

## A New Historicist Critique of Institutional Failure in Aatir's *Stragglng Through Fire: An Anthology of Proemistry*

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▪ p-ISSN: 2663-3299

▪ e-ISSN: 2663-3841

▪ L-ISSN: 2663-3299

**Abstract:** *Stragglng through Fire* is the creative critique of the deterioration of democratic socio-political institutions of Pakistan. Contemporary socio-cultural and political circumstances reflect the plight and sufferings of the masses. They are deprived of their fundamental human rights. New historicism propounds the idea of studying a text within its context. It comprehends literature in its socio-cultural and political context. This study is supported by the theoretical perspectives of Foucault, Greenblatt, and Montrose. Foucault's concepts of power, subject, knowledge, discourse and the relationship between text, author and reader weave the fabric of the research. Greenblatt's concept of resonance and wonder and Montrose's concept of 'historicity of text' and 'textuality of history' help locate the issues responsible for institutional failure and social upheavals. The present work finds out that public suffers due to the malperformance and failure of democratic socio-political institutions.

**Key Words:** Pakistani English Poetry, New Historicism, Institutional Failure, Proemistry

## Introduction

This research highlights the predicaments and muddles of people, their angst against stagnating egalitarian social institutions, their extremity because of mal performed bureaucracy, and their adherence to the notion of soilism taken as a rehabilitation measure. Pakistani English poetry negotiates the socio-cultural and political upheavals resulted by institutional failure. Pakistani post-colonial poetry focuses on identity crises and historicity (Mansoor, 2012, p.20). Taufiq Rafat fashioned a new trend in Pakistani poetry by giving the discourse and concept of Pakistani idiom to showcase the culture and circumstances of Pakistan: our

climate, heritage, myths, music, art and environment. Pakistani poetry spurs the socio-cultural and political consciousness of the bibliomaniacs and readers.

By pinpointing the institutional failure through new historicist framework, this study highlights the agony of natives resulting in retrogression of public self-esteem, mimpathy and infanticide of children by parents, corrupt politics, and bankrupt economic system, hegemonic army, poverty and extremism. New historicism believes in the "textuality of history" and "historicity of texts" (Louis Montrose, 1989). With this holistic view, Louis propounds the idea of context and

discourse. History and text can never be studied without their context and discourse. Greenblatt explains this meaning making process under the terms of resonance and wonder. Exponents of new historicism narrate that texts are the products of cultural, social, historical and political issues. Aatir's work is a true reflection of day-to-day life of people, their aspirations, woes, and dreams.

This work is aimed to investigate the issues of deviance of fundamental human rights, social belongings, culture, animalistic human nature, identity crisis, and religion in both democratic and military regimes. It studies the role of socio-cultural and historical barriers in socio-cultural and political upbringing of Pakistan. The work under study *Stragglng trough Fire* is penned by Ghulam Murtaza Aatir who is an emerging and iconoclastic voice in contemporary Pakistani English literature acknowledged for his poetic English translation of *Aik Tabeer Khawab Chahti Hai (2020) (In Search of a Dream)* by Manzoor Saqib. Proemistry is a groundbreaking genre in Pakistani Anglophone poetry. Istifsaar is Aatir's another poetic collection in Urdu language. *In Search of a Dream (2020)* is his opening wedge in Pakistani literary sphere. His first creative work *Stragglng through Fire (2021)* marks his ingress into the world literary canvas. He quite artistically criticizes the gnawing and sufferings of Pakistanis by focusing on the institutional failure of democratic and public organizations.

Proemistry is a detailed discussion of people's plight in the forms of floods, hunger, manslaughter, unemployment, na-maloom afraad, missing persons, qabza mafias, poor judiciary, dirty water, poor health conditions, terrorism, inequity, sectarianism, and illiteracy. Dr. Aatir (2021) says: 'Proemistry is of the margin, for the margin, by the margin' (p.9). It discusses the overall socio-political conditions of Pakistan and Pakistanis discursively. The concept of institutional failure is comprehensible by considering the

textuality of history and historicity of text of the book under study. Patricia Hopkins Lattin- a retired English Professor at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York- analyzes book on its thematic and spiritual and evolution between religions, cultures, and languages. He centers Aatir's masterly teeter-totter moves "between the physical and metaphysical" (Aatir, 2021, p. 9) which pinnacle the world governed by illegal gestures. Dr. Asif Khan, the author of *An Aura of Autumn*, considers *Stragglng through Fire* an allegorical work in its moral, sardonic and sarcastic in intent: "these proems are a mixture of odd parts" (Aatir, 2021, p. 9) of tradition, poetry, prose, stark reality, wild imagination, and adventure. It deals with national, communal and global socio-cultural and political matters through his strong creative imagination.

