

Classic Poetry Series

Sahir Ludhianvi
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Sahir Ludhianvi(8 March 1921 - 25 October 1980)

Sahir Ludhianvi (Urdu: سہیر لودھیانوی; Devanagari: सहिर लुधियानवी) was a popular Urdu poet and Hindi lyricist and songwriter. Sahir Ludhianvi is his pseudonym. He won the Filmfare Award twice, in 1964 and 1977, and in 1971 was awarded the Padma Shri.

 Early Life

Sahir Ludhianvi was born into the wealthy family of a Muslim Syed as Abdul Hayee on 8 March 1921 in Ludhiana, Punjab in India. His mother name was Sardar Begum. Sahir's parents had a very loose and estranged relationship. In 1934, when he was thirteen years old, his father married for the second time. At that time, his mother decided to take the bold step of leaving her husband, forfeiting all claims to the financial assets. Sahir's father then sued his mother for child custody but lost. He threatened to make sure Sahir did not live with his mother very long, even if that meant taking the child's life. Sahir's mother then found friends who kept a close watch on him and didn't let him out of sight. Fear and financial deprivation surrounded the formative years of this young man. His parents' divorce brought him and his mother face to face with poverty and struggle in life.

The house where Sahir was born, a red sand-stone haveli, stands in Karimpura, a Muslim neighborhood of Ludhiana, with a small plaque announcing its importance upon the arched mughal darwaaza — the only effort by the city to remember him.

Sahir studied at and graduated from Khalsa High School in Ludhiana. Upon matriculation, he joined the Satish Chander Dhawan Government College For Boys, Ludhiana. He was quite popular for his ghazals and nazms in the college. He was famously expelled from the college within the year 'for sitting in the Principal's lawn with a female class-mate'. About his expulsion, some accounts erroneously mention Amrita Pritam as the girl, but she never lived in Ludhiana. They met after the partition of India, when she arrived in Delhi from Lahore in 1949.

In 1943, after being expelled from college, Sahir settled in Lahore. Here, he completed the writing of his first Urdu work, Talkhiyaan (Bitterness). He then began searching for a publisher and, after two years, he found one in 1945. After his work was published, he began editing four Urdu magazines, Adab-e-Lateef, Shahkaar, Prithlari, and Savera; these magazines became very successful. He then became a member of the Progressive Writers' Association. However,

inflammatory writings (communist views and ideology) in Saveria resulted in the issuing of a warrant for his arrest by the Government of Pakistan. So, in 1949, Sahir fled from Lahore to Delhi. After a couple of months in Delhi, he moved to and settled in Bombay. A friend of his recalls Sahir telling him "Bombay needs me!".

His most famous love affair, however, was with Amrita Pritam, who became his most ardent fan. She has openly acknowledged her love for Sahir in interviews and her books. Apart from Amrita, several other women too came in his life but he could never decide on accepting any of those as his life partner. He remained a bachelor all his life.

In recent years there have been many attempts to chronicle his life and times. Many books about him were published both in India and Pakistan. In 2010 Danish Iqbal wrote a Stage Play 'Sahir' about his life which was directed by NRI Director Pramila Le Hunt. This Play became a commercial success and had a dream run in Delhi. For perhaps first time, in the history of Indian Theatre, songs were used as narrative to recreate the life and struggles of Sahir. Many of his misty eyed contemporaries, Ramesh Chand Charlie, Kuldeep Nayyar and few others, thronged the performance with nostalgic ache in their heart.

Attempts are being made to convert this Play into a film on Sahir. Because the Play Sahir had characters like Guru Dutt, Yash Chopra and Amruta Preetam, it would be a tough task for the casting and depiction but it would be a nostalgic journey down the memory lane both for the public and his friends and admirers.

 Lyrics and Bollywood

Sahir lived on the first floor of the main building of an Andheri outhouse. His famous neighbours included the poet, Gulzar and Urdu litterateur, Krishan Chander. In the 1970s, he constructed Parchaiyaan (Shadows), a posh bungalow, and lived there till his death. Journalist Ali Peter John, who knew the poet personally, says real-estate sharks have been eyeing Sahir's abode after the death of his sister. His belongings and trophies are in a state of ruin, according to the journalist.

Sahir Ludhianvi made his debut in films writing lyrics for the film Aazadi Ki Raah Par (1949). The film had four songs written by him and his first song was Badal Rahi Hai Zindagi... Both the film and its songs went unnoticed. However, with Naujawaan (1951), he gained recognition. S.D. Burman composed the music for Naujawaan. Even today, the film's lilting song, "???? ?????????? ???...", remains popular. His first major success came the same year with Guru Dutt's

directorial debut, *Baazi* (1951), again pairing him with Burman. Thus he became part of the Guru Dutt team, and after the success of *Naujawaan* and *Baazi*, the combination of Sahir Ludhianvi and S.D. Burman came out with many more everlasting songs.

