

Pessimism versus Optimism: A Comparative Study of W.B. Yeats's *The Second Coming* and Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)*

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Abstract

*The paper tries to understand the relationship between optimism and pessimism existing in W.B. Yeats's *The Second Coming* and Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)*. It is clear that *The Second Coming* represents pessimism as a consequence of Second World leading to destruction of human civilization leading to hopelessness and *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)* expresses pessimism as a consequence of implementation of Martial law in Pakistan leading to a far-fetched optimism. Arguing on the basis of different circumstances in which these poems have been written it attempts to show how pessimism and optimism are linked to each other in both the poems because *The Second Coming* traverses a journey from optimism to pessimism by assuming that the previous human civilization was good enough for survival of human beings whereas, *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)* takes us from gloom to a life of hopefulness where people of God will govern and the oppressed rulers will be overthrown. Since both the poems capture the journey of human beings but in two different directions therefore it becomes important to see the interrelationship between both of them. On a careful observation it emerges that ...*

Keywords: *Optimism, pessimism, The Second Coming, Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)*

Introduction

Optimism and pessimism have been subjects of various forms of literature as both represent the world in a different sense. They examine human life differently to reach a conclusion if it has any meaning. W. B. Yeats in his poem *The Second Coming* represents a feeling of nothingness and also focuses on meaninglessness of human life and Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)* explores the contemporary condition of innocent human beings and provides them a beautiful ray of hope for the future. W.B. Yeats indicates pessimism in his poem through certain symptoms that it would bring devastation to the human civilization in future where as in case of Faiz's poem the devastation will be replaced by peaceful and harmonious conditions for the common masses. It indicates that in case of W. B. Yeats the pessimism is the outcome of certain features which are already visible and are destroying the existing optimism and leading to hopelessness. In Faiz's poem the idea of pessimism is a temporary feeling which would be replaced by a just social order. Before illustrating and understanding contradictory concepts existing in both the poems it becomes important to understand the basic

concepts of optimism and pessimism on a comparative basis.

Primarily optimism and pessimism are personal attitudes or opinions and hence, the terms have been defined secondarily by philosophical theories. Different types of reactions by individuals are important to understand the terms. There are attitudes or opinions regarding dominance of good or evil in human existence. The judgment about the world whether it is good or evil is also one of the aspects of human attitudes or opinions. There are also opinions about the dominance of certain cultural or historical periods in human existence. The overall evaluation of the whole universe whether it is governed by good or evil is also included in it.

Optimism is a positive mental attitude which indicates that consequence of a given action would be positive, full of happiness and hope. A common notion to differentiate between an optimist and a pessimist is reflected through a glass filled with water to the halfway point where an optimist represents it as half-filled where as a pessimist will represent it half-empty. The word optimism has been derived from Latin word *optimum* which means "best." An

optimist expects the best possible outcomes of a given action. There is a specific term for such kind of optimism in the field of psychology and that is called dispositional optimism. The idea behind this is to indicate that the future outcome will be the best one and therefore it provides relaxation at the time of frustration, anxiety, stress and fear related to the current conditions.

On the contrary, pessimism the negative mental attitude which indicates that consequence of a given action would be negative, full of gloom and hopelessness. The focus of the mind in pessimism is towards undesirable outcome of a given action. Those who are pessimists always look for the darker side of life. A glass which is filled to the half-way point is appear to be half-empty to a pessimist as compared to an optimist. The word pessimism has been derived from the Latin word *pessimus* which means 'the worst'. For the first time, it was used by Jesuit critics of Voltaire's 1759 novel *Candide*. Philosophically it gives negative meaning to human existence. It assumes that human existence is meaningless and empirically pain dominates over happiness in such kind of attitude. Philosophical pessimism is not a unified movement rather it is expressed through various tendencies. Fredrick C. Beiser states that nothingness is better than being in existence. Some philosophers like Schopenhauer believe in self-denial whereas Rene Descartes states that if negative reactions to negative situations had wiped out the life would have been better. Albert Camus talks about divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting which according to him constitutes the feeling of absurdity.

Background

The Second Coming was published in 1919, immediately after culmination of the First World War and *We Will Witness* was published in 1981 long after the end of the Second World War in global scenario and it was a time of Martial Law in Pakistan. There were diverse conditions prevalent in context of writing of these two poems but the attention of the researcher in the paper will be to understand optimism and pessimism existing as it is irrespective of diverse situations existing during the writing of these poems in the world in general and special parts in particular. Can it be said that *The Second Coming* represents the whole European civilization and *We Will Witness* only reflects the conditions

prevalent in Pakistan only? It could not be said because poets do not belong to a particular country. Their vision and imagination is limitless and it is important to see their portrayal of human lives in general rather than trying to fix the locations of their imagination.