## Literature Review

Stephan Greenblatt originated the term 'new historicism'. As a literary school of thought, it gained popularity in 1980s. New historicism rejoins the concept of consolidation of time period with its socio-political context. Proponents of new historicism assert that non-literary and literary work is the product of the historical moments of its time period. New historicists believe that texts are implanted in historical, political and socio-cultural matters, and they focus on the "textuality of history" and "historicity of texts" (Louis Montrose, 1989). Historicity of Text considers the social ingraining of all moods of writing and cultural uniqueness of any nation while Textuality of History deals with the defined position of fictionality and history.

Matt Hickling (2018) in *New Historicism* asserts that exponents of historicism were basically the "traditional Historians" (p. 55) who avoid the identification or any pinpointing of history and prefer the literary research which decreases "the importance of their subject" (p.55). He enforces Greenblatt's

concept that actual society is “constantly shaped and re-shaped by the texts it produces” (p.55). New historicism focuses on the history written from layman’s perspective and colored “with emotions” (p.55). Matt observes the shift from historicism to new historicism which affects the relation between events and human emotional response and enforces that such issues can never be taken as neutral.

D. G. Myers (1989) in his work *New Historicism in Literary Studies* recounts the blooming of new historicism and narrates that New Historicism demonstrates its “disdain for literary formalism” (p. 27). Its proponents are dispirited with abolishment of “social and political circumstances” (p.27) from interpretation of literary and non-literary works. He narrates that new historicism is a response against “literary studies” (p. 27). New historicism considers that literary work cannot be studied in their independent state rather it blurs the boundaries between literature and society. So, new historicism disseminates the “text into society” (p. 28) of which it is a product.

### Poetic Response to Institutional Failure: Stylistic and Thematic Concerns

Pakistani English poetry and literature gives voice to the socio-political and cultural turmoils of Pakistanis resulted by colonial raj and male performance of democratic institutions. Poetry provided a broad canvas to the authors to represent the contemporary socio-cultural and political scenario. Alamgir Hashmi (1990) while examining the progress of *Pakistani Verse in Pakistani Literature in English: Past, Present, And Future* asserts that Pakistani verse has reached its distinct shape, voice and color from 1947 and is quiet modernist in its advancement as well. Pakistani English verse is also synchronously “relevant, and genuinely of the place” (p. 50) and has become a mode which bears the

charges of primitive civil advancements and culture and rearranges it step-by-step in branded new settings.

The poetry of Ahmad Ali and Shahid Suhrawardy begin the tradition and custom of national English literature roughly a decade. Tariq Rahman (2015) states Shahid Hussain Suhrawardy “has much in common with the poets of the ghazal” (p. 150). Language of his later poetry is quite, direct in its impact and straightforward. Modernist obliqueness, irony and cynicism are weaved through the subjects of frustrated love and romance. Conclusively, he “is moving towards modernism” (p. 152). Ahmad Ali’s poetry also shows the distraction from emotionality and pliancy of Ghazal tradition. Ali’s *Purple Gold Mountain* (1960) deals with political themes. His later work reflects a flourishing process over the issue of relation between art and politics. Muneeza Shamsie (2017) in her article *Pakistani- English Writing* considers Ahmad Ali as a Muslim who became an opening wedge of modern nationalistic South Asian Literature in English and coincided it with liberation movement (p.2).

P. Suneetha (2016) in *The Evolution of Major trends in Commonwealth Poetry* finds out the evolution of postcolonial Pakistani literature. She discusses Itrat Husain Zuberi as one of the post WW1 poets who began to create imaginative work. He started to write about the disputes between Eastern and Western civilizations and cultures. Zuberi is inspired by T.S. Eliot as its “evident in the imagery and language of Hussain Zuberi’s poetry” (P. 403). Diction of his poetry is studious, esoteric and anti-romantic. Zuberi discloses the pursuit and trailing for cultural roots, identity, and Muslim-Hindu uproars in his verse.

