

THE STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEM “THE EXECUTION YARD”

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of the poetic devices embedded in the poem, “The Execution Yard” from *Dast-e-Saba* (The breeze’s hand, 1953). The study seeks to “denaturalize ideologies that have been naturalized” (Rogers, 2004, p. 252), with the intention of bringing “a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis by uncovering its workings . . . and there by help in achieving a more equitable social order” (Kress, 1996, p. 15). The basis of this study is to trace the traditional division of “personal” and “political” poetry by forging a new style that wedded the two, reclaiming the right of subjective points of view to speak in opposition to the unified voice of society or the imposed voice of those in power. It invites the reader to reflect on the diffusion of ideology and power through the political situation prevailed at the time of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Since Faiz’s poetry embody the themes of ideology and power relations, political upheaval, and social roles and how these are nurtured or imposed by particular groups and institutions, questions about acquiring, developing, and participating in such practices are necessarily complex, socio-political questions. To answer these questions, researchers must move beyond the surface level and probe more closely at the ways that particular piece of writing effects the mind of the reader. So the study tries to explore how such types of literary practices structure and is structured by the immediate and extended contexts of people’s thoughts. This type of analysis requires the account for local meanings and uses of various literary devices as well as the ways in which local meanings reproduce and/or resist larger norms and structures of power.

Keywords: Dominant, Execution Yard, oppressor, despair, tomorrow.

INTRODUCTION

This lyric poem is taken from *Dast-e-Saba* (The breeze’s hand, 1953) an anthology of prison poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. The Execution Yard is written in prison, when Faiz Ahmed Faiz was arrested on March 9, 1951. He was arrested due to the misconception that he is included in conspiracy to overthrow the government headed by Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan. His poems in *Dast-e Saba* may be categorized loosely as poems of defiance, followed by a middle period of remembrance, and finally a time of loneliness and despair. This poem is related to the 1st category as poems of defiance.

Until that very morning, however, Faiz had considered him-self immune from government oppression. For the first time, Faiz realized he would be tried for conspiracy to overthrow the government. The London Times would portrays him as one of, “The most dangerous and influential leftist figures in Pakistan” (March 10, 1951)

Over the next two years he would face trial before a secret tribunal that held the power to condemn him to death before a firing squad; he would also compose the remarkable poems of his second book, *Dast-e-Saba*.

Adorno writes:

“Such a precisely specifying cast of thought is not at odds with art and does not add merely external commentary—it is in fact required by every linguistic creation. A poem’s indigenous material, its patterns and ideas, cannot be exhausted through mere static contemplation”.

Faiz had been the new nation’s most visible writer, as both poet and journalist, in the years following the 1947 Partition of British India into India and Pakistan, and he had initially supported his new nation as described by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

He used subjective point of view to speak in opposition to the voice of society or those who were in power. In this context,

Syed Sajjad Zaheerre called that,

“We had heard these poems from the lips of Faiz himself and had also read them repeatedly, but all those prisoners who had a literary taste were overjoyed at the publication of the volume” (1989, 41).

By the very act of opposing, however, the poet of witness enters into a dialogue, overt or covert, with his oppressor, and thus the language (the style, the form, even the imagery) of the poem is partly dictated by the conditions under which the work is written.

As poet Gregory Orr writes in the introduction to *Poetry as Survival*:

“Human culture “invented” or evolved the personal lyric as a means of helping individuals survive the existential crises represented by extremities of subjectivity and also by such outer circumstances as poverty, suffering, pain, illness, violence, or loss of a loved one. This survival begins when we “translate” our crises into language—where we give it symbolic expression as an unfolding drama of self and the forces that assail it. This same poem also arrays the ordering powers our shaping imagination has brought to bear on these disordering. Thus the poem we compose (or respond to as readers) still accurately mirrors the life crisis it dramatizes, still displays life’s interplay of disorder and order”. (2002, 4)

In the poem *The Execution Yard*, following rhyme scheme is used.

Aaa baa caa daa eaa

Poetic Devices

This poem “*The Execution Yard (A Song)*” is written in strictly formal style of poetry, attending to all the requirements of the form and diction. By using sound devices such as alliteration,

assonance, consonance along with such figures of speech as allusion and pathos, the poet conveys the message impressively and forcefully. The repetition of the word, “tomorrow” throughout the poem places the emphasis firmly on the hope of bright future.

The phrases like, “the road of longing”, “drinker’s thirst for wine”, “the Street of Scorn”, “an army of enemies” and “the execution yard” lends a colour of pathos to the poem and intensifies the tone of the poem which is full of sorrow and anger.

The poem shows his growing mastery and manipulation of the stock imagery of “the morning star”, “fierce grapevine” and “day’s shining face”. Faiz found prison life to be “a fundamental experience” as he challenges his oppressors, in this poem to “bring an army of enemies, we will meet them tomorrow.” Faiz sank deeper into despair, but once again he turned—through his poetry—to strengthen his faith in bright tomorrow, rather than events of the day.

