate meaning in the void. Change is the inescapable law of dialectics. One is fated to

accept change, willingly or otherwise. As Heraclitus observes (Russell 63), no mortal can step into the same river twice, for when he enters it again, neither the river nor he remains the same. Dialectics stands as the supreme and compelling law of nature. It regulates society, institutions, and even human consciousness. Hegel holds that the human mind is engaged in an internal struggle, ceaselessly striving to grasp truth. Conflict between opposites is inherent. Every idea, a thesis in its incompleteness, generates its antithesis. The tension between thesis and antithesis culminates in a synthesis. This synthesis, in turn, becomes a new thesis. The process continues endlessly until the universal spirit or world reason, that is, truth, is attained.

As Auguste Comte noted, an evolutionary transformation is constantly underway. Human societies progress gradually, moving from simpler forms toward greater complexity. Intellectual advancement accompanies social development. Human thought resembles a flowing river, continuously in motion. No particular strand of thought or philosophy can be rigidly classified as absolutely right or wrong. Ideas acquire meaning as right or wrong only in relation to their historical context. In fact, human thought is perpetually expanding and advancing. Human history itself is a forward leap toward change.

Gadai Sahab embarked earnestly on a quest for change. It scarcely mattered to him which means could bring that change about. What truly mattered to him was change itself. If democracy could live up to the aspirations of the common man, it aligned perfectly with his sensibilities. If a form of government other than democracy could assure the desired transformation, Gadai did not hesitate to embrace it. The blurred boundaries we have so far encountered in our examination of his thought are fairly reconcilable. We subsume many isolated and individual doctrines, or their components, under a broader conceptual framework termed “Gadaism.”

If we may take the liberty of drawing a parallel, Gadaism may be seen as a personalized version of utilitarian philosophy. The greater the usefulness, the better. Utility serves as the benchmark against which institutions and practices may be evaluated.

As articulated by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, the aim should be “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” Gadaism is a practical ideal, largely bordering on realism. To sum up, Gadaism is, to the core, a philosophy of the common man.

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