Zulfikar Ghose has chosen the historical and political subjects but he often responds to the Western issues instead of Pakistani concerns. His verse generally transmits the feelings of deprivation from conventional

worth and is “against war, against modern industrial civilization” (Rehman, 2015, p.159). His poetry discloses the anxiety, chaos, and fears of the modern age and discusses the uncertainty caused by current scientific warfare.

Muneeza Shamsie in *Dragon Fly (1997)* states that Maki Kureishi uses the theme of lost social and cultural identity in her verse. She cognizantly uses English language as a tool to “reflect the East-West duality of her world” (p. 65) in which she lives. Her poem “Kitten” is enriched with social images and portrays the communal ways of dealing the vulnerable and weak. Metaphor of kittens represents the destitute and unarmed people of a community. Muneeza Shamsie (2017) in *Pakistani-English Writing* narrates that Taufiq Rafat proposed the term of Pakistani-Idiom in Pakistani Anglophone poetry\_ “a poetry that reflected an experience of Pakistan and its culture” (p.5). Carlo Coppola (1998) in *Some Recent English-Language Poetry from Pakistan* considers Rafat’s poetry as charged with strong and manly ventures just as hunting, polo, soccer and mountain hiking, and “they reflect a profound, refined appreciation of nature” (p.204). His earlier work is filled with a genuine aquarium of animals: ducks and birds of various kinds just as sparrows, pigeons, herons, kites, geese, kingfisher, eagles, partridges, gulls and other mortals as well. He also makes poetic experimentation but remains unripe in capital lettered distractions and repetitive portrayals.

Daud Kamal, another prominent poet, makes use of symbolism in his poetry. The poem “Floods” encapsulates his artistic and imagist style rightly. Tariq Rahman (2015) observes that like ghazal poets, “Daud too enjoys the voluptuousness of tender emotions” (p. 170), the charm of reminiscence and the dejection of remorse. His intellectual humanitarian perspective becomes the manifested theme in his poetry.

Pakistani residential and diasporic

elements are visible in Alamgir Hashmi’s work. Amra Raza (2014) detects that the theme of history prevailing in Subcontinent in her article *The Subcontinent Palimpsest in Alamgir Hashmi’s Poetry*. He discusses the different ruler’s inscriptions about Subcontinent to discuss the cultural accumulation and aggrandizement which makes it a fertile land for historical studies. Alamgir Hashmi reproduces the palimpsest structure in poetry “so that the layering of history and the erasures wrought by conquest or colonization can be seen simultaneously” (p. 138). His reading, writing, teaching and self-exile in Europe empower him to move between places. He talks about geographical and cultural spatialities.

Vinay Dharwadker (2001) in *Poetry of the Indian Subcontinent* states that Ghose, Rafat, Hashmi and Kamal described the history of pre-colonial Subcontinent, classical art of Buddhism, and multiple Muslim conquests. They give voice to the Pakistan’s snaggy landscape “which changes rapidly from icy mountain and fertile river-valley to desert and seashore” (p. 275). Kamal discusses the decay and decrepitude of Mohenjo-daro while narrating the buried history and land; while Ghose showcases the civilizational diversity of repressed ancient times. Rafat creates symbolic spaces with animalistic violence while Hashmi narrates the journey and migrations from one region to another. Bilal Tanweer (2012) in his column *ESSAY: The Portrait Artist - the Poetry of Harris Khalique in Retrospect* talks about Harris Khalique both as a poet of English and Urdu language. His Punjabi poetry is more musical while English poetry is most straight and short.

To encapsulate, new historicism is a reaction to historicist text-centered approach. It believes that every text is a product of socio-political and cultural context of which it is a product. It’s quite engrossing that significant themes of poetry remain the tension between tradition and

modernity, displacement, identity crisis, and individual reaction to reality. Pakistani English poetry never discusses the political and historical variations in Pakistan satisfactorily. Some pre-partition inscriptions about history are available in poetry but contemporary historical account is missing. So, this study will focus on that fact that Aatir's work showcases the magnificence of Pakistani history and socio-cultural norms and values.