In describing the poets of this era, Robert Bly has written,

“Difficult poetry of the true and vigorous sort does not move from idea to idea, from mind to mind, but moves from the anguished emotions to the intellect and back”. (2001, xv)

A poem like “The Execution Yard” is exactly what he means.

Theme of the author

“The Execution Yard” was clearly intended to fuel the political passions of his fellow inmates. In this poem, the familiar character of the drinker is placed as the significant figure of the poem. Likewise, calling for summons “*to the assembly from the Street of Scorn*” would appear to be a direct appeal for the people of Pakistan to riot against the General Assembly. In Faiz’s altered landscape, it becomes any street anywhere in Pakistan, where the summons can come for anyone at any time.

As V. G. Kiernan writes:

“So much of the spirit and tone of Urdu poetry derives from Persian tradition that this ancestry must often be kept in mind, even when a poet like Faiz is alluding to quite contemporary matters. Verse forms and meters, besides diction, have helped to preserve continuity; and, still more strikingly, a common stock of imagery, which can be varied and recomposed inexhaustibly.” (1972, 32)

The assembly, familiar to readers is a reference to the General Assembly. This was to prove the richest period in Faiz’s poetry. Though he often felt the urge to write during those first days of his imprisonment, it had been impossible for Faiz to preserve the poetry that came to him. Zaheer refused to dwell on the particularities of the trial or his imprisonment; he insisted:

“Long after the people forget all about the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, the Pakistani historian, when he comes across the important events of 1952, will consider the publication of this small book of poems as a most important historical event”.

Handling of Theme

Faiz is an example of syncretic poet, who in today's language would be described as cross cultural poet. Faiz was disillusioned by the lack of progress in democracy and social justice in country and he used this poem as overt criticism of the oppressors of the people.

The poem is written in the era when newly established country requires a lot of efforts to stand on its own feet. He was arrested in doubt to rebel against the country. Here in this poem he has shown his own feelings against political circle of that time. He pointed out the government that whatever it is going on in country, one day it will be changed. One day it will be proved that he is loyal to country.

Furthermore, by publishing the poems in Dast-e Saba in the rough order of their composition, Faiz invites us to read the psychological progression of his creations as they relate and respond to the unstable conditions of the nation-state system they oppose.

Careful historical analysis of the events shaping the composition of this poem provides much insight into this progression as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy trial pulled on for nearly two years and the likelihood of Faiz's faith became increasingly certain. These events, however, do not fully define the poem, and it is equally fascinating to read the describing argument of Faiz's work as he develops a system of setting the true country of Pakistan—the nation promised by Jinnah before Partition—in opposition to the realized totalitarian nation-state. Thus, his poem occupies the singular space of a lyric that does not speak for the subjugated one against the opposition to the realized totalitarian nation-state. Thus, his poem occupy the singular space of a lyric that does not speak for the subjugated one against the oppressive many, but rather for the many ruled against the ruling few.

CONCLUSION

Faiz Ahmad Faiz was a citizen of his world and his work was very much rooted in the struggles of that world. His work took him all over the world and much was written by and about him. Faiz entered upon a socially and politically engaged public life that was to last to the end of his days. This poetry is usually seen as the poetry of exile of sadness and longing and recollection. This reading of Faiz's later poetry takes his political commitments seriously and sees his life in the political context in which it was lived. It also underlines the centrality of homeland, to Faiz's thought and explains why he ended his self-imposed exile by returning to Pakistan in 1983. Faiz died in 1984 and thus was spared the total collapse of so many things he held dear. Perhaps only historians will remember the context in which Faiz created his poetry, but we can be sure that new contexts will create new appropriations of some of the finest Urdu verse of the twentieth century.

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APPENDIX: THE EXECUTION YARD

Where the road of longing leads us, we will see tomorrow.
 This night will pass, and this too we will see tomorrow.
 Don't fear my heart; we will see day's shining face tomorrow.
 Let the drinker's thirst for wine slowly sharpen:
 We will see how long they deny the fierce grapevine tomorrow;
 We will see how long they refuse the cup and flask tomorrow.
 Let the summons come to the assembly from the Street of Scorn:
 We will see who is stopped by idle threats tomorrow;
 We will see who is strong enough to return tomorrow.
 Today men of heart go to test their spirits and their faith:
 Let them bring an army of enemies, we will meet them tomorrow;
 Let them come to the execution yard, we will join the spectacle tomorrow.
 No matter how heavy this last hour may seem, my friend:
 We will see the light hidden tonight shine brightly tomorrow;
 We will see the morning-star sparkle as today edges into tomorrow.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Translated by *Agha Shahid Ali*

(A well-known Kashmiri poet who translated many poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz)