

HISTORICAL PORTRAIT OF SHIITES AND SUNNIS IN IRAQ IN THE POEM "NACHNU SYA'BUN LAA YASTACHII": A LITERARY SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Saddam Reza Hamidi^{1*}, Dihyat Haniful Fawad²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: saddamreza28@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The poem "Nachnu Sya'ibun Laa Yastachii" by Ahmad Numaini serves as a socio-historical critique, reflecting sectarian tensions and political dynamics in Iraq. This study explores two primary aspects: first, how the poem reflects the socio-political context of Iraq during its composition, and second, its portrayal of Shiite history as interpreted by the poet. Employing a qualitative research methodology with Alan Swingewood's literary sociology approach, this study analyzes the poem's use of historical symbolism, particularly the Karbala tragedy, to critique patterns of betrayal and disunity within the Muslim community. The findings reveal that the poem functions as both a reflection of its era and a critique of contemporary socio-political conditions. This study highlights the role of literature in documenting and critiquing historical and societal phenomena, reinforcing its relevance as a medium for social commentary.

الملخص

يُعدُّ الشعر "نحن شعب لا يستحي" لأحمد النعيمي نقدًا اجتماعيًا وتاريخيًا يعكس التوترات الطائفية والديناميات السياسية في العراق. تستكشف هذه الدراسة جانبين رئيسيين: أولاً، كيفية انعكاس السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي للعراق خلال فترة تأليف الشعر، وثانياً، تصويره للتاريخ الشيعي كما فهمه الشاعر. باستخدام منهجية البحث النوعي مع مقارنة سوسيولوجيا الأدب لآلان سوينجود، تحلل هذه الدراسة استخدام الرموز التاريخية في الشعر، خاصة مأساة كربلاء، لنقد أنماط الخيانة والانقسامات داخل المجتمع الإسلامي. وتكشف النتائج أن الشعر يُعدُّ مرآة تعكس عصره وفي الوقت ذاته نقداً للأوضاع الاجتماعية والسياسية المعاصرة. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على دور الأدب في توثيق ونقد الظواهر التاريخية والاجتماعية، مما يعزز أهميته كوسيلة للتعليق الاجتماعي.

INTRODUCTION

The poem "Nachnu Sya'ibun Laa Yastachii" by Ahmad Nuaimi is a remarkable literary work known for its exceptional grammatical construction. However, it sparked controversy in Iraq and Iran due to its depiction of historical events, particularly its portrayal of alleged Shiite betrayals against Muslims. This controversy reflects the sensitivity surrounding the sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis, which has shaped Iraq's socio-political landscape.

Ahmad Nuaimi's poem addresses themes of betrayal and oppression, which are central to the historical tension between these two sectarian groups. According to Ali (2005), literary works are not solely born from the imagination of their authors but are also

deeply rooted in historical realities. Nuaimi's work aligns with this perspective, using poetry as a medium to document and critique the socio-political conditions of his time.

The conflict between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq has historical roots but intensified following the U.S. invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. The poem critiques the perceived role of Shiites in this period of upheaval, emphasizing the struggles faced by Sunni communities under the new political order. This theme resonates with the observations of Rani Dwi Kurniawati (2015), who noted that power struggles and political discrimination drove the Sunni-Shia conflict in post-Saddam Iraq.

The poem "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" reflects the socio-political realities of its era, making it an ideal subject for analysis through Alan Swingewood's literary sociology theory. Swingewood (1972) views literature as a social mirror, capturing societal phenomena and historical conditions. This theoretical framework enables a deeper understanding of the poem's relationship with its historical and cultural context.

This study aims to explore two key questions: (1) How does the poem "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" reflect the socio-political context of Iraq during its composition? (2) What historical elements of Shiite-Sunni relations are portrayed in the poem? These questions will be addressed using a qualitative descriptive approach and an interpretive paradigm, focusing on the socio-historical aspects embedded in the text.

