

## Faiz's "Internationalist" Poetics: Selected Translations and Free Verses

By Christina Oesterheld

Indian poets had come into close contact with English poetry in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and in the years to come English translations opened up literature in other western languages such as French, German and Russian to Urdu writers, poets and critics. In the twentieth century this contact with western literature was furthered by travelling to the west, particularly to Great Britain, and after 1947 London became an important meeting point for authors from the Subcontinent. The great pioneer of modern Urdu poetry, N.M. Rashed, settled down in London and attracted a number of younger poets, for instance Saqi Faruqi, who also made London his home. Zehra Nigah provided another meeting point for Urdu literati, and Iftikhar Arif for many years supported literary activities as director of the Urdu Markaz.

Faiz was a frequent guest in London, but in contrast to his contemporaries he also had very close contacts with the Soviet Union. In 1949 for the first time he came into contact with a Soviet delegation that had arrived late for the Progressive Writers' Association's Conference in Lahore. He again met a Soviet delegation when he was allowed to take part in a conference of Asian writers in Delhi in 1956. The Soviets strongly voted for a resolution for the creation of a regular organisation including African writers to which the Hindi writers, especially Agyeya<sup>1</sup> were opposed. The disagreement ended on the compromise to postpone any such decisions until the next conference which would take place in Tashkent at the invitation of the Soviet delegates. Thus in 1958 Faiz together with Hafiz Jalandhari visited the Soviet Union for the first time. He kept visiting the country until the end of the 1970s, and from 1978 until 1983 he edited *Lotus*, the literary journal of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, mostly from Beirut. These intensive contacts with a number of Soviet authors and non-Western authors whom he met through his Soviet hosts and with the Palestinians clearly left visible traces on

---

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym of Sachidananda Vatsyayan (1911-1987), eminent Hindi poet, novelist, freedom fighter and journalist. His autobiographical novel *Shekhar ek jivani* (1941/1944) is regarded as one of the milestones of modern novel writing in Hindi. Faiz has reported the heated debate on the question of the necessity of a final document and a permanent organization in an article which was re-published in English translation in *Lotus* No. 57 (1986), p. 8.

his thinking and writing and thus distinguishes him from other Urdu poets and writers of his time.

Internationalism was one of the premises of communist ideology, proclaiming the solidarity of the working class all over the world which was then extended to the solidarity with peoples fighting for the freedom from colonialism. Literature was seen as a means to further this ideology which explains the Soviet support for the Afro-Asian Writers' Association. One may also cynically regard these efforts as part of the Big Game of the Cold War period with the Soviet Union trying to co-opt the newly independent African and Asian countries into its sphere of power, but in the 1960s many intellectuals all over the world sincerely believed in the possibility of a better and more peaceful world which would be free from colonial exploitation and from war. Hence, while looking at Faiz's literary and editorial activities of those years one needs to keep the atmosphere of that period in mind. Thus, internationalism to him probably meant to engage with the struggle for peace and for a better, more equitable and just society everywhere in the world. In a way it was also an extension of the concept of exchange between different Indian literatures advocated by the Progressive Writers' Association in the 1930s, that is, at a time when many Indian intellectuals were well aware of writing in metropolitan languages such as English, French and Russian but knew next to nothing about contemporary writing in Indian languages. Whatever their intention, there can be no doubt that Soviet publishers undertook an unprecedented project of getting literature from the periphery translated and published and of furthering cultural exchange between the countries of their bloc and countries of the Third World. Faiz's close contacts with Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda would have been unthinkable without this policy.

The focus of the present paper, however, will be limited to the following three aspects of Faiz's engagement with contemporary Soviet and other authors whom he met in the 1960s and 1970s: discussions of questions such as literature and life, commitment and aesthetics, poetics; Faiz's literary translations and selected poetry inspired by poets of other languages.

### **1. Exchanges on the Representation of Life in Literature, Commitment and Aesthetics, Poetics of Committed Literature**

Faiz has reported a number of discussions with fellow writers in his reminiscences, particularly about the Soviet Union, in Urdu prose which he wrote in 1974-75 at the request of Progress Publishers, Moscow who published them in

1979 under the title *Mah-o-sal-i ashna'i* (Months and years of acquaintance).<sup>2</sup> In the second part of this book Faiz has recollected his meetings with Nazim Hikmet, Ilja Ehrenburg, Jean Paul Sartre, the Kazakh writer Umar Ali Sulaimanof and Chingiz Aitmatow. Faiz claims that these reports are based on memory since he did not make any notes during his talks. Of all the meetings and discussions mentioned in the book, those with Nazim Hikmet seem to have been most important to Faiz, and only these will be discussed in the present essay.

Nazim Hikmet (1902-1963) was one of the first Turkish poets to use more or less free verse. During his lifetime he became the best-known Turkish poet in the West, and his works have been translated into more than fifty languages. He had joined the Turkish Communist Party in 1920 and studied Sociology and Economics in Moscow from 1922-1928. After his return to Turkey he spent 17 years in prison until he was released in 1950 due to massive international protests but was again persecuted, and when he finally fled from Turkey in 1951 he had to leave his wife and son behind. In 1951 he was deprived of Turkish citizenship. He took refuge in Moscow and spent the rest of his life in the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1963 he died in Moscow of a third heart attack.

Faiz had read a slim volume of Hikmet's poetry in English translation in Lahore. It consisted mainly of prison poems. When Nazim Hikmet escaped from prison he got asylum in the Soviet Union but despite leading a comfortable life there his heart always longed for his home which turned many of his poems into sad elegies (MoS: 75). Faiz met Nazim Hikmet for the first time at the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference at Tashkent in 1958 where a *mushaira* had been organised which was a new thing for most of the participants. They became friends and remained friends until Hikmet's sudden death. Faiz had long discussions with him about poetics, style, language usage etc.

Faiz reports that Hikmet believed a poem could never be completely free, there would always be a specific word order which would set certain limits and a particular harmony/inner linkage of words which distinguishes poetry from prose, but the first requirement of poetry would be rhythm which again should correspond with the theme or content of the poem. He rejected the concept that poetry could only be created in the traditional patterns and forms. Hikmet believed in the poetic potential of colloquial language. Poets should try to discover the natural rhythm and melodiousness of the spoken language and bring their poetry as close as possible to it. He specifically criticised the custom to follow Arabic prosody in

---

<sup>2</sup> A Pakistani edition appeared in Karachi, Maktaba-yi Daniyal, 1981.

languages such as Urdu or Turkish. Hikmet tried to free himself from the fetters of Arabic prosody and thus arrived at a new rhythm and at free verse. This was a view adopted later by many modern Turkish poets (MoS: 76-77).

Hikmet did not, however, advocate a complete break with the poetic tradition. He wanted to establish a link with the older indigenous tradition of folk songs, *dāstān* and epics. He linked the shift to Arabic prosody with changes in society, as a move away from the older sovereign tribal order to forms of feudalism. He speaks of a long phase of stagnation in society and literature, perhaps following Marx. But now a new era has dawned, the industrial era which brings about fundamental changes in all aspects of life and necessitates new approaches and techniques in literature. However, realism alone is not enough, aesthetic qualities are essential for works of art. Hikmet now thought that his earliest poetry which was predominantly political and used in mass meetings and rallies was one-dimensional and could only fulfill short-term needs, but its language and diction did not reflect the depth and intricacy of human experience (MoS: 77-78). Hikmet stressed the inseparableness of tradition, form and subject. When it was suited to the material, he also used strict formal patterns, local language or expressions of the past. He compares the form to a silk stocking on a beautiful woman's white leg/shank—it should enhance the leg's beauty but should itself not be too visible (MoS: 78).

These ideas seem to correspond to most of Faiz's poetic practice. Much of his poetry owes its effect to the intense human experience it expresses. Faiz also deemed these ideas important enough to repeat them in his book. We will never know to what extent they were colored by his own views—at least he did not voice any disagreement here. It is astonishing how far he initially deviated from this stress on personal experience and the aesthetic in a discussion with fellow poets and writers recorded by Radio Pakistan on 5 October 1974<sup>3</sup>, that is in the same year in which he started to put together *Mah-o-sāl*. Here he went on to underline the importance of collective experience, almost to the exclusion of the personal, individual element, until one of his interlocutors reminded him that his poetry would lose most of its impact without the personal involvement felt in it. Faiz then argued that when he became more mature he realized that political or ideological commitment can only be integrated into poetry when it forms part of the poet's personality. Only if it is an inseparable aspect of his inner life and his emotional experience can it find aesthetic expression. He named the period of his confinement in jail as the turning point in this regard. In a way, this statement mirrors Hikmet's perspective paraphrased above.

---

<sup>3</sup> Part 4 of the interview, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/radiopakistanonline>. This interview has recently been made available to the public by Radio Pakistan on YouTube.

During their meetings Hikmet occasionally also recited some verses. Faiz mentions that he included some translations although he was conscious of the fact that they could hardly convey the beauty of the original (“*tarjume men un kā husn kyā dikhā’ī degā. bahar hāl do cār tarājim agle bāb men śāmīl hain.*”, MoS: 79). Faiz goes on to say that several poems he wrote in Moscow and published in *Mah-o-sāl* are probably a result of these discussions with Nazim Hikmet. (“*Is mauzūc par hamārī ka’ī bār guftugū hu’ī aur ba’z nazmen jo main ne māsko men likhī thin aur is kitāb men dūsarī jagah darj hain gāliban inhī suhbaton se mutāsir hain.*”, MoS: 77).

