

Challenges in Translating Faiz Ahmad Faiz into English: A Select Study of Three Poems by Shiv K. Kumar

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Abstract

The translation of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's literary works has been accomplished critically to communicate, ponder, and disseminate philosophy, ideology, and metaphors of other languages across the globe. Faiz's literary contributions during wartime or opposing the governmental policies, Pakistan's association with American anti-Russian ideology or the Muslim League's repression of the leftist forces speaks volumes. That means that the translation of the works of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's literary works, like any other translations possesses its signification and plays an essential role in conveying the semantic meanings, cultural metaphors, and literary messages from Urdu to other languages. However, it has been observed by the critics and scholars of translation that translation of poetry is the most difficult and arduous when we translate not just literally but simultaneously emerges as the subtle process when the goal of the translator transcends beyond just the literal meaning of the words to emotional, cultural, and aesthetic and contextual aspects. This article presents an overview of the issues, principles, and possibilities associated with Urdu-English literary translation to investigate several translation theories and approaches that are often employed in Urdu-English literary translation with regard to the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz. The paper intends to explore the translation of poetry as an incredibly challenging task of translating illustrious poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz into English, who have withstood the test of time, history, cultural mobilization, and language barriers. Faiz noted as a product of his culture and his poetry, was deeply rooted in the struggles of his era, when the world was fighting the world wars and the subcontinent was fighting for independence from colonial rule. Truth, brutality, injustice, and bloodshed problems that plagued the world are imprinted in his writings. The present paper seeks to analyze Faiz's three Urdu poems *Tanhai*, *Sham*, and *Khatm Hui Barish-e-Sang* that have been translated into English by Shiv K. Kumar.

Keywords: Cultural Issues; Linguistic Issues; Poetry Translation; Urdu Poetry.

The literary canvas of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry has been acclaimed widely and justifiably for addressing the issues of humanity, hunger and poverty when the world was caught between the two world wars and the Indian subcontinent was already fighting for independence from the British colonial regime. The translation of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry justifies the definition of translation by Newmark as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text" (5) and holds its ground for its strong emphasis on accurately translating the author's intended meaning from the source language into the target language (TL). The last decade of the 20th century witnessed an increase in the translation of world classics other than English from regional languages into English and other foreign languages, establishing the debate on translation as an essential tool for creating new vocabulary, combining existing ones, and learning about obscure or distant cultures.

The world, today is a playground for people who belong to different nationalities, multiple religious beliefs, cultures, beliefs, and languages, some extinct and some affluent for their rich socio-cultural heritage. Given the existence of cultural, ethnic, and regional variances, translation serves the goal of maintaining the original tone and intent of communication between the source and target languages. Roman Jakobson uses the metaphor of 'cheese' quoting Bernard Russell that "no one can understand the word 'cheese' unless he has nonlinguistic acquaintance with cheese" (113) justifies the translations of the cultural metaphors evident preoccupying poetic cannons of Faiz. However, human beings have been satisfying their literary appetite for ages, with translations of prominent literary texts from other languages, ever since written books first appeared. Translation has played a vital role in transmitting knowledge across different cultures having different linguistic backgrounds justified by Jakobson, in his article, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959), where he has served the classified theory of translation.

While discussing interlingual translation, Jakobson is of the opinion that there is no full equivalence when translation occurs between two languages. He states, "On the level of interlingual translation, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code units, while messages may serve as adequate interpretations of alien code units or messages" (114). Thus, with reference to Faiz's poetry influenced by leftist political ideology, his association with Urdu writers, and his participation in the peasant's orga-

nization, it can be concluded that there is always a loss of meaning in the target language when the translation of his works occurs. Another critical theorist who contributed a lot to the theory of translation is J.C. Catford who in his book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), discusses in detail the various issues with regard to translation theory and its practice, deliberates over multiple types of equivalence and also gives the concept of shift in translation. However, his essential concepts with regard to translation theory can be considered linguistic and cultural untranslatability. Catford defines linguistic untranslatability as "...failure to find a TL equivalent is due entirely to differences between the source language and the target language" (98) and Cultural untranslatability implies "...when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely absent from the culture of which the TL is a part" (99). Thus, concerning the translation of Faiz's poetry, we understand that we can derive justification from theories regarding linguistic and cultural issues.

