

THE LURE OF THE LAND IN THE POETRY OF TAUFIQ RAFAT

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Abstract

This paper reads Taufiq Rafat's poetry of place as the record of a shifting, unsettled relationship with the land – its landscape, people, customs and buried history. Through close readings of "The Mound," "A Positive Region," "From a Train Window," "Reflections," "Village Girl," "Arrival of the Monsoon," "A Middle-Class Drawing-Room," "Kitchens," "Thinking of Mohenjodaro" and the three Karachi poems, it traces a perspective that moves between enchantment and disgust, intimacy and estrangement. Rafat emerges as a poet offering an alternate history: where the Subcontinent has been unkind to its own past, his verse recovers the mound, the ruin and the monsoon as sites of memory, while the urban poems register the ambivalent advance of modernity upon an older way of life. Employing Reader's Response Theory, the paper argues that no single attitude to the land prevails across Rafat's work. His position alters from poem to poem, the observer repeatedly becoming a participant. In doing so it makes the case for Rafat, still critically neglected, as the quintessential poet of the Pakistani landscape.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to establish that sub-continental poets writing in the English language have shown maturity and deserve recognition. Taufiq Rafat, in particular, has been neglected in that scholarship about his work is still scarce. Rafat was born in Sialkot in 1927, and went to elite schools in Dehra Dun and Aligarh. Muneeza Shamsie describes him as being an admirer of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden. His work was published in all major anthologies, from the pioneering First Voices (1965), Pieces of Eight (1971) and Wordfall (1975) to A Dragonfly in the Sun (1998). He translated Punjabi verse into English and wrote critical essays on the state of Pakistani poetry in English (Shamsie 53).

This paper examines the relationship that the poet has with his land, which extends to the

landscape, the culture, the people and their customs. The history of the Indian sub-continent remains in the backdrop. The self-questioning of the poet in search of an idiom indicates that he has searched for identifying and defining their identity and roots. This is what Waqas Khwaja has called "intimacy and estrangement."

Rafat's poems analysed in this paper are "The Mound," "A Positive Region," "From A Train Window," "Reflections," "Village Girl," "A Middle-Class Drawing-Room," "Kitchens," "Karachi 1955," "Karachi 1968" and "Karachi '79".

In post-colonial literature, land becomes a central image and metaphor because the writer explores his new identity in terms of the changes his land has undergone through colonisation. Poets like Derek Walcott discover that the cornerstone of

their strength in a post-colonial society is the constancy and resilience of the landscape that has endured colonisation but maintained its own distinct features. The process of colonisation in the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent has left some unforeseen dividends in the form of writers like Walcott and others who have explored the post-colonial identity and come up with a body of work that has attained its own merits.

Poets like Rafat are also not oblivious to the influence of the landscape. The lure of the motherland and landscape is more pronounced in Rafat than in his compatriots. Rafat actually develops a strong and rooted relationship with the land. He is the quintessential Punjabi son of the soil, and his poetry draws its essence from that soil.

The sense of belonging to an ancient culture and civilisation is embedded in Rafat's work. In "The Mound," he stands on the ruins of a 5000-year-old town. The ruins attract the objective observer. "Archaeologists say the town/ had a highly developed culture" (5-6). To the archaeologist, the emblems of this "highly developed culture" (7) are the "tools littering the museums" (9) that have been discovered from the ruins. To the archaeologist, the artefacts and ornaments discovered from the ruins indicate that the people who lived in the ancient city "were a peace-loving people,/ tillers of the soil,.../their only enemy the drought" (14-17).

Rafat, as the observer of not just the ruins, but also of the process of historiography and archaeology, can offer a word of caution, when he dismisses the archaeologist's view as "mere hypothesis" (28). He is not pleased with the historian who has "by-passed the mound" (29) and not accorded it the attention it deserves. The historian, the archaeologist and the excavator have all failed to have "reconstructed here/ another Mohenjo Daro" (22-23). The poet becomes a historian as well, and fulfils the role of poetry to reconstruct a parallel narrative, paying attention to the forgotten and ignored portions of history. While Mohenjo Daro, Harrappa and Taxila have been romanticised through historical fictionalising, this unnamed mound, one of many

still unexplored in the Indian Sub-continent, has been left to be ravaged by time. Rafat, given his intense sense of belonging to the land, chronicles with a seeming detachment the treatment that the people of the Sub-continent mete out to history. When he stands on the mound and looks around him, what he sees in the ruins of the ancient city are:

The wide lanes and sensible houses,
and a marvellous system of drainage
that did not poison the rivers and the sea;
and, miracle of miracles,
only the one temple for the populace. (29-33)

The poet is amazed at these signs of the harmonious co-existence of people in the past. The "one temple for the populace" (33) evokes the modern metropolis where there are more than one places of worship in one small neighbourhood, let alone a whole town. Clearly, Rafat does not admire the multiplicity of houses of worship. There is a disgust at how history has been treated after Partition, with apathy.

The people of the sub-continent have been generally unkind to their history, often reducing monuments to tourist attractions. It is not surprising, then, that Rafat finds this attitude appalling. The current state of the mound is that "water-logged fields/ have pushed to its very hem/ a village of two-score houses of mud" (40-43). This is the general state in which history has been preserved in the Sub-continent. The poems ends on a striking image of squalor and disgust: "A sluggish drain runs down its middle/ into which all the children defecate" (43-44). The scatological imagery reflects how the historians and archaeologists of the Sub-continent have chosen to defecate on historiography itself. Rafat, as a poet providing an alternate history, has chosen as his subject the history of those parts of his land which have been ignored by traditional historiography.

Rafat, at times, seems to be enchanted by his native landscape in an almost child-like manner. This sense of wonderment is pronounced in a poem such as "A Positive Region". The title evokes a positivity that stems from the description of the actual landscape in the poem. The reinforcement of positive adjectives reflects

the landscape's lure for the observer. "Confident pines" (2) cover the landscape that is "bursting over/ with green springs at every nook" (2-3). These images of abundance strengthen the development of Rafat's bond with his land. "What could such a place deny?" (10) The question is not rhetorical, and the poet actually looks to ascertain the plentiful gifts that his motherland has bestowed on him. The grass is "impossibly lush" (12), "Bushes brim with birds" (17), "Here everyone/ has Mr. Universe calves. And the women/ need no brassieres" (29-31). Mother Earth is lavish in endowing the region with its fruits, and the poet, as he travels in a jeep, is wistful for his past youth, when he had the courage:

to disembark at will, and with a shout
slither down to where the stream
among the smooth pebbles at the bottom
sparkles like soda. (27-29)

The sheer joy that Rafat experiences at encountering the abundance of Nature reflects his rooting in his landscape. However, it might appear there is an element of irony here as well. Rafat has chosen the colonial master's language as his creative vehicle. If the natural landscape is as bountiful as shown here, should Rafat not have managed to find creative expression in a regional language? The answer is that while it is apparently incongruent, the lines quoted here show how secure Rafat is in the identity given to him by the native landscape. It is this conviction in his roots that allow the poet to use the language of a foreigner to describe scenery that belongs to a different culture. The colonised poet's landscape is vibrant and inspiring enough to assimilate the language of the colonised master.

This landscape also gives birth to Rafat's idea of what his poetic idiom and mission is. In "From A Train Window", which is the main poem to consider when looking for Rafat's idea of what the Pakistani writer's canvas should look like, he states his mission clearly:

My countryside is not
pine-forest or paddy-fields
(though I have lived among such);
it is miles and miles

of sand and nameless scrub. (1-5)

This poem maps Rafat's landscape more clearly than any other poem. It places him in his surroundings, providing the roots for the rest of his poetry. The "sand and nameless scrub" (5) is no wasteland of the imagination, but the dust-infested landscape of the Indian Sub-continent, where the post-colonial experience has left behind nameless scrub, from which Rafat and his generation of poets strive to build the trees of their own imagery. The poem works on two levels, and that is the multiplicity of perspective that the poet tries to achieve.

