

Pakistan in Quest of Stable Democracy: A Socio-Political Interpretation of *Season of The Rainbirds*, in the light of Theory of New Historicism, a Novel by Nadeem Aslam

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Abstract

The study aimed to analyze the factors that derailed democracy and caused political and social unrest in Pakistan during military regime of General Zia, in Aslam's Season of The Rain birds (1993), in the perspective of theory of New Historicism. The analysis reveals that since independence the institutions of democracy have not been strengthened in a comparable manner due to certain factors, i.e. corruption of bureaucracy and politicians, politicization of religious ideology and intervention of military forces.. Until The dynastic politics, the murky nexus between religion, politics, and corruption exists, that leads society to extremism and fanaticism, the toll on democracy continues to grow. The findings lead to the conclusion that as long as ruling authorities are not held accountable to the masses and yield to the laws, as long as the system of checks and balances not developed, as long as the poor people are exploited in the hands of powerful politicians, religious authorities and bureaucracy, the institutions of democracy cannot be stabilized in Pakistan.

Keywords: Military intervention, Democracy, Politicization of religious ideology, Murky nexus, New Historicism

Introduction

Pakistan, a product of 20th century, was born in great hope. So far as her political history is concerned, this hope has been frayed by various misfortunes and unhappy chain of political events. After getting independence Pakistan had adopted a parliamentary form of government. Since last 69 years, the leaders of the day used to evoke the memory of Quaid-i-Azam and they have been falsely pontificating on how they honor Quaid's legacy. Jinnah believed in democratic values and Unity, Faith and Discipline were his watchwords. But not one of these watchwords has been honored in true spirit. The initial political and social time period of Pakistan was encircled with multitude of crisis. Since independence the nature of democratic set up has been very fragile and weak in Pakistan. Pakistan is still in quest of stable democratic system. This process of democratization has been passive and vulnerable. Yousaf (1979) remarks that the tradition of democracy had been vulnerable in Pakistan due to certain factors and the country was insufficiently prepared for democratic organization. Likewise, Asrar (2002) observes that corrupt politicians and bureaucracy played a major role for political instability as they could never address the problems of the masses sincerely.

Aslam's *Season of The Rainbirds* (1993) has depicted a true picture of 1980's Pakistani political and social setup. On the surface, it seems to depict everyday life in a remote town of

Pakistan during General Zia's regime. The incidents narrated cover one week. The novel begins with the incident of murder of corrupt judge named, Anwar. Then there is depiction of train crash that took place 19 years ago in which a bag of letters was lost. Now this sack of letters has been found and letters are to be delivered to concerned persons of the town. The influential people i.e. the political figures of the town don't want these letters to be delivered as it will reveal hidden secrets that can damage their political career. The novel seems to be a detective apparently, but it deals with many serious issues of Pakistani politics. Nadeem Aslam has written it with some specific purpose. It is a political and social satire on 1980's decade of Pakistan. Aslam has drawn life-like characters i.e. a cleric, Maulana Hafeez, the bureaucrat, a deputy commissioner, Azhar who is in quest of murderer. Both remain unsuccessful in their missions, as DC couldn't solve the mystery of murder and Maulana Hafeez could never make people to develop moderate outlook. (as judicial corruption, injustice and religious bigotry is the order of the day). Another main character is of landlord Mujeeb Ali, a politician, bully and murderer who support the martial law forces of General Zia's regime. General Zia, a dictator, sought his own vested interest and adopted delaying tactics to delay elections. *Season of The Rainbirds* also takes a critical view of unjust death sentence of the 9th prime minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that took place on July 5, 1979 and succeeded by military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq.

In *Season of The Rainbirds* the Zia's regime has been described as a reign of terror, brutality and aggression. The non-civilian forces politicized religion to prolong and strengthen its rule. It was the time when general Zia-ul-Haq had overthrown the government of democratically elected prime minister and imposed martial law. His policies have been criticized by pro-democratic socialists, activists and politicians. As it curtailed their freedom of expression and entrapped them in a deep pit of social, political and economic fear and ignorance.

