

Tanveer Sipra: A Study Of Resistance, Protest And Voice Of Labourer

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eISSN:3005-3757

pISSN: 3005-3765

Received: 27-07-2025

Accepted: 22-09-2025

Online: 29-09-2025



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ABSTRACT: This study examines Tanveer Sipra's poetry as a powerful means of expressing political opposition and the working class's voice in modern Urdu literature. A lesser-known but influential progressive poet, Sipra stands out as a voice for underrepresented workers whose opinions are frequently left out of the mainstream literary conversation. Through a close textual analysis of his selected poems, this study investigates the themes of class struggle, economic injustice, and systemic oppression. Anchored in a Marxist and postcolonial framework, the paper highlights how Sipra uses metaphor, symbolism, and vernacular idiom to critique feudalism, capitalist exploitation, and authoritarian regimes. The study contends that Sipra not only upholds but also radicalizes the Urdu tradition of resistance poetry by emphasizing the lived realities of both rural and urban laborers, placing his work alongside such luminaries as Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Habib Jalib. The paper concludes that Sipra's poetic voice serves as both a record and a rallying cry for the oppressed, making his contribution vital to the corpus of resistance literature in South Asia.

KEYWORDS: Tanveer Sipra, poetry, resistance, protest, laborer.

Tanveer Sipra, whose real name was Muhammad Hayat and pen name “Tanveer” belonged to the Sipra clan. He was born in .Darapur, a village in Punjab, Pakistan's Jhelum district, in 1932. Coming from a poor family, he faced financial hardships early in life, which compelled him to begin working as a laborer soon after ,completing his basic education. Following the creation of Pakistan he spent ten years doing manual labor in Karachi. Later, he ran a small grocery shop in Jhelum for about two years. In 1959, he joined the Tobacco Company in Jhelum, where he continued his ,professional life. Tanveer Sipra passed away on December 13 in Islamabad. Lafz Khurdary” (Rough Words), his sole ,1993 published poetry collection, demonstrates his profound empathy for .the plight of the working class

دن بھر تو بچوں کی خاطر میں مزدوری کرتا ہوں
رات کو اپنی غیر مکمل غزلیں پوری کرتا ہوں
آج بھی سپرا اس کی خوشبو مل مالک لے جاتا ہے
میں لوہے کی ناف سے پیدا جو کستوری کرتا ہوں

All day I labor for the sake of my children
And at night, I complete my unfinished ghazals
Even today, Sipra—its fragrance is claimed by"
,the master
”.Though it is I who turn iron’s navel into musk

(1)

This couplet is rich with metaphor. The speaker(likely a laborer) claims that although the beauty or product (fragrance) of his labor is taken by the master (employer/owner) it is he ,(the worker) who toils and transforms raw, harsh material (iron’s navel) into something precious and rare (musk).

Standing up against oppression is a mark of the courageous, and this trait was present in Tanveer Sipra to the highest degree. This facet of his personality is evident in his poetry. He was one of the founding members of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) ,in Jhelum .and he saw the party win multiple elections during his lifetime. However, he never pursued any kind of personal benefit, not even a rupee.

Just as resistance was a defining feature of his poetry, through which he deeply inspired the masses, his life was an even stronger example of practical resistance. Whenever he saw injustice, his nature could not tolerate silence; he would immediately raise his voice in protest regardless of the consequences or any personal benefit that might be at stake

Tanveer Sipra was among the founding members of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). He became the voice of the working class at party gatherings and political rallies. He effectively conveyed the hardships and tribulations of the oppressed classes in his poetry. This is why, when we read his verses, they do not seem like the personal emotions of a single individual. Rather, they resonate as the collective voice of thousands of laborers giving poetic form to their shared pain, hopes, and resistance

کتنا بعد ہے میرے فن اور پیشے کے مابین
باہر دانش در ہوں لیکن مل میں آئل مین
How great the distance between my art and my
profession
,Outside, I am a man of intellect; inside the mill
an oilman. (2)

مل مالک کے کتے بھی چربیلے ہیں
لیکن مزدوروں کے چہرے پیلے ہیں
کل بھی میرے آگے ظلم کے پریت تھے
آج بھی میری راہ میں جبر کے ٹیلے ہیں
Even the mill owner's dogs are well-fed
But the workers' faces remain pale
Yesterday, mountains of oppression stood
before me
Today, the path is still lined with dunes of
tyranny. (3)

Tanveer Sipra contrasts the luxury of the exploiters with the suffering of the workers in this potent stanza through the use of stark imagery. While the pale faces of the workers represent exhaustion, hunger, and economic injustice, the mill owner's dogs stand for luxury and privilege. The final two lines reinforce the continuity of systemic oppression: yesterday's struggles have not faded, and today's realities remain equally harsh, only changing form from



,mountains" to "dunes"—from massive obstacles to persistent grinding hardships

Tanveer Sipra maintains a resolute attitude and a firm, unyielding position. He demands his rights with exceptional courage and clarity. In his own words

مزدور ہوں محنت کا صلہ مانگ رہا ہوں
حق دیجئے خیرات نہیں چاہیے مجھ کو
I am a laborer, asking for the reward of my toil
Give me my right, not your charity (4)

