

RE-PRESENTATION OF ROMANTIC IDEALS IN TAUFIQ RAFAT'S ARRIVAL OF THE MONSOON

Kinza Arshad

Ms., Kinnaird College for Women, Pakistan,
Kinza.arshad91@hotmail.com

Abstract

Writing from Post-Independence period to the early nineties, Taufiq Rafat is considered as the pioneer of English Poetry in Pakistan. His remarkable contribution was that he relieved English language of the colonial baggage and used it to express emotions and sensibilities rooted in the indigenous milieu. Earlier, Pakistani literature in English was subjected to prejudices and biasness for being written in the former master's language. It was from Taufiq Rafat that the language was used to express the sensibility of the local people. He called it the Pakistani Idiom.

This practice of employing Pakistani idiom is evident in his first collection of poetry *Arrival of the Monsoon*. Rafat has innovatively used language to communicate the Pakistani culture. Local fauna and flora, idioms and cultural practices are common in Rafat's jargon. Through language, he creates a romantic aura seeped in local practices and lifestyle. In comparison to the widely established and historically renowned British Romanticism, Rafat's romantic ideals are Pakistani in nature. The basic tenets of nature and individuality of man are kept intact by Rafat, who described them in a completely local setting, totally aloof from the conventional British setting.

This study will specifically explore the re-presentation of the already set notions of Romanticism in a localized version and how his use of English language does not reflect the foreign flavor, but rather a traditional mode of expression. The research will analyse the first section of *Arrival of Monsoon*, named, "Arrival of Monsoon 1947 -1969". This section comprises of 35 poems with diverse themes and topics for analysis. The paper will present that Rafat's expression creates an atmosphere of romantic ideals that have Pakistan's original sensibility

Keywords: Romanticism, ideals, local, culture, Pakistan.

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing from post-Independence period to the early nineties, Taufiq Rafat is considered as the foremost pioneer of English Poetry in Pakistan. His remarkable contribution was that he relieved English language of a "colonial baggage" and used it to express emotions and sensibilities rooted in the indigenous milieu. Earlier, Pakistani literature in English given to emulating British style of expression. It was with Taufiq Rafat that the language of the colonists began to express the new sensibility of the local people.

This practice is evident in his first collection of poetry *Arrival of the Monsoon*. Rafat has innovatively uses language to communicate the dynamic fabric of Pakistani culture. Native fauna and flora, local idioms and cultural practices are common in Rafat's work. Through language, he creates a romantic world seeped in local practices and lifestyle. In contrast to the widely influential and historically renowned British Romanticism, Rafat's romantic ideals are Pakistani in nature. The basic bonds of nature and individuality of

man are kept intact by Rafat, but he embeds them in a completely local setting, thus creating new ways of expression.

This study will specifically explore the re-presentation of the already set notions of Romanticism in a localized context and how Rafat's use of English language does not reflect the foreign flavour, instead breaks new ground. The research will analyse the first section of *Arrival of Monsoon*, named, "Arrival of Monsoon 1947 -1969". This section comprises of 35 poems with diverse themes and topics. The paper will be divided into three chapters: introduction, the discussion and analysis and last chapter will present the conclusion

2. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Pakistani poetry written in English was considered a weak version of the British style of writing for a very long time. Since its advent, English poetry by Pakistan was discouraged on the premises that such work was a sign of colonial chains and burden. The themes and concepts were considered to be borrowed from Britain. It was a widely acknowledged belief that Pakistan's writing in English still promoted British sensibility, until Taufiq Rafat's first published collection of poetry, *The Arrival of Monsoon*. This collection highlighted a paradigm shift. It clearly distinguished the Pakistani sensibility from the British. For, Rafat English is merely a language to express emotions that were personal. Rafat, through his poetry displayed the natural lifestyle, culture and concerns of his own people. In doing so, he establishes a personalized set of romantic ideals. These romantic ideals serve as the foundation of the Pakistan's first original and personalized expression in English.

Nature has been a very prominent aspect of the British and Pakistani poetry. Despite its of lending a range of themes to both, it also distinguishes them. Nature for Rafat is evoked in descriptions of the Pakistani landscape, weather and seasons. Nature in Rafat's poetry varies in its intensity and form. This in turn has a variety of effect on the people. The country of various seasons and landscapes provides Rafat's poetry a depth which in turn gives the reader an insight into all the varieties of nature. The country side of Pakistan is described in "The Mound" as "a village of two score houses of mud. A sluggish drain runs down its middle". The poem, "The Time to Love", questions the appropriate time of love being the "if it's the muddy August or tepid April" (Rafat 1995, p.19). Such instances of nature's changing intensities on the moods of the people depict Rafat's treatment of nature as a Pakistani romantic ideal. In Pakistan, the lifestyle and concerns of people depend largely on nature. A Pakistani day can constitute of a sun shining so intensely that "its muscular rays crack the most stubborn rays like a nut" in "Karachi 1955" or it can be like the day in "The Wind Howls" where the roaring wind creates a haunting atmosphere, or it can be a night where, "All night a prophetic rain has fallen on the steady slanting tiles" as in "Meditation and Prayer" (Rafat, 1995, p. 6, 3, 47). Rafat's poetry has incorporated this aspect of Pakistani nature skilfully to provide a departure from the British treatment of nature. Glancey describes that "British Poetry offers a particularly rich appreciation of the landscape, because the country side of Britain is varied and beautiful, lush with heavily scented greenery that a temperate climate provides" (Glancey, 2002, p.159). Thus the nature in British romantic poetry is limited to fixed particular green scenery, which influences the majority of the poetry. Rafat, on the other hand, shows the reader the variety with areas "smothered by confident pines" in his poem "A Positive region"; and "the sea, biting into the beachhead with an ancient rasping sound" in "Karachi 1955"; it can be "miles and miles of sand" as views in "From a Train Window"; and shows the rice fields and terrace plantations whereas "Drought" shows a image of "gradual drying up" of land (Rafat, 1995, p. 20, 6, 38, 36) . This rich and varied landscape creates a Pakistani romantic ideal of living in a country of diverse contrasts, in comparison to of the British Romantic idea of living within the English rural regions.

Furthermore, the British Romantic poetry focuses on the man going back to nature to discover his self and find solace. David Daiches explains the evident theme in Romantic poetry that "man's escape from his loneliness is not by normal human companion, but by rediscovering man in general through external nature" (Daiches, 1960, p.861). Nature's role in the British poetry consists of withholding an autonomous existence and man makes an effort to reach back and find peace. Nature is burdened with a responsibility of helping man with his conflicts, and it is considered as being man's last resort. Taking Wordsworth's poetry as an example, it is evident how nature is treated differently. Wordsworth's iconic treatment of nature and its relation with man has made nature as one of the most discussed themes in British Poetry. Wordsworth's poetry takes nature as a means of solace. According to Gravid, "Wordsworth more than any romantic poet is associated with the idea that human life is at most sane when lived close to nature" (Gravid, 2007, p.14). In contrast to this, Rafat's poetry depicts an overwhelming presence of nature. There is no evident struggle and desire of reaching back to nature. Nature in Taufiq Rafat dominates. It has an existence on its own, and man adjusts and reshapes his life according to it. As "Karachi 1955" says that, "All the forces of nature crowding

man of his perch so that the land can return to its ways" (Rafat, 1995, p.6). Man in Rafat's poetry is not unaware of nature. He is constantly surrounded by it. This is aided with Rafat's elaborate descriptions of the weather and seasons of his land. He skillfully made use of the Pakistan's climate to depicts that man is dominantly surrounded by nature, and all his activities and life are shaped according to it. In the first section of the book, there are a few poems like "To see fruit ripen", "A cool May", "Arrival of the Monsoon" and the "Ceremony for Autumn" which are completely dedicated to seasons and climate. Apart from these seasons remain a constant theme in his other poems as well.

