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PATTERNS OF CONNECTION IN PRISON POETRY OF EZRA POUND AND FAIZ AHMAD FAIZ

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ABSTRACT

Comparative literature allows literary works from different cultures to be understood through their comparisons relying on the idea that no piece of literature exists alone, rather the meanings are made while studying one piece of work in comparison to the other. Adopting this theoretical framework of Bassnett (1993) and Zepetnek's (1998) principle of thematic inclusion that allows literature from the margin to be seen at par with the literature from the center, the researchers have attempted at understanding the patterns of connections between two popular prison poets i.e. Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Ezra Pound. The purpose was to explore if two poets belonging to different cultures, political and philosophical affiliations, and poetic traditions and using different mediums for poetic expressions have patterns of connections. The textual analysis of the prison poetry of both the poets showed that there are certain juxtapositions in their poetry like movement from personal to political, references to history and traditions, delineation of the prison environment, freedom of expression, resistance to the oppressor and relationship with the outside world. But they have also retained their individualities through different philosophical affiliations, political ideologies, lyricism, and aims of writing poetry like Faiz is revolutionary while Pound is philosophic, and they also follow different poetic traditions. Their comparison also suggested that points of connections and departure are an extension and addition into the field of comparative literature and further analyses of works from different cultures could help in promoting the concept of world literature and looking at human experience at universal level.

INTRODUCTION

Boethius's work *Consolations of Philosophy* in 523 AD, Grotius's *Commentary on Saint Matthew*, Buchanan's renowned work *Paraphrases of the Psalms of David* in 1565, Cervantes's *Don Quixote* in 1605, *The house of the Dead* by Dostoevsky in 1860, and *De Profundis* by Oscar Wilde in 1905 are just few

examples from the enormous body of literature produced when the writers were serving their prison time. It also suggests that prison writings belong to significant form of literature that occupy central place in world literature. Freeman (2009), while commenting on the history of prison writing in England, suggests that the revival of prison literature in 16th and 17th centuries makes it the most “characteristic cultural form” of English literature (p. 132). As there is a great body of prison literature available but it is also one of the least read literatures in the world. Special attention was given by the modernists when most of the writers during those times served prison and also that the attention was diverted from classical works to others (p. 135). Disraeli (1881, p. 36) also dedicated a chapter on the intellectuals that had been imprisoned suggesting that there is aesthetic appeal and availability of influential ideas in the prison writings. Like other forms of popular literature, prison writings are also not just confined to one culture or area. Prison writers from all over the world belonging to various cultures have produced notable works that have contributed to the realm of philosophy and literature (Larson, 2010, p. 144).

Genoways (2004, p. 94) argues that prison experience, in the twentieth century, embedded a culmination of the personal and the political views in the poetry of the writers. The poet comes face to face with the ideology of the people or the oppressor and enters into a dialogue that gives a new style to writing poetry and that kind of poetry is very much influenced by the conditions in which it has been written. Therefore, the study of the conditions of the poetry becomes extremely important to understand the poetry. Gregory Orr (2002, p. 4) also suggests that the poetry becomes a matter of survival for the prisoner for it is his inner crises that is translated through language. There is not just the subjectivity driving the poetry rather also an expression that dwells upon the disorder around the poet particularly the cause of the sufferings of the poet.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study is an attempt to explore, analyze and study prison literature produced in different cultures i.e. *Zindan Nama* (Prison Journal) and *Dast-e-Saba* (Hand of the Wind) by Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1954-5) and *The Pisan Cantos* by Ezra Pound (1948). The leading research question in this study is how these poets develop patterns of connections where they meet through their poetry. In the backdrop of the theoretical perspectives of thematic inclusion by Zepetnek (1998) and comparative literature by Bassnett (1993), the researcher aims to explore patterns of connection from the prison poetry of both the writers.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Zepetnek's (1998, p. 15) concept of thematic inclusion is based on one of his principles' of studying comparative literature that the works considered to be at the margin and periphery are also important pieces of literature and could be compared with the works that belong to the cultures at the center i.e. the western culture. There could also be ideological, political and methodological similarities that could help in studying literature beyond borders. In this globalized world, comparative literature offers a way of studying and comparing literature considering it a universal phenomenon of expressing what is essentially human. This perspective clearly rejects the politics of exclusion and invites literary works from all cultures to be assimilated, studied, explored

and analyzed. As the researchers have opted for the comparison of prison poetry from two different cultures, therefore, this concept of thematic inclusion is a relevant theoretical perspective.

