

The Manifestation of the Social Issues through Humour- A Case Study of Saraki Village Sanjar Pur District Rahim Yar Khan

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Abstract:

The present paper focuses on the significance of the humour in the society. Mostly humour is considered as a silent fraction of the society. The present paper highlights the significance of this silent fraction of the society. Present paper emphasis on that how society has been divided though the humour. Humour not only provides a sense of happiness among the people in the particular society but it also labels the multiple segments of the society through unique characteristics in distinctive way. Positive criticism through humour not only provides a plate form to the people to remove their anxieties, but also present a flat way to regulate the behaviour of different segments of the society according to the norms of the particular society. The unique attribute

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of the present paper is that it reflects that how social issues are highlighted through humour for instance unemployment, drug addiction and social classes in the society. The data presented in this paper has been collected by using qualitative anthropological research techniques.

Key words: Mullann, Molvis, Khatam, Nashaii, Hadd Harami, Pawolee, Kirarh.

Introduction:

Humour is not an act of individual. It has embedded in the society. You cannot laugh loudly in the room while you are sitting alone in the room.

“Laughter is always the laughter of a group” (Henri Bergson, 1956:64)

Humour deals with certain social settings. Humour is not single fold element of the society that provides only fun to the members of the society. It has multi dimensions regarding to the nature of the certain society.

“The secret source of Humor is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven”. (Mark Twain)

There are many targets of the humor may be individuals, society or institution of the society. Humor is global process which has been performed almost all around the world but its nature varies from society to society. It is hard even for the researcher to find out reality of the humor in the society. Most of the time humor is like a running commentary about political, economic and social structure of the society.

“When you realize that you are not getting something a joke, a proverb, a ceremony that is particularly meaningful to the natives, you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it.” (Robert Darnton)

Meaning in the jokes is always hard to grasp over it, because the social construction of the meaning is very complex action. Humour is vehicle to understand the social system of the society and how different social institutions are correlating with each other. The importance of the humour is very valuable in order to understand the power relations in the society. Power relations are expressed through humour in certain ways. Meaning attached with the particular humour illustrates certain power relations in multiple senses. Ethnicity, religion, economic and political power relations are expressed through the humour.

Countless scholars have been expressed the multiple roles of the humour in the society. As a historian Peter Gay pointed that

“The varieties of laughter cover so vast and varied a terrain that they all but frustrate mapping,” and that “wit, humor, the comic . . . are exceedingly ambiguous in their intentions and their effects, prudent and daring, conformist and rebellious in turn” (Peter Gay, 1993, 369)

To understand the culture of the people, social issues of the particular society can be understood through the humour as Bakhtin explains:

“We cannot understand cultural and literary life and the struggle of mankind’s historic past if we ignore that peculiar folk humor that always existed and was never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes. While analyzing past ages we are too often obliged to “take each epoch at its word,” that is, to believe its official ideologists. We do not hear the voice of the people and cannot find and decipher its pure unmixed expression” (Bakhtin, 1984:474)

Multiple roles of the humour in the society are very valuable because it not only a plate form of fun or provide a social network but it also express the hidden truths of the society in

form of social evils and through it we get a way to eradicate these social issues in a descent way.

Methodology:

Qualitative anthropological research methodology which includes methods like Socio-economic survey, participant observation, key informants interviews and in-depth interviews were used to collect the empirical data. Different sampling techniques were used during the research like purposive sampling, random sampling and snow ball sampling. By using these sampling techniques 100 households out of 300 households have selected as sample of study. Beside this structured and unstructured questionnaire and in-depth interviews have been used during the study. Modern methodology like photography and recording have also used during research. The research conducted in four month from February 2012 to June 2012.

Results and Discussion:

Target Community, Jokes and Humour

This paper covers the targets groups for creating humour, the nature of jokes and extent of humour available in the village. Further, the paper provides the analysis of such jokes within socio-cultural context. The paper also discusses the modern trends in humorous behavior and the impact of mass media revolution in 21st century especially in Pakistani context on the humorous behavior of people in Pakistan.

