



Urdu Studies

An international, peer-reviewed,
bilingual research journal
ISSN: 2583-8784 (Online)
Vol. 4 | Issue 1 | Year 2024
Pages: 84-97

The Poetics and Politics of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's Poetry

Sohini Saha¹

Abstract. This paper is an attempt to interrogate the supposed 'political turn' that Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry is assumed to have taken in *Naqsh-e-faryādi* (Remonstrance) through his popular nazm "Mujh se pahlī sī mohabbat mirī mahbūb na maang" It is understood as marking a departure from his writings on the beloved (*mahmoob*) to turn towards the concerns of the society steeped in oppression. However, I argue against reading it as a 'departure' and instead see this as emerging from his love for his beloved, through a reading of "*Raqīb se*," a nazm from *Naqsh-e-faryādi*. In doing so the paper engages with the poetics and politics of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poetry, in order to argue that his writings enmesh the themes of love and politics in a way that makes a separation between the two impossible. Lastly, the article argues, in reference to Faiz's writings, that the concept of unrequited love, *hijr* (separation), *vasl* (union) of the traditional/classical Urdu poetry can itself be read politically. The paper thereby concludes that Faiz never really 'departed' from Classical Urdu poetry and neither did he make a fresh entry into the 'political', since the essence of love and affection remains, blends and informs his poetries on resistance and revolution.

Keywords. Urdu Poetry, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Love, Resistance, Politics.

Introduction: Faiz and his poetry

Faiz Ahmad Faiz's (1910-84) poetry has taken on many hues, from classical romantic ghazals to poetry of resistance and revolution. Born in the early twentieth century at a crucial political juncture of colonial rule and anti-colonial movements, the partition and the formation of new nation-states of Pakistan and India, Faiz belongs to this period which shaped him as a poet. Faiz is understood to be one of those poets who brought political resistance in poetry and is considered to have made "the Pakistani nation conscious of its postcolonial political identities" (Langah, 78). Faiz began his

¹ Dr. Sohini Saha is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous) Kolkata

Included in UGC-CARE List since October 2021

Published on August 11, 2024

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journey as a poet in the 1930s, in a period when the Progressive Writers' Association was formed. His writings therefore were already situated in a time when poetry writing was itself undergoing transformation, whether it was the reformation of Classical Urdu poetry in the twentieth century or under the progressive period of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM) that emphasized on writing for the people and for socio-political issues (Mufti 217). His writings were also always politically situated if we see how he has remained attached to people's struggles across the world. His writings were also situated in politically tense places and in extreme political situations, like in prisons and in exile, including one in which Faiz is said to have written his book "*mire dil, mire musāfir*" for the Palestinian struggle while bombs fell all around (Husain 121). From writing on the partition of the Indian subcontinent, the anti-colonial struggle, against the Zia regime in Pakistan, to writing for others' homelands like Africa and Palestine. "His love and patriotism were not restricted to his homeland. He risked his life in exile, fighting for the cause of the Palestinians with Yasser Arfat" (Husain, 121). As we witness at the present moment the violence unleashed on Palestinians in Gaza, we recollect his poetry for Palestinian struggle.

*jis zamīn par bhī khilā mere lahū kā parcham
lahlahātā hai vahān arz-e filistīn kā alam
tere a.adā ne kiyā ek filistīn barbād
mere zakhmoṅ ne kiye kitne filistīn ābād* (Faiz, *Nuskha...* 656)
Wherever I unfurl the banner of my blood,
There flutters the flag of Palestine.
One Palestine has been destroyed
By my enemies
But my agony has given birth
To innumerable Palestines (Kamal 162)

The above lines also speak about the universality of struggles as Faiz moves beyond a country to speak for Palestine. As today we witness university students across the world rising up for Palestinians, these lines of Faiz become truer. The wounds and sufferings of the Palestinians have been felt and recognized by people across the world, especially students across universities, who have come in support of Palestinians and have therefore symbolically recreated Palestine in these places. Faiz's writings have been shaped by the struggles across the world, making him emerge as a poet who wrote on universal struggles and resistances that is valued till this day. From his initial writings that carried on the tradition of classical Urdu romantic ghazals, Faiz is said to have taken a turn to writing more politicized poetry based on oppression, resistance and revolution. This transition, emphasized both by Faiz himself and other authors, is marked by the second part of his first volume, *Naqsh-e-faryādī* (Remonstrance) and is taken forward in his *The Poetics and Politics of Faiz Ahmad...*

