

READING FAIZ AHMED FAIZ'S POEM HUM DEKHIENGEY (WE SHALL SEE) IN PRESENT SCENARIO

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Abstract

Who could have thought that after four decades Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem could incite controversy in the Sub-continent? Written in 1979 in the context of Pakistani president Zia Ul Haq regime Faiz's famous revolutionary song Hum Dekhiengey (We Shall See), rendered into music by famous singer Iqbal Bano in 1986 has become the anthem of protest. Faiz Ahmed Faiz was a revolutionary poet, whose poetry had reached far and beyond. Faiz used his poetic talent for the cause of revolution, protest, dissent. His poetry is a hybrid of love with the revolution where it becomes very difficult to distinguish between both. The poet who championed the cause of poor masses and fought for its revival was jailed, exiled but nothing could subvert his strong determination. The present paper is going to discuss his poem Hum Dekhiengey (We Shall See) in its context, reading poetry is easy but decoding its metaphors and illusions needs the skill what is called as 'how to read a poem and how not to read a poem'.

Keywords: Hum Dekhiengey (We Shall See), Faiz, revolution, protest, poetic language.

INTRODUCTION

How one can define poetry, or how to read poetry or how not to read a poem needs effort, labor and great skill. Poetry can be defined as a language which says more intensely than does ordinary language. Reading poetry is not as easy as reading prose. Poetry is the figurative language full of illusions, metaphors, paradox, imagery and other literary techniques. And reading a poem means responding to it, responding to its feelings, responding to its emotions, responding to its gaps, and have to duck into its lines. An American poet said once poetry is the way of taking life by its throat. Terry Eagleton (1943-) in his famous book *How to Read a Poem* (2007) writes regarding poem as:

A poem is a fictional, verbally inventive moral statement in which it is the author, rather than the printer or word processor, who decides where the lines should end. This dreary-sounding definition, unpoetic to a fault, may well turn out to be the best we can do. Before we dissect it piece by piece, however, let's note what it doesn't say, rather than what it does. (Eagleton 25).

Poetry presents experiences in language, the experiences which the poet creates for the reader to recreate. Poetry has the power to reveal the things most hidden, latent or silent understandings. When Poet chooses to write a poem, he sinks deep in it and while fighting with the waves of poetic techniques, he/she creates a piece which is full of poetic figures.

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ AND HUM DEKHIENGAY: A REVIEW

Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) is the voice known to his lovers far and wide. His poetry speaks to different readers at different occasions. Despite having a brilliant academic carrier, he chose the life of a rebel, was threatened, jailed and exiled several times for his revolutionary, dissent and protest voice. Faiz wrote eight poetry collections in and outside the prison or in exile and was widely translated into a number of languages. His Poem Hum Dekhiengay was written in 1979 when President Zia Haq was in power in Pakistan. It was written as a form of protest, dissent or anger against this military dictator. It became a popular anthem of protest. Other poets have written dissent or protest poetry. Habib Jalib is one of the main figures in Urdu poetry who has written against the oppressive regime. He was several times incarcerated even during the times

of Zia's rule. After all, Jalib was a famous rebel poet whose verses define the anger of the people at Ayoub Khan's government in 1962. His famous dissent poem *Main Nahin Manta*, though simple and ringing had framed the dissent against the dictatorship in Pakistan, this poem has achieved the remarkable space of protest anthem, as the poet writes:

***Deep jiskamahallaat hi meinjale
Chand logon ki khushiyonko le kar chale
Vohjosayeemeinharmaslehat ke pale
Aisedastoorko, subh-e-benoor ko
Main nahin manta! Mein nahin Janata***

Which can be loosely translated as:

***A lantern that sheds light only on places
That provides to the urges of a chosen few
That flourishes in the shadow of compromise
This so-called system, this light-starved morning
I don't accept it! I don't know (Trans. Mine).***

Another famous poet Urdu Ahmed Faraz from Progressive Writers Association, who despite being incarcerated and exiled during Zia's rule kept writing poems about the importance of freedom, justice, dignity and respect. These progressive poets have the militant voice and vocal tone, and rebel-ness in their verses.