For Rafat, the sense of belonging to one culture does not exclude the sense of familiarity with another culture. Much like Alamgir Hashmi, he is comfortable with both sets of images and metaphors. He is placed in the tradition of English poetry, having read the masters, and chosen this foreign language for expressing his own creative output. However, unlike Hashmi, he does not try to belong to both cultures at the same time. In fact, he understands that in admitting that his sources are the "sand and nameless scrub" (5) of the plains of the Sub-continent, he also needs to acknowledge that he does not place himself in the idiom of "pine-forest or paddy fields" (2). Only by first admitting this knowledge can Rafat identify that the "sand and nameless scrub" (5) is the binary opposite of the "pine-forest or paddy fields" (2), thereby making it possible to assert his expression through his own familiar landscape.

In placing himself in this setting, Rafat is moved to the epiphany that even "the glossy shishams/ are not our trees" (8-9). This distancing from a native tree is an important step in finding his bearings. He places himself in the scenario passing outside the train window, much as Philip Larkin does in "The Whitsun Weddings", where he is a detached observer, but all the time he is coming closer to the scene and subtly becoming a part of it. When Rafat emphasises the negative "not" to distance himself from one motif, he uses a positive assertion to place himself in relation to something else. In describing the landscape, he includes the people as well:

My countryman is not

a key-swinging merchant,
or wrestler in loincloth
wielding a mace;
but an itching moron who can drub
his wife, and stubbornly tills
a handkerchief plot
between eroded hills. (17-24)

Rafat realises that the people have an important part to play in defining the landscape. The placement here is particularly interesting, as the poet first distances himself from the key-swinging merchant, a typical image of the banya, the Hindu money-lender who lorded over the Sub-continent for centuries. He also distances himself from the traditional wrestler “wielding a mace” (20), another typical image from the rural settings of the Sub-continent. Why does Rafat need to create a distance from these characters? It is probably because it is only through creating this distance, that he can create a positive assertion of identification with the “itching moron” (21) who can “drub/ his wife” (21-22) and “stubbornly tills” (22) his piece of land. One can imagine the poet standing at the edge of this landscape, looking at the people that he calls his own. He is therefore distancing himself from the stereotypes that colonial powers over the centuries have cultivated about the Indian people. The native poet, when he writes back to the centre, challenges these stereotypes and reverses them by offering images of his own.

Rafat further describes the landscape that he sees through the train window. He asserts that his home is not “a bungalow/ in a seven-acre lot” (34-35). It is rather “an ancestral hovel/ with a roof/ which has snouts for the wind” (36-38). Rafat distances himself from the colonial legacy in a post-colonial country where a large number of people still aspire to the colonial “bungalow” (34). His “tenement” (33) is a typical rural “hovel” (36).

Then, as the participant, he invites the reader to act as observer:

Look how in this single curtainless room
I manage to copulate
among my sleeping children,
who at dawn
rush to the still-wet fields

to relieve themselves.

Afterwards, they rub
their bottoms on the ground. (39-46)

The stress on the abject poverty of the scene described here is in direct contrast to the spaciousness and perceived respectability of the colonial “bungalow” (34). “From A Train Window” manifests these contrasts, and through these, the poet looks for a reconciliation of two opposing forces. This synthesis comes from his rooting himself in the local, rural environment. Rafat draws his inspiration from his rural beginnings, and looks at his rural roots for inspiration. He is placed firmly in the rural setting, and this firm position allows him to develop a perspective about his surroundings.

Another major poem that helps establish Rafat’s perspective about his landscape is “Reflections”. “The long dry spell is over,” (1) he writes. This is the beginning of the monsoon season in the plains of Punjab. The dry and arid land is blessed rain. “Waiting is ended.” (2) It appears that the poet places himself as part of the landscape surrounding him, and it his own waiting that has also ended. “The time for action is here,/ and action for some means words.” (10-11) Rafat feels something new in the air, and this also influences his poetry. It is through looking at the landscape that he finds this newness which makes him “articulate again” (12). This is Rafat’s answer to the search for an idiom that roots itself in the surroundings, and draws from the landscape. This is where the outside merges with the inscape of the poet, giving birth to a new expression. This articulation, which has been found again, is the unique perspective that he brings to his writing.

