

Trends of Pakistani English Fiction from Partition to 1970s

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ABSTRACT: *Trend of Pakistani English Fiction Since Partition to 1970; is a multidimensional effort to not only to highlight the prevalent themes and trends of the fiction, but also to bring into limelight those legends of Pakistani English Fiction, who can be considered the founders of English fiction in Pakistan. The phenomenon includes a lot of names, which are now completely forgotten or are taken for granted by the modern generation of Pakistani English Fiction readers. These themes and trends of the fiction of the time also witness the socio-political and cultural conditions of the times in Pakistan. However the primary focus of this piece of writing is on the trends and themes of Pakistani English Fiction from partition to 1970s, as it was the time when Pakistani English fiction started developing itself as an independent genre.*

KEYWORDS: *Pakistani English Fiction, Trends, Themes, Writers, Decades, Prominent*

I. INTRODUCTION

Pakistani English Literature is the name of a fully developed and independent literature. It was started emerging most probably after 1940; right when the freedom movement reached at its peak. We can find the traces of rebellion and quest for identity as a separate nation in the pieces of writings, which were written during the era by the hands of the prominent literary figures of the time, including Ahmad Ali, Mumtaz Shahnawaz and Shahid Soharwardi. Investigation of the themes of that time and categorization of those themes are not that simple, as fiction of the time is filled with a beautifully complex combination of mature and immature expressions.

The purpose behind the selection of the topic to work on is to study the initial stages and the early themes of Pakistani English writings. Another important reason for working on the English fiction of 1947 to 1970s is that: no one has ever attempted to highlight the names of those legends of 1950s and 60s; whose hands nourished the Infant Pakistani English fiction immediately after independence. It was the time when everywhere in the new born state there was chaos and a general tendency of hatred towards the language of British Colonizers. To probe deep into the phenomenon of Pakistani English Fiction; it is necessary to have a slight glance on its background.

Basically our pre-partition and early post-partition fiction both in English and Urdu is plumped with the tragic tale highlighting untold and unbearable miseries inflicted by the ruthlessness of the rulers of *British Raj* on the people of subcontinent. The fiction, thus made its appearance during the freedom movement, highlights the saga of partition.

There are themes of extreme nationalism based on religious sentiments & social set-up, quest for freedom and protection of cultural & traditional heritage narrated with rigorous reasoning. However, the post-partition literature deals with the socio-political, ideological and ethnic problems of Pakistani society.

The prominent writers of pre partition (from 1940) and post partition (1950s) had sketched and painted a dark picture of deserted values, unceasing warfare and themes of extreme nationalism. The first and most prominent Muslim writer, who recorded the treacherous acts of British *Raj* in subcontinent with a particular sense of despair and dejection, was **Ahmad Ali**. He in 1940, wrote the gem of Postcolonial fiction '*Twilight in Delhi*', which was set in 1911, in a Muslim Neighborhood at Delhi. The entire work grossly provided a portrayal; where despair over the downfall of the *Mughals* and the rise of the British government had represented with a heart throbbing description of events.

Other prominent Muslim contemporaries of Ahmed Ali were **Feroze Khan Noon, Mumtaz Shahnawaz and Khwaja Ahmed Abbas**, who also painted the pathetic picture of Pre-partitioned Sub-continent. Feroz Khan earned a great fame for his autobiography, '*From Memory*' (1966) and from the only novel '*Scented Dust*' (1941); highlighting the sociological aspects of life in sub-continent i.e. the laws of social and religious life in both Muslim and Hindu Community. Khawja Ahmad Abbas, who was a socialist and

nationalist, wrote two novels, a novelette, a drama, and two collections of short stories, two travelogues and one account of journalism. His famous literary works are “*Tomorrow is ours (novel), Blood and Stones (novelette), The Umbrella, Flowers for Her Feet, Twelve Hours, Saffron Blossom and Reflection in Mirror (Short Stories)*”. The major themes in his works had pertained to socialist and secular nationalistic movements. Themes of courtesan and prostitution, Hindu-Muslim controversies and atrocities in sub-continent had remained the dominant themes of his works.

