

TED GENOWAYS

“Let Them Snuff Out the Moon”: Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s Prison Lyrics in *Dast-e Saba*

“In our society, for a whole lot of people, getting sent to jail is not something out of the ordinary or unexpected, rather it is a part of their lives.”

—Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1985, 117)

AT 6:30 A.M. on March 9, 1951, a group of policemen arrived at the house of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, editor of the liberal *Pakistan Times* and one of the nation’s most prominent poets. Faiz’s wife Alys woke to the sound of loud voices repeatedly calling her husband’s name. “I crossed the verandah, and looked down over the parapet into the garden below,” she wrote later. “I could see armed police—plenty of them—they had surrounded the house” (Faiz, Alys 1993, 133–4). The elections for the Punjab Assembly were scheduled for the next day, and Faiz told Alys that he suspected the police only intended to detain him long enough to assure his silence until after the elections. Before he could tell her anything more, the men pried open the doors and the upper courtyard of the house was suddenly filled with policemen, “their rifles at the ready” (*ibid.*, 134).

The officers did not know the exact charges but insisted that Faiz come with them. He refused to leave until he could consult with Mazhar Ali Khan, his colleague at the *Pakistan Times*. By the time Khan arrived at the house, a warrant had been produced for “[i]ndefinite detention without trial under the Bengal Regulations of 1818” (*ibid.*)—an outdated law created by the British to hold anti-government elements. Khan assured Faiz that this was merely a short-term election detention and that he should go quietly. After he was allowed to gather bed linens and a few

clothes, Faiz was loaded into a jeep and taken to Sargodha jail, but the superintendent of the all-women's prison had not been informed of Faiz's arrival.

While the superintendent was on the phone trying to straighten out the matter, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan came on the radio with an important announcement. He said that a conspiracy to overthrow the government had been uncovered and the leaders of this intended coup arrested. They were identified as Major General Akbar Khan, Chief of General Staff; his wife Nasim Akbar Khan; Brigadier Muhammed Abdul Latif Khan, Commander 52nd Brigade and Station Commander Quetta; and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. In his statement, the Prime Minister declined to "disclose publicly the details of the plans of those who were implicated in the conspiracy," citing national security concerns, but he asserted that they had intended to use "violent means" to disrupt "the stability of Pakistan" (Zaheer 1998, 1, 13; Faiz, Alys 1993, 148).

The news must have come as a shock. Faiz's political leanings were no secret, but he was no revolutionary. If anything, his politics were fiercely unpredictable—seemingly guided only by his personal convictions. He had tested his poetry readers in undivided India in 1943 by openly criticizing Gandhi in the poem "To a Political Leader," but when Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, Faiz risked the scrutiny of the Pakistani government by traveling to India to attend the funeral. He consistently supported leftist causes, but refused to join the Communist Party. He took high-profile positions as the vice president of the Trade Union Federation of Pakistan and as secretary of the Pakistan Peace Committee, but remained close with many of the country's top military leaders, with whom he had become friends when he served in the Moral Welfare Directorate of the Indian army during World War II.

Faiz had been the new nation's most visible writer, as both poet and journalist, in the years following the 1947 Partition of British India into India and Pakistan, and he had initially supported his new nation as described by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah. However, after witnessing the communal violence in Punjab during the Partition, the assassinations or mysterious deaths of the leaders who led Pakistan to independence, the corruption and social intolerance of the new government under Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, and the tyrannical rule of the police in Punjab, Faiz's early enthusiasm for the possibilities of a Muslim state quickly faded. He assumed the editorship of the *Pakistan Times* in 1947, where, V. G. Kiernan writes, he "made use of prose as well as verse to denounce obstruction at home and to champion progressive

causes abroad; he made his paper one whose opinions were known and quoted far and wide” (Kiernan 1971, 24). Until that very morning, however, Faiz had considered himself immune from government oppression.

The prison superintendent finally found a cell in solitary confinement for Faiz and ordered him away. For the first time, Faiz realized he would be tried for conspiracy to overthrow the government. By the next day, the *London Times* would characterize him as one of “the most dangerous and influential leftist figures in Pakistan” (March 10, 1951). Over the next two years he would face trial before a secret tribunal that held the power to condemn him to death before a firing squad; he would also compose the remarkable poems of his second book, *Dast-e Šabā* [Fingers of the Wind].

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In coining—or at least popularizing—the term “poetry of witness,” Carolyn Forché acknowledged that this new way of categorizing poetry “presents the reader with an interesting interpretive problem” (1993, 31). Twentieth-century poetry of witness resisted the traditional division of “personal” and “political” poetry by forging a new style that wedded the two, reclaiming the right of subjective points of view to speak in opposition to the unified voice of society or the imposed voice of those in power. By the very act of opposing, however, the poet of witness enters into a dialogue, overt or covert, with his oppressor, and thus the language (the style, the form, even the imagery) of the poem is partly dictated by the conditions under which the work is written. As poet Gregory Orr writes in the introduction to *Poetry as Survival*:

Human culture “invented” or evolved the personal lyric as a means of helping individuals survive the existential crises represented by extremities of subjectivity and also by such outer circumstances as poverty, suffering, pain, illness, violence, or loss of a loved one. This survival begins when we “translate” our crises into language—where we give it symbolic expression as an unfolding drama of self and the forces that assail it. This same poem also arrays the ordering powers our shaping imagination has brought to bear on these disorderings. Thus the poem we compose (or respond to as readers) still accurately mirrors the life crisis it dramatizes, still displays life’s interplay of disorder and order.

