

Faiz Ahmed Faiz: Life and Literary Style

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Love of Liberty and Freedom is a universal feeling. It is a feeling that has been growing among mankind and is not limited to a few individuals or areas. It is this desire for freedom that led the Muslims of the subcontinent to struggle for a separate homeland. The result of this struggle under the leadership of the Quaid-i-Azam was the establishment of an independent sovereign state, Pakistan, on 14 August 1947. It was decided that the national language of this new state would be Urdu. Prior to independence Urdu had been spoken in different areas of undivided India. Each area had its distinct dialect and accent. There was a constant tussle for dominance between the Delhi and Lucknow schools of thought. With the establishment of Pakistan this versatile language developed and grew rapidly under the influence of the major regional languages viz. Pushto, Balochi, Sindhi and Punjabi. Now the language and literature of Urdu developed with a new identity and diction. Writers had to deal with the trauma of rioting and massive displacement of people that Partition caused. The most prominent writers of the day, particularly of the Progressive Writers Movement that included prominent writers like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, were writing works that reflected the problems of the day. The period between 1947 and the 1950's was a time when nearly every writer was experimenting with new methods and ideas. Leftist and socialist views were very popular. Among the poets of the time Faiz Ahmed Faiz stands out like a bright star. His impact is tremendous not only on Urdu poetry but also on the reading public. Without severing his ties with the traditional style he is still able to have a very modern approach. He is able to write not only in the classical tradition of Iqbal and Ghalib but also able to address the problems of the day.¹ He was and still is criticized by literary groups who feel that he is a lyric poet who used classical *ghazals* (a poem that speaks

¹ www.faiz.com. Also see *Faiz Ahmed Faiz Mutha loh au Qalam* (Pen and Ink), (Karachi: Mukhtaba Danyal, 1983).

of love) for his ideas, which were certainly not traditional. Faiz's answer to these critics is 'I use ancient metaphor in my poetry because it is a part of my heritage'.² In the words of Khalid Hassan 'his poetry is a celebration of life and an affirmation of the law of change'. His voice rang up against dictatorship, oppression and colonialism. His poetry represents the longing for freedom. Faiz's aim is the establishment of an exploitation free society. To understand and to do full justice to such a great poet it is important that his life and works are discussed.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984)

Faiz Ahmed Faiz was born in Sialkot on Feb 13 1911 in a family with a strong literary and religious background. His father Khan Bhadur Sultan Muhammad was a Barrister by profession and served as secretary to the Afghan King and was his ambassador to Britain.³ His father was a learned man and enjoyed the company of literary persons. He had to his credit the biography of the King of Afghanistan Amir Abdur Rahman.⁴ Faiz has a loving memory of his father. Every morning he would go with his father for prayers. At night he would write letters for his father who at that time had some difficulty in writing. He would also read the newspaper to him. It was his father who encouraged him to read English novels.⁵ His mother's name was Sultan Fatima. At the age of four Faiz began to memorize the Quran. His formal education began in 1916 when he was enrolled in the school of Maulvi Ibrahim Sialkoti. Here he was to learn Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. When he was in Class IV he was admitted to the Scotch Mission High School in 1921. In 1927 he did his Matriculation from Murray College Sialkot. During this period he also learnt Persian and Arabic from Shamsul Ulema Maulvi Syed Meer Hassan who had also been Allama Iqbal's teacher.⁶ In an interview with Dr Ibadat Bardvi in London Faiz recalls how Allama Iqbal had been a friend of his father. They had spent time together in London. Faiz met Allama Iqbal for the first time when he was 6 or 7 years old. Iqbal had been also a part of a gathering at Anjuman-i- Islamia where Faiz recited

² Cited poetic quotations in Urdu are from *Faiz Ahmed Faiz Nuskha Hai Wafa* (The Prescription of Loyalty) (Lahore: Caravan Press, n.d.), all translations into English are by Daud Kamal from Khalid Hassan (ed.), *The Unicorn and the Dancing Girl*, (Lahore: Student Services, 1988).

