

The Ghazals of Firaq Gorakhpuri: Confluence of Love and Resistance

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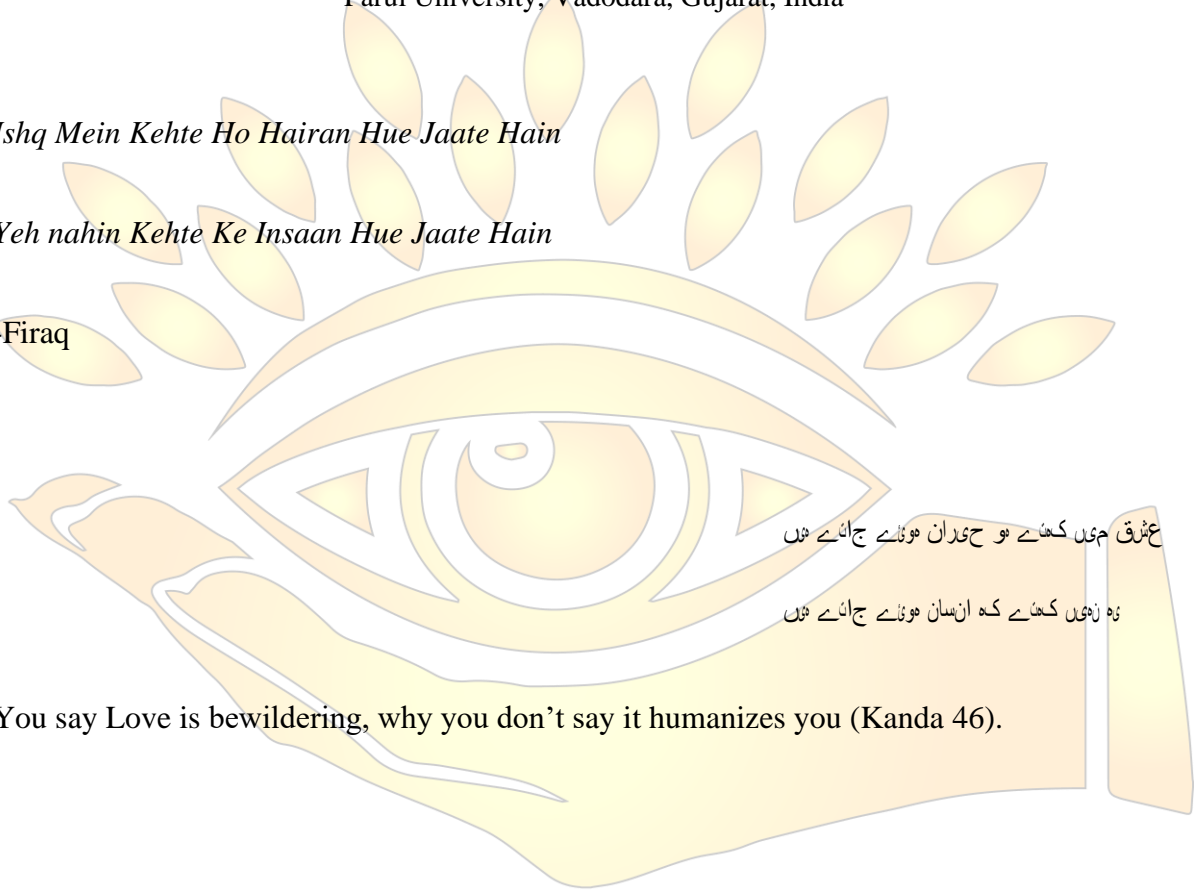
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Ishq Mein Kehte Ho Hairan Hue Jaate Hain

Yeh nahin Kehte Ke Insaan Hue Jaate Hain

-Firaq



You say Love is bewildering, why you don't say it humanizes you (Kanda 46).

Firaq Gorakhpuri has often been looked as poet of love and beauty and his poems are labelled as Ishqiya Shayri . . He was a romantic poet and initially wrote love ghazals but he was a progressive poet too. Influenced by the progressive movement flourishing in his days he has also written on social and revolutionary themes along with love “It was the stark reality of the human condition that made Firaq Gorakhpuri, who belonged to the older generation, whose forte was love poetry (he gave Urdu poetry the touch of eroticism that is found in Sanskrit poetry), associate himself with the ideology of the movement”

(Padmanabhan 1). He was a classicist and had a great respect for the new trends of the Progressive Movement and became a part of it.. This paper examines the construct of love and resistance in relation to selected ghazals of Firaq Gorakhpuri .

Firaq wrote a number of nazms, ghazals and rubais which reflected his social and political concerns. His progressive ghazals may be less in numbers but they do not lack the spirit of progressivism and his emotional affinity to the cause of freedom, change and progress. His progressive ghazals are as realistic as the ghazals of Faiz. The content of their progressive ghazals is same. Firaq also brings in the common man into his ghazals like Faiz. He too introduced a new sensibility and new literary concerns through his ghazals. Like Faiz in Firaq's ghazals also we find a call for social justice. It is right Firaq wrote a lot about Sharab and Shabab but he wrote about Inquilab too. One finds zeal to change the social order in his progressive ghazals which is one of the motifs of Progressive Movement. The themes of Firaq's ghazals run from the struggle against British Raj, domination of rich over poor, equality among the people... He was influenced by old voices but his voice emerged as a new voice and as a different voice. Like his contemporaries he also used ghazal as a weapon for social transformation. Firaq on one hand is a love poet on the other hand he is a socially committed progressive writer and a writer of avant-garde who strongly believes in the betterment of social life and society at large. In his progressive ghazals he addresses India's social, political and cultural climate. The underlying veracity and truthfulness of his Progressive ghazals is too powerful to be ignored.

After reading his ghazals we come to know about Firaq's different personalities, Firaq as a lover who is lost in the love and beauty of his beloved, Firaq as a strict realist who is concerned above all with the social reality of people, we also find in him a sharp satirical critic of the life and system of his society at the same time he is a positive upholder of the

cause of social change and a better future. His ghazals are embedded in the society and culture of his times but they are relevant today also. Firaq's style is simple and direct. He expresses his thoughts directly. At times he gets angry and sarcastic too, his anger is against society, its system and feudal mentality. He challenges society and its traditions. Like other progressive writers his poetry also had a clear leaning towards socialist philosophy. Though his poetry was mostly romantic he also gave his perspectives on humanism, secularism, socialism, realism and feminism.

Firaq writes passionately but also with brutal honesty about society. Independence and Partition are also the principal backdrops against which much of his ghazals and rubais unfold. He used literature or ghazals to promote reform. He did not conform to a particular genre; he was part of an ongoing tradition and evolution. It was natural for Firaq to write social poems, poems of love, poems of revolution etc.

His depiction of life is bitter but also sweet, precious and very close to the heart for example the following couplet:

Maut ka bhi ilaj ho shayad Zindagi ka koi ilaj nahi (Gorakhpuri 295).

Death perhaps may have a cure, But incurable is life (Kanda 131).

Like other Progressive poets Firaq was an outspoken rationalist ever ready to fight for the cause of injustice and inequality in the society. He spoke on behalf of those whose voices were throttled as they were not allowed to give vent to their aspirations and their desires were hardly noticed. He was the poet of the people and his object was to serve humanity. For him real freedom lies in the renunciation of all prejudices against all and embracing everyone irrespective of their caste and creed.

Although physical beauty and love are dominant subjects of Firaq's ghazal, his lyrics encompass such thoughts, emotions and themes which had not been represented in the old classical ghazal before him. In the words of scholar Ali Jawad Zaidi, the entire field of human yearning and suffering forms his canvas. Firaq's art is also distinct in his portrayal of mood and external settings and atmosphere the qualities that lacked in Urdu lyrics and which he might have learnt from English literature of which he was a teacher at the Allahabad University.

Firaq knew very well the relationship between art and life/society and also the demands of art and society. This is the reason the he got a great success in creating pieces that combined social purpose and artistic excellence. For Firaq writing was like a mission. He belonged to the category of writers who could not afford the luxury of writing without a social purpose. The more intensely he felt about the social issues the more effective became his ghazals.

The ghazals of Firaq are concerned with the problems and sufferings of the down trodden people. His ghazals criticize the differences among human beings in all the three areas of human life: social, economic and political. He condemns the divide between the rich and the poor, between men and women, between upper cast and lower cast. His ghazals depict the miseries of the lower class and lower caste people and the working-class people, who suffered because of the inhuman behaviour of the ruling people or upper caste people. Through his poetry we come to know that he is on the side of the people, the common people. Like a physician, he aims to restore health, not of an individual however but of the society as a whole. The principle aim of his progressive ghazals is to bring the voices of the voiceless at the front.

As we know that Firaq was a scholar of English literature and its impact is clearly visible on his ghazals especially the impact or influence of English Romantic poets. In his essay A Defence of poetry written in 1821 P.B.Shelley claims that “the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world, a poet is the most highly intellectual man and his poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world” (14). The same string of thought can be found in the poems of Firaq Gorakhpuri. For example, the following couplet:

Shair ka to kaam hai yeh, har dil main Kuch dard e hayat siwa ho jaye The poet is guided by one aim

To create compassion in every heart (Kanda 253).

Like Shelley Firaq also wrote about poet and his functions in his article Meri Shairi Firaq wrote that “a poet is one who feels much more than others and about many more things” (Hasan 45). Being a people’s poet, he always writes such pieces which become an inspiration for his readers. He writes to encourage and motivate his readers. For example, the following lines reveal his faith in the purpose of life. With faith, man can conquer adversities that threaten the very existence of life.

Dikhaa to deti hai behtar hayaat ke sapnay Kharaab ho key bhi yeh zindagi kharaab nahin.

Life’s beautiful dreams can no doubt be envisioned

Despite being decomposed, life is not that decayed (Kanda 72).

“His poetry reveals that hope is alive and eternal in him. Despite the feeling of loneliness in his life, and temperamental at times, he was never miserable. He rose out of his predicaments like a phoenix to serve as an example to people burdened with problems. Firaq’s significant poetic journey becomes more impactful due to the personal

disappointments he faced in his life. Definitely, the path he travelled is a path to be extolled and emulated” (Tejaswani 5). There are many factors that contribute to Firaq's popularity and his greatness as a poet. But one factor which stands out above all others is his universality and wide appeal. He wrote for everyone, he did not write for one group or for one community, he wrote for humanity, he was concerned for the coming generations for example the following couplet from the ghazal “Is Sukot e Fiza Main Kho Jayain” (Gorakhpuri 14).

Raah main aani wali naslon ke Kher kaante to hum na bo jayain

Let us atleast ensure that we do not sow

The seeds of strife in the path of posterity (Hasan 109).

In the above couplet Firaq is speaking like a philosopher who is concerned about the upcoming generations. He is trying to suggest that people should work in such a way that the lives of the coming generations become easy. He wants to set such examples which will encourage and inspire the next generations.

“Firaq attempted to go back beyond Ghalib to Mir to try to imitate his style and revive his conception of love. This move toward Mir meant that a more objective view of the classical tradition would emerge. In his poetry Firaq attempted to learn from Mir and in turn to enrich the traditional framework of ghazal by incorporating into it themes untried before. As a result of this a sensuous and earthy view of the beloved marks Firaq’s ghazals, which present ishq as fulfilment of body and soul” (Natrajan 338). “His ghazlas represent a very unique and very new world of ishq/love and while describing the union and separation of lovers (wisal and hijr) he does not follow the traditional pattern” (Narang 396).

According to Hasan Askari Firaq “introduced to Urdu poetry a new lover who is a dignified soul and is sensible enough to realise that he has to also care for needs other than love. In other words, in Firaq’s poetry love does not appear as an experience isolated from other experiences of life. It makes its appearance within the perspective of human life, which brings in its wake manifold experience; love is just one of them. ()

For example, the following couplet:

Chup ho gaye tere rone waley Duniya ka khayal aa gaya hai (197).

Another couplet where he sounds like Faiz:

Dil jo mara gaya Firaq to kya Zindagi bhar isi ka matam ho If the heart has been mauled in love,

Should we mourn for all our life? (Kanda 17).

Shafey Kidwai in his book Urdu Literature and Journalism: Critical Perspectives writes that “Firaq was instrumental in transforming Urdu Love poetry into a repository receptacle of multi layered human consciousness that transcends the time and space barrier” (87). In the ghazals of Firaq a new type of human relationship between two individuals emerges. “These relationships are no idealistic infatuations between two starry-eyed lovers but between two individuals caught in the cobwebs of human predicament. Firaq’s ghazals suggest that love is not merely a pleasure-seeking sensation or possessiveness” (Kanda 40), it is more than that. Firaq wrote a full-length book Urdu Ki Ishqia Shaeri (Urdu Love Poetry), which deals with the role of love in an individual’s life. For Firaq love is not merely a matter of affection between the lover and the beloved but for Firaq love is something which makes one’s life better which makes one a good person. Firaq suggests that after falling in love one

reaches to the stage of highest stage of awareness. The following couplet emphasizes the humanizing role of Love.

Ishq Mein Kehte Ho Hairan Hue Jaate Hain Yeh nahin Kehte Ke Insaan Hue Jaate Hain

You say Love is bewildering, why you don't say it humanizes you (Kanda 46).

Ishq/love in Firaq is a mystical communion with the indwelling beauty of existence. It is an instrument of access and intimacy. It is often a magical idiom of awareness, of freedom and of bliss" (Hasan 41). For example:

Farishton aur dewatawon ka bhi jahan se dushwar hai guzarna Hayat koson nikal gayi hai teri nigahon ke saye saye.

Life has access, through the shady avenues of your eyes,

To miles upon miles of territory where angels fear to tread (Hasan 41).

The traditional Urdu poetry describes ishq (love) and husn (female beauty) as a deception but Firaq says so is male love for example: yeh husn o ishq to dhoka hai sab magar phir bhi. Firaq invented a new way of looking at female figure and female beauty. One does not find his female figure sitting beautifully and majestically. But she is found to be busy in everyday and real things as feeding a baby, sweeping the courtyard or milking a cow. Like Firaq another Progressive poet Kaifi Azmi also looked at the female figure from a different perspective. According to Vishnu Khare "Kaifi comes up with a modern kind of romanticism, pensiveness and tender emotion. But women in his poetry are never an object of sensual desire" (2).

There are many kinds of writers. There are those who choose not to respond to their socio-political surroundings. And, there are some writers who cannot dissociate their work from their surroundings and remain very much a part of the society. They write because they do not accept the system or the society, so they show their anger through writing and Firaq Gorakhpuri was such poet. He writes about his self but more than that he writes about his society. He was not ready to accept the accepted value system of his times. His ghazals appear as a break barrier to get rid of all those elements which generally become a hinder in our progress. His ghazals show his disillusionment with the world. Like a visionary poet he had a vision of an alternative world, which was very different from the real world. His ghazals are concerned with a strong need to change the system, internal change as well as external change, the internal change refers to the change in the mentality of people and external change refers to the change in the society and system. He wanted a system which is free of tyranny and dictates of society. He wanted a change in the overall system of society, change in the existing social mores, value systems and power equations. He was against the system which gives birth to differences and inequalities and he wrote against such a system.

Firaq through his ghazals gives birth to a desire to resist, protest and oppose. He uses power of words. Firaq uses words as weapons to express the problems faced by people as well as their anger against the system. His Progressive ghazals became a tool of resistance, a note of protest against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or community.

Ahl e raza main shan e baghawat bhi ho zara

Itni bhi zindagi na ho paband e rasmiyat (Gorakhpuri 33)

Conformists should occasionally sport airs of rebellion Let life not become such a slave of convention (Hasan 90).

Firaq wants his people to move further and cross all the boundaries, he wants progress of his people and change in society. He talks about justice, freedom and democracy, oppression, revolution in his ghazals. Firaq's revolution is very different from the revolution of Faiz or the progressive writers in general. It is true that he was not loud like Faiz. He was immersed in a revolution of his own design. He also uses pen as a sword. Firaq was also a rebel and poet of revolution but his rebellion and revolution is different from his contemporaries like Faiz, Azmi, Majaz, Sahir etc. He writes against different forms of oppression. His ghazals are rooted deeply in the land/culture and idiom of those whom he wrote for. He was a committed poet whose ghazals are embedded in the society and culture of his times.

In the book Hand Book of Twentieth Century Literature of India Nalini Natrajan writes that “after Ghalib and his contemporaries, there had been several good ghazal poets, including Dagh, Ameer Meena'i, Hali etc. Yet, these poets, by and large, continued to write within the framework of traditional poetics. With Akbar Allahabadi and Hasrat Mohani, the ghazal had begun to change under the influence of modernization. This change became even more apparent in the ghazals of Mirza Yas Yaghana Changeezi and Firaq Gorakhpuri” (338).

According to Nawazish Ali “Firaq's ghazal is a rare and creative juxtaposition of different trends found in Urdu, English, Persian and Hindi poetry. In one chapter of his book, covering nearly 150 pages, Ali traces the influences of classical Urdu poets, like Mir, Dagh, Amir Minai, and Momin on Firaq' ghazal and afterwards his own contribution to this genre. In fact, Firaq's style kept changing and he imbibed influences of many other classical poets”. Further Ali writes that “the new generation of Urdu poets has learnt a lot from Firaq. No

other contemporary of Firaq influenced more poets representing modern ghazal than did he alone. Firaq's ghazal is the avant-garde of modern ghazal."

"Firaq was a modern poet and his poetry/ ghazal was modern in that it represented the tone and sensibility of his times, while showing sensitivity to the classical expressions as well. Firaq enabled ghazal's creative tradition to imbibe modern sensibility of the contemporary world" (Ali). When Urdu poets were following the traditional themes, the traditional way of writing ghazals, in Firaq's ghazal, we encounter a new style and a man who thinks about universe afresh and engages the issues of modern thought. In a way it can be said that he challenged the poetry of his time.

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