The eight methods of translation, as evinced by Peter Newmark, suggest the word-for-word translation as common and can be called literal, where the challenges deepen with faithful, semantic, adaptation, free, idiomatic, and communicative translations. S. M. Fasiullah briefly explains these types as the literal translation that connotes translation from word-to-word, sentenceto-sentence, and collocation-to-collocation, including the nuances of metaphors and proverbs. Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), has achieved unrivaled international fame, which endures through his poetry and Ghazals, in his timeless changes of phrase, and the eternal beauty of his imagery. The renowned Orientalist Edward Said praised him as "the greatest of contemporary Urdu poets" (Kumar x), pronouncing him a legend during his lifetime. Faiz started writing poetry in the genre of Ghazals before gradually switching to Nazm strongly adhering to the cause of humanity rather than just one particular community or nation, embodying their hopes, pains, agonies, and miseries. Faiz continued to write and publish throughout the turbulent phases of his life, eventually emerging as the best-selling contemporary Urdu poet in both India and Pakistan.

The translation of his poetry into several languages, such as English, Russian, German, French, etc. made him a significant literary signature and acclaimed globally Faiz received several academic awards, including the Lenin Peace Prize in 1962. The book *Nuskha Haye Wafa* contains all of his collections and was published posthumously in 1984. The literal translation of Faiz's poetry, the construction of the grammatical syntaxes from Urdu, and the word-for-word translation would render it out of context retaining only the style of the original. Faiz was arrested in 1953 for al-

leged participation in a conspiracy against the Government of Pakistan establishing him as an accomplished poet in prison. Coppola in journal articles calls it "to him as a poet....a well-disguised blessing." Hence, it seems improper to comprehend the literal translations of the poems that were written inside the confines of the prison walls. Edward Said, in his essay "The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile" emphasizes "exile as a potent, enriching, motif of modern culture" and in this light reflects on the exile of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and the poetry written during his exile as "exile antinomies embodied and endured with the unique intensity" that has language, poetic conventions and life history.

Hence, instead of literal translation, the translator should resort to faithful translation to reproduce the exact contextual meaning of Faiz's poetry, and preserve the meaning but take the liberty to go beyond the grammatical constructions naturally understood in the target-translated text. Adaptation can be understood as the freest form of translation, predominantly used in the translation of literary works, including poetry. (20)

Out of all the genres of literature, poetry can be difficult to translate, especially when it has strong cultural overtones like those found in the vast literary canons of Faiz and to convey the syntactical connotations, the translator should be proficient linguistically with the idea of cultural overtones available in the target text. Edward Said recounts how in a restaurant, Faiz, while in exile, recited his poems to his, while his friend Iqbal translated them for Said's discernment and he reflects, "For what I watched required no translation, it was the enactment of the homecoming, expressed through defiance and loss."

Agha Shahid Ali assures the poetic prowess of Faiz as "a poet who drew fifty thousand people to his readings, a poet whose work is quoted by heart by the literate and the illiterate, a poet whose lines are recited even by those who oppose him." Ironically, as asserted by Agha Shahid Ali, Ayub Khan, and the then President of Pakistan, known for the arrest of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, at the behest of UNESCO, nominated his name for translation into English. Quoting Agha Shahid Ali,

"Like Garcia Marquez, (Faiz) was read and listened to both by the literary elite and by the masses. His lyrical paradigms always glitter with a unique cadence and intensity." Agha Shahid Ali has done a marvelous service to Urdu literature by translating Faiz "in the hope that something may be borne across the English readers." Poetry is usually considered untranslatable as far as the translation of the tangible like 'passer-by', 'stars', etc.,

and the intangible imagery like 'aggrieved heart' 'drowsy tapers', and 'alien dust' etc. in the poetry of Faiz is concerned as has been accurately and seriously questioned. A translator needs to comprehend the poem correctly which implies that he must correctly understand not only the message conveyed but also the context of Urdu literature and culture as embedded in his poetry. The complex translation of Faiz's poetry includes the revelation of the multiple perspectives from personal, nationalistic, and socialistic themes where the translator Shiv Kumar has encountered multiple challenges while struggling to maintain the structure, meaning, style, and context of the translated poems. Shiv Kumar, while dealing with linguistic structures, cultural issues, stylistic features, and the content of the poem aims to transform the text to ascertain its aesthetic survival with his bilingual and bicultural competence. Faiz started writing with the romantic notion addressing the personal notion of love but gradually started addressing the social and nationalistic issues. Though most translators argue that, it is reasonable to assume that the translations of Faiz's poetry are absolute since most of the poems are created organically and indissolubly hence remain independent and autonomous literary enterprise.

Faiz has been read and reread as an open-ended exercise for his ideological leanings, for the semantic notion, and for the aesthetic nuances incorporated within the ideological framework. The juxtaposition of various images, symbols, and poetic motifs from other cultures is a distinctive feature of Faiz's poetry. His poetry flows naturally and has smooth musicality and lyricism. His poetry ranges from revolutionary strains to political issues to experiences of love, separation, and the depth of heart-rendered affections. Reading Faiz in English or any other language than Urdu can compromise the aesthetic dynamics of the poetic text and recognize the ideology and the ideological effect imbued with the genuine significance of grandeur and effect. The translator of poetic structures hence has to deal not only with the obvious but also predominantly with the gaps and the silences within the superstructure. The literal translations may stay very close to the original poetic text but would fail to capture the axis of semanticism. Faiz, being the most appreciated and read poet, at times is read for the dynamics of aestheticism but rarely for his sociopolitical mysticism rendering popularity for his subconscious poetic talent. The whole argument lies in the fact of whether the translator is doing any justice to the completely repressed meanings, ideological perspectives of poetic constructions, or the unearthing of the eloquent silences addressed aesthetically within the text. In addition, Faiz is praised for his poems written in classic Urdu styles like the Ghazal and for his exceptional capacity to go

beyond the usual theme confines to address political and social issues and use his calm and demeanor to inspire those who were being oppressed to fight for their rights. Faiz became the most renowned poet of the Indian subcontinent because of his poetry's ability to continue to transcend geographical boundaries, rendering fame to his immense poetic talent outside of his paradigmatic national existence through translation. Faiz has a large list of translators and has been translated by great scholars like V. G.

Kiernan's Poems by Faiz (1971), Noami Lazard's The True Subject (1988), Agha Shahid Ali's The

Rebels Silhouette (1991), Shiv K. Kumar's The Best of Faiz (1995), D. Karmals and K. Hassan's O

City of Lights, Sarvat Raman's 100 Poems by Faiz Ahmad Faiz (2002), and very recently by Baran Farooqi's The Colours of my Heart (2017). These translations are outstanding illustrations of fervent involvement with the poet. These translations hold the potential to draw readers from the English-speaking world to its socio-political poetic work. Faiz achieved great status through translations. There is more to his and poems than simply language; there is the mysterious structure of language, words, rhythm, image, and thought that should be translated to achieve the real essence of poetry.

In the present paper, we have focused on the three selected poems Tanhai, Shaam, and Khatm hui Barish-e-Sang by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, translated by Shiv K. Kumar into English as "Loneliness", "Evening" and "End of the Rain of Stones". Tanhai has been taken from the collection of Naqsh-e-Faryadi 'imprints' which Faiz published in 1943, and the other two poems,

Shaam and Khatm hui Barish-e-Sang have been taken from the collection Dast-e tah-e- Sang (The Hand Beneath the Rock), published in 1965. Remarkably, each of these poems has a different theme and structure but investigates the issues and difficulties that the translator has faced while preserving the context. The unique aspect of Faiz's poetry is that he does not present his idea of revolution or freedom directly, which is frequently the mark of resistance poetry but rather uses metaphors, images, and similes, and other elements from an ongoing tradition of Urdu and Persian poetry and makes them relevant in the current context. The significant influences that shaped Faiz's vision and voice have been the struggle for independence, resistance against colonial rule, his growing leanings toward Marxist ideology, and after partition, the struggles of the leftist

ideology in Pakistan. The poetic metaphors and structure serve as an inspiration from his poetry that serves as an inspiration to encourage them to fight against capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and an oppressive ruling class that takes advantage of the common people for their own gain. For Faiz Ahmad Faiz, poetry became an effective tool to emphasize the social and political challenges of the time. In an interview, Faiz has enunciated his shift from European Romantic poets like Keats and Shelley to

