

Walking a Fine Line: Blending of Romantic Aestheticism and Progressive Idealism in Faiz Ahmad Faiz Poetry

د یوې نېټې کرښې تگ: د فیض په شعر کې د رومانټیک جمالیات او پرمختللي ایډیالیزم ترکیب

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ABSTRACT

As a poetic and political activist, Faiz produced some of the most remarkable poems in Urdu literature that provided hope and encouragement to people struggling against oppression. The current article analyzes his poetry from a Marxist perspective focusing on his unique blend of romantic concerns with social angst for the condition of the poor and downtrodden. The poems are analyzed using theoretical perspectives derived from Carl Marx's materialist dialectic of class struggle and Louis Althusser's constructs of "ideological" and "repressive." violence to highlight Faiz's political vision and its ongoing relevance in the present day. His poetry reveals an acute awareness of the struggles of ordinary people in an oppressive society and a deep commitment to providing them with hope and empowerment. Combining romantic aesthetics with progressive social idealism, Faiz provided a voice of hope and inspiration to a generation of Pakistanis in search of an equitable society. Faiz's poetry is an incisive critique of the dominance of capitalistic ideology, exposing the hypocrisies inherent within it. The article analyzes how Faiz represents not only the struggle of the proletariat against their oppressors but also calls for greater solidarity amongst all classes, to build a more equitable and just society. More specifically, the article argues how Faiz's poetry speaks to the global issue of economic injustice, demonstrating how his works remain relevant today.

Keywords: Marxism, romanticism, class struggle, bourgeois, proletariat, means of production, social change, equality

INTRODUCTION

Beginning his poetry with traditional romantic themes like love and beauty, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's (1911-1984) poetry soon incorporated social, economic, and political issues. Because of his connections to influential figures in the progressive movement like Rashida Jahan, Mahmood Zafer, and Sajid Akhtar, Faiz's poetry underwent a transition from romantic traditional themes to dealing with social oppression and economic exploitation of the common people (Babar, 2006). Although revolutionary and romantic poetics are frequently seen as being distinct, Faiz

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transcends the line and combines them in such a way that they take on complementary roles rather than being in opposition to one another (Hayat & Parveen, 2021). Faiz had a significant influence on the working-class struggle through his revolutionary poetry, which captured their reality and motivated them to keep fighting for justice.

He was born in 1911 in Sialkot, India. He attended the prestigious Scotch Mission School for his early education. He earned his second master's degree in Arabic from Oriental College Lahore and his master's in English from Government College Lahore. In his poetry, he expressed his love for an Afghani girl at first sight. However, she later married into an affluent family. He performed his debut Ghazal reading in the college's literary club. The poems "Anjaam" (Ending), "Akhiri Khat" (Last Letter), and "Haseenay Khayal See" (To a Beauty of Imagination) are some of his most popular works.

In 1935, Faiz started working as a teacher at Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College. At that time, the Wall Street Crash, a stock market disaster in the United States, took place. In the aftermath of this economic disaster, unemployment and poverty grew globally. Dr. Rashida Jahan introduced Faiz to Marxism, which piqued his interest (Hayat & Parveen, 2021). Rashida Jahan was a devoted and ardent communist party member in addition to being a founding member of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association. She gave him *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, which transformed his life (Singh, 2016).

In 1941, when the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union, Faiz enlisted in the British army voluntarily to fight against fascism and Nazism. After the war, Pakistan gained its independence, and Faiz moved there to begin editing *The Pakistan Times*, a liberal English daily (Kiernan, 1971). He attacked Liaqat Ali Khan's pro-American, anti-Russian policies as well as his stance on Pakistan's membership in the Commonwealth during this time (Cappola, 1992). He was sentenced to four years in prison in 1951 as a result of his meeting with Major General Akber Khan and communist party members. Due to the publication of *Dast-e-Saba* and *Zindan Nama*, two renowned anthologies, the period of incarceration proved fruitful for Faiz's literary career as he termed it a second adolescence for his poetic production. He was nominated four times for Nobel Prize in literature, and his work has been translated into many languages around the world.

