

**RESEARCH PAPER****A New Historicist Approach to Faiz's Revolutionary and Patriotic Poetry: A Study****Rubab Raza and Anser Mehmood**

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Email: rzaa967@gmail.com, anser.mahmood@ell.uol.edu.pkReceived: 15th February 2017, Revised: 22nd March 2017, Accepted: 27th March 2017**ABSTRACT**

The theory of New Historicism is a Post-modern conception. New Historicists intend to comprehend the work of art through its "cultural context" and strive to make out "intellectual history through literature". In this way literature becomes the reflection of the society. This study points out some of the literary works to establish the proposition that contextual references have always been the part of the creative writing. This research paper particularly seeks to explore various assumptions and propositions of New Historicism recurrent in Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry. Faiz in his poetry has emerged as a voice against the injustice and socio-political strife prevailing during his times. This study traces out those historical incidents which persuaded him to express the wrongs of the society in his poems. In Michael Delahoyde words, "New Historicism seeks to find meaning in a text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era" (n.pag). Similarly this study also interprets Faiz's revolutionary poetry during the then stern political environment encouraging the present youth to fight against suppression and injustice.

Key words: Cultural context, Intellectual history, Contextual references, Revolutionary poetry

INTRODUCTION

The term 'New Historicism' was first introduced by the American reviewer Stephen Greenblatt whose book *Renaissance Self Fashioning, from more to Shakespeare* (1980) is usually regarded as its origin. It can be referred as the study of any particular text with reference to its social and political context. As stated by Shakespeare scholar Jonathan Bate, the approach of New Historicism has been "the most influential strand of criticism over the last 25 years, with its view that literary creations are cultural formations shaped by the circulation of social energy" (n.pag). The followers of this particular theory investigate the psychological and social factors that motivate an artist to infuse history in his piece of literature.

This research paper is specifically concerned with the socio-political influence on the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984). Faiz was a poet who has written both during the pre-partition era as well as in the post-partition times. His first collection of poems, *Naqsh-e-Feryadi* is an encouragement to the enslaved Muslims of the Sub-continent to struggle for their independence while his second collection of poems, *Dast-e-Saba* is an address to the masses of the newly independent state to rise against the injustice of their power intoxicated rulers.

Faiz tried to bring social awareness to his people by highlighting what damage has been done by their political unawareness and their ruler's egocentricity. He considered that the only way to make his country progressed was to empower the common man who was completely unconscious of his rights and obligations. Victor Kiernan has made a cutting critique over the social ignorance prevailing in 1950s. In his words-

Punjab and its capital city Lahore were in many ways the picture of a Sleepy Hollow where life moved at the pace of the feeble cab-horses; where young men could indulge in old carefree idle ways, with long hours of debate in coffee houses and moonlight picnics by the river Ravi. There was little modern industry or urbanization. Big landlords, many the creation of British rule and loyal to it, dominated the society. (p.3)

During such a devastated socio-political environment Faiz took a responsibility to reform his nation through his poetry. He shifted his pen from the romantic to the patriotic and reformative

themes and highlighted the importance of individual in the society. His spirit to counter capitalism and feudalism stands as a symbol of hope for the present and future generation to fight for their rights and follow the principle of equality. That is why his poetry is appreciated by the people of every time and context and will be cherished in all times.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Following are the basic aims and objectives behind the current research-

1. To apply different postulations of New Historicism to Faiz's selected poetry.
2. To explore the possible historical and contextual references in Faiz's poetry.
3. To analyze the social and political factors behind Faiz's contextual poetry.
4. To study Faiz's selected work as an instrument to heighten our national strength in the current scenario.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research has been conducted to explore the possible answers to the following questions and queries-

1. Which postulations of New Historicism can be traced in Faiz's selected poetry?
2. Which historical or contextual references can one find in Faiz's poetry?
3. What were the social and political factors behind Faiz's contextual poetry?
4. How can Faiz's selected work be applied to boost up our national spirit in the present scenario?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The poems translated by Victor Kiernan and others have been analyzed with reference to the socio-political scenario when they were first published and also their aptness in the present circumstances. The research celebrates Faiz's audacity and valor which made his poetry universal in its thematic structure and a sharp reply to the dictatorship of the unjust rulers. Hence it is a connection between the chaotic past and anarchic present of our homeland providing a ray of courage to our vigorous youth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A profound study of world's literature reveals that art has a strong effect of its context. In every time period the sensitive and intellectual minds of society have portrayed their political and social scenario in their writings. In this way literature becomes the mirror of the society. An exceptional and initiative example of such a "contextualized" study is Peter Thornton's *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (1978). This book bridges the distance between the literary and non-literary works and provides an insight to the Elizabethan society but with all its poetic and literary content.

Clifford Geertz, a new historic critic explains the influence of a work of art on its reader's mind in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). He considers literature a gateway to discover the unexplored regimes of the past. In his book he says, "...we don't have clear access to any but the most basic facts of history...our understanding of what such facts mean...is...strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact" (279). For Geertz all forms of literature are the interpretations of their era which allows the future generations to look at and comprehend their history from the perspective of the literary writers.

A review of world literature based on the theory of New Historicism is incomplete without taking into count Stephen Greenblatt's works. Greenblatt's works on new historicism and "cultural poetics" include *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) (with Catherine Gallagher), in which Greenblatt talks about how "the anecdote... appears as the touch of the real" (p.4). That is to say a literary work becomes the document of its era and shapes the reality for its reader.

During a Lecture given at the University of Western Australia, later published in his book, *Towards a Poetics of Culture* (1987), Greenblatt proves his point that "how art and society are interrelated" (p.3). He has established an inseparable relation between art and society by considering art as the manifestation of its political and social currents depicting historic facts in one way or the other.

Greenblatt first used the term "New Historicism" in his 1982 "Introduction" to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* where he exploits Queen Elizabeth's "bitter reaction to the revival of Shakespeare's *Richard II* on the eve of the Essex rebellion" (p.17) to exemplify the "mutual permeability of the literary and the historical" (p.9). This book also demonstrates the courageous and spirited attitude of the literary writers to present truth to their readers, in spite of all the difficulties and obstacles enforced upon them by the ruling class.

The reason behind associating a New Historic approach to Faiz's poetry can be better understood after going through a comment made by S. NomanulHaq, a professor of Humanities and a scholar in Islamic history and philosophy. He says in an interview, "Faiz will remain relevant mostly because of his themes - he wrote extensively about human misery, inequality and injustice. These are timeless issues. These are universal issues and are not restricted to a country, or a group" (n.pag). Therefore Faiz's poetry presents the clearest and the most vivid reflection of the political and social turmoil and can be aptly studied with the perspective of New Historicism.

On the basis of alike social and political situations, one of the most acknowledged Faiz scholars and translators, Victor Kiernan, made a study to draw the similarities between Faiz and the poet of East, Iqbal. He inferred that "Poetry for both was not merely a display of ornamental skill" (n.pag). For both these great poets art was not for the sake of art but was a medium to bring reforms to their nation suffering from injustice and brutality. As a faithful historian and student of literature, Kiernan viewed both Iqbal and Faiz "animated by something fresh and great, some cause above themselves" (n.pag).

Kiernan examines the poetic skills of both the poets and their sensitivity towards the miserable and restless state of their nation waiting for a savior to liberate them from the fetters of unjust government. He evaluated the two poets and noticed that "each was acutely aware of his human environment as a committed poet" (n.pag). As far as their stylistic qualities are concerned in Kiernan's view, "Both combined older modes, elegiac, romantic, introspective, with a fresh note of criticism of society, and desire to alter it" (n.pag). The two of them were the audacious, revolutionary and visionary poets trying to console and uplift their nation through their poetry.

Besides Iqbal, Faiz has also been compared with Ghalib in his choice of thematic structure to reform the society. According to the words of an article, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz: The Conscience of his Time and Station" published by *Masrif* website, "Faiz was basically a social campaigner" (n.pag). The article discusses Faiz's desire for change by stating, "Everything he has written is imbued with his unrelenting passion for social justice" (n.pag). Faiz's poetry was for the masses to evoke in them the realization of their strength and persuade them to raise their voice against injustice. As the article states, "Like Ghalib, Faiz realized that in order to reform society we need a clear understanding of the problems of social and individual life" (n.pag).

Before applying New Historicism to Faiz's poetry it is important to understand the significance of his context and the influence of his background on his poetry. In this regard Taimoor Shahid, a critic and scholar, comments in his article, "The Politics of Enchantment: Remapping the Precapital in Faiz Ahmad Faiz's Postcolonial Poetry",

I believe that in the case of Faiz who, in addition to being a colonial and postcolonial subject was also a member of the Communist Party, associated with Soviet Russia (1930s-1960s), as well as a member of the Progressive Writers Movement (1930s-1950s) committed to the cause of social change; it is difficult to kill the author. (p.216)

Hence a New Historic approach provides a better understanding of any literary text and it is inevitable to explore the hidden meanings in Faiz's poetry with all its social, political and cultural references.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a qualitative research based upon the translated poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz by Victor Kiernan and others. The research is exploratory and text oriented in its approach. Research journals and articles from the electronic and print media have been viewed to have different perspectives of New Historicism. Besides, close reading of the translated text of selected poems has been made

with reference to their historical context. Biography of Faiz and the socio-political history of Pakistan have been also studied to interpret Faiz's poetry with reference to its historical context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A concise selection of Faiz's poetry has been analyzed from the perspective of a new historicist H. Aram Veerer. He presented some basic postulations of the New Historicism in his "Introduction" to an anthology of essays, *The New Historicism* published in 1989. Veerer's notion of New Historicism constitutes the basic framework of this research paper to explore Faiz's poetry. Some of the ideas put forth by him were-

1. Every human action is actually the effect of a network of material practices.
2. Every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes.
3. A critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (p.11)

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Faiz Ahmed Faiz belonged to a literate and erudite family of Punjab. His political awareness and social sensitivity is evident in his patriotic and revolutionary poetry. He had the nerve to raise his voice against the inequitable government of his times and then to stand the predicaments as a result. A brief passage by Taimoor Shahid throws light on Faiz's attitude towards various governments of his times. He states,

Faiz has been in and out of favor of different Pakistani governments at different times – imprisoned (without evidence) in the Rawalpindi Case during Liaquat Ali Khan's regime, then another prison-term under Ayub Khan's martial law; favored during Z. Bhutto's term, only to be forced into self-exile when Zia came to power; and returning home just a couple of years before death. (p.201)

Faiz sums up his entire struggle against the oppression and injustice in a single couplet from his poem "August 1952" translated by Agha Shahid Ali,

*Don't regret our breath's use as air, our blood's as oil –
some lamps at last are burning in the night. (L.7-8)*

According to the words of a website, *Masrif*, "He was arrested in 1951 and spent four years in prison. In the brief preface, that he wrote from Hyderabad jail, to his second book, *Dast e Saba*, Faiz sets forth his conception of his life's work in a simple and forceful manner" (n.pag). One of his historic poems published in this book is "August 1952". In this poem Faiz has shown a beam of light in darkness. He is optimistic that tables will turn for the present government and that the process of revolution has already begun by the oppressed. He says,

*Its still distant, but there are hints of springtime:
some flowers, aching to bloom, have torn open their collars.
In this era of autumn, almost winter, leaves can still be heard:
their dry orchestras play, hidden in corners of the garden. (L.1-4)*

The problems faced by the recently independent state were increased many folds by the self-centered and unconcerned attitude of its rulers. Common citizen was deprived of basic human rights in the British Raj and under the rule of the dictators as well. Victor Kiernan in a preface to *Poems by Faiz* writes, "The sentiments that were quite justified under the British Raj, now expressed so powerfully by a citizenry deprived of basic rights in an independent country" (p.4). Faiz portrays this picture in his poem "A Few Days More" translated by Victor Kiernan and says,

*Under oppression's shadows condemned to breathe,
Still for a time we must bear them, and tears, and endure
What our forefathers, not our own faults, bequeath:
Fettered limbs, each impulse held on a chain... (L. 2-5)*

In this way Faiz's second book represents the shattering of his idealistic aspirations which he formerly expressed in his first book. Therefore Kiernan remarks in the preface to his second volume, "No one could have imagined that his words would haunt his country and provide this crutch to the people repressed not by any foreign power but by his own people" (p.5). In "A Few Days More" Faiz calls this misuse of power by the native people of Pakistan as "load beyond words of a foreign yoke" (L.14).

Quite contrary to the thematic structure of his second book, *Dast e Saba*, Faiz's first book of poetry, *Naqsh-e-Feryadi* published in 1941 encourages the people of the Sub-continent to rise against slavery. This book ensures a better and brighter future to the disheveled Muslim nation. Faiz's famous poem from his first book of poetry, "Bol" is pretty suggestive of that era. Faiz wrote it during the ultimate phase of the British Raj, later translated by Riz Rahim in 2008 suggesting,

*Speak up,
this limited time is long enough,
before you and your voice die.
Speak up, the truth is still alive.
Speak up,
say what you want to say. (L.11-16)*

Besides his upset political scenario Faiz also had a profound understanding of the devastated societal conditions. Faiz's kindness can be judged from Kiernan's remark when he says, "Faiz belonged to a generation that examined poverty at close range, with its dirt and sores and learnt its problems in social, economic detail" (p.7). Faiz has portrayed the misery of a common man in his poem "A Few Days More", when he says,

*Dust of affliction that clings to your beauty today,
Crosses unnumbered that mar our few mornings of youth,
Torment of silver nights, a pain with no cure,
Heartache unanswered, the body's long cry of despair- (L.16-19)*

According to Abram's assumption of the New Historicism, "Representation makes things happen by shaping human consciousness" (p.89). Faiz's poem "Do Not Grieve" translated by Daud Kamal appears to be an attempt to mould the consciousness of the flaccid people of the developing countries. It suggests them to hope for a prosperous future, to have patience and that their efforts will bring fruit to them. Faiz encourages his desperate nation by saying,

*Do not grieve
This pain will cease.
Friends will return
Wounds will heal
... Do not grieve.
Times will change.
Birds will sing.
Spring will come.
Do not grieve... (L. 1-4...11-15)*

Faiz's poetry is indeed full of revolutionary spirit. In the words of Kiernan, "As the voice of newly created country, he hoped that by criticizing the society and by pointing out its follies, he would be in a position to chart the way forward for social reconstruction and reform that the new state needed" (p.10). His poem "August 1952" is an effort to make a common man conscious of his strength and to make him realize that a revolution can only be brought by him. He hints the beginning of a socio-political revolution when he says,

*Night is still where it was, but colors at times take flight,
leaving red feathers of dawn on the sky.
... When imprisoned man opens his eyes, cages will dissolve: air, fire,
water, earth -- all have pledged such dawns, such gardens to him. (L. 5-6... 11-12)*

It is a widely accepted notion presented by Abram that "New Historicists concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power" (p.88). In the same tradition

Faiz's poetry is also a cutting critique over the power intoxicated rulers who consider their power the ultimate and everlasting. One of his most famous poems "We Shall See" Translated by Syed Mohsin Akhtar Naquvi is a word of warning to all the dictators of the world that their unjust rule will end in a disaster, as he says,

*We shall see
When the mountains of oppression and cruelty
Will float like carded cotton
Under the feet of us, the oppressed
This earth will quake
And over the head of the ruler
Lightening will thunder (L.5-10)*

The issues and the themes discussed by Faiz make his poetry universal in its appeal. This is the reason due to which they are as relevant today as they were in the past. His poem "A Word" translated by Sain Sucha is the most just depiction of the present socio-political environment. It runs like,

*Today, again, the mind searches for a word:
... A word of aversion:
Like a wrathful sword –
One which forever devastates the oppressors' strongholds.
Dark – like the night in a haunted graveyard.
The very utterance of it should burn my lips black. (L.1...10-14)*

CONCLUSION

After a methodical analysis of Faiz's revolutionary and patriotic poetry the most significant thing which emerges is that it encourages us to rise and raise voice against the injustice. After applying New Historicist approach to his poetic collections one thing has become evident that Faiz has never relented to stand against the oppressor or the dictator of his times and that he has conveyed the same message to his future generations through his passionate poetry. Faiz's poetry is an account of courage and valor through every thick and thin because only then nations can be reformed. As he states in "August 1952",

*Your feet bleed, Faiz, something surely will bloom
as you water the desert simply by walking through it. (L.13-14)*

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