



The Feudal Dynasty and Politics in Pakistan: A Socio-Political Analysis of Season of the Rainbirds in the Light of New Historicism

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the factors behind the political instability and economic inequality in Pakistan, especially during General Zia's military regime as reflected in Nadeem Aslam's novel 'Season of the Rainbirds' (1993), in the light of the theory of New Historicism. The study highlights that the military intervened in political affairs and imposed martial law in 1977. The parliamentary democratic process in Pakistan did not get stability due to certain factors, such as feudal dynasty, social and economic inequalities, exploitation of masses, and low literacy rate. The feudal elites have always supported the military in this process to seek their vested interests, as their dominance over political affairs has been great. On the other hand, the masses' dependency on their land for economic survival has worsened the situation. This study is based on a qualitative research approach and has been carried out by doing a textual analysis of the selected excerpts from the novel 'Season of the Rainbirds'. The findings reveal that the social composition of the feudal class has undermined the institution of democracy and caused political, social, and economic disintegration. It monopolized the institution of politics and made a way for the military to intervene in the political affairs of the country. Without the provision of social and economic justice, democracy cannot get stability in Pakistan.

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1. Introduction

Pakistan has experienced political instability throughout its history since its independence to date. Sayeed (1967) states that the democratic process has been disrupted many times due to the frequent intervention of military forces and the corrupt practices of the politicians and civil bureaucracy. Furthermore, it was a common perception about Pakistan in 1947 that this country is lagging far behind India in political leadership, economy, and administrative services. No doubt, when Pakistan came into being, it faced many serious social and political problems. As a nation we have not yet been able to resolve these issues, especially the issue of political fragmentation. Pakistan experienced the intervention of martial law after almost every decade. After the adoption of the first constitution, martial law was imposed in 1958 by Field Marshal Ayub Khan. After 1971, democracy was restored for a short period and the parliamentary government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was formed. This democratic rule was derailed by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 and then his martial law regime lasted for more than a decade. Although democracy restored after Zia's plane crash in 1988, the democratic process could not work properly due to the flawed policies of politicians. In 1999, the military intervened again, and the military rule lasted for another eight years.

Since independence, the nature of politics in West Pakistan has been feudal. The constitutional assembly of West Pakistan was divided into two groups of landlords. Regarding this issue, Sayeed (1967) points out that some of the landlords were involved in feuds with each other. Dating back many decades and under certain circumstances, they were compelled to cooperate, as their common objective was to win the elections. These landlords either embody political groups or government-supported camps who were mainly used either to win the elections or to topple a government, and after achieving specific objectives, these groups were often disintegrated. This has been a specific cause of political fragmentation in the politics of Pakistan. According to Hussain (2017), Pakistan has been facing this problem of political fragmentation since its birth when the politicians could not develop consensus over the constitution for a decade which led the nation towards the first martial law in 1958.

Nadeem Aslam's *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993) has highlighted this political fragmentation of Pakistan, especially during General Zia's regime. The novel has portrayed the routine life of a Pakistani town that covered ten days. The novelist has narrated the incident of murder of a judge (corrupt one) whose name was Anwar that highlighted the corruption prevailing in the institution of judiciary. Further, a sack of 19 years back lost letter was found which became the talk of the town. The influential people of the town. i.e., the landlords do not want the letter to be delivered as this would bring to light the hidden facts that could stain their political career.

Season of The Rainbirds is a socio-political documentary that satirizes those factors that were the cause of the martial law of 1977. Aslam has painted realistic scenarios and characters. First, we find the character of a staunch religious cleric, Maulana Dawood, who makes the masses fanatics. Another character is of a corrupt bureaucrat, Deputy Commissioner, Azhar, who is in a constant struggle to resolve the murder mystery of the judge, but it remains clueless. This is a satire on the law-and-order situation. Another character is of the most influential person of the town, landlord Mujeeb Ali, who is an opportunist and represents a corrupt politician. The character of Mujeeb Ali also represents the exploitation of the poor farmers done by the feudal lords, as he exploits the poor farmers who work on his lands. Mujeeb Ali is a supporter of martial law force. The novel also criticizes the unjust death sentence of the 9th prime minister of Pakistan, Z. A. Bhutto, that was succeeded by the 11-year-long military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq.