next two volumes *Dast-e-sabā* (hand of breeze) and *Zindān-nāma* (*Prison Letters*), which forms part of his prison writings. Faiz's involvement with the Progressive Writers' Movement also made him a poet of revolution and resistance and his writings were seen to take a more political turn. Yet the theme of love or *muḥabbat* did not fade away from his poems. It is here that the paper comes to argue that Faiz's poetry, or ghazals of love and longing were not distinct from his writings on political issues, preferably in his nazms. Thus, one may not necessarily see his poems on resistances as a departure from his romantic love poetry. This paper will thereby seek to understand Faiz's poems as always already "political" not only limited to politics of the nation-state or political situations, but a politics that is immanent to love and longing.

Progressive Writers' Movement: Situating Faiz's Writings

The early twentieth century marked a time of upheavals not only in context of the nationalist movement but also the radical changes and reformation that were taking place in society. It was becoming pertinent to thereby speak on issues that concerned society and thereby take a radical stance in relation to them. The Progressive Writers' Movement began in the 1930s with the publication of *Angarey* in 1932. In 1936, the All-India Progressive Writers' Association was formed at Lucknow. It emphasized "breaking away from tales of magic and romance and the highly stylized court poetry" to take up themes of "problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness, and political subjugation" and to become critical of "rigid orthodoxy" and "blind adherence to tradition". (Sahni 179-182; Mir & Mir 5). The emphasis thereby was on the "actualities of life" and was marked not only by anti-colonial sentiments but also "anti-religious," making it move away from "conservative" to becoming "progressive" (Mir & Mir 6-8). Thus, the art of poetry became a "people's art". The Progressive Writers' Association's manifesto emphasized on rescuing art from the hands of the "(p)riestly, the academic and decadent classes" and "bring the arts into the closest touch with the people. (Mir & Mir 5)" This separation from the traditional mode of poetry writing was also visible in poetic reformations that came up in the twentieth century. Amir Mufti argues how a distrust of the ghazal existed in the twentieth century (217). According to Mufti, after the 1857 uprisings and the collapse of the previous social structure of the *asraf* elites of northern India, there was a demand for reformation. This reformation was mainly directed at Classical Urdu poetry as it was considered to be removed from the realities of everyday life of the people as well as their language (Mufti 217). There was a distinction that was also emphasized between the writings of ghazals and nazms. Nazms were a departure from ghazals not only in their structural differences but also differences in how they are constituted. Ghazals were considered a more of a subjective form of poetry focusing on

imagination and fantasy and mainly dedicated to love and longing. Nazms, on the other hand, were objective, driven towards realism, having a more “logical evolution of a thought and theme” (Kanda 3). The nineteenth century became a period when nazms became more popular, owing to a realization among poets that ghazals were limited and narrow in scope while nazms offered space for expressing thoughts (Kanda 4). This continued in the twentieth century in literary movements like Progressive Writers’ Association who were “committed to the social purposiveness of poetry” and also in reformation of Classical Urdu poetry (Mufti 217).

In this context, Ali Husain Mir and Raza Mir recollect Sahir Ludhianvi’s couplet:

fan jo nādār tak nahīṅ pahūṅchā
abhī m’eyār tak nahīṅ pahūṅchā (Ludhianvi 257)

The art that doesn’t reach the poor
Has not achieved its potential (Mir & Mir 24)

This focus on people’s art and severing of ties with traditional romantic poetry marked a transition in poetry writing. This further led to a more politicized form of poetry writing during the Progressive Writers’ Movement. Although love and politics cannot be inherently separated in Urdu Poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Faiz himself, alongside authors (Husain 11) (Ali 136) have emphasized on a transition in his writings in the second part of *Naqsh-e-faryādī*.

***Naqsh-e-faryādī*: Understanding Faiz’s ‘Political Turn’**

Imdad Husain translates and discusses the way Faiz began *Dast-e-sabā* by reflecting upon one of Ghalib’s poems on river Dajla. According to Husain, it marked his “new poetics” and was aimed at providing a vision for poets and writers (11).

All I had to say is that an understanding of the struggle of human life and a participation in it, according to one’s capability, is not only a prerequisite of life, it is also a prerequisite of art. Art is part of this life and an artistic struggle is a part of this struggle. This struggle is never ending (Trans, Husain 12-13).

