Pakistaniness in Taufiq Rafat’s Selected Poems

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Abstract: Pakistani literature, since Independence, has come a long way from its early roots in post-independence English writings in the subcontinent. Over some 50 years or so, it has evolved from its imitative, slavish cast into an original and rather dynamic mode. Today it has a distinctive ‘Pakistani’ color, or flavor, different from that of other English literatures being written in other former colonies where English was introduced initially by the colonizers but was soon adapted into “native” or “local” cultural ethos. Pakistani English literature claims to have its own idiom reflecting Pakistani culture, society, and mannerism (Dr. Munawwar Iqbal, Dr. Safeer Awan, Kashmir journal of language research, 2011). The English literature written in this part of the Sub-continent tends to achieve its own color from 1970’s: different from that written in other parts of the world. Pakistani English literature just like Indian English literature realized very later that the main objective of the literature is to depict what one encounters throughout one’s life and that it is not something like building castles in the air or a shot in the dark. This idea emerged with Taufiq Rafat who created a distinctive idiom for Pakistani poets; later it became the standard. In this paper, the poems (“Arrival of the Monsoon” and “Kitchens”) under discussion indicate that the images employed by Taufiq Rafat are culture-specific and different from that of Western images. These images could not be applied to other parts of the world for they are found only in Pakistani society.

Introduction
The English literature that has been developed and evolved in Pakistan by Pakistani or Pakistani diaspora writers is known as ‘Pakistani Literature in English’ (Google Wikipedia). Before the partition of the Sub-continent (1947), a number of English educated Indians were writing in English, for instance, Kashi Prasad Ghose, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Mannohar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, and Shahid Suhrawardi. Though, they depicted Indian Society, in style they followed British English writers. The mode of feelings, emotions, and expressions they had found in the writing of British English writers, reflects in the writing of these Indian English writers and it continued till 1947. After the partition, Indian writers felt the need to pay attention to the Indian culture, tradition, symbolism and imagery in order to make their own identity in literary world. They developed a new type of poetry which is an epitome of their culture, tradition, identity and what else they had in their society. The well-known and recognized writers who became the pioneers of this new type of English poetry include: Nissim Ezekiel, KekinDaruwal, P. Lal, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, Gieve Patel and others.

Unlike India, in Pakistan, Poetic writing in English started later for English education reached this part of the Sub-Continent later than that of India where in 1827, they started writing poetry in English with the establishment of English education centers and missionary schools. After the partition, in Pakistan, when English became the language of instructions and official use along with Urdu, writers like Ahmed Ali, Shahid Hossain, Zulfikar Ghose who were later joined by Maki Kureshi, Kaleem Omar, Salman Tarik Kureshi, and Daud Kamal, started composing poetry in English language. In the early stages they also followed the British English writers like Indian writers did and took time to understand that they also had a distinct culture, tradition, and colors to fill their pictures with. This idea emerged with Taufiq Rafat in 1960s but became popular in 1970s. Taufiq Rafat introduced a distinctive idiom known as ‘Pakistani Idiom’ which became a standard for Pakistani poets to compose poetry in, that can reflect Pakistani society, culture, tradition and ideology. “According to Taufiq Rafat, poetry emanates from the very land in which it is written. The cultural substratum that gives anchorage to its roots remains a variable source from which it gains nourishment and defines the self of the poet.”(Asma Mansoor IIUI, Pakistaniat, A journal of Pakistan studies, vol 4, 2012). The landscape, the seasons, the smells, the characters, these are all local and give the very essence of Pakistani society and culture (Sarwat Ali: ‘Our Best English poet’, 2009). “Pakistani literature claims to have its own idiom reflecting Pakistani culture, society and
mannerism. It also has its own symbols, has emerged more visibly in Pakistani poetry than fiction, and no other Pakistani poet has contributed more, in shaping a distinct Pakistani idiom, than, Taufiq Rafat” (Munawwar Iqbal and Safeer Awan ‘IIUI’ 2011; Ksahmir Journal of language research). The imagery of Taufiq Rafat reflects Pakistani society. His poetic style, imagery and symbolism are exactly related to the context of Pakistan. He has not sacrificed his idea for the sake of rhyme scheme. For him content is more important than form. He has depicted the true picture of Pakistani society by using natural imagery like animals, flowers, grass, birds, insects, and seasons (Tariq Rahman). Taufiq Rafat’s distinctive idiom can be observed in his collection of poems “Arrival of the Monsoon” comprising of 116 poems. The images of kites, pigeons, gliding, rainy water, mud, clouds, all represent Pakistani culture. Many Pakistani poets follow his style and distinctive idiom. The most famous of his poems are: Soil, The People, Raindrops, Rain, Seasons, Pigeons, Lights, Eid, Ramadan, Mango Trees, Grass, Loneliness, Family, Aunts Uncle and Cousins. Regarding his distinctive style and language that show Pakistani culture, language, society, traditions and religion, he has been rightly called the Ezra Pound of Pakistan by Imran Aslam, one of his disciples.