Bassnett (1993) argues that comparative literature is the study of literature across cultures going beyond the space and time boundaries to see the “patterns of connection” among various works (p. 01). She argues that no single event or piece of work could be comprehended alone; there is need for another body of work to relate to and make meanings. This theoretical perspective is based on the concept of Mathew Arnold (1857) that all events and literatures are interconnected and that one piece of literature can be understood in connection with the other body of work. Therefore, the adoption of this conceptual framework provided the researchers to explore the prison poetries from two different cultures in connection with each other so that a better and deeper understanding could be developed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At their individual levels both poets i.e. Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Ezra Pound occupy a significant place in literature as both produced influential poetry during their serve in prisons. Interestingly both of the poets were charged of treason from which they were later absolved. Their prison works are considered to be among their most inspiring, coherent and masterly works yet they have not been compared by the scholars so far.

Faiz Ahmad Faiz was also an international poet with translations available in English but primarily he wrote in Urdu language and belonged to south East Asian country i.e. Pakistan and had strong affiliation with communism and Marxism, so his popularity is somewhat confined to the readers to his region and language. However, Kirk (2019) regards him an internationalist and accords him a specific place in world literature who is an inspiration to the oppressed all over the world. Singh (2012) positions him as a poet of global stature who addressed the masses through his art and wanted to inspire the oppressed majority to realize their potential and rights and work for their freedom and liberty (p. 212). Although Faiz was essentially a revolutionary poet for his poetry rested on Marxist philosophy but he was also a humanist expressing the sufferings and pains of human beings in his poetry irrespective of the boundaries and nationalistic discourses. Therefore, in his poetry one can find the delineation of pains of human beings across borders i.e. like the pains of the Palestinian people, the Africans, the Syrian and so on. His poems are not infested in the rhetoric of ideologies and philosophical jargon, rather he addresses to human beings in classical mode mixing up with the modern western political ideals focusing on the humanitarian aspects of masses (p. 215).

Shahid (2013) has traced the roots of Faiz’s poetry by suggesting that he was not just a modern poet rather in his poetry there are evident examples of ‘Persio-Arabic, Indo-Persian, and Urdu literary traditions’ which date back to ‘pre capital pre-colonial’ era (p. 215). From the perspectives of looking at his poetry in these traditions elucidate other dimensions rather than just interpreting him a revolutionary poet. Considering him just a political revolutionary poet is an act of reduction which otherwise creates a barrier in enjoying this poet from

aesthetic and classical level. This kind of labeling must thus be avoided while studying this versatile poet. Shahid's (p. 148) foremost concern is thus not to depoliticize Faiz's works but rather to identify and interpret various other layers of poetry which, due to labeling, may remain hidden.

Yet, in his poetry there are also clear and strong effects of imprisonment. Zaidi (2019) argues that imprisonment in fact polished Faiz and made him ponder on the natural world. Therefore, in his poetry there are allusions to nightingale, rose, gazelle, night, stars, and the moon. There is also a strong sense of the concern for others in his poetry. mostly, the poet addresses to his beloved which is either his country or the muse, but there is a strong parallel to the world of nature and the feelings that he shares with his readers coming out of him due to his long experiences of imprisonment. Imprisoned due to Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case in 1951, Faiz Ahmad Faiz produced two volumes of poetry i.e. *Dast-e-Saba* (The Writing of the Wind) and *Zindan Nama* (Prison Journal) in Urdu language whose some poems were translated in English by Kiernan (1971), Farooqi (2017), Daud Kamal and Khalid Hassan (2006), Naomi Lazard (1988), and Sain Sacha (1987).