A significant part of the lure of the land is the attraction exerted on the poet by the native residents of his land, who come to represent the reclaimed nature of the post-colonial land as an idealised place where new beginnings must be found. In Rafat’s poetry, these people are mostly from a rural background, and represent the qualities most commonly associated with the ethos of a rural setting, particularly in the plains of Punjab. The people are hard-working, humble, and despite the harshness of their everyday life, they exude a certain grace and gentle hospitality

that welcomes the outsider. And Rafat is no outsider to the rural setting. He is grounded in his rural upbringing, and perhaps this is why he is strongly attracted to the landscape, people and culture of the Punjabi rural areas he represents.

"Village Girl," a short simple poem, embodies the general affection he feels for the rural landscape and the people who lend it character. The poet views her from a distance, "tall and straight/ as a sugarcane stalk" (2-3). This simile grounds the village girl as part of the landscape. In the backdrop of a sugarcane field, where the stalks stand tall and straight in the face of a storm, the girl exhibits the ramrod-straight grace of these stalks. While Rafat seems a detached observer of this scene, he leaves a certain ambiguity. It is not clear whether he is attracted to the village girl or to the images of sugarcane fields and rural life that she evokes in the poet's mind. This ambiguity leaves the reader to ponder whether Rafat is located inside the poem or outside. Here, the inscape and the outside do not marry as naturally as in "Reflections". Yet, it is this ambiguity that lends the situation:

such a sweetness

it was almost more

than a man could bear. (11-13)

"A Middle-Class Drawing-Room" is another poem where the poet acts as a detached observer despite being a participant in the scene. The setting is not the rural outdoors, but the drawing-room of a small town house. However, the sentiment at work and the values that Rafat observes are very similar to the rural settings he has used elsewhere. There is a complicity at work in the poem. The guest and the host are playing a game, where both understand the rules but pretend ignorance and innocence nevertheless. This lends the atmosphere an underlying hidden quality, creating a sense of deception and hypocrisy to social relationships. While Rafat does not appear to pass judgement at any point, he does seem to underscore the necessity of this complicit lying in the kind of social set-up that is linked to the middle-class:

What am I doing here? Ostensibly

a neighbourhood call, but the real purpose

is to judge the suitability of this house

for a cousin to be married into. (13-15)

So, from Rafat's vantage point, he understands that the host is aware of the "real purpose" (14) of his visit, but when both pretend to be involved in this charade of middle-class respectability where they have to pretend to be innocent of each other's knowledge; we find another evolution of his perspective. Here, we find that Rafat does not only romanticise his people, as in "Village Girl", but has actually matured enough as a poet to present the people around him with their faults and their charades. This is the same attitude we have earlier seen in "From A Train Window", where he emphatically states that his countryman is "an itching moron who can drub/ his wife" (21-22). Having the simplicity of rural life in the background does not mean that Rafat only presents his native land and the native people in a particular romanticised light. He does not dress them up as ideals. Yes, he draws his idiom from his native land, but where there is need, he does not hesitate in presenting the unpicturesque and less perfect side of life.

This is another aspect of the post-colonial debate: whether the writer should present the native public in a purely romanticised way, and thus create a eulogy of sorts for the land and people ravaged by colonisation, or whether he should present the post-colonial reality as it stands. In Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, for example, the character of Lestrade represents the post-colonial bureaucratic mindset, and the writer in no way exonerates this mindset of the corruption prevalent in post-colonial West Indies.

A lifestyle has changed, though, and this change is reflected in Rafat's poems. "Kitchens" chronicles what the poet witnessed in his childhood. The poem is a nostalgic remembering of a way of life that has changed. Rafat acts as witness to this change. "Mother presided,/ contributing only/ her presence" (19-21), he writes, noting that "noise/ was warmth" (22-23). In presenting the contrast between the past and the present, he is uniquely placed at that crux of history which witnessed both eras. These contrasts are presented through images. In the past, they were "high-roofed, spacious" (3), while

now there are only “cramped spaces” (24), in which “there is/ no time for talk” (24-25). The kitchen had acted as a dining-room and conference hall, where the family would gather around the stove while fresh food was served. The discussions in those kitchens revolved around “primaries” (17), these being “births, deaths, marriages,/ crops” (18-19). Now, the kitchen has lost its “intimacy” (30):

We would not dream
of coming to this place
to savour our triumphs,
or unburden our griefs. (31-34)

Further contrasts give the reader an insight into how he views this transition:

Chromium and formica
have replaced the textured
homeliness of plaster, teak.
Everything is clean
as a hospital. (36-40)