In describing the role of seasons he establishes that seasons and their predictability and surprise determines the everyday life of people. In "A Cool May", Rafat is surprised at the unconventional coolness of this time of year and starts to ponder that, "and what shall I make of this summer?" (Rafat, 1995, p.22). The poet is affected by weather and at the same time is thinking about his "lost merchandise" amidst the "wheat sheaves" and "flowering graveyard trees" (Rafat, 1995, p.22). Similarly, in "To See a Fruit Ripen", the man's completeness is shaped by nature that surrounds him. This is unlike the Wordsworth's man deliberate return to a country side for meaningful existence. "A ceremony for Autumn" again represents a synchronized mood of man in accordance with its surrounding and along with that, it describes the changes a Pakistani man undergoes due to the changing as the seasons around him (Rafat, 1995, p.43, 61). Changing seasons is a dominant part of Pakistan's lifestyle and Rafat has captured it in detail to establish another original Pakistani romantic ideal. It says, "winter's nudity has not yet replaced the flamboyance of summer", as autumn is a season of transition and change, thus so is the state of mind of the common man where he is waiting for the transition to end (Rafat, 1995, p.61). The poet confesses that, "only the whirling sun of June or January hail can extract from us spontaneous speech", through which he shows that the life of people in Pakistan is determined by the two extremes that dominate throughout the year and determine life (Rafat, 1995, p.61). Likewise, the poem, 'Arrival of the Monsoon' elaborately describes a rain scene and how it refreshes everything. The pouring rain makes "alive, alive, everything is alive again". Thus yet again showing that without a human effort, the powerful existence of nature is affecting the common man (Rafat, 1995, p.55).

Rafat in his portrayal of nature establishes that it is a determining factor in the lives of common Pakistanis, and it exists involuntarily. Unlike the man in Wordsworth's poetry, the man in Rafat does not decide to go back to discover nature. Rafat's man is observant. He is not deprived of nature, and neither is nature considered as a sacred entity. It is a part of everyday existence. He does not seek it. It is there around him.

Another element in English Romantic Poetry is the emphasis placed on ruins and abandoned buildings. Stafford describes that, "During the Romantic Period, ... Ruined castles and abbeys were seized as sites of exciting Gothic narratives difficult to accommodate in more modern realistic situations." (Stafford, 2012, p. 13). Thus, the buildings and ruins in British Poetry have been treated as a separate yet reachable entity however, the architecture and buildings described in Rafat's poetry represent a country which has ancient buildings in proximity with urban areas. His poem "Too Many houses" portrays a urban area which is has been "stung into shapelessness" due to unplanned construction. His poem "The squalor in which some people live" describes the demolished houses in ancient places of Lahore which had "cost a continent" (Rafat, 1995, p.17, 23). Rafat's description of architecture is an amalgamation of the old ruins and cities established close to each other. This serves to establish of another romantic ideal: the historic past and its contemporary presence. In the "The Mound", Rafat describes a 5000 year old town which "had a highly developed culture" and is surrounded by a village where people live today (Rafat, 1995, p.18) . In the poem "Thinking of Mohenjo-Daro", Rafat clearly says that "crumbling fort you pass is your home" (Rafat, 1995, p.63). Thus the ruins and heritage in Pakistan are not lots due to geographical distance but are situated right in the middle of the cultural milieu. This again serves as a distinguishing factor between the British and Pakistan's romantic sensibility. In British romanticism, the ruins and abandoned places are a source of peace and tranquillity. In Pakistan, the ruins are not situated in isolated places but integrated in the everyday life.