Bashir (2017) conducted a detailed study in his thesis by comparing the poetry of Neruda, Samih-al-Qasim and Faiz Ahmad Faiz from the perspective of revolution and resistance. He has attempted at concluding that politics is the unavoidable part of art in the contemporary times and this phenomenon cannot be avoided. The poets are important segments of society who cannot miss the ongoing currents of politics in their poetry. Bashir (2017, p. 168) also concluded that the poetry of Faiz has not been given much attention as it should have been and so there is a need to understand it from various perspectives. One such perspective adopted by Bashir is that of understanding the revolutionary strands in his poetry and comparing it with other poets. He has argued that the poetry of Faiz is not only revolutionary but also instigates its readers to prepare and move forward for the revolution and fight for equality and justice in the society. Coppola (1992, p. 154) also comes up with the similar views when he suggests that the struggle against the tyrannous acts is the recurring feature in the poems of both volumes written during the prison by Faiz i.e. *The Hand of the Wind* and *Prison Journal*.

In a letter to his wife, Alys Faiz, Faiz (1985, p. 117) expresses that it is a common experience for the people of Pakistan to be sent to jail. It does not happen with the few rather there are a great number of people who are sent to jail for various reasons in his country. Faiz's prison poetry thus cannot be studied without its context of the prison. The predominant context in Faiz's poetry is his disillusionment with the environment after partition which is like the breaking of the promise made during the partition with the people and raising voice for the fulfillment of that promise makes him revolutionary and a powerful voice of resistance (Genoways, 2004, p. 115). The efforts and struggles within the poetry of Faiz are very much obvious. As an example, Faiz's very popular poem

The Dawn of Freedom could be explicitly read like,
This light, smeared and spotted, this night-bitten dawn
This isn't surely the dawn we waited for so eagerly

This isn't surely the dawn with whose desire cradled in our hearts
We had set out, friends all, hoping
We should somewhere find the final destination
Of the stars in the forests of heaven (Faiz, 1954/2017, p. 40)

It is this very disillusionment with the conditions of the country which is also a source of struggle and effort for Faiz and he resolves to continue with the effort till his last breath. He is ready to sacrifice his life for his beloved country and does not refrain from saying,

Bury me under your streets, O my beloved country,
where today men dare not pass with heads held high,
or where lovers of you who wish to pay tribute,
must fear for their lives and come around on the sly. (Faiz, 1954/2004, p. 115)

Faiz is ready to lay down his life for his beloved country where people fear to raise their heads straight. There are perils of punishment and death. But Faiz assures himself and his readers that he is ready to go to any extreme for the sake of his country and his ideals. These words are not only a solace to him but also a reason to survive in the loneliness of imprisonment (Genoways, 2004, p. 117). Thus at an individual level, a lot has been written about the themes, imagery and lyricism of Faiz Ahmad Faiz with specific reference to his prison poetry but its comparison with Ezra Pound has not been made so far who was also a prison poet and produced a very popular work *The Pisan Cantos* (Pound, 1948) during his prison term.

Elaborating the background of *The Pisan Cantos*, Williams (1949, p. 216) reflects that the cantos 74 to 83 mention the locale and the persons who were detained in Disciplinary Training Center (DTC) near Pisa where he was a guard. Williams (p. 217) explores the lines from the cantos that refer to the inside of the prison environment to express the agony, anguish and pains Pound was going through during his time in DTC from May to October 1945. The reference to Colonel Steele (Canto LXXXVIII, p. 57) with words like "awful", "slaughter", "blood" bespeak of the cruel personality of the person charged to monitor the prisoners of the "death cells" (Canto LXXIV, p. 6). It is the inside narration by a guard that Pound also makes in his cantos that the "gorilla cage" (Canto LXXXIII, p. 111) where he was kept so that the fascists should never be able to rescue Pound from the prison. Such are the horrible images painted by Pound in his cantos and verified by Williams (1949, p. 216-221) when he was serving as guard there.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following the interpretivist research paradigm that suggests that reality is mentally constructed based on society and experiences of the individual. Various individuals may thus have various realities which may be changing from time to time depending upon the nature of individual's social experiences (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This paradigm mostly makes use of qualitative research methods which allow the researchers to delve deep into the works and their meanings. Following this paradigm and qualitative research methodology, the researchers have opted close reading as the most suitable method of analysis