Mumtaz Shahnawaz,

(1912-1948) who was a political activist, published her famous political novel ‘*The Heart Divided*’ which she wrote in between 1943 and 1948. It sketched the creation of Pakistan in Indian Muslims’ point of view. She died in 1948; leaving behind the first draft, which her family later published unedited after 11 years. The novel was basically designed with the theme of renunciation of the idea of Hindu-Muslim Unity and the acceptance of the idea of creating a separate state for the Muslims called Pakistan. This theme was expressed through the plot which consisted of the issue of changing relationship of a Hindu and a Muslim Families. It was also a realistic and honest treatment of the politics of India. The lack of distortion of the truth redeemed this novel from the charge of being boring at places. An extreme sense of self-consciousness is the major theme of all the early fictional English works of Pakistan.

Pakistani literature soon after independence was affected by the two major ideologies; on one hand there was Russian Totalitarian socialism and on the other hand there was Islamic fundamentalism. In 1950 the fiction and prose both were strongly in the hold of the dominant religious movement Jamat-e-Islami by Molana Modudi. Mostly the literature aimed to serve the people on religious and didactic grounds.

‘*PEN*’ by Ahmad Ali was a great portal for Pakistani English Literature to grow. Ahmad Ali and Shahid Soharwardy contributed in the growth of a standardized English fiction with their efforts on ‘*PEN*’. It had played a role as ‘*Scrutiny*’ of F.R. Levis played in standardizing the fiction and poetry during Victorian era. With all the pressure of religious fundamentalism, it continued its efforts diligently. While quoting Mr. Shahid Soharwardi’s proclamation in an unambiguous language, Dr. Tariq Rehman wrote as: “*Literature today in my review has thus struck a retrogressive and unlikely path. It has reverted to didacticism...*” (Rehman, 1991)

Comparatively speaking, those who were writing in English on that time remained liberal and unorthodox in their approach. One of the dominant names of the time included the name of Ahmad Ali, worked on his short stories during the time. He tried his best to detach himself from the other orthodox trends of literary writings.

Another important name, which is now almost forgotten is the name of Elsa Kazi. **Elsa Kazi**, was the German wife of I.I Kazi. I.I. Kazi was a *sindhi* intellectual and remained the Vice Chancellor of Sindh University. Elsa Kazi’s novel: ‘*Old English Garden Symphony*’ was published in 1952. This was an extensive novel, narrating the story of a musician Eric. The entire work of fiction was divided into two parts. It was written in Victorian style. It was full of emotions and romance, that’s why it could not achieve fame among the conservative social trends of the time.

The second prominent literary figure of the time was Mrs. **Zaib-un-Nisa Hamidullah**. The themes of her literary works were a combination of traditional and absurd existential in their approach. She was tended to focus her artistic skills more on writing short stories and poetry than fiction.

The third prominent literary figure of the time was **Mr. Zahir. H. Ferooqi**. Ferooqi was a civil servant by profession. Due to the job requirements he had to visit different countries.

He stayed several years at Italy and Rome during his service. His first novel was “*Love in Ruins*”. It was written in 1950s but was published in 1960s. This novel was written during his stay at Italy. It was a romantic novel. The plot of this novel consisted on a love story of a boy Fred and girl Stella. Fred was represented as a married man having wife and a child. But the love of Fred and Stella ended on Fred’s death. After that Stella once found a boy, very much like Fred, he was actually cubby (Fred’s son). He too started attracting towards Stella, but Stella did not want to ruin his life, that’s why she disappeared at the end. Over all it contained a pessimistic ending. According to Dr. Tariq Rehman: “*The novel’s theme and settings are the results of the enigmatic impacts of Italy on Ferooqi’s mind, as Italy once considered a symbol of emotional liberty.*” (Rehman, 1991) The novel seemed like one of the novels of D. H. Lawrence’s; ‘*The Lost Girl*’. Ferooqi’s influence of his eastern psyche made him to give a different end to his work. Ferooqi’s eastern

tendencies did not let him break any family in the novel. This sort of trends were also prevalent in the short stories of Mrs. Hamidullah.

The period of 1950s cannot be considered a much productive in the context of the production of English Novels.

So the major themes of 1950s are based on Alienation, struggle and contemporary social issues. Mrs. Hamidullah's stories contained the social themes and themes of struggle of an individual against the common social and cultural problems and conventions. Mrs. Hamidullah's short stories had a bent of existential absurdist notions. Her short stories '*The Peeple Tree*' and '*Fame*' are exactly based on such themes. So a collective categorization of the literary and fictional trends of Pakistani English Literature of the time witnesses the trends of imagination, freedom of actions and individuals on the verge of traditions and conventions.

This era witnessed the rise of middle class in Pakistan. In 1958 general M. Ayub Khan, the commander in chief of the Pakistani army overthrown the president Iskender Mirza and imposed martial law. This was a period of great agony and political turmoil. The new born nation was coping with cultural, political, economic and social changes and violence. Industrialism started emerging in Pakistan during 1960s. However this era also had a few positive aspects, which were the rise of middle class and the emergence of industrialism.

Faiz was the dominant name in poetry, with all his notoriety as a communist, he was a great intellectual and poet. The progressive movement did not produce any considerable literary piece. Contrary to religious fundamentalism, the progressive movement developed a too much liberal culture, which was full of frivolous activities of using alcohol in the pubs. A fashionable liberal, elite class emerged in response to this sort of cultural derangement.

Pakistani English writers of the time remained free of any cultural and social grudge towards any particular class of society. They neither belonged to religious fundamentalism nor to the progressive movement. They remained secular and liberal in their approaches. A typical representation of this sort of writers was Mr. Nasir Ahmad Farooqi.

Nasir Ahmad Farooqi.

Farooqi's first novel '*Faces of Love and Death*' was got published in 1961. This was a novel based on the values, life style and pretentious nature of high class society. Apparently its plot was revolving around a love story but Farooqi's craftsmanship represented many contemporary political and administrative roughs in the novel. It was engulfed with the aftermaths of colonial rule and society. A mixture of cultures was highlighted through a love relationship between Nick Shiekh and Aine (the protagonists of the novel).

Farooqi's second master piece was '*Snake on The Ladder*' published during 1960s. It was again a mere representation of power hungry and power spoiled bureaucrats of the time. It represented their lust for domination, power and wealth. According to an estimate the title of this novel was interpreted as; bureaucracy on the ladder of power and authority. Both of Farooqi's novels contained the realistic view of the society of the time. Themes and trends of the fiction of the time of 1960s gave us an idea of realism. Though the fiction of the time was somehow immature but it was leading to the maturity of the themes in the coming times. It is merely an honest privilege of the social, ethnic, socio-political and economical conditions of the time.

Moreover most of the novels on the time were based on a description of elite life style and the problems they were suffering with. In order to maintain a standard in the English fiction, only upper hand issues were highlighted. Realism was there but one sided view of those pieces of writings exposed the immaturity of their approach. A very few literary pieces disclosed the conditions of the middle and lower classes of the time. Themes on that time were depicting the pathetic conditions of human values, politics and humanity.

Another important name in the decade of 1960s English fiction of Pakistan was **Attia Hossain**. Her magnificent novel '*Sunlight on a Broken Column*' was published in 1961. It was based on a struggle for getting freedom of action and thinking. The protagonist Laila, belonged to a high class Muslim family. She was represented struggling with the norms of her family and traditions. She at last won that battle for freedom of action by marrying her poor relative with whom she was in love.

The most important name of 1960s was **Zulfikar Ghose**, that was appeared after 1965. Ghose' novel; '*Murder of Aziz*' Khan was published in 1967. This was a novel, exposed the great narration power of the writer. The story and plot were too strong. It was over all a beautiful amalgamation of old and new trends. Ghose in this

novel openly represented a twist of Pakistani economic structure from agriculture to industry. This novel was also based on the theme of newly emerging Capitalism in Pakistan. Aziz Khan a landowner was represented as the protagonist falling from a high status to lower. It was highlighting the decay of agrarian culture due to the growth of industry.

In fact Ghose was considered among those great novelists, who provided a mature track to Pakistani English fiction to run on. He represented a bi-sided view of the socio- political and economic situations of the time.

There were also a very few short story writers in 1960s. There were only two prominent names of short story writers during this decade; one was a young and dynamic lady Ayesha Malik and the other a was young guy Burki. Their short stories mostly contained social themes.

This was a time when Pakistan lost a very important part of herself. The selfish policies and political agendas made us lost the eastern Pakistan; now known as Bangladesh. The literature of this era was a little bit disturbed due to the influence of the great loss of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) . In the context of the production of English novel in Pakistan during the decade of 70s “**Bapsi Sidhwa**” was the prominent name. Ghose too published a couple of his works during the decade. A lot of individuals attempted to write short stories, during the era.

Zulfikar Ghose published his novels ‘*Don Bueno*’, ‘*A new History of Torment*’ and ‘*Figures of Enchantment*’ during 1970s. They were all designed in western settings, but Ghose’s primary themes of desertedness and Alienation were remained same.

Mrs. Bapsi Sidhwa, was a parsi female writer. She started writing fiction during the decade of 1970s. She in almost all of her novels tried to highlight the *parsi* culture and living patterns. She published one of her master piece novels during the decade. ‘*Crow Eaters*’ 1978, was based on a beautiful description of *Parsi* living styles. It was also a beautiful combination of funny and serious element of their lives. The novel is also currently studied as a post- colonial piece of writing.

So the themes and trends of Pakistani English fiction of 1970 are comparatively more mature than the works of the earlier decades. Though the war of 1971 and political & national turmoil scared the nation but the writers of the era tried their best to make the literary zest alive, by representing society, trends and cultural things through their works. Ghose and Bapsi Sidhwa remained the dominant literary figures as fiction writers of this era.

In the light of the extensive discussion I have tried to classify the themes of Pakistani English Fiction of these three decades into four major categories. This Periodical classification may represent a bird eye view of trends and themes of English Fiction of Pakistan from 1940s/47 to 1970s:

- 1 Fictional works contain the themes of struggle, nationalism and quest for separate identity. As we can find such themes in the writings of Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Khawja Ahmad Abbas and Feroz Khan Noon.
- 2 Fictional works contain the themes of authoritarianism, personal desire, liberty of thought, male domination, religious Puritanism and a few glimpses of absurdism. As we find in the writings of Zahir.H.Farooqi, Elsa Qazi and Mrs. Hamidullah during 1950s
- 3 Fictional works contain the themes of liberty of thought and action, problems of politics, authoritative power, drunken bureaucracy and few glimpses of industrialism of 1960s. We can easily find such themes in the novels of Attia Hossains, Nasir Ahmad Farooqi and Zulfikar Ghose during 1960s.
- 4 Fictional works contain the themes of social problem, political Controversies. We can also find a turn from agriculture to industrialism (from socialism to capitalism), and cultural identity. These are the dominant themes of Zulfikar Ghose and Bapsi Sidhwa’s novels.

So by the above mentioned trends and themes of Pakistani English fiction from 1940s to 1970s, we can easily divide them into four basic categories, according to their writers’ themes and trends during different decades. We can also observe the political, social and cultural situations and their effects through the study of the fiction of those periods.

It is not easy to comprehend all the names who worked in the growth of our Pakistani English novel, soon after independence with a great diligence and patience, though they are very few and unfortunately are avoided or forgotten. However the important names are tried to be highlighted through the article.

The political, social, cultural scenario is exposed through the fiction of those periods. Through this piece of writing, I have tried my best to bring those initial phase writers of Pakistani English novel into lime light, whose honest efforts have now given it a status of an independent and fully flourished genre of Pakistani English Literature.

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