## 2. Translations

Before turning to Faiz’s translations in his various collections, I would like to focus on two translations of Russian poems from *Mah-o-sāl* which are embedded in the text and were not included in Faiz’s collected works but which are nevertheless worth mentioning. As far as I know Faiz has not left any note on his method as a translator. He did not know Russian or any of the other languages whose poetry he translated. But as I assumed, which was recently confirmed by Iftikhar Arif<sup>4</sup>, he had the poems translated by his interpreters or sometimes by the authors, perhaps into English or even Urdu, and then produced his own poetic translation on the basis of those literal translations. In spite of this indirect mode of translation through the medium of a third language, some of the results work remarkably well and faithfully capture the mood of the original. Faiz was well aware of the problems of literary translations, and particularly of poetry. He was actively involved in translating Urdu poetry into English, and this experience probably helped him in working on his own Urdu translations.

In the following examples Faiz’s translations will be contrasted with English translations of the original poems so that the reader can have an overview of Faiz’s achievement. The first example is not very remarkable as far as its poetic quality is concerned. It simply conveys the basic meaning of the immensely popular Russian children’s song ‘Pust’ vseгда budet solntse’ composed by Lev Oshanin in 1962. Reportedly, the foundation for the song had been the four lines of the refrain, which were composed in 1928 by a four-year-old boy Kostya

---

<sup>4</sup> Oral communication on the occasion of the Faiz Centennial Seminar at the SOAS, London, on September the 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Barannikov.<sup>5</sup> Faiz has also added a concept which is missing from the original—that of the homeland which makes his translation sound more patriotic than the original:

<b>Faiz's Translation</b> (MoS: 59)	<b>English (Literal)</b> <sup>6</sup>
یہ آ	A sunny disk, the sky's around (it);
یہ	This is a drawing by a young boy. He drew it on a sheet (of paper),
یہ؟	And signed in the corner: Chorus:
میرا	May there always be sun
میں	May there always be sky, May there always be mama,
میرا	May there always be me!

A much more poetic and creative translation is the following, and here, although Zoe Ansari's version of the title is more catchy, Faiz captured the atmosphere of the original somewhat better than Ansari, whose translation at places appears rather pedestrian in comparison to Faiz's although he knew Russian very well and translated from the original. It is the famous anti-war poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1961):

<b>Translation by Faiz</b> (MoS: 60)	<b>Translation by</b> <b>Zoe Ansari</b> (Ansari: 147-148)	<b>English Translation</b> <b>by Leonard Lehr-</b> <b>man</b> <sup>7</sup>
کیا ہم روسی جنگ طلب ہیں؟	چاہتے ہیں کیا روسی جنگ؟	<b>Do The Russians</b> <b>Want War?</b>
ج	پوچھو اس خاموشی اس سناٹے	O, do the Russians long for war? Ask of the stillness

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.songlexikon.de/songlexikon/songs/maytherealways>, retrieved 11.01.2013.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> <http://ljllehrman.artists-in-residence.com/translations/DoTheRussiansWantWar.html>, retrieved 15 September 2011.

ا:	سے	evermore, Ask of the field, or ask the breeze, And ask the birch and poplar trees.
اس مغموم فضا سے پوچھو، اس خاموش ہوا سے پوچھو،	جو دور تلک بچھے کھیتوں، میدانوں پر،	
جس میں جھول رہے ہیں پودے، دیودار اور چنار،	پھیلا ہے دیوداروں اور کھلیانوں پر	Ask of the soldiers who now lie Beneath the birch trees and the sky, And let their sons tell you once more Whether the Russians long Whether the Russians long Whether the Russians long for war.
جا ان کے نیچے کام آئے تھے بانگے کئی جو ہزار		
ار ان کی جگہ ان کے نیچے پل کر ہیں ساتتار		
چاہلے سے بھی جانتے ہو، اب جان لو پھر ایک بار		
کیا ہم روسی جنگ طلب ہیں؟		

It needs to be mentioned, however, that Faiz translated only the first stanza, whereas Zoe Ansari translated the whole song. Both translators have used considerable poetic license, but how far have they succeeded in conveying the mood and the central ideas of the poem? As far as I can judge, Faiz has done quite well. His translation has a poetic quality of its own. The Russian original has a strict pattern of meter and rhyme which Faiz has tried to retain. Zoe Ansari took more freedom with the rhythm of the poem, but his translation is more faithful to the original wording of the poem. In one case this clearly is an advantage: The question “Do the Russians (really) want war?” in the Russian original does not include the speaker/lyrical voice, the Russians are named in the third person. It is difficult to judge why Faiz changed this line. Perhaps the translated version with which he worked created such a wrong impression, or he intended to intensify the impact of the line? As it is, to me Zoe Ansari’s version appears more powerful. Urdu speakers, however, should better judge this.