³ www.dhadkhan.com

⁴ www.faiz.com

⁵ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *The Unicorn and the Dancing Girl* (Lahore: Student's Services, 1988).

⁶ www.urduhistory.com

from the Quran. When Faiz went for admission to Government College Lahore it was Iqbal who gave him a letter of introduction for Qazi Fazal Haq. When Iqbal returned from the Round Table Conference in London Faiz and his college mates gave Iqbal a warm welcome. His love and respect for Iqbal is reflected in his poem 'Iqbal' which he read out in a *mushaira* (poetry reading session) while still a college student. For it he was to receive a prize. Very affectionately Faiz called him.⁷

(The *faqir* with the melodious voice came and with his individualistic style this *ghazal* writer passed away) [Translation by author]

Even as a child Faiz had a very mild and loving personality. Recalling his boyhood and youth he says, 'Our poets have always complained of the indifference suffered at the hands of their contemporaries ... As far as I am concerned it is the other way round. I have had such kindness and love showered on me --- by friends and acquaintances and even virtual strangers --- that I often feel that I do not deserve it... And this feeling of inadequacy is not something, which came to me in my later years. Even as a child I felt the same way. When I was a small boy in school, for some reason that I could not understand, my classmates seemed to have decided that I was their leader. I must confess that I have never had what are called qualities of leadership'.⁸ At home which was predominately female he was also a great favourite. His other two brothers Tufail and Inayat were defiant while Faiz's mild temperament made him the easy prey of the women folk as he humorously recalls 'These ladies indoctrinated me into spending a frightfully straight life. Then, as now, I have found myself congenitally incapable of uttering a single obscenity or making a rude gesture...I feel that I was denied the playful moments associated with childhood. I remember myself watching from a distance the boys in the streets flying

⁷ Faiz Ahmed Faiz *Mutha loh au Qalam* (Pen and Ink) (Karachi: Mukhtaba Danyal, 1983).

⁸ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*

kites, or playing marbles or spinning tops. I did not find the courage to join them, because it was all said to be perfectly frivolous'.⁹

Regular *mushairas* used to be held in an old big house in front of Faiz's home. They were arranged by Pundit Raj Narain Arman and presided by a friend of Allama Iqbal and Mir Munshi to the Maharajah of Kashmir, Munshi Sirajuddin. Faiz started to write poetry during the last year of his school year and recited some of his poems at this gathering of poetry lovers. He was advised by Munshi Sirajuddin to stop writing poetry and to concentrate on his studies because his mind lacked maturity. But when Faiz joined Murray College, Sialkot his Urdu teacher Professor Yusuf Salem Chisti encouraged him to compose *ghazals* confident that one day he would become a great poet.¹⁰

When Faiz's father died the family suffered various financial constraints. It was a difficult period for everyone. But it was an important learning period for Faiz for he was to learn the importance of deep everlasting friends. His friends may have been few but they were thick. Among them those, which Faiz always remembered with affection, were Ehtashammudin, Sheikh Ahmed Hassan and Dr Hamiduddin.¹¹

After his passing Intermediate examinations successfully Faiz joined Government College Lahore for BA (Hons). He was to pass them in 1931 and in 1933 he completed his M A (English), also from the same College. This was a very important time in the formation of Faiz as a poet. He came under the beneficial influence of teachers like Prof A S Bokhari 'Pitras', Dr M D Taseer, and Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum. He was in close contact with the literary circle of Lahore and came to know people like Imtiaz Ali Taj, Charagh Hassan Hassrat, Hafiz Jullandri and Akhtar Shirani. They were the luminaries of the literary scene and Faiz was to learn a lot from them.