There is no such article or book available regarding the work of Taufiq Rafat and any other Pakistani poet, that can help the students of Pakistani English literature except some general review-articles by Scholars like Dr: Safeer Awan (IIUI), Dr: Munawwar Iqbal (IIUI), Asma Mansoor (IIUI), Dr: Tariq Rahman, and some chapters from the pen of Alamgir Hashmi. These works are indeed valuable, but it is very difficult to get access to these and a lot more works by prominent scholars. So, this paper will be a humble attempt to describe the imagery employed by Taufiq Rafat in ‘Two’ of his famous poems—“Arrival of the Monsoon” and “Kitchens”. Although this study does not cover the whole range and variety of the poet’s imagery, yet I hope some students who are interested in Pakistani English poetry; they will find it a ray of hope as only a few review-articles are available on Internet, which hardly help the students, and they, most of the times, get in trouble to find relevant work to their field.

Literature Review
Taufiq Rafat is a distinguished poet among Pakistani poets. He has won a name for his great work in poetry. He has established a new pattern for composing poetry that is being followed after him. There are many critics who have worked on different aspects of his poetry, but unfortunately those works are not easily accessible. However, their comments are helpful to understand what they have found in his poetry. Some of them are, Sajjad Hussain, Tariq Rahman, Alamgir Hashmi, Athar Tahir, Zia Mohyeddin, Kaleem Omar, Imran Aslam, Khalid Ahmed, and Sarwat Ali. Dr. Munawwar Iqbal, Dr. Safeer Awan and Asma Mansoor(IIUI), have also written some articles about Taufiq Rafat.

Zia Mohyeddin appreciated Taufiq for the language he uses in poetry. He also said that the words he chooses are up to the mark. Renowned writer Kaleem Omar said that Taufiq Rafat was a poet of the language who had a complete control over the description of his thoughts and feelings. A renowned critic Khalid Ahmed commented that Rafat could not be judged so easily merely by his poetry as he always avoided the awkward display of images. M.Tahir Athar, a well-known writer and a disciple of Taufiq is of the opinion that he was a creative writer and a real carpenter of nature. Almgir Hashmi and Muneeza Shamsi also appreciated Taufiq Rafat for his distinctiveness and being the representative of his own culture, tradition, religion and society. Sarwat Ali in his essay writes that everything in Taufiq Rafat’s poetry was local and within the context of Pakistani culture.

So much work has been done on different aspects of Taufiq Rafat’s poetry like language, themes, symbolism etc. Our Respected teachers Dr: Munawwar Iqbal and Dr: Safeer Awan have written an article “Eastern Symbolism and the recovery of the selfhood in Taufiq Rafat’s Arrival of the Moonsoon” but my study will be limited to two poems of Taufiq Rafat with the objective to find how and what imagery is specific to our culture in Taufiq Rafat’s poetry, and how he has established a different style from that of native English writers.

Hypothesis

The imagery employed by Taufiq Rafat is Culture-specific and reflects Pakistani culture and society.

Research Questions
What culture-specific imagery has been employed by Taufiq Rafat in his selected poems?

How that imagery is culture-specific?

Is the imagery employed by Taufiq Rafat reflects Pakistaniness?

SIGNIFICANCE

This research focuses on the significance of Taufiq Rafat’s poetry in Pakistani English literature, as he represents the culture of Pakistan. This research will facilitate the future researchers who are interested to trace the real essence of Pakistani English poetry. It is significant because Pakistani English poetry has still to establish itself on the national scale. This study is an endeavor to show its richness and distinctiveness to Pakistani readers. This research will also prove to be an asset for those students who would go for further studies in Pakistani English literature.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will be handled through qualitative method. All the data will be analyzed through Historical Approach and will be discussed in explanatory way. All the meanings and explanations occur in a particular perspective or context; hence Historical Approach will explain the idea in a very clear way.