for analysis of the prison poetry of purposely selected poets belonging to various cultures. Couey and James (2018) argue that close reading “is the best way to understand individual poems” (p. 01). The steps of close reading include: selection of poetry, identification of the purpose of close reading, preparation of the text, annotating the text, making text-dependent questions for rereading of the text in a deeper way (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 5). The researchers, in this paper, have also adopted the similar steps to understand and find deeper meanings from the text so that these could be compared and patterns of connections may be explored.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers have explored various patterns of connections between the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Ezra Pound, however, the degree of association with the particular ideas is varying in both of these poets. These patterns of connections are broadly in ideas like movement from personal to political, allusions to history and traditions, subscriptions to poetic traditions, descriptions of prison environment, relationship with the outside world, and philosophical deliberations. The textual analysis of the prison poetry of both the poets suggests that the abovementioned ideas have been expressed in their prison poetry in different ways, yet these are the very points where the poets intersect each other and become one in the universal panorama of literature.

The poem “Bury me Under Your Streets” by Faiz Ahmad Faiz in *Dast-e-Saba* (1954/2004) is an ideal example of moving from personal to political. Stanza one talks about personal devotion to the country (“Bury me under your streets, O my beloved country,” from Stanza 1, Line 1), while second addresses the country (“It is too much for tyranny’s trigger-happy hand,/if your name is invoked even by extremists” stanza 2 line 1-2), and then the third stanza is movement back to the personal (“I live, in short, in the fantasies of nightfall and dawn;/I live in the shadow of walls, in the gate’s closed palm” stanza 2, lines 7-8), and the fifth stanza moves back to the country (“If today our enemies ride high, playing God, so what?” stanza 4, line 5). This movement from personal to political is a salient feature in the prison poetry of Faiz. In another Ghazal from *Zindan Nama*, the movement from personal to political is obvious, confined to the cage, we aren’t all that alone, really the morning breeze of home, every day Arrives scented with memories and departs bright with tears (Faiz, 1954/2017, p. 62)

Imprisoned, the poet relates his personal experiences of recalling his home through the breeze that brings scents. The reference to the breeze is recurrent in the poetry of Faiz that symbolizes the memories of the poet that soothe the poet and are respites in the painful and lonely condition of prison. Pound’s (1948) cantos also bear certain instances of this movement from personal to political as in canto 74, “Oh my England/that free speech without free radio speech is as zero” (p. 03). As a very popular line from his canto, this serves as the personal reference to his condition as well as the political situation in which he is not allowed to exercise his right of freedom of speech. Interestingly, this was the very plea which he adopted while defending his case in front of the jury (Nadel, 2007). It is in canto LXXVII that Pound turns mostly to his personal self-i.e.

through the memory of his college days in Clinton, New York. But, he moves on towards the description of WWII and its end.

Entered the Bros Watson's store In Clinton N Y
preceded by a crash, i.e. by a
huge grip sack or satchel
which fell and skidded along the 2.0 foot aisle-way
and ceased With a rumpus of glassware (Canto 77, p. 41)

Right after this allusion to the personal life, Pound moves on to refer to the political. He says, “and With the enquiry “WOT IZZA COMIN”/I’ll tell you wot izza comin’/Sochy-Illsm IS a--comin”” (Canto 77, p. 41). During those days at college, they have been talking about the coming of socialism and its impacts on the people around the world. Likewise, Cantos LXXX, also contains references to his personal life during his travels to various parts of the world like England, Spain and France. Then he also moves forward with the political and artistic movements that he observed in his travels. Like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Pound also describes his own feelings through nature.

In Faiz, morning breeze and nightfall are some of the most recurrent images but Pound expresses his sentiments and feelings through clouds and birds. For example Pound says that “and the clouds o,er the Pisan meadows/are Indubitably as fine as any to be seen” (Canto 76, p. 35). Cloud seems to be a very important image in the poetry of Pound that the eyes that were “The suave eyes, quiet, not scornful” (Canto 74, p. 2) in the beginning are referred to as cloud “your eyes are like clouds” (Canto 83, p. 104). The movement from personal to political and philosophical is thus recurrent in the poetry of Pound. But it must be noted here that it is not just the shift towards politics as one finds in Faiz, it goes towards philosophical and artistic realms of intellect. Mostly it is towards philosophical notions of Confucianism and discussion of the soul and Love in the universal sense.

