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The Aesthetics of Revolutionary Violence: A Fanonian Reading of Shaikh Ayaz's Anti-Colonial Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This paper applies an anti-colonial analysis of the modern Sindhi poetry of Shaikh Ayaz employing Frantz Fanon's revolutionary model. Writing during the height of imperial rule in the Subcontinent, Ayaz vehemently rejected colonization and supported armed resistance over constitutional non-violence. Adopting a qualitative, textual analysis methodology, this paper critically examines his anti-colonial verse, focusing on his celebrated opera, Hanging of Bhagat Singh. The central argument posits that Ayaz views revolutionary counter-violence as a structural necessity to destroy imperial tyranny and shatter the settler's superiority complex. Furthermore, the paper unmasks the complicity of the local comprador bourgeoisie and emphasizes the reclamation of indigenous history and cultural archetypes. Ultimately, the study illustrates that Ayaz rejects superficial, formal independence, demanding a continuous transition toward total systemic emancipation. It recommends future comparative research between Ayaz and other Subcontinental resistance poets.

Keywords: Shaikh Ayaz, Anti-Colonialism, Revolutionary Violence, Subcontinent, Frantz Fanon.

Introduction and Literature Review

In modern Sindhi literature, Mubarak Ali Shaikh, popularly known as Shaikh Ayaz (1923–1997), stands as a foundational progressive figure. Born eighty years after the British annexation of Sindh, Ayaz's conscious intellectual development was deeply shaped by the oppressive realities of imperial rule in the Indian Subcontinent. Consequently, anti-colonial resistance became an inseparable thematic anchor of his poetic journey (Rasool *et al.*, 2023). This paper analyzes selected poems by Ayaz through the lens of anti-colonial theory, focusing primarily on his celebrated lyrical opera, *Hanging of Bhagat Singh*. While mainstream Subcontinental politics often prioritized constitutional negotiations, Ayaz's verse aligns with a radical trajectory that validates armed defiance against imperial structures.

Poetry has historically served as a vital vehicle for political resistance, challenging colonial status-quo structures and reclaiming shattered indigenous identities. In the twentieth century, global anti-colonial literature emerged across multiple occupied territories (Aziz, 2025). In Africa, Mozambican poet José Craveirinha utilized verse to reconstruct national identity against Portuguese rule, framing poetry as an active force in disputes over ancestry (de Souza, 2016).

Similarly, Algerian poet Ahmed Sahnoun deployed urgent, imperative language to mobilize the masses against French occupation, exposing the economic disparities created by colonial extraction (Ali, 2018). In the Middle East, poets like Iraq's Ma'ruf al-Rusafi and Iran's Farokhi Yazdi invoked ancient regional histories to counter Western imperial hegemony and critique domestic puppet politicians (Ganjali et al., 2020). Within the Subcontinent, Allama Muhammad Iqbal subverted colonial epistemological tools by synthesizing local traditions with anti-imperial critique, transforming colonized subjects from passive spectators into historical actors (Qazi, 2015). Furthermore, radical poets like Muhammad Hussain Azad and Munir Shikohabadi intentionally glorified local customs and heroes following the 1857 War of Independence to undermine the hegemonic authority of the British Raj (Siddiqui, 2012). While existing scholarship on Shaikh Ayaz has explored his work through Marxist criticism (Lashari, 2016) and eco-critical frameworks (Shaikh & Shaheen, 2018), a sustained evaluation of his explicitly anti-colonial paradigm remains scarce in English academia. Rasheed Bhatti (1988) provided a foundational baseline by analyzing the political context of *Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, illustrating how British state terror drove India's radical youth toward direct militant action. This study builds upon that baseline by applying a formal Fanonian framework to analyze Ayaz's poetic resistance. To fully appreciate the radical anti-colonial stance in Shaikh Ayaz's poetry, his work must be situated within the broader socio-political, geopolitical, and historical resistance movements of Sindh. The early twentieth century in Sindh was defined by a profound radical wave sparked by external geopolitical shocks, notably the First World War and the subsequent collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This global crisis catalyzed intense Pan-Islamic sentiments within Sindh, acting as an ideological awakening that unified local populations against Western imperial models and aggressive colonial overreach (Rasool et al., 2023). This radical wave directly manifested in regional anti-colonial maneuvers. When conventional negotiation policies reached a complete deadlock with the British Empire, the local population engaged in extreme ideological actions. The Hijrat Movement emerged as a monumental response, standing as the first formal, collective political case in the modern history of Sindh where the native underprivileged classes explicitly boycotted British imperialism on a structural level (Rasool, Keerio & Faisal, 2023). However, these anti-colonial expressions also created intense socio-religious friction within British India, as the region experienced ideological interplay, polemical debates among Sindhi scholars, and complex internal communal fractures alongside the broader anti-imperial struggle (Rasool et al., 2024). This intricate atmosphere of local political contests and institutional resistance heavily shaped the anti-colonial environment from which Ayaz emerged (Arain et al., 2025). Furthermore, the Subcontinent's long record of confronting foreign incursions serves as a vital thematic baseline for local resistance. The structural and cultural shifts in the region are historically rooted in ancient conflicts, such as the initial Arab conquests and the fall of Raja Dahir, which established early historical paradigms of territorial defense and regional sovereignty (Veesar et al., 2025). This collective memory was actively preserved through distinct indigenous spaces, such as the *Otaq* system. Beyond its socio-cultural role, the *Otaq* historically operated as an autonomous cultural nucleus and gathering space that allowed native communities to sustain collective oral histories, foster camaraderie, and maintain an independent cultural identity free from colonial surveillance (Khatti et al., 2023).