. Aslam has portrayed a true picture of 1980's contemporary society and discussed the related issues of that time in a measured tone. "Historical circumstances, human folly, personal ambition, economic motives political aspirations and religious beliefs, have all played their part in shaping the political course of the country". (Yousaf, 1979, p.2)

Literature Review

The new historicists place historical opinions and considerations to the center stage of literary analysis. This school of thought assumes that there is no objectivity and human subjectivity is formed by certain cultural principles which limit and define us in different ways. As Newton (1994) remarks that our reading of text and analysis of present day world and of the past are defined by history, by the politics and certain social codes that are rooted in them. New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text.

New historicism developed from historicism. Historicism holds that all knowledge and cognition are historically conditioned. It is also widely used in diverse disciplines to designate an approach from a historical perspective. Historicism stressed the unique diversity of historical contexts and stressed the importance of developing specific methods and theories appropriate to each unique historical context. The purpose of New historicists is to understand the relationship between a text and the political, social, and economic circumstances in which it originated.

Newton (1994) comments, 'New Historicism is to be read as a reaction to the formalism of structuralism, post structuralism and as a response to the perception that American educational institutions and culture are rapidly forgetting history. (p.153).

New historicism has four main intentions,(1) Literature is historical, which means that a literary work is not primarily the record of one mind's attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. (2) Literature, then, is not a distinct category of human activity. It must be assimilated to history, which means a particular vision of history. (3) Like works of literature, man himself is a social construct, the sloppy composition of social and political forces. (4) As a consequence, the historian/ critic is trapped in his own "historicity." New Historicists tend to concentrate on those at the top of the social hierarchy (i.e. the religion, the monarchy, the upper-classes).Thomas (1991) remarks that cultural materialism and the new historicism are correlated.

The history exhibits that the historical imagination that stimulated historicism is unthinkable without a change in the idea of reality that indicates the origin of modern era. The pragmatists take the analysis of past events as a source to assist those in the present era, to adapt to their existing environment. It helps them to form a new future in the guiding light of the past. Dewy (1938) quotes that the understanding of previous happenings serves as a tool for shaping and moving the present into a specific new type of future.

Dewy (1938) further states that the changes that go on in the present, provide a new turn to social setup and problems. Such changes also reveal the importance of what took place in the past, into new picture in new perspective. Aram (1989) says that the new historicist can easily justify to introduce new ways of studying history and new awareness of how culture and history relate each other. Gallagher (1989) remarks that New Historicism implies analyzing nonliterary and literary texts as elements of historical discourses, both outside and inside of texts.

Analyzing the novel *Season of The Rainbirds* in the light of New Historicism it is evident that Nadeem Aslam has revealed the exploitation of common man in the hand of those who are at the top social hierarchy i.e. the martial law forces, the bureaucracy and so called theocracy. As Rahman (1994) comments in his article that In *Season of The Rainbirds* the ruling elite-the bureaucracy, the politicians and military General-inhabit a world with modern implements of destruction in their control, the rural people who are in majority in Pakistan, live in world where nothing seems to change until the self-interest of these elites are not involved.

Rehman (1994) further opines that Nadeem Asalm in *Season of The Rainbirds* highlights certain contemporary issues of the day, the clueless and traceless murder of judge(corruption of judiciary),exploitation of religion and common men in the hands of elites ,the crackdown of martial law forces during General Zia ul Haq 's regime on political opponents.

Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature as it analyzes and synthesizes the primary and secondary data to develop insight. The interpretation of *Season of The Rainbirds* has been carried out in the light of the theory of New Historicism with the help of the text of the novel as main evidence. The researcher has highlighted the author's use of different narratives, character

portrayals and interrelated textual quotations. The critics and analysts' views have been analyzed side by side to support the argument. The researcher has raised the claim that the military interventions, seeds of religious bigotry sown in 1980's Pakistan and corruption that prevails in the institution of politics and bureaucracy have made democracy vulnerable in Pakistan. The researcher has supported her claim with evidences from text and with analysts' views. In order to make study focused and systematic, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How did the exploitation of religious ideology by the military General, lead Pakistan to religious extremism and created social and political chaos in 1980's decade?