Another basic theme of British Romantic Poetry is war. War for the British has always been a sign of Valour. Ferber describes British poetry has a "celebration of martial heroism" (Ferber, 2012, p.184). They have treated it as a sign of heroism and knighthood. Rafat, on the other hand, establishes the concept for war and its meaning for Pakistan. Like nature and ruins, war in Rafat's poetry is an intricately woven idea. It is a part of everyday life, and affects the mundane matters of man. There are again a number poems dedicated to the theme of war in the first part of "Arrival of Monsoon" like, "The Medal", " The Village", "Sialkot", and "Karachi 1968". These poems reflect the wars which affect the daily life, either after the war situation like in "The Medal", where a dead soldier's family is rewarded with a medal which "is just another piece of bronze." After the initial "tributes" and "congratulations", the medal is now just "lying in its box" (Rafat, 1995, p.28). Or it can be a portrayal like in "The Village" where the area was evacuated due to war threat and the people lived "tormented guessing the fate of their unattended cattle, their women". It can depict never ending threat of

war as people living in cities near borders witness that “enemy lights blink on the horizon” in “Sialkot” (Rafat, 1995, p. 32, 64). These diverse descriptions of war demonstrate Rafat’s approach towards war and the aftereffects it has on the local people and how they treat war.

Thus thematically, Rafat distinguishes the Pakistani sensibility completely from the British by writing about the everyday life of a common man and vividly showing that how everyday life of Pakistan will remain different even if described in English. He establishes the separate romantic ideals for his people. Moreover linguistically, Rafat made the widest contribution in establishing a distinct identity of Pakistani poetry in English. His use of language portrays the dire importance of local phrases which are absolutely necessary in conveying the local contextual meaning. His wide use of Pakistani idioms examples and local jargon makes his poetry a Pakistani experience to read, and via use of his language, he establishes a whole distinct Pakistani jargon and sensibility.

In describing feminine beauty in “The Village Girl”, Rafat makes use of the simile, “tall and straight as a sugarcane stalk” (Rafat, 1995, p. 5). Furthermore, in his poem, “Once upon a time”, the poet remembers his youth and strength which he had “teeth that cracked a walnut into half” (8). This conveys the local and original Pakistani measure of beauty and strength which is not borrowed from Britain. Local abuses or swear expressions translated into English Circumcision, “bastard and son of a pig” give a distinct flavor. While the whole poem describes a very local ritual of a Muslim family. Similarly, in the poem “A Middle Class Drawing room”, Rafat introduces the reader to another local tradition of bride hunting in Pakistan. Through mention of the “mohri carpet” and a “sindhi costume” the bride hunters are assessing and judging, “the suitability of this house for a cousin to be married into” (Rafat, 1995, p. 11, 15). In “Eye of Eid ul Azha”, he describes a “sheep, heannad like a bride”, which is a sight seen across the country at the time of Muslim festival (Rafat 1995, p. 60). Rafat’s use of local similes and idioms further emphasize his motive of establishing a separate Pakistani identity, inspite of using the former colonizer’s.

3. CONCLUSION

This research analysed the first part” Arrival of the Monsoon” of Taufiq Rafat’s poetry collection of the “Arrival of the Monsoon” in accordance with its use of the English language, the incorporation of themes and romantic ideals.

It proves that the themes, concepts and romantic ideals established by Rafat in his poetry are completely Pakistani in nature and are not inspired by the British Romanticism. Rafat’s description of everyday life of Pakistani people makes them distinct in two very important concepts of life – nature and war. Rafat’s simple and localized description distinguishes a Pakistani man from a British person. It is established that nature in Pakistan is overwhelming and dominant, war is feared and despised and ruins are an integrated part of everyday life. These distinct romantic ideals carve a separate identity for Pakistan. Lastly, Rafat’s use of English language is loaded with local expression which further enhances the originality of his poetry as Pakistani poetry.

Thus, concluding, Taufiq Rafat’s Arrival of the Monsoon establishes distinct Pakistani romantic ideals which reflect the Pakistani man and his everyday common life, his jargon, his language and his lifestyle, which is different and true to itself.

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