The sectarian divide between Shiites and Sunnis has long been a source of tension in Iraq, with roots tracing back to early Islamic history. However, as Humaini (2019) highlights, modern political developments, including the Iranian revolution, have further exacerbated this divide. The poem integrates historical symbolism, such as the tragedy of Karbala, to illustrate the enduring impact of sectarian conflicts on Iraqi society.

The diction and metaphorical language used in the poem amplify its critique of sectarianism. For instance, the phrase "the largest human zoo" symbolizes moral and social degradation, while references to historical events underscore the cyclical nature of betrayal and conflict. This aligns with Wahyuningsih (2015), who emphasized the power of symbolism in literary works to reflect social realities.

Methodologically, this research employs data triangulation to ensure the validity of findings. Primary data are drawn from the poem itself, while secondary data include books, articles, and scientific journals. This approach follows the guidelines set by Moleong (2001) for qualitative research, ensuring that the analysis is both systematic and comprehensive.

Previous studies using Swingewood's theory provide valuable insights into the role of literature as a reflection of its time. For example, Putra (2018) analyzed Wiji Thukul's poetry as a social critique of its era, while Yenti (2021) examined the portrayal of the Mentawai community in literature. These studies highlight the applicability of literary sociology in uncovering the social dimensions of literary works.

The interpretive paradigm adopted in this study prioritizes understanding the relationship between literature, history, and society. As Suwardi (2011) notes, sociology of literature emphasizes the interplay between social factors and literary production, viewing literature as both a reflection of and a response to societal dynamics.

This research acknowledges the limitations inherent in literary analysis, particularly when dealing with controversial subjects. While the poem offers a perspective on Sunni-Shia relations, it is important to consider alternative narratives to provide a more balanced understanding. Recognizing these limitations ensures that the analysis remains objective and academically rigorous.

In conclusion, this study situates Ahmad Nuaimi's "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" within the framework of literary sociology, using it as a case study to explore the intersection of literature, history, and social critique. By examining the poem's themes and historical references, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of literature in documenting and influencing socio-political realities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the researcher examines Alan Swingewood's literary sociology theory as applied to the poem "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" by Ahmad Nuaimi, an Iraqi poet. The poem critiques socio-political tensions in Iraq and presents a controversial perspective on Shiite-Sunni relations. Nuaimi was executed under Iranian-influenced governance on December 29, 2015, which adds a layer of historical context to his work. This analysis focuses on Swingewood's three theoretical elements: literature as a reflection of the times, literature as a product of the authorial process, and literature in relation to history.

The poem "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" provides insights into the historical depiction of Shiite-Sunni dynamics using Swingewood's literary sociology framework. The researcher identifies the following aspects:

Literature as a Reflection of the Times

مبروك... عراقنا أكبر حديقة حيوان بشرية حكومتها إيرانية تحكم قطعانا عراقية

Congratulations... Iraq, is now the world's largest human zoo, the Iranian government controls Iraq.

This stanza metaphorically describes Iraq as "the world's largest human zoo," critiquing the socio-political climate under Shiite-majority rule. The poet uses this analogy to express his perception of moral and social degradation, which he attributes to the alleged betrayal of Shiites against Sunni Muslims. While the metaphor is provocative, it reflects the poet's perspective rather than an objective historical fact, emphasizing the tensions and divisions within Iraqi society.

In 2015, Iraq experienced significant political shifts, with increased influence from Iranian-backed governance following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. During Saddam Hussein's rule, Iraq was predominantly governed by Sunnis, but after his overthrow, power transitioned to the Shiite majority, leading to socio-political tensions. These shifts exacerbated long-standing divisions, as governmental policies were perceived as favoring Sunni interests, leaving other groups, including Shiites, feeling marginalized.

The poem "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" reflects the deep socio-political conflict in Iraq. As Rani Dwi Kurniawati (2015) noted, the Sunni-Shia conflict in post-Saddam Iraq stemmed from power struggles and political discrimination under the Nouri al-Maliki regime. These tensions not only disrupted daily life but also became prominent themes in literary works.