## Theoretical Framework

This study employs the theoretical perspectives of Michael Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose to examine the intricate relations between text, reader and author and how text highlights the institutional failure by piercing deep into the lives of people. Foucault's paradigms of power and power relations had great effects on the fundamental concept of new historicism. His ideas are also included in Greenblatt's theoretical works. He followed him in the practices of civilizations and cultures or in the alliance of power. Other admissible articles, books and non-literary references are incorporated as secondary source of information in this study to analyze the institutional failure in Aatir's proemistry. Peter Barry (2009) describes new historicism as a mode of "parallel reading of literary and non-literary text, usually of a same historical period" (p.166). M.A.R. Habib (2005) stated that "literature must be read within the broader context of its culture ... politics, religion, as well as its economic context" (p. 760). New historicism denies the privilege of literary works over historical and cultural accounts and promotes a mode of "study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight" (Barry, 2009, p.166). By decreasing the distinctions between text and context, exponents of new historicism consider "social contexts as themselves as narrative constructions" (Rice & Waugh, 2001, p. 253) as a product of pragmatic and

discursive management of power relations. New historicism inspects the depiction of past in texts under the paradigm that "past is available to us only in the form of textuality" (Rice & Waugh, 2001, p. 253). Tyson (2006) states that new historicism can be defined "as the history of stories cultures tell themselves" or "as the history of lies cultures tell themselves. Thus, there is no history, in the traditional sense of the term. There are only representations of history" (p. 288).

## Major Influences on New Historicism

### Michel Foucault: Paradigms of Knowledge, Power, Discourse and Politics

The eminent intellectual analytical thinker Michel Foucault's work on knowledge, discourse, power and power relations influenced the new historicists a lot. His ideas show that "how so-called objective historical accounts are always products of a will to power" (Rice & Waugh, 2001, p. 253) enacted through implementation of knowledge within peculiar institutions.

Foucault's book *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) prospered his concepts about discourse and "examines the network of discursive rules that underpin the discursive construction of knowledge and power" (Leckie, Given & Bushman, 2010, p.64). His paradigms of discourse and power have intellectual influences on new historicists who consider history as a narrative and as in disconnectedness. Under his influence, new historicism believes that authority and power never only emerges from the top of political and socio-economic structures. Tyson (2006) states that according to Foucault, "power circulates in all directions, to and from all social levels, at all times" (p. 284).

Gloria J. Leckie, Lisa M. Given, and John E. Buschman (2010) state Foucault took the concept of power/knowledge as "intersubjective a product of the shared

meanings, conventions, and social practices operating within and between discourses” (p. 66). Foucault’ concept of discourse has “it’s link with desire and with the power” (Rice & Waugh, 2011, p. 211). Discourse not only represents the desire; rather it also becomes an object of the desire. It becomes the power which has to be seized. According to Nobbert Ricken (2006) Foucauldian analysis of power examines the procedures in which “human beings are made subjects” (p. 551). Thus power relations can be comprehended by analyzing the resistance and efforts made to set apart these relations. Through the concept of resistance, Foucault gives the idea of control over the techniques of getting power. So, power is never rigid and monolithic rather it implies different sites of resistance and power.

Foucauldian approach of discursive analysis leads to the reinvestigation of the relation between, text, reader and the author. Generally knowledge is transmitted from author to the reader through the medium of the text and discursive analysis asserts that author acts as a creator of information while readers behave like the active receivers in the meaning making process. Foucault believes that author is only a product or function of writing a text.

### Textuality of History and Historicity of Text

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Louis Montrose promotes the idea of discursive analysis of literary works by stating that “this contextualization of literature involved a reexamination of an author’s position within a linguistic system” (Habib, 2005, p. 762). Habib (2005) states that Louis introduces the phrases like “textuality of history and “historicity of texts” (p. 20). “Textuality of history” gives voice to the idea that history is a text and access to pass is only possible through textual and historical narratives. Historical narratives can be a product of historian’s personal cultural,

social, political and economic conditions. Barry (1995) discusses Montrose’ paradigm of historical and textual narratives by considering that a text “creates a culture by it is created, shapes the fantasies by which it is shaped” (p. 173). While “historicity of texts” takes fictional works as representative of history of the time and space of which they are produced. Historical background cannot be separated from the text and it removes the boundaries between history and literature which historians used to believe in. Montrose believes that “all the texts are conceived as discourse which consists of the verbal formations of an era” (Lyu, 2021, p. 1077).