When British formal control intensified, it met uncompromising, armed guerrilla warfare that directly mirrors the Fanonian model of absolute counter-confrontation. The Hur Movement, under the leadership of Pir Pagara, represented a massive, organized armed rebellion against British authority (Keerio et al., 2023). To suppress this insurgent drive, the British Raj deployed

severe state-sanctioned violence, introducing specialized, highly restrictive concentration camps across Sindh to break the spirit of the local freedom fighters.

Crucially, this armed movement was heavily sustained by subaltern agency; local women exerted a profound, transformative influence within the Hur resistance, actively redefining political roles and reshaping the socio-political history of anti-colonial resistance in Sindh. It is this specific regional legacy of structural boycotts, cultural spaces, and armed subaltern defiance that establishes the foundation for the radical aesthetics and revolutionary violence found in Ayaz's poetry.

Methodological Framework (Qualitative Textual Analysis)

This study is a non-empirical, qualitative piece of literary research utilizing a close-reading textual analysis approach. Textual analysis allows the researcher to understand the deeper ideological, political, and cultural subtexts embedded within literary works. Rather than treating poetry merely as an aesthetic expression, this methodology approaches the text as a historical document that records and resists colonial trauma.

The primary literary data analyzed in this study is Shaikh Ayaz's celebrated lyrical opera, *Hanging of Bhagat Singh* (*Bhaghat Singh Khy Phasi*, 1986), alongside selected anti-colonial poems from his *Collected Works (Volume 1)*. The analysis is structured around identifying recurring thematic motifs such as structural violence, the critique of the native comprador bourgeoisie, the revival of indigenous cultural archetypes, and the rejection of superficial administrative independence.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Frantz Fanon's Model of Anti-Colonialism

To unpack the radical aspirations in Ayaz's verse, this study relies on the theoretical models developed by Martinican psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon, primarily drawing from his foundational texts *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon's framework is uniquely suited for this study because it moves away from passive post-colonial critique and focuses instead on active, revolutionary decolonial praxis.

Fanon's model relies on three core pillars that directly mirror the structural trajectory of Ayaz's poetry:

Thematic Analysis Matrix Table

Frantz Fanon's Decolonial Praxis			
Decolonial Violence		The Comprador Bourgeoisie	National Culture
Colonialism	absolute	Local elites mimic white	Imperialism erases native
terror; can only be		masters and must be	history; must reclaim ancient
shattered by counter-		dismantled along with Raj.	local heroes.
violence			

Delovarova *et al.*, 2026

Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Lyrical Weaponization of Revolutionary Counter-Violence

In his masterpiece opera, *Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, Shaikh Ayaz frames the execution of the revolutionary leader not as a tragic defeat, but as a catalyst for systemic upheaval. Mainstream Subcontinental political discourse under the dominant leadership routinely advocated for constitutional negotiations and non-violent resistance. Ayaz explicitly breaks away from this passive methodology, aligning his poetic voice with what Fanon calls the absolute necessity of counter-violence.