From these two minor attempts we will now turn to Faiz’s better known translations and adaptations most of which are included in *Nuskahā-i vafā*. It is to Faiz’s credit that he acquainted Urdu readers with the Soviet poets Rasul Hamza-

tof and Olzhaz Omar Ali Sulaiman to whom they would otherwise not have had access. Without the original poems to refer to I am unable to judge how faithful Faiz has been to the Russian<sup>8</sup> originals, but the translations are fine poems in their own right.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Zoe Ansari who knew Russian included Faiz's translations in his own collection<sup>10</sup> may also indicate that he approved of Faiz's renderings. No doubt Zoe Ansari put before the Urdu public a broader range of eminent Soviet poets, but his work probably reached far fewer readers than Faiz's select but few translations.

Poems by Rasul Hamzatof (1923-2003) form the final chapter of *Sar-i vādī-i Sīnā* (1971) which bears the title "*Dāgīstān ke maliku-ś-śū<sup>c</sup> arā Rasūl H,amza ke afkār*" (Thoughts/Ideas of the Dagestani poet Rasul Hamza, NV: 465-473). There are a few deviations in the versions published in *Mah-o-sāl* under the heading "*Rasūl Hamzātof ke tarājim*" (NV: 115-122), and *Mah-o-sāl* contains one additional poem: "*Imdādī fanḍ keli'e sifāris*" (Recommendation for a relief fund, MoS: 123). In *Mah-o-sāl* Faiz has reported that he grew so close to Hamza's poetry that he translated several of his poems almost in one sitting ("*... Rasūl Hamza kā kalām to itnā mānūs ho gayā ki main ne qarīb qarīb ek hī naśast men un kī cand nazmon kā tarjuma mukammal kar liyā*", 97). When we look at the poems he has chosen for his translations we cannot fail to notice that with few exceptions they express very individual, subjective concerns, emotions and yearnings, dealing mainly with subjects such as love and death. Social aspects do, however, surface in some poems. One of them, "*Ba nok-i śamsīr*" (At the sword's point) is reminiscent of Ghalib's utterance about the martial tradition of his family, contrasting it with his

---

<sup>8</sup> Both poets dealt with here write in Russian.

<sup>9</sup> Tracing the original texts and comparing them with the translations would no doubt provide an interesting field for further study. What can be safely said about the translations, however, is that they seem to reflect a reader-oriented approach, reproducing some of the alien ideas and images of the original but presenting them in a familiar idiom. Translating through a third language may have watered down some of the original concepts and images but without having all versions before us this really cannot be judged. As I have noticed while comparing German translations of Premchand's stories from Hindi/Urdu with those from English, a translation from English does not necessarily produce inferior results as long as the translator is well-versed in both the source as well as the target culture. Hence the fact that all translated authors discussed in this chapter were Muslims probably made the process of cultural translation easier for Faiz.

<sup>10</sup> This fact has created some confusion about the authorship of several translations in Faiz's collections. Zoe Ansari, however states very clearly in his selection of translations from Russian that he has included Faiz's translations in his book: '*Rasūl Hamzātof ke dost Faiz Ahmad Faiz ne un men ba<sup>c</sup>z ko urdū libās<sup>c</sup> atā kiyā thā aur ham ne vah bhī śāmīl kar liye*' *Soviyaṭ yūniyan ke pandrah śā<sup>c</sup>iron kā muntakhaba kalām*, Māsko 1974, 108. He has not marked the respective translations, hence one may assume that they consist of those which were later included in Faiz's own collections of poetry.

own career as a soldier of the pen. It is quite possible that Faiz translated this very poem because the similarity in thought and expression held a special appeal for him. This is his translation (NV: 468, MoS: 118):

بہ نوکِ شمشیر **At the point of the sword**<sup>11</sup>

میرے آبا کہ تھے نامحرم طوق و زنجیر  
وہ مضامین جو ادا کرتا ہے اب میرا قلم  
نوکِ شمشیر پہ لکھتے تھے بہ نوکِ شمشیر  
روشنائی سے جو میں کرتا ہوں کاغذ پہ رقم  
سنگ و صحرا پہ کرتے تھے لہو سے تحریر

My forefathers who were strangers to  
yoke and chain  
Wrote on the point of the sword with  
the point of their sword  
The themes which I write down with  
my pen.  
What I put to paper with ink  
They inscribed on the rocks with their  
blood.

