

Verses that Refuse to Die: Poetics of Faiz Ahmad Faiz

Anisa Rafique

anisarafique987@gmail.com

Department of English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Muhammad Khakan Ajmal

khakanonline711@gmail.com

Assistant Professor, Higher Education Department, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Khakan Ajmal khakanonline711@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article securitizes how the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz acts as a political and aesthetic tool to fight against systematic oppression. Faiz's poems are not merely thematic but serve as an active driving force against social agony and despair. It serves as a remedy for suffering and oppression, renewing the role of art in politics to impede futility and disappointment in society. Through Paulo Freire's impression of critical hope, this study unveils how Faiz's poems represent a defiant, deliberate, and optimistic vision. This idea urges to capture realities insightfully and seek a paradigm shift that emphasizes the nexus between art and collective action. Love, beauty, and memory in his poems are forged into weapons against power structures. Faiz Ahmad Faiz blends content and form in integration and transforms hope into a potent force of radical awareness.

Keywords: Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Art and Activism, Paulo Freire, Critical Hope

INTRODUCTION

Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911 -1984) was one of the most celebrated and beloved poets of Pakistan of the 20th century. He himself was a symbol of revolt, resistance, and hope. He was born in the same city that birthed Allama Iqbal, Pakistan's national poet. Faiz Ahmad Faiz's early period poetic age was intellectually fermented by India's progressive writers' movement and the anti-colonial sentiment of those days. He rose up during the ultimate stature of freedom struggle against British imperialism and political activism in the subcontinent that helped him shape his ideology. He was also introduced to Marxism, and his study in literature and philosophy progressively molded his belief that art is for life's sake. He believed that art can be a form of activism, and poetry can serve as a medium for protest.

Faiz was not a mere observer of history unfolding at a distance; in fact, he lived it. After becoming a leading figure of the progressive writers' movement, he applied his pen as a weapon against inequality, domination, and oppression. His poems become a voice for the working class, representing their struggle against suffering and for a better tomorrow. After Pakistan's independence, he retained his voice against injustice and tyranny. In 1951, Faiz was drawn into the Rawalpindi conspiracy case -a political outrage involving military officers and leftist scholars accused of plotting to overthrow the government. He went to a custodial institution for four years, but he did not hesitate even in prison. His poetic collection, Prison Poetry (Zindan Naama), penned during his imprisonment, remains among the most influential testimonies to human endurance and hope.

His rhyme is revolutionary but never harsh. His verses are deeply political but retain their lyrical beauty. His philosophy was that one can find light even in the darkest hours, and his poems are often end with the promise of daybreak. With his iconic poems such as "Bol" and "hum dhaikhain gaey" he has become the voice of silenced and oppressed masses. Many of his poems have crossed borders and generations and have inspired movement well beyond Pakistan.

Faiz was a social reformer who himself dreamed of a society where people have equality and autonomy. He spoke against dictatorship, war, poverty, and religious racism through his lyricism and firmly believed in social humanism. He never succumbed to hopelessness, even during censorship, exile, and imprisonment. His poems and life reflect social failures while also illuminating the path toward a more just and better future. This was not naivety; it was defiance. This is the kind of hope that never dies even when there is darkness all around. Possibly, this is the most enduring feature of his legacy. Faiz Ahmad Faiz is a symbol of hope; he is the poet never without hope, the one who turned pain into lyrics. He was the poet who continued to write for peace, beauty, and freedom in the face of adversity and oppression.

Paulo Freire was the Brazilian most leading figure of 20th century. He was a humanist and educator. He was committed to struggle against oppression and progressive politics. He was greatly influenced by Marxism and postcolonial thoughts and liberation theology. Freire ideology was that the education should be a tool for social change. In his seminal work, “pedagogy of oppressed” (1968) that was written during exile that criticizes the traditional “banking model” of education where students are considered as passive recipients. Paulo Freire advocates for the two ways of learning through dialogue that empowers learners in participating and challenges as well as transforming oppressive structures. “Critical hope” according to Freire’s concept is the belief in the possibility of a just and better world that emphasizes his pedagogical philosophy. He encourages self-awareness, questioning and the fusion of theory and practice to stimulate collective actions and liberation (Schuhrenskey, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This article employs interpretive and qualitative analysis based on a close reading of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetics. It practices Paulo Freire’s theory of critical hope to demonstrate how Faiz makes hope an active agent of resistance.