In a broader context, Humaini (2019) highlighted that modern political events, such as the Iranian revolution, have reignited Sunni-Shia conflicts in the Middle East. The poem employs historical symbolism, including references to the tragedy of Karbala, to illustrate the enduring impact of sectarianism on Iraqi society.

As Siswanto and Furoidatul Husniah (2019) explained, Alan Swingewood's sociological theory of literature views literary works as socio-cultural documents reflecting societal conditions. In "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*," Ahmad Nuaimi utilizes sharp, critical language to portray the socio-political tensions of his era, reinforcing the role of literature as a mirror of its time.

The phrase "حديقة حيوان" creates a vivid metaphor that symbolizes moral and social degradation in Iraq. This imagery reflects the poet's critique of socio-political conditions, particularly under Shiite-dominated governance, as interpreted in the poem. The use of figurative language, including the central metaphor "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*" (We Are a Shameless Nation), underscores social irony and highlights perceived injustices in Iraq, particularly after the United States invasion. The repetition of "we are a shameless nation"

amplifies the emotional tone and reinforces the central theme of societal self-criticism.

The stanza's free structure, unbound by a rhyme scheme, mirrors the chaos and instability of the times. This structural choice enhances the relevance of the poem's social critique. The irregular rhythm complements the poet's assertive tone, functioning as a protest against political systems and societal divisions in Iraq.

The poem addresses sectarian conflict and betrayal as its core themes, portraying them as not merely religious issues but also as political, social, and cultural challenges that continue to shape Iraqi society. By emphasizing these themes, the poet critiques the destructive impact of internal divisions within the nation and religion, presenting a powerful commentary on the long-standing sectarian tensions.

The poem's aesthetic appeal lies in its bold use of sharp metaphors and potent symbolism to deliver social criticism. The direct and accessible language enhances its effectiveness, aligning with Putra (2018), who suggests that poetry serves as a medium to express social truths through evocative literary expressions.

Numaini employs striking metaphors, such as the "human zoo," to articulate his social critique. Wahyuningsih (2015) observes that poetry often strengthens its aesthetic and symbolic value by reflecting social realities with sharp and meaningful language. This aligns with Adriyanti et al. (2021), who demonstrate how symbolism and metaphor in poetry effectively convey social phenomena.

Literature as a Production Process of Authorship

على مر التاريخ لسان وأقلام الشيعة ضد الكفار بزعمهم وقلوبهم معهم
بينما لسانهم وأقلامهم وسيوفهم في صدور المسلمين السنة
هذا هو الغزو الفكري الحقيقي للسائل عنه
ولو أرينا سرد جميع الحقائق لاحتاج الأمر مجلدات

Throughout history, Shiite pens were used to fight the Kuffar with the claims they made, while their hearts were with the Kuffar.

As for the Shia's words and their pens as well as their swords, they are aimed at the breasts of the Muslims.

This is the real war of thoughts for those who ask.

If we sort the existing facts, then it would require volumes of paper.

The stanza above illustrates the poet's motivation for writing the poem, reflecting his critique of Shiite groups within the context of historical and contemporary conflicts. According to the poet, the "war of thoughts" metaphorically represents ideological and political struggles within the Muslim community, where the author accuses certain Shiite factions of actions he perceives as betrayals against Sunni Muslims. This perspective aligns with the author's broader intent to use the poem as a medium for social critique.

Through these verses, the poet conveys a sense of disillusionment with what he interprets as ideological inconsistencies among Shiite groups. The metaphor of "pens and swords aimed at Muslims" symbolizes the poet's view of internal divisions within Islam as deeply damaging to unity. The poem serves as a response to these perceived betrayals, emphasizing the author's desire to address these issues through literary expression.

This critical stance reflects Swinewood's theory of literature as a product of the authorial process, where the author's personal and sociopolitical experiences shape the creation of the text. The poem encapsulates the poet's attempt to document his perspective on sectarian conflicts, using powerful language and metaphor to convey his concerns.

