

## Preserving the Poetic Soul: A Comparative Study of Native and Non-Native Translations of Faiz Ahmed Faiz

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### ABSTRACT

*This comparative study analyzes the translated works of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry to manifest how natives and non-natives as well as poets and non-poets differ in their approach towards translation of Faiz's poetry. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry is highly regarded and has been translated into many languages due to its themes. Both native and non-native translators have tried their hand at translating the verses of Faiz, and both have advantages and disadvantages concerning the use of language and social and cultural milieu. Translating works from one language to another is always challenging, and it becomes doubly difficult when it comes to poetry. For this purpose, out of a large variety of works, seven translations have been chosen to analyze the differences between various translated works. The translators include Naomi Lazard and Victor Kiernan from the natives, whereas the non-natives include Daud Kamal, Shoaib Hashmi and Shahid Ali Agha. Close textual qualitative analysis has been done. Analysis of Faiz's translations shows that, despite great effort, translators only partially capture the original spirit. Poet-translators outperform non-poets. Additionally, non-native translators like Kamal, Hashmi, and Ali—sharing Faiz's socio-cultural background—better grasp cultural nuances, giving them an advantage over native translators. Conversely, natives excel in language proficiency and lexical choices but sometimes struggle with cultural gaps in their renditions.*

**Keywords:** Faiz Ahmed Faiz, themes, native translators, poetry, translation.

### INTRODUCTION

Translating verse is like capturing the essence of a fleeting moment in another language. When one of the subcontinent's most renowned poets, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, is the subject, the task becomes even more difficult. Because Faiz's poetry transcends linguistic and cultural barriers and is recognized for its profound themes and lyrical beauty, translators must strike a balance between maintaining poetic integrity and cultural authenticity.

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The sublimity of his poetry is evident from the fact that it has been translated into many languages worldwide. In particular, translating his works into English introduced him to many readers. The earliest English translations of his poetry came from the persons who were very close to him, and among them, Victor Kiernan, Naomi Lazard, and Daud Kamal were prominent figures. Among the later translators, Khalid Hassan, Mehboob-ul-Haq, Mahmood Jamal, his son-in-law Shoaib Hashmi, and Agha Shahid Ali are notable names.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry is challenging to translate due to its cultural depth and poetic nuance. Existing translations vary in quality, influenced by the translator's background. This study addresses the lack of comparative analysis on how native vs. non-native and poet vs. non-poet translators affect the accuracy and poetic essence of Faiz's work.

The research paper deals with the following questions:

1. To what extent do the English translations of Faiz's poetry differ from or close to the original?
2. To what extent did the socio-cultural background help the non-native English translators in their translations of Faiz's verses?
3. What linguistic advantage do the native English translators of Faiz's poetry have over the non-natives?
4. To what extent the translations of Faiz's works by poets differ from the ones who are non-poets?

There is a considerable difference between Urdu and English languages concerning the cultural milieu, patterns of rhythm, choice of words, use of figures of speech, etc. Therefore, it is quite challenging for the translators to do their work, and it becomes more so when poetry is translated from one language to another. It is complex and more demanding because the translators must remember that they may maintain the rhythm and poetic sense in the translation process. Some translators try to maintain the original patterns of rhyme and rhythm, while some experiment with both to make ideas fit into their scheme of things.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Translation is a complex process as it involves various social, cultural and linguistic aspects. According to Munday (2002), translation involves converting a written text from its original language into a written form in another language. The translation of poetry, especially from Urdu to English, has been a topic of academic fascination because of the complex obstacles created by linguistic and cultural disparities. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetic work, characterized by its intricate use of metaphor, rhythm, and cultural references,

poses a distinct set of difficulties for translators. This review delves into the available literature on the translation of Faiz's poetry, highlighting areas where further research is needed and placing this study within the broader realm of translation studies.

It is commonly acknowledged in translation studies that translating poetry is one of the trickiest things to do. Poetry depends on both form and meaning, which makes translation an inherent challenge, as noted by Kenesei (2010). In a follow-up to his 2008 study on the invisible translator, Venuti argued that a "domestication" of the text results from the loss of cultural context and subtleties in translation. Faiz amplifies these difficulties with his poetry, which is full of cultural allusions and socio-political commentary. Such poetry demands a careful balancing act between preserving the poetic structure of the original and capturing its cultural essence in translation, according to Weissbort and Eysteinnsson (2006). Many translators have varying degrees of success because it can be challenging to achieve this dual fidelity.