It uses Paulo Freire’s theory of critical hope to illustrate how Faiz makes the case for hope as a dynamic agent of resistance. This study conveys together the literary analysis with historical and political context and demonstrates how Faiz’s poetry fuses form and content into a radical and revolutionary vision. The study brings together literary analysis with political and historical context, illustrating how Faiz’s poetry fuses form and content into a radical, revelatory vision.

Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in Paulo Freire’s theory of critical hope, as enunciated in pedagogy of Hope and Pedagogy of the oppressed. In Freire concept, hope is neither a utopian fantasy nor an emotional refuge but a grounded, political and epistemological force. Critical hope, grows not from denial or consolation but from the capacity to confront in justice while sustaining belief in transformation. It is built through conscientização—the awakening of critical consciousness that recognizes the possibility of reshaping oppressive social realities through reflection, dialogue and collective action (Freire, 2021). false or naïve hope, which refuses to see hardship, is not critical hope; critical hope looks despair in the eyes, but refuses to be consumed by it.

This notion of hope works as a captivating lens through which I will examine the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz whose poems emerges from political subjugation, aborted progress and ideological disenchantment. Faiz’s poems never ignore desolation instead, it provokes it more closely. At the same spell it challenges and rejects to let despair define reality. His poems represents hope as an active and creative agency, especially his poems that were written during his exile, censorship and imprisonment. these poems echo what the Paulo Freire calls an “ontological need” for hope – the human need to believe that change is possible even in the darkest period (Freire, 2021, p. 2).

Faiz poetic approach thus echoes with Freire’s claim that actual hope must be chained to action. Faiz

poetry is not an abstract reflection on sufferings, it is corrective measures. His metaphors shift between tenderness and urgency, sorrow and resistance, while his aesthetic strategy seeks to renew the spirit of resistance. Faiz takes hope as action, as force, he imagines future that disrupt the inertia of hopelessness by asserting dignity that will not depend on power's consent. Furthermore, Faiz's hope is rooted in solidarity. His poems are rarely expressed in an isolated voice; it grips a comprehensive. This shared voice aligns with Freire's idea of dialogic praxis, where masses craft meaning together as equal in the struggle for liberation. Faiz's hope does not express from a position of authority; it supports the people and encourages collective action through beauty, compassion and strong belief.

“cultural problems in underdeveloped countries” an essay written by Faiz, in which he explicitly criticizes the neocolonial efforts to defeat native growth by substituting local culture with he calls “anti-culture trash” literature, art and ideologies that promote and inhibit critical thinking. He argues that such cultural stagnation results in what he calls “arrest growth” a systematic condition in which national identity and consciousness is intentionally constrained. The only viable response to this condition, Faiz argues, is the advancement of progressive cultural expression by socially aware artist, scholars and writers. He writes “art is the major factor in the material process of production, as is education” (Faiz, 2005). This assertion closely reflects Freire's idea that education as well as culture plays a vital role in any project of human liberation. For both Faiz, and Freire, culture and education are not passive activities; they actively shape societal consciousness, challenges oppressive systems and inspire collective transformation.

For Faiz art has dual responsibility: it must reflect the conditions of society and the sufferings of people and it must work to change those conditions. Art, like education is an active agency which can modify the consciousness, build up national identity and explode collective resistance. For Faiz, writers and artist must give raise a society from darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge and consciousness. Hence, Faiz's vision of art and hope aligns with Freire's belief that a dialectical approach to learning and communication empowers the oppressed to reclaim their voice and reshape their world.

Collaboratively, Freire's concept of critical hope and Faiz's ideology of hope as cultural resistance purposes dynamic framework for understanding literature as a tool of just intervention. Hope in this regard, is both the method and message – a rebellious force that claims dignity, possibility, liberation through aesthetic form and political commitment.

Analysis

Faiz Ahmad Faiz in his poems has unwavering hope. Hope that is not escapism but a resistance. In the face of tyranny, exile and hopelessness, this section will have a look how Faiz Ahmad Faiz manages to change agony into strength explaining hope as a radical collective strength.

“A Few Days More” is a poem by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, from the book *Naqsh-e-Faryadi* (1943). It was written when he was extremely distraught and facing persecution for his ideas. The poem alternates between howls of agony and protests of pure inner strength. While honestly discussing suffering, Faiz also offers a glimmer of optimism. Faiz's poem inspires those on the edge of despair to persist, as better days await.