RQ2: How did the corrupt bureaucracy and dynastic politics exploit the masses economically, politically and play a pivotal role in leading Pakistan towards unstable socio-political system during military regime?

Data Analysis

The Politicization of Religious Ideology and Role of Bureaucracy

Under Military Regime of 1980's

In *Season of The Rainbirds*, (1993) the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq has been criticized for number of reasons. After the hanging of elected prime minister, the persecution of political worker, politicization of religious ideology and supporting a certain sect of religion ,ban on freedom of expression were the norms of Zia's regime.Rehman (1994) comments that *Season of The Rainbirds* depicts violence and censorship during martial law regime of Zia which is related to the forces of outside world; lust of bureaucrat and narrow mindedness of so called religious figures that exploited the poor Elizabeth Messiah and martial law forces of General Zia exploited religious ideology and made the life of political workers of opposition party miserable and troublesome.

Mr.Kasmi, who is Ahmadi by faith and Yusuf Rao, an anti-Zia political worker, discuss the same matters in the novel in the following words: "I wish we could find out who actually runs this country? The army? The politicians? The industrialists? The landowners? ----- Yusuf Rao smiled and referred to the voices from the mosque. 'Or is it God?'" (Aslam, 1993.p.213)

General Zia politicized the process of Islamization with two certain objectives. Firstly, to speed up the movement of agitation which was introduced by the Ulemas against Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and secondly, to delay the election. Zia used it as a tool to win the sympathies of religious groups and public to extend his regime.It has been a strategy of Zia and his successors to bury the real social and economic problems of the country under the weight of religion. Religion has been used as an anchor by political figures to sustain and perpetuate their rules and to gain vested interest. The seeds of religious bigotry sown in military regime of General Zia had far reaching negative impact on society. Consequently, Pakistan still reaping the harvest of hate in form of extremism and terrorism. Since then the terrorists and militants have been exploiting Islam and

killing innocent people. Haque (2013) commented in his article that the wave of Islamization justified the killing of Hindus in their temples, Christians in their Churches and Sunnis, Shias and Ahmadis in their mosques. People have become bigot and fanatics .

General Zia's policy of Islamization gave rise to social, political and economic conflicts. Sectarian issue was on the rise. As *Season of The Rainbirds* highlights this issue through Maulana Hafeez and Maulana Dawood who belong to two different sects that indicates division and rift in society. Their mosques are different, prayer timing different and their stance are different on social and moral issues. "The call for prayers from the other masjid –the denomination called its followers 20 minutes before Maulana Hafeez---altered him to the time."(Aslam, 1993.p.55)

Maulana Hafeez is a spokesman of religious segment of society who condemns cinemas and TV, as these inventions mislead humans from right path. 'It is forbidden—You only need a pinch of poison'(p.53).Though Mansoor tries to convince Maulana that TV transmission reflects Zia 's islamization as transmission begins and end each day with a recitation of Holy Quran and according to the new measures of Zia's regime the transmission has to break off at prayer time. But nothing could change Maulana's opinion.

The irony of the situation is it that the public seems to be unconcerned with the real social and economic problem of the country. In the name of Islam they are authorized to probe into others personal affairs. The illegitimate relations of Elizabeth Messiah and DC Azhar is the talk of the town.Nabila, wife of Mujeeb Ali, expresses her anger," Stop inviting him into the house. Deputy Commissioner or no deputy commissioner, I do not want any sinner in the house."(p.49). Nabila also consulted Maulana Hafeez and asked him to talk to DC as it is a sheer disgrace. "It is an outrage against public morals and religion. I have also asked Maulana Dawood to talk to DC."(p.79). It was the norm to seek advice of religious clerics in personal affairs of others'life pattern i.e. as DC Azhar;s illegitimate relations with Elizabeth could have a negative impact over the people of town .As Nabila told Mujeeb Ali that Elizabeth Massih was the topic of hot discussion among the women of the town .She further tried to make her arguments weighty by saying that Mujeeb should keep in mind that they had daughters too. The public pressure built up and the most peaceful cleric of the town Maulan Hafeez has to condemn openly DC and his mistress in Friday sermon in these words: ' *Ties of family, friendship and faith keep us united against the attentions of Shaitan.*'(p.216)