Season of the Rainbirds also exposes the social and economic exploitation of poor farmers in the hands of feudals. These social and economic inequalities and injustice prevailing in the society do not let the democratic process flourish. Martial law is always supported by the civil service and feudals that constitute the power elite of Pakistan. In Pakistan, bureaucracy and judiciary often become a tool in the hands of a political party that forms the sitting government. Consequently, both these institutions become subservient to the rulers. This exploitation does not let the benefits of socio-political and economic progress reach to the poor and feeble segment of the society.

2. Literature Review

The New Historicism school of thought emphasizes a parallel reading of the non-literary and literary texts of the same period. The new historicists hold the view that texts of all kinds reflect the weft of cultural, political, and social formations. The literary critic sees and uses history as subjective knowledge and context to explain a literary work. Therefore, it is useful to interpret literary studies, as it helps to explore the connection between literature, culture, and history. Newton (1994) holds the view that our reading of a text and the analysis of the existing time and the past are defined by history, politics, and certain social and cultural values that are rooted in them. The New Historicism originated as a reaction to the earlier theories, such as Formalism, Deconstruction, Structuralism and Reader-Response theory. New Historicism sees a literary text in its historical background while focusing on socio-cultural circumstances.

William (1977) argues that we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practices. According to William (1977), ideas, beliefs, art, and customs are determined by history. Brannigan (1988) explains that the new historicists interpret the literary texts in the context of social, cultural, linguistic and political weft of society in a detailed way.

According to new historicists, a literary work represents the cultural and social values of particular people of a particular time. It should not be considered as a universal truth of human nature. Leavis (1984) defines literature as a means of education about society and politics. Geertz (1993) brought anthropology close to the practices of literary studies when he called human beings as cultural artifacts. Geertz (1993) is of the view that culture holds a pivotal place in forming human beings. It is quite evident that the object of new historicism is to maintain the relationship between literary studies and socio-political aspects of a certain time. It involves the analysis of literary and non-literary texts as elements of social and historical discourse.

The present study of *Season of the Rainbirds* has been done in the light of the theory of New Historicism. Aslam has reflected the exploitation of common masses as they are at the mercy of the ruling elites, i.e., the feudals and the civil and military bureaucracy. Rehman (1994) maintains that in *Season of the Rainbirds*, the top social hierarchy, i.e., the military generals, the feudals, and the bureaucracy, occupy a world of power and authority in their hands. The powerless common man lives in a static world where nothing is going to be changed unless the vested interests of the top social hierarchy are involved. Rahman (1994) is of the view that in *Season of the Rainbirds* Aslam has highlighted certain social and political issues, i.e., corruption of politicians, judiciary and bureaucracy; economic and social exploitation of masses; and the crackdown of military forces on the political party during the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq.

3. Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative research approach. To expose the social and political realities of Pakistani society, the close reading method has been adopted. The close reading has been done from the perspective of New Historicism. Cuddon (1999) notes that the method of close reading is an effective way to analyze and synthesize the primary and secondary data to develop an argument. The textual analysis of *Season of The Rainbirds* has been done in the light of new historicism to understand and evaluate the specific issue. The analysis of various narratives, character portrayals, and the related quotations of the text '*Season of the Rainbirds*' (1993) reveals that feudalistic politics and corruption prevailing in the society do not let the democratic process flourish in Pakistan and eventually make a way for the military intervention. The researchers highlight that the social composition of feudal class and civil and military bureaucracy have undermined the institution of democracy and caused political, social, and economic disintegration in Pakistan. The views of various critics and analysts have been analyzed side by side to support the argument. Furthermore, the views of various critics and analysts have been added to support the claim. Further, the researchers have explored how the feudal dynasty exploited the masses economically and politically and played a pivotal role in leading Pakistan towards an unstable socio-political system during the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq.

4. Analysis and Findings

Since independence, Pakistan has experienced little if any social equilibrium. This is one of the major reasons that help to explain why political stability and nation-building programs have broken down repeatedly in the country. *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993) depicts the political and economic scenario of General Ziaul-Haq's martial-law regime. It is a depiction of the 1980s society in strife, where daily life is going on against a portentous atmosphere of power, fanaticism, brutality and decadence. The novel consists of various narratives that revolve around the issues of social, economic, and political injustice and chaos, i.e., a judge's murder, a religious devotee troubled by local people's deviation from the right path, a bureaucrat sexually involved with a Christian maid, economic and political exploitation of common people of rural areas in the hand of feudal lords. It also reflects that clouds of political uncertainty, fear and apprehension hovering over the country after the demise of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1979.