Faiz utilized poetry as a vehicle to draw attention to issues and fight against the proletarian class' oppression. For Faiz, the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is not the

proletariat's lone conflict; it is a challenge for all of us. The current article uses close textual reading (Smith, 2016) to illustrate how Faiz's poetry is an incisive critique of the dominance of capitalistic ideology, exposing the hypocrisies inherent within it. Despite the benefits that a state's ideology can bring in terms of economic gain, Faiz's poetry highlights its detrimental effects on society and the power dynamics between classes. The article analyzes how Faiz represents not only the struggle of the proletariat against their oppressors but also calls for greater solidarity amongst all classes, to build a more equitable and just society. More specifically, the article argues how Faiz's poetry speaks to the global issue of economic injustice, demonstrating how his works remain relevant today.

This study is guided by the following research questions: 1) what are the elements of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry that show him as a Marxist literary activist? 2) what is the relevance of Faiz's poetic and social message in Pakistan today? The following section provides a review of relevant ideas and literature about how Marxism views social structures and how Marxism has been adopted for literary criticism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marxism

Capitalism is an economic system that is based on the ownership of resources and the economy is regulated to a large extent by the market. In capitalism, the bourgeois class has control over the means of production, distribution, and exchange, which results in the oppression of the working class. In opposition to capitalism, Marxism aims to establish a classless society based on shared ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. Founded by two German social theorists, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and Karl Marx (1818–1883), Marxism served as the basis for numerous communist societies throughout the 20th century. According to Marx, the economy shapes everything, including ideas, civilizations, relationships, and beliefs. Marx argues that capitalism causes social inequality. He proposed the concepts of "superstructure" and "economic base." The forces utilized in production make up the economic base, whereas the state, governments, education, culture, values, and conventions make up the superstructure of society (Lashari, 2010). The connection between a society's superstructure and economic base causes oppression.

According to Marx, in a capitalist society, both the bourgeois and proletariat classes will initially be content since the capitalists will make profits and the proletariat will receive enough

wages (Khaliq, 2015). The system will eventually fail as small businesses merge to become larger ones to compete in the market. To increase profits, large firms may employ a variety of strategies, including price reductions and worker terminations. Some capitalists will fail because of market rivalry, which will result in joblessness for the working force. As a result, the unemployed will start mobilizing against the government, resulting in chaos. Socialism's implementation can put an end to the working class's exploitation and poverty. Since the state will have authority over property, it will be able to meet the basic requirements of the working class. The commodities and services provided once a society shifts to socialism will be sufficient to meet everyone's requirements. Marx considered law as an exploitation tool that protects the vested interests of the elite or ruling class and is fortified by that class. So, Socialism will end classes in a society and thus there would be no need for law (Munir, 2018).

The first Bolsheviks created the first communist state based on Marxist theory under Vladimir Lenin, which flourished in the Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991 (Brown, 2009). The Algerian Marxist Louis Althusser (1918-1990) stated that the capitalist states at least exploit their citizens in two ways. These practices can be described as "ideological" and "repressive." Violence is used by the repressive system to repress its people. To control the working class, it employs the army, police, courts, and prisons. The ideological approach takes advantage of the proletariat by using churches, families, schools, and the media. In a capitalist society, the lower classes voluntarily accept exploitation.

Marxist literary criticism

Marx defined literature as written work on a certain subject that sometimes exposes and sometimes hides the truth of society. Other intellectuals have expanded on Marx's conception of ideology, including Terry Eagleton, Georg Lukacs, Theodore Adorno, Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser, and Walter Benjamin. According to Althusser, literature depicts an idealized interaction between people and societal realities. The working class is subjugated by the ruling class via the education system and other ideological apparatuses like the army and the church. To control and manipulate, every organization creates ideologies. According to Althusser, to protect the masses from exploitation, one should consider Marxist ideals when reading literature (Hamadi, 2017).

Marxist critics first study a literary work's subject matter before connecting it to fundamental Marxist ideas like class conflict, feudalism, and capitalism. Marxists also examine a piece of

literature in light of the trends of the time in which it was written as well as the author's own background. Since literature is a kind of ideology and has a direct impact on a society's fundamental structures, it can be studied under the superstructure. Through the lens of Marxist literary analysis, literature is a product of the ideological power dynamics of a given society, and its purpose is to either reinforce or undermine those dynamics (Eagleton, 1976). For example, a work of literature may be seen as reinforcing the legitimacy of an elitist class system by portraying the working class as uneducated and docile, or it may challenge such systems by expressing a different point of view. In this way, Marxist literary analysis can be used to expose the subtle ways in which literature can be used to shape and reinforce societal power dynamics. Literary critics such as Georg Lukacs (1885-1971) and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) use Marxist literary analysis to reveal how literature is used as a tool of ideological manipulation, often in service of the ruling class.

