ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL
Available Online: https://assajournal.com
Vol. 03 No. 02. April-June 2025.Page#.2516-2522
Print ISSN: 3006-2497 Online ISSN: 3006-2500
Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17094050

Destabilizing Binaries: Atta Shad's Use of Paradoxical Symbols in Modern Balochi Poetry

Dr. Adnan Riaz
Asst. Prof., Department of English, University of Turbat, Kech, Balochistan
Email: Adnan.riaz@uot.edu.pk
Dur Jan
Lecturer, Department of Education, University of Gwadar, Balochistan
Email: Durjan.gichki@ug.edu.pk
Zoha
MPhil English Literature University of Turbat
Email: zohabaloch261996@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
The paper analyses Atta Shad's paradoxical symbols in some of his poems in order to underline his unique contribution to modern Balochi poetry. Contrary to earlier critics who focused on some dominant thematic focal points of Shad's poetry, this study concentrates on the symbolic and deconstructive forms of his poetic imagery. Focusing closely on such poems as Kadi Beet Man Nazana Mani Aagahi Cha Waaba, Bita Kadi Nabeete, and Saah Kandan, the paper interrogates how Shad reconfigures the traditional pictorial and verbal signs associated with life, death, virtue, and divinity, and deploying paradoxical signs, he defamiliarizes any entrenched meaning, and pushes the reader to encounter reality from a relative and post-modern perspective. The analysis shows that Shad's symbolic order not only reflects human struggle and cultural consciousness but also opens new ways of understanding "existence" through a fluid and changing context in modern Balochi literature.

***Keywords**: Atta Shad, Symbolism, Postmodernism, Paradoxical Symbols, Balochi Poetry.*

Introduction

Sajid Hussain, Mariyam Suleman, and Fazal Baloch have highlighted Atta Shad's (1939–1997) contribution to modern sensibilities and cultural representation in Balochi poetry; however, their discussions often remain descriptive or thematic, with limited attention to the technical and symbolic intricacies of his poetry. In Pakistan's academic culture, where knowledge transmission frequently favors thematic reproduction and discussion over critical engagement, Shad is also a victim of this disregard for theoretical depth in Balochi literary criticism (Jan, Riaz, & Yaseen, 2023). In Pakistan's literary scene, Balochi literature's marginal status can also be interpreted in light of curriculum centralization, which makes indigenous languages less admired. (Dur Jan & Kazimi, 2023). This study seeks to address that gap by focusing on Shad's paradoxical symbolism beyond thematic definitions, analyzing how his imagery functions to deconstruct conventional realities and reimagine existence through a postmodern lens.

Shad's contribution to Balochi poetics has a unique place in scholarly discourses, despite the fact that it cannot be divorced from the ongoing linguistic and orthographic conflicts that continue to influence the Balochi language (Hakeem, Baloch, & Riaz, 2021). For much the same reasons,

Balochi literature is still in its infancy since there is still a lack of writing, discourse, and admiration for those like Shad.

In Shad's poetics, the relationship between dream and reality also evokes psychoanalytic interpretations, in which dreams represent both revelation and suppression (Riaz & Shari, 2024). Shad emerges as the father of modern Balochi poetry, who rarely yields to conventionalism and prepares the readers to embark on an entirely different journey. Balochi poetry, before his arrival, demonstrated a classical tone, more of a representation of the poetic imagination bound within the spheres of dominated literary cultures, tastes and movements of the region. Shad represents a leading figure in the sphere of Balochi poetry mainly for his innovative use of imagery and symbols. While earlier poets such as Mir Gul Khan Naseer and Zahoor Shah Hashmi shaped Balochi poetry through revolutionary voices or linguistic refinement, Shad introduced a poetics that destabilized conventional meanings and opened new symbolic pathways.

Shad’s composition resonates in the postmodernist sphere and lead the reader to a multiplicity of meanings. Central to his settings is the use of paradoxical symbols—images that simultaneously embody opposing or contradictory meanings. These paradoxes not only reflect the complexity of human emotions and cultural experiences but also challenge established binaries such as life and death, sin and virtue, or divinity and mortality. In Shad’s poetic world, meaning is lost and then reinvented in a new form.

