

***The Enchanted Paradigm:
Modernity of Difference in Faiz Ahmad Faiz's Poetry***

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Much critical discourse on modern (postcapital and postcolonial) South Asian literature is governed by a paradigmatic tenet that reduces so-called “third-world” literature to a political program, namely, the unfolding of a universal modernity in the world. Many theorists have critiqued the very idea of a universal modernity by demonstrating its European origins and its inadequacy for grasping complex and heterogenous modernities outside of Europe. These heterogeneous modernities, I contend, can be reflected as Gadamerian *prejudice* in critical thought since all critical thought remains tied to the place. And as such, they call for a different theoretical paradigm of critical inquiry.

Taking this as my point of departure I examine the work of Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), the premier “modern” Urdu poet who was the leading icon of the Progressive Writers Movement (1930s-50s) as well a prominent member of the Communist Party associated with the Soviet-Russia (1930s-60s). Most scholarship on Faiz reads him through the Eurocentric paradigm of modernity as “progressive,” “secular,” “Marxist/Communist,” “postcolonial,” etc—all different codes for modern in this context. I take issue with these readings by striving to locate Faiz within the classical Urdu literary tradition. I argue that his poetry is rooted in his “locale” through premodern enchanted genealogies which can be traced to the Qur’an, Islamic lore, and the classical Arabo-Persian *ghazal* tradition, none of which can be confined within the paradigm of a secular, disenchanting, postcolonial modernity. These genealogies of Faiz’s aesthetic and ethical world produce a peculiar enchanted modernity that is not modern in the Western sense. Even when inspired by non-local modern thought such as Marxism, Faiz incorporates it into the rich local library and gives it a different form than the Eurocentric Marxist and postcolonial historicism allows us to see. His fusing of two horizons allows the medieval to exist in the modern, and calls for a new, locally rooted paradigm for analysis.

What conclusions about alternate/local paradigms of the modern can we draw from this? What does it say about the dominant paradigm of analysis focused on rupture (viz. modern v. premodern) that the “premodern” tradition continues in the premier “modern” poet of Urdu?