(2002, 4)

The conundrum is that the crisis reflected in lyric poetry takes a necessarily individuated form—the very distinguishing feature of the lyric—thus complicating the task of determining overtly the crisis it represents. If, however, as Orr suggests, the lyric “still displays life’s interplay of disorder and order,” then it must not only be possible but imperative to read the lyric poem in light of the context of its production.

In his seminal essay, “Lyric Poetry and Society,” Theodor W. Adorno contends that this is especially important because the content of lyric poetry is “essentially social in nature” (1974, 57). The use of private imagery and individual expression is paradoxically what distances and binds the reader to the poet by showing that the unknowability of each individual is perhaps the most singular trait we share. This interplay refuses what Adorno calls “vague feelings of universality and inclusiveness” (*ibid.*); the poet beckons us to bridge the human divide by filling in context and historical background on our own, bringing the poem back to the instant of its creation. Adorno writes:

Such a precisely specifying cast of thought is not at odds with art and does not add merely external commentary—it is in fact required by every linguistic creation. A poem’s indigenous material, its patterns and ideas, cannot be exhausted through mere static contemplation.

(ibid.)

In the case of poetry of witness, such historicized readings become even more important as the “indigenous material” may not be entirely of the poet’s choosing. Because it speaks in opposition to other voices, the lyric of witness is not the voice of the poet alone but the voice of the poet in dialogue. As such, Forché writes, “... it will take many forms. It will be impassioned or ironic. It will speak in the language of the common man or in an esoteric language of paradox or literary privilege. It will curse and it will bless...” (Forché, 1993, 46).

Furthermore, in the case of prison writings, the context of a poem’s production is inseparable from its content and thus crucial to its interpretation, as material demands placed on the poet often determine defining features of the work. Miguel Hernández’s famous poem “Lullaby of the Onion,” for example, cannot be reasonably understood without the biographical information that he was imprisoned at the time and had learned that his wife had only bread and onions to eat, souring her breast milk and giving their newborn child colic. Without this information, these lines would be inscrutable: “Fly, child, on the double moon / of her

breast; / though saddened by onions, / be satisfied.” So essential, in fact, is this external context that nearly every edition that includes the poem—in Spanish or in translation—features the headnote provided by Hernández’s first editor.¹

As significant as the imposed imagery of prison life are the quotidian material demands of writing under such circumstances. One could not offer a full, legitimate interpretation of the dense, crystalline gulag short stories of Russian writer Dmitry Stonov without knowing that he was denied writing materials and was forced to use a contraband pencil nub to compose his stories in a miniature script on the inside of his unrolled cigarette papers. Is it any wonder that, in contrast to the great Russian epics of the period, Stonov’s stories are highly distilled vignettes?²

Likewise, when Faiz was confined to solitary, his pen and paper confiscated, he composed *qitʿas*—a four-line rhymed form that he could memorize and recite. Later when he could commit his poems to paper, Faiz’s writings that were sent outside the confines of the prison walls were subject to rigorous censorship. Thus he was forced to develop a covert system of images and metaphors, often drawn from the traditional forms of Persian and Urdu poetry, that would seem harmless to the unthinking eyes of the censors.

On March 12, 1984, less than six months before he died, Faiz revealed something of this private cosmology when he addressed the Asian Study Group at the British Council in Lahore. The left-leaning newspaper the *Dawn* reported that although he was “ostensibly lecturing on the cultural and social background of the classical ghazal and the evolution of contemporary Urdu literary movements,” Faiz instead seemed to be laying out “a discourse on the subtle art of evading censorship.” In the lecture, Faiz contended that

an entire range of symbols evoked in the Urdu ghazal have transcended successive historical periods, each time acquiring new meanings to reflect changing political, economic and social realities. Faiz then demonstrated why traditional symbols like chaman (garden), sanam (idol), sayyaad (captor) and qafas (prison) are valid today and how they can be used as a means of escaping censorship. He said that when a poet speaks of ehd-i-

¹For Hernández’s poetry see, Genoways 2001.

²For Stonov’s short stories see, Stonov and Darrell 1995.

junoon (period of obsession) or chaman ki udasi (sorrow of the garden) he or she is actually referring to oppression and injustice.³

Thus, the poet has left a partial key to unlocking the complicated imagery of his most lyric poems.

As Aamir Mufti suggests, however, the images in Faiz's prison poetry must not be interpreted as representative—and thus universalized—lyrics about the condition of incarceration. They must instead be read in the context of their particular historical moment of production as exemplars of

some of the central dilemmas of Urdu writing in the aftermath of the Partition of India at the moment of independence from British rule. [Faiz's poetry] represents a profound attempt to unhitch literary production from the cultural projects of either postcolonial state in order to make visible meanings that have still not been entirely reified and subsumed within the cultural logic of the nation-state system.

(1997, 183–4)

Furthermore, by publishing the poems in *Dast-e Šabā* in the rough order of their composition, Faiz invites us to read the psychological evolution of his productions as they relate and respond to the shifting conditions of the nation-state system they oppose.

His earliest poems in *Dast-e Šabā* may be categorized loosely as poems of defiance, followed by a middle period of remembrance, and finally a time of loneliness and despair. Careful historical examination of the events shaping the composition of these poems provides much insight into this progression as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy trial dragged on for nearly two years and the likelihood of Faiz's conviction became increasingly certain. These events, however, do not fully define the poems, and it is equally fascinating to read the unfolding argument of Faiz's work as he develops a system of setting the true country of Pakistan—the nation promised by Jinnah before Partition—in opposition to the realized totalitarian nation-state. Thus, his poems occupy the singular space of a lyric that does not speak for the subjugated one against the oppressive many, but rather for the many ruled against the ruling few.