The comparisons stretch to the “surrealistic clock” (41) which has replaced “the eloquent grandfather” (42-43) clock which was a feature of most middle-class households. The final comparison encompasses the quality of the meal. In the kitchens of the past, meals were leisurely affairs:

Once there, we dawdled
over last night’s curry
and fresh bread dripping
from the saucepan, eggs,
and everlasting bowls of tea. (12-16)

In contrast to this, the modern kitchen with its appliances and its direct link to the hurried way of contemporary life, does not offer the pleasure of enjoying a breakfast with the entire family present:

We are deferential
to the snap pleasures
of electric toast, and take
our last gulps standing up. (45-48)

The last line is an accusation aimed at the poet himself as much as it is at the changed ways of life. We see a poet who looks at the process of history with some objectivity, and is able to draw appropriate contrasts that show not a useless angst for the past, but rather a realisation that certain inevitable changes have taken place and

are now irreversible. This realisation is critical in the evolution of his perspective. When contrasted with “Reflections”, there is a maturity to this reminiscing. The maturity is also reflected in the unstated realisation that this is the modern way of doing things.

Another poem where he contrasts the present and the past while using the landscape is “Too Many Houses.” This poem, however, lacks the maturity of “Kitchens.” Rafat looks at the “roofs telescoping into each other” (3), and is reminded of the first man who must have built in the hills. The poet travels from observing the present view to imagining what it must have felt to that first builder. He imagines that the first man to construct a house in the hills “must have watched/ with pride the second house grow” (8-9). Later, he must have then experienced “anguish as the houses/ attacked the hillside in a swarm” (11-12). Now, these houses, once built with love, are used “as sleeping places only” (18). Like “Kitchens”, this poem also bears witness to the inevitable change that time has brought to a way of life. However, the change in landscape in “Too Many Houses” does not elicit the maturity that Rafat exhibits in “Kitchens.” These two poems are then two perspectives of looking at change: “Too Many Houses” looks at change with revulsion, while the nostalgic undertones of “Kitchens” simultaneously include the acceptance that change is inevitable. The attitude in “Kitchens” had been more reconciled to change as compared to “Too Many Houses,” and the reconciliation and acceptance of modern ways of doing things showed a post-colonial maturity which befits a writer who chooses the English language to create an idiom steeped in native imagery. That, after all, is the greatest reconciliation he attempts in his work.

Rafat has written three poems about Karachi, which was for a long time the capital of the country, and was also the major urban centre. Coming from someone who obviously feels comfortable in rural surroundings, these poems about a cosmopolitan urban ethos are surprising. All three poems capture different emotions and reactions, and are pivotal in understanding how Rafat’s perspective develops with time.

“Karachi 1955,” “Karachi 1968,” and “Karachi ’79” are not only poems that capture and record how the city has changed over time; they also record how with the passage of time, the poet’s relationship with the city has evolved. The first poem in this series does not include introspection. The reader is pushed to the middle of a scene being described. The senses are evoked, and all the elements seem to unite in creating a scene which appears rather forbidding to the observer. “The screaming wind” blows “the soil/ particle by particle” (1-2). The sun’s heat intensifies the desolation of the scene. And then there is the sea, “biting into the beachhead/ with an ancient rasping sound” (5-6). Nature is at its most powerful here, “crowding man off his perch/ so that the land can return to its ways” (7-8). The city by the sea exerts a powerful pull on Rafat. Whether this is because of the presence of the actual sea is not hinted at, nor does the rest of his poetry indicate any fascination for the sea. Yet, it is a city that he keeps coming back to.