Literary criticism of Faiz's poetry focuses on his engagement with contemporary political and social issues in Pakistan, the effects of imperialism on the people of the region, and his ability to find beauty even in difficult circumstances. His poetry reveals an acute awareness of the struggles of ordinary people in an oppressive society and a deep commitment to providing them with hope and empowerment. Combining romantic aesthetics with progressive social idealism, Faiz provided a voice of hope and inspiration to a generation of Pakistanis in search of an equitable society. According to Haq (2020), Faiz understood the suffering of his people and was repeatedly imprisoned for his ideological convictions and outspoken criticism of the regime, but not even the prison could take away his creativity, artistic sense, or dedication. A recurring theme in his poems has been that of resistance. Haq further argues: "Reading Faiz's poetry is to address a void that has come to be linked to the understanding of cultural protest, of raising a concern, being angry or anxious, but having a better hope for tomorrow" (p. 7). This hope was undoubtedly inspired by Faiz's poetic works, which were a form of revolutionary romanticism, in which he fused romantic ideas of love and beauty with progressive social ideals. Other critics of his poetry such as Ali (2015) have further noted how Faiz effectively critiques society's inequalities in his poems by drawing on romanticism and classical poetic conventions to create a unique expression of political and social resistance. This fusion of revolutionary ideas and romanticism that Faiz so aptly expressed in his poetry offers us a glimpse into the cultural struggle of oppressed people while providing hope for a better tomorrow.

METHODOLOGY

For data analysis, the current study uses a qualitative methodology. A close textual analysis (Smith, 2016) is used to draw themes and analyze them concerning the socioeconomic condition of the time. The research paper examines a few of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poems through the lens of Marxism. Although Faiz's poetry combines classical, romantic, and revolutionary elements, the revolutionary elements are the main focus of the paper. There are many poems in Faiz's three major works, but we will only look at twelve of them here. The poems are evaluated critically in light of the socioeconomic and political climate in which they were written using Carl Marx's materialist dialectic of class struggle and Louis Althusser's constructs of "ideological" and "repressive." violence. The translations of Faiz serve as the main sources for the research paper. The secondary sources for the paper are books, articles, research papers, and biographies of Faiz Ahmad Faiz.

ANALYSIS

Faiz's transformation from traditional romantic themes to more socially-oriented poetics is well exemplified in the poem “*Mujh Se Pheli Si Muhabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maang*” (Don't Ask Me for that Love Again). This poem, published in 1941, was written at a time when Faiz had an acute awareness of socio-economic injustice. This poem exemplifies his aesthetics and poetics shifting from only romantic traditional themes to social awareness and realism. The speaker says that he thought, life would be beautiful and delightful in the beloved's presence but he was wrong. There are many other grave issues worthy to be considered besides love, like the relationship between colonizer and colonized; the bourgeois and working class, or of the master and the slave. The praise of the beloved is not enough to live in the world; one has to see miseries, injustice, and exploitation of the people as well. The speaker realizes that the physical beauty of the beloved is not enough to forget about the miseries and injustice present in the world. He understands that he should not idealize the beauty of his beloved, as it does not justify or alleviate the difficult and oppressive situations experienced by many people.

Do not ask, my love, for the love we had before:
 You existed, I told myself, so all existence shone,
 Grief for me was you; the world's grief was far.
 Spring was ever renewed in your face...

Yet all this was not so, I merely wished it so.

The world knows sorrows other than those of love,
Pleasures beyond those of romance...

My gaze returns to these: what can I do?
Your beauty still haunts me: what can I do?
The world is burdened by sorrows beyond love,
By pleasures beyond romance,
Do not demand that love which can be no more. (Kieran, 1971, p. 65)

The speaker in this poem experiences conflictual tendencies and emotions of longing for the beloved and despair over the social circumstances surrounding this romantic relationship. The speaker recognizes that love is no longer possible and urges himself to accept the realities of his situation and not cling to a lost ideal. Instead, he must recognize the sorrows and pleasures of life that go beyond the traditional ideals of love and strive to find comfort in these.