The first line, “my forefathers who were strangers to yoke and chain” may point at the strong sense of pride, freedom and independence of the poet’s tribe. He makes it quite clear that, although writing in Russian, he belongs to a culture which is distinctly different from the Russian culture of the centre. On the other hand, like all Soviet peoples his tribe took part in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. He refers to it in his touching poem “*Bhā’ī*” (Brother, NV 466, MoS: 116):

بھائی **My Brother**

آج سے بارہ برس پہلے بڑا بھائی مرا  
اسٹالن گراڈ کی جنگاہ میں کام آیا تھا  
میری ماں اب بھی لئے پھرتی ہے پہلو میں غم  
جب سے اب تک ہے وہی تن پہ ردائے ماتم  
اور اس دکھ سے میری آنکھ کا گوشہ تر ہے  
اب مری عمر بڑے بھائی سے بڑھ کر ہے

Twelve years ago from today  
My elder brother was killed in Stalin-  
grad  
My mother is still nurturing her pain  
Is still wearing the dress of mourning  
And my eyes fill with tears when I re-  
member  
That I am older now than he could ever  
be.

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the English translations are mine. No attempt has been made to arrive at a poetical rendition as this would be beyond my capacities.

So while stressing a distinct cultural identity, the poet sees his family firmly grounded in the Soviet mainstream through the sacrifice of his brother's life in the battle of Stalingrad which formed the turning point in the war against the German aggressor, with his mother sharing the grief of millions of other mothers.

In the poem "Sālgirah" (Birthday, NV: 470, MoS: 120) we may detect a satirical aside against poets which are celebrated by the regime but are devoid of any literary merit:

### سا لگرہ Birthday

شاعر کا جشن سا لگرہ ہے، شراب لا	It is a poet's birthday, bring wine,
دولت ہو یا خطاب، انہیں کیا نہیں ملا	Riches and fame, what has he not
بس نقص ہے تو اتنا کہ ممدوح نے کوئی	The only flaw in his career is this:
مصرعہ کسی کتاب کے شایان نہیں لکھا	Not a single line of his is worthy of publication.

Also written in an ironic/mocking way is the poem "Imdādī fand ke li'e sifāris" (Recommendation for the relief fund, MoS: 123):

### امدادی فنڈ کے لئے سفارش Recommendation for a relief fund

فنڈ والوں سے گزارش ہے کہ کچھ صدقہ زر	The undersigned requests the allocators of funding
سائل محولہ بالا کو ملے بار دگر	To kindly bestow some financial aid
پوچھ لکھتے ہیں جو وہ لکھتے ہیں تسلیم مگر	Again to the applicant mentioned below. His writing is mediocre no doubt, but
ان کی اولاد و اعزاء کو نہیں اس کی خبر	then
آل بیہودہ نویسیاں کے لئے نان جویں	His children and relatives don't know about that.
ٹالٹائے کے گھرانے سے اہم کم تو نہیں	The dependents of useless writers are As needy as Tolstoy's descendents.

This tongue-in-cheek reference to the equal bodily needs of great and mediocre (or even worthless) writers and their dear ones may be based on the use and misuse of cultural institutions and official/state funding or also on the poor living conditions of unacknowledged writers.

Some of the translations have a *gīt*-like quality, combining a good share of New Indo-Aryan/Indic vocabulary with a melodious, mellow rhythm, such as in the poem “*Main tere sapne dekhūn*” (I dream of you, NV: 465, MoS: 115):

میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	I shall dream of you
بر کھا برسے چھت پر، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	May the rain beat on the roof,
برف گرے پر بت پر، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	I shall dream of you
صبح کی نیل پری، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	May the snow fall on the hill,
کوئل دھوم مچائے، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	I shall dream of you
آئے اور اڑ جائے، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	May the blue dawn break,
باغوں میں پتے مہکیں، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	I shall dream of you
شبم کے موتی دکھیں، میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	May the cuckoo shout,
اس پیار میں کوئی دھوکا ہے	I shall dream of you
تونار نہیں کچھ اور ہے شے	May he come and fly away,
ورنہ کیوں ہر ایک سے	I shall dream of you
میں تیرے سنے دیکھوں	May the scent of leaves fill the garden,
	I shall dream of you
	May the dew drops shimmer,
	I shall dream of you
	You are not a female, but some other thing
	Otherwise
	Why would I dream of you all the time