³“How a Poet Escapes Censorship,” *Dawn*, March 13, 1984 <<http://dawn.com/events/Mughal/1984.htm>>.

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For the first three months of his imprisonment, while he awaited trial, Faiz was held in solitary confinement at Sargodha then later at Lyallpur. No visitors were allowed, and he was denied all reading and writing materials. To pass the time, Faiz would recite poems he had committed to memory by Ghālib or Iqbal. Sometimes he would listen to the stories of the man in the adjacent cell, who would spin tales of genies, demons, fairies, and saints. The only poems he composed during this period were *qit'as*—a form he could memorize or (according to his fellow inmates) scrawl with chunks of coal on the walls of his cell. Not surprisingly, these brief poems fluctuate between pure defiance and extreme loneliness. The best known of these is also the poem that Faiz claimed as his first prison composition:

Why should I mourn if my tablet and pen
are forbidden,
when I have dipped my fingers in my own
blood until they stain?
My lips have been silenced, but what of it?
For I have hidden
a tongue in every round-mouthed link of
my chain.⁴

Bravado, however, would frequently give way to longing. In another poem of this period, Faiz addresses an unnamed, absent lover. By this time, he already advocated the use of stock imagery from Persian love poetry as a way of averting the temporal—an idea fully-realized later in a poem titled “Any Lover to Any Belovèd.” Nevertheless, it is hard not to believe that Faiz had his wife, from whom he was not only separated but held incommunicado, specifically in mind when he wrote:

Of the long days when I knew you could
not come,

⁴All translations are my own, based on the literal translations available in V.G. Kiernan’s text and literary translations by Kiernan, Agha Shahid Ali, Shiv K. Kumar, and Naomi Lazard.

don't ask if I thought of you or missed you
 very much.
 Your memory alone fills the wellspring of
 my mind
 but it is not the same as your lips, your
 arms, your touch.

Even here, the imprisoned lover instructs his beloved not to ask of his longing, because—he implies—he refuses to long for her on the days when he knows that she is impossibly separated from him, and thinking of her only reminds him of his forced isolation. Thus, even in the love poems of this period, Faiz's righteous defiance pervades.

Alys, however, left to care for their two daughters, could not afford to fly in the face of officials. Rumors and conflicting accounts of Faiz's mistreatment inside the prison were excruciating, but she had to continue to have faith in his safety and work through channels to arrange a visit. "Those who came to see us brought tales of horror," she later remembered. "He was being tortured, he was on a lie detector, he had gone out of his mind" (Faiz, Alys 1993, 48).

There was good reason to fear. On April 28 the government announced that the Parliament in a secret session had passed the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Act of 1951, appointing a Special Tribunal to try the conspirators. The act declared that the trial would be held outside of Pakistan's usual legal system, and, as such, several special provisions were included, stipulating that: 1) convictions would be determined by the government-appointed Tribunal, not by a jury; 2) the Tribunal would have the power to convict the accused of crimes not included in the list of charges, and all statutes of limitation on previous crimes were repealed; 3) the proceedings would be closed to the public, and the accused would be forbidden to speak to anyone but their counsel or face prosecution under the Official Secrets Act of 1923; and 4) the convictions of the Special Tribunal would be exempt from appeal or future revision and could only be overturned by pardon or reprieve from the Governor-General.⁵

In late May, Alys was at last permitted to see Faiz at Lyallpur, where he was still being held in solitary confinement:

He looked well, pale but cheerful, but was distressed at the sight of me.
 You are thin, pale. Remember I depend upon you now, be of good cheer

⁵Zaheer (1998) reprints the entire Act, 305–9.

and courage—we have a battle to fight. The girls clung to him. We said goodbye and the long trial began.

(Faiz, Alys 1993, 49)

On June 4, all those accused under the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Act were officially charged, boarded onto a specially commissioned train under armed guard, and then transferred to the Hyderabad jail. The walls of the prison were raised higher in preparation for their arrival. Additional police were hired to guard the jail. All gates were electrified. But when Faiz wrote to Alys on June 7, he made it sound as if they were honored guests.

How grandly we traveled! We had everything—the only thing missing was a brass band! The moment we boarded the train it felt as if all our troubles had vanished. The joy of travelling, the pleasure of seeing the world again, the elegant meal—so many delightful things happened to us all at once. For the first time since that distant day when they suddenly took me away from home, we had a really delicious meal—roast chicken, pulao, fruit cocktail, and ice cream. (Unfortunately, I didn't have an appetite.) But the best thing of all was to have some human company—the most cherished thing in the world—something we had been denied for so long...

Our home in the jail is not bad. We have enough to eat. It doesn't get too hot either. Anyway, the worst days are over. Whatever else may happen, I need not fear being put into solitary confinement again. Nor is there any reason to fear further interrogation by the police. My life and my self-respect are intact. Now I can put before me your picture—and the children's—and smile. My heart no longer aches thinking of you the way it used to. I am now more than ever convinced that in spite of everything life is wonderful—and also very lovely.

(Faiz 1985, 118)

This ebullience appears to have been real. Among those brought to Hyderabad with Faiz was Major Muhammad Ishaque, an old friend, who had been arrested on April 27. He later remembered being “relieved” when he saw Faiz for the first time in jail, after months of “rumours and strange agonizing stories” about the brutal treatment he was receiving at the hands of the police. “He had the same smiling face and the same glitter in his eyes,” Ishaque wrote. “Around him was the same aura of the smiling Buddha and all-embracing love which is so familiar to all those who know him” (Ishaque 1989, 44).