To approach this nuance in Shad’s works, the paper closely examines three poems—Kadi Beet Man Nazana Mani Aagahi Cha Waaba, Bita Kadi Nabeete, and Saah Kandan. Through textual analysis, the study demonstrates how Shad employs paradoxical symbols to reconstruct human experience, destabilise fixed cultural meanings, and invite readers into a realm where contradictions coexist. This strategy reflects broader postmodern paradigms, where absence and void destabilize fixed meanings (Mamona & Riaz, 2023). By doing so, it argues that Shad’s poetic method not only enriches Balochi literature but also situates it within broader currents of modern and postmodern literary expression. The study not only contributes to the existing Shad’s criticism but also may be pivotal to celebrate the poetic ingenuity, and thus, by doing so, it widens the horizons.

J. Derrida (1976) challenges the stability of binary oppositions, arguing that meaning is always deferred (différance) and that concepts such as life/death or innocence/guilt exist only in relation to each other. The meanings that we often construe are the provisions and institutions of society. Therefore, meanings, along with other social structures, are an outcome of collective acceptance of certain ideas. Similarly, R. Barthes (1972) emphasises that cultural symbols are not natural but constructed codes that can be disrupted, re-signified, and opened to multiple interpretations. Jean-François Lyotard (1984), in his formulation of postmodernism as an “incredulity toward metanarratives,” resists totalizing explanations and highlights the value of plurality and contradiction in meaning-making. The highlighted perspectives underline how paradoxical symbols destabilise cultural certainties, resist ideological closure, and invite readers into a space of interpretive multiplicity. The selected poems will be studied from these perspectives.

Atta Shad leads the lineage of modern Balochi poetry through the use of unconventional methods and tools never utilised before in the Balochi language, and he was equally aware of his role. Sajid Hussain quotes Shay Ragam, a Baloch writer, who once asked Atta about the secret behind his eventual recognition: “Is it your poetry that has changed, or are the readers more accommodating now?” he asked. “Time has changed,” Atta responded (Hussain, 2014). Kareem Dashti describes Shad as a pioneering figure, believing that he not only helped the language

warmly accept aesthetic and sensational qualities of poetic composition but also contributed to a thorough diversification of Balochi poetry (Dashti, 2014). Just as climate change discourse frames human survival in terms of cyclical decline and resilience, Shad's paradoxical symbols of mortality reflect a similar awareness of existential precarity (Yaseen, Ahmed, & Riaz, 2022).

Atta Shad's symbols entice readers and critics alike. Mariyam Suleman Baloch, in "Atta Shad: The Literary Giant of Balochistan", sheds light on culturally construed symbols such as "a bowl of water is worth the loyalty of a hundred years; let us quench our thirst, and barter our lives." Though Suleman highlights the major symbols and cultural connotations, she does not address the intricacies of symbolism. Sajid Hussain digs deeper into Shad's poems and discusses the dual nature of symbols in Shad's style. Hussain maintains a somewhat cursory approach to the issue, though he remains critical and explains the symbolic order in a detailed manner. Similarly, Adnan Riaz, in "The Poetics of Suppression: Atta Shad's Revolutionary Symbolism in ساہ کندن", analyses the symbols in the context of suppression and uprising against the systematic dominance of the powerful. Riaz argues that human faculties are capable of disorientation and detraction in Shad's poetic realm. The ideas of suppression are expressed through a systematic order of symbols and through the deconstruction of social and physical structures (Riaz, 2020).

Possibly, as Muhammad Naseem in "Atta Shad: A Legendary Figure" argues, Shad's experiences as a poet, critic, and researcher enabled him to see the world from different perspectives, leading to a more vivid description of life and the creation of an upside-down reality. Completely indifferent to conventional symbolic preferences, his poems reimagine reality and make it relative to both individual and social contexts. One may argue that this is primarily because Shad was influenced by postmodernism and recreated the world beyond reason—his poetry is characterised by broad scepticism, subjectivism, and relativism; it reflects a general suspicion of reason and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in maintaining political and economic power. Fazal Baloch offers a similar perspective in "Atta Shad: The Poet of Modern Sensibilities." Baloch believes that Shad materialises clichés, antitheses, and metaphors; this approach is not only unconventional in Balochi literature but also a negation of a literary culture dominated by names such as Mir Gul Khan Naseer and Zahoor Shah Hashmi. Fazal Baloch also wrote an article in which symbolism, clichés, antithesis, and metaphors were extracted from different works of Atta Shad while he expressed socio-political themes, unlike Zahoor Shah Hashmi, who focused on purifying the Balochi language, and Gul Khan Naseer, who gave a revolutionary voice through his writing (Fazal, 2013). Shad's unconventionality is attributed to different factors. Masood Hameed, remembering Shad, argues that Mirahi, Noon Meem Rashid, and the European Symbolist movement influenced him (Hameed, 2018).