Sahir worked with many music composers, including Ravi, S.D. Burman, Roshan and Khayyam, and has left behind many unforgettable songs for fans of the Indian film industry and its music. *Pyasa* marked an end to his successful partnership with S.D. Burman over what is reported to be S.D. Burman's displeasure at Sahir receiving more admiration (and thus credit for the success) from audiences for the words of the lyrics than S.D. Burman did for his memorable tunes. Later, Sahir Ludhianvi teamed up with composer Datta Naik in several films. Datta, a Goan, was a great admirer of Sahir's revolutionary poetry. They had already worked together to produce the music for *Milaap* (1955). Sahir wrote many unforgettable gems for Datta.

In 1958, Sahir wrote the lyrics for Ramesh Saigal's film *Phir Subah Hogi*, which was based on Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*. The male lead was Raj Kapoor and it was presumed that Shankar-Jaikishan would be the music composers. However, Sahir insisted that only someone who had read the novel could provide the right score. Thus, Khayyam ended up as the music composer for the film, and the song *Woh Subah Kabhi Toh Aayegi* with minimal background music remains an all-time hit. Khayyam went on to work with Sahir in many films including *Kabhi Kabhi* and *Trishul*.

Admirers and critics rate Sahir's work in Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* as his finest. *Pyasa*, some say, bears resemblance to Sahir's early years as a poet. The onscreen poet, Vijay played by Guru Dutt, bears a strong likeness to the man whose poetry gave the film its soul.

With success, Sahir started displaying arrogance. He insisted on writing the lyrics first and then having them set to music unlike his other contemporaries who would be happy penning their verses to the tunes. His other insistence of being paid 1 Rupee more than Lata Mangeshkar created a rift between him and S D Burman and Lata. His attempt at promoting a new singer Sudha Malhotra who was also his love interest was another example.

Sahir Ludhianvi's work in the 1970s was restricted to films mainly directed by Yash Chopra. Though his output in terms of number of films had thinned out, the quality of his writing commanded immense respect. *Kabhi Kabhi* (1976) saw him return to sparkling form. These songs won him his second Filmfare Award for Best Lyricist, the first being for *Taj Mahal* (1963).

 Last days

On 25 October 1980, at the age of fifty-nine, Sahir Ludhianvi suffered a massive heart attack and died in the arms of his friend Dr R.P. Kapoor. He was buried at the Juhu Muslim cemetery. His tomb was demolished in 2010 to make space for new bodies.

Sahir's final works were released for the Hindi film Lakshmi (1982). He will always be remembered along with Kaifi Azmi as the poet who brought Urdu literature to Indian motion pictures. Over twenty-five years after Sahir Ludhianvi's death, his poetry and lyrics remain an inspiration for lyricists of the day. Composers and singers of Sahir's time swear by the depth, intensity and purity in his poetry. As singer, Mahendra Kapoor said in a Vividh Bharati interview, "I don't think a writer like Sahir Ludhianvi will be born again."

Sahir also wrote songs for Laila Majnoon and Daag

 Personality

It was ironically appropriate; while the poet's heart bled for others, he never paid enough attention to his own life.

His friend, Prakash Pandit once recalled how, after the Partition of India, Sahir was unhappy without the company of his Hindu and Sikh friends (they had all fled to India). A secular India was Sahir's preference to an Islamic Pakistan.

Sahir Ludhianvi was known to be very egotistic, perhaps as a result of his zamindar background; he fought for, and became the first lyricist or songwriter, to get royalties from music companies. Sahir insisted on writing the songs before the song was composed, against the Bollywood norm. However, some of his songs were written after the tunes were ready. For example, "Naya Daur" (Naya Daur 1957 - music by O.P. Nayyar). At the height of his popularity, Sahir is known to have demanded a rupee more than what was paid to Lata Mangeshkar for singing it. It was on Sahir's insistence that All India Radio started crediting lyricists along with singers and music composers for songs it aired.

 Poetry

"?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ????? ???, ?? ?? ?? ????? ????? ??
?? ?? ?? ????? ????? ??, ?? ?? ?? ????? ????? ??
????? ????? ????? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ??,

??? ????? ????? ?? ??, ??? ?????? ????? ??? ??
?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?????? ??, ?? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?????? ???
?? ?????? ????? ?? ???????, ?? ?? ?????????? ?????? ???"