Data Analysis:

Poetry is a powerful tool of expression in literature. Imagery is one of the most important elements of poetry. A poet always puts great efforts to create images from his/her own society, because images have a very powerful impact on the reader’s mind. These images which the poet takes from the society depict the culture of that society. Taufiq Rafat, in particular leaves no stone unturned to represent these images with great skills. The representation of these images is one of the greatest achievements of Taufiq Rafat. That is why he is called—The Ezra Pound of Pakistan by Imran Aslam, one of his disciples. I would like to come to those images which are under discussion:

These images collected from the poems are to be analyzed in order to see how Rafat has used them to depict Pakistani culture. The poem ‘Arrival of the Monsoon’ has an image of ‘coniferous lands’ that refers to the context of South Asia in general and to that of Pakistan in particular. In the time of Monsoon the wind blows from south to north according to the Meteorologists. The trees of conifers are in a great number in the northern parts (Himalaya) of Pakistan. In this case the image of blowing wind towards the coniferous lands appropriately reflects Pakistaniness.

“Before the thrust of this liberating wind whatever is not fixed, has a place to go, strains northwards to the coniferous lands.”

The image of the clothes on the washing line raised above themselves is quite understandable when it comes to the context of Pakistan during the Monsoon. Because of this wind the clothes which are hung in the sun to dry up, raise up in a special way. This imagery can be understood by examining dust particles turning round and round in a circle that indicates the wind of Monsoon. Same thing happens with the clothes rising above themselves, and when we observe this, we say this is the start of Monsoon. The imagery of ‘flapping sheet’ along with ‘everything dragged to the corner of the roof making it a battlement’ reflects to our eyes as if they were fighting with each other, and we observe this during the Moonsoon.

“And, drunk with motion, clothes on the washing-line are raised above themselves; a flapping sheet turns a roof corner into a battlement.”

The next imagery is brought so skillfully that with a flash we recognize something special in the poetry of Taufiq Rafat; that is of bird gliding, and again the end of the gliding days reflects Pakistaniness as with the arrival of the Monsoon the birds, especially pigeons, postpone their gliding. In Pakistan 'Pigeon Gliding' has got a remarkable concept and it is a cultural norm across the country. Throughout the year people enjoy pigeon gliding but when Monsoon comes, the wind does not allow them to glide and we say gliding days are over.

“Gliding days are over. The birds are tossed sideways and back, and lifted against their will. They must struggle to achieve direction.”

Another image that might wonder the readers because 'darkness’ in literature is always an
“A welcome darkness descends. Harsh contours dissolve, lose their prosaic condition. All the sounds we have loved are restored.”

This 'darkness' is used here in a special context; that is, Pakistani context during the Monsoon. The wind brings very deep clouds which in turn bring darkness that provides an environment of enjoyment. People call it romantic weather and a charming sight. The sun goes behind it. The air becomes cool and we feel comfortable. This is why Rafat has used ‘welcome darkness’, which in most of the countries might not be welcomed but we do, because it provides us a comfortable shelter from the scorching weather for some time. The images of lovely sounds add to the list, which also bring the reader close to the culture of Pakistan. In Monsoon, the sounds of clouds, chirping of birds, and the hissing of insects are observed more than other days of the year. These sounds add enchantment to the attractiveness of the Monsoon weather that is why, we love these sounds and here Rafat connects these sounds with loveliness keeping in mind the notion of Pakistaniness.

The next stanza is full of images that can easily be associated with Pakistani culture. The sullen wind brings clouds which pour rain in squalls. It sweeps the streets and compels the boys to come out to enjoy it. These features are specific to Monsoon rain otherwise normal rain does not catch the attention of the boys as compared to that of Monsoon; neither pours in squalls nor sweeps the streets.

“And now the rain! In sudden squalls it sweeps the street, and equally sudden are the naked boys paddling in the ditches.”

Summer is the hottest season in Pakistan. Not only animals and plants but also human beings become sluggish as if they were dead. So, with the arrival of the Monsoon the weather altogether changes and everything rises and shines. It seems as if new souls have been instilled in everything. The hotness of the weather calms down with the arrival of the Monsoon. Everything regardless of its nature begins to taste the cool water of the rain. In Pakistan electric wires are exposed in open air. They become very hot in summer resulting in low voltage. When Monsoon rain comes they become cool, get energy, voltage increases and they swing as if they were dancing in joy. These wires are so happy that the poet says they seem crazy. It looks like a miracle has made everything woken up from a deep slumber.

“Alive, alive, everything is alive again. Savour the rain’s coolness on lips and eyes. How madly the electric wire is swinging!”

Before the rain there is dust in the air, when rain falls; these particles mix with the rain and turn into brown water and when the branches of the trees shake themselves as a response to the rain, the brown water drops down. The rain results in the winding up of the harsh summer in a very pleasant manner.

“From brown waters eddying round their hooves the drenched trees rise and shake themselves, and summer ends in a flurry of drops.”

“The phenomenon of water buffaloes coming out of water holes and shaking themselves (drops of water flurrying around them) and the old trees shaking themselves like ponderous water beasts are tropes of the revivifying powers of much-awaited monsoons in the fullest sense.”