This clearly puts forward Faiz’s understanding of a poet’s role and his reference to Ghalib’s verse shows how this effort was already there in poetry much before the Progressive Writers’ Movement began. Faiz has further elaborated on his advice for poets by emphasizing on the fact that “serious writers” needed to denounce any imperialist, racist and colonialist agendas and participate in the struggle for people across the world. He emphasized on the use of pen as a “barricade” against any form of oppressive forces (Husain 13). According to Husain, although *Naqsh-e-faryādī* brought in a distinctively new form of love poetry, it was in the second half of the volume that Faiz

made a departure. This departure and transition from love poetry to writing on issues pertaining to the socio-political conditions came in with an epigraph in Persian “*Dil-e-ba-farokhtam jaan-e-khareedam*” (I sold my heart and bought myself a soul) followed by one of his most popular nazm, “*Mujh se pahlī sī muḥabbat mirī mahbūb na māng*” (Husain, 11). This nazm became a form of transition by which we see a clear trend in Faiz’s writings, that renounced romantic love and espoused “the misery of the poor of the world” (Husain 11). Husain explains this departure or transition by situating Faiz in the period and in the context of the political and literary conditions in undivided India. He elaborates on how undivided India was divided between two groups, one consisting of the capitalists and landlords, the powerful and the on the other, consisting of workers, farmers, unemployed, the powerless. The persistence of the first depended on the exploitation of the latter (8). This is reflected in this nazm.

an-gīnat ṣadiyon ke tārīk bahīmāna ṭilism
resham o atlas o kamkhvāb meṅ bunvā’e hue
jā-ba-jā bikte hue kūcha-o-bāzār meṅ jism
ḵhaak meṅ lithre hue khūn meṅ nahlā’e hue
jism nikle hue amrāz ke tannūron se
pīp bahtī huī galte hue nāsūron se (Faiz 61-62)

The dark beastly spell of countless centuries
 Woven into silk and satin and brocade,
 Bodies sold everywhere in alley and market,
 Smearred with dust, washed in blood,
 Bodies that have emerged from the ovens of diseases,
 Pus flowing from rotten ulcers (Kiernan 65-67)

Faiz makes the departure in the poem by introducing us to the countless centuries of dark spells that have been cast on the underprivileged. According to Agha Shahid Ali, Faiz is “drawing a line of demarcation between the political and the romantic” (Ali 136). His description of the beauty of the beloved gives way to a very dark and intensely moving description of the plight of the underprivileged whose bodies are sold in market places, bodies that are smearred with blood and dust, filled with diseases and pus. Faiz begins on the note of the description of the beauty of the beloved and moves towards a description of an intense shivering realism. This, I argue, is a powerful and intense poetic transition. According to Mir and Mir, Premchand had announced that the understanding of beauty, which was a central theme of classical Urdu poetry, needed transformation. Thus, “Beauty for them had to be sought not just in the face of the beloved, but in the body of the toiling worker” (Mir & Mir 35). However, Faiz brings in the beauty of the beloved only to move away from it towards the bodies of the underprivileged. This is

also evident in *mauzu-‘e-sukhan* where he engages in a critique of the themes of poetry taken up by poets on the beauty of the beloved and uses a sarcastic tone to challenge it (Mir & Mir 43-44). Carlo Coppola discusses how Faiz in *mauzu-‘e-sukhan* elaborates initially on the beauty of the beloved, following the traditional Urdu poetry. After which one finds Faiz countering the same by suggesting “subjects of poetry drawn from the suffering and struggle of mankind” (338).

Critics of Faiz’s poetry have often seen his depiction of the beloved as someone belonging to a privileged background with all references to moon, jewel and mansions. Syed Akbar Hyder provides an interesting critique to this when he says: “After recognizing the beloved for who he was, the lover invited him into his world to see the price at which luxury came (72). *Mujh se pehlī sī muhabbat* can also be understood in such a context. The description of the beloved’s beauty is itself a political necessity in order to show the intensity of difference in the plight of the underprivileged. The first part describing the beloved thus resembles the classical form of poetry, combining imagination, fantasy and love, while the second part exposes us to the reality or rather realism (Coppola 324) taking a turn towards the way poetry became more politicized in the twentieth century. Thus, I argue the transition depicted in the nazm takes two turns, one from ghazal’s imaginative romanticism to that of realism and thus a departure from traditional poetry to a more political form of poetry for the masses. Hyder has also argued: “Whereas the overtures of the ghazal were framed by a masochistic lover impressing on his beloved linguistic flair, eloquence, fealty, and resignation, Faiz resorts to a different mode of poetry, the nazm, and addresses the beloved with a compassionate indictment of the old ways of love” (59). The nazm not only shifts its focus on a more political issue of the underprivileged but is also seen as necessarily breaking away from the beloved, the central theme of traditional ghazals, in order to move towards the concern of the common masses. The popular lines that mark this transition in the nazm are:

laṭ jāti hai udhar ko bhi nazar kya kījiye
ab bhī dīlkash hai tira ḥusn magar kya kījiye
aur bhī dukh haiṅ zamāne meṅ muhabbat ke sivā
rāḥateṅ aur bhī haiṅ vaṣl kī rāḥat ke sivā
mujh se pehlī sī muhabbat mere mahbūb na māṅg (Faiz 61-62)

My glance-comes back that way too: what is to be done?

Your beauty is still charming, but what is to be done?

There are other sufferings of the time (world) besides love,

There are other pleasures besides the pleasures of union;

“Do not ask from me, my beloved, love like that former one” (Kiernan 67)

These lines embody the spirit of the Progressive Writers’ Movement, that

seeks to foreground the major concern on the “other” sorrows/ *dukhs* outside the sorrows of love. While classical Urdu ghazals have always focused on *gham* and *dukh* or pain and sorrow, these were always in relation to the beloved. Their association with *muḥabbat* or love have been the central theme of ghazals. The Progressive Writers’ Movement as well as Faiz’s nazm brought a departure to understanding *gham* and *dukh* outside the context of love to bring it in context of everyday sorrows of common people. Another significant aspect of a ghazal was the theme of *hijr* and *vasl* or separation and union, and Faiz through the lines “*rāḥateṅ aur bhī haiṅ vaṣl kī rāḥat ke sivā*” (There are other pleasures than the pleasures of union) also makes a departure from this. Thus, for Faiz there are other sorrows outside *muḥabbat* (love) and there are other pleasures than the pleasure of union. Interestingly, he invokes the ideas of *muḥabbat*, *hijr* (separation) and *vaṣl* (union) that are typical to ghazal writing, yet also departs from it by invoking a different context and sense of love. These frequent references made to the themes of ghazals or style of ghazal writing, I argue, problematizes a strict ‘departure’ from traditional Urdu ghazals. This was happening at a time when moving away from ghazals was emphasized by several poets.

“*Ghazal apni zahniyat ki vajah se jazbātī lamhoṅ aur ‘ārzi kaifiyatoṅ kī tarjumaanī ban kar rah jāti hai*” (A ghazal is reduced to a mere translation of emotional moments and transient conditions because of its temperament) (Mir & Mir 27). Thus, ghazal itself became unfit for the progressive poetry that was the demand of the time. “The classical tradition of lyric poetry, and in particular the ghazal form, became the site of fierce contention...as too decorative, subjective, and impervious to nature and (Indian) reality, incapable of the sober intellectual effort and didactic purpose called for in the ‘new’ world” (Mufti 210). It was emphasized that progressive poetry needs to focus on *gham-e-daurān* (sorrow of the world) and detach itself from *gham-e-jānān* or (sorrow of the beloved) (Mir & Mir 30). Faiz’s “*Mujh se pahilī sī muḥabbat*” could be seen as falling into this category of writing where the separation was ensured.

“*Gham-e-jānān*” & “*gham-e-daurān*”: Resisting the Divide

The dilemma in Urdu poetry writing between “*gham-e-daurān*” and “*gham-e-jānān*” (Mir & Mir, 30) have remained since the Progressive Writers’ Movement (Mir & Mir, 30) (Coppola 340). Although through *Mujh se pahilī sī muḥabbat* in *Naqsh-e-faryādī*, Faiz makes a departure from the “beloved” to write on socio-political issues, in the same series he brings in *Raqīb se. Raqīb se* although appears similar to *Mujh se pahilī sī muḥabbat*, in that it too moves away from the beloved and ends on the note of feeling pain for the underprivileged yet this feeling emerges from his pain from the beloved.

Raqīb Se is unique in making us rethink the *raqīb* or rival. A rival is mostly seen as a person who will be disliked or will be seen as a competitor.