*In the scorched desert of the space of this age We
must stay, but not stay like this,*

*The nameless, heavy oppression of foreign hands Today
must be borne, but not always borne.*

The dust of tribulations enfolding your beauty, Counting of

*the frustrations of our youth of two days, Futile burning
pain of moonlit nights,*

*The heart's profitless throbbing, the body's despairing cry A few
days more, my dear, only a few days.*

(keirnan, n.d., pp. 79)

In these lines, Faiz paints a landscape of injustice, emotional collapse, and pain, but beneath it all, he sews the unbroken threads of hope steadily. Faiz describes an intense and painful experience shaped by a time that is emotionally barren and politically harsh. He used scorched desert to symbolize a time of hopelessness. Through this comparison, he showed how such an environment drains people's spirit. He represents the sense of being stuck under the "nameless" dense oppression of foreign hands; however, he does not accept this condition as eternal.

This verse, "we must stay, but not stay like this," conveys a powerful tension between staying and moving. He portrays the difficulty of the condition, yet he refuses to normalize this situation. He rejects the idea of normalizing despair. He carries all these feelings at once deliberately. This tension highlights the essence of what Paulo Freire meant by critical hope – a kind of hope that is not merely an emotional outpouring but a disciplined and mindful commitment to social transformation (1994). Hope is neither loud nor exaggerated in this poem, but it is found in the understanding belief that suffering is temporary. Faiz acknowledges the harsh realities of the present time, but he draws a distinction between enduring and accepting them. In this distinction, hope acts as a tool of awareness of oppression that is not eternal, and it can be challenged and resisted.

The metaphorical expressions such as "the dust of tribulations", "futile burning pain", "profitless throbbing", and the body's despairing cry in Faiz's verses are the catalogue of emotional and physical cost of this condition. He is not anxious about the weight of suffering; in fact, he repose in it and rejects false comfort. He summed up with a phrase charged with reserved hope, "A few days more, my dear, only a few days." This grips space for sorrow, yet maintains endurance. For Freire, this is the language of critical consciousness, acknowledging the pain of suppression while imagining a brighter and just future

"At the place of execution" was written in post partition era of subcontinent .it was a poem by Faiz Ahmad Faiz that was the artifact of both political and social unrest in Pakistan around 1951, when a very well-known writer Sadat Hassan Manto had been captured under notorious and harsh article of 295-C. This poem is a testimony to Faiz's resistance against inequality and injustice. He induces optimism resistance and resilience to change through his vigorous and fresh imagery..

We too shall see the goal of hope's long race

Patience , my heart : night's length will pass.

And we shall see tomorrow rise with shining face

The drinkers' thirst once sharpened, we shall see how long the
fiery grip can be denied

Or flask and cup under lock and key

(keirnan, n.d., pp. 155)

This first verse expresses collective hope. The use of pronoun "we" is powerful – it turns hope into shared struggle, not just as individual desire. The impression of "long race" is not only a metaphor

for endurance but also suggests a significant hope that does not appear overnight instead it embodies with patience, struggle and of collective action. By emphasizing commitment as vital to overcoming despair, Faiz aligns himself with Freire's idea of critical hope. This hope is not just optimism, rather it expresses a determined political stance against dejection. It urges society to become conscious and work for positive change.

Faiz addresses the mental strength that will keep you believing in something. Faiz calls directly to the heart, and as a result, this struggle is made personal and human. Night is a metaphor for political darkness, oppression, or despair—but it is framed as temporary. In Freirean terms, this demonstrates the recognition that oppressor systems are historically created and can be contested through understanding and action. Like Freire, Faiz's hope is based on a belief in the transformative power of people. Faiz creates a cadence through enjambment. Shining morning symbolizes clarity, justice, and freedom. This idea of face reflects the promise and proximity of hope—the promise of something tangible and godlike, almost. For Faiz the future is not an abstraction; it is concrete and colorful. It reflects Freire's vision that what raises the ability for transformation in both the oppressor and the oppressed is the belief in a better future.

The metaphor of “the drinkers” is the symbol of underprivileged people who desire justice, dignity, and satisfaction. Their “thirst” grows more intense from the long denial. Faiz shows the effect on desire and resistance when you are denied freedom. This makes parallel with Freire's idea of consciousness as “being stretched through adversity” and how critical reflection on suffering can lead to greater consciousness and, ultimately, praxis.