The feudal dynasty has always played a vital role in the politics of the country, as this segment of the society has always supported non-civilian forces to preserve their position and rule in the country. Feudal culture has been an obstacle against the political and economic progress of the country. Feudal lords do not only rule the region they belong to, but they also exercise their authority in political affairs and decision making. Sayeed (1967) states that big landholders always join the government-supported groups as they offer them safety and

protection in return against their rivals (p.88). In *Season of the Rainbirds* the same authority lies with Mujeeb Ali, a feudal who exploits the poor people of the town economically and politically. As they work on his lands on meager wages, they cannot make personal decisions of their lives without the permission of the feudal lord.

Since independence, in Pakistan, the concentration of wealth and resources into a few hands of feudal lords and industrialists created large-scale discontent and economic inequalities in society. As mentioned in the novel, 'sometime in the previous century the British had awarded large tracts of Crown land to the Ali's; Mujeeb Ali's great-grandfather was awarded the title 'Khan-bahadur'. Their wealth had increased tenfold since then mile upon mile of fishing rights, hundreds of acres of woodland and hundreds of acres of farmland' (Aslam, 1993, p. 84). Mujeeb Ali, the powerful lord of the town, exploits the poor peasants working on his lands. As there is an incident mentioned in the novel where the old peasant, covered in sweat, talks to Mujeeb Ali, 'I have been standing in the sun all day because the clerk refuses to pay my wages...My turn has come and gone, I will be the last one to get paid, as in clerk's eyes, I am rude' (Aslam, 1993. p. 44). Furthermore, Mujeeb Ali does not want that sack of letters, that was lost 19 years back in a train crash, to be delivered to the people of the town. He tries his best to hide these letters from being exposed because he is fearful that any of these letters may contain information that would prove to be harmful to his political career. For this purpose, he plans to ask the religious clerics of the town to handle the issue because he believes that the religious clerics can convince the people easily, as the people trust them blindly and will not raise any objection against clerics on this unethical practice of examining each letter before delivery. 'We will examine each letter and withhold any that might result in the kind of crime...Who is we? asked Maulana Hafeez. A group of people, responsible citizens, chosen by yourself and Maulana Dawood' (Aslam, 1993. p. 86). Religion mobilizes the religious sensibilities of people to get their support and capture power. It has been a frequent practice of the politicians that they exploit religious ideology to rule the country. If religion holds political authority, it seeks to exploit it to fulfill a divine mission. It claims that it derives authority from divinity, and therefore its mission is motivated by an aim to reform the society under spiritual guidance. During the military regime of General Zia, the religious ideology was exploited to gain vested interests. Zia used the strategy of Islamization to extend his autocratic rule in the country. He wanted to strengthen his political base, and for this purpose he used public sentiments as a cover to provide himself legitimacy. He started the process of Islamization of political, legal, economic and social institutions to make the state theocratic (Grover & Arora, 2002). Haqqani (2018) holds Zia's regime responsible for the state's insurmountable socio-political degradation that culminates in religious fanaticism, sectarian and ethnic polarization, domestic and political violence, and elitism in the state establishment.

Season of the Rainbirds highlights the issue of the social status of minority, i.e., the Ahamdis. They have been described as a vulnerable segment of society who are living under a constant state of fear. As it raised a sectarian cleavage within a common ethnolinguistic-religious group of society, the constitution of Pakistan was amended in 1974 to declare them as a non-Muslim community. The Ahamadis were declared non-Muslims by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government. Braibanti (1997, p. 464) views this political move as a threat to Pakistan's national integrity, 'as such interpretations of membership exclusively in the body of Islam can strengthen the other tendencies toward fragmentation of Pakistan'. As mentioned in the novel that when Mr. Kasmi tried to convince the mob not to beat Elizabeth and leave her, a furious and fanatic mob tried to attack him.' (Aslam, 1993. p. 229). The politicization of religion has been a tactic of politicians in the political history of Pakistan that played the main role to weaken the democratic setup in the country. General Zia politicized the Islamization process to prolong and strengthen his regime and he ruled the country for 11 years. Ziring (1988) holds the view that the Islamization of Zia was contrary to interests of the masses, as he used this slogan for his political goals