The dignified defiance of a worker who refuses to be reduced to a passive object of sympathy is embodied in this verse. Sipra asserts his legitimate claim to recompense and respect, rejecting the idea of charity in lieu of justice. His poetry gives voice to the silenced laborer—the one whose demands are often crushed by ruthless employers and authoritarian regimes

Yet, when such a voice is strangled and suppressed, it transforms into poetic resistance. Sipra writes

اور مجھے مت خوش فہمی کی لاحاصل جاگیریں دے
یا یہ سنے واپس لے لے یا ان کی تعبیریں دے
,Do not offer me the false estates of delusion
Either take back these dreams—or give them
their meanings(5)

Here, dreams symbolize hope, justice, and self-actualization—all of which remain unfulfilled under systems of oppression. The poet is not content with empty promises or idealistic illusions; he demands either true fulfillment or an honest end to deception. This blend of personal voice and collective protest is what makes Sipra's poetry a compelling part of Urdu resistance literature

Tanveer Sipra was a fervent supporter of human dignity, peace, and love in addition to being an advocate for workers' rights. He was fully conscious that his poetry delivered a revolutionary message to his nation. He frequently used resentment and protest against the prevailing ideologies and social mores of his era in order to achieve this. Sipra's voice sparked movement during a time when the

country was engulfed in indifference and stagnation, enlightening .the conscience of the oppressed masses as well as the ruling class He reminded people that change was possible, offering hope to .those living in extreme poverty—particularly to those in the slums He proclaims the dawn of revolution and inspires hope in one of his :potent poetic declarations

اونچے اونچے کاخ گرے گے دھول اڑے گی لائوں میں
اب کے ایسی جنگ چھڑے گی جھگیوں اور ایوانوں میں
اے جاگیروں کے مختارو! اب وہ لمحے دور نہیں
سرخ پھیرے لہرائیں گے جب کھیتوں کھلیانوں میں
ان لوگوں کے جسموں کے بھی ٹکڑے ہونے والے ہیں
دھرتی کو جو بانٹ چکے ہیں چھوٹے چھوٹے خانوں میں
Lofty palaces will crumble, dust will rise in
,manicured lawns
This time, a war will erupt—between the slums
.and the mansions
O masters of estates! Those days are not far
,now
When red flags will wave across fields and
.farmlands
—Even the bodies of those will be torn apart
Who have carved the earth into tiny private
plots (6)

These verses are vivid, symbolic, and incendiary. They predict a ,radical upheaval, a clash between the oppressors and the oppressed and express Sipra's vision of redistribution, justice, and hope. The red flags” signify revolution, possibly a reference to socialist“ ideology, while the “slums and mansions” contrast the extremes of poverty and privilege. The final line is particularly fierce—it warns that even those who have fragmented the land for their greed will .not be spared

This section demonstrates how Sipra's poetry combines lyrical force, human compassion, and visionary politics, securing him a .special place in the canon of Urdu resistance poetry

In his poems, Tanveer Sipra adopts the voice of a plundered traveler someone who has nothing left to lose and no fear left to feel. His tone is bold and defiant—he is prepared to snatch his rights from the hands of tyrants, landlords, employers, and factory owners. When the ruling class shamelessly robs the poor, snatching even the last morsel from their mouths, fear ceases to matter. In such circumstances, when all dignity and security are stripped away, a person becomes fearless—not because of bravery alone, but because they have nothing left to lose.

"This state of mind is powerfully portrayed in his poem "Sarguzasht :("The Tale")

مجھ پہ ہر آن رئیسوں کا غضب ٹوٹا ہے
مجھ کو ہر دور میں لوٹا خداوندوں نے ہے
میرا ہر عہد میں آجر نے لہو چوسا ہے
مجھ پر ڈھائے ہیں ستم بن کے خدا بندوں نے
At every moment, the wrath of the rich has
,rained upon me
.In every era, the lords have plundered me
In every age, my employer has sucked my
,blood
And men have oppressed me in the name of God
(7)

The speaker in these verses is not a lone victim but rather a representation of the downtrodden working class throughout history, reflecting a long history of exploitation. Sipra does more than just complain; he calls out the brutality of structural injustice, and denounces the phony sanctity of those in positions of authority, including those who use authority or religion to defend oppression.

This fearless tone and unwavering refusal to submit mark Sipra's poetry as a significant contribution to resistance literature in Urdu where poetry becomes a form of political struggle and personal liberation.