For a brief time, this joy of “human company” brought a spark of creativity. On June 14 Faiz wrote to Alys, “I have just finished my sixth poem after being arrested. That means I have written twice as much in the past three months as I had written in the previous three years” (1985, 119). But soon inspiration was subsumed by constant talk of the upcoming tribunal, meeting with lawyers, preparing for a defense. “[It] becomes hard to engage in quiet reflection,” he told Alys. “Besides, we are now busy preparing for the trial and there is little free time available” (*ibid.*). Once the trial began, however, Faiz’s attention returned unexpectedly to his poetry. “Human mind works so strangely!” he wrote to Alys on June 24:

For the past three months my mind constantly worried about this case. But now that the case has started, I feel not the slightest interest in its proceedings. Again and again I remind myself that it’s a very grave matter and that one should take it quite seriously. But my heart remains unaffected. It all appears like an unreal and totally silly play which will one day come to an end as suddenly, and without reason, as it started. Like my arrest and imprisonment, this case too has no cause or justification.

(ibid.)

Soon after the official commencement of the trial, Alys was notified that she could come to Hyderabad for her first visit, but before she could start out she received a telegram from Faiz saying only, “Don’t come yet.” Inside the prison, the accused men had been told that they could only see their families through an iron grate. The prisoners refused to leave their cells to attend the trial. After a brief standoff and interruption of the proceedings, the prisoners were allowed to see their families in locked meeting rooms monitored by two armed guards. All conversations would be transcribed (Faiz, Alys 1993, 50).

When Alys at last received word to come, she crossed the Sindh desert alone in the middle of summer in the crushing heat of a second-class railcar until she arrived at last at the station and was taken to the jail gates.

So this was Hyderabad and these were the grey prison walls, and here in the compound was the whipping post. I was to grow to know it all so well. The dreary Dak bungalow, where the lawyers stayed and where food was cooked for us on payment. The cool desert breeze after nightfall. The Victoria carriage which would take me to the jail gates. The sound of the bolts being drawn, the small door through which I entered. The Superin-

tendent's room, the arrival of the CID officers. The arrival of Prisoner No. 13. Can't you change your number? Make it 12B? Faiz laughed, and asked what difference a number made. It hardly did.

(*ibid.*, 51)

After the first visit from Alys—with its mix of joy and longing—Faiz composed this ghazal of self-encouragement:

When time starts to heal memory's
scars,
I make excuses to think of you for
hours.

When the words of my beloved break
into flower,
every woman begins to brush out her
hair.

When I walk down your street, even
now,
I see old friends in place of where
strangers are.

When exiles whisper of their homelands
to the wind,
tears fill the eyes of the morning hours.

When our lips are sewn closed,
the air rings still louder with these songs
of ours.

When prison doors lock me behind
night's bars,
inside my heart, O Faiz, it is bright
with stars.

This poem is written in the strictly formal style of the Persian ghazal, attending to all the requirements of the form: the parallel structure (which translates as anaphora, though the reflexive structure of Urdu arranges those repetitions at the end of each couplet in the original), a rhyme introduced at the end of each of the first four lines and repeated at

the end of each following couplet, and use of the poet's name in the final couplet. Other more stylistic conventions are also followed; the second line of each couplet complicates or contradicts the first line, and each individual couplet could potentially stand apart as its own poem.

Choosing this form, Faiz allies himself with a form that extends back to the seventh century. Hundreds of Persian poets—Ḥāfiẓ and Rūmī best known among them—wrote in this form from 1100 to 1500; its dominance as the major mode of love poetry in the region could be likened to the preponderance of love sonnets in English for the two hundred years following. Predominantly used for love poetry or for spiritual contemplation reached by drinking wine, the form is nevertheless almost always melancholy. The very name derives from what Kashmiri poet and Faiz translator Agha Shahid Ali called “the cry of the gazelle when it is cornered in a hunt and knows it will die” (Ali 2000, 3). Aside from its topical history, the form also encourages grand associative leaps from one couplet to the next—a style that Ralph Waldo Emerson famously complained was like the unstrung beads of a necklace, but which Ali called “ravishing disunities,” adding that despite their apparent disparity, “there is a cultural unity—created by the audience's shared assumptions and expectations. There is a contrapuntal air” (see Padgett 1987, 87; Ali, 5).

These shared assumptions create the specific context in which the poem is written; thus, it must be remembered that the poems of this period were written for three defined audiences: his fellow inmates, his friends and family on the outside, and the general readership of Pakistan. These audiences were not only aware of the long history that Faiz was writing in, but also the social moment he was describing. As such, the lyric gesture in these poems is not an expression of isolation, so much as recognition of a degree of intimacy beyond the need for exposition or even narrative.

Though it may seem hard to believe, prison officials at Hyderabad allowed Faiz to give readings to his fellow inmates twice a month. Muhammad Ishaque, who lived in the cell next to Faiz's, was entrusted with bringing the poet's notebooks to each reading, a charge he carried out with great pomp and mock pageantry:

When the other companions saw us walking in a procession, a wave of happiness used to spread all round. This was because in jail, the occasion of the recital of Faiz's fresh poetry was tantamount to a festival. Then we walked in a style that provided a humourous occasion for merriment. Faiz Sahib sauntering smilingly, anxiously and coyly trudging along and I, like

a formidable villager, stiff necked, with my nose high up in the air, looking over the heads of others, proved quite a sight. Not until Faiz Sahib was seated and had been presented the book of verses with due decorum, did I relax or smile.