As you see, it is full of references to the changing seasons as they are presented in the *bārahmāsa* tradition (the romantic image of the falling rain and the cry of the *ko'il*), added by a feature from the poet's *vatan*: snowfall in the mountains. Contrary to the Indic tradition, however, the poetic self, the lover, is a man, and the object of his love is not simply a “*nār*” (woman) but a rather elusive “*śai*” (thing). The poem thus presents a charming combination of the familiar with the unfamiliar, slightly opaque, all of it couched in an easy-flowing, soothing rhythm with an almost folksy air. Two of the poems given above, on the other hand, are much

closer to the Persianate diction of classical Urdu poetry. In the case of “Ba nok-i śamsīr” (Written with the sword) this may be attributed to the historical reference in the poem and perhaps also to the assumed link with Ghalib. With “Imdādī fand” the lofty, heavily Persianized and Arabized wording highlights the ironic mode of the poem, contrasting the verbose language with very down-to-earth, materialistic concerns. In the brief poem “Dāgīstānī khātūn aur śā‘ir betā” (A Dagestani lady and her poet son, NV: 467, MoS: 117) again the language is very simple and colloquial in accordance with the persona of the poem, a mother who confesses to be unable to understand her grown-up, famous son’s words:

داغستانی خاتون اور شاعر بیٹا **A Dagestani lady and her son, the poet**

اس نے جب بولنا نہ سیکھا تھا      When he learned to speak  
اس کی ہر بات میں سمجھتی تھی      I understood every word of his  
اب وہ شاعر بنا ہے نام خدا      Now he has become a poet, God preserve him  
لیکن افسوس کوئی بات اس کی      But alas  
میرے پلے ذرا نہیں پڑتی      I don’t understand a word he writes.

This alienation, which is a common enough experience, would have been brought about by the generation gap, enhanced by the gap in education and by an upward social mobility facilitated by changes in the social system. The pedestrian language of the poem is in line with the professed ignorance of the first person persona. An interesting rhetorical device is the paradoxical contrast between the possibility of communication between mother and son before he learned to speak, that is on a non-verbal plane, and the complete lack of understanding now that he has mastered the language.

Out of two translations of poems by the Kazakh poet Olzhaz Omar Ali Sulaiman (Sulaimanof, born in 1936) in *Mah-o-sāl* only “Sahrā kī (ek) rāt” (A night in the desert, 124-125) has been reproduced in *Śām-i śahr-i yārān* (NV: 587-588). There are considerable differences between these two versions, perhaps based on a thorough revision by Faiz before *Śām-i śahr-i yārān* was published in 1978. The poem does not contain any reference to revolution, social change or state ideology. It could have been written by any poet anywhere in a similar setting, combining images of the surrounding nature with the inner landscape of man.

It is interesting to also look at the content of the second poem by Sulaimanof in *Mah-o-sāl*, “*Lailatu’l-qadr*” (The night of power, 126-127). Here the poet has taken up an important Islamic concept, again combining (partly personified) elements of nature (the moon, a river, rocks, trees, meadows etc.) with human activities (contemplation, devotion, prayer), ending on a lyrical note when the poetic persona voices its own concern—that its prayer may be heard and answered by the beloved (who seems to be more *majāzī* than *haqīqī*; MoS: 127):

...This is the night when prayers are  
answered  
And I, like my forefathers,  
Walking on the prayer mat  
of concrete roads,  
pray under my breath,  
and my prayer is your name.  
If only my prayer will be answered to-  
day!

--- یہ دعائیں سنے جانے کی رات ہے  
اور میں بھی بزرگوں کے مانند  
سڑکوں کے سینٹ  
کی جا نمازوں پہ چلتے ہوئے  
زیر لب کچھ دعا کر رہا ہوں  
اور یہ دعا تیرا نام ہے  
کاش میری دعا آج مقبول ہو

As mentioned above, it is striking that the poems chosen by Faiz do not contain any conspicuous “Soviet” element. He might have kept the Urdu reading public in mind, but first and foremost his choices would have been based on a pre-selection by the authors and on his own poetic preferences. His choice of authors, in a way, may be seen to reflect his own attitude toward the Soviet system and the socialist ideology of the Progressives. Rasul Hamzatof and Olzhaz Sulaimanof were both honoured members of the pan-Soviet literary establishment which guaranteed them “the right to limited dissent”—perhaps “the most beguiling of permitted privileges” (Ram: 292). Another important aspect of their work is the tension between writing in Russian, the mainstream, metropolitan language, and yet representing the periphery. Thus traces of their non-Russian identity are easily detected in their poetry and are much more pronounced in their prose writings. Hamzatof celebrated his homeland in the lyrical novel *My Dagestan* (1967-1971) which is a poetic blending of historiography, genealogy, literary history, general knowledge about the region and folklore. Sulaimanof in a talk with Faiz described the Kazakh people as a blend of “Turk traditionalism, Buddhist contemplation, Muslim collectivism and Western individualism” (MoS: 87). He “scandalized the Soviet

Academy of Sciences with the semi-academic tract *Az i Ia* (1975)<sup>12</sup> in which he tried to trace Turkic elements in the language of the Russian epic “Slovo o polku Igoreve” (The song of Igor’s campaign). Harsha Ram reads it as a “cultural manifesto” (Ram: 289) echoing third-world-nationalism and pleading for the ethnic dignity of his people within a culture of “‘synthesis’ and ‘interdependence’ between Slav and Turk” (Ibid.).

