

SOCIAL PROTEST IN THE POETRY OF FAIZ AHMED FAIZ

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ABSTRACT

Stauffer professor of literature defined protest literature as “the text that not only criticizes and protest society, but that suggests either explicitly or implicitly a solution to society’s ills.” The writers of the protest literature aim at to abolish disorder, chaos, anarchy, and discrimination to bring social order in the society, and their main motive is to aware the people about their rights in order to bring socialism and communism in the society as Karl Marx also states such arguments in his book Das Capital.

The writers whose writing reflects the social protest are Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Pabula Neruda, and W.B. Yeats etc. Faiz was one of the most eminent and powerful literary voice of the twentieth century. Being a committed Marxist poetry was his chosen subject and his ability to move from his poetry of love to the poetry of revolution made him a global poet. His new themes were equality, timeless freedom, dignity and justice. He was so strong and mighty in launching struggle that no wave of repression could stop his rock like determination in this regard. He could not be gagged and not silenced, he said,

I grieve not that you have robbed me of my pen and paper

For I have dipped my fingers in the blood of my heart

I grieve not that you have sealed my lips

For I have put my tongue in each loop of chain.

Key words: Protest, Gagged, Revolution, and Justice

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Stauffer professor of literature defined protest literature as “the text that not only criticizes and protest society, but that suggests either explicitly or implicitly a solution to society’s ills.” The writers of the protest literature aim at to abolish disorder, chaos, anarchy, and discrimination to bring social order in the society, and their main motive is to aware the people about their rights in order to bring socialism and communism in the society as Karl Marx also states such arguments in his book *Das Capital*.

Social protest literature of the nineteenth century was a product of the rapid urbanization and industrialization of Western countries, along with the rise of socialist thought. It may be divided into two broad categories: literature that focuses on revealing society's ills and literature that either advocates or opposes certain types of social or political reform. These broad categories encompass a wide variety of works that treat a range of subjects, including slavery, women's rights, minority rights, poverty, aristocracy, racism, ethnocentrism, and the immigrant experience. German writer LudolfWienbarg perhaps best encapsulated how nineteenth-century protest writers envisioned their role and the purpose of their works when he declared, “Prose is a weapon, and we have to sharpen it.”

England was the center of nineteenth-century social protest literature, with such well-known writers as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell infusing social criticism into their writings, writers from other countries also produced literary works that actively reflected the political and social controversies of the day. In France, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) remains one of the most powerful depictions of corruption and depravity in literature.

In Russia, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Ivan Turgenev produced novels of social protest. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) both critique Russian society while depicting members of the radicalized younger generation. While Dostoevsky, in his depiction of the character Raskolnikov, showed radicalism to be misguided as well as dangerous, Turgenev presented a much more sympathetic portrait of a radical in his central figure Bazarov. Turgenev's use of the term “nihilist” to characterize Bazarov brought it into wide use in political discourse throughout Europe and America to describe revolutionaries who advocate the complete destruction of the status quo. In what is sometimes viewed as a direct response to *Fathers and Sons*, the radical journalist and member of the *raznochintsy*, NikolayGavrilovichChernyshevsky wrote *What Is to Be Done?*(1863). This novel portrays a nihilist, Kirsanov, in heroic terms and posits an idyllic society that will emerge after the destruction of the present one.

While European protest writers often focused on philosophical questions of individuality and the dynamics of social structures, American reformist literature commonly emphasized political issues. The most prominent of these issues were slavery, women's equality, corruption within the government, and the distribution of wealth. Mark Twain is considered one of the key American promulgators of literary social protest, largely due to his novel *Huckleberry Finn* (1885). In it he achieves a skillful blend of protest and literary craftsmanship by highlighting the flaws and hypocrisies of American society.