Target Groups

Target groups are those referent groups, which are mostly subject to be targeted during humour creation by the humorists. In the village *Sanjar Pur*, during observation it is identified that, no one is entirely spared from humorists and

jokes and almost all persons irrespective of age, gender and status are often subject to humour directly or indirectly. Although, in daily life, people talk about in pleasant mode with smiling face, however particularly the individuals with high and low temperament also become the target of jokes and satire. The field data identified that following segment of society are subject to constant target of humorous behavior in Saraiki region inclusive of research locale:

Clergymen

Clergymen (called as *molvi* in Pakistani context) in every society in Pakistan have a distinguished status due to their expertise in religious knowledge. In Pakistani context, the clergymen are given much respect in normal course of life. However, in current socio-political conditions of Pakistan, the often thought low graded clergymen are notorious for using the religious tenants based on their own interpretation for their self-interest. The *molvi* or sometimes called as *mullann* are often subject of humour in most cultures of Pakistan, however in *Saraiki* culture, these personality type is often greater source as well as target of humour.

These *molvis* therefore become the target, directly and indirectly in jokes and satires. Their presumption ability, skills and prerogative for spreading religious values in society becomes the main cause of the jokes and satires on them. Their interpretation regarding the prohibition of drinking, adultery, injustice, heaven, hell, and 70 hours (virgins) and *sharab-tahora* (sacred wine) and their personal contradiction is often subject to humour and subsequently the objects of jokes on them.

Molvis in their sermons taught people to moderate in behavior, expenditures, eating, making love, dress and of course, in all walks of life, however they themselves act otherwise. Most of the respondents argued that only *molvis* persons in our society are the ones who eat much, marry to

more women, dress wealthy, behave immoderately and they are the cause of sectarian and societal conflict in society. Upon such apparent contradiction of giving others the instruction for good and doing something otherwise, everybody in society ridicules the personality of *molvis* and thinks that these *molvis* have made the religion just a way of earning income. There were multiple stories and humorous jokes prevalent in the village Sanjar Pur, some of these are narrated here:

***Molvi* and Satiety**

While sitting on the hotel, a humorist narrated the story of *molvi* and his satiety in rather comic way. According to him:

Once upon a time, a young Molvi was given the invitation for alms food in the village. The Molvi went to his mother and asked for pray to be succeeded in eating much food in today's feast.

Upon this his mother prayed for him, "O my son! May God help you".

The *Molvi* went to the village and performed his duty. After having much food, he was not able to walk easily, therefore he started walk by firmly holding the walls of the houses. When his mother saw him in trouble, she shouted, O my son, what have you done today? You have just ruined the name of your father because you have eaten less food."

The Molvi replied to his mother, 'O my mother, do not you see that I am just leaning across the wall only because of having so much food.

Nevertheless, his mother was not satisfied with his performance and said, "O my son, whenever and wherever your father went to any alms food, the people always helped him return by carrying him on cart". Therefore, while listening the end of the joke, there raised a laughing roar in the hotel.

Molvi, Satiety and Doctor's Advice

Similarly, another humour specialist who happened to be writer as well narrated a comic story associated with *molvi*, his satiety and the doctor's advice. He told that:

Once a *molvi* was invited to alms food, there *molvi* ate too much food and he became fainted apparently for having so much food. The people took him to hospital for treatment. After examining the *molvi*, Doctor advised the assistant to pour two spoons syrup in the mouth of *molvi* so that his stomach may be get washed.

Upon this, one of those people who brought *molvi* to hospital replied that.....the *molvi* have had eaten the leg piece of chicken, if there might have any space left in his stomach, therefore it is impossible to pour syrup in his mouth. Upon the end of joke, there raised a roar of laughing because everyone knew the eating behavior of *molvis*.

Molvi, and Khatam Sharif

One old man, happened to be critic regarding the youth's activities in the contemporary time, also narrated a comic view regarding *Molvis*. He argued that *Molvi* always think, act and performs in terms of basket of food. He narrated the practices of *Molvis* in this context. He described a story that once there was *Molvi* living in the village. Whenever, he was invited to *khatam* (ceremony on the funeral or death anniversary in which food is distributed as alms).