(Ishaque 1989, 47)

These sessions may have begun with great humor, but the seriousness of Faiz's verses soon shifted the tone. Poem's like "The Execution Yard (A Song)" were clearly intended to stoke the political fires of his fellow inmates:

Where the road of longing leads us, we will see tomorrow.
 This night will pass, and this too we will see tomorrow.
 Don't fear, my heart; we will see day's shining face tomorrow.
 Let the drinker's thirst for wine slowly sharpen:
 we will see how long they deny the fierce grapevine tomorrow;
 we will see how long they refuse the cup and flask tomorrow.
 Let the summons come to the assembly from the Street of Scorn:
 we will see who is stopped by idle threats tomorrow;
 we will see who is strong enough to return tomorrow.
 Today men of heart go to test their spirits and their faith:
 let them bring an army of enemies, we will meet them tomorrow;
 let them come to the execution yard, we will join the spectacle tomorrow.
 No matter how heavy this last hour may seem, my friend:
 we will see the light hidden tonight shine brightly tomorrow;
 we will see the morning-star sparkle as today edges into tomorrow.

Though it may seem remarkable that guards allowed such poems to be read, Faiz was able to avoid repercussions by the use of certain stock images from Persian and Urdu poetry.

In "The Execution Yard," the familiar character of the drinker is positioned as the central figure of the poem, though he can clearly be read as the accused inmates. Likewise, calling for a summons "to the assembly from the Street of Scorn" would appear to be a direct appeal for the people of Pakistan to revolt against the General Assembly, but, in fact, "the assembly" and the "Street of Scorn" are familiar tropes in Urdu poetry. As V. G. Kiernan writes:

So much of the spirit and tone of Urdu poetry derives from Persian tradition that this ancestry must often be kept in mind, even when a poet like Faiz is alluding to quite contemporary matters. Verse forms and metres, besides diction, have helped to preserve continuity; and, still more strikingly, a common stock of imagery, which can be varied and recomposed inexhaustibly.

(1971, 32)

Thus, the poem's tropes are predicated on a scheme of acknowledged fictions which Faiz then works to reshape into a new but still recognizable context. The assembly, familiar to readers as the fictive circle to which all poem's are recited, can double for the direct reference to the General Assembly. "The poet's world," writes Kiernan, "is an imaginary city ... [and] in this city there is always a 'Ku-e malamāt,' or 'Street of Reproach'" (*ibid.*, 34), which in earlier times referred to the wrong side of town where the prostitutes and dancers and poets lived, but which could be read more literally as the restless streets of Pakistan.

So effective was this subversion, that the censors permitted Alys to carry copies with her from Hyderabad, always with "the pompous rubber stamp, 'Passed by the Censor, Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case Tribunal,' then the Registrar's signature, plus the date" (Faiz, Alys 1993, 45). When she returned, friends gathered to hear news of Faiz's well-being and listen to his latest poems. Alys remembered, that "poems were copied as they came, and it was obvious to all that this was to prove the richest period in Faiz's poetry. Magazines vied for the poems, and they were bargained for, couplets were on everyone's lips" (*ibid.*, 52). Though the rhetoric heated up within the sealed courtroom, Faiz grew increasingly serene. He joked with Alys on July 2:

I sometimes fear I might turn into a saint by the time I get out of the jail. Nothing bothers me. All the lies, the deceits, the false accusations which used to bother me so much in the past—now when I think of them I only laugh. In fact, in a way, I find delight in them. . . . These days, after the evening meal, I teach my friends Ghalib's poetry. I find it very enjoyable. I don't mean to boast but I think I'm a very good teacher. I should never have left the job at the college and joined the army. Well, I'm now resolved that when this stupid case is all over, I shall only read and write.

(1985, 120-1)

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Though he often felt the urge to write during those first days of his confinement, it had been impossible for Faiz to preserve the poetry that came to him. Now he was able to record his memories of the experience in longer, more complex poems written in alternating rhymes, such as those in “Ghazal”:

Among the sun’s cooling embers, the evening star turns to cinder.
 Night unfurls its curtain, cloistering the devout.
 Will no one shout in defiance?—nearly a lifetime has passed,
 since heaven ordered the caravan of day and night driven out.
 To quell memories of friends and shared wine,
 they outlaw the moon by night and disallow the day its clouds.
 But the morning breeze comes again tapping the prison door:
Dawn is breaking—tell your heart not to doubt.

(1954, 49)

Such poems show his growing mastery and manipulation of the stock imagery of the evening star, wine drinkers, and the prison door. Faiz found prison life to be “a fundamental experience” (1989, 29), which had the unexpected effect of focusing and concentrating his talents—an experience he later likened to being in love:

The first thing is that, like the dawn of love, all the sensations are again aroused and the mistiness of the early morning and evening, the blue of the sky, the gentleness of the breeze return with the same sense of wonder. And the second thing that happens is that the time and distances of the outside world are negated; the sense of distance and nearness is obliterated in such a way that a single moment weighs on the mind like the day of judgement and sometime [*sic*] the occurrences of a century seem to be like the happenings of yesterday. The third thing is that in the vastness of separation, one gets more time for reading and thinking and for decorating the bride of creativity.

(ibid.)

The trial, however, would prove grueling. The accused were forced to spend “hours of sitting as prisoners on our haunches before the Special Tribunal,” Syed Sajjad Zaheer later remembered, “hearing the statements

of the witnesses, the arguments of the lawyers, and the legal hair-splittings of the learned judges” (1989, 41). All the time they were aware of the Prime Minister’s growing desire to see them executed; in their rallies, in government pamphlets, and in editorials run under banner headlines in special issues of newspapers, the men Ishaque called “the toadies of the government” were “demanding ... our death by a firing squad” (Ishaque 1989, 45).

