COMMITMENT IMAGE IN GEORGE SHAKUR’S EPIC

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DOI: 10.7813/jll.2015/6-2/63

ABSTRACT

Ashura is an epic or a tragedy that can be considered unique because its owners, imams and martyrs of the movement, put themselves into danger and portrayed everything in the battle. Contemporary Arab poets with any religion could not simply disregard Imam Hossein’s great epic of Ashura and the events of both contemporary and poet’s society determines the specified way of expressions in Ashura poetry. Therefore, poets committed themselves to working in poetry and works created were unique and beautiful. Among them, the Lebanese Christian poet, George Shakur, is one whose works and methods are to be investigated by the authors of this paper to study the epic of Hossein through its great contemporary poet. What this paper aims to show is that although George Shakur had an eminent Christian personality, Imam Hossein’s movement and Karbala were both a great event and this event will stick in people’s mind. Imam Hossein does not only belong to Shiites Muslims, but he has a universal character belonging to all generations and people. To sum up, the love of Imam Hossein has been depicted in Shakur’s poetry and his interviews.

Key words: Epic of Hossein, George Shakur, Imam Hossein, Martyrdom, Sacrifice

1. INTRODUCTION

Shia love for holy realm of Seyed-Al-Shohada is flame that is kindled into life. Ashura is the tenth day of Muharram in the Islamic tradition happened in 61 AH, and in the Shiite society, the third Imam, Hossein ibn Ali, was martyred in the land of Karbala with all his companions and their women and children were captured; at first the captives were taken to Kufa and Syria, and then were allowed to return to Medina (Shahidi, 1993). Shorty afterwards, this event attracted the attention of the people living in both Islamic lands and all other corners of the globe, and broadcasted the name of Karbala and Ashura in different languages. Today, the bloody greatness and sanctity of Karbala is one of the most transcendent manifestations of the human spirit and Muslims’ fighting against oppression and the free world are familiar to everyone.

More than seventy-two victims of this massive sea of sacrificed their blood to carry the burden of leadership to the house of divine. Viewing unique bloody funeral and the burning deserts of Karbala quickly captured the hearts of the world and awakened thoughts and emotions in order to restore the school of Ashura in motion. And this flame of passion and intelligence is not based on divine tradition of silence and pacification.

Hence, the attachment, love and devotion of Shiite poets and writers are not surprising and new, but when Christian scientists and scholars use words like love, passion and devotion to describe the family of the Prophet (pbuh), this acknowledgment of the truth is replete with love and compassion to the family of the Prophet (pbuh) and has risen.

With regard to Ashura poetry, efforts have been made by Christian poets and books like “Ali and Hossein in Christian poet” by Rayef Younis Al-Majid, and “Hossein in Christian Poet” by Zamizam Saeed Rashid include a collection of poems and short biographies of the poet. Assuming this, this study aims to focus more on George Shakur’s analysis of epic of Hossein which has made this study different from previous ones.

Ashura event can influence the political life of a nation and the record of the life of a community as well as the spirit and philosophy of life in a community. Therefore, the impact of this great event on the literature of different nations and different religions is of high importance. Thus, this study aims to analyze the content of a poem called “the epic of Hossein” written by Christian Lebanese poet, George Shakur. Furthermore, another purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of this event on George Shakur’s life and poetry and respond to two fundamental questions. Firstly, how and why did a Christian poet abandon all poetic themes and focus on Imam Hossein?, and, what mental and emotional pictures does he have about Imam Hossein? In order to find the answers of these two questions, an analytic descriptive approach was used to examine the life of the poet and his purpose of addressing Ashura in his poem by analyzing the content of the poem. The results will be presented at the end.

2. GEORGE SHAKUR’S PERSONAL LIFE

A. George Shakur and Poetry

The Christian Lebanese poet and writer, George Shakur, was born in 1935 in the village of Jebel Amel Sheikhan. He studied Arabic literature and the history of civilization in St. Joseph’s University of Beirut (Zamizam, 2012). He published the first collection of poems in praise of Akhtal Saghir in 1971. Moreover, beside releasing several collections of poetry, he corrected the works of some of the great poets of the Arab countries such as Ahmad Shoghi and Saeed Aghil. Shakur’s first poems are related to the resistance and fight against the Zionists in Lebanon, and he is known to be the co-founder of literature and poetry (Ansari, 2013).

Aside from the usual literary activities, Shakur is one of the top poets of freedom in life and he writes poems in praise of Ahl al-Bayt without having a biased look toward religion. Although it is done in a country like Lebanon, where Abrahamic religions live side by side, it is not far-fetched.
Shakur grew up in a country that is home to many Christians, and on whose walls the pictures of Imam Ali are painted and attached. Currently, poets and writers intend to create works with comprehend and deep contexts. One of the frequent questions about the character of the writers and poets is whether they are Shiite or not? Even if the answer is negative, it is important to humanity and freedom in view of these scholars, beyond the boundaries of religion, and religion is defined. Shakur has three outstanding works in the field of literature, namely, the Saga of the Prophet (pbuh), Imam Hossein Epic, and Saga of Imam Ali published in 2001 (Zaeri, 2010).