### Stephan Greenblatt: Author, Text and Socio-historical Context

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Stephan Greenblatt is a well-reputed intellectual and theorist of new historicist school of thought. He encouraged the study of linkage among discourses and social and aesthetic constructions. He believes that “neither human subjects nor human artifacts exist outside of history ... both are historically shaped” but it does not “suggest that they have no power to intervene in the processes of history” (Rice & Waugh, 2001, p. 256). Meaning making process is directly linked with the historical and socio-cultural conditions of the author. Just like Foucault, he proposed the theme of power/knowledge and its adjustment within socio-political and historical circumstances. In this context he believed that power relations work “through discourses” (Bertens, 2014, pp.156) and analytical approach is based on writer’s socio-political and historical context. Greenblatt proposed the idea that both non-literary and literary text “contribute to the distribution of social energy” (Veenstra, 1995, p. 174). Stephan Greenblatt also examines the dialects which exhibits the links between the individual and text and between individual and discourse.

## Resonance and Wonder

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Greenblatt proposes the ideas of resonance and wonder to mirror the complex nexus of society, culture and its history by grabbing the attention of readers. Greenblatt's essay *Resonance and Wonder* (1990) narrates the concepts of 'resonance' and 'wonder'. Greenblatt (1990) says: "New historicism has distinct affinities with resonance" (p. 20) and its objective is to "recover the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own" (p. 20). Wonder grabs the attention of the readers and resonance is the oscillation of culture and history in texts.

## Subversion and Containment

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Greenblatt's paradigms of subversion and containment are closely related to Foucault's concepts of power and resistance. Balkaya (2014) mentions that Louis Montrose uses this term as "the capacity of the dominant order to generate subversion so as to use it to its own ends marks the very condition of power" (p.7071). Subversion interrogates the ideological social order which showcases the ruling order to release the disappointment of the public while containment commands this subversion to avert the substantial results. If a literary text illustrates the mechanism of subversion it definitely mentions the strategies of containment simultaneously.

## Analysis

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Institutional mismanagement, unemployment, illiteracy, miserable judiciary, executions, kidnapping for ransom, qabza mafia, ailment, scarcity of pure drinking water, poverty, starvation are multiple aspects are studied and analyzed in Aatir's *Stragglng through Fire* from New historicist paradigm provided by Foucault, Greenblatt, and Louis Montrose.

## New Historicist Impulses in Stragglng Through Fire

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*Stragglng through Fire* (2021) brings to light the socio-political disputes in Pakistan and Muslim world as well through pure Pakistani perspective. It depicts the day-to-day sufferings, stresses, strains and experiences in politically and socially administered democratic institutions in present-time. Aatir wrote down his subversion by the social mechanism against the plights and alzheimerous behavior of Pakistanis.

Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000) stated that new historicist study never abjects the aesthetic pleasure. It detects the innovative and creative power which shapes any literary product outside the conventional narrow boundaries (p. 12). Like anti-literature, Aatir's proemistry is a record of senseless and meaningless designs of political and social life by originating a new art pattern\_ snit-poetry in Pakistani English poetry. *Stragglng through Fire* is a national allegorical account of socio-political discourses and context while some proems have informal and anecdotal touch. The most striking feature of his work is its narration of reality by bringing tears on the brims of eyes and smile on the perimeters of mouth. Being a national allegorical utterance in socio-political and cultural context, it gives voice to marginalized and silenced voices and also provides a chance to write in it as Aatir (2021) says "it is an ongoing genre: neither a proem nor, therefore, a collection of proemistry can ever be complete" (p. 13). He declares it the "P-book – the process book of process proemistry" which is "of the margin, for the margin, by the margin" (p. 13).

## Institutional Failure and New Historicist Paradigm

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### Malfunctioning of Socio-Political Democratic Institutions

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Crucial and acrid socio-cultural and political issues faced by the public constitute the

thought content of *Stragglings through Fire*. New historicists believe that culture and society cannot be excluded for the comprehension of a literary work and give equal value to secondary sources of knowledge and information. The proemist sketches out the torment and agony of his people by through a new artistic taste and it becomes an act of containment and resistance mourning the failure of democratic institutions. The proem "I AM..." brings to light the human plight because of democratic institutional failure such as malnourishment, floods, disease, hunger, lynchings, terrorist attacks, fundamental killings, extortions, mafias, and many other. It's an anaphoric proem and starts with a prefatory line and readers know about the basic disruptions faced by Pakistan even from its birth when it says: "I am a bilingual essay in Urdu and English;" (Aatir, 2021, p. 65). The proem starts with first person narration and the subject "I" stands for Pakistan. Pakistan is personified into a human being and it narrates its own deplorable lifelong story of devastations, miseries, and chaos. Disastrous floods resulted by heavy rainfall led to the loss of crop harvest, livestock, property, and financial distress for the survivals. Narrator gives voice to the afflictions of its residents as he says:

I am a dead body bloated in floods,  
And dehydrated in a waterless river;  
I am Death by water and a Cry against  
water;  
I am a Daily of two decades  
With a consistent bloody headline and  
Intermittent gory breaking news ... (pp. 65-  
66)

In these prines, the proemist repents and satirizes the carelessness of socio-political authorities and leadership who did not take it on serious note and causing a lump sum damage to human lives as floods used to do in 2003, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2020, and in 2022 as well. Instead of

considering the remodeling of flood controlling infrastructures and frameworks, they are habitual of wearing long shoes and giving statements in flood season for a proper snapshot with the legacies of the victims. Another proem entitled "Between the Earth and the Sky" is also written on flood of 2014 and criticizes the publically administered policies and parliament itself when the narrator- the sufferer himself says:

Could someone tell them  
That I don't need a parliament?  
The word is with me since I could hear.  
Gone grey now,  
I need only a tree  
To keep me alive  
Between the Earth and the Sky  
In the next Flood! (p. 28)

It is a real world incident when a man climbed up a tree with his four children and he remained stuck there for four days and was unable to move. *OCHA Services' Reliefweb* highlights the loss caused by flood in 2014 in a report entitled *Pakistan: Floods-Sep 2014*. It killed 367 individuals and changed the living style of more than 2.5 million and knocked down almost 129,880 houses. Instead of lofty and sky high dreams people are just looking for the basic need of life\_ the water. In this proem, water is presented as wicked force in human existence and the prines: "Water, Water, everywhere, / And not a drop to drink" (p.27) are a cry and squall against malfunctioned welfare department. These lines are allusioned from S.T. Coleridge's "Rime to Ancient Mariner". In monsoon because of lack of water management programs and adaptation measures people suffer by the loss of their lives, property, livestock, and houses and on the other side people suffer with the problem of scarcity of clean drinking water throughout the year.

"I Am..." also portrays the issue of killing of innocent people on the basis of religious



declarations. The prine: “I am a Muslim murdered by Muslims,” (p. 66) points back to the innocent killings of Mashal Khan and many others. Mashal Khan\_ a Muslim student at Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan was murdered by furious mob over the assertions of sharing blasphemous material online. Later on, in investigation his innocence proved as Inspector General of Police stated that they couldn’t find any substantial evidence under which any legal action could be launched against Mashal. A report \_ *Revisiting Mashal Khan’s family a year after his lynching* by Nazar-ul-Islam (2018) on TRT World states that his friends and investigation report declared that Mashal’s vocal denunciation and support for students’ rights and satire on university administration led him to the planned murder. Mashal’s murder is a manifesto of how educational institutions have been turned into political territories and democratic slogan of freedom of expression has become an overhead crime for individuals and commoners even in sacred organizations. Aatir expresses all this bullshit when the narrator says:

I am a Pure Prostitute fucked by Promise Mafia;

I am a boat vandalized mercilessly by the boatmen!!! (p. 66)

“I Am...” also deals with the subjects of Qabza Mafias and extortions in several cities of Pakistan. Proemist enforces the readers to record their resistance and subversion and raise their voice under the governmental containment. He advises them to writer even a single word, prine, or phrase to document their silenced voices and to write the world’s longest ever-growing proemistic epic in the history of literature as an act of resistance and subversion.

Na maloom afraad,

.....

Got a parchi and the next day

Lost my papa,

Lost my son,

My house demolished,

Lost my land to Qabza Mafia, (p. 68)

Above mentioned prines bring to the light the target killings and murders by namaloom afraad, Qabza mafia group, and sufferings of people by the direct and indirect involvement of law-enforcement institutions in such non-human and bloody activities.

### Befuddled Public Organizations and Marginalized People

Greenblatt narrated that a work of literature must be implanted in socio-cultural and political fabric of a community and Stragglng through Fire is a faithful specimen of new historicist work. The proem “One Bhutto for Sale” incorporates the socio-political problems of political associations, poverty, bread, and income support scheme etc. The narrator states her father’s association with PPP\_ Pakistan People’s Party and its motto\_ Roti, Kapra aur Makaan and the consequences which she faces because of his blind following. It appears as this motto came from Russian revolution’s slogan\_ liberty, equality and fraternity and met the same end. As Russians were deprived of all these three things; similarly Pakistanis are also deprived of Roti, Kapra aur Makaan. As the narrator says: “My father ruined his life and mine/ For Bhutto and his dream: / Roti, Kapra aur Makaan (p. 41). While “My father died and my mother died/ Without Roti, Kapra aur Makaan (p. 41). Because of unavailability of basic needs and poverty people are enforced to live and die without Roti, Kapra or Makaan or to marry their daughters to someone “Who do (original did) not have / Roti, Kapra aur Makaan (p. 41). This proem satirizes the governmental strategies of befooling public first of all by depriving them from basic needs then by allotting them support programs as she says:

Now I am getting

Two thousand rupees per month  
Under Benazeer Income Support Program (p. 41).