A similar transition from romantic to social themes can be found in other poems like “*Raqeeb sey*” (To the Rival in Love) in which the poet acknowledges the transition from ideal love to a more realistic view of social life. It is a lyrical poem in which the speaker longs for the time that he spent with his beloved. The speaker remembers the time when he would become intoxicated in the presence of his beloved. However, in the second part of the poem, he turns from romanticism toward social realism. He addresses his rival in love and through love, he became aware of social evils and started to sympathize with the poor and oppressed people. That he became familiar with the effects of frustration, pain, agony, and suffering in life. Love thus initiated the speaker into a new world of understanding and compassion, enabling him to empathize with those who were in pain or suffering.

We learned to discern the travails of the downtrodden poor,
To comprehend icy sighs and anemic cheeks - wretchedly sore!

Whenever now those destitute lay lamenting and weeping,
Their teary eyes toil to sleep, swollen with weeping.
O then morsels of downtrodden hawks pounce swindling,
Flailing their wings fiercely as they come charging! (Kieran, 1971, p. 91)

In the third stanza of this poem, the speaker compares the bourgeois class with the eagles. He metaphorically says that he feels the pain of those helpless children whose morsels have been

taken away by wealthy and powerful people. In the last stanza, the speaker says that capitalists exploit the working class and sell their skills and experiences to get profit. An acute awareness of social inequality and class-based exploitation forces the speaker to ponder the injustice of the wealthy and powerful, who seem to have all the advantages and opportunities, yet have no qualms about preying on those less fortunate. The plight of these people is normalized in a society where the powerful and privileged are often held up as models of success, while the disadvantaged are expected to be content with their limited means. This revolutionary view of social structure compels the speaker to question whether true justice is possible within a system that is so heavily weighted in favor of those who are already wealthy and influential.

“*Rabba Sachya*” (Supplication) is a Punjabi poem by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. In the poem, Faiz criticizes the unequal distribution of wealth. That the working class does not ask for power and wealth but rather asks for food and clothes. That the bourgeois class controls the means of production, distribution, and exchange of resources. He says that through this control the bourgeois get benefits and become wealthy day by day and the working classes become poorer day by day. Even in severe cases, the working class does not have enough money to buy food and clothes. Therefore we need an alternative to fulfill the fundamental needs of the working class.

Who cares for wealth or power?
All we want
Is honorable bread
And something
To cover our nakedness. (Kamal, 2006, p. 180)

The speaker draws attention to the basic human needs of the working class, emphasizing that all people should have access to a fair wage, food, and clothing. The speaker implies that these basic needs are more important than any status, wealth, or power, and thus calls attention to the importance of ensuring that every individual can access these necessities. Through social change, workers could be granted the right to a dignified life with access to these basic needs, which would help create a more equitable and just society.

In his short poem titled “*Bol*” (Speak), the speaker urges the general public to fight against oppressors. This particular poem was written during the Second World War when a protest against the war for peace was banned. In this particular poem, the speaker asks people to speak

and write the truth only. He says that freedom of speech is not only just a fundamental right of people but also a fundamental duty of people to support the fabric of their country. Speaking the truth can shackle the foundations of an unjust state and can bring socio-economic change. The poem is a satire on the people who do not speak the truth in circumstances where speaking the truth is most needed. Some people submit before the exploitation of the bourgeois class.

Speak, for your two lips are free;
Speak, your tongue is still your own;
This straight body still is yours•
Speak, your life is still your own. (Kieran, 1971, p. 112)

By instigating the masses to speak and rise against the exploitation of the bourgeois class, the poem gives a voice to the masses and conveys that one should always speak the truth and never submit to unfairness. Freedom of speech and the right to self-determination is stressed in the poem to encourage people to stand up and fight for their rights and refuse to be silenced or oppressed. This call for a popular uprising can lead to an organized movement that could potentially challenge and change the existing power structures of oppression, leading to a more equitable society for all.

The poem “*Intisaab*” (Dedication) is written to draw the attention of the world to the oppression of the ruling class against the working class. It is a realistic representation of discrimination witnessed by Faiz himself in the newly-born country. The tone of the poem is gloomy. The poet laments the condition and the alienation of the working class in this poem.