For Ayaz, the colonial state's legal apparatus is nothing more than a structured vehicle for terror. When the colonial judge sentences Bhagat Singh to death, Ayaz does not write a plea for mercy; instead, his verses convert the gallows into an anti-colonial altar. Ayaz writes:

"The noose around your neck,

*Is not a rope of hemp It is the dawn's embrace,
Shattering the night of the Raj."*

Through these lines, Ayaz implies that when the state uses absolute violence to silence dissent, the only logical dialectical response for the colonized subject is to pick up the gun. This directly mirrors Fanon's assertion in *The Wretched of the Earth* that decolonization is always a violent phenomenon because it alters the order of the world which was originally instituted by violence. The counter-violence of the colonized is justified because it reacts against the structural violence of the colonizer.

4.2 Unmasking the Comprador Bourgeoisie in Sindh

Ayaz's verse expands beyond a surface-level critique of the white British officer; he turns his sharpest poetic arrows toward the native elites who facilitated foreign rule. In the context of British India, this class was comprised of the feudal *Waderas*, British-sanctioned titles (*Khan Bahadurs*), and bureaucratic loyalists.

Through his poetry, Ayaz exposes these individuals as parasites who traded their collective national identity for localized economic privileges and colonial favors. By applying Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie, Ayaz shows that these native elites suffer from a profound psychological fracture they wear "white masks" over their "black skins." Ayaz warns his audience:

*"Beware the native kings who toast the crown,
Whose hands are stained with their brothers' blood.
They speak the master's tongue,
But wear the chains with pride."*

Ayaz warns his readers that true liberation cannot be achieved if the white British master is simply replaced by a local brown landlord. His poetry demands a total structural purge of both the external imperial force and the internal comprador class.

4.3 Reclaiming Indigenous Archetypes and Subaltern Space

A central finding of this study is how Ayaz uses cultural nationalism to defeat the colonial superiority complex. The British Raj systematically depicted the local population of Sindh as passive, fatalistic, or historically insignificant. To counter this psychological erasure, Ayaz intentionally bypassed Western literary forms and populated his poetry with radical historical figures, indigenous folklore, and geographical icons of the Indus Valley.

By celebrating the militant resistance of historical figures and local movements, Ayaz transforms historical memory into an active political force. He takes back the spaces colonized by imperial structures and returns them to the subaltern. This process directly matches the final phase of Fanon's evolution of the native writer: Ayaz moves past the phase of mimicking the colonizer's style, skips the phase of mere nostalgic longing, and enters the "fighting phase," where literature is openly weaponized to awaken national consciousness and reclaim sovereign identity.

Conclusion

This study has evaluated the modern Sindhi poetry of Shaikh Ayaz, specifically his lyrical opera *Hanging of Bhagat Singh*, through the theoretical framework of Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial model. The findings demonstrate that Ayaz's literary corpus functions as a radical counter-offensive against the structural and psychological hegemony of the British Raj. By explicitly favoring the militant trajectory of Subcontinental defiance over constitutional non-violence,

Ayaz frames revolutionary counter-violence not as a mere choice, but as a structural necessity to shatter imperial tyranny and heal collective colonial trauma.

Furthermore, the paper highlights Ayaz's sophisticated dual critique: he simultaneously unmasks the local comprador bourgeoisie (the feudal and bureaucratic elites who wore "white masks" to facilitate foreign extraction) while weaponizing indigenous archetypes, folklore, and regional resistance legacies to dismantle the settler's superiority complex. Ultimately, Ayaz rejects a superficial, formal decolonization that merely swaps rulers, advocating instead for a continuous post-colonial transition toward absolute systemic and psychological emancipation.

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