* **Literature, politics, and resistance: Part - II**

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In the first part of this column yesterday, we discussed some personal accounts by political activists and leaders. My definition of resistance literature is broad and includes biographical literature too, which shares personal experiences and observations with readers.

Parveen Khan’s two books that provide valuable information are 'Mushadidaat' (Observations) and 'Martial Law ke Qaidi' (Prisoners of martial law). The first presents the experiences and observations of a senior left-wing intellectual and leader, Raza Kazim. In the second book, Parveen Khan writes the painful stories of renowned political leaders who were sentenced under martial-law regulations.

Such leaders included Nasrullah Khan, Wali Khan, Benazir Bhutto, Meraj Muhammad Khan, Rasul Bakhsh Palijo, Maulana Fazlur Rahman, Sardar Shaukat Ali, and dozens of others. Sardar Shaukat Ali reminds me of his book 'Bhutto, Zia, aur Awam' (Bhutto, Zia, and the people) which was published by the Frontier Post in 1993. In this book, Shaukat Ali sheds ample light with his left-wing perspective on people’s political struggles in Pakistan. Afzal Tauseef’s book 'Election, Jamhuriat, Martial Law' (Election, democracy, and martial law) is an account of the days characterized by imprisonments, lashes, and hangings.

The book translated by Dr Zafar Arif is titled 'Insani Huqooq ki Pamali' (The trampling of human rights) narrates the violations of human rights during and immediately after martial law and under the Junejo government. It is based on a report from the International Jurists Commission, and reflects very well on that era. Another book, 'Aur Bayan Apna' (And thus we spoke) contains the full statements submitted to the Supreme Court of Pakistan by Wali Khan, Bizenjo, Khair Bakhsh Marri, Attaullah Mengal, and Arbab Sikandar Khan Khalil. It also includes the response from the executive council of the National Awami Party submitted to the Supreme Court by Qaswar Gardezi.

Anwaar Mazdaki’s book 'Wali Khan ki Siyasat' (The politics of Wali Khan) is a well-written account of his democratic struggle; the politics of Balochistan is well covered by Mansur Qadir Junejo in his book 'General Sherof'. This is a collection of articles about, and interviews with Mir Sher Muhammad Marri. Jaam Saqi, the first president of the Sindh National Students Federation (SNSF) and later a well-respected communist leader, also wrote a couple of good books on student movements in Sindh and 'Zameer Ke Qaidi' (Prisoners of conscience).

I have written previously in detail about books on journalists’ movements; suffice it to mention here just one more book by Abdul Hameed Chhapra titled 'Political Harlotry' which is a collection of his articles published in the 1990s. On student movements, the two volumes by Saleem Mansur Khalid, 'Talaba Tehreekain' (Student movements) contain articles by former student activists and writers, from Hafeez Khan, Imtiaz Alam and Javed Hashmi to Sajjad Mir, Naseem Hijazi and Fareed Paracha. These articles offer useful material on student movements in Pakistan.

Similarly, Ashraf Raza’s compilation is 'Siyasi Jamaaten Talaba ki Adalat Mein' (Political parties in the court of students). This book was published in October 1970, just two months before the general elections of December 1970. The students’ court invited representatives from eight major political parties to defend their case. This book helps us understand students’ politics in those tumultuous years. Before moving on to discussing the resistance literature in fiction, the last non-fiction book I would like to mention is 'Jamhuriat ki Azmaish' (The crucible of democracy) by Dr Jaffar Ahmed. This is a collection of articles by Dr Jaffar Ahmed about the political trends and issues during the second government of Benazir Bhutto from 1993 to 1996.

And now we move on to discussing the literature of resistance in fiction. Up until now, we have seen that many activists and leaders involved in democratic and political struggles have penned their impressions and observations. Most of these were based on facts, but published many years after the events took place. Most fiction writers find themselves in a difficult situation when they try to delineate social suppression and state repression in writing, and also strive to protect themselves from the wrath of the rulers. We remember – from Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Sajjad Zaheer to Zaheer Kashmiri and Habib Jalib – all those intellectuals and poets who suffered in imprisonment.

Still, they managed to transfer on paper their feelings and thoughts in the shape of progressive and resistance literature. Many critics and writers have discussed progressive literature, but we find scant substantial writing on the literature of resistance. It is debatable whether the terms ‘progressive literature’ and ‘resistance literature’ imply the same streak, or whether there is a fine line one can draw between them. It is pretty challenging to respond to this question with a conclusive opinion. Perhaps, the best we can say is that the literature of resistance is just another form of progressive literature.

The primary task of both is to expose injustices in society and raise public awareness about them. From Krishan Chandar’s 'Hum Wehshi Hein' (We are savages) and 'Peshawar Express' to 'Habib Jalib’s Aisey Dastoor Ko, Subhe Benoor Ko, Main Naheen Manta' (I don’t accept this constitution and this black dawn), such literature, be it in prose or poetry, pinpoints the problems and difficulties people have to endure. Such literature expresses anger and anguish against repression in society. Indeed, sometimes resistance poetry is relegated to the level of sloganeering, but such poetry has always challenged social hegemony.

In this series of articles we will discuss just some of the examples of Urdu fiction in Pakistan to explain how our writers have dared to produce masterpieces that deserve a place in the world literature of resistance. Here, Fakhar Zaman is worthy of special mention for his contribution not only as a writer of resistance literature but also as the chairman of the Pakistan Academy of Letters in the mid-1990s. He facilitated the publication of special issues of resistance literature in Pakistan both in English and Urdu in 1995, during the second government of Benazir Bhutto.

Well-known and highly respected writer Rasheed Amjad compiled the Urdu selection of resistance literature, and also wrote an article 'Urdu Mein Muzahimati Aab ki Riwayat' (The tradition of resistance literature in Urdu). Abrar Ahmed too penned an equally good essay 'Muzahimati Adab'. In English the managing editor of 'Resistance Literature' was Mazharul Islam, whereas Hafizur Rahman was its editor. The English version includes translations of resistance literature from several languages. The circumstances that Pakistan is witnessing in 2019, and the way the state is curbing the freedoms of expression and writing, remind you of the resistance literature of yore.

Even now, when you read the resistance literature that our writers penned many decades ago, you feel that such literature is beyond the boundaries of time and space; it represents the realities of almost all eras of Pakistani history. For example, when Faiz wrote in the 20th century:

Bol yeh thora waqt bahut hai (Speak, while the moment lasts)

Jism o zaban ki maut se pehle (Before the body dies and tongue mortifies)

Bol ke sach zinda he ab tak (Speak, that the truth is still alive)

Bol, jo kuchh kehna he, keh le (Speak, whatever you must)

Faiz couldn’t have imagined that even after the second decade in the 21st century, these lines would be as relevant and timely as they were at the time of his writing.

To be continued

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