Atta Shad's poetic style is characterised by a cyclical representation of human life articulated through diverse contexts and symbols. Similar to the displaced identities in diasporic fiction, Shad's paradoxes frame identity as fluid and contingent rather than fixed (Riaz, 2021). Furthermore, I argue that he not only deconstructs ideas central to human existence but also envisions a realm of paradoxes, guiding readers to perceive the world from an inverted perspective of reality. The paradoxes in the selected poems, as this paper argues, encapsulate the human struggle to confront the complexities of existence. The paradoxical representations of lost love, displaced homeland, mortality, and other socially significant themes reconstruct human perception and compel readers to engage with reality through an alternative lens. Although not optimistic in essence, this vision is distinctly deconstructive in approach. The paper examines the paradoxical symbolism in Atta Shad's selected poems.

Atta Shad's poem کدی بیت مں نزاناں منی آگہی چہ وابا (Kadi Beet Man Nazana Mani Aagahi Cha Waaba) incorporates a range of symbols that appear inherently contradictory. The title itself reflects this paradox: "I don't know when I will wake up from dreaming." However, the nuanced emotions in the latter part of the poem suggest that the reference is not merely to physical or biological sleep but rather to an intentional ignorance of reality or a reluctance to acknowledge truth or see the calamities unfolding infront of his eyes. The poet not only deconstructs the conventional notion of dreaming but also constructs an unlikely relationship between dream and reality. A magical-realist conception of آگہی (enlightenment) displaces the conventional association of awakening with physical sleep or dream. The binary oppositions, in the context my truly be a part of a wider lack of indifference to crises and political upheaval.

The poet reestablishes his paradoxical symbolism in the penultimate line, stating شفاریں بیکاں منی ("with the help of your hair let me tackle the struggle of the mortal coil"). In a conventional love relationship, a lock of the beloved's hair often symbolises affection or longing, yet here it is paradoxically employed as a means of confronting existential crises. Shad goes against the conventional definitions of locks of the beloved: which are often tagged as a point of entanglement and enchantment where, more often than not, a lover dies a sweet death. In the concluding lines, contemplation is presented as a source of knowledge. However, contemplation interacts with human consciousness in a manner that complicates, rather than clarifies, the capacity for judgment. The poet's individuality is thereby introduced into a dialectical framework, wherein he not only distinguishes between different human faculties but also represents them symbolically, privileging one faculty over another in a critical manner.

On similar grounds, Shad constructs interchangeable human faculties in his poem بیتّ ءَ کدی نبیتّیں (Bita Kadi Nabeete) and in the lines منا چہ بیوسیں دل او دلءَ چہ واراں مں خُدا اے داتگیں زندءَ بِبر کہ گاراں مں. The symbolic representation of the heart embodies the emotional characteristics of the individual; however, Shad disengages the heart from the poet's self. Consequently, the speaker presents his case before God and seeks emancipation from the burdens of life. Although situated in an emotional realm, the poet simultaneously yearns to make a rational choice.

Shad's words منی گُناہ ہمیشیں کہ ہچ گُناہ اوں نیست ("the only sin I commit is that I am innocent") redefine the very essence of virtue and sin. The accused undergoes trial for his innocence, and death is ironically linked to the happiness that emerges from sorrow (وشّیءِ گم). Death, happiness, and sorrow are intertwined to present a complex representation of human emotions, existence, and perceptions of reality. Shad develops a parallel symbol in سُتککگیں کِشاراں او وشّیءِ گم ("burnt field after the harvest"), where the paradoxical image portrays the cyclical relationship between happiness and sorrow—happiness inevitably confronting sorrow and resulting in سُتککگیں ("burnt feelings"). Although these symbols are deeply indigenous in context, they simultaneously embody a universal significance.