Likewise, it has been shown in *Season of the Rainbirds* that the bureaucracy, feudal lords and judiciary got close to one another in the political arena to get vested interests. Mujeeb Ali has friendly relations with Deputy Commissioner, Azhar. 'They frequently visit each other and keep each other aware of current affairs. Mujeeb Ali has discussed the lost letters affairs with DC who informs him that a journalist is coming to cover the story of those letters within a day (Aslam, 1993. p. 46). Azhar assists Mujeeb Ali in maintaining his authority and

exploiting the masses. The way commissioner arrests innocent Gul-Kalam without any proof just based on doubt is another example of political agenda of the feudal elite. The police could not prove the allegations on the basis of which Gul-Kalam was arrested. Actually, it is a way to make the people of the town pressurized and fearful so that they could never dare stand before the ruling elites, and they must always obey their orders willingly or unwillingly. Thus, by exploiting the lower class of the society, the feudal elite gain their political interests. When Maulana Hafeez asks Mujeeb Ali that why they have arrested the poor guard (Gul-Kalam) in the case of Judge Anwar's murder, Mujeeb Ali replies that he was involved in Judge Anwar's murder. They paid him to guard the street for a few hours and also got the layout of the house from him. Further, when Maulana Hafeez asks Mujeeb Ali that who "They" are, he replies that 'he is not sure yet' (Aslam, 1993, p. 84). Asrar (2002) maintains that the politicians and bureaucracy have not been successful in addressing the problems of the masses, as they lack sincerity and devotion. They have been totally unaware of their problems the masses face at the grassroots level.

Similarly, the novel highlights the corruption of the judiciary as another cause of political and social chaos in Pakistan. *Season of the Rainbirds* highlights this issue too. As in the case of Judge Anwar's murder, Yousaf Rao tells Mr. Kasmi that Judge Anwar was corrupt to the core and he was involved in politics too, so the murderer can be anyone (Aslam, 1993, p. 40). The novel reveals this corruption of the judiciary in the following words:

Many years before, having just returned to the town of his to begin a practice, Yousaf Rao had soon understood that Judge Anwar of the Fourth Criminal Court put many obstacles in the way of justice. He had duly denounced the judge to the authorities in the capital, accusing him of failing to remand the known criminals, even murderers, in custody and allowing them to intimidate witnesses; he had also given court credentials to some of the killers on the Special Commission's list. (Asalm ,1993, p .40-41)

Yousaf (1980) points out that the breakdown of social values in Pakistan is associated with an authoritarian and feudalistic social system. Mujeeb Ali, a feudal, is the most hypocritical character in *Season of the Rainbirds*. He exercises his authority and influence over the bureaucracy, judiciary and police. He is the one who killed Kalsum's son. With the help of corrupt police and judiciary, he does proper planning to harm his rival in the election. 'I have no doubt that there were people planted in that crowd who made sure that the blows did not stop until the boy was dead' (Aslam, 1993, p. 132). He planned very smartly and achieved his political goal, and after that he became a hero by paying monthly wages to the boy's mother.

The feudal prefer to coordinate with the sitting government and preserve their monopolized position and always maintain their authority in the respective areas. *Season of the Rainbirds* reveals that the feudal not only exercise authority over the politics and economy of the country, but the media of the country is also under their control. As Yousaf Rao tells Mr. Kasmi that on becoming a minister, Mujeeb Ali's brother tried to buy Saif Aziz by offering him a bribe, which Saif had rejected outright, and the result of this rejection was the shutting down of the whole newspaper (Aslam, 1993).

Season of the Rainbirds exhibits that the martial law that was imposed in Zia's regime sought the aid of the feudal elite. In this way, Mujeeb Ali preserved his dominant position in the town. His brother became a minister, and they even had a deputy commissioner of their choice (Aslam, 1993, p.105). The policies of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto regarding land distributions could not harm the feudal rule of Mujeeb Ali. General Zia gave back the lands that were taken from the feudal elite. That is why the feudal elite provided full support to the military regime. In Pakistan most of the politicians are feudal-oriented, and consequently democratic setup could not get stability in Pakistan. The democratic and constitutional rights are absent in feudal setup, and there is a concentration of wealth and power into a few hands. With this power and wealth, the feudal lords influence the bureaucracy and political affairs of the state. So, the economic resources are confined to the privileged feudal elite.