A colossus amongst film lyricists, Sahir Ludhianvi was slightly different from his contemporaries. A poet unable to praise Khuda (God), Husn (Beauty) or Jaam (Wine), his pen was, at its best, pouring out bitter but sensitive lyrics over the declining values of society, the senselessness of war and politics, and the domination of materialism over love. Whenever he wrote any love songs, they were tinged with sorrow, due to realisation that there were other, starker concepts more important than love. He could be called the underdog's bard; close to his heart were the farmer crushed by debt, the soldier gone to fight someone else's war, the woman forced to sell her body, the youth frustrated by unemployment, the family living on the street and other victims of society. His lyric from Payasa when lead actor Guru Dutt (Vijay) was passing through a red light area by singing this song, moved even Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Honourable Prime minister of India that time.

"?? ?????, ?? ????????? ?????? ??,
?? ?????? ??? ??????? ????????? ??,
???? ?? ????? ?? ?????????? ????? ???
????????? ????? ?? ????? ??,?? ????? ?????"

Sahir Ludhianvi's poetry had a "Faizian" quality. Like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, he too gave Urdu poetry an intellectual element that caught the imagination of the youth of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. He helped them discover their spine. Sahir asked questions and was not afraid of calling a spade, a spade; he roused people from an independence-induced smugness. He would pick on the self-appointed custodian of religion, the self-serving politician, the exploitative capitalist, and the war-mongering super-powers.

Sahir's poetry reflected the mood of the age. Whether it was the arrest of progressive writers in Pakistan, the launch of the satellite Sputnik or the discovery of Ghalib by a government lusting after minority votes, Sahir reacted with a verve not seen in many writers' work. Kahat-e-Bangal ("The Famine of Bengal"), written by a 25-year-old Sahir, bespeaks maturity that came early. His Subah-e-Navroz ("Dawn of a New Day"), mocks the concept of celebration when the poor exist in squalor.

Perhaps Sahir is the first renowned Urdu poet, who, could express his view towards The Tajmahal in a complete different way. He wrote

"???? ????? ???? ?? ???? ?? ?????, ?????- ?-???? ??? ??????? ? ???? ???? ????.
??? ??? ????? ? ? ???? ???? ? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ???? ????
?????"-

The poet asks his lover to meet him anywhere else but Tajmahal. A tomb which has been a symbol of luxurious monarchy for years, there is no need to make journey of love by two beautiful but not famous hearts there.

Sahir will always be remembered as a poet who made his creation a lesson for all ages of Urdu poetry to come. In this way he contradicts his own creation:

"kal aur aayenge naghmo ki khilti kalian chunnewale, mujhse behtar kehnewale, tumse behtar sunne wale; kal koi mujhko yaad kare, kyun koi mujhko yaad kare, masroof zamana mere liye kyun waqt apna barbad kare?"

Translation:

"Tomorrow there will be more who will narrate the love poems. May be someone narrating better than me. May be someone listening better than you. Why should anyone remember me? Why should anyone remember me? Why should the busy age waste it's time for me?"

 Personal Life

Sahir Ludhianvi remained a bachelor all his life, he had two failed love affairs with journalist Amrita Pritam and singer/actress Sudha Malhotra. These relationships had left him an embittered man. He took to drinking heavily and drank himself deep into alcoholism. The tragedies and pathos of his personal life most truly reflected in his poignant poetry.

His relationship with Amrita Pritam was so passionate that at one time, while attending a press conference, Amrita wrote his name hundreds of times on a sheet of paper. The two of them would meet without saying a word and Sahir would puff away with his cigarettes, and after he left, Amrita would smoke the cigarette butts left by him. After his death, she hoped the smoke from her cigarettes would meet him in the other world.

It is said that when Sahir was courting Amrita Pritam, he built a taller house in front of Amrita Pritam's residence in Ludhiana to show her father that he could afford a house. This statement is a fallacy derived from the Hindi film Tere Ghar Ke Samne. Sahir's economic position at the time was pitiful, so 'building a house' would be out of the question; and secondly, Amrita Pritam did not belong to Ludhiana but to Gujranwala; and the "love of her life" was another Urdu shayar,

Imroz, as detailed extensively in her autobiography, written in Punjabi for which she got a Sahitya Academy Award.

 Awards

1964: Filmfare Best Lyricist Award: Jo Wada Kiya (Taj Mahal)

1977: Filmfare Best Lyricist Award: Kabhi Kabhie Mere Dil Mein (Kabhi Kabhie)

Aaj

Sahir Ludhianvi

Aao K Koi Khwaab Bunein

Sahir Ludhianvi

Aawaaz-E-Adam

Sahir Ludhianvi

Aawaaz-E-Adam

Sahir Ludhianvi

Aawaaz-E-Adam

Sahir Ludhianvi

Ab Aayein Ya Na Aayein

Sahir Ludhianvi

Ab Koi Gulshan Na Ujare

Sahir Ludhianvi

Ab Vo Karam Karein Ya Sitam

Sahir Ludhianvi

Bachchon Tum Taqdeer Ho Kal Ke Hindustaan Ki

Sahir Ludhianvi

Bhool Sakta Hai Bhalaa Kaun Ye Pyaari Aankhein

Sahir Ludhianvi

Blood Is But Blood!