Wine—the “fiery grape”—comes to stand in for a joyfulness, a freedom, a revolutionary ardor, laid low. Faiz again seems to suggest that to deny is untenable by questioning how long it can be denied. It is stated with an air of confidence: nothing can oppress forever. In a place where we see critical hope as refusing to accept the normality of suffering. “Or bottle and glass in confinement.” In this final image, the flask and cup, which symbolize the joy and expression of the people, are put away, hinting at an imposed control of both emotional and political life. But there is an implication: dude, you can pick locks. This means diction may imply that joy and justice are now being kept hostage under the bone metaphor, but they are neither lost nor removed and can be reclaimed.

“Today Come in Fetters to the Marketplace “(Aaj Bazaar Mein Pa-Ba-Jaulan Chalo) is one of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's iconic resistance poems written by him while he was in jail in the dictatorial Pakistani regime. Imagining martyrdom and sacrifice, Faiz calls upon the oppressed to challenge persecution—and not just silently but with a visible and courageous spirit. The poem expresses a radical kind of hope that will not be crushed even in the midst of despair. This is a dogmatic protest and an innate assertion of resilient humanity.

The wet eye, the stormy spirit, is not enough,

The accusation of secret love is not enough:

Today come in fetters to the marketplace, Come waving
hands, come exulting, dancing,

Come with dust on the head, come with blood on the dress

All the city of the beloved is gazing, come, ·

There too is the governor of the city, the public gathering too,

The arrow of calumny too, the stone of abuse too,

The unhappy daybreak too, the wretched day too

(keirnan, n.d., pp. 231)

In this poem, Faiz paints a radical vision of hope that does not deny pain but appears from it. This poem opens with a refusal of passive emotional responses – “the wet eyes”, “the stormy spirit” – are not enough. This promises a hope that is transformation in the face of injustice and suffering. It is not about calm after disaster, but a bold step taken in public space against oppression. In this regard, hope becomes a force of resistance and change rather than mere acceptance. Freire’s critical hope based in agency, struggle and critical consciousness that aligns with Faiz’s notion of hope. This dialectic is well described by Faiz’s call to “come in fetters”...exulting, dancing, captures this contradiction, even in chains, they moved forward with dignity and spirit. This is not unrealistic optimism but a fundamental belief that even in chains, human spirit cannot be erased.

For Faiz “the market place” turns into the theatre of resistance. In the verses “with dust on the head” and “blood on the dress” emphasizes that hope is not based on neglecting sufferings but on facing it courageously and directly. This public performance of suffering is an act of resilience. By articulating these personal wounds in a collective and visible form of protest, Faiz brings suffering into a source of moral authority and unity.

These poetic verses, “all the city of the beloved is looking, come, “and “there is also the governor of the city,” make the oppressed visible before the power and people. Instead of escaping from surveillance, Faiz advocates boldly stepping into the gaze. In the Freirean concept, this is an ontological hope, the affirmation of human dignity and identity in a situation of dehumanization.

In addition, the accretion of oppressive elements – “the arrow of calumny... the stone of abuse ... The unhappy daybreak.. The wretched day...” are not just overloads, rather, help to reckon the load that the fight for justice necessarily places on one’s back. The hope in this poem is not passive; it is an active agency. It calls for risks and visibility, for walking into public places with wounds open and spirit unbroken. This is revolutionary hope that does not accept the silence of absence; it insists upon presence.

CONCLUSION

The poetics of Faiz Ahmad Faiz arises out of the lived experience of colonization, partition, political subjugation, censorship, and exile. Hence, his poems carry a radical hope. Based on Paulo Freire’s notion of critical hope that emphasizes critical consciousness, praxis, and the determination to transform, this study asserts that Faiz’s poems inspire a dialogic response to torment and repression. He never denies despair or romanticizes it. Rather, he thinks of it as a part of human life and offers resistance by mutual envisioning.

Faiz highlights this by countering the separation of aesthetics and politics. In his poems such as “khuch roz aur”, “sar-e- maqal” and “aj bazar mein,” he balances personal misery to public defiance, daring readers to name inequality, injustice, to remember sufferings and to keep dreaming through oppression. His poems are meant to see, preserve the cultural identity, and imagine liberation- a sign that follows the core idea of critical hope.

Faiz incorporates Persian motifs, symbolism, and revolutionary rhetoric into his poems to make his verses a part of a large Trans historical struggle for justice. His poems align with both artistic purpose and immediate political concerns. Faiz’s poetics not only survives but it survives, challenging, inspires, and guides in reshaping the future through transformative action.

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