W. B. Yeats a great modern poet, dramatist and writer was born in 1865 and died in 1939. Being an Irish poet he had been influential in Irish Literary Revival. Irish myths, legends and folklore influenced him a lot during his childhood and it got reflected in his early poetry which was primarily lyrical and was replaced by realistic and political ideas in the later poetry. He played a significant role in founding Abbey Theatre. He was awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1923 for "his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation." He used symbolic structure in his poetry and hence he is also called a symbolist poet. He experimented in traditional forms of poetry. The *Second Coming* is considered to be a dirge for the decline of European civilization. His poetry is also marked by anxiety, fear and frustration which are the outcome of the First World War.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz was a Pakistani Poet who wrote in Urdu and Punjabi. He was born in 1911 and died in 1984. He had been a man of experience who won Lenin Peace Prize in 1962. He was also a member of Progressive Writers' Movement. His works influenced Pakistani literature and arts to a larger extent. He showed revolutionary fervor in his poetry where he raised his voice against tyranny and oppression which included military dictatorship which has been peculiar of Pakistan. He followed established western styles and developed a new form of verse which was most suitable for the kind of poetry he wrote. He had been a firm supporter of socialism which he considers to be solution of all the problems of the country men.

It must also be noted that W. B. Yeats received Nobel Prize for literature in 1923 and Faiz Ahmad Faiz had been nominated for Nobel Prize.

Journey of Life Reflected in The Second Coming

In *The Second Coming* the persona is observing the changes taking place around him symbolically indicating that something negative is going to happen. The wheel of time is moving, the falcon has stopped obeying falconer and the things are falling apart because the center has lost its

capability to hold the things. There had been no law and order in the world around him and violence had destroyed innocence of the people. The worst people are confident with passionate intensity whereas the best people are being silenced and hence they don't have conviction in their voices. The person seems to be perfectly sure about the fact that some kind of paradigm shift is going to take place soon. Whatever chaos is there it could not be by coincidence, it prophesies that apocalypse is falling upon the land and destruction is near. Various frightening images from the "Spritus Mundi" justify the fact that surely the civilization is at the point of devastation. The persona is quite sure at the end of the poem that worst will happen in the world. It shows that some kind of beast is approaching the earth which will be the source of devastation. An image of having a body of a lion and the head of a human being is also incorporated in it to highlight the fact that it would have the features of human beings and also of beasts. It entails that the human intellect having the tendency of a lion to kill is going to bring this destruction of human civilization. The beast had earlier in deep slumber and now had got up from his slumber to strive for action.

The poem tries to express directly or indirectly two kinds of pictures: one is of the existing human civilization which is subject to negative changes and another is of the future consequences of The Second Coming. The first line of the poem indicates that the wheel of time is moving like a continuous event. Simultaneously, it has been also highlighted that earlier the falcon was hearing the falconer. Things were compact and the center had the capacity to hold the things which now had been lost. Now it is mere anarchy which had been unleashed upon the world but earlier it could have been respect to law and order or morality. The innocent people would have been confident before and the best people have conviction in their voices but the worst may be having lack of passionate intensity. The beast having in deep slumber during twenty centuries to time period is an indication that the world had no effects of this kind of evil and everything was going into the right direction. It could be said that if such were conditions before the emergence of negative symptoms then it is imperative to say that the era could have been having optimism among the people regarding their lives. In this sense The Second Coming

could be considered as a journey from optimism to complete pessimism where there will be total chaos and destruction.

Journey of Life Reflected in *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)*

The Poem *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)* is abound with optimism that positive changes will take place in future and everything will get settled. There will be no scope for oppression at that time. It is something like Utopia- No Man's Land where everyone will live peacefully. The persona is certain that this change will definitely take place. The day which had been promised and whatever had been mentioned in the law of nature will definitely take its turn. On the promised day the mountains of oppression will fly like wool. The heavy mountains will lose their weight and fly. The oppressive forces will fly away like wool and everybody will be free from oppression. Not only this when this will happen the earth beneath the feet of oppressed or ruled will also tremble like heartbeats. The rulers will not be spared and the light will crackle over their heads. It will be the time when the false icons from the God's Earth will be removed. The innocent and excluded people then will be taking the positions to govern and the crowns will be overthrown or the thrones will be overturned. The person is quite certain that it will definitely happen. Only the name of the God will remain in tangible and intangible forms, being a spectator and a scene both. The acclamation that 'I am the God' will arise which includes me and you both. At that time the people of God would be at the helm of power to govern themselves. It is quite certain that this change will take place in future.

Conclusion

Comparing both the poems and their diverse backgrounds and social settings it could be concluded that the wheel of time reflected in *The Second Coming* would culminate into total destruction of the current civilization which clearly indicates a journey from optimism to pessimism. Whereas, in case of *Hum Bhi Dekhenge (We Will Witness)* a vivid picture of optimism is expressed in a convictional tone. There is no scope of doubt left in the poem for the contrary to happen. The certainty expressed in both the poems is of remarkable nature but based on contrary assumptions leaving no space of any kind of skepticism. The conviction

in the voice expressed in both the poems enlightens the masses on different scales expressing optimism and pessimism capturing human psychology in depth. It is also clear that *The Second Coming* represents pessimism as a consequence of Second World leading to destruction of human civilization leading to hopelessness and *Hum Bhi Dekhenge* (We Will Witness) expresses pessimism as a consequence of implementation of Martial law in Pakistan leading to a far-fetched optimism.

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