The *molvi* always kept in his mind the nature of food and the distance of place of *khatam*. If the place of *khatam* is at far distance, and the food is luxurious, he used to say.... 'You are asking me to go just near, it has ok, come with me'. And if the food is just simple and even the distance is also located somewhere near to his residence, he used to say no to the invitation by saying, 'you are asking some distant place, I cannot go because I am much busy'.

Interpretation:

In Saraiki region, on the one hand, there is great respect for the *molvi*, and, on the other hand, people often make fun of the *molvi* personality and take him as source of humour. Often the humour related with eating much food and satiety is always linked with the *molvis'* personalities. Subsequently, the *molvis* are greater source of amusement in *Saraiki* culture.

Pakistan being predominantly an Islamic society and like other cultures of Pakistan in the village Sanjar Pur there is routine of alms giving on social and religious occasions. As a matter of rituals and practices, people give food in alms upon the death of some near and dear ones, their funeral ceremonies, and their annual death anniversaries or upon certain religious obligations. In *Saraiki* culture, this alms-giving activity is called as *khatam*, which means that, there is tradition of recitation few verses from Quran to give the blessings to food.

Therefore, conventionally as well as 'institutionally' *molvis* perform this *khatam* ceremony. Sometimes, people bring the food for *khatam* to *molvis* house, mosque or place of sitting, while often *molvis* themselves had to go to people's houses for *khatam*. Therefore, people bring *molvis* at home for *khatam*. It is common observation and also reports that the *molvis* certainly eat much food than that of any other person in the society.

It is interesting to understand that, on the one hand, people ridicule *molvis* for eating too much food, and, on the other hand, people generally prepare and manage greater quantity of food for *molvis* at such occasions. The people conventionally call such *molvis* as *datti phati molvis*, which is the matter of addressing those religious practitioners who are regarded as operating on fraudulent methodology and who use religious practices only to get their benefits.

Drugs Addicted Persons

The second most targeted segment of society for humour is the drug-addicted (*Nashaii*) group. On the one hand, drug addicted persons and their acts provide direct humour to people, and, on the other hand, the humour specialists create humour by giving reference to the personality of the drug addicts. The society identifies these addicts as *heroini*, *hafimi*, *charsi* and *sharabi*. However, humour on drunkard, hashish takers (*charsi*), Opium (*hafimi*) and heroin users are different from individual to individual, group to group and society to society.

In village *Sanjar Pur*, these drug-addicted persons are direct target of humour because of their mental illness, foolish acts and unnecessary boldness and physical imbalances. Although, closely correlated the drug addiction and unemployment, there is varying trends regarding the causes of drug addiction in the society. However, *nashaii* as it is called in the village *Sanjar Pur* is the great source of humour. Some of the following jokes and stories regarding drug-addicts determine the way people laugh about:

***Hafimi* and Bull-man**

According to story told by humorist that:

“Once There was an addict *hafimi* (who is addict of opium) living in village; he often use to get milk from milkman co-villager. According to the tale, one day he (the opium addicted) took much opium and could not go to get milk from the house of the milkman at scheduled evening time. When he woke up at mid-night, he thought that there is still evening time, so he went to milkman’s house for getting milk. On the way, when he was going on the left bank of drain, he saw a bull cart with a man on it, which was actually coming from the right bank of the drain. Upon this, he mistakenly understood that the bull cart is coming on his side and may hit him.

He instructed the bull man to be careful while passing him.

The bull man replied, O you *hafimi*, you are still in intoxication because how can I hit you when I am going the other bank of the drain.

However, the *hafimi* again instructed him that ‘although you are coming on the other bank, yet you should be careful not to hit me’.

After few minutes, *hafimi* reached the milkman house and knocked the door. At that late hour, the milkman became angry at the *hafimi* and said, O’ *hafimi*, you have just woke up from your intoxication, there is no milk left for you. He then closed the door. The *hafimi* sat on the doorstep in his state of intoxication”.

In the villages, normally people are used to public toilets; therefore, later on, the wife of milkman woke to pass on urine on the courtyard of house. The noise created by pissing of women on earth mistakenly understood by *hafimi* as the milking of cow.