In a similar tone, خُداءِ ساہگ also contradicts the widely accepted religious conception of God. Although خُداءِ could be interpreted as God's blessings, the expression undermines the socio-cultural definition of divinity. God is paradoxically attributed with physicality, as the notion of a shadow implies material existence and mortality. In Baloch cultural and religious contexts, however, God is not associated with physical embodiment and therefore does not possess a shadow. Similarly, سمیں وابءِ ڈولءَ شگوست نیم شپاں reflects the desire to personify سمیں and dissolve it within the idea of a dream. In this construction, سمیں and dream alternate and converse with one another, paralleling the tension between خُدا and ساہگ. These dualities merge into paradoxical realities, each destabilising conventional definitions.

Shad, at the conclusion of the poem, deciphers his symbolic order by asserting that گنوکی (madness) is a social construct defined by the majority. The idea of madness, therefore, is not absolute but contingent upon collective interpretation, as reflected in the line جهان سار ببیت اگاں نه ساراں من ("If the entire society is sane, then I am not sane"). By destabilising conventional reality, Shad demonstrates that madness is merely a socially mediated perception rather than an inherent condition. In the same way, the concepts of sanity and other socially construed perceptions are not only relative but also open to challenge. Similarly, sin and virtue are not necessarily pathways to heaven or hell. Instead, they are redefined and represented as contingent attributes of worldly life rather than as determinants of mortal destiny.

ساه کندن acknowledges the reality of human suffering amid war and conflict. The poem presents a vivid portrayal of biological degeneration and the process of death, which in Balochi is referred to as ساه کندن. The poet engages with the harsh reality of death cyclically, constructing an image of humanity's struggle for survival and its ideological resistance against tyranny. In the line چم پچی ءُ بیوانکیءَ استیں زُباں, a moribund man, though unable to speak, conveys meaning through his eyes. Shad deconstructs the conventional notion of vision by asserting that not every eye possesses the faculty to see and that seeing is not merely a physical act but an emotional and human process independent of biological sight. Physical existence, therefore, does not guarantee the capacity to live, as reflected in سَہی انتءُ بیگواہ انت زند.

Similarly, ارواح (spirit) conventionally symbolises peace and tranquillity. In Shad's poetic realm, however, the spirit shrieks and resonates with the entire universe. Death (مَرّگ) and beheading (سرانی گُڈگ) do not necessarily signify domination or the conquest of a nation. Instead, immortality is associated with مهرءِ واہگ—the desire or love for an idea. Thus, to dominate an individual, the oppressor must destroy the ideology that can outlive physical death. Shad asserts, مرگءَ منی لوٹءِ تو ارواحءَ بُکش ("if you want to kill me, kill my spirit or the will to gain liberty"). His poetry also resonates with the politics of ethnicity and language in Balochistan, where literature functions as both cultural preservation and resistance (Ahmed, Ali, & Riaz, 2023). Here, the suffering human being is symbolised as a paradoxical embodiment of human qualities, where the concepts of life and death merge into one another. استءِ (being) and نیستی (non-existence) emerge as two sides of the same coin of reality, functioning as alternate ways of understanding and confronting the human existential crisis.

Conclusion

In order to examine how paradoxical symbols serve as interpretive places where human existence is both deconstructed and reimagined, this paper has examined three poems by Shad that have never been explored through such a lens: Kadi Beet Man Nazana Mani Aagahi Cha Waaba, Bita Kadi Nabeete, and Saah Kandan. To reveal existential paradoxes and socio-political upheavals, symbols typically connected to intimacy, innocence, vision, and spirit are transformed. In each instance, Shad uses paradox as a critical tactic to examine the circumstances of human existence and cultural identity in times of crisis, rather than only as a stylistic element. In a technical sense, this is a new and unique way to appreciate Shad's poetic brilliance. In addition to reflecting cultural struggle, Shad's paradoxical symbolism is consistent with postmodern, deconstructive, and semiotic theories that challenge the permanence of meaning. According to the report, Shad's paradoxical symbolism is both a political intervention in the sociopolitical culture and a poetic artistic invention. His rejection of fixed symbolic systems offers a symbolic lexicon that allows for the expression of silenced voices and shattered realities while also defying literary tradition and ideological dominance. In Balochi poetry, he appears as

a Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shad establishes Balochi literature as a venue of cultural redefinition and intellectual resistance by making paradox the central theme of his poetics.