(Munawwar Iqbal, Safeer Awan; Eastern symbolism and recovery of the selfhood in Taufiq Rafat’s Arrival of the Monsoon)

The second poem which I am going to analyze is the “Kitchens”. Though, according to some, it is a comparison of the life we had in past and what we have now. To others, it might be a nostalgia for the past traditions. One other prominent thought is that it is a comparison between urban and rural ways of life, however, it is a poem which gives us certain images that are unique. So let us see what sort of culture these images reflect. The tense used in the poem is of course, 'simple past,' but it is even today we feel the same situation in most parts of Pakistan.

In the very first lines we are introduced to a specific kind of kitchen where we grew up. They become very hot in summer resulting in low voltage. When Monsoon rain comes they become cool, get energy, voltage increases and they swing as if they were dancing in joy. These wires are so happy that the poet says they seem crazy. It looks like a miracle has made everything woken up from a deep slumber.

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In the very first lines we are introduced to a specific kind of kitchen where we grew up. It might be shocking to Westerners. What kind of kitchen that would be, where people grow! But when it comes to Pakistani culture, we realize that, 'yes,' it is being said about the kitchens we have even these days. This image of kitchen becomes particular rather than general term used everywhere, and the theme related to it makes it so. In Pakistani villages where 70 % of our population live, there we have kitchens, where we not only prepare meals but also dine. It has enough space to serve as a dining room too in that sense. It has got such a strong cultural color that we are attracted by the taste it
The second part of the poem reflects the city life, which the poet condemns and that is why we realize that the first part of the poem is dependent upon the second part to prove the depiction of Pakistani culture. In this part, the poet reveals that the society imported from somewhere else has not brought us closer rather it has contributed in our farness from each other. The society depicted in the first part was the very essence of our national and cultural heritage, and it was better for us to maintain that societal standard, but unfortunately we have adopted the western way of life and that’s why we are unable to share our happiness and grieves with each other. This was possible in the old kitchens, where we would come to “savor our triumphs or unburden our grief.” The traditional slats have been replaced by chair which are insular, and the texture has been replaced by chromium and Formica which are not familiar to us nor can immerse into our culture. All images in the second part of the poem are found in West. Even the poem condemns the clock which has replaced the picture of Grand-father once used to hang on the wall.

“The surrealistic clock, where once the eloquent grandfather swung.”

The last four lines come in a clear contrast with the kitchen of the first part of the poem, where we would take our breakfast along with previous night’s curry sitting together in the presence of mother making bread for us, and now we are having electric toasts instead of fresh bread and we are in such a hurry that we while taking the last gulps rush out of the dining hall.

“We are differential to the snap pleasure of electric toast, and take our last gulps standing up.”

By taking into consideration the images employed in the poem, one can easily trace Pakistani culture, either in first or second part of the poem. In first part we come across such imagery which we mark as typical Pakistani imagery, while in the later part of the poem, we come across such images which on their own claim to be Western rather than Pakistani, and for this reason the poet condemns it, and again for this reason, we say that the poem in broader sense reflects Pakistani society. On the other hand in restricted sense, one can interpret it as the reflection of Pakistani village life versus Pakistani city life. Pakistani city life is not the life led by its inhabitants, and therefore, we say it has been imported from the West.
Conclusions

The two poems when analyzed, I have got that the imagery that comes from the themes employed by Taufiq Rafat, is particular to the context of Pakistan. In the first poem “Arrival of the Monsoon” the season depicted is general to the context of South Asia but specific to that of Pakistan for being Pakistani we have observed it here. Other may relate the poem to their own cultures. Moreover, “Coniferous Lands,” “Northern Areas,” and “Gliding Days,” give us an edge and make the poem distinctive in its real representation. The poet has also observed Monsoon here in Pakistan, so our claim to the representation of Monsoon with special reference to Pakistani culture is justifiable.

In the second poem “Kitchens” by comparing the two different types of kitchens the poet reveals upon us our own culture. He sheds light on the two ways of life—Pakistani and Western and by comparing the two, he gives us the opportunity to select the one which is the very essence of our tradition and culture and the only thread that can bind us together. Apart from what the message is, by focusing on the images, we come in contact with a society which is our own. We realize that there is some difference between the writers of the West and Taufiq Rafat. The aim of this research was just to focus on the imageries employed by Taufiq Rafat in order to justify the claim that “The writing of Taufiq Rafat is the reflection of our culture—Pakistani culture. This point might be sought out through stylistic analysis of the poems, but it needs a further research and the present research paper might play a key-role for those researchers who are interested to study Pakistani English literature, especially Taufiq Rafat.

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