He loudly shouted, you (milkman), are milking the cow at this time while you were saying otherwise. Upon this insult, the milkman became angry and came to hit the *hafimi* with bamboo. When he smacked the *hafimi*, the *hafimi* shouted, at last you hit me as I was expecting, O, you bull-man. *Hafimi* mind was still struck to bull-cart.

The listeners of this joke are amused with this joke and laughed for considerable time. The reason is that, the joke is classical blend of incorporating the cultural metaphors like, bull-cart, drain, milking cow, pissing in public toilets, *nashaii*’s behavior, and people’s honor (*ghairat*). As the listeners of the joke quite understood such cultural metaphors, therefore, they laughed on ending of the joke.

Nashaii Hadd Haram

As it is already said that, *nashaiiis* person who is addicted of opium, heroin, hashish and wine, therefore, these persons often having such intoxicants remain in state of drowsiness.

Therefore, the extreme idleness called *hadd harami* in *Saraiki* culture is normally associated with *charsi*, *hafimi*, and *heroini*. The term *hadd harami* is used for that person, who does no physical work but eating, drinking and merry making. The term is also used for unemployed person in *Saraiki* region. Some of the jokes incorporating this character of drug-addicted and creating humour are as follows:

Funny Tale 1. It is said, once there were two *hafimi* persons sleeping at the road at the night. Meanwhile, there passed a truck on the road. The truck driver put the horn to get them up so that he may cross the road. One of the *hafimi* got up and said to truck driver, *O hafimi ae, na uthsi, tu zara truck tun lah aa tay maikun cha tay sarak tu hata sat'* [He (the second one) is *hafimi*, he will not get up; you (truck driver) should mount down from the truck and carry me (the first *hafimi*) aside from the road].

Funny Tale 2. According to another often-quoted tale in the village Sanjar Pur, once *heroini* stole an iron guarder of 60 kg from his house, carried it to market on his shoulders, and sold that in order to purchase opium for him. However, someone unearthed his theft. However, his parents and housemates forgave him but thought that he is still healthy of carrying 60 kg weight on his shoulders. Few days after the incident, his mother asked him to move 40 kg bag of grains only few meters away. The *heroini* refused to do that by answering his mother, *"Tu medi changi maa haen, Tu aadi hosain k ae heroini hy, wazan cha k dhasi te mar posi, sadi jan chut waisi"*. [You are strange mother, you were thinking that I (*heroini*) am intoxicated; and when I will carry weight, I may fall down and could die, and you will then be free and happy].

Pawolee

As is already given that *pawolee* is basically the landless low graded cast as well as class in the society. People normally think and believe that *pawolee* are generally foolish people by birth. Even in the society, people associate every sensible person as belonging to *pawolee* if he or she may commit any foolish mistake. They will invoke the other as, *pawolee ta nahn tu'* (Are you belong to *pawolee*, if you are saying like). It means society does not expect any serious, mature, rational and intelligible remarks from *Pawolees*. The funny story regarding the *Pawolees* is representing the rationality behind using *Pawolees* as referent for humour.

Pawolees and the Nawab Sahb (land honour)

The humorist argued that, *pawolees* have their own rational thinking and behavior. He narrated a funny tale regarding the *pawolee* tribe. According to tale: Once *pawolee* tribe was living under the reign of *nawab sahib*; meanwhile the *nawab's* wife died and his subjects were visiting the *nawab* for condolence on the death of his wife. The *pawolee* tribe also thought that, it should also visit *nawab* palace for condolence. The meeting held among *pawolees* and the chief of *pawolees* lead the delegation towards *nawab* palace.

On the way, one old man was beating his son. The chief of the *pawolee* tribe went to that old man and forbade him to beat his son. The old man replied that who he (the chief) is asking him (the old man) about beating son. Upon this reply, the chief convinced that old man that, he also consider that boy as his own son, therefore he cannot bear this oppression. The old man realized his mistake, convinced by chief's persuasion, and stopped beating son. Everyone in *pawolees* tribe also applauded the chief's convincing power.