To inflame the public in the name of religion has been a strategy of politicians and military dictators since General Zia's regime. The same mindset has been reflected in *Season of The Rainbirds*, after Maulana Hafeez's open Friday sermon, people became aggressive and entered forcefully in Deputy Commissioner Azhar's house to punish Elizabeth. . It was heart rending to see the brutal fanaticism of the mob. Elizabeth Massih was much scared and told the furious crowd, "He's not in" but the door which was in between her and the crowd outside, was pushed forcefully and hit her (p.220). Elizabeth was being dragged and Mr Kasmi and Maulana Hafeez tried to rescue her.Mr kasmi was much grieved at the incident and he was giving its detail to Zebun. ' ' I was struggling with the crowd. Then a section of the crowd turns on me: Get the Ahamadiya as well' (p.229). . When Zebus comments on the incident that men are worse than animals, Mr.Kasmi told her that not only men were there but women and children were also in the mob who turned against Mr.Kasmi and Elizabeth (P.228) .

It has been a marked feature of Pakistani politics and politicians to provoke religious group controversy for the sake of self-interests. Likewise, PM Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto couldn't escape this legacy. In 1974 the constitution was amended and the Ahmadiya community was declared non-Muslim. It was a political move of Bhutto. In *Season of The Rainbirds* Mr. Kasmi is an Ahmadiya when Saif Aziz asks whether he is from one of the villages around here, then Mr. Kasmi replies in a flat voice that he is from one of those villages which were burnt down under the last government (p.134). Being an Ahmadiya, Mr. Kasmi doesn't socialize due to certain fears and apprehension. When a frenzied mob was dragging Elizabeth Massiah on the road and Mr. Kasmi tried to rescue her. The inflamed mob turned towards him for beating him being an Ahmadiya. Mr. Kasmi does not socialize freely in the town as he is well aware of public hate and intolerance for the Ahmadi sect. To keep the masses away from mainstream political affairs, it has been a strategy of the ruling class to exploit religious ideology tactfully. The negative politics had a far-reaching negative impact on society. Today's Pakistan is reaping the crop of fanaticism and religious bigotry which seeds were sown during the military regime of General Zia.

Braibanti (1977) is of the view that this decision of the Ahmadiya matter could prove dangerous for national integrity as Ismaili Muslims or the Shia community can be a victim in the future and furthermore, it can strengthen other tendencies towards fragmentation of Pakistan. (P.464). In Pakistan sectarian violence has been on the rise since then. The religious groups motivated by animosity, target each other. Between 1985-2007, in Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict about four thousand people are estimated to have been killed. Being in the minority, the Shia sect suffered a lot. Since 2008, thousands of Shias have been killed by religious fanatics. This religious bigotry is the order of the day. The recent lynching of a pupil named, Mashal Khan of Mardan University, by a frenzied crowd that took place on April 13, 2017 is a heart-rending incident that reflects that as a nation we are approaching a complete breakdown of law and order. Mashal Khan became a victim of religious fanaticism. This incident is a microcosm of the mindset that has become pervasive in Pakistani society. It reflects that how easy it is to excite the public in the name of faith. Hussain (2017) opines that Sectarian militancy cannot be eradicated by counter-extremism strategies in a very short time. It would take a long time to clean the country from militant sanctuaries and supporting networks of anti-social elements.

“The British often take pride in having trained many African and Asian countries in the art of governance during the colonial era but it is seldom realized that the army and the bureaucratic machines had been far better skilled than the political leaders that they left behind.” (Sayeed, 1967, p.101). On independence, the institution of the army was trained to obey political authority. But the army as the most organized institution of the country took undue advantage of its position and took command of the political affairs four times with the help of religious ulemas and bureaucracy. During the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq the political process of Pakistan declined from a parliamentary system into a despotic state that had caused social, political and economic unrest. Yusuf (1979) says that General Zia didn't abrogate the constitution of 1973 but Martial Law was proclaimed. General Zia stated that his object was to restore civilian authority after a new election. Zia planned to hold elections within 3 months. (P.166). But General Zia didn't fulfill this promise of holding elections. General Zia very successfully prolonged his regime with the support of bureaucracy, Ulemas and feudals. As the postmaster in *Season of The Rainbirds* comments, ‘This martial law has been an answer to Mujeeb Ali's payers. The expropriated lands were returned and the mills. His brother has become a minister, and they even have a deputy

commissioner of their choice.’(P.105). The military’s dominance over the politics of country has been great since its birth..Ziring (1977) is of the view that the role of military establishment in national policy-making has been backhanded and ambiguous. ---the military may not always accept Bhutto’s handling of the country’s security. In *Season of The Rainbirds* it is quite evident that the army was completely overshadowed by the charisma and popularity of Bhutto. After coming into power the army General was still under pressure due to public protest over Bhutto’s hanging. “The General had threatened death penalty for any ‘wayward ‘journalist who dared ‘denigrate’ his regime.”(Aslam, 1993.p.72)

Aslam in *Season of The Rainbirds* takes the regime of General Zia as a reign of terror. General Zia, the third chief martial –law administrator of Pakistan sentenced to death the democratically elected prime minister in 1979. Since then there is constant atmosphere of fear and apprehension. Zia was so pressurized due to public reaction that to curb protest and to suppress freedom of expression, he took many undemocratic measures. The police station began appearing everywhere, even in the remotest villages and towns. (P.94). Because of such despotic measures there was complete ban on all types of demonstrations and procession. During the 11 year long despotic regime of Gen Zia-ul-Haq, the print media was kept in bondage. It has been highlighted in novel as well, a journalist Saif Aziz who dared to begin printing the countdown to the General’s promise of holding the elections within 90 days, had to suffer a great loss as his newspaper was shut down. In the words of Saif Aziz this was the worst government they have ever had (p. 145). Yousaf Rao, a lawyer and anti-Zia activist’s wife comments, ‘The sooner we get rid of this evil General, the better it would be’. (p.214). Yusuf Rao ,a passionate political worker hides in town and keeps on changing his hiding places so that martial law forces could not arrest him.

Anti-Zia activists and civil society suffered a lot in 1980’s .In *Season of The Rainbirds*. Saif Aziz, a political activist, remained hidden for a long time as Martial Law forces were in search of him. ‘---Anybody who ever uttered a word against the regime was bound to be rounded up’, a photographer told Mr. Kasmi. (p.190). During military rule, it is stunning that the police systematically went about arresting the journalists and political activists, who were raising voice against despotic rule, concocting false and sham evidences against them to get them convicted. Censorship and direct control on print and electronic media kept the public ignorant of all political moves that were taken during military regime. The public called the general an evil tyrant. Lahore remained under curfew. .The anti-Zia activist who held protest processions, were prisoned and beaten brutally by the military forces. The public was so reactionary against despotic ruel that there was an attempt on General Zia-ul-Haq’s life on February 7, 1982. Al-Zulfiqar, an organization, was accused of firing a SAM-7 missile at a plane carrying the General. Aslam has thrown light on this incident in *Season of The Rainbirds*, when attempt on General’s life was made , the police began to arrest the protestors who raised voice against military dictatorship and put them behind the bars.The jails were crowded.