However, it is essential to interpret these claims as reflective of the author's subjective perspective rather than objective historical facts.

قسماً نحن شعب لا يستحي
نحن قطاع الطرق وخونة الدار
نهدر دم المسلم ونهجم على الجار
نعتمر عمائم بيضاء وسوداء وما تحتها عار

*Really..! We are indeed a nation that has no shame
We are robbers and traitors in our own home
We spill Muslim blood and then we blame it on our neighbors
We wear white and black turbans, but they contain nothing more than something
embarrassing*

The stanza above illustrates the poet's critique of what he perceives as moral and social failures within Iraqi society, particularly in the context of sectarian dynamics. The metaphorical expression "a nation that has no shame" reflects the poet's disillusionment with societal divisions and internal conflicts. By using the imagery of "white and black turbans" to signify religious leaders, the poet critiques hypocrisy and betrayal as perceived in his socio-political environment.

Maulana (2019) observes that power dynamics in the Middle East, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran, significantly shape the construction of Sunni and Shia identities through social narratives. In this context, Numaini's poetry exemplifies how literature serves as a medium for resisting political domination and highlighting sectarian struggles.

Numaini's poem was written during a period of perceived political dominance by Shiite factions in Iraq after the US invasion. Reflecting the experiences of Sunni groups, this work aligns with Kholis (2021), who notes that literary works often mirror the socio-political experiences of their authors, including criticism of perceived injustices. This perspective aligns with Swingewood's theory that literature is deeply connected to its socio-political context.

The diction in phrases such as "نهدر دم المسلم" reflects the poet's sense of betrayal, resonating with his identity as part of the Sunni community. Similarly, the figurative language in "لسان وأقلام الشيعة ضد الكفار بزعمهم وقلوبهم معهم" critiques what the poet views as ideological inconsistency. Through repetition and irony, the poet delivers a sharp critique of the socio-political dominance he perceives.

The poem's narrative structure reflects a progression of emotions, moving from pain and disappointment to anger and protest. Its irregular rhythm symbolizes spontaneity, emphasizing the poet's urgent response to socio-political conditions.

Persona-wise, the poet assumes the collective voice of the Sunni community, making the poem both personal and representative of broader sectarian discontent. The sharp and sarcastic tone reflects a rejection of perceived hypocrisy and disillusionment with political and religious leadership.

The artistic value of this poem lies in its ability to address controversial issues with simple yet impactful language. The work showcases Numaini's creative process, shaped by his personal experiences and social environment, making it a compelling example of how literature serves as both reflection and critique of its time.

Literature in relation to history

ألسنا من بايع الحسين ثم خناه؟
ألم تكن قلوبنا معه وبسيوفنا ذبحناه؟

*Weren't we the ones who betrayed Al Husain, then we also betrayed him?
Were not our hearts with him, then why were our swords the ones who killed him?*

This stanza reflects the poet's allusion to the tragic events of Karbala, where Hussein bin Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was betrayed and killed. Through this rhetorical questioning, the poet critiques the collective betrayal of Hussein by those who initially pledged allegiance to him but ultimately abandoned him in his time of need. The poet's choice of diction emphasizes the historical weight of these events, framing them as a moral and spiritual failure.

Historically, the events of Karbala unfolded as Hussein responded to letters from the people of Kufa pledging their support for his leadership over Yazid bin Muawiyah. However, upon Hussein's journey to Kufa, many of these supporters abandoned him under pressure from the forces of Ubaidillah bin Ziyad. The betrayal culminated in the Battle of Karbala, where Hussein and his small group of followers faced overwhelming opposition. This history, as symbolized in the poet's verses, underscores themes of betrayal and the consequences of disunity within the Muslim community.

Maulana (2019) argues that the narrative of Karbala continues to shape Sunni and Shia identities in the Middle East, as sectarian tensions are often linked to historical events. The poet's rhetorical questions critique the moral implications of these divisions, connecting the historical betrayal of Hussein to the broader socio-political issues of the poet's time.

This perspective aligns with Swingewood's theory, which sees literature as a medium to reflect and critique historical events and their enduring impact on society. The stanza uses a blend of rhetorical and figurative language to draw parallels between past and present, illustrating the poet's frustration with what he perceives as recurring patterns of betrayal and disunity.

The poet's depiction of Karbala not only serves as a historical commentary but also functions as a critique of contemporary sectarian politics. By invoking the tragedy of Karbala, the poet underscores the destructive nature of division and betrayal within the Muslim community, making the historical narrative relevant to the socio-political realities of his time.

ألم نبكي الحسن بعد أن سممناه؟

Aren't we the ones who cried for Al Hasan after we poisoned him?

This stanza reflects the poet's critique of historical events surrounding Hasan bin Ali's death, portraying it as an act of betrayal. The rhetorical questioning emphasizes the poet's disillusionment with perceived moral and political failures within the Muslim community. Historically, Hasan bin Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, died at the age of 47 in either 49 AH or 50 AH (Katsir, 2014). His death is widely attributed to poisoning, though historical accounts vary regarding the identity of the perpetrator.

Some narratives suggest that Muawiyah ordered Hasan to be poisoned, while others claim that Yazid bin Muawiyah instructed Hasan's wife, Ja'dah bint Al-Asy'ats, to administer poison in exchange for promises of marriage (Katsir, 2014). The poet uses this tragic event as a symbol of betrayal and hypocrisy, framing it as a moral critique rather than a simple

recounting of history.

ألسنا من وإلى علي وفي صلاته طعناه؟

Weren't we the ones who made Ali caliph? Then we were the ones who stabbed him in his prayers!

This stanza critiques the historical contradictions in the treatment of Ali bin Abi Talib, the fourth caliph of Islam and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. The poet uses the rhetorical question to highlight the betrayal of Ali, who was supported as caliph by his followers yet ultimately assassinated. Historically, Ali was killed during morning prayers by Abdurrahman bin Muljam, a member of the Kharijites, a group that opposed his leadership (Buchori, 2009).

While Ali's assassination was not directly attributed to the Shiite community, the poet's verses reflect the broader theme of betrayal and disunity within the Muslim community. Atabik (2015) notes that Ali's followers revered him as the rightful leader, but internal divisions and external pressures led to conflicts that culminated in his tragic death.

The poet's portrayal of Ali's assassination serves as a metaphor for the destructive nature of internal conflicts and divisions within Islam. This aligns with Swingewood's theory, where literature critiques historical events by embedding them in broader social and political contexts. Through this stanza, the poet emphasizes the consequences of disunity, using Ali's death as a poignant example.

قاتلنا إيران مع صدام

وحاربنا مع إيران ضد صدام

*We fight Iran together with Saddam
Then together with Iran we will finish off Saddam*

This stanza critiques the shifting alliances and betrayals in Iraq's political history, particularly during and after the Iran-Iraq War. The poet uses this verse to symbolize the cyclical nature of betrayal and political opportunism in the region. The juxtaposition of "fighting Iran with Saddam" and "finishing off Saddam with Iran" illustrates the poet's disillusionment with political actors who prioritize self-interest over loyalty or ideological consistency.

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), one of the most significant conflicts of the 20th century, exemplifies the intersection of geopolitical, sectarian, and ideological tensions. According to Basundoro (2019), this war was driven not only by border disputes over the Shatt al-Arab but also by the ideological clash between Saddam Hussein's Pan-Arabism and Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of Shia Islamism. This backdrop is critical to understanding the poet's critique of betrayal, as the poem reflects the historical and ongoing sectarian struggles between Sunni and Shia communities.

In post-Saddam Iraq, the shift in power from Sunni dominance to Shia political control further exacerbated sectarian tensions. As Lubis and Dewi (2016) note, these tensions were intensified by foreign interference and sectarian policies after the US invasion. The poet critiques this transformation, portraying it as a continuation of historical betrayals, symbolized by the repeated invocation of the Karbala tragedy.

Numaini employs historical symbolism to emphasize the recurring nature of sectarian

conflicts. The Karbala event, a cornerstone of Shia identity, is used metaphorically to highlight betrayal and disunity within the Muslim community. Muamaroh et al. (2022) argue that such literary works provide valuable insights into historical elements shaping contemporary socio-political conditions, as seen in this poem's emphasis on betrayal as a central theme.

The poem also critiques the socio-political dynamics that have emerged in modern Iraq. By invoking both historical and contemporary events, the poet presents a narrative of cyclical betrayal and power struggles that transcend specific moments in history. The use of sharp diction and irony strengthens the poem's role as a critique of sectarianism and political opportunism, reflecting Swingewood's theory that literature serves as a reflection and critique of its historical context.

The diction of the phrases "ألم نبيكي الحسن بعد أن سممناه" and "ألسنا من والى علي وفي صلواته طعناه" evokes a sense of historical regret, emphasizing the poet's perspective on recurring betrayals in Islamic history. These rhetorical questions serve as powerful tools for the poet to critique moral and political inconsistencies, reflecting the tension between allegiance and betrayal within the Muslim community. The figurative language, particularly the use of historical irony, underscores how the poet views history as a cyclical narrative of disunity and betrayal.

The structure of the poem flows seamlessly from classical historical events, such as the Karbala tragedy, to modern conflicts like the Iran-Iraq War. This transition highlights the continuity of sectarian conflicts over time. The deliberate pacing of the historical sections allows readers to reflect on past events before being confronted with the more intense critique of contemporary issues. The Karbala tragedy functions as a central symbol of betrayal in Islamic history, used by the poet to draw parallels between historical and modern sectarian tensions.

By invoking the Karbala tragedy, the poet strengthens his critique of sectarian divisions. However, rather than presenting the Sunni-Shia conflict solely as a modern issue, the poem frames it as a legacy of historical struggles that persist in shaping contemporary Islamic societies. This dual perspective enriches the poem's thematic depth and underscores its relevance to ongoing socio-political issues.

The aesthetics of the poem lie in its ability to integrate historical narratives with modern socio-political commentary, transforming it into a literary document that is both historically significant and artistically compelling. The innovative fusion of classical Arabic poetic traditions with modern themes of social criticism exemplifies the poet's contribution to contemporary Arabic literature. This blend of tradition and innovation not only enhances the poem's artistic value but also establishes it as a vital commentary on the enduring impact of sectarian conflicts.

CONCLUSION

Alan Swingewood's sociological analysis of literature provides a useful framework for understanding Ahmad Nuaimi's poem "*Nachnu Sya'bun Laa Yastachii*", which critiques socio-political and sectarian tensions in Iraq. The poem reflects the poet's perspective on recurring betrayals and injustices, using historical and rhetorical elements to highlight the complexities of Sunni-Shia relations. Through its vivid imagery and sharp criticism, the poem illustrates how literature serves as a medium for expressing social and historical realities.

This study identifies three components of Swingewood's theory within the poem: literature as a reflection of the times, literature as a product of the authorship process, and literature in relation to history. The poem reflects its socio-historical context by addressing events such as the Karbala tragedy and modern conflicts, illustrating how sectarian divisions continue to shape contemporary Islamic societies. By using rhetorical questions and historical symbolism, the poet critiques patterns of betrayal and disunity within the

Muslim community.

Literary works, as demonstrated in this poem, are not merely products of the author's imagination but are deeply rooted in historical and social realities. Swingewood's concept of literary sociology positions literature as a reflection of the human relationship with society, where aesthetic elements are employed to adapt to and critique the surrounding environment. This integration of historical facts and poetic expression underscores the relevance of literature in capturing and influencing socio-political transitions.

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