One old man among them suggested the tribe to put some iron cage upon the mouth of chief so that he may not lose all his golden words in the way because that are needed while

talking to nawab sahib. Therefore, the tribe people acted upon the advice of that old man.

However, the delegation reached the house of *Nawab sahib* and started condoling to *Nawab sahib* upon the death of his wife. Meanwhile, the *Nawab sahib* asked the *pawolees*, “Why have you put the iron cage upon the mouth of your chief? The *pawolees* replied that as the chief was losing his golden words on the way, so we decided to put the iron cage upon his mouth to save words to talk to you.

Nawab sahib became happy and suggested them to put off the cage so that he might be able to listen those golden words.

Therefore, after putting off the iron cage, the chief started talking with the *nawab sahib*.

Sir, we whole tribe is here for the condolence upon the death of your wife. We all consider her as our own wife.

Upon listening such condolence, *nawab sahib* ordered the *pawolees* to put iron cage upon the mouth of chief because he (the chief) actually was losing golden words, the *nawab* sarcastically remarked.

Unemployed or Idle Persons

In the village *Sanjar Pur*, interestingly the youth's those members who are unemployed or idle become the target of humour repeatedly. Every individual generally and old age persons of the village particularly make fun of those unemployed youth. However, such humour is not always to ridicule them but mostly it is done to rectify their behavior in rather pleasant mode. Similarly, the reason of creating humour against the idle persons is to give them the message that the status of unemployed and idleness is unreal and un-natural.

Humour linked with youth idleness is normally imbedded in those activities linking with vagabond nature and obsessed way of finding the opportunities of making love. The old man and of course the humorists try to address such

matters with the emblematic and abstract ways due to sensitivity of subject.

During the fieldwork, one old man sitting in the tea-stall started criticizing the youth that these days, the youth is just eating three time meal without doing anything along with thinking about sex (*lan mondhey te chai wadin.....they (youth) have taken penis on shoulder. It means they are ever ready to make love. He blamed on media, mobile and movies for articulating such behavior. Upon these criticisms, the people sitting in the café were laughing and laughing. The reason is that they all understood that the old man was saying right and he was addressing the matter rather in comic way.*

Sexually Passionate Person

Generally, precise within sex and age group humour is normally targeted towards seemingly sexually passionate persons. In the males, as is already said, sometimes old man criticizes the youth for indulging into masturbation, homosexual and heterosexual legitimate as well as illegitimate sexual activities. However, such criticism and discussion related with sexually oriented humour in females is reserved across the age group.

During my fieldwork, one day, a seemingly witty old man sitting in the hotel turned to a man on his own, on the other side of the room and provoked. "*Tu dassa k kidahin tu apni run te charhiya hoven te teda lan na khara thia hovey*" [Have you ever failed to get an erection when you've been to bed with your woman?]. Everyone sitting in the hotel laughed. The targeted man, however, avoided giving a direct answer. Rather he attacked that aged man and said, "Are you asking that because you yourself have become impotent now?"

Again there raised a roar of laughing. The old man ridiculed that man and said, '*ae even thi vaindaide aksar assan kehra har vely kushte khadi wade hondun*' [it occasionally happens because we have not eaten Viagra all the time). Every

one again laughed in the hotel. Another person sitting laughed and remarks that I often see you sitting by the side of Hakeem (botanical medical practitioners). This is routine matter people generally ask each other such embarrassing questions about each other's sex lives while sitting at hotel or in meetings where there are no female presentation.

Similarly, another famous *bulliar* attacked the youth for excessive masturbation. He turned to a young man and asked him. O' young man! Have you purchased the washing machine or you are still washing your clothes on hand? Actually, impliedly the meanings of washing machine here is women, and the washing of clothes on hand is masturbation. The argument implicitly means that whether that young man has married to women or was just passing his time by masturbating.

This argument/criticism brought forth the laughing roar among the sitting listeners. The targeted young man replied in the same coin that the poor man could only wash clothes on hand. People laughed again on such response.