Faiz Ahmed has written number poems like *Hum Dekhiengay*, like his other famous poem 'Bol', where Faiz has courageously spoken truth to power, and his sentiments had a deep voice in this poem;

***Bol ke lab azad hain tere
BolZuban ab tak teri hai
Terasutvaan jism hai tera
Bol ke jaan ab tak teri hai***

Translated into English as,

***Speak, for your lips are free,
Speak for your tongue is still yours
Your upright body belongs to you
Speak for your soul is still yours. (Faiz, The Colours.)***

No doubt the poet has spoken courageously for the common man to express himself/herself but there seems no rebel-ness or militant-ness in the poem. He has simply used the Urdu word 'Bol' which is loosely translated into 'speak'. But *Hum Dekhiengay* carries a strong rebel-ness and warning for tyrants. Faiz was often labelled as an atheist, but this poem is deeply rooted in the Holy Quran, and he has used references from different chapters from the Quran. Written in the context of Zia Haq in 1979, the poem is still regarded as the anthem of protest.

***We will see
It is true, we too shall see
That day which has been promised
Which is written with God's ink
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
We shall see
When from the K'aba on God's Earth
All the idols will be removed
We the truthful ones but out of favor
Will be raised to the stage***

***All the crowns will be thrown away
All the thrones will be turned over
Then only God's name will remain
Who is Unseen but present
We shall see
It is true we too shall see
We shall see***

(Translated by Syed Mohsin Akhtar Naquvi)

Iqbal Bano rendered it into music on 13th of February 1986, two years after Faiz's demise in front of fifty thousand audiences, while listening to her, the audience appalled, cheered and started shouting ('Inqalab Zindabad' 'Long live the Revolution'). The black sari was banned as a non-Islamic outfit by the dictator General Zia-ul-Haq. Black is considered to be the universal protest colour against oppression and tyranny. So she came into a jam-packed hall wearing a black sari to protest against his tyranny. Soon after her first go, she was asked by the audiences for recurring. Ali Madeeh Hasheemi, Faiz's grandson writes it is recurring which survives today. This recurred was smuggled out from Pakistan, was copied, within weeks the recording reached all over the world.

The poem ingeniously uses Islamic metaphors to attack fundamentalism and has come to be seen as a revolutionary song for those fighting any kind of oppression or injustice. The allusions are taken from different chapters of Quran on the day of judgment when everything will perish down, Only the name and the fame of Allah will remain (Surah, Rehmanch. 56), and clatter of the earth (Surah Zuljulal, ch.99).

Approximately four decades after his demise in 1984, Faiz's poem became the matter of controversy in India.. From Delhi to Ahmedabad, Mumbai to Kolkata, Kerala to Bihar, From IIT Kanpur to AMU, from Jimia to JNU, the poem was chanted in the different universities. More accurately, his poem titled 'Hum Dekhiengey' has become the anthem of the resistance to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

It got a controversial status when in IIT Kanpur students started singing it loud and wide against CAA in December 2019. A Professor Vashi Sharma, from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur complained about the poem as anti-Hindu, not knowing the techniques of poetry, its metaphors, illusions, paradoxes etc. How can be Faiz anti-Hindu becomes the question. No doubt Faiz always remained controversial in his lifetime and beyond - yet those who hated his ideas confessed to loving his poetry and were attracted by its sheer love of life and humankind. In 1958, when Faiz was jailed again by Ayoub Khan's regime, interestingly when UNESCO approached the Pakistani government to nominate the representative writer from their country; Faiz Ahmed was the first name given by the government. His poetry was not confined to any religion or boundary; his was a universal voice cutting across countries, cultures and centuries. The poet, who has lamented on the partition of the country in his famous poem *Subah Azadi, (Dawn of Freedom)* how Faiz can be anti- to any nation.

***Ye daghdaghujala, ye shab-gazedasahar
Vointizarthajiska, ye wo sahar to nahin,
Ye wosahar to nahin jis ki arzulekar
Chale the yar ke mil-ja-egikahinnakahin***

(This stain-covered daybreak, this night-bitten dawn,
This is not the dawn of which there was expectation;
This is not the dawn with longing for which

The Friends set out (convinced) that somewhere there would be met with. (Faiz. Poems by Faiz)

Commenting upon the reaction his daughter Salama Hashmi from Pakistan said "never underestimate the power of Faiz... Hashmi said, adding that Faiz will always stay relevant to lovers of poetry everywhere, not just in Pakistani creative people are "natural enemies of dictators. The poem is an instrument of focusing the fervor and passion of young people -

leading them towards an understanding of how they must move forward - very upsetting for the powerful who can sense the fragility of their position, once people's energies are unleashed. Thus poets, writers, singers and indeed all creative people have been the natural enemies of dictators."Famous Romantic poet and critic P B Shelley(1792-1822) famously wrote in his Defense of Poetry (1840) "Poets are unacknowledged legislators of the world".

Faiz had continued to enthrall his readers in every pros and cons of life. Of course, the idioms, similes, metaphors and, above all, symbolism and structure of traditional Urdu poetry were already highly developed. But Faiz was first to change the traditional metaphors of poetry while keeping the taste intact. So, Faiz was able to pick up words and expressions that were part of the traditional vocabulary of this form and clothed them in a novel meaning or context. For example, beloved\ mahboob becomes the long-pending freedom, longing\ wisal is seen as the long struggle for freedom and if we quote other examples like morning, dawn becomes the symbol of both union and freedom of people; night\shaam is seen as the reflection of darkness not only of unrequited love but ignorance of people, raqeeb/ rival is the dictator or imperialist power, etc.

CONCLUSION

This is what has happened to Faiz Ahmad Faiz's famous poem Hum Dekhiengey the widespread protests against the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act December 2019, has given an exclusively new context. Aligarh Muslim University Professors Assim Siddiqui and Aftab Alam wrote on the figurative and metaphoric language of nazm in these words:

This is a poem with an extraordinary rhythm. Its cadences enhance the meaning of the words in the poem. It has been composed in a way that makes it especially suitable to sing or speak out loud in large public gatherings. It also deploys some important metaphors. An untrained ear may end up reducing these analogies down to their literal meaning. For example, the word "but", which means idol, and the word "Allah", in the context of the poem, are not to be interpreted literally. Though derived from Islamic history, these words have not been used in theological terms by Faiz. To interpret them in doctrinal religious terms would do injustice to Faiz's revolutionary intentions. (Siddiqui)

Faiz had never intended to hurt the sentiments of any religion. The metaphor of 'buut' Idol Faiz has referred to is false gods which mean authoritarian rule or the dictator. The metaphor of Allah should not be interpreted in isolation, but with images and metaphors such as "mehkoomon" or those who are ruled over or oppressed people, and "mardood-e-haram", which means people who are expelled from sacred places, and "ahl-safa" means pure and honest people. Similarly, the poem has the words "ana-al-Haq" or I am the truth and "k̄hulq-e-k̄hudā", common people and another famous Sufi metaphor "ana al Haq" which means that we are right or common people were right or when they rule. Javid Akther famous singer of the poem recently in an interview with journalists say, in response to the question why Faiz has used the word Allah in nazm, answers because he was then referring a Muslim dictator. When Faiz referred to "buut" idols, he was referring to dictators rather than idols.

Faiz's voice is the real voice of resistance against all forms of tyranny, injustice or inequality. Faiz is the poet who championed his life for the cause of common masses, people who are oppressed and ruled over.

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