This paper reflects the social protest in the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz Faiz Ahmed Faiz who was born on February 13, 1911, in Sialkot, India, which is now part of Pakistan. He had a privileged childhood as the son of wealthy landowners Sultan Fatima and Sultan Muhammad Khan, who passed away in 1913, shortly after his birth. His father was a prominent lawyer and a member of an elite literary circle which included Allama Iqbal, the national poet of Pakistan. Faiz started memorizing Holy Quran when he was 4 years old. Throughout his tumultuous life, Faiz continually wrote and published, becoming the best-selling modern Urdu poet in both India and Pakistan. While his work is written in fairly strict diction, his poems maintain a casual, conversational tone, creating tension between the elite and the common, somewhat in the tradition of Ghalib, the renowned 19th century Urdu poet. Faiz is especially celebrated for his poems in traditional Urdu forms, such as the ghazal, and his remarkable ability to expand the conventional thematic expectations to include political and social issues.

Faiz was one of the most eminent and powerful literary voices of the twentieth century. As a poet he could be put in the class of Ghalib and Iqbal and it may be no exaggeration to see Faiz as a true heir to Ghalib. By the time Faiz started writing, Urdu had developed a rich literary history beginning with Amir Khusro and including Quli Qutubshah, Shamsudin Wali Decani, Mir Taqi Mir, Mirza Rafi Sauda, Khwaja Mir Dard, Nazir Akbarabadi, Sheikh Muhanned Ibrahim Zauq, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Hakim Mohammed Momin Khan Momin, Nawab Mirza Khan Dhag, Mohammed Iqbal and others. Faiz's life spanned over a period of change. His world was turbulent one with two World Wars, the depression of the 1930s, the growth of isms communism and Fascism, decolonization and the Middle East conflict. Closer home Faiz witnessed the independence movement in India the rise of religious nationalism, India's independence and partition, Pakistan's struggle with military dictatorship and creation of Bangladesh. All these developments impacted Faiz's poetry. His nazams reflect political commitment but instead they expose the inner dilemma and struggle.

Faiz's poetry needs to be interpreted against the background of the political upheavals of the twentieth century. His life spanned the two world wars, the rise of fascism in Europe, the growth of religious nationalism in the Indian subcontinent, decolonization and the partition of India, and the uncertainties of postcolonial nationhood, most vividly brought home by the break of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Samuel Hynes in his book *The Auden Generation*, opines,

A close relation exists between literature and history, and I think this relation is particularly close in times of crisis, when public and private lives, the world of action and the

world of imagination, interpenetrate. I do not believe that literary history can be separated from social and political and economic history... (164)

This is applicable to Faiz Ahmed Faiz in undivided India in much the same way as Auden generation in England in the early part of the 20th century. This period is marked by struggle and strife, upheaval and turmoil. The poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz rooted in the major events and preoccupations of the times in which he lived.

For Faiz Poetry was his chosen field and his ability to move from poetry of love to poetry of revolution, made him a global poet. His new themes were equally timeless freedom, dignity, and justice. Faiz's life spanned over a period of change. In the book *Poetry East*, Carlo Cappola calls him, 'A spokes person for the world's voiceless and suffering peoples whether Indians oppressed by the British in the 40's, freedom fighters in Africa, and Roseburg's during the cold war in the 50's, Vietnamese peasants fleeing America napalm in the 60's, or Palestinian children living in refugee camps in the 1970's.' (35)

Faiz was committed Marxist, in his collection 'Dast-e-Saba' he reflects the basic essence of the Marxist outlook when he states that: "the understanding of the struggle of the human life, and participation in it is not only pre-requisite of life, it is also a pre-requisite of art." While studying the external man-nature dialectic, Marx and Engel reached the conclusion that as individual expresses their life, so they are. What they are coincides with their production, both with what they produce, and how they produce. Hence what individuals are depends upon material conditions of production. Faiz in a sense reflects an integrated approach through his life and works in the times he lived.

When Faiz was in Amritsar he joined *Progressive Writers Association* (PWA), which was a new movement in art and literature and attracted some of the best literary and poetic talents of that time including Sibte Hassan, Uppendra Nath Ashiq, Sahir Ludhianavi, Ismat Chughtai etc. The PWA wanted to bring art and literature closer to the people and also make it more relevant and also make it more relevant to their day to day existence. The artist and the poet had the social responsibility to expose the ills of the society and to present a vision of a more equal and just world. During this time there was the shift in his poetry from *gham-e-janatogham-e-dauran*, from the sorrows of life to the sorrows of the world. The second section of the *Naqsh-e-Fariyadi* reflects this change with one of Faiz's best known Nazam *Mujhse Pehli Si Mohabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maang* (Don't Ask Me, Sweetheart, for the Love We've Had Before) taken from the collection *Naqash-Faryadi*. The love for the beloved was no longer enough, there was now a greater pain which could only be addressed by a greater love. The poem ends, "There are other sufferings of the time (world) besides love, / There are other pleasures besides the pleasures of union; / Don't ask from me, my beloved, love like that former one".

Adopting the pen name 'Faiz' which means 'dedication to the service of his fellow men,' he revolutionised Urdu poetry. He relentlessly showed that the pen is mightier than sword in rousing the people. In one of his poem 'Stray Dogs' taken from the collection *Naqash-Faryadi*, Faiz speaks about the suffering of the working class that they were going to be exploited by the

people who belongs to the higher strata of life i.e Britishers. , they lack sense of dignity, motivation and purpose in life and make no efforts to improve their condition. The colonizers or the masters are skilfully able to divert their mind with the help of insignificant material and apply the policy of divide and rule.

These stray dogs in the streets,
Begging – an endowment their only treat.
Curses from others, are their total effects,
Abuses by the world are their only assets.

Neither rest at night, nor joy in the day,
Filtch is their abode, in gutters do they lay
If agitated, then turn them on one another,
A piece of dry bread will do this wonder.
Expected to be kicked around by every stranger,
Accustomed to wither away with lingering hunger (91)

In the above lines faiz is talking about the conditions of the poor people during the British regime in India that how they were wandering futile and begging for their bread and everyone is abusing them for this act. They had no peaceful life even their appearance was shabby. The Britishers who was also capitalist were exploiting them even for a single piece of bread and they did not understand their essence because they were unaware about the dominant ideology of the Britishers. But Faiz through his poetry wanted to aware the people about their rights as he said in the same poem,

If these poor beasts ever lift up their heads
Mankind would, then, forget all deeds of rebellion.
If they decide, they can own the universe,
Even chew down the bones of their cruel masters.
Just make them aware of their degradation so deep
Just make them move their tail that has fallen asleep. (91)

Here poet is talking about the ability of the poor people's that if these people would unite definitely they will bring revolution where this discrimination will be avoided socialism will come into existence in the form of democracy as also said by Marx. Faiz says that they are unaware of their power and urges them to action. Faiz declares that the day when the masses

will arouse the imperialism would definitely come to an end and he visualises the situation similar to the Revolution that took place in Europe during 1830-1848. Hence this poem is a protest against the rule of a privileged minority over a suppressed majority and makes a call on the part of action of the suppressed masses.

Man can do whatever he will but for that it is necessary to awaken the inner consciousness. Here the poet is knocking the bell of the people's mind that bewares about their rights which is clear from the following poem i.e. Speak Up:

Speak, your lips are free.

Speak; it is your own tongue.

Speak; it is your own body.

Speak; your life is still yours. (92)

In the above lines poet means to say that they are human beings and have the power to speak and it is only human beings who have upright bodies. No animal has the upright body and power to speak, thus the poet wants to make his countrymen realise that God has given them power to speak and they must speak up the things they want to say, even they have soul of their own. They should follow the voice of their soul and say the things they have kept buried in their hearts out of fear. He again says,

See how in the blacksmith's shop

The flame burns wild, the iron glows red;

The locks open their jaws

And every chain begins to break (92)

In the above lines poet uses the symbol smithy which mean the struggle going on for indias freedom, then oven which is the heat generated by the death of the various martyrs, the flames are the voices of the protest that have begun to rise everywhere. And the last one the padlocks and the fetters are clearly the symbols of slavery. They are waiting to be melted in the smithy of the freedom fighters. What the poet means to say through these symbols is that the common people should also join this struggle and raise their voice against the cruel repression of the British rulers. The padlocks and the fetters of slavery have already begun to melt, and the cooperation of the common people certainly gives the movement a big boost. At last in the same poem i.e. Speak Up he says,

Speak; this brief hour is long enough

Before the death of body and tongue

Speak, 'cause the truth is not dead yet

Speak, speak, whatever you must speak. (92).

Here the poet calls upon his countrymen to speak up now or it will be too late. He says that the time is running out the smithy is yet in full heat and they must strike while the iron is yet hot. If once gets cold, it will again become as hard ever and the padlocks of chain and slavery will become unbreakable. The poet says that the truth is not dead yet. It is known to everyone that what is just and what is unjust, what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, everyone must speak up and say whatever they have to say.

The ability to speak is a unique ability. But such is the state that human beings lack this power whether due to hegemony or of ruling class, even this fundamental right bestowed on man by nature. As the title of this poem i.e. Dogs urges the masses to action, in the same way Speak Up insists on self expression. This poem is a protest against imperialism and bondage which includes the denial of voice to those who have been colonized or are of an inferior class socially or inferior because they are powerless.

Eric Hobsbawn in his latest book 'How To Change The World: Tales Of Marx and Marxisms,' recalls that at the 2007 Jewish hegker due t week coinciding with Marx's death anniversary, Jacques Atali while paying tribute to Marx had said, "Philosophers before him had thought of a man in his totality, but he was the first to apprehend the world as a whole, which is at once political, economic, scientific and philosophical." (34) This personal attribute of a Marx is actually a reflection of the attribute of the Marxist world outlook. Same outlook had been adopted by the poet in his life.

Faiz says that no regression or repression could hold him back; he strongly believes that ideas gave courage to the people. Once they are persuaded of their truths they become an unstoppable force. For any decline in intensity of belief leads to decline in effective activity. He therefore wanted first to strike away those ideas which were ignoble and sordid, which leave people without power and install in them courageous revolutionary thoughts. While on one side of his poetry there is the fragrance and splendour of love, on the other there is the thunder and lightning of revolt. He was so strong and mighty in launching struggle that no waves of repression could stop his rock like determination in this regard. He could not be gagged and not be silenced, he said in his poem *Tablet and Pen* from the collection *Dast-e- Saba*,

I grieve not that you have robbed me of my pen and paper

For I have dipped my fingers in the blood of my heart.

I grieve not that you have sealed my lips

For I have put my tongue in each loop of the chain (113)

These lines were written after the creation of Pakistan and when he was sent to jail. By his pen he was trying to present the problems of the Pakistani people that how they were going to suffer under new elected govt. Even his pen and paper were confiscated from him in jail, so that the truth remains behind the curtain and people cannot know the truth.

Faiz loved his people and wattan too much and became wanderer-travelling, meeting comrades of freedom struggles and people who were as inspired and agitated as him. So his poetry appreciated across the world and his heart always yearned for home and his people; Every resting place i imagined was home/it was just the consolation of my wandering heart. Faiz returned to his country but did not agree with the policy and politics of the oppressors. His pen and words could not be restrained from protesting.

A Number of poems written by Faiz resist the violence of colonization, oppression, injustice and inequality. The poem *We shall witnessed the Day ordained (Hum Dhekenge)* taken from his collection of poems *Mere Dil Mere Musaffer* written in 1981 is one of such poem. It is a poem of great hope for the have-nots of this world. Here faiz dreams of revolution in which the people who belongs to the downtrodden section of the society will turn the tables and there will be complete reversal of roles. Here Faiz mentions the destruction of tyrants at the hands of marching multitude of the downtrodden.

When the mountains of oppression
Blown away like wisps of cotton,
When this land
Quivers under the feet of the oppressed,
When lightning flashes
And thunder roars over
The heads of oppressors.

Salman Rushdie once said, "A poet's work is to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it from going to sleep."

Conclusion:

The protest poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz has a power of framing, sustaining, and developing us, as nothing else can. Thus knowledge gained from poetry usually goes unremarked. Much has been written and will, indeed, be written in the future about the work of this socially committed literary genius and a dedicated communist. A particular lesson that everyone should aspire for and works towards revolution must learn is to combine the passion of commitment with creativity. Faiz did this with his poetry and mastered the use of classical forms transforming them before his audience rather than break from the old forms. He makes to hear and recite his revolutionary message in the old and the new together and at once.

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