When we add to this concern with identity the common Muslim cultural background of the three poets and some shared literary traditions due to the strong influence of Persian on Indian as well as Turkic literatures it is easy to understand why Faiz was drawn to these authors with whom he perhaps felt a kind of communion. The tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar between Faiz’s own reality and poetic context and that of his fellow writers may have generated an additional attraction. Thus we find in Faiz’s renderings a vast repertoire of familiar tropes and images which are, however, combined with new, fresh images from a different geographical as well as literary landscape. To give only a few examples: In Sulaimanof’s poems we come across rocks at the bottom of a mountain waterfall which appear to perform perpetual ablutions (“*ābsāron tale/ caṭānen hameśa se dn rāt/jaise vuzū kar rahī hain*”, MoS: 126), or a rivulet is compared to a silken turban which has been opened and unfolded (“*jaise reśm kī dastār ke sāre bal khul ga’e ho*”, MoS: 127).

Now we will turn to poetry by Nazim Hikmet in whom Faiz apparently saw a kindred spirit. In Turkey the ban on Nazim Hikmet’s works was lifted only in 1965, but his poetry was again suppressed after 1980. Despite political suppression and exile he is not only regarded as the greatest Turkish poet of the twentieth century and is revered as the national poet of modern Turkey, but also is the most widely read modern poet.<sup>13</sup> In the afterword of a recent German edition of Nazim Hikmet’s selected verses, the editor and translator quotes the romantic German poet Novalis who called poetry “the self-awareness of the universe” (Kraft: 312), thus underscoring the importance of retrieving Hikmet’s poetry for the present and future generations. It is a poetry based on the experiences of an extraordinary life and an exemplary dedication to freedom and equality, expressed in a very individual, intensely personal manner. And yet most of Nazim Hikmet’s poems are sufficiently removed from the concrete experience, are abstract to such an extent that they acquire a universal appeal. Although his poetics is quite different

---

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.erlanidrissov.com/?p=148>, retrieved 14.10.2011. The title consists of two Russian forms, one archaic and one modern, of the first person pronoun ‘I’.

<sup>13</sup> A brief, but comprehensive biography of the poet is available at: [http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/nazim\\_hikmet/biography](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/nazim_hikmet/biography)

form that of Faiz, at least of Faiz as a ghazal poet, they share this element of poetic abstraction or generalization which may be the reason for their popularity among a wide audience many of whose members have differing political commitments and don't always share the ideological persuasions of the two poets.

Apart from publishing the poems in *Mah-o-sāl*, Faiz also included three of his Nazim Hikmet translations in his collection *Šām-i šahr-i yārān* (1978, NV: 583-586). There are some minor differences between the earlier and the later versions, suggesting that Faiz slightly revised them after the first publication. The first example is not included in *Nuskha hā-i vafā*. There are several English translations of this poem which is part of a much longer piece. Here are two of them:

3<sup>14</sup>

Sunday today.  
Today they took me out in the sun for  
the first time.  
And I just stood there, struck for the  
first time in my life  
    by how far away the sky is,  
    how blue  
    and how wide.  
Then I respectfully sat down on the  
earth.  
I leaned back against the wall.  
For a moment no trap to fall into,  
no struggle, no freedom, no wife.  
Only earth, sun, and me...  
I am happy.

**Today Is Sunday (Bugün Pazar)  
(Letters From A Man In Solitary  
Confinement, Part 3)** <sup>15</sup>

Today is Sunday.  
For the first time they took me out into  
the sun today.  
And for the first time in my life I was  
aghast  
that the sky is so far away  
and so blue  
and so vast  
I stood there without a motion.  
Then I sat on the ground with respectful  
devotion  
leaning against the white wall.  
Who cares about the waves with which  
I yearn to roll  
Or about strife or freedom or my wife  
right now.  
The soil, the sun and me...  
I feel joyful and how  
(1938)

---

<sup>14</sup> Trans. by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk (1993), retrieved from  
[http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/nazim\\_hikmet.html](http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/nazim_hikmet.html), 15 September 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Translated by Talat Sait Halman. (Literature East & West, March 1973), retrieved from  
[http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/nazim\\_hikmet.html](http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/nazim_hikmet.html), 15 September 2011.

