

## **The Idea of Resistance in the Poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Agha Shahid Ali**

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### **Abstract**

Writers, who resist indomitable ideologies, always share excruciating and coercive experiences through immaculate words. They share the traumatic past and present with the hope that they may change the course of struggle and inequality in the future. The written words of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Agha Shahid Ali have exposed the ideologies which victimized innocent in the name of the welfare state and society. Hence, they do not take swords and guns to face the antagonist but use powers of pen that have always been mightier to articulate the message. It is one, perhaps, the best form of resistance. The present paper deals with the idea of resistance that is prominent in the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Agha Shahid Ali. Both the bards sing about the miseries and sufferings of their society, which have similarities in tone and expression.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Struggle, Resistance, Marxism, Equality, Culture, Nationalism

“What if my pen and paper have been snatched away?

I have dipped my fingers in the heart's blood.

What if my lips are sealed?

I have lent my tongue to each link in the chain” (Faiz 48)

Social problems mirror the writings of great writers. These bards do not stand still but invoke the idea of resistance in the minds of the gentry with whom they live. Sometimes, such expressions oppose the powerful and coercive structure of government or such bodies. By opposing, they show the crystal view of right and wrong, exploited and exploiters, promise and reality, silence and freedom of voice. The literature appears to have a flow of voice that entertains and also opens the dark recesses of social, political, and economic injustices; thereby, it changes the perspective of common men. When writers turn their writings into social and political resistance, then words become the fore bearer of a message that will lay down the foundation of a new society.

'The conception of art as growing solely from the ego of the artist without any reflection of social realities obviously a superficial view' (Gupta -1983). It seems an artist takes conceptions from the burning issues of his time. As Warren and Wellek say, 'the writer has been a citizen, has pronounced on questions of social and political importance, has taken part in the issues of his time' (Wellek, 1956). Social problems like state 'oppressions as oppressive state apparatus' (Althusser, 2001), individual Liberty, and cultural instability have been the preambles of the authors' minds. Through his creative expression, a writer exhibits the power of resistance. The word resistance, many times, is misunderstood as a physical or violent form that a crowd or revolutionary takes against despotic powers. Burhan Basir says, "Resistance...seeks to achieve its objective through the use of nonviolent resistance (also called civil resistance, which includes literature)" (page 163), for Ngugi's pen might do the work of the gun' (Barrel of Pen, 1983). Caryl Phillips has also remarked that "a writer can infuse in a people with a sense of their own unique identity and spiritually kindle the fire of resistance" (Bohmer 176). Marxist theories infuse and support the same ideology of resistance. Michel Foucault writes, "If there were no possibility of resistance, there would be no power relation at all" (95). The writers who rise up with the power of pen leave an indelible mark to motivate the powerless and dominated to rise up

against oppressors. Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Agha Shahid Ali are such authors. Both are stalwarts of poetic expression infused and laden with socio-political situations of their time. They record the devastation, pain, and blemishes inflicted by ideological apparatuses on the timeline of history and people.

Agha Shahid Ali, an Indian-born, received his education in Srinagar, Delhi, and then America. As a Kashmiri-American, he wrote eight volumes of poetry. His collections of poetry are imbued with loss, bereavement (Ghose) of Kashmiri culture and people. Kashmir, which has been called heaven once, suffered great losses due to the political situation and the tussle between India and Pakistan. Ali had seen a beautiful and perfect cultural aura that faced declensions in the 1980s and 1990s of the twentieth century, thereby the migration of both Hindus and Muslims. His inspiration for poetry is definitely some amount of political rage at times, and 'Kashmir is the most vibrant and evident' (Kapoor Manan) symbol that projects not only the history but also the feeling of resistance. The rhetoric of his poetry is full of such words, which suggest the idea of resistance automatically. Words like 'Kashmir Shrinks, my own exile, massacred town, grieving mothers, midnight soldiers, and 'Kashmir is burning' (Ali, 2010) are great emblems to clarify that Ali is a poet of resistance. By voicing the heartrending scenario of the valley, he exudes anger, pain, and loss.

Although he is a Diaspora poet yet this position places him to see social injustice done to the Kashmiri people from different situations. The oeuvre of his poetry gives voice to the secular tradition, freedom, and culture of the Kashmiri People. He spent most of his time in America, yet the images he culls from dreams and memories present the social devastation of Kashmir. The images of his poems simultaneously describe social wailing and political oppression.

Grieving mothers and  
snow begin to fall  
On us like ash. Black on  
us of flames  
It cannot extinguish the  
neighborhood  
The home was set ablaze  
by midnight soldiers  
Kashmir is burning. (Ali -  
179)

Agha Shahid Ali's career is a narrative of the intricacies of loss. He describes the transience of human existence accelerated by political and diplomatic instigation. His mind does not see any "immanent will" like Thomas Hardy, a noted Victorian poet, but an immanent exploiting power of politics that can be resisted if not defeated. The political condition of Kashmir is the gist of Ali's writing; even the shattered feeling and society are shown in an exact manner.