The scope of the current study has essentially been restricted to just three poems. Subsequent studies ought to broaden the scope of the analysis to include Shad's larger body of work and analyze it using comparative frameworks that situate him alongside other modernist and postmodernist poets from Pakistan, South Asia, and beyond. There is more to discover in Shad's contextual settings, which could help up-and-coming Baloch authors and educate the present public to break down meaning. This method would enhance our comprehension of Balochi literature and the larger field of contemporary South Asian literary studies by providing a more thorough knowledge of how Shad's paradoxical poetics navigates the interaction between regional cultural expressions and transnational literary trends. This study is the first step toward the premise that Shad merits a more thorough investigation into his corpus, one that could go far beyond the interpretative discussion and more analytically reflect his poetry via postmodernist lenses, such as those of Derrida, Barthes, and Lyotard.

References

Ahmed, C., Ali, M., & Riaz, A. (2023). Democracy and the politics of ethnicity and language in Pakistan during the Bhutto regime: A case study of Balochistan. Journal of Political Studies, 30, 71–90.

Baloch, F. (2013). Atta Shad: The poet of modern sensibilities. Zahida Raees: Raji.

Baloch, M. S. (2015). Atta Shad: The literary giant of Balochistan. PakVoices. https://pakvoices.pk/atta-shad-the-literary-giant-of-balochistan

Barthes, R. (1972). Mythologies (A. Lavers, Trans.). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1957)

Dashti, K. (2015). Dil e chol ent sara kushant pa rahe. In Gulzamīn: Daptar, kullīyāt (pp. 169–194). Balochi Academy.

Derrida, J. (1976). Of Grammatology (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1967)

Jan, Dur A. Riaz., & Kazimi, A. B. (2023). Challenges to the implementation of Single National Curriculum: A new tool for education reform. Global Educational Studies Review, 8, 136–147.

Hakeem, T., Baloch, A., & Riaz, A. (2021). A discussion on scriptorial and orthographic issues of Balochi. Hanken, 13(1), 50–59.

Hameed, M. (2018, February 16). Remembering Attah Shad. The Friday Times. https://www.thefridaytimes.com/2018/02/16/remembering-attah-shad/

Hussain, S. (2014, December 5). Atta Shad: The architect of modern Balochi poetry. Sajid Baloch Blog. http://sajidhbaloch.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/atta-shad-the-architect-of-modern-balochi-poetry/

Jan, D., Riaz, A., & Yaseen, M. (2023). The impact of pedagogical knowledge and teaching practices of teachers on students' achievement in public schools of Pakistan. Pakistan Journal of Social Research, 5(2), 469–478.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1979)

Mamona, M. A., & Riaz, A. (2023). Erasure dynamics in WALL-E (2008): Navigating void and absence in the postmodern paradigm. Jahan-e-Tahqeeq, 6(4), 449–459.

Naseem, M. (2013, February 13). Atta Shad: A legendary figure. The Baloch News. https://www.thebalochnews.com/2021/02/13/atta-shad-a-legendary-figure/

Riaz, A. (2019). The poetics of suppression: Atta Shad's revolutionary symbolism in Saah Kandan. Hanken, University of Turbat,
Riaz, A. (2021). Displacement and fluid identities in Little Bee, Shooting Kabul, and Exit West. European Journal of Language and Literature Studies, 7, 45–57.
Riaz, A., & Shari, D. J. (2024). A Freudian psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams in Atiq Rahimi's Earth and Ashes. Harf-o-Sukhan, 8(1), 521–535.
Shad, A. (2015). Gulzamīn: Daptar, kullīyāt. Balochi Academy.
Yaseen, M., Ahmed, J., & Riaz, A. (2022). An investigation on the climate change awareness and concerns. Journal of Social Research Development, 3(2), 193–211.