The relationship with his teachers was to develop into a personal friendship. Prof Bokhari on a regular basis every month would hold a literary meeting, which was initially called 'Bazm e Urdu', and later 'Bazm e Aabab'. Faiz would regularly attend these gatherings. Furthermore, he would spend his time either at the home of Sufi Tabassum or Taseer Sahib where discussions of a literary mode were held. Now Faiz was regularly writing poetry as he says he needed poetry to give vent to his feelings.¹² It was in Lahore that he developed a taste for smoking. From that time on rarely would he be seen without a

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Faiz Ahmed Faiz *Mutha loh au Qalam* (Pen and Ink), *op.cit.*

cigarette in his hand. Sufi Tabassum recalls how during an exam he was supervising, the students were not allowed to smoke. He noticed that Faiz was at a loss. Sufi Tabassum requested Prof Bokhari to grant Faiz special permission to smoke. The permission was granted and Sufi Tabassum recalls how during the growing clouds of smoke Faiz was found happily writing.¹³

In 1934 Faiz was to complete his M A (Arabic) from Oriental College Lahore. After completing his education Faiz got a job in 1935 at the M.A.O. College Amritsar as a Lecturer in English. It was here that he came under the influence of the Progressive Writers Movement. Now he developed social and political consciousness and the poetry written during this period shows a marked awareness of the socio-political environment. There is a realization that there is more to the world than love.

(There are afflictions, which have nothing to do with desire
Raptures, which have nothing to do with love
My love do not ask...)¹⁴

Faiz became politically aware because of the particular influence of the friends he made in Amritsar. They included Mahmood-us-Zaffar, Dr Rashid Jahan, and Dr Taseer. As Faiz writes 'I had entered a new world. I began to work in the trade union movement, became involved in a league for civil liberties and joined the Progressive Writers Movement. Never before had I felt so much at peace with my environment and myself. I was very much a part of the great controversies that developed around the Progressive Writers Movement...At the time, there were two groups among writers: those who believed in literature for the sake of literature and those who maintained that literature had a higher social

¹³ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Nuskha Hai Wafa* (The Prescription of Loyalty) (Lahore: Caravan Press, ND).

¹⁴ Cited poetic quotations in Urdu are from *Faiz Ahmed Faiz Nuskha Hai Wafa* (The Prescription of Loyalty) (Lahore: Caravan Press, n.d.), all translations into English are by Daud Kamal from Khalid Hassan (ed.), *The Unicorn and the Dancing Girl*, (Lahore: Student Services, 1988).

purpose. Their debates were fiery and I was never far from the scene of action'.¹⁵

The Progressive Writers Movement was founded when the movement for national independence among the Muslims of India was in full swing. Most of the writers and people worked on this objective. Furthermore, the writers of this movement felt a need that the social exploitation of the common people be the subject of literature so that after independence social injustice would be a thing of the past in the newly independent Muslim state.¹⁶

It was in 1938 that Faiz was to become editor of a new literary magazine *Adb-i-Latif*. In 1940 he was employed as a Lecturer at Hailey College of Commerce, Lahore. In 1941 he married Alys Faiz from whom he had two daughters Salima Sultana born in 1942 and Muneeza Gul born in 1945.

1941 was a momentous year for Faiz for he published his first anthology of poetry *Naqshe-i-Fariadi*. It was an instant success. His poetry became so popular that people could recite it by heart. In this anthology we can trace the development of Faiz as a poet. The first part of the anthology deals with poems that are purely romantic but the second part consists of poems that show his heightened awareness of the political and social environment and his awareness of the pain and suffering that surrounded him.

In 1943 Faiz joined the army as a Captain and worked in the Public Relations Department in Delhi. In 1943 he was promoted to the rank of a Major and in 1944 he was to become a Lieutenant Colonel. In 1944 he received a Military M.B.E award. But he resigned his service in 1947. Faiz realised that by serving in the army he would participate in the destructive aspects of war while his job, as a writer is to fight on the intellectual plain.¹⁷

After leaving the army Faiz was made the editor of *The Pakistan Times* under the Progressive Papers Ltd, and also of the Urdu newspaper *Imroze* and a political weekly *Laila o Nahar*. The Progressive Papers had been organized by Mian Ifthikaruddin to put Pakistan on a progressive and secular path. The Martial Law of General Ayub Khan crushed this effort in 1958 when he took over the paper and put it under the National Press Trust.¹⁸ At that time most of the writers particularly of the Progressive Writers Movement were writing with a leftist bias. Faiz was

¹⁵ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

also one of them. He was deeply influenced by the socialist ideals advocated by the communists of Russia. While in Russia Faiz had first read the Communist Manifesto of which he says 'I read the Manifesto once and the way ahead was illumined'.¹⁹ In an interview with Hafeez Sidiqqi in Karachi for the monthly *Jaheeza* in January 1965 Faiz says, 'Russian Classical Literature is more alive and full of life for it represents unity and rebellion. Writers of that age move their voice against an environment they did not like. Our own environment is the same that is why we find this kind of literature more appealing'.²⁰ There was a general feeling of dissatisfaction after independence. After the initial euphoria writers felt that the people had not achieved real independence.

This dissatisfaction was also seen in sections of the army. An attempt within the army was made to take over power by overthrowing a democratically elected government. The coup attempt was led by the Chief of General Staff Major General Akbar Khan, the Commander 52 Brigade Muhammad Abdul Latif and the Station Commander Quetta. Among them Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Mrs Naseem Akbar Khan were the two civilians who had also participated. The *raison d'être* for the coup attempt were the following

1. Failure in Kashmir and the ceasefire held there
2. The refugee problem
3. Presence of British officers in the Armed Forces
4. Ineptness and corruption within the government.

Faiz had had intimate and friendly relations with Major General Akbar Khan and he was deeply impressed by him as a soldier. Akbar Khan on the other hand was deeply impressed by Faiz's intellectual horizons. Faiz though an activist of the Communist Party was not a regular party member though he was on friendly terms with many of its senior leaders like Sajjad Zaheer the secretary general of the party. The Communist Party had been approached by some army officers to remove the present Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. It was proved that it was Faiz who acted as a go-between the Communist Party and Major General Akbar Khan. For this reason Faiz was arrested in 1951 and the charges were proved against him. He was sentenced under section 121A of the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Faiz Ahmed Faiz *Mutha loh au Qalam* (Pen and Ink), *op.cit.*

Pakistan Penal Code to four years rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 500, and in default further rigorous imprisonment of one year.²¹

These years of imprisonment were the most difficult for Faiz. But his readers were to benefit tremendously for during this time he wrote some of his best poetry. In prison he wrote *Dast-i-Saba* (The Wind Writes) and *Zindan Nama* (Prison Journal). *Dast-i-Saba* was published in 1952 and it was very well received. Alys Faiz in her numerous letters to Faiz reveals the success of this anthology. In her letter of 8 January 1953 she says, '...No book has ever sold like *Dast-i-Saba*'. In another place she says '...The book binder of *Dast-i-Saba* says he has never seen the likes of the sale of a book he couldn't keep up with' and in her letter of 9 March 1953 she says 'The University students I am told skip periods to sit and discuss *Dast-i-Saba*'.²² This was the impact of Faiz in those days and his impact and following has grown over the years. In 1956 his third anthology *Zindan Nama* was published. Faiz who had been imprisoned on 9 March 1951 was released in April 1955. During this period he had been imprisoned in various prisons of Pakistan. The first three months he spent in solitary confinement in the prisons of Sarghodka and Lyallpur. Then all the inmates of the Conspiracy were imprisoned together in Hyderabad Jail till July 1953. After that they were divided into groups and sent either to the prisons in Lahore, Montgomery, Much (Balochistan) and Hyderabad. Faiz was to be sent to the Montgomery Central Jail but during that period he was ill. For treatment he was sent to a hospital in Karachi after serious symptoms of ill health.²³ On this occasion his wife Alys in her letter of 26 June 1953 writes '...I wonder how you feel leaving Hyderabad for the first time in two years? What a relief it must have been to gaze upon the world outside'.²⁴

In the Hyderabad jail after every fifteen days a *mushaira* would be held in which everyone had to participate. Faiz's new poem written for the occasion would be eagerly awaited. Most of the poems included in *Dast-i-Saba* and *Zaindan Nama* are of this period.²⁵ When Faiz was released from prison in 1955 he returned to the Progressive Papers. When Pakistan's first Martial Law regime came in 1958 after having overthrown the constitutional Government of Malik Feroz Khan Noon,

²¹ Hassan Zaheer, *The Times and Trial of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy 1951: The First Coup Attempt in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²² Alys Faiz, *Dear Heart (1951-1955)* (Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd., 1955).