Pound’s (1948) cantos are infested in the references to history and traditions. The traditions alluded to Pound are not confined to cultural traditions of the west, rather these references are stretched over various cultures including Greeks, Chinese, Western, and American. Right from Odysseus (Canto 74, p. 02), Zeus (Canto 74, p. 4), sia Cythera, sia Ixotta, sia in Santa Maria dei Miracoli (Canto 74, p. 4), Mt Taishan (Canto 74, p. 5), Salamis (Canto 74, p. 6) till Notre Dame, Giovanni, Gregorio, Treviso, Uncle William, Stone Cottage in Sussex, Madonna, Westminster, and Senator Edward to the end of Canto 83, there are numerous allusions to history and traditions in The Pisan Cantos. Faiz’s ideological effect is derived from Marxism, while his aesthetical effect is due to the “metaphorical edifice of the oriental tradition” (Narang & Bakht, 2009, p. 52). In oriental tradition, the images of the cups and wine represent a state of joy and ecstasy, but coming to the consciousness of Faiz the same imagery is referred to the economic condition, freedom, liberty, and rights. For example in A Morning in the Prison House (Faiz, 1954/2017) Faiz states that “Awake, for the wine of sleep that was your share is shrunk/to the bottom of the wine cup” (p. 53). Here the wine is not that drink, rather it is symbolic that can stand for peace, tranquility, or even rights of people. So the images of the oriental

tradition which are in the sub-conscious of Faiz, as argued by Narang & Bakht (2009), have been modified and reapplied in a different way by Faiz. “Beauty” and “Beloved”, a very important image and adjective in oriental poetry are not only used in a subjective way for the damsel by Faiz, rather these are for the country which is true love of Faiz. For example, the lines by Faiz that “There is no diversion, desolation or hiding,/Which may conceal my beloved from me” (Faiz, 1954/1987, p. 04) refer to the country not any woman because in the context of the poem written in Prison Journal, Faiz reassures himself and his readers that nothing can keep him away from his beloved. The same image has been often repeated in the prison poetry. In another poem, We, Who were Slain in Unlit Pathways from Prison Journal, Faiz uses the image of “beauty” for his country like,

Our suffering was a testimony to your beauty
See, we were faithful to our pledge
We, who were slain in unlit pathways. (Faiz, 1955/1971, p. 201).

There are promises to the beauty and beloved of Faiz and he wants to fulfill his promises till his end. These are the promises that keep him going. In short, the references to history and traditions are somewhat confined and restricted in the prison poetry of Faiz especially to the poetic tradition of oriental literature mostly. One major reason for this could be the medium of writing poetry in Urdu. However, the historical and traditional allusions in the prison poetry of Pound are numerous touching upon various cultures including Greek, Western, American and Chinese.

However, Bush (2010) argues there is more to the Pisan cantos than just the mentioning of the grim details of the detainment camp. There are philosophical allusions that begin from Cavalcanti and Avicenna’s concepts in the cantos and move on to arguing the Chinese and ideas from other cultures (p. 670). The spiritual forms that set the bodies in motion and move the man from inside are allusions to the philosophical realms of intellect which Pound seems to abide by in his cantos. Love thus transforms the intellect and both are infused together to let the poet move forward in his labyrinth of loneliness in prison (p. 694). Yet, Bush (2007) is of the view that there is a lot of involvement of cultural memory in the cantos as it was exclaimed by Dorothy, his wife when she received the first manuscript of the Pisan Cantos. She was compelled to say that it was Pound within the lines describing himself relying on the memory that is coming out of the poet. Although, before the start of the world war II, Pound wanted to delve deep into the philosophical adventures in his cantos, to move into the “intellectual form of Love” (p. 72) and become one with the soul that moves towards an intellect which is universal, but the experiences of prison and war affected much of his philosophical pursuits. Therefore, there is not just philosophy that could be found in the Pisan Cantos which is a continuation of Pound’s cantos from 1930 to 1969 out of which The Pisan Cantos is his poetry written during prison from Cantos 74 to 83. Zhu (2006) tries to evaluate cantos from the perspective of Confucianism which is not a longed-for philosophy by Pound but also a method to join the philosophical ideas presented in The Pisan Cantos (p. 394). Pound’s aspiration for the Golden Mean of Confucius a kind of harmony that is achieved by man when he tries to become a superior man by

attaining the mean, the moderation, the harmony in life to live. Pound finds oneness in the Dao of Confucianism and tries to follow that unity between nature and man. It is on the basis of this principle that the whole text of cantos could be regarded as one-principled text according to Zhu (2006). But that is just one way of looking at Pound's prison poetry. The researchers believe and contend in this paper that there is more to the poetry of Pound, which when brought into comparison with other prison poetry, would yield deeper and detailed understanding of The Pisan Cantos. Therefore, the Bassnett's (1993) concept of comparing literary works has been applied here for better understanding of both the poets.

The environment within the prison is another point of intersection in the prison poetry of both the poets. Two impressive poems by Faiz in *Hand of the Wind* (Dast-e-Saba), *An Evening in the Prison House* and *A Morning in the Prison House*, are ideal examples to explore what Faiz thought of prison life. The images like "signs of sorrow", "grief of distance", "dark surface", "poison-saturated cries of the prison house", "slammed shut", "chain rattled", "a dagger thrust deep into a padlock's heart", and "to strike its head violently over and over again" (Faiz, 1954/2017, p. 54) are a few examples to delineate the environment of prison. Likewise, Pound (1948) has also expressed images that are dark, desolate, violent, lonely, and enforced like iron in the prison. His imagery of prison throughout the cantos is like, "gorilla cage", "smoke hole", "slaughter", "blood", "hoar frost", "boxes", "god-damned", "death cells", "moonlight drill" and so on. There is a subtle difference in the portrayal of the environment of prison by both the poets. When Faiz depicts the disturbing environment of prison, he suddenly lives up with the hope that he would fight and struggle till the end and through his memory of the beloved he gets enlivened. The depression of Pound is very severe and there is very little of hope in his poetry while delineating the environment of prison. The solace for Pound is in the philosophical heaven that he creates through Confucianism. But hopelessness and despair are prevailing in the imagery of Pound as compared to Faiz who sees life through the breeze, while Pound is shrouded under the clouds.

Some is supplied to the secret assemblies of the censors
and some is delivered to the preacher's house
Very little of what should be ours—the rightful share of the true
drinkers—
falls into our wine cups (Faiz, 1954/2017, p. 62)

The wine cups could be interpreted as the symbol that refer to the share of the common man in the society, this couplet of the ghazal is suggestive of the political ideology of Faiz that the lion's share is always snatched by the imposers in the secret gatherings and the religious leaders who have power and pressure in the country while the very less is given to the common people like us. Faiz's philosophical affiliation is confined to Marxism for essentially, he was a poet of the people who was not just a philosopher but also a teacher (Singh, 2012, p. 122), whereas, the philosophical affiliation of Pound is with Chinese Confucianism (Zhu, 2006, p. 394). However, Pound relates to various philosophical ideas in his cantos like politically he is a fascist and

metaphysically and ethically a Confucian. Although he tries to follow the epic style of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but the ideas of Pound are different that seem to strive for unity in the disorderly world.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of the prison poetry of popular poets i.e., Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Ezra Pound suggests that there are various patterns of connections that could be found in their prison poetry. The poets seem to intersect each other in their movement from personal to political, references to history and traditions, delineation of the prison environment, freedom of expression, resistance to the oppressor and relationship with the outside world. But there are also certain points where they depart from each other in areas like different philosophical affiliations, political ideologies, lyricism and aims of writing poetry like Faiz is revolutionary while Pound is philosophic, and they also follow different poetic traditions. The comparison of both the poets enumerates various characteristics of each other which substantiate Bassnett's (1993) concept of comparative literature that comparisons in literary works help in understanding each other. The Zepetnek's (1998) principle of thematic inclusion has also been very helpful in comparing two poets one from the center and the other to be regarded as belonging to the culture of the marginal, for there have been certain similarities which essentially place the so-called marginal poet aligned with the center and hopes to look at literature from around the world in the same footing.

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