“thirties social and political themes that became more important than romantic ones” (Allen Jones). Faiz’s poetry became the voice of the down-trodden, subjugated, and oppressed sending a message to the dictators with imagery and metaphors that their reign is on the verge of a complete collapse. He employed figurative language to describe the people’s suffering, pain, and pitiable predicament and romantic images to communicate his inner feelings and emotions. In poetry, the medium of language is parochial, local, and less universal in appeal, but the intricate complexities of the language, the words, and their structure, in Faiz’s poems, emerge from the complexities of human lives and emotions.

Tanhai, one of the most read poems, narrates the context metaphorically, using significant Urdu words that have deep-rooted contextual significance. The central idea of the poem is loneliness. The speaker’s desperation in the poem is expounded through his desperation of waiting for someone, while the waiting hours are extended beyond expectation. With the approaching of the early dawn, the thoughts of the speaker verge on disappointment and mental fatigue. The speaker of the poem may be waiting for good governance because the poem was written when India and Pakistan were struggling for independence from the British. The poem begins as follows:

Phir koi aya, Dil-e-zar! nahin, Koi nahin;
 Rah-rau hoga, kahin aur aur chala-ja-e ga
 Dhal chuki rat, bikharne-laga taron ka ghubar,
 Larkharane lage aiwanon men khwabida charagh (27)

Shiv K. Kumar translates these lines as:

Is someone out there again, O my aggrieved heart?
 No, perhaps some passerby, bound elsewhere
 the night is snapping at the seams,
 scattered is the cluster of stars

and down the hallways

the drowsy tapers are gasping away (28)

Faiz employs vocabulary like *dil-e-zār*, *rāh-rau*, *tāroñ*, *khvābida* *charāgh*, *ajnaḥ* *khaak*, *qadmoñ ke surāgh*, *shameñ* and *muqaffal* to create imagery with significant connotative meanings that can be assumed as a reference to the capitalists or the current government of his era, or they might have been a reference to the British, who were in power and had dominated the country. Shiv K. Kumar translates this poem following a literal approach. The above words have been translated as: 'aggrieved heart', 'passer-by', 'stars', 'drowsy tapers', 'alien dust' 'footprints', 'lights,' and 'lock' and with the critical analysis of these translated words, the syntactical metaphoric meanings of the poem emerge. As a result, maintaining the context in the source text becomes a difficult task for the translator when it comes to the musicality of his Ghazals and Nazms, to capture the rhyming scheme of poetry of silence that speaks eloquently to the readers. Shiv Kumar's translation of the word *khvābida*, as 'drowsy' is unsatisfactory because, in Urdu, the word *khvābida* means *soya howa*, so 'sleepy' would be a better replacement for it. The translation of *khvābida* as 'drowsy' defies the genuine sentiment of the speaker because to be 'drowsy' is a condition of heaviness brought on by a heavy diet or medication whereas 'sleepy' could have been interpreted as the condition of a lonely depressed soul waiting for someone of a beloved. 'Dhal Chuki Rat' has been translated as 'The Night is Snapping at the Seams' which again moves away from the source text, losing the context in the process of translation. Abdul Naseeb Khan quoted in his thesis regarding this line: "Shiv. K. Kumar's translation falls short of achieving the effect intended by the poet (63). A poet like Faiz, known for his aestheticism, poetic structure, and sociopolitical context, becomes a daunting task for the translator while translating his texts, even though the translator, Shiv. K. Kumar restricts to remaining close to the original not only in meaning but also in spirit. Sham is another well-known poem by Fiaz Ahmad Fiaz that contains many cultural words, such as:

Is torah hai ke har ek pad koi mandir hain

koi ujra hua be noor purana mandir

... de koi sankh dohai, koi payal bole

koi but ja ge, koi savnli ghoonght khole (113)

The use of words in the poem, such as *Mandir*, *benoor*, *sañkh*, *pāyal*, *Butt*, and *ghūñghat*, which the translator deemed fit not to translate to

transport the cultural essence from the original. The rich Urdu vocabulary used poignantly and linguistically emerges as an ambassador of culture embedded within the rhyme. Sometimes the translators appropriate the transcendence of the significance beyond mere vocabulary to excavate the deeper significance of the melody and the rhythm of the source text is either strongly ingrained in a certain cultural context or has some unique figurative or extended connotations. Shiv K. Kumar's translation of the words "temple," "conch," "ankle-bells," "idol," and "unveil her face" resulted in the loss of cultural meaning in the translated version. These words often have additional or connotative meanings, depending on the situation.

Lawrence Venuti, an American translation theorist, is widely recognized for his studies on the significance of power dynamics and cultural context in translation. He popularized the key translation techniques of "domestication and foreignization," which provide linguistic and cultural direction where the translators must avoid the temptation to incorporate foreign literature into the target culture. He also ascertains the theory of domestication that refers to "...an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring them back home," while foreignization is "...an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (1995, 20). In the theory of domestication, translation remains transparent and fluent where the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers is minimized. Whereas in the theory of foreignization, target conventions are deliberately broken and some of the foreignness of the original is retained by the translator and transliterates the words from the source into the target text and provides the glossary of words with their meanings either in footnotes or endnotes to preserve and showcase the culture of the source text in the target text. It becomes a daunting task for the translator to convey the socio-cultural meanings, signs, and symbols to the target readers but it also results in cultural loss in the target text.

Khatam Howi Barishy Sung is a complex poem because of the poet's frequent use of compound words. The poem starts as:

Nagahan aj mere tar-e nazar se katkar
tukre tukre hue afaq pe khurshid-o qamar
ab kisi simt andhera na ujala hoga
buj gai dil ki tarh rahe-vafa mere bad

dosto! qafila-e dard ka ab kya hoga

ab koi aur kare parvarish-e Gulshan-e gham(121)

Shiv K.Kumar translates the poem as:

Suddenly, today, sundered from my vision's thread,

lay splintered in the sky, the sun and the moon.

now there'll be no light or darkness anywhere.

extinguished, after me, like the heart, is the path of commitment.. friends,
how will it now fare with a caravan of pain? let somebody else now nurture
the garden of sorrow; (122)

Faiz uses the compound words like *tār-e-nazar*, *rāh-e-vafā*, *gulshan-e-gham*, *bārishe-sāng*, *khāk-e-rah*, *lab-e-dildār*, etc. to maintain the aestheticism, the musicality, and the poetic structure for the expression of the tonality and setting the tenor of the Ghazal. Shiv Kumar translates these compound words as 'vision's thread', 'path of commitment', 'garden of sorrow', 'rain of stones', 'pathway's dust', and 'beloved's lips'. Shiv Kumar closely tags along with the literal translation to maintain the translated text's close proximity to the source text, apparently losing the musicality of the language in the target text. When we compare the translation of Khatam Howi Barishy Sung with other translators, their failure to remain closer semantically to the text becomes apparent for either they translated the compound words in Urdu with single words or left them untranslated.

From this study, we conclude that Shiv Kumar encountered the challenges of poetry translation but still could attain effective translation through his proficiency and profound grasp of both languages. Shiv Kumar possessing the ability to successfully transfer the meaning, content, emotions, style, and other literary devices from the source text with little less deviance from other translations of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's verses by other translators. From the selections of the translated works of Faiz by Shiv Kumar, it becomes evident that Shiv Kumar possessed the semantic cognizance of the expressive and cultural metaphors and images evident in the source text. However, avoiding the translation of certain words or phrases or translating them inappropriately undermines the aim of the source text. Moreover, Shiv K. Kumar has successfully remained and continues to remain close to the source text while capturing the nuances of his imagery that evolved over the years from romantic, mystical, and socio-political imagery.

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