Deep distress over class differences and the psychological suffering they cause the oppressed is reflected in Tanveer Sipra's poetry. The



poet is restless and aware of systemic injustices because injustice .and exploitation are ever-present

One of the most provocative and bold aspects of Sipra's work is his criticism of deceptive religious agents—those who exploit faith to pacify the poor while securing luxury for themselves. In this, Sipra's critique resonates strongly with Karl Marx's view of religion as an instrument of control used by the elite to suppress class .consciousness

:In several poems, Sipra directly targets these religious opportunists

چند عیاروں نے کچھ فرضی خدا خلق کیے
اور پھر اپنی ہی مخلوق کے اوتار بنے
,A few deceivers invented imaginary gods
Then became incarnations of their own
creations (8)

,These lines expose the constructed nature of religious authority where the elite fabricate belief systems only to become its unquestioned interpreters and beneficiaries. The critique becomes :sharper

میری دانش پہ عقائد کے بٹھا کر پہرے
میرے گھر بار کے خود مالک و مختار بنے
,They placed guards of belief over my intellect
And claimed ownership of my home and life (9)

This verse demonstrates how faith is used as a weapon to legitimize material exploitation, which is a profoundly Marxist idea of ideology supporting class power, in addition to manipulating .thought

:Sipra continues

مجھ کو ان لوگوں نے دوزخ کے ڈراوے دے کر
میری محنت کا صلہ وقف کیا اپنے لیے
They frightened me with hell to claim my labor's
,reward



They showed me dreams of paradise, while
building their own here on earth (10)

Here, heaven becomes a tool of distraction—a false promise used to justify the withholding of justice in this world. The poet condemns the way these agents deny the poor both worldly comfort .and spiritual agency

In an especially potent critique of political-religious authority, he :writes

میں نے جس وقت بھی محنت کا صلہ مانگا ہے
مجھ کو مرعوب کیا شوکت شاہی نے وہیں
میں نے روٹی کے لیے جب بھی زباں کھولی ہے
میرے ہونٹوں کو سیا ظل الہی نے وہیں
Whenever I asked for the reward of my labor
They silenced me with royal grandeur
,Whenever I opened my mouth for bread
My lips were stitched shut by divine shadows
(11)

The horrific imagery of stitched lips and divine oppression demonstrates how censorship, intimidation, and spiritual .manipulation are used by those in positions of power

But Sipra does not leave the reader in despair In the end, his poetry turns into a call to action, imploring the downtrodden to regain their :autonomy

گر مجھے زیست سہولت سے بسر کرنی ہے
اپنی خوابیدہ اناؤں کو جگانا ہوگا
گر مجھے اپنی مشقت کا ثمر لینا ہے
دہر سے جھوٹے خداؤں کو مٹانا ہوگا
,If I am to live a life of dignity
.I must awaken my sleeping pride
,If I am to receive the fruit of my labor
I must erase these false gods from the
earth (12)

This conclusion is revolutionary because it demands resistance, self-awareness, and the overthrow of ideological authority. Sipra's poetic voice thus moves beyond mere protest—it offers a vision for .emancipation rooted in truth, justice, and collective action

,The oppression in Palestine has affected people across the world and the Palestinian issue has remained a subject in every form of literature. Writers and poets, in their own ways, have always condemned this injustice. In the modern era, creators in every genre continue to raise their voices in resistance against this tyranny and .violence

Tanveer Sipra is a poet of resistance who raised his voice against injustice faced by all classes of society, and that same voice emerges powerfully when addressing the issue of Palestine. He has poetically expressed the bloodshed in Gaza, the cries and sighs of innocent .children, and the assaults on human dignity

Tanveer Sipra poses a compelling question: Why does the devastation of Palestine continue to be met with nothing more than hollow statements? As Israel descends below the bounds of humanity and surpasses every limit of brutality, the anguished people of Gaza still await meaningful action from the global community. What more must the world witness before it chooses to — act? What act of cruelty will finally serve as the breaking point ?the moment that stirs our conscience from its slumber

Our flower-like children are held at the tip of a dagger, our daughters' veils are being torn to shreds, and we continue to preach ?peace. Are we even worthy of being called courageous

عرب کی سرزمین کا ذرہ ذرہ چنچ اٹھا ہے
ہماری بیٹیوں کی آبرو ریزی کے چرچے ہیں
مگر ہم ہیں کہ اب تک اک سکوت مرگ طاری ہے
ہمارے پھول سے بچے ہیں زیر خنجر اعدا
مگر ہم ہیں کہ اب تک امن ہی کا ورد جاری ہے
بلاوے دے رہی ہیں ہچکیاں معصوم بچوں کی



سہ ماہی ”تحقیق و تجزیہ“ (جلد 3، شمارہ: 3)، جولائی تا ستمبر 2025ء

اٹھو اور مرکز صیہونیت لاشوں سے بھر ڈالو
ہماری بیٹیوں کی سسکیاں یہ ہم سے کہتی ہیں
بڑھو سارے زمانے کا سکوں برباد کر ڈالو
.Every grain of Arab soil is crying out in agony
The dishonoring of our daughters is being spoken
.of everywhere
.And yet, we remain shrouded in a deadly silence
Our flower-like children lie beneath the enemy's
,dagger
And still, we continue to chant the mantra of
.peace
The sobs of innocent children are calling out to
— us
Rise, and flood the center of Zionism with
!corpses
— The cries of our daughters are telling us
Advance, and destroy the peace of this entire
!world (13)

In short, Tanveer Sipra is among those poets who rose above personal gain and loss to raise their voice against exploitation and oppression. His resistance is powerfully reflected in his poems and ghazals. He wove the suffocation he felt within into a string of rough, unpolished words, expressing it with raw honesty



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