Ziring (1977) argues that in Pakistan the institution of politics has never been explored by consensus. Consequently, the feudal lords with narrow vision have always monopolized the economic decision making. Feudal lords do not permit their subjects to get education, acquire money, improve their standard of living, and improve their social conditions. Even they are not

allowed to perform religious duties without their approval. They are bound to get permission for the marriages of their sons and daughters from the feudal lords. Thus, they do not have upward social mobility. The feudal archetype in Pakistan consists of landlords with large joint families possessing hundreds or even thousands of acres of land. They seldom make any direct contribution to agricultural production. Instead, all work is done by peasants or tenants who live at subsistence level. The poor peasants are forced to live a miserable life, whereas the feudal lord enjoys all the comfort of life. Pakistani democratic process has suffered much from decadent feudalism.

Democracy can never be rooted deeply unless public control in the real sense is established. A new economic order, i.e., land reforms should come into existence to cope with this issue. The same took place in our neighboring country, India, in the 1950s where feudalism has long since been banished. Since then, the democratic system has been stable in India. Efforts to redistribute farmland among the peasants were introduced twice in Pakistan in the 1950s and 1970s, but those reforms were not fully implemented. Sayeed (1967) explains this issue as follows:

Several regimes, both central and West Pakistani, had promised land reforms, but landlords in Sindh and in Punjab were so influential that this move was never pursued seriously. It remained just a matter of verbal declarations. (p. 95). Politicians and landlords go hand in hand to strengthen their positions politically and economically. They have always supported martial law forces whenever a political crisis arose.

5. Discussion

The data analysis and interpretation of *Season of the Rainbirds* have led to the following findings:

In Pakistan, the tradition of democracy has been weak, and the country is insufficiently prepared for the democratic system of government. Therefore, it is easy to understand why the martial law forces intervened and derailed democracy in 1977 a third time. *Season of the Rainbirds* has revealed that democracy did not flourish in Pakistan due to a general lack of political awareness, social and economic inequalities, absence of educated middle class, and corrupt feudal lords and politicians who exploited the masses politically and economically. The analysis of the novel carried out from the perspective of New Historicism reveals the fact that the main political parties in Pakistan are feudal-oriented, and these feudal lords occupy the key executive posts in the country again and again. The situation is still the same. These politicians still use the same old tactics to keep the masses under control. The feudal elite does not let the masses be economically independent and politically aware.

The study also reveals that the economic and political exploitation is still on the rise in the country. Furthermore, these politicians, for their self-interests, have used the party system to divide people into majorities and minorities. All this has consequently fanned the sectarian issue in Pakistan. As has been analyzed in *Season of the Rainbirds* that there is an atmosphere of hatred and prejudice against the Ahmadi sect, the feudal lord, Mujeeb Ali, and ruling authorities of the martial law regime tend to exploit this issue whenever they need. Since independence to date, the democratic process has not worked properly in Pakistan because the political leaders never followed the true spirit of democracy, that is, liberty, equality and social justice for all. They did not establish viable political parties that could work out of diverse regional and linguistic groups which is very vital for national unity and solidarity. These flawed policies made a way for military interventions also. Whenever military intervened in political affairs, the main reason was that the democratic governments did not come up to the expectations of the masses. The majority of Pakistani people are still struggling to raise their living standards. A majority is still surviving under poverty line. The corrupt feudal political leaders still hold power and authority and own thousands of acres of land. Their family members hold key posts in administrative offices. They strengthen their families and carry on their feudal agenda, that is, to keep the masses under control so that the masses should never be able to have upward social mobility, as this would pose threat to the feudal authority, power and wealth.

6. Conclusion

Based on the new historicist approach, the analysis of Aslam's *Season of the Rainbirds* reveals that parliamentary democracy cannot work properly in Pakistan where social and economic justice does not prevail; where masses are exploited by the feudal ruling elite; where literacy rate is low; where a majority of people are not mature enough to use their votes to elect the right candidates; where most of the people are politically unaware to support or criticize certain national policies and plans. It is the corruption of politicians, their ever-shifting loyalties to factions or groups (which is their disloyalty with the masses), feudal dynasty, and corrupt bureaucracy that has always paved the way for the military to intervene in the political matters of the country. These factors led to the disruption of democratic process. The leaders of the political parties exploited the ignorance and credulity of the people. They mistrusted the trust placed in them, and this is the reason that the masses always welcomed the military regime. The military, supported by cohesive latest machinery, i.e., a strong and well-equipped army, could seldom resist the temptation to overthrow democratic rule, especially whenever politicians' corruption and disloyalties with the masses were exposed. It is a time to get rid of dynastic politics and feudalism by introducing land reforms. Social and economic justice should prevail in society which is a guarantee of the smooth working of democracy.

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