English and Urdu are poles apart in terms of sociocultural aspects, and the nature of both languages differs considerably in terms of lexical and semantic aspects and prosody, so it becomes tricky for translators to carry on their tasks. It turns out to be doubly difficult when the poetry is to be translated from one language to another. Faiz was himself of the view that the Urdu language is quite distinct from the English language as both languages vary concerning their patterns of rhythm, cultural background, choice of words, allusions, and symbols (Hassan, 2006).

Compared with prose, the translation of poetry demands a lot more expertise, as in the case of verses, the target language's poetic sense and rhythmic patterns must be kept alive. Faiz's poetry has been translated into various languages. The person who first translated Faiz's poetry into English was a historian named Victor Kiernan. After his studies at Cambridge University, he visited India in 1939. First, he translated Iqbal's poetry into English, and later, being a friend of Faiz, he translated his poetry too. Most commentators are unanimous in their opinion of him as one of the most authoritative translators to date. His work introduced Faiz earlier than anyone else to a wide range of audiences at the international level. (Hashmi, 2022, p.205)

Numerous academics have investigated the translation of Faiz's poetry, each contributing their unique perspective to the procedure. Due to linguistic and cultural barriers, the English translations of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry deviate from the original Urdu texts, losing aesthetic and connotative significance (Alowedi & Al-Ahdal, 2023). It is difficult to convey the semantic ambiguities and complexity of poetic expressions in these translations because they cannot capture the literary touch and poetic nuances found in the original works (Pei, 2023). A comparison of the Urdu and English translations of Faiz's poem "Subh-e-Azadi" reveals the challenges in translating complex themes, rhyme, and poetic devices, which ultimately affects the source text's structural and thematic elements [Rafique, 2021]. These problems are further highlighted by machine translation, which is seen in the translation of Arabic poetry and is unable to convey the figurative language, cultural context, and subtleties that are crucial to translating poetry (Mohsin et al. (2020). In summary, despite attempts to provide precise translations, the English

translations of Faiz's poetry frequently need to capture the beauty and whole meaning of the original pieces.

Although previous research has established a solid base, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. One key area lacking comparative analysis is the difference between translations by native English speakers and those by non-native English speakers. Furthermore, the influence of translators' sociocultural backgrounds on their translations has not been thoroughly investigated. Current studies tend to concentrate on individual translators rather than providing a comprehensive comparison, thus hindering a complete understanding of the overarching trends and distinctions in translation strategies.

This research attempts to fill these gaps by comparing the ways that native and non-native English speakers translated Faiz's poetry. This study looks at linguistic and cultural factors in an effort to offer a more comprehensive picture of how various translators deal with the challenges involved in translating Faiz's writing. The precise questions this study will address are how well translations convey the poetic and cultural spirit of the source, how translators' sociocultural backgrounds shape their choices, and the linguistic advantages and difficulties faced by both native and non-native translators.

Translation studies of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry remain abundant, offering valuable insights into more general problems in translation theory and practice. This literature review has identified essential gaps that this study seeks to fill while highlighting earlier works' main issues and contributions. Through an analysis of the translations of Faiz's poetry by native and non-native English speakers, this study aims to improve our comprehension of how language, culture, and poetic expression interact when being translated.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative comparative textual analysis of the English translations of Faiz's poetry by native and non-native speakers of the English language. It involved close reading and literary analysis of the translated works. The translations of the works selected for study were *'Zindan ki aik sham'*, *'Ash'ar'*, *mujh se pehli si muhabbat meray mehboob na maang'*, *mata e loh o qalm'*, *'bahaar aayii'*, *'chand roz aur meri jaan'*, and *'pass rahou'*. The seven works in the purposive sample deal with the love theme, which is linked with human suffering, though Faiz's tone remains calm and sweet, and he never loses hope. The translations done by natives, i.e., Naomi Lazard and Victor Kiernan, and the non-natives, namely Duad Kamal, Shoaib Hashmi, and Shahid Ali Agha, have been chosen for comparison. For each of the poems, two English translations, one by a native and one by a non-native, are taken to be compared. The translators have been selected, and the poems have been taken on an availability basis. An assessment of the comparison of poems was made while considering the analysis of lexical items and how noun, verb, and adjective phrases have been translated. On the syntactical level, an analysis was made by keeping the verse and phrase length in view to see whether the length is intact or altered. It has also been observed that the translators followed the original stanza structure or changed it according to their plan of arrangement of ideas. A lyrical analysis was conducted

to determine whether the original's musical quality has been maintained. The researcher rendered the names of the poems and Urdu verses into Romanized English.

### ANALYSIS

The first poem chosen for comparison is '*zindan ki aik shaam*'. This poem is a forceful expression of the poet about exile and captivity. The poet expresses the conditions of agony in a rich language and exuberant style. Amid all the adverse conditions, the poet never loses his optimism and boldly challenges the despotic forces. In his poem translation, Ali deviates from the original structure, using three lines to convey the idea in the first two lines. This syntactic variation seems to lose the impact the two lines create; the true vigour is lost in the new arrangement.

In the translation of the following two lines, Ali's use of the words 'so very close' emphasizes the proximity of the breeze, whereas it is not what Faiz wants to convey; it is instead the way the breeze passes by, leaving a fresh impact which is stressed upon. In the following line, the words 'just happened to' lessen the poetic impact; the line would have been more poetic had it been as if someone spoke of love. In the translation of the third line by Kiernan, if the words 'close as' occurring in the beginning are taken away, it will become more effective, being terse and poetic. In the following two lines, Ali translates the words '*sehn e zindaan*' as courtyard while Kiernan uses the words 'prison courtyard', which are more effective. Ali uses the word 'refugees' for '*be watan*' whereas Kiernan makes use of the word 'exiles'. Kiernan's word seems more appropriate because the word refugee means being out of the country by force or by one's own will, which is not the case with exile.

Ali uses the words 'embroidering maps', which is a strange combination, and from a semantic point of view, it is an inappropriate verb-noun collocation. Ali can be given the advantage of using a poetic license, but even then, the words do not sound so poetic. Kiernan uses the word 'broidering', which is an archaic word but has a good impact. Ali combines lines eight, nine and ten in his translation. At the same time, this is not the case with Kiernan, and the original verses also give the clear impression that lines eight and nine correspond to each other and provide a combined effect, whereas lines eleven and twelve go with the next stanza. Ali applies the word 'moon' for '*chandni*', but Kiernan translates it as moonlight, and it is apparent from Faiz's verses that the feminine moonlight is contrasted with the roof's high crest, giving an impact of solace and softness. In Kiernan's translation of lines ten and eleven, the second line would have been more poetic if, instead of 'one white', just the article 'a' would have been used. In the next lines, the Urdu words '*nilgunsae*' are translated by Ali as 'dark green shadows.'

In contrast, Kiernan translates the words as 'deep blue shadows', and it is in this sense that the true message of sadness is conveyed as deep blue has such connotations, and it is only in this sense that it corresponds to what comes next, i.e. the approach of the pain of separation into the heart. In the last stanza or the last seven lines, although semantically close to Faiz's, Kiernan's translation lacks the poetic touch and looks quite flat. It is also apparent that although well versed in Urdu, Kiernan still fails to negotiate with the

expression '*zahr gholne-wale*' and translates it literally while the expression means 'the ones who make life miserable'. Ali's translation of the last seven lines is more poetic even though he brings syntactic variations. The last line in his translation seems excessive, and the impact would have been much better if it had ended in the second last line.

In his translation of *Ash'ar* of Faiz, Ali has made syntactic changes, translating the four lines of the original into seven. The impact and force of the original expression are entirely lost. As regards the choice of words, there is a dearth of grandeur, which results in a lack of loftiness.

Using the refrain 'I was like' totally changes the implicit way of conveying ideas, and the brevity of expression also gets compromised. In the fifth line, the gentle air movement sounds good, but the words 'with great care' mark the effect and seem needless. In the very next line, Ali, it appears, unnecessarily adds the word dying with the patient, which shifts the focus to the grave condition of the patient and the real focus, which is on the impact, gets lost. On the other hand, Kiernan has retained the four lines in his translation and his rhyme scheme, too; he has retained the one in the original, i.e. abcb.

'*Mujh se pehli si muhabbat mere mehboob na maang*' is one of Faiz's most famous and quoted poems. It describes the shifting attitudes in the poet's life, how, in earlier life, being beloved was everything important for the poet, and how, with the dawn of maturity in life, he was much moved by the sufferings of humanity. It seemed that the agony of the suffering humanity made him even forget his love for his beloved, and in his poetry, the focus shifted to a more significant cause. In Kiernan's translation of the poem, the expression in the second line that is 'because you lived' is the very literal translation of '*tere hone sey*', and it snatches the lyrical effect of the line. The translation of the third line also fails to capture the force of the original verse, as words are less poetic and, therefore, fail to attain lyrical impact, particularly the expression 'you alone were pain' (p.65). In the fourth line, 'earth's springtime' seems excessive; only 'spring' would have sufficed and more terse. The translation of line '*jaa baja biktey huey koocha o bazaar main jism*' is very literal. In the last line, the poet replaces the word 'old' with 'that', which he used to translate the same expression in the first line, and it is apparent that 'old love' does not sound so poetic as the way 'that love' does.

Ali does not follow the same pattern in his translation of the same poem and sometimes breaks lines into two. The translation of the first line is far from the terseness of the original. The translation of the line '*tera gham hai tou gham e dahr ka jhagra kia hai*' is quite exquisite and poetic. Still, the very next line, i.e. 'How could one have any sorrow but the one you gave?' ruins the effect of the earlier line, and one gets the impression that the lack of satisfaction with the first line prompted the addition of the second. The translation of the line '*teri aankhon ke siwa dunya main rakhha kia hey*', i.e. 'The sky, wherever I looked, was nothing but your eyes.' is not so impressive and would have been better if 'the sky' were not there in the beginning and after looked, the words 'I beheld' were added. 'Bitter threads began to unravel before me' has poetic grandeur.

The quatrain of Faiz, starting with '*mata e loh o qalam*' and ending with '*zaban main ne*, ' is one of the most beautiful expressions of the deprivation of freedom of expression. It is remarkable for its pithy expression. While portraying the curb on the right of expression, the poet conveys that such ill conditions can never successfully propagate and express truth. It is without any title, but the translators, i.e. Victor Kiernan and Daud Kamal, titled the quatrain 'IF INK AND PEN' and 'Captivity', respectively. Kiernan has taken the idea from the very opening line of the quatrain, and his title, which has an incomplete conditional clause, fails to give a poetic impression. In contrast, Kamal has considered the idea, and it is quite evident that the title given by Kamal is more appropriate and poetic. Kiernan has remained faithful to the original structure, i.e. four lines, though his rhyme scheme is slightly different from the original.

On the other hand, Kamal broke the stanza structure and made four short stanzas in his translation. Kiernan's start of the translation with conditional 'if' fails to have the force of the original expression; Kamal's beginning with 'What does' seems more elegant and poetic. Kiernan's choice of words for the translation of the last line is not so exquisite, for words like 'mouth' and 'round link' do not sound poetic; Kamal's use of 'tongue' also mars the effectiveness.

Faiz's poem '*Bahaar aayii*' is one of the most captivating poems as it has a richness of beautiful images, powerful diction, and exquisite rhythm. Faiz's quality of bringing two opposite ideas, one related to the delicacy of love and the other linked with human miseries, is at its best in this piece. Translation of such a poem also challenges the skill of the translators. Translations of Shoaib (1991) and Jabbar (1991) are taken for the sake of comparison. On the linguistic level, how the two translators handled the exuberant Urdu phrases used by Faiz is analysed. The adjectival phrases such as '*malaal e ahwaal e dostaan*' and '*khumaar e aaghosh e mah vashaan*' and the noun phrases such as '*ushhaq kaa laho*' and '*ghubaar e Khaatir key baab*' are compared with their translations. It is evident that Lazard did make use of vivacious diction in her translations of the given lexemes, which are 'melancholy with the suffering of friends', 'intoxicated with embraces of moon-bodied beauties', 'the blood of your lovers', 'the chapters of the heart's oppression' respectively. The reason for the choice of such diction is Naomi's poetic sensibility and the fact that she remained in close association with the poet. Hashmi, on the other hand, translates the given lexemes as 'sufferings of old friends', 'the forgotten pleasures of the nearness of love', 'blood of your friends', 'the buried chapters of the book of Life', and it is apparent that poetic sense is missing from the diction he did make use of.

It is important to note that whereas Hashmi's translation fails to impress concerning the choice of words, i.e., at the semantic level, he impresses the readers with his syntactic arrangement. Lazard's translation is quite successful in keeping the richness of the original poem's sensory texture intact. Still, in her elongated verse structure, the terseness of expression and the lifting rhythm get somewhat lost.

The poem '*chand roz aur meri jaan*' is another beautiful poem full of pathos that echoes the hope for a better future. In this poem, Faiz exquisitely presents ideas related to injustice, human misery, pain, love, and despotism, yet it retains hope and longing for the

period of oppression to end. For comparison, the translations of the poem by Kamal and Kiernan are taken. To do the linguistic analysis, noun, verbal and adjectival phrases, which are '*guftaar peh taazeeren hain*', '*muflisii kii kabaa*', '*arsa e dahr ki jjhulsi huii veeraani*' have been selected as they present some central ideas of the poem. In Kiernan's translation, these phrases are translated as 'words each watched and set down', a beggar's gown', and 'close bounds of an age that desert sands choke'. In contrast, Kamal has translated the exact phrases as 'strangled speech', the tattered coat of a beggar', and 'present is a burnt-out wilderness'. The words chosen by Kamal are more terse, powerful, and poetic. Kamal's diction for his translation is more poetic because of his sensibility. He has also broken the verses, which are longer ones, into two and condensed some expressions to provide the theme with semantic richness. Kiernan, on the other hand, maintains the original meter of the verse, and it sometimes gives an impact of being more literal, hence somehow losing the grip on the theme. Out of both translations, the first four lines are translated for comparison. Kamal's translation of the first four lines:

Only a few days, dear one, a few days more.  
 Here in oppression's shadows condemned to breathe,  
 Still for a while we must suffer, and weep, and endure.  
 What our forefathers, not our own faults, bequeath-  
 (Kiernan, 1971, p. 79)

The rhyme pattern of Kiernan, though not exactly like the original, is yet very close to it, but there is an air of literalism about this translation. Kamal, on the other hand, can handle the smoothness of flow through his free verse:

A few days more- my love- only a few days,  
 We are constrained to breathe this miasmic air.  
 In the trackless jungle of oppression  
 Let us try to endure it a little longer-  
 This wolf-torment, this cobra-grief.  
 We know that suffering is our  
 ancestral heritage. (Kamal, 2008).

In the poem '*pass rahou*' Faiz touches upon the love theme coupled with agonies and sufferings. The poem has rich metaphors, Persianated Urdu phrases, lucid images, and diction. For the sake of comparison, two translations of the poem have been chosen; one is the translation by Naomi Lazard, and the other is that of Agha Shahid Ali. To do the linguistic analysis, noun, adjectival and verbal phrases, i.e. '*qaatil*', '*aasman o kaa lahoon pii ker*', '*mehram e mushk liye nashter e almash*' and '*maatmi sunsaan siah raat*' have been chosen. In Naomi's translation, these are translated as 'tormentor', 'drunk from the gash of sunset', 'with the balm of musk in its hands', 'it's diamond lancets' and 'night comes, dragging its long face, dressed in mourning' respectively. By narrating the phrases, she has made them a bit longer, but her choice of words is poetic. Ali, on the other hand, used the words 'you who demolish me' for '*qaatil*', which lacks poetic sense; his other words, such



as a sword sheathed in the diamond of stars', 'drunk on the blood of skies', 'dark hour when night mourns' are quite forceful and pithy. In his translation:

You who demolish me, you whom I love,  
Remain near me when evening,  
(Ali, 1989, p.10)

In these lines, the words 'demolish' and 'remain' mar the charm of diction suitable for poetry and spoils the rhythm. In contrast, Naomi's translation in the opening lines is very poetic in its construction, with the only exception of the word 'now', which seems superfluous:

Be near me now,  
My tormentor, my love, be near me--  
(Lazard, 1988. p.26)

Both translations show that Lazard has rendered the poem better, as her choice of words is more poetic, though her arrangement of words has not been so successful in certain places. Ali's images, despite being forceful, have not been able to attain overall grandeur because of the broken rhythm, and it is the rhythm that provides real grace to the original verses.

## CONCLUSION

The poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz is exceptionally rich in various ways; it has loftiness of thought and ideas, grandeur of style, appropriateness of diction and an overall sense of sublimity. Translating work of such a high standard poses significant challenges for the translator. Translating Faiz's poetry into English is even more challenging because both languages are distinct in multiple respects. Analysis of the translated works of Faiz makes it apparent that despite their utmost effort to attain the original essence of Faiz's works, the translators could only capture the spirit in fragments and not in totality and among the translators the ones who were the poets proved better than the non-poets. Another difference that is quite apparent is the one between native and non-native translators, the non-native translators i.e. Kamal, Hashmi and Ali being from the same socio-cultural background as that of Faiz were in a better position to understand the various complexities emerging from social and cultural milieu, hence giving them advantage over the natives. The natives on the other hand carried the advantage of language which was used as a medium of translation of the poetic works of Faiz. Moreover, they have the advantage of lexical choices, but cultural gaps are sometimes observed in their rendition.

One thing is apparent in the case of translations by Kamal, Ali, and Lazard: being the poets themselves, their translations are of a literary quality. Among these three, Lazard and Kamal have been much better in their translations than Ali, as they have remained quite faithful and successfully maintained the poetic sense. Kiernan can be credited for being a historian; he made a great effort and even succeeded to a great extent in translating Faiz,

though there is a touch of being literal at times. Maintaining the stanza structure like the original and mainly following the rhyme patterns is worthy of praise. The translations do not carry any charm for a person with knowledge of the Urdu language and who has had exposure to the original works. Still, it is also essential to consider that the translations of Faiz into English have done an excellent service of introducing his verses to a wide range of audiences unfamiliar with Urdu language.

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