B. George Shakur’s Attachment to Imam Hossein

One question that comes to mind is how Shakur became familiar with Imam Hossein. It is said that one day, Mohammad Yousef Beizoun, Member of Parliament and the chairman of Amелиyeh, invited him to Ashura ceremony, a meeting where Beizoun had wanted to speak about the personality of Imam Hossein and its events. At first, he did not accept the invitation and postponed it for three years. A friend gave him some reference books based on the life of Imam Hossein in order to become familiar with the personality of him. “I began to study the books”; Shakur says. When he read about the events and their lives, he cried. The, he started reading more and loved his personality. So he wrote this epic about Imam Hossein. This effect was accompanied by a good feedback and it is also available in French, Persian, and English languages. He was happy when he wrote the epic of Imam Hossein. He was crying and was proud of that. Basically, he does not write about a subject that he does not love. At the meeting, he presented his book to Saeed Aghil and told him that God is greater than all of us, and he is watching our speech, which means that Imam Hossein is a source of honor and pride for him.

3. RESULTS

George Shakur’s epic of Imam Hossein and many prominent contemporary poets and scholars and Lebanese poetry are sensational and avoid having a mournful look on that event. In the opening verses of it, literary ways of addressing Imam Hossein are used: “In the heart, blood flow that glow like fire and chaos if the victim is beheaded and deadly among the disbelievers” (Shakur, 2002, p.?).

Then, in his book, Shakur (2002) asks if Hossein is the son of Prophet Mohammad or not. According to him, the Prophet called him Reyhaneh of the youths. Shakur, in these two verses, refers to the tradition of the Prophet who said Hassan and Hossein are both Dwellers of the garden and whoever love them, loves me and whoever hurts them is actually hurting me. Shakur (2002) states that the Prophet love for Imam Hossein, and his kissing on the lips of Imam Hossein is similar to the scent of pollinating blossoms at dawn. The poet has also mentioned the ugly traits of Yazid in different parts of the work using satire and words such as unfaithful, thugs, dealers, and crafty.

Shakur (2002) describes Ashura, Imam Hossein and his companions as his eyes were blind in tears. In another part of his book, Shakur (2002) states “the character of a free person is like one who is proud and never gives up” (p.?). He also describes martyrs as sharp eagles flying into heaven where God is in their field, and if the field is narrowed down, their souls are at the peak of sky. Moreover, this poem compares materialistic people who love money and physical materials, with high-minded martyrs who died with dignity and were never deceived by materialistic life. In addition, the poet compares human freedom of Karbala between and human freedom of evil to achieve to this reality that power and the right will gain the opportunity to rule forever and it is their right.

The poet knows that the true victory is for Imam Hossein and his followers blamed the apparent victory of Yazid and his army who were defeated. And the apparent failure of Imam Hossein and his followers is actually a real victory which calls for justice. Shakur (2002) states that Yazid’s grave is a symbol of oppression and Imam Hossein’s grave is the symbol of innocence, sacrifice and resistance: “In Karbala, it was Yazid who failed, and Imam Hossein won because when you find the standard of justice in the land, you find the way to a sweet tomb, and pilgrims rush to this direction eagerly to visit Imam Hossein’s tomb. But where is the grave of Yazid? The pilgrims say there was nothing but dust, rocks and soil” (p.?). Poet mentioned Hazrat Zeinab talking against Yazid in the parliament, unlike many poets, he faces a brave woman: “Zeinab sighed and cried and spoke, like thorns that are worn out.”

In the final verses, Shakur (2002) starts humiliating Yazid, Imam Hossein’s looks great, valuable: “O Yazid, you should know that I am to blame you, eternal life is left, never forget that materials have no value and price” (p.?).

4. CONCLUSION

The roaring voice of the oppressed Hossein can be heard and his voice is like the red flag which is on the peaks of the resurrection, and the resurrection will also be flying.

Shakur (2002) is a prominent Arab poet and his poetry is mostly about the resistance of Lebanon’s people. Resistance, strength, dedication, sacrifice and self-seeking are among the characters that Shakur sees in Imam Hossein and considers that Imam Hossein as having a high character belonging to all religions and faiths and beliefs that can be found in the world, away from any religious prejudice, the love for Imam Hossein is for all. Shakur (2002) describes Karbala to be painful, but he knows that final victory of right over wrong is a promise. Cultural and social environment in which George Shakur lived has a special effect in poetry.

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