However, here Faiz draws resemblances with the *raqīb*, showing how they, both fell in love with the same person, the “beloved”. For Faiz, instead of the beloved, it is the *raqīb* who will understand him better and understand his feelings better. This way of understanding the *raqīb* is distinct and breaks the prior understanding it had. *Raqīb se* also breaks a conventional divide between “*gham-e-daurān*” and “*gham-e-jānān*” with the lines

*ham pe mushtarka haiñ ihsān gham-e-ulfat ke
itne ihsān ke ginvā'ūñ to ginvā na sakūñ
ham ne is 'ishq meñ kyā khoyā hai kyā sikhā hai
juz tīre aur ko samjhā'ūñ to samjhā na sakūñ* (Faiz 68)

So many favours that if I were to count, I would not be able to count;

What I lost in this love, what I learned (Kiernan 71)

He speaks of the uncountable *ihsān* or debts he has from the sorrows of love or “*gham-e-ulfat*”, the things he has lost and learnt, which is almost unexplainable. He then elaborates on the things he has learnt from the sorrows of love

*'ājizī sikhī gharībōñ kī himāyat sikhī
yās-o-ħirmāñ ke dukh-dard ke m'ānī sikhē
zer-dastoñ ke maṣā'ib ko samajhnā sikhā
sard āhoñ ke rukh-e-zard ke ma'ānī sikhē* (Faiz 68)

I learned of misery, helplessness, despair,

I learned to be the friend of suffering creatures,

I came to know the torment of the oppressed,

The truth of sobbing breath and livid features (Kiernan 73)

Above all he first mentions learning humility/*ājizī*, that we understand has also humbled him to understand the plight of the underprivileged. He goes on to elaborate on how he has learnt about the support/protection of the poor, learnt about their agony and pain, understood their hardships, sufferings and meaning behind their pale and discouraged faces. These ways of understanding the suffering, pain and agony of the poor and subordinates emerges from his sorrows of love. Thus, the pain and separation, rejection makes him understand and learn about the sorrows of the common masses.

*jab kabhī biktā hai bāzār meñ mazdūr kā gosht
shāh-rāhoñ pe gharībōñ kā lahū bahtā hai
āg sī sīne meñ rah rah ke ubaltī hai na pūchh
apne dil par mujhe qaabū hī nahīñ rahtā hai* (Faiz 68)

Wherever the workman's flesh is sold in the market,

The blood of the poor flows on the highroads, -

Something like a fire that is always in my breast mounts up, do
not ask!

No control over my heart is left to me (Kiernan 75)

With this Faiz comes to the last two couplets, taking us into the grave socio-political realities of the time and the impact they have on him by saying how fire engulfs and boils inside his heart. However, this way of feeling for the downtrodden is once again emerging in Faiz from the deep sorrow of love that makes his heart also feel the pain of the downtrodden. *Raqīb Se'* shows us how the love and longing for the beloved itself teaches Faiz the meanings of *ājizī* (humility), to feel for the downtrodden, and instills in him the spirit of revolution. This equation and merging of the sorrow of love and sorrow of the world is beautifully expressed here. Faiz has himself said, "The measure of one's depth is only to be found in one's emotional (and psychological) relationship with the human community, particularly those relationships that involve the sharing of pain and suffering. The sorrows of loving and the sorrows of living are different forms of the same expression." (Mir & Mir 35). The last line interestingly combines *gham-e-daurān* and *gham-e-jānān*.

Faiz's Poetics and Politics

Amir Mufti discusses how Faiz's poetic vocabulary drew extensively from Arabo-Persian images from the Classical Urdu ghazal for example, *lauḥ-o-qalam* or *dast-o-gulzār*, which he reads as resisting the plain language that many of his contemporaries were following. He writes, "In this sense Faiz's poetry is a living rebuke to the ideal of a neutral 'Hindustani' idiom from which both Arabo-Persian and Sanskritic influences have been excised, an ideal to which the secularist, 'anti-communalist' imagination in South Asia has been repeatedly drawn" (Mufti, 213).