Female Gender

Female gender is actually matter of discussion whenever two male individuals meet each other. Mostly people abuse each other in rather humorous way. The youth consider abusing each other as sense of humour. They start abusing each other whenever and wherever they meet. The youth often like to discuss as well as make fun and get amused with sexual conversation about female sexuality and sometime cut joke on each other with subject of homosexuality. With all these sexual conversation, they intend to show intimacy and frankness with each other.

One of my respondent identified that such frankness determines their intimacy and strong friendship and vice versa. Some of jokes shared by my respondent, of the age of 40 and resident of village Sanjar Pur are as under:

A & B were travelling around and on their way they saw a man carrying a double load of clay pots. *A* asked *B* if he could make those pots break themselves. *B* asked how it can be possible. Then *A* put off his cap, took it in his hand, and just ran by that man. The man asked *A* why he was running. *A* said, "Don't you see, the sky is catching fire? Then the man looked up and as he did so, the rope, which he had stretched against his forehead, got loose, making all his earthen pots fall to the ground and break into pieces. Then the two friends giggled and proceeded further.

Later they came across a man and his wife. Then *B* asked *A* if he could cause a quarrel among those two men. *A* asked *B* how can it be possible? Therefore, *B* called the man's wife and whispered to her, "I am whispering and the whisper has no meaning. By saying this, he went away. The woman got angry and went back to where her husband was. Her husband asked her what *B* had told her. She replied, "Nothing. So her husband got angry with her. He thought that Mr. *B* must be her lover. Therefore, they started quarreling. Again, the two friends laughed merrily and went on their way.

Sometime later, they came to a field where some girls were weeding. Then Mr. *A* asked *B* whether he could make a girl eat dung. *B* said, "Let me see how you will do it." Then *A* went and stopped at a spot in the field where the girls would have to come in the course of weeding. At that spot, he put some stone chips, put some dung on that, and covered them with earth. Then one of the girls, in the course of weeding, touched the dung... She at once shook her hand, which struck against the stone chips. These hurt her and she instantly raised her hurt finger to her mouth. The two friends laughed heartily and went on.

Marginalized Segment of Society

It is already said that humour and jokes are sometimes directed towards marginalized class or castes of society to show self-

superiority over others. Although, many types of above mentioned targeted communities come under this fold of marginalized segment of society, however, the jokes on *pawolees* and *kirarh* are specifically the targeted marginalized segment of society. It is clear from a joke told by master *Qayyum* about a socially lower class called *kirarh* (they are basically Hindu and known to produce vulgar humour).

According to joke, one day *Lala kirarh* was going somewhere on his donkey. On his way, some persons came and asked him for his donkey.

Kirarh asked them, "Why do you need donkey?"

Persons replied that they wanted to fuck the donkey.

Upon such reply, *Lala Kirarh* started beating his donkey with shoes by considering donkey as the sister of those persons and said sarcastically; damn it! I was taking you to your bride's home and here your brothers are already out to fuck you.

People become very ashamed and departed the next moment.....

Actually, Master *Qayyum* also belongs to humorous specialist class called *Bulliar*. He knows the fun of creating humour within cultural context. He uses such type of examples in figurative sense to identify the evils of contemporary time.

Conclusion:

Multifold study of the humour in the social context is really interesting as well as a new sphere for manifestation of the social issues. The significance of the humour in the society cannot be negated but it not only provides a space for the people of the particular society to have fun through the humour as well as it is a social source to highlights the social issues. Through the positive criticism by the humor in the society not only highlights the social issues of the certain society but it also provides a silent solution to eradicate the social issues like

manipulation of the masses through power relations, unemployment and drug addiction.

Social relations are very central to understand the nature of the humour in the society. Humour is not an act of individual but it is an act of group so that the nature of social relations is very important. In the context of particular society the web of social relations is mostly influence by the powerful members of the society like clergymen and landlord class and in the same way the identity of the feminine is also constructed through such classes. Through Humour these discursive roles are highlighted. Through humour the sense of social equality has been introduced. Similarly others social issues like unemployment and the role of people who run away to do work in the society is also highlighted through the humour. Positive criticism in the sense of humour not highlights these social issues but it also provide a solution to eradicate these social issues in particular socio-cultural context.

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