In mid-July, Faiz’s brother Tufail came with his wife Sarwar and their two daughters to visit him at Hyderabad. Tufail had been unwell but was desperate to see his brother. The arduous journey by train across the desert, however, had taken its toll; on the morning of July 18, while still in the city, Tufail suffered a fatal heart attack during his morning prayers. A call came to the *Pakistan Times*, and Mazhar, Faiz’s replacement there as editor, was forced to tell Alys the news that Tufail had died from “heart-break” (Faiz, Alys 1993, 55). By all accounts, Faiz was never again completely lighthearted, and Ishaque believed that Tufail’s death was the reason “that in the latter part of *Dast-e Šabā*, there is no such abundance of passion and zest, which is found in the first part” (Ishaque 1989, 50).

Instead the poems of the middle period turn more toward poems of sorrow and remembrance. No longer defiant, poems such as “These Days of Manacle and Stake” employ a different rhetorical strategy though they share formal similarities to the earlier poetry:

These days of waiting lie down every path.
 These days of spring are not really the days of spring.
 These days of praying for bread weigh on my heart.
 These days of suffering test the beloved’s beauty.
 Bless the moment that brings a dear friend’s face to mind;
 these days quiet the disquieted heart.
 When there is no wine, no one to share it, what use
 these days of watching clouds move over the mountain?
 If no friends are allowed, what good
 these days when shadows dance among the cypress and chenar-trees?
 The scars of my heart ached like this long ago, but now
 these days away from friends are something different.
 These days are days of ecstasy now, of manacle and stake now.
 These days are days of free will now, of coercion now.
 The cage is under your command, but you do not command
 these days when the garden brightens into rose-fire.
 No trap can stop the dervish of morning breezes.

These days of spring can't be made prisoner by a snare.
 No matter that I can't see it myself. Others will see
 these days of the brilliant garden and the singing nightingale.

The poet no longer challenges his oppressors, as he did in “The Execution Yard,” to “bring an army of enemies, we will meet them tomorrow.” The insistence of personal freedom has devolved now to asserting the dominion of nature over the dictates of petty rulers. Faiz concedes now that “the cage is under your command” and that the August days of spring would arrive and pass without him.

Then on 16 October 1951, the unexpected occurred. Just as Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was expected to make an important announcement before a large crowd gathered at the Municipal Park in Rawalpindi, he was assassinated by Saad Akbar. The assassin was immediately riddled with bullets by the Prime Minister's bodyguards, leading to speculation that his guards were party to the murder. Many suspected that Khan's Deputy Prime Minister Khawaja Nazimuddin, who quickly stepped in to fill Khan's post, had ordered the assassination.

There was brief hope that Khan's death could be an opportunity to halt the conspiracy trial. Progressives within Pakistan and around the world—including Paul Robeson and Howard Fast in the United States—sent letters to Nazimuddin to appeal for Faiz's release. Instead, scrutiny was stepped up in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy; the fact that the murder took place in Rawalpindi, after all, only seemed to confirm their guilt. On October 28, the day of their tenth wedding anniversary, Alys wrote to Faiz to tell him that she was under constant surveillance:

The general public censures the CID and the police very strongly for Liaquat's death and they in their turn circulate all kind of rumours which no one of course believes. In the normal way, upon my return, the “guests” are at the gate. Sitting two at a time, sometimes even three—and yet they couldn't save Liaquat!

(Faiz 1985, 122)

Faiz sank deeper into despair, but once again he turned—through his poetry—to remembrances of the past, rather than events of the day. Most famously, he composed that summer a poem that would come to symbolize Pakistan's long struggle for independence and true self-rule. “The Dawn of Freedom (August 1947)” turns back to the moment of Partition and with knowledge of recent events asks whether the “severing” of Partition was the solution to Muslim problems after all:

This leprous daybreak, this night-bitten dawn,
 this is not the dawn we awaited with longing sighs;
 this is not the dawn that drew our friends on
 believing that, somewhere in the desert of these skies,
 they would find the resting-place of the stars,
 somewhere find where night's sluggish tides reach shore,
 somewhere find the boat of heartache and drop anchor.

When we friends set out by the secret byways of youth
 how many hands bid us stay, pulling at our hems!
 From eager bedchambers in the palace of truth,
 sweet arms kept crying out, flesh calling us to come;
 but dearer was the seductive face of daylight,
 dearer still her robe aglow with sprites:
 my longing seemed to buoy me, my weariness grew light.
 It is said that the division of day from night is done,
 it is said our goals are realized and unflawed;
 but only the ways of our hurtful leaders are new-sprung,
 collective joy decreed, the anguish of separation outlawed.

The fire in our livers, the burning in our hearts, the riots in our
 eyes—
 this severing cannot cure any of these.
 When did that dear morning wind arrive—and must it go yet?
 The lamps on these byroads have not felt its breeze;
 no one has come to lighten this night's heavy load yet,
 our heart's inheritance has not been bestowed yet.
 Come with me, come, our goal lies down the road yet.

Though clearly the most overtly political and direct poem of Faiz's prison years, "The Dawn of Freedom" still relies on a number of stock metaphors, most significantly *hijr*—translated here as "the anguish of separation." As Aamir Mufti eloquently argues:

the desire for justice, the steadfastness in face of suffering and oppression, and the belief in a new dawn, are complicated by the "partitioned" nature of the collective subject. In other words, the significance for me of Faiz's repeated use of *hijr* and of its derivatives is that it imbues the lyric experience of separation from the beloved with a concrete historical meaning—the parting of ways or leave-taking that is Partition.

(1997, 202)

This notion begins to surface even in Faiz's letters during this period. Responding to Alys's anniversary letter, he wrote her on October 30:

You have mentioned how alone you are. I know how hard it must be for you. How heavy must be these hours of separation. One can't wipe them off one's mind. But one can certainly lessen the pain by recalling how good were the days that are gone—and how good will be the days that shall come. At least, that's what I do. Since the day the gate of the jail was locked shut after me, I sometimes unravel the past to its very warp and woof. Then weave it together again in diverse manners. At other times, I try to catch the coming days in my imagination—then design with them all sorts of futures. It's a useless pastime—that I know. Dreams can never be set free from the chain of the realities. But at least for a short while one can use one's imagination to lift oneself out of the surrounding mire. Escapism is bad, but when one's hands and feet are tied down it's the only way to freedom. Thanks to such thoughts I now find the bars of the prison insignificant and illusory. Very often I don't even think of them.

(Faiz 1985, 122–3)

*

This conflation of the beloved with the beloved country—through the conventional theme of *hijr*—allowed Faiz to take his familiar imagery to new heights. If the true country of Pakistan, “the dawn we awaited with longing sighs,” has not yet arrived, then he may address his nation with the same sense of longing he feels for his absent wife. This union of the personal and political is most manifest in the poem “Two Loves,” which begins with the extremely conventional gesture of addressing Saqi, the wine-bearing muse of Persian poetry, in exclamatory declarations of love, before revealing midway the poem's central conceit:

I

Oh rose-like Saqi, fresh yet in my memory
 are those days whose bright mirror still vibrates with her;
 those moments we met, like an opening flower,
 the moments, like fluttering heartbeats, I waited for her—
 Lo!—hope, roused by the sad heart's good luck;
 lo!—that love's night of heartache had come to end;
 lo!—that those sleepless stars of sorrow were sinking,

that promised joy so long dormant had awakened.

From this rooftop the sun of your beauty will rise,
 from that corner its rays red as henna will dawn,
 from this doorway your steps like quicksilver will flow,
 by that pathway your twilit dress will blossom!
 Fevered days too have I known, separation's pangs,
 when lament was forgotten in the soul's sorrow,
 each night's dark load so heavy, the heart was crushed,
 each morning's flame piercing it like an arrow.

In solitude, how could I keep from thinking of you?
 What refuges did my sad heart not seek?
 Sometimes I felt the hand of the morning-breeze on my brow,
 sometimes I put my arms around the moon's neck.

II

In this same way I have loved my darling country;
 in this same way my heart has pounded with devotion to her;
 in this same way my passion has sought the respite of a resting-place,
 in the curve of her cheek, in the curls of her hair.

In this same way, to that sweetheart world, my heart and eyes
 have called out with laughter, cried out with tears.
 All the demands of her summons I have fulfilled;
 I made light every pain and calmed every fear.
 No bidding toward ecstasy ever went unheeded,
 never did the bell's echo return to the tower alone.
 The heart's ease, creature comforts, a station in life,
 all the connivers shrewd advice, forgotten.

What befalls all travelers on that road befell me,
 a solitary prison cell, my name ridiculed in the market;
 self-anointed holy men from their pulpits thundered,
 dictators roared from their seats of power.
 No treacherous arrows were spared me by strangers,
 no scorn was omitted by those most esteemed,
 but my heart feels shame neither for this love nor that love;
 there is every scar on this heart but the scar of shame.

By using only loose rhyme and discarding the incantatory traditional forms he had previously favored, Faiz places the emphasis firmly on his subject matter—the division of the lover from the beloved in section one and the division of the beloved country in section two. The poem is not only literally partitioned into halves, but the middle octave is cleft for the dramatic effect of interrupting the lover at the height of his fervor—asking “What refuges did my sad heart not seek?”—in order to insert: “In this same way I have loved my darling country; / in this same way my heart has pounded with devotion to her.” The insistent repetition of “in this same way” conjures the ghazal, but in this case the parallel structure is used to emphasize the thematic similarities of the two halves of the poem. As the poem closes, Faiz returns to the defiant stance of his earliest prison poems, claiming that though he is confined to “a solitary prison cell, my name ridiculed in the market,” his heart “feels shame neither for this love nor that love”—meaning the love of his wife nor the love of his unrealized dream for post-Partition Pakistan.

The late poems of *Dast-e Šabā*, composed in the first nine months of 1952, thus, become its most fully realized. Relying less on traditional structures and predetermined rhetorical turns, the poems aspire to more imagistic inventiveness and are, at times, strikingly unpredictable, as in the poem, “Prison Nightfall”:

Rung by rung, night descends
 its spiral staircase of stars.
 A breeze passes gently by,
 as if words of love had been whispered.
 Trees in the prison courtyard, like exiles
 with heads bowed, are absorbed
 in embroidering arabesques on the skirt of the sky.
 On the crested roof are glittering
 the beautiful fingers of moonlight,
 dissolving star-shine into dust
 and washing the blue sky into white.
 In the green corners, dark shadows collide
 as if the ache of separation
 might eddy and fill my mind.

But one thought keeps running through my heart—
 how sweet these moments are. Though
 there are those who may concoct tyranny’s poisons,

they will have no victories, not today or tomorrow.
 So what if they douse the candles in rooms
 where lovers meet? If they're so mighty,
 let them snuff out the moon.

In describing the Spanish poets of this same era, Robert Bly has written, “Difficult poetry of the true and vigorous sort does not move from idea to idea, from mind to mind, but moves from the anguished emotions to the intellect and back” (2001, xv). A poem like “Prison Nightfall” is exactly what he means. The poem is far from narrative, but its tropes link in intuitive linear ways—what Hart Crane called “lyric logic”—so that the images are neither scattered like beads from an unstrung necklace, nor strung too tightly together. After this impressionistic succession, the poet feels as if *hijr* (“the ache of separation”) “might eddy and fill my mind.” Again the mention of separation, the invisible specter of Partition, moves the poem from the personal to the political.

Interestingly the closure of “Prison Nightfall” returns to the rhetorical turn of “These Days of Manacle and Stake,” but with greater success. Here the poet allows that rulers may be able to “douse the candles in rooms / where lovers meet,” as he granted earlier that “the cage is under your command.” However, rather than baldly asserting “you do not command / these days when the garden brightens into rose-fire,” comparing their small power to nature directly, Faiz instead challenges these rulers to demonstrate their superiority: “If they're so mighty, / let them snuff out the moon.” The parallel structure is more fully realized as well—showing their power over a candle but not the moon, rather than over a prison cell but not the rose garden.

The promise of these stylistic advances in the last poems of *Dast-e Šabā* is fulfilled in the poem, “Bury Me Under Your Streets.” Shuttling brilliantly from rhetoric to image, from argumentation to emotional evocation, it moves, as Bly says the best difficult poems do, “from the anguished emotions to the intellect and back”:

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.
 Good men suffer this new law and decree
 where stones are locked up and dogs run free.

It is too much for tyranny's trigger-happy hand,
 if your name is invoked even by extremists.

When power-starved men are both accuser and judge,
 who will defend us, where can we seek justice?

But man somehow spends the days he must spend,
 away from you, as mornings come and evenings end.
 As the prison grating darkens, my heart remembers
 that somewhere under these stars, you brush out your braids.
 When the links of my chain begin to shine, I think
 that somewhere day breaks over your sleeping face.
 I live, in short, in the fantasies of nightfall and dawn;
 I live in the shadow of walls, in the gate's closed palm.

This is the same war tyrants and true men have always fought;
 their tactics are not new, and neither are ours.
 They have always set fires and we turn them to flowers;
 their tricks are not new, and neither are ours.

That's why I don't complain about my fate;
 or let my imprisoned heart start to quake.
 If today I am away from you, tomorrow we'll be together;
 this separation of one night is nothing to us.
 If today our enemies ride high, playing God, so what?—
 their reign of four days is nothing to us.
 Only those who hold to their vows under such scrutiny
 are safe from night-and-day's endless mutiny.

The poem's opening phrase, "Bury me under your streets," means literally, "Let me be a sacrifice to your streets" (*"Niṣār main terī galyōn kē"*). A common Urdu phrase ("Let me be a sacrifice to—") is usually completed by some expression of religious devotion, but here Faiz uses the structure ironically, preferring to be a sacrifice not to some higher power but to the streets of his beloved country. Stanza two continues with the direct address of poet to his country, but stanza three shifts to the personal and the addressee is now the beloved, whom the poet imagines in her bedchamber and he sits confined in his cell. Stanza four seems to return to addressing the country, but in the concluding stanza five, that shift is called into question. The climactic lines—"If today I am away from you, tomorrow we'll be together; / this separation of one night is nothing to us"—can be read equally literally as an assurance to the poet's lover or to his country. The "reign of four days" would seem to apply most directly to the four years of Pakistani government, but even this is

reduced to the human level of two lovers separated by but a few days. The final couplet puns on the word “vows,” meaning either marriage vows or vows of allegiance to the mother country, and asserts that these principles alone are enough to undo “night-and-day’s endless mutiny.” Returning again to the natural world, Faiz implies that mere men cannot “snuff out the moon,” but those who hold to their vows of love will survive the succession of daybreaks and nightfalls and the succession of nation-states.

On December 22, *Dast-e Šabā* was released at a well-attended ceremony at the Argentina Hotel in Lahore. The book begins with a short introduction by Faiz himself, a small polemical on the responsibility of the artist. Though he never overtly mentions the circumstances of his arrest or imprisonment, he wonders whether Ghālib’s famous statement that “an eye which cannot perceive an ocean in a drop of water is not a discerning eye” would not now bring him under scrutiny as “a supporter of propaganda in literature. If instructing a poet to perceive an ocean in a drop is not an obvious attempt at propaganda, then what else is it?” Faiz, however, asserts that mere perception of a hidden ocean is no longer enough:

[T]he poet’s work is not only perception and observation, but also struggle and effort. A full comprehension of this ocean of Life through the live and active “drops” of his environment depends upon the poet’s depth of perception. To be able to show this ocean to others depends upon his control over his art; and his ability to set in motion some new currents in the ocean depends upon the fire in his blood and the zeal of his passion. Success in all three tasks demands continuous toil and struggle.

(1963, 3–4)

Within the walls of Hyderabad, the prisoners also learned of the publication of *Dast-e Šabā*. Syed Sajjad Zaheer remembered that “we had heard these poems from the lips of Faiz himself and had also read them repeatedly, but all those prisoners who had a literary taste were overjoyed at the publication of the volume” (1989, 41). The inmates obtained permission from the prison officials to throw a party. Though the outcome of their trial was increasingly certain, they celebrated that some part of their story would be known. Within a few months all fifteen men charged in the Rawalpindi Conspiracy trial were convicted of crimes of varying seriousness. Though none in the end were sentenced to death, all were eventually sentenced to additional years in prison, including Faiz who would not be officially freed until his sentence expired in April 1955.

Many years later, however, Zaheer refused to dwell on the particularities of the trial or his imprisonment; he insisted:

long after the people forget all about the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, the Pakistani historian, when he comes across the important events of 1952, will consider the publication of this small book of poems as a most important historical event.

(*ibid.*) □

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