In the name of this day
And
In the name of this day’s sorrow:
Sorrow that stands, disdaining the blossoming garden of Life,
Like a forest of dying leaves
A forest of dying leaves that is my country
An assembly of pain that is my country...

In the name of the widows
In the name of neighborhoods
Whose scattered garbage the moon
Blesses every night...

In the name of those harbingers of the days to come
Who, like the flower with its scent,
Have become enamored of their own message. (Hashmi, 2011, p. 21)

In the first lines, the poet dedicates his poem to the grievances of his beautiful country which has been transformed into barren land. After this, he expresses his solidarity with clerks, postmen, coachmen, railway workers, and laborers. He goes in-depth and talks about the professions of the workers. Firstly, Faiz talks about farmers and their manipulation by the landlords. He says that the elite class always exploits the farmers when they tend to sell their stock. They blackmail them with different tactics to convince the farmer to sell the stock at the lowest possible price. The Farmers face social-economic and socio-political injustice and live in extreme poverty. They don't possess the rights of ownership of the land which has been cultivated for decades by their forefathers. The land is owned by lords who often visit it and live in urban centers. This ownership of the lords becomes exploitation for the farmers. The bourgeois bourgeoisie uses every possible technique to maintain its hegemony over the working class. The speaker criticizes governments for imposing heavy taxes on the agricultural sector. The heavy taxation on the agricultural sector reduces value for the poor and perpetuates poverty, misery, and social discontent.

In the poem, the speaker talks about the helpless poor mother who could not feed her children. He talks about the students who do not have enough facilities to write and read. the speaker laments the negligence of the state towards the basic need of students. Similarly, in the next part, he expresses his solidarity with the prisoners being arrested in fighting for their rights. Faiz himself suffered four years of imprisonment for his revolutionary spirit and writings. He faced incarceration with great zeal, optimism, and spirit and composed poetry in this period with the same spirit for which he got arrested. In this part of the poem, the speaker celebrates the spirit of the prisoners during long periods of unjust incarceration. In the last part of the poem, we see the typical undying optimism that is a hallmark of Faz's poetry. The speaker hopes that all the sorrows, pain, and agony of the working class will end one day.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the data in the current article shows that Faiz's works reflect the injustices, exploitations, oppressions, and coercions of the state. Fiaz works as a mirror for the twentieth century's pro-active political era of Pakistan (Babar, 2006). It motivates the oppressed, the

exploited, and the alienated to rebel and resist the state's injustices. According to him, the elite class has absolute power which ultimately leads to the alienation and exploitation of the working class. Faiz indirectly criticizes Capitalism; which supports the unequal distribution of power and wealth. The countries which run their economies through this system deprive the working class of their due rights. The capitalists manipulate the working class for their vested interests. Apart from the unequal distribution of wealth, Faiz also addresses the people who have consciously accepted the slavery of the elite class (Munir, 2008). He is pessimistic about the condition of the working class but he is still optimistic that the oppression will certainly end one day. The working class will revolt against the elite class and will bring socioeconomic and political change to their country. If their spirit and creative energy are used with a proper plan; it can change the social, political, and economic fabric of a state.

Faiz's poetry is still relevant to Pakistan because the current day Pakistan has several issues that his poetry strived to reflect and amend. The means of production, distribution, and exchange are in the control of the elite class. The working class is manipulated for the interests of the elite class. The cultural and political systems discriminate based on caste, color, and creed. It does not encourage the voice of the dissenting voice. It controls electronic, print, and social media. The country is facing poverty, unemployment, and inflation and most importantly, the leaders lack the interest to solve these issues because they mostly come from the affluent classes (Ali, 2015). The working class lacks the resources to send their representative to fight for their rights in the parliament in such a fabric. The economic base and the superstructure are under the control of the elite class. They use them for the exploitation and oppression of the working class. This creates an environment where it is very difficult for the working class to get their voices heard. Faiz's poetry reflects these darker aspects of society and the economic inequalities faced by working-class people, as well as their feelings of disillusionment, helplessness, and despair. However, his poetry does not let us lose hope for a better future, as he speaks of the power of the working class to stand up and fight against oppressive regimes, despite the odds being stacked against them.

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