²³ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Nuskha Hai Wafa* (The Prescription of Loyalty), *op.cit.*

²⁴ Alys Faiz, *op.cit.*

²⁵ Faiz Ahmed Faiz, *Nuskha Hai Wafa* (The Prescription of Loyalty), *op.cit.*

he was abroad. His friends cautioned him not to return but he did not heed their warning and came back. On his return in December he was put in 'preventive detention' for a brief period.²⁶ After his release in 1959 he was appointed Secretary of Pakistan Arts Council, a post he was to hold till 1962. Now he turned towards filmmaking. With A J Karder as Director he wrote the script and screen play for the award winning film *Jago Huva Savera* (Awake, it is morning). It told the story of a poor community struggling against social and political oppression.

During this period Faiz also wrote lyrics for the films of his friends Hameed Akhtar and Shamim Ashraf Malik. In 1962 Faiz was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize for which he was condemned and criticized. Faiz was completely disheartened by this criticism and he left his beloved homeland for two years deciding to settle abroad. But luckily for us he returned in 1964 to Karachi where he became the principal of the Abdullah Haroon College situated in the poorest locality.²⁷ Faiz lived in Karachi till 1972. During this period in 1971 he was asked by the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to head the Pakistan National Council in Islamabad. During Bhutto's rule he freely expressed his views on Pakistani culture and ideology. He was a target of the religious political party the Jamaat-i-Islami for saying 'The roots of Pakistani culture lay in India'.²⁸ During this period Faiz organized a music research cell and headed a commission on cultural planning. He represented Pakistan in various international conferences. When Martial Law was once more declared in 1977 Faiz resigned from his post. In 1978 he again went into self-exile. He now lived in Beirut where he was Chief Editor of the Afro-Asian writers' magazine *Lotus*. During this period he was to write more verse, which was published during the course of these years. They were *Dast-i-Taha Sangh*, *Sar-i-wadi-i-Sina*, *Ghubar-i-Ayam* and *Mere Dil Mere Musafir*. Faiz stayed on in Beirut till 1982 when Israel attacked Beirut. He still refused to budge but was forced to leave on the behest of the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, who had become a close and personal friend.²⁹

Faiz returned to Lahore a city he loved and had missed terribly during his days of exile and imprisonment. Some say he came to die and that might be true for after spending only two years he died on 20 November 1984.³⁰ Four days before his death he visited the residence of

²⁶ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ www.dhadrkhan.com.

²⁹ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Mrs Sarfaraz Iqbal where he met the literary figures of his time like Mumtaz Mufti, Shafiqur Rahman, Gulzar Fatima, Col Ziauddin and Arbab Jahanghir.³¹ His death was a great loss not only to his family and friends but also to his nation. He is remembered as a mild natured tolerant soul who always had a smile on his face. People would abuse and criticize him but he would listen to them with a tolerant smile on his face. He never hit back with greater criticism, abuse, and satire. Along with his other qualities this was a great quality within him. His daughter Salima pays him the greatest tribute when she says, 'My father...was tremendously tolerant --- you could present him with the face of evil and he would find it in his heart to forgive or to understand'.³²

Romantic revolutionary:

Faiz Ahmed Faiz is essentially a poet in the amorous romantic style religiously followed by the Urdu poets. This romantic strain is particularly obvious in the poetry of his youth, which forms the first part of his anthology *Naqsh-i-Faryadi*. Take for example the first verses

(Last night/When I thought of you/ All the deserts became fragrant with zephyrs./Spring was everywhere/And my dying heart suddenly came back to life)

The language is simple so is the imagery and the diction. It is a reflection of the passions and emotions of the young. Yet also there is a haunting lyricism and rhythm, which makes his verse very melodious. That is one of the major reasons why so much of his poetry can be set to music. This melody, this spine tingling rhythm and passion is felt vividly in his most popular poem *Yaad* (Remembrance). Reading this beautiful poem one drifts into the passionate world of sensuality and profound emotion underlying the deep feeling of loneliness and solitude of the poet.

³¹ Dawn, 21 November 2001.

³² Rina Saeed Khan, *The Friday Times Profile* (Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad: Vanguard Books (Pvt.), Ltd., 1998).

(Love, in this desert of solitude/ Quivers the shadow of your voice/And now and then trembles before me/The mirage of your lips/Look there/ In the midst of thorn bushes/Bloom the rose and jasmine of your beauty.)

This melancholic feeling is part of the traditional make-up of all Urdu poetry. Following in those traditional footsteps is such a melancholic reflection in his poem *Tanhaee* (Loneliness) where he tries to comfort his lonely heart

(Lock up your slumber less door, dear heart!/ For, now no one will ever come again.)

Yet Faiz is not all romance. He is very much aware of the world around him. In the 1930's when he was in Amritsar and had associated with the Progressive Writers Movement he realized that the external world and its problems could not be shut out. Faiz recalls that period when he says 'It was a time of great creativity and the opening of new perspectives. I think the first lesson I learnt was that it was impossible to detach oneself from what was happening externally...What matters is the world outside and the people in it and what happens to them. What is important is the larger human equation of pain and pleasure. As such internal and external experiences are two sides of the same coin'.³³ When independence came many like Faiz realised that it was not real independence for the pain and oppression did not end. For many it was a shattered dream

³³ Khalid Hassan (ed.), *op.cit.*

(This stained light, this night bitten dawn/ This is not the dawn we
yearned for/This is not the dawn for which we set out/ Hoping that in the
skies wilderness/We would reach the final destination of the stars.
/Surely, the nights turgid sea will breathe its last/ On the inevitable shore.
/Surely, the boat of the hearts agony will somewhere come to a stop.)

But Faiz's greatness lies in the fact that he never loses hope --- a
hope that he desired for freedom and independence will be theirs one
day.

(Warn all those in authority/ To hold fast to their book of deeds. / When
the masses surge into the streets/ Crying for vengeance, / All appeals for
mercy ---/ All blubbery excuses/ Will be spurned aside. / Patrons and
influential friends will be out of house/ Reward and punishment will be

dispensed here/ Here will be hell and paradise./ Here and now will be the day of judgement.)

All his emotions, warmth and passion were for the downtrodden that he felt would one day rise and break the chains that were holding them back

(Whenever the meat of the workers is sold in the market and the blood of the poor is spilled on the streets a fire burns in my chest and I cannot control my heart) [Translation by the author]

He felt that the poets were duty bound to fight the fight of the oppressed and the exploited because he felt the poets were

And it was his staunch belief in the truth of his ideals that led him to spend a portion of his life in captivity and exile. Some of his most beautiful and moving poetry has been written during this period. This is poetry of such profound depth and feeling that no one who reads it can escape the underlined loneliness and yet never lose sight of the great sense of hope. When Khalid Hassan wrote to him in Beirut in 1981 after the establishment of Martial Law once again in Pakistan his answer was not to lose hope and become disillusioned as he says, 'What has happened is not our pre-ordained destiny, nor what the people necessarily want. Islam is not a stumbling block in the march towards progress. The laws of politics and social change, unlike the laws of nature, do not always follow a straight line. There are many deviations, but this should not be taken to mean that they do not operate. Delay can occur, but ultimately truth manifests itself. No night is without end'.³⁴ This feeling of hope is rejuvenated in his poem 'Wash the blood'

³⁴ *Ibid.*

(And all those who saw/ Cried out:/ Why do you harp on / The same old theme/ That sincerity is dead. / Wash the blood off your feet. / When the paths are erased/ By the dust/ Hundreds of new ways will appear/ Hold firmly to your heart ---/ Hundreds of arrows will break in it)

In Faiz Ahmed Faiz this revolutionary zeal never turns into sloganeering. He is never rude or harsh in his poetry though he did protest. But it was a protest in a passionate and soul-stirring vein. In spite of the all the hardships he had to undergo it never made him into a poet who was harshly satirical, venomous, bitter or biting. As he says beautifully

(I will adopt Pen and Ink and will write whatever my heart undergoes)
[Translation by author]

Rather his objective is more constructive as he rouses the people into positive action with the passion and fire of his words

(Those sitting in the dust get up for the time has drawn near when thrones and crowns will be thrown down) [Translation by author]

Faiz never gave up his fight for a change but it was a change that was to occur through ideas that is one of the reasons that he has advocated his ideas and ideals so passionately. He was never frivolous in his beliefs but stuck to them even during his captivity and life of exile.

Captivity and exile

The four years that Faiz spent in captivity had their obvious difficulties – he was cut off from his family, their financial and other day-to-day difficulties worried him. Yet this period of confinement had its own benefits. Without the distractions of everyday life now he had the leisure to be more introspective and thoughtful. This period of pondering thoughtfulness poured out in the form of his best poetry. Recalling that period he says, ‘The two collections *Dast-i-Saba* and *Zindan Nama* are a tribute to my captivity. Confinement like love is a fundamental experience. It opens many new windows on the soul. The early sensations of youth return in an intensified form. One’s curiosity returns, as does one’s sense of wonder at such phenomena as the light of early morning, the fading twilight, the sheer blue of the sky, or the gentle touch of the wind. Time and the immediate world become one. What was near appears to have reached into the distance and what was in the distance, moves in. A passing moment can become an eternity’.³⁵ Such thoughts are expressed beautifully in his poem ‘A Prison Evening’

³⁵ *Ibid.*

(How precious is life! / How wonderful this passing moment! / But the tyrants have injected their venom/ Into the veins of humanity. / They have slaughtered our joy. / Centuries of oppression, brutality, plunder. / And, yet, the moon shines in all her splendour/ The lotus blooms./ Life is eternal.)

According to Major Muhammad Ishaq (a close companion of Faiz during his days of captivity) Faiz's poetry written in prison underwent four moods. The first mood is of the defiant and rebellious captive who wrote

(So what/ If pen and paper/ Have been snatched from my hands? / I have dipped my fingers/ In the blood of my heart / So what if they have/ Sealed my lips? / I have threaded with a tongue / Every link of my chains.)

This was the time of solitary confinement in Sarghodha and Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) jails when he was denied access to reading and writing material. The solitary confinement had such a major impact on his personality that when he was shifted to Hyderabad jail with the rest of the prisoners of the conspiracy case he would often recall that ordeal. In this new jail the inmates were given individual rooms but were also allowed the use of a connecting hall. Initially Faiz refused to stay alone in his room and persuaded everyone to sleep together in the main hall. Surrounded by his friends he was by far happier. Their chatter soothed him but this situation did not last long for soon he overcame his sense of loneliness and shifted back to his room. This was a very creative time for him and he became very prolific. This period is a part of his second mood. Although he was now comfortable in his surroundings the passion of his verse had not abated nor had his defiance. These emotions are found in the first part of *Dast-i-Saba* but such qualities seem to be lacking in the second part of the Anthology. There are two reasons. One everyone including Faiz seems to be suddenly interested in the proceedings of their trial hence a time for deep thought. Secondly and more importantly his brother after visiting him in jail died on 18 July

1952 while saying his prayers. This was a time of great personal grief and dejection for Faiz.

Faiz's third mood is the time he spent in a hospital in Karachi for an ailment. Here the atmosphere was naturally freer and his friends could have easy access to him. He was to feel deeply the loss of the freedom he was denied by his captivity. After spending about two months there he was shifted to the Montgomery jail and the sense of losing his liberty deepened. This may be the reason his Anthology is called *Zindan Nama*. His poem 'Meeting' of this period reflects the great emotional pain. Yet the poem also manifests great calmness and a sense of peace. We never lose sight of his deep faith and belief, his patience, wisdom and hope. This hope never dies rather it rekindles again and again in his heart.

(This grief given by the night gives us hope of a morning. A hope that is more merciful than this sorrow and the morning greater than the night.)
[Translation by author]

The fourth mood begins during his long stay at Montgomery jail. Here Faiz was relatively comfortable and was surrounded by people who took a keen interest in literature. His family and friends had easy access to him and he could meet them regularly. Despite the comfort he was becoming impatient with his captivity. He started to feel the burden of imprisonment and felt deeply the sorrows that were rampant in the world outside. He seemed to find a deep affinity with it. His poetry now is more universal for he seems to be speaking for the whole of humanity. Such feelings are detected in his poem 'Africa Come Back' and particularly in his poem 'We who were killed on the dark path.' a poem written about martyrs and martyrdom anywhere in the world.

In March 1954 for three weeks he was to visit his beloved Lahore for some dental treatment. Back in the city he loved he felt even more the burden of captivity. This visit led to his tribute to Lahore in his poem 'Oh City of Lights'. He is behind bars but he can imagine the lights of his city and he very poignantly asks the people that when they turn on their lanterns to place them up high so that he could see them and enjoy their glow in a free atmosphere.

Days of exile

Faiz's days in exile were like an extension of his captivity. Although friends and well-wishers surrounded him wherever he stayed yet the

poetry of this period shows his great yearning for his homeland. His anthology *Mere Dil Mere Musafir* reads like the poetry of exile. But it must be remembered it was voluntary exile as he said, 'I was wandering about of my own free will. Nobody has ordered me to leave. I can return whenever fancy takes me ... I saw that things were not quite right, so I thought I would take a holiday from the situation'.³⁶

Knowing the anguish of separation from one's homeland he had a keen sense of understanding of the situation of the people of Palestine. He understood their freedom struggle and their great sense of uprootedness.

(Far away on indifferent highways/ Of foreign lands/ Or on the unfamiliar streets of alien cities, / 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.)

Khalid Hassan in his reminiscences recalls that Faiz always thought of returning to Pakistan one day. To him Pakistan was home. In 1980 he was offered employment in India including a Visiting Professorship at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. He refused for to accept would mean permanent exile from Pakistan. He also forbade Khalid Hassan from accepting employment in Delhi as he said, 'That would amount to

³⁶ *Ibid.*

cutting your umbilical cord with Pakistan. Go elsewhere if you have to'.³⁷ When Faiz was abroad his love for his homeland and his patriotic feelings burned even brighter. True he had not written popular national songs to be sung on T V but his love for his people is reflected in the pain, and hope for freedom which he advocated in his poems. During the 1965 war with India while other writers were singing the praises of a bloody war Faiz saw only the heartache, destruction, and suffering of the common man in 'The Soldier's Elegy'

(Arise from the dust, my son/ Wake up/ The black night is over us/
Bedecked in soft blue shawls/ I have made your bed/ Consecrating it
with the pearls of my tears/ So many pearls/ That the sky is luminous
with their splendour/ The splendour of your name/ Arise from the dust,
my son/ Awake)

The sorrowful repetition of the writer asking the dead soldier to awake and arise shows the poignancy of the situation. But this great sacrifice is soon forgotten as Faiz bemoans that

³⁷ *Ibid.*

(Nowhere but nowhere is there a sign of the blood that was shed).³⁸

Faiz was a poet of peace and freedom who continued to advocate his ideas to the end. Although he once told Khalid Hassan 'It is not that one has no fight left. It is only that one is not as young as one once was. It is difficult to take physical punishment when one is older. The spirit is willing, but the body is reluctant'.³⁹ This to me is such a realistic view of life and his poem 'Evening be kind' reflects the life he had led.

(Past is the hellish noon of tyranny. / Senseless tyranny. / The noon of pain, rage and grief)

And when he asks the evening to be kind repeatedly we are comforted by the hope that one day there will be freedom, love, and peace.

The poet Daud Kamal in his poem 'Ascent'⁴⁰ has given the best tribute that can be paid to Faiz.

Ancient gardens
in your eyes
and the falling snow.
We had not broken camp ---
Our horses
were at pasture ---
unsaddled.
Restless traveller!
Again exiled?
The valleys unfold

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

themselves for you.
Birdsongs. Jewelled grace
of November leaves.
Intercede for us ---
river- forgotten
magnetic stones.