This mechanism of subversion and containment and power and resistance leads the readers back to Hitler's illustration of democracy. In answer to a question about democracy, he took an alive rooster and started to peel his skin off besides of his ailing and crying and then threw some millet in front of him to forget the original pain. Just like a rooster, after peeling off their skins by the authorities in the name of country's wellbeing people are awarded by numerous support schemes to forgo their sufferings, their identity, and purposes of life. Public is now just pondering about how to earn to eat, wear and live without Roti, Kapra, or Makan. Aatir records this process of subversion and containment in the interests of his public when narrator says that despite of all managerial and governmental efforts of her demise somehow she conceives two babies and she names them as BHUTTOS (original Bhuttos) but study writes them as BHUTTOS to take part in the act of containment and to highlight the value of Bhutto's name in Pakistani socio-political scenario for almost last four decades. She pronounced to sell one Bhutto for some money and property and hoped to get some Kapra and Roti by selling the other Bhutto and tried to raise voice against all this diminishing political associations. This proem becomes a mouth piece of every second Pakistani's life story. People started to sell and kill their children just to save them from hunger and starvation. An editorial *Killed by Poverty* produced in The International News narrated some episodes of killing the children by throwing them into rivers just because of hunger and poverty. Four children between one to seven years of age were killed by throwing them into a water channel at Sheikhpura Road because he was unable to purchase new dresses for his children. Another woman in Chakwal committed suicide in February after

killing her three children in reviver because of unavailability of meals for them (The International News, 2021).

The Proem "I Am..." also reflects the matters of malnourishment, hunger, disease, starvation and hunger Proemist writes:

Hunger,  
Cancer,  
Unemployment,  
One meal missed,  
Two meals missed,  
Ten meals missed,  
I don't remember how many meals missed,  
(p. 67)

M. Khalae (2018) in Top 10 Facts about Hunger in Pakistan discusses the intense food insecurity aroused from low investment in remodeling infrastructures affected the Sindh really hard (The Borgen Project, 2018) which is elaborated in "Letter to Election Commission of Pakistan". This proem is a polemic political expression as a strong containment against public institutional norms. It is written in the form of a letter from the departed souls of Thar to democratic Election Commission of Pakistan. This proemistic letter by 150 dead children is an exaggerated expression and from literary point of view it is a hyperbole to give voice to the agony of residents of Thar and citizens of distant areas of Pakistan.

This study highlights the issues of poverty and hunger in "Letter to Election Commission of Pakistan" to unpin the institutional failure of public organizations as 150 children died in in Spring 2 in Thar as a result of food insufficiency. This proemistic letter as a rhetorical device provides an utterance to the dead children and their sufferings in this so-called democratic world and requests the Election Commission to include the symbol of bread on the ballot paper. Narrators narrate their hunger and poverty when they say:

Our companions may die unable to read and

write

But they would like to put

Their thumb impressions on bread.

Bread (p. 57)

Touching the sign of bread will be a greatest luxury for the stunted children and people in Thar. Thar suffered every 2 to years from draught but government's indifference behavior becomes evident when study deals with non-literary resources of information for instance Chief Minister of Sindh\_ Qaim Ali Shah's statement. Habib Khan Ghori writes down his statement in a report about deaths by draught and hunger in Thar in a session of National Assembly held on March 26, 2014. He said "there is no proof of a single death from hunger," (Dawn News, 2014).

In "In Debt" Aatir describes the issues of debt, poverty, and inflation which public especially widows have to suffer in Pakistan. Proem starts with a real and casual event of any poor household where buzzing bees and utensils with broken lip are quiet common. Social issues of debt, poverty and inflation are discussed when house owner says:

"The rent will be seven thousand from this month."

And widow replies:

"It's too much.

Even five thousand leaves us

With almost nothing" (p. 55).