Now look at Faiz's translation (MoS: 134-135):

جیل سے خط: ۲ A letter from prison: 2

آج پیر کا دن ہے Today is Monday,  
اور آج پہلی بار And today for the first time  
وہ مجھے باہر کھلی ہوا میں لے کر گئے They have taken me out into the open.  
آج زندگی میں پہلی بار Today for the first time in my life  
میں نے بہت حیرت سے دیکھا I saw with wonder  
کہ آسمان کتنا نیلا ہے How blue the sky is  
اور کتنا دور And how far away  
میں دھوپ میں ساکت کھڑا رہا I stood in the sun, motionless,  
اور پھر ادب سے سر جھکا کر And then with my head bent respectfully  
پتھر کی دیوار سے ٹیک لگا کر leaning against the wall  
بیٹھ گیا، I sat down,  
اور پھر یکبارگی سب کچھ بھول گیا And suddenly I forgot everything  
خوابیں بھی My dreams  
آزادی بھی Freedom  
اور تم بھی مری جان Even you, my dear.  
بس اک سورج، دھرتی اور میں Only the sun, the soil and I  
اُن کتنا سُکھ ہے، کتنا سُکھ ہے What a bliss, what a bliss

This passage is part of one of the numerous prison poems of Nazim Hikmet. You will notice that there are two minor mistakes (the number of the poem and the

name of the day), probably caused by misunderstanding the literal translation on which Faiz based his adaptation. Apart from these deviations, he successfully captured the mood and central ideas of the poem, at least as far as can be judged from the English translations<sup>16</sup>. The second English version has some end rhyme, trying to imitate the rhyme structure of the original, which does not necessarily make it a better rendition of the text. It is also more literal. In Faiz's rendition, on the other hand, apart from two lines there is no attempt to reproduce the rhyme structure of the original.

Solitary confinement and exile were shared experiences of both authors, as was their commitment to ideals of freedom and social justice. In part 4 of the interview with Radio Pakistan Faiz mentions the sense of wonder at simple, everyday experiences he regained when he was in solitary confinement, without access to the outside world, to newspapers, books and a writing pad, and he compares it with the innocent impressions experienced by a child. Thus the joyful experience expressed by Hikmet was something he was familiar with, and Hikmet's poem probably revived this memory in him. From Faiz's reminiscences and his translations one gets the impression that with Nazim Hikmet he felt connected by a much stronger emotional bond than with the other foreign poets he had met in the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence.

One of Nazim Hikmet's latest poems, composed shortly before his death, is addressed to his Russian wife Vera (Hikmet: 298)<sup>17</sup>:

Faiz:	ویرا کے نام	Vera'ya	To Vera
She said come	اس نے کہا آؤ	Gelsene dedi bana	Come, she said to me
Then she said stay	پھر اس نے کہا	Kalsana dedi bana	Stay, she said to me
Smile, she said	ٹھہرو	Gülsene dedi bana	Smile, she said to me
Die, she said	مسکاو کہا اس نے	Ölsene dedi bana	Die, she said to me
I came	مر جاؤ کہا اس نے	Geldim	I came

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately I do not know the Turkish language and can therefore, apart from recognizing the rhyme structure, not compare the translations with the original.

<sup>17</sup> Faiz's translation is to be found in *Nuskhahā-i vafā*, 585. The Turkish original was taken from Nâzım Hikmet, *Hasretlerin Adı. Die Namen der Sehnsucht*, 298. The English translations are my own.

I stayed	میں آیا	Kaldim	I stayed
(I) smiled	میں ٹھہر گیا	Güldüm	I smiled
And also died	مسکایا	Öldüm (1963)	I died
	اور مر بھی گیا		

Here the contrast in form and structure is obvious. Hikmet's poem is austere and laconic to the extreme. Not a single word could be removed without destroying the effect of the text. The parallelism of the lines creates an impact which one is bound to feel but which is hard to define. The very regular rhythm creates a solemn, hammering beat which almost announces/suggests inevitability. The rigid sequence of verbs denotes a sequence of events and at the same time may be understood to hint at a causality which the lyrical self is not able or/and not willing to escape. The ambiguity between the metaphorical and the literal meaning of "to die (for somebody)" opens up a number of associations: A lover may profess his willingness to die for the beloved, or he may let his old/previous self die and leave his past behind to start a new life with the beloved, and, more literally, it may refer to Nazim Hikmet's knowledge that after two heart attacks the third could occur at any time. Thus the somewhat mystifying effect of these few lines relies on the unsaid which allows for several interpretations. And finally the minimalistic form also evokes the sense of time running out for saying what one wants to say. Faiz's translation has mellowed down the harshness and austerity of the original. Perhaps he was not aware of the original form and thus could not aim to reproduce it. It is also possible that he felt the Urdu verbs would not allow a similar parallelism in sound. Whatever the reason, Faiz's changes have considerably reduced the impact of the poem.

The last piece in Faