

The Social Impact of the Poetry of P.B.Shelley and Faiz Ahmad Faiz: A Comparative Study

MASTER SHOWKAT ALI

PhD Scholar, Dept. of English

University of Kashmir, Hazratbal

Srinagar(Jammu & Kashmir)

Abstract

The present paper proposes to study the two popular aesthetic thinking minds, **P. B. Shelley** an English poet from West and **Faiz Ahmad Faiz** an Urdu poet from East, whose process of thinking created great poetry, that is subtle and sublime with great power of activism and humanism and promises a transformation in the pattern of thinking of its readers, irrespective of age and place. The comparative study of the poetry of both these two poets shows that they are deeply moved by the sufferings of common man and fervently wish to improve their lot.

Shelley cares and writes for the common people and especially the workers. He very early on in his life develops a passionate hatred and contempt for the kind of society he lived in. He sought to change the world by changing people's minds - as is reflected in many of his poems like *Song to the Men of England*, *The Mask of Anarchy*, *Prometheus Unbound* and many more. **Shelley's** first long poem *Queen Mab* is a ferocious and sometimes magnificent diatribe against the existing social order. He is against every kind of oppression whether political, religious, or economic as we see in his poems like *Rise like Lions*, *Hellas*, *Men of England*, *Ode to Liberty*, and *Ode to the West Wind*.

Comparing with **Shelley**, **Faiz Ahmad Faiz** also wants to usher in a world order based on the principles of justice and equality, humanism and brotherhood as is made clear by the poems such as *The Morning of Freedom*, *August 1947*, *Black Out*, *The Festival of Bloodshed* and *The Dust of Hatred in My Eyes*. **Faiz** like **Shelley** also sings of hope for the hopeless, and of freedom, in spite of being held in chains, as poems like *Hold on Restless Heart* bear witness. He is having a wide canvas, not limited to the state of his own country and its inhabitants but for the whole world. Poems such as *We Who Were Slain in Unlit Pathways* testify to this assertion.

This paper with the help of a close reading of the selected poems of both the poets highlights that their poetry is revolutionary and has great social appeal and impact throughout and forever.

Keywords: Shelley, Faiz, Oppression, Suffering, Prison etc.

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Comparative literature is the study of international literary relations and it makes an endeavor to erase linguistic, regional, national, ethnic and religious boundaries; and to foster a global literature which facilitates an accord and understanding between literatures in various languages, regions, nations and cultures. The ‘texts’ from varied origins, languages and cultures are given a chance to have an “interaction due to circulation and recirculation through translations, transcreations... across the globe”

In the same context two popular aesthetic thinking minds P.B Shelley an English poet from West and Faiz Ahmad Faiz an Urdu poet from East, while thinking created great literature, which is subtle and sublime with the power of activism and humanism. They promise a transformation in the pattern of thinking of its readers, irrespective of their place and age. The comparative study of the poetry of these two poets shows that they are both none other than the voices of common men, crying their sufferings and fervently wishing to improve their lot. It is a widely recognized fact that the aesthetic of a creative writer is basically formed by his sensibility and outlook on life. P.B Shelley and Faiz Ahmed Faiz are creative writers as well as thinkers and deal in their writings with fundamental issues surrounding the human condition. Despite their religious, cultural and age differences they feel and think alike in matters related to the existing human conditions in their societies. Motivated by almost similar convictions it is only natural their views on society are identical and to bring an awareness to change their societies should also have affinity. Both social thinkers are romantic as they prophecy a revolt against the existing social set-up, they live in.

Keats in *The fall of Hyperion* asks ‘what benefit’ the poet can be to the world, and asserts that poetry is ‘not useless’ and that the true poet is ‘a sage; A humanist, physician to all men’, not a ‘dreamer’. In *Alastor*, Shelley also shows the dangers of being ‘a dreamer’ and of idealistic self-absorption, asserting the need for poetry and the poet to connect with the world. By implication *Alastor* argues that poets and poetry must be socially engaged if they are to be fruitful. *Queen Mab* is an astonishing debut poem for a twenty year old poet, innovative in its formal variety, bravely radical in context. His radical and revolutionary creed is surfaced as he writes:

Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man
 Inherits vice and misery, when force

And false hood hang even o'er the cradled babe,
Stifling with rudest grasp all natural good. (iv. 117-120)

Like William Blake, Shelley saw injustice linked in one poisonous system which must be uprooted as he says in the same poem

Let the axe
Strike at the root, the poison-tree will fall;
And where its venom'd, exhalations spread
Ruin, and death, and woe, where millions lay
Quenching they serpent's famine, and their bones
Bleaching unburied in the putrid blast,
A garden shall arise, in loveliness
Surpassing fabled Eden". (iv. 82-89)

The same *Queen Mab* divines a bright future for mankind. God, Heaven and Hell are the three words which tyrants exploit now, but the time is not far off when the inherent good of man will triumph over evil as:

Every heart contains perfection's germ (v. 147)

Shelley admits himself in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: 'I have what a Scottish philosopher characteristically terms "a passion for reforming the world" and that comes through strongly in his writings. In *Song to the Men of England* one can understand as it does give a sense of Shelley's ardent concern for social improvement by bringing the awareness among masses:

Men of England, wherefore plough
For the lords who lay ye low?
Wherefore weave with toil and care
The rich robes your tyrants wear? (1-4)

The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.(17-20)

Then he admonishes them to change their way of doing things by being brave, and leads them to a revolt as he writes:

Sow seed-but let no tyrant reap;
 Find wealth, - let no imposter heap;
 Weave robes, - let not the idle wear;
 Forge arms, - in your defence to bear.(21-24)

In another revolutionary poem *The Mask of Anarchy* Shelley opens up his volcanic spirit and calls on the people of England with inspiring voice to.

‘Rise like Lions after slumber
 In unvanquishable number-
 Shake your chains to earth like dew
 Which in sleep had fallen on you-
 Ye are many-they are few.’(378-382)

One of Shelley’s most well-known poems *Ozymandias* is an attack on tyranny and power. Other related socio- political issues are taken care of in many of his poems, which include attacks on aristocracy, law, militarism, poverty, labour and money. He had an extraordinarily acute sense of the inequalities promoted by a social system based on financial competition. His writings have made universal impact upon the minds of people living on earth as he dislikes every sort of inequality and exploitation. Particularly relevant here are his notes to the long poem *Queen Mab* published anonymously in 1812, that were used throughout the 19th century by working-class educational organizations, in which, for example, he attacks wealth as ‘a power usurped by the few, to compel the many to labour for their benefit’. (p.80) Shelley’s awareness of the economic motor generating social injustice is a crucial part of his political analysis, of which he speaks also in his political essay *A Philosophical view of Reform* where he denounces merchants and bankers as ‘a set of pelting wretches’. (p.613) His works influenced great thinkers and his words are like sparks scattered from a dormant but unextinguished fire, capable of flaring into fiery life at any moment. His works like *Queen Mab* and *The Mask of Anarchy* are quoted by great philosophers like Harriet Taylor, Karl Marks and Engels to name only a few. *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, *Ode to liberty* and *Ode to Naples* are a reflection of his political ideas and his utopian millennial views. In these works Shelley is seen as assimilating, utilizing and expressing all the contemporary political and economic issues. He, therefore, represents the earlier application of literature for political theory and political propaganda to supply the basic doctrines for Marxism. The development of literature was not sudden or an independent process existing in a vacuum for Karl Marx for whom Shelley remained, in a sense, the pioneer :

“Marxist critics of Shelley frequently sight Marx’s declaration
 that the real difference between Byron and Shelley is this;
 those who understand and love them rejoice that Byron died

at thirty six because if he had lived he would have become a reactionary bourgeois; they grieve that Shelley died at twenty-nine, because he was essentially a revolutionist and he would always have been one of the advance guard of socialism.”

The most striking affinity between Shelley and Faiz is their revolutionary creed and fervor. The bases of their revolutionary faith are surprisingly identical. They base their premise on this optimistic faith in a coming better future and never allow their readers to give-up but to believe in as Shelley argues well at the conclusion of *Ode to the West Wind*:

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?(70)

A common thread of thought runs through both the poets and like Shelley, Faiz in all his poetry emerges as a revolutionary and wishes to usher in a world order based on the principals of justice and equality, humanism and brotherhood. The poem *When Autumn Came* speaks out the prevailing oppression and exploitation in society as:

This is the way that autumn came to the trees:

it stripped them down to the skin,

left their ebony bodies naked.

It shook out their hearts, the yellow leaves,

scattered them over the ground.

Anyone could trample them out of shape

undisturbed by a single moan of protest.

The birds that herald dreams

were exiled from their song,

each voice torn out of its throat. (Faiz. 1988. 1-10)

Here ‘autumn’ -a season of decay is connected with the idea of oppression by upper class. Faiz believes in social revolution and wants a change from a class-based society to a classless society. It tells us the intensity of the oppression –with trees probably representing the poor people. Autumn represents a period of hopelessness, a time when the upper classes torment and humiliate the lower classes (stripped them down to the skin).the upper class humiliates them so mercilessly that they didn’t even have the courage to protest. Even if they protest they are not heard. So Faiz basically talks about social cruelty, violence, injustice, economic inequality on part of oppressors inflicted on the oppressed. This is only one of the interpretations but there are many examples as in *Don’t Ask me for that Love Again* Faiz breaks radically from Urdu’s usual manner of looking at the Beloved, asking that his social commitment be accepted as more important than there love.

All this I’d thought, all this I’d believed.

But there were other sorrows, comforts other than love.
The rich had cast their spell on history:
Dark centuries had been embroidered on brocades and silks.
Bitter threads began to unravel before me
As I went into alleys and in open markets
Saw bodies plastered with ash, bathed in blood.
I saw them sold and bought, again and again.
This too deserves attention ...
And you still are so ravishing- what should I do?
There are other sorrows in this world,
Comforts other than love.
Don't ask me, my love, for that love again. (Faiz. 1995. 11-24)

At another place in one of his famous ghazals he says that:

This rapture of simple routines life's common struggles
Have surpassed my memory of love
It's proved more enticing just to survive
Even more than you my love. (Faiz. 1995. 7-8)

Like Shelley, Faiz is also sanguine about a better future, a beautiful tomorrow. This is the very asset, that gifts him with optimism instead of grief and sorrow. This optimism doesn't blind his eyes from dreaming of a beautiful future and from the hope of a new dawn. In one of the ghazals concluding couplet, Faiz prophecies the same hope as:

Faiz be grateful to autumn
to its cold winds
that are seasoned postmen
carrying letters as mere habit
from spring
its custom to announce thus
that it will surely come. (Faiz. 1995. 9-10)

And in *It Is as Though Nothing Exists Anymore* he is optimistic and tells about that no doubt terrible period is on but endure as

Even though this dire moment is upon us
Remember, my heart, it is only a moment. (Faiz. 1988. 11-12)

Conscience enhances its verification and corroboration because of the intensity with which he gives a glad tidings of transmogrifying his Kishtiveeran (wasteland) into a green and verdurous peace of land. The conclusion of *Prison Meeting* is saturated with hope as:

The gift of this night is my faith that morning will come.

Ah, this faith which is larger than any pain.

this morning that is on its way

is more bounteous than any night. (Faiz. 1988. iii. 10-13)

And the same thing is prophesied in the last couplet of a ghazal:

Once again the breeze knocks on the prison door.

It whispers, Don't give up, wait a little, Dawn is near. (Faiz. 1995. 7-8)

Faiz Ahmad Faiz in one of the quatrains is sanguine enough that his words would definitely guide them to make an appeal and impact on the minds of the common masses to awaken them, to rage a war against the sea of troubles as:

Though they have stolen my paper and pen, I don't grieve.

I dip my fingers into my heart's blood.

Though they have gagged me, it hardly matters.

I have given voice to every link in my chains. (Faiz. 1988. 9-12)

Edward W. Said while commenting on the greatness and influence of Faiz Ahmad Faiz writes that:

“Faiz was read and listened to both by the literary elite and by the masses. He was, I think one of the greatest poets of this century and was honored as such throughout the major part of Asia and Africa.”

In a nutshell, I conclude with these words that both Faiz and Shelly are saturated with their enthusiasm for a passion which is closely allied to their commitment to bring social change. The impact of their poetry is working universally throughout societies to set them free from the shackles of injustice, inequality and bondage.

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