Her final reply to the owner "Sahib jee, we shall vacate it next week," (p. 55) is quite ironical. This vacation may be a retirement from this democratic and mortal world into immortal world.

### Political Militancy in Pakistan

Pakistan remained an unstable state since its independence from India and Britain in 1947 as democracy and dictatorship are coexisting phenomenon in its socio-political history. It confronted both zonal confrontations and national disruptions in political ground. This

study culminates Greenblatt and Michel Foucault's concepts of relationship between a work and its historical context in which it is written. "An Unpoetic Sonnet" is a chronicle account of political militancy in Pakistan starting from 1958 – 2007. It starts with the narration of first martial law in Pakistan starting from October 1958. Succeeding Martial Laws by Muhammad Yahya Khan and Zia-ul-Ha are mentioned in second pranza by featuring peculiar dates. It generally discusses the historical and political timeframe with socio-political upheavals and Pakistan's history can be documented as a tale of frequent takeovers along with prolonged spell of dictatorships momentarily highlighted by appointed civilian rules. So, political instability led the political parties or groups into several batches which show their concern for political power instead of democracy. This political involvement by the military resulted in institutional failure of socio-economic and political organizations as Pakistan couldn't make any fruitful use of peoples' efforts and sacrifices who worked hard to bring name and fame to Pakistan. As proemist in "There is No News" writes that:

There is no news of

Those who went in search of

The morning stars, whose blood

Walked on the soil with torches

In the hands of their RBCs (p. 84).

The present study observed the cases of Madam Fatima Jinnah and Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan as set mark for such examples in history. Fatima Jinnah\_ the Mother of the Nation faced charges by General Ayub Khan and his defenders. The reality about her death also remained suspicious. A report by Akhtar Baloch in Dawn News provides a reference to this issue who appointed Ghulam Sarwar who sued a petition to get justice regarding her unnatural death under section 176 of criminal prosecution (Dawn News, 2015). Another imminent example of embarrassment and indignity is Dr. Abdul

Qadeer Khan's case. He was charged of selling nuclear technology to North Korea, Libya, and Iran and being house-arrested from 2004-2009. His death is reported under the title\_ Abdul Qadeer Khan: 'Father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb' dies by BBC News by discussing his notoriety and imprisonment as nuclear proliferator. He was always accused by West for the proliferation of nuclear technology and consequently house-arrested (BBC NEWS, 2021). Aatir manifests his resistance and laments over the devastation of natural resources. As he writes:

There is no news of  
Scintillating stones of Kanhaar,  
Ageing Ravi,  
Copper of hot earth,  
Flowering of the trees  
Into fruition (p. 85).

Pakistan is blessed with reserves of fossil fuels. Proper use of these resources can put Pakistan on the way of development and prosperity. However, poor judicial system, corruption, and political unrest had perverted its full use.

## Conclusion

To precise, Aatir's proemistry is an innovative form in Pakistani English poetry. It proved an appropriate and suitable expression of subversion and containment to the socio-political enigmas of downtrodden. The crisp of Aatir's work is the failure of socio-cultural, political and democratic institutions that led to famine, floods, draughts, and poverty, scarcity of drinking water, target killing,

blasphemy, extortions, lawlessness, poor healthcare and political militancy. The resonance of historical, cultural, and socio-political adversities informs the readers about Aatir's imagination. He globally exposes the sufferings, enigmas and plights of people through his proems like An MCQ Test to share the view that the entire world is sharing the same history and history of the whole world is interconnected. He expresses the socio-political history of Pakistan by using metaphors, symbols, and refrains and creates the world of wonder and estrangement. Resonating issues of public sufferings, history and political instability turns the book into a national allegory. *Stragglings through Fire* is a product of its socio-political and cultural context and discursively it exposes the society and community of which it is produced. Institutional failure is provided by the sketching of people of Thar living below the line of poverty, and by extortions, ethnic conflicts, sectarianism, mafias, and the issues of target killing. Proemistry in its anti-poetic expression and form creates wonder and estrangement. Pakistani public is swinging like a pendulum between the issues caused civilian and political militancy in the country. In "An Unpoetic Sonnet", Aatir mourns the confusion prevailed for fifty years in the affairs of state and consequently both Pakistan and the public are in debt now. The two blank leaves left at the end of the book and a margin line on every page turn it into 'our' book instead of 'his' book and prove it an ever-growing product becoming a social watchdog highlighting the institutional failure in Pakistan.

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