General Zia prolonged his regime with the help of bureaucracy, corrupt politicians and Ulemas. In the name of religion, he introduced many social and political reforms that was actually a political move in order to strengthen his regime. “ During Zia’s regime some of the religious leaders enlarged the scope of their activities to include political aims, hoping thereby to gain access to power in order to remould national life according to their school of thought’’. (Yusuf,1979.p.180). Though, the General after coming into power expressed his

intention to transfer the authority to civilian government after holding election within 3 months. But he never fulfilled his promise of holding elections. ; Instead he proclaimed national referendum on 19th December 1984 on his “Islamization” program which was approved by majority. With the plane crash death of General Zia-ul-Haq in August 1988, general elections were held in 1990 after 11 years.

Through a number of actions, the bureaucracy was made the unquestioning tool of an authoritarian regime. In most of the key positions, a new type of civil servant appeared on the scene who was politicized and untroubled by conscience. It is evident in *Season of The Rainbirds* that bureaucracy and corrupt politicians joined hands with Martial-law forces and fortified the military rule and the religious ideology was exploited successfully by martial-law forces of General Zia to extend the military regime.

Husain (2017) comments on this issue that Pakistan facing this problem since independence when the politicians couldn't develop consensus over constitution for a decade. This conflicts among politicians caused a power vacuum that was filled by 1958 martial law by General Ayub Khan .Then 1969 martial law by Gen Yayha khan that led Pakistan to political and social chaos .The 1977 martial law by Gen Zia lasted for 11 years .Then Gen Musharruf's military rule lasted for 9 years i.e. From 1999 to 2008.Pakistan has fought wars of 1965, 1971, and Kargil conflict, during military regimes. The incompetency of politicians and the corruption in the institution of civil service are the major factors that has always led military to exercise its authority and influence over political affairs. No one can deny the fact that during their military regimes the ruling authorities have left behind a bigger mess.

Findings

The analysis of *Season of The Rainbirds* in the light of social and historical perspective shows that the martial law forces of General Zia used Islam to form the authoritarian military regime and it has played a vital role to weaken Pakistan socially, politically and economically. Freedom of speech and assembly were basic rights that were denied to the masses under a military dictatorship. The institution of democracy could not promote due to frequent military interventions.

Keeping in view the theory of New Historicism, the political history of Pakistan reveals that the politicians did not follow the democratic process----they kept on changing their loyalties and always strengthened the military regime for their own vested interests. They were hopelessly split into religious groups and sects.Consequently, it led to the socio-economic backwardness of the people and general lack of political awakening.

The study also finds out that the religious ideology and bureaucracy had been a tool readily used by the martial law forces and influential and resourceful politicians to get their ends. The politicians have been habitual to make hollow claims for raising the social and economic status of the masses, still the majority is devoid of basic needs in Pakistan .Unfortunately, the most of the politicians who raise the slogans to serve people, lack genuine concern and sincerity for the poor masses.

Conclusion

From the analysis of Nadeem Aslam's *Season of The Rainbirds*, it is concluded that in 1977, after the dismissal of parliamentary government of Bhutto, the ascendancy of the military has taken place due to the murky nexus between the politicians, the bureaucracy and the ulemas that resulted in incompetency and corruption of political class and religious fanaticism and bigotry that prevailed in society.

As long as the poor masses have to struggle for survival at the hands of influential and resourceful politicians and bureaucracy, as long as rulers are not accountable to the people and submit to the laws, and as long as religion is a tool in their hands to manipulate the masses, we cannot hope for stable democratic setup in Pakistan.

Each time the military forces have taken over, democracy could not have been expected to strike roots in the traditions of political process. Military should come to this realization that they don't have magical powers to resolve the country's issues. The politicians need to learn the problems of the masses at grassroots level. Because the reason of failure of past democratic setup has been the lack of sincerity and devotion on the part of politicians and bureaucracy. Good governance will strengthen the institution of democracy. Democratic setup is always better than military dictatorship. Even a flawed democracy gives people hope and voice that is not available to them under military dictatorship.

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