Repression is sill repression
Rising, it must flop
Blood is sill blood
Spilling it must clot.

Whether it clots on desert sands
Or upon assassin's hands
On justice's head or around shackled feet
On injustice's sword or on the wounded corpse
Blood is still blood
Spilling, it must clot.

However much one lies in ambush
Blood betrays butcher's hideout
Conspiracies may veil in thousand darkly mask
Each blood dropp ventures out with burning lamp on its palm.

Tell oppression's vain and blemished fate
Tell cruelty's crafty Imam
Tell the UN Security Council
Blood is crazy
It can leap up to the cloak
It is inferno, it can flare up to burn grain-stock.

The blood you sought to suppress in abattoir
Today that blood moves out into street
Here an ember, there a slogan, there a stone
Once blood comes to flows
Bayonets are no avail
Head, once it is raised
Is not downed by law's hail.

What is about oppression?
What is with its impression?
Oppression is, all of it, but oppression
From beginning to end
Blood is still blood
Myriad form it can assume
Forms such as are indelible

Embers such as are inextinguishable
Slogans such as are irrepressible.

Sahir Ludhianvi

Brothels

These lanes, these marts of rich delights,
Precious lives, undone, defiled;
Where are the defenders of virtuous pride?
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

These sinuous streets, these doors ajar,
The clinking coins, the moving masks,
Deals of honour, haggings fast,
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

These dimly-lighted, stinking streets,
These yellowing buds, crushed and ceased,
These hollow charms, for sale and lease;
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

The jingling tinklets at casement bright,
Tambourins athrob' mid gasping life;
Cheerless rooms with cough alive;
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

Boisterous laughs on public paths,
Crowds at windows, thick and fast,
Vulgar words, obscene remarks;
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

The betel spittal, the floral wreaths,
Audacious looks and filthy speech,
Flaccid figures, looks diseased;
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

Lecherous eyes in beauty's quest,
Extended hands chasing breasts,
Springing feet on stairs pressed;
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

This is the haven of young and old.
Aging sires and youngsters bold,
Wife, mother and sister — she plays a triple role.
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

Help, O Help, this daughter of Eve!
Radha's child, Yashoda's breed;
The prophet's race, Zuleikha's seed;
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

Call, O call the leaders wise
Let them see these streets, these sights,
Where are the champs of eastern pride?
Where are they who praise, the pious eastern ways?

Sahir Ludhianvi

Cheen-O-Arab Hamaaraa

Sahir Ludhianvi

Dekha Hai Zindagi Ko Kuchh Itnaa Qareeb Se

Sahir Ludhianvi

Jaageer

Sahir Ludhianvi

Jab Kabhi Unki Tavajjo Mein Kami

Sahir Ludhianvi

Saathi Haath Barhaanaa

Sahir Ludhianvi

Taj Mahal

The Taj, mayhap, to you may seem, a mark of love supreme
You may hold this beauteous vale in great esteem;
Yet, my love, meet me hence at some other place!
How odd for the poor folk to frequent royal resorts;
'Tis strange that the amorous souls should tread the regal paths
Trodden once by mighty kings and their proud consorts.
Behind the facade of love my dear, you had better seen,
The marks of imperial might that herein lie screen'd
You who take delight in tombs of kings deceased,
Should have seen the hutments dark where you and I did wean.
Countless men in this world must have loved and gone,
Who would say their loves weren't truthful or strong?
But in the name of their loves, no memorial is raised
For they too, like you and me, belonged to the common throng.

These structures and sepulchres, these ramparts and forts,
These relics of the mighty dead are, in fact, no more
Than the cancerous tumours on the face of earth,
Fattened on our ancestor's very blood and bones.
They too must have loved, my love, whose hands had made,
This marble monument, nicely chiselled and shaped
But their dear ones lived and died, unhonoured, unknown,
None burnt even a taper on their lowly graves.

This bank of Jamuna, this edifice, these groves and lawns,
These carved walls and doors, arches and alcoves,
An emperor on the strength of wealth, Has played with us a cruel joke.
Meet me hence, my love, at some other place.

Sahir Ludhianvi

Tu Hindu Banega Na Musalmaan Banega

Sahir Ludhianvi

Ye Desh Hai Veer Javaanon Ka

Sahir Ludhianvi

Ye Mahalon Ye Takhton Ye Taajon Ki Duniya

Sahir Ludhianvi