Faiz's engagement with ghazal writing is also worth mentioning. Increasingly seen as devoid of realism, ghazal was devalued and critiqued for its fundamental focus on the theme of love. Omar Qureshi argues that a reformation in Urdu Literary tradition came up in the twentieth century that saw the Urdu Poetry of the Mughal era as ambivalent to the present times as it was perceived as "impotent and debilitating in face of the colonial onslaught" (Qureshi 7). Faiz took a different approach to ghazals. According to Ritu Sharma, by keeping the "form" "diction" and "symbol" of ghazal intact, Faiz reinterpreted it to contemporary context (91). Hyder argues, "Faiz does not castigate the ghazal for being bereft of realism or excessively decadent" but brings it out from its "complacency" (60). In doing so he brings in the concept of love or the beloved but alters the way love or beloved is thought of. In his later poems especially *Dast-e-ṣabā* and *Zindān-nāma* we come across poetry that fuses, as Shabeena Parvin says, love and revolution together where the "beloved" comes back into his poetry as both the person

he loves and also the “motherland” (865). Rather than seeing it as a return of the beloved, the article argues, the question of love never faded from his work but rather remained as inspiring his poetries on revolution. Faiz is said to have believed in the Persian poetry lines “Every foundation that you see is defective, Except the foundation of love which is without defect” (Husain 3). Thus, in Faiz’s poetry we keep coming across the concept of love. Love remains a theme in his writings which is often fused with politics, revolution, and humanism (Parvin 865). Authors like Hyder have discussed how Faiz’s poetry has blended “the horizons of his carnal beloved and the beloved that is his homeland” (Hyder 63). This is evident in Ahsan Ul Haq’s work where he argues that Faiz’s poetry is distinctive in that he never expresses it through a “direct voice” like poetries of resistances are but rather uses “metaphors” for the same (Haq 8). Thus, *mahbūb* is both the beloved as well as the nation and sometimes the idea of freedom that he desires or imagines. Ahsan Ul Haq writes, “Faiz is at its core a broken lover/majnoon and struggle for union with Laila is transposed from personal ambition to the collective dream of oppressed people, and the light/*raushnī* which will break through the darkness/*andhera*. This is how he blends “politics” with his “poetry” (8). However, in all these writings, Faiz’s poetry is interpreted as blending and fusing ‘love’ with ‘politics’. The article argues that the idea of ‘blending’ assumes a clear separation between ‘love’ and ‘politics’ that comes together at a particular juncture. Although that is often true, Faiz’s poetry also shows the inseparability of ‘love’ and ‘politics’, which the article elaborates in the next section.

Lauh-o-qalam (Tablet & Pen) is one such nazm which is written bringing the idea of love and resistance together that urges people to continue nurturing the feelings of one’s heart in pen and paper. Here the question of heart brings in an important query. How do we understand a heart or ‘*dil*? Does the heart only absorb and feels in love or *muhabbat* or does the heart also feel for the world, for the downtrodden? How do we distinguish between the two? When Faiz writes, “*ham parvarish-e-lauh-o-qalam karte rahenge jo dil pe guzartī hai raqam karte rahenge*” [I will go on cherishing the tablet and pen, I will go on writing down what passes over the heart] (Kiernan 129), he speaks of writing all that the heart is going through, whether it’s the pain or sorrow of love or the suffering under a tyrannical rule. In a similar manner the lines “*asbāb-e-gham-e-ishq baham karte rahenge, vīrāni-e-daurān pe karam karte rahenge*” [I will go on collecting the attributes of the grief of love, I will go on pouring bounty on the desolation of the age] (Kiernan 129) speaks of both the sorrow of love as well as the dissolute time or *gham-e-daurān*. When he speaks of the tyranny or the ignorance that he receives, it is unclear whether it is the ignorance or tyranny of the beloved or the socio-political tyranny and ignorance or both. Thus, the nazm blends both the theme of love and politics, such that a separation between the two becomes impossible. It is a poem of resilience against all atrocities. The urge to keep writing what the

heart goes through is itself a political act of struggle and remembrance.

In a similar context, '*Gulon men rang bhare*' is a ghazal that speaks of longing for the beloved. Faiz writes this during his days in Rawalpindi's Montgomery prison, 1954. His prison writings, particularly, *Dast-e-ṣabā* and *Zindān-nāma*, forms an important part of his journey as a poet which according to him continues with "the same mental and emotional chains" that has started with *Mujh se pahlī sī muḥabbat* (trans, Husain 29). In reflecting upon his experience of writing poetry from prison he said, "Prison life, like love, is itself a fundamental experience which opens up a new vista of thoughts and insight" (trans, Husain 29). He then elaborates on the resemblances of prison life and love, firstly, by equating both as arousing all kinds of sensations and making one experience things with a sense of wonder. Secondly, the outside world is considered to be separated or negated such that even a single moment feels like a lifetime. Lastly, he sees prison life through a "vastness of separation" from the outside world, which according to him helps in reading, thinking and cultivating creativity in people (Husain 29). Understanding 'separation' as a 'vastness' that not only separates but also invokes sensations that make one feel, know and create gives a very distinctive understanding to the idea of separation. *Hijr* (separation) remains poignantly embedded in his ghazals, including one written in the prison. *Gulon men rang bhare* remains one such ghazal that invokes the feeling of separation/*hijr*, either from the beloved or from the outside world due to his imprisonment. Here the experience of prison life and love merges. For example, the lines

qafas udaas hai yaaro sabā se kuchh to kaho
kahīn to bahr-e-ḵhudā aaj zikr-e-yār chale (Faiz 264)

(The Prison/cage is sorrowful and solitary, please let the breeze know.
Somewhere, for God's sake, let my beloved be mentioned)

Here *qafas* implies a cage or the prison itself which is sad because of the absence of the 'beloved'. The pangs of separation are felt by the poet who requests the breeze (*ṣabā*) to bring along with it any reference or account of the 'beloved'. Here it is left open whom Faiz is reciting for, is the beloved the outside world, the nation from whom he has been separated from or is he speaking about a lover, the 'beloved'? This ambiguity remains since this separation from the 'beloved' happens as a result of a political condition of imprisonment. Yet even if this is conceived solely as a classical love poetry or ghazal based on love and imagination of spring and the beloved, it remains embedded in a political context of his imprisonment. It is here that a political situation, his prison life, arouses in him the love for the beloved much the same way that his love for the beloved made him aware of the plight of the downtrodden in "*Raqīb se*." As Agha Shahid Ali said, "Sometimes the two, especially in the ghazals, are entangled in such a way that there is no point in trying to separate them: the political meaning informs the romantic and the

romantic, the political” (136).

Love as Political: *Hijr* and the Politics of Longing

Love itself is political when we consider love in the context of same sex relations or inter caste and interreligious marriages. In such contexts, *gham-e-daurān* cannot be separated from *gham-e-jānān* when the beloved is separated because of socio-political conditions. “*Gulon men rang bhare*” is also such a separation due to the prevailing socio-political conditions of the times leading to Faiz’s imprisonment. The theme of separation has dominated most poetry, especially that of Faiz. I also read this separation or *hijr* as political. *Hijr* is not only about separation in love but also about longing. According to Shailza Rai, Faiz brings in *hijr* in a political sense also through the concept of *hijrat* or migration in the context of partition. “The recurrent motif of *hijr* in Faiz encompasses both the inevitability of *hijr* and melancholy attached with displacement” (337). Being a partition poet and writing extensively on partition, his *gham* reflects the notion of *hijr* intermingled with the notion of migration (*hijrat*) when one is separated from their place of beloved/nation/country. Thus, when Faiz writes on *hijr* or separation in love, it is both a separation as well as a displacement, *hijr* and *hijrat*, separation from beloved as well as nation through partition.

Faiz’s supposed political turn might not be a turn i.e, a departure from classical Urdu poetry and neither a fresh entry into the political, since his poetics (lyric and metaphorical) and politics, love and resistance, *gham-e-daurān* and *gham-e-jānān*, cannot be separated in a strict sense. In the twentieth century Urdu poetry became more politicized considering the socio-political changes of the times. Faiz’s writings too brought in a fresh and more political purpose to poetry but that did not necessarily mean poetry was not political all along. The element of unrequited love in ghazals that one longs or desires for is also similar to an unreachable justice or freedom, that one desires and works towards in hope and longing. The act of writing about this unrequited love or the unfulfilled desires of what one holds dear, whether love or freedom or justice then becomes a political act. When Faiz writes *gulon men rang bhare* inside a prison, speaking about spring and the beloved, which generates a sensation of hope and happiness, it itself forms a kind of resistance against his imprisonment. The walls of prison are unable to contain him and his thoughts as it fails to imprison the poet’s imagination. Thus, the article speaks of a possibility to understand Faiz’s poetry to be ‘poetic’ and ‘political’ all along as it documents the struggle, perseverance, and hope of people in love with what they hold dear.

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