“Karachi 1955” describes a bleak landscape. It is a city that has “scarce sweet water and little rain” (9), and so every person living in this parched city “protects his rood of greenery/ with panicked care” (10-11); “only the spendthrift gul-mohur spills its gold/ in the pitiful spring that time allows” (15-16). As the people are inextricably linked to the land they occupy, “we wear our features to suit the landscape” (17), and this is the link between Rafat and the land he surveys. Whatever his subject, he “wears our features” (17) to suit it. With the village girl, he had assumed a rural grace when he looked at her from a distance. His persona assumes a gentle warmth in the first part of “Kitchens” and becomes cold in the second part where he describes how the ways of the past have changed. This first Karachi poem ends on a reflection that brings Rafat back to the scene he is describing. “We wear our features to suit the landscape” (17), he writes. He returns to observing “the commuters storming the gates” (21) of the terminus. The poem ends on a striking image: “the arms of the cactus lifted in prayer” (24). This anomalous image throws the reader off, for this kind of an ending is rather rare in Rafat. The

cactus perhaps is a metaphor for the poet himself, as he stands in a city where he does not feel at home. What it does is that it plants a seed, which then develops in the other two Karachi poems. The cactus, like the camel in Alamgir Hashmi’s *America is a Punjabi Word*, is extremely resilient, can store water, and survive in arid conditions.

“Karachi 1968” offers similar kinds of images, but the tone is decidedly different. Whereas “Karachi 1955” starts with the description of a harsh wind blowing near the sea shore, this poem begins with a comment that seems to be mocking the city’s culture:

Karachi is the only city I know
where barbers solicit like whores, and papayas
are considered fruit. (1-3)

While “Karachi 1955” comments on the lack of rains and the artificial greenery planted by the municipal corporation, “Karachi 1968” notes that “There is no weather here as we northerners/ understand weather” (8-9); “Each new morning/ brings no hope of change” (11-12); and “A splitting sky announces a jet not rain” (14). While Rafat is still describing a city which is not blessed with rains and greenery, the quality of description excludes the sense of an urban wilderness that is obvious in the first poem.

“No, I do not think I shall come to terms/ with this grey place” (15-16), Rafat announces in the latter poem; yet, this does not have the kind of deserted sound that the previous poem has: “and malice moves like a rainless cloud/ over the brown cliffs of the teeth” (18-19). Clearly, Rafat’s perspective regarding the port city has evolved. He comes from the planes and to him Karachi must be an unwelcome city. Over the course of thirteen years, though, two different visits evoke two different responses. The first response, “Karachi 1955”, evokes the imagery of a deserted, desolate and almost desert-like atmosphere, creating an almost ghost town, where things are unnatural, and therefore distant and delusional. The latter response, “Karachi 1968,” shakes off this first delusion, and notices that the people of the city have a character too. This is manifested in the comment on the barbers of the city, and on the people who even consider the tasteless

papaya to be a fruit, a characteristic that someone from the fertile planes of Punjab, where ambrosial mangoes are taken for granted, would find ridiculous. It is still a city without the month-long monsoon that circumscribes life in Punjab, but the scenery seems to have become softer as compared to the desert-like scene in the previous poem. While “Karachi 1955” ends on the image of a cactus whose arms are “lifted in prayer” (24), “Karachi 1968” ends on the even more surrealistic image of “the whirling airport searchlight” (20) that “brandishes its sword over the hushed city” (21). The first poem has the writer looking for familiarity in the natural landscape, which he fails to find. This latter poem looks for familiar signs in man-made signs which denote homogeneity in urban centres: the port city cannot have the same lushness of grass as Lahore or Sialkot, but it can have an airport which gives some level of comfort and recognition.

As if these poems, set thirteen years apart, had failed to establish the evolution of the poet’s perspective about the city, he comes up with one final poem about the city eleven years after the second one: ‘Karachi ‘79’. And, it is in this poem, that we see a kind of reluctant but inevitable synthesis of the first two poems:

A strange love-affair
between this city and me.
I can’t stand it for more
than a few days at a time,
yet every ten years or so
it extracts its poem. (1-6)

This love-hate relationship extends to how Rafat feels about the city’s weather. In “Karachi 1955”, he seemed appalled at the “pitiful spring” (16); in “Karachi 1968”, he had the epiphany that the weather of Karachi is different from the way he understood weather as a northerner; and now, he has matured enough to slyly remark that “This year I’ve brought/ my weather with me” (13-14). While he had seemed unhappy at the lack of rain earlier, he now realises that when rains lash the port city, they do so as torrents:

My relatives here
have had to be evacuated
by a naval boat. (16-18)

The final synthesis in these three poems comes in the realisation that the “strange love-affair” (1) does not have an amicable solution, and that city and visitor do not overcome each other:

Well, here it is,
and here am I
circling each other again.
The question is: who’s
going to get to spit first
in the other’s eye. (25-30)

While Rafat and Karachi circle each other, the question is left unanswered. This is a deliberate ambiguity. The image is every bit as striking as the images that end the first two poems, but ‘Karachi ‘79’ brings this set of images to an open-ended closing. In “Karachi 1955,” the cactus might be the poet, and thus represent the human race in a consonance with Nature. In “Karachi 1968,” the final image is of an airport searchlight scanning the skies, giving an artificial and mechanised look, representing the spread of globalised urbanisation, which represents man in opposition to the forces of Nature. “Karachi ‘79” ends on the two contrasting forces locked in a primeval dance, but the outcome is unknown. Rafat has clearly matured enough to realise that the Man versus Nature battle does not have a definite ending in favour of one of the contenders. It is an ongoing circular movement, reflected in the poet’s “strange love-affair” with this most urban and modernised of Pakistani metropolises, which, although the poet cannot stand it for long periods of time, provokes him to write a poem about it after every decade.

“Arrival of the Monsoon” is another major poem that develops Rafat’s relationship with his landscape. The images described in this poem are typical in nature, and root the poet in his surroundings. This poem also lends its title to his collected poems, and its significance extends to beyond the surface description of monsoon’s arrival. Rafat describes the pre-monsoon winds as “liberating” (1), indicating that he was awaiting the arrival of this season. Such is the ferocity of this “liberating wind” (1) that “birds are tossed/ sideways and back, and lifted against their will” (7-8). The arrival of the clouds is a “welcome

darkness" (10), and the poet observing the scene is becomes part of the celebration:

And now the rain! In sudden squalls
it sweeps the street, and equally sudden
are the naked boys paddling in the ditches. (13-15)

Here then is life at the simplest. The small joys of a rural life tie Rafat to his roots, and these joys are apparent in this poem. We do not see his presence, and yet he is at one with the scene he describes. "Alive, alive, everything is alive again" (16), and so is the poet. He stands watching the scene with detachment, but seems to be part of this perfection at the same time.

The final poem to be looked at in this section of the analysis is "Thinking of Mohenjodaro". This particular poem, although shorter than the other poems looked at, takes the poet and reader on a journey through history and explores the meaning of what revisiting history implies. The revisionary look at history indicates a maturity of perspective. It would be convenient for the post-colonial writer to eulogise his native civilisation and its landmarks, and rue the historical process of colonisation. However, Rafat as a mature post-colonial poet realises that the colonial process is now an integral part of shaping the histories of the former colonies:

Thinking of Mohenjodaro
Alexandria and Rome,
I note how times curves
back upon itself
like an acrobat. (1-5)

This curving back of time is the repetitive nature of history and of empires, whether the ancient Greeks and Romans or the modern British. The monuments of the past, like the ruins at Mohenjodaro, are now mere landmarks which serve as tourist attractions and nothing more. "Who will read this?" (13) the poet is prompted to ask, referring not only to the poem, but also to the ruins of history which can be read as lessons. Rafat is able to read these runes, and addresses his reader as much as himself when he ends the poem: "Stranger, the crumbling fort/ you pass is your home" (14-15). In calling out to a "stranger" (14), Rafat ironically establishes an immediacy much like Auden's "Look, stranger, on this

island, now". The stranger here is the self, who has been alienated from his roots. By considering the ruins of past civilisations, the poet's self is united with the ancestral land and its myths. The Indus Valley civilisation, whose centre was Mohenjodaro, was an advanced civilisation much before the European colonisers came to this region. So, as time passes, the post-colonial writer, steeped in the dual culture of a colonial era, learns to look for familiar markers in his own cultural icons. This is the creation of a "home" (15) and an idiom that roots itself in the familiar and the ordinary.

Pakistani poetry in the former coloniser's English language flourished from the 1960s up until the 1990s. The most noted poet in this period was Taufiq Rafat. As new poetry is published less regularly than during the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, it is important to research and revisit the classics of Pakistani English poetry, and thus a number of recent attempts have been made to create interest in the first generation of Pakistani poets writing in English. Particular attention has been paid to the work of Rafat as the pioneer of a Pakistani identity in English poetry.

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