"In this country, we step  
out with doors in our arms

Children run out with  
windows in their arms

You drag it behind you in  
lit corridors

If the switch is pulled, you  
will be torn from everywhere.  
(Ali-176)

This dividing of the country, the division between Hindu –Muslim, Muslim- Hindu, you cannot imagine how much I hate it (Ghose). Ali illustrates the harmonious atmosphere which has become a lost dream in the lake. His mastery over the gaze of the window which he mingles the socio-political pathos is another example of resistance where he records the misery and sorrow of a beautiful culture and its people.

"The prisons fill with the cries of  
the children.

Then how do you subsist, how do  
you persist land". (Ali- 347)

His approach to socio-political issues appears to be cosmopolitan because, in most of his poems, he alludes to a few lines of some great poets from all over the world to make his pathos similar to the human beings of other parts of the world. Hence, he shows the similarity between the suffering and resistance of Kashmiri people and the rest of the world wherever such situations have been. Ali, like great literary historians, records the gory picture of Rizwan, a Kashmiri young man who died resisting the dominant ideology:

"Don't tell my father I have died,  
he says,"

And I follow him through the  
blood on the road

And hundreds of pairs of shoes,  
the mourners

Left behind". (Ali- 179)

Faiz Ahmed Faiz, an Urdu Pakistani poet, and journalist born in Sialkot, faced the trauma of the division of India and Pakistan with the hope that one day both the countries shall thrive prosperously. He studied English, Arabic literature and wrote several collections of poems. His poetry combines the themes of love, beauty, and political ideals into a vision of a better world and goodness (FAF). This legendary poet of the people, a humanist less concerned with the poetic fancies for art's sake than with the aspirations of the common man. In spite of Marxist belief, Faiz does not burden his poem with Marxism only. His kind of thinking is more rooted in fraternity, Liberty, equality, and sympathy for the common people. From the first collection *Naqush-e-Faryadi* to *Zinda Nama*, he searches for human pathos and tries to give a new vision to minimize the suffering of people. Faiz is 'the poet of common masses and Tangavala (Charioteer) and Rickshaw puller (Auto driver)' (Ahsanul Haq-11). Although Faiz is romantic at the beginning of his career yet the failure of the promises that politicians made at the beginning of new nations changed his attitude; consequently, he assimilates socio-political thinking and becomes dexterous in using his power of the pen. Gopi Chand Narang affirms that "Faiz is a poet with

social consciousness" (Narang). Faiz changes his mind as he sees injustice and exploitation in society. Then, he questions his own romantic attitude that he had at the beginning of his career.

"Mughasepahalisimohhaabbat mere mahaboobnaamang" (Faiz -38 )

(My love do not ask the way I loved you once)

Faiz resists the irresponsible and self-centered political system, which is devoid of the feeling of the common good. He depicts the fragile system of government, which is apart from common men's pain and pleasure. People were left in hunger and penury, while government apparatuses were involved in satisfying their petty egos and power hunger.

"Nadari ,daftarhookhaurgamm  
Ensapano se takaratenrahen  
Berahamthaachaumukgpatharayn  
Yenkanchkedhanchekyaakaraten"  
(Faiz-56)

[Poverty, office, hunger and sorrow,

From these illusions came face to face

Merciless was the whole environment  
What could this frazil system be?]

The poems of Faiz are full of motivational sway, which is a rare beauty of a writer. Agha Shahid Ali found a great role model in Faiz's poetry. Shahid not only translated his poem but also composed great lines on Faiz. Faiz talks about the livelihood, field, bread, and sweets of the common man. His language is full of sympathy expressed overtly.

“Wherever you were, Faiz, that  
Language spoke to you, and when you  
heard it,  
You were alone in Tunis, Beirut,  
London, or Moscow. Those poets’  
laments  
Concealed, as years revealed, the sorrows  
Of a broken time”. (Ali -56 )

Faiz, a revolutionary of revolutionaries, is optimistic beyond the chaos and destruction. Although the poetry of Faiz seems to have many dimensions yet the dimension of hope give the readers a glimpse of a personal vision to become impersonal for the betterment of society.

Both Ali and Faiz wrote in two different languages and different socio-political setups, but their craving for social rehabilitation and descriptions of pain and pathos of common people seem alike. Agha Shahid Ali was not declared socialist like Faiz, yet the ideas we find in his poetry show a great concern with society, similar to the ideas expressed in the poems of Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Certain concepts like exploitation of the poor, individual helplessness against political oppression, the devastation of public means, Environmental dejection, and stagnation, described by both poets, seem similar.

The concept of freedom is prominent in Ali and Faiz. Ali describes the time when people were allowed to live freely. The life of the Kashmiri people was without any imposition. Today, the situation is changed; now, everywhere is restricted, and hope for

freedom is an illusion. The sight of the city is not what it was once.

“The city from where no news can come

It is now so visible in its curfewed night

That the worst is precise.” (Ali-178)

Faiz also talks about the freedom on which the division of Bharat and Pakistan was done. People were told that after separate territory, they would achieve complete Liberty. But this concept turned into an illusion.

“Yah daagdaaguzaala, Yah Shabgazeedaa Sahar

Vah EntejaarThaa Jiskaa. Yeh Vah Sahar to nahin” (Faiz-76)

[This dark spotted light, this filthy morning,

This is not the morning that was expected.]

Both poets feel helplessness and pain in their hearts the moment they see the injustice done to the people. This sense of sympathy favors the people who have been exploited in the name of the welfare state and justice. Ali wants to save the country from the hand of the dominating powers. He is disturbed for not having communication between him and the people of his motherland. His incapability to hear the cries of the people feels his heart with pain.

“These words may never reach you.

Another end: "The skin dissolves in dew without your touch.

And I want to answer: I want to live forever. What else can I say?

It rains as I write this. Mad heart, be brave". (Ali-206)

Seeing the poor being exploited openly, Faiz Ahmed Faiz finds himself in the same internal fluctuation and pain as Ali feels for the people of Kashmir. Faiz, as a socialist, expresses sympathy and his broken heart that cannot be silent, meek, and mild.

“Jab Kabhibikataahainbaajaar Main majadoorkaagoshat  
Shaharahon pain gareebonkaa  
Lahunbikatahain.  
Aaggsiseenai main  
raharahakeinuchhalaitihain,  
Aapanendil par  
mughenkaabunheinahinrahatahain”.  
(Faiz-49)

[Whenever the flesh of laborer is sold in the market  
The blood of the poor is sold in the city.  
Fire throbs slowly and slowly in the heart  
And it is hard to control the heart.]

Ali cannot bear the sight of Eden that once Kashmir was. The cultural garden went into long autumn not because of a seasonal change but because of human nature, hunger for governance, domination, and overall lack of social communion. Now, because of so much destruction done to his city, it has become desolate sight. Everything is dejected; merely stagnation is left.

Ali, like Faiz, reflects upon the sight of the city.

"Everything is finished; nothing remains."

I must force silence to be a mirror,  
To see his voice again for directions.

.....  
Only silence can now trace my letters

To him. Or in a dead office, the dark panes." (Ali-204)

Ali wants to give voice to the voiceless and stability to the destroyed culture of Kashmir. Faiz also describes the social desolation which has destroyed the smoothness of the people's minds. Even the house and roads are full of silence. Both Faiz and Ali look very close when they describe the silence.

Ekmajor Baam-o-darkhamusheekeinbogh  
sein choor  
Aasmaanonkeinzuyen-dardravaan  
Chaandkaadukhabharafasanneynnoor  
Shaheoahonkeekhanakmeingalta. (Faiz-64)

[A sight  
Doors and roofs laden with the burden of silence  
The waves of pain are continued from the sky  
The sorrowful story of the moon's light  
Is drowned in the dust of the road.]

The condition of the common men expressed in these two poets also suggests how much similar in theme and expression they are. The people who have dedicated their lives for the sake of their country are facing lots of difficulties; simultaneously, they are being punished because they believe in the government,

and the same government victimizes them. Ali presents very explicitly the political and sorrowful picture of the valley.

"Men are forced to stand barefoot in snow water all night. The women are alone inside. Soldiers smash radio and television with bare hands. They tear our houses to pieces." (Ali 194)

Faiz also exposes the plight of people who want to retain the harmony of the country and live in peace. People are being victims of political power if they oppose the government.

"Haraayen din yehkhudavandagaane-meharo-jamaal

Lahunmeingark mere  
gamkadeinaatenhain

Aayen din mere  
najarunkeinsaamneinunakein

SheedzismsalamatuthayeinLatinhain."

(Faiz-102)

[On every coming day, these merciful people

Pestered in blood comes into my painful house

On every coming day before my eyes

Martyr bodies are taken away properly.]

The poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Agha Shahid Ali are imbued with the cause of socialism that nurtures the idea of resistance without any doubt. Perhaps it is the virtue of maintaining art as art with a social tone. Simultaneously, Ali transforms the ghazal form into English and maintains its form with a social tone. Ali and Faiz both dedicate their lives to their countries. Ali says, 'I would like to go back to Kashmir to die.' At the same

time, Faiz expresses his views to 'Nisaar' (dedicate) himself to a country whose condition is worse. Ali imbibes the quality of perseverance of human sorrow from the mounting violence that seized the Kashmir region. He accepts Faiz as his inspiration. Both Faiz and Ali represent society in its multifaceted pain imposed by the ruling power. They see the solution in Liberty, fraternity, and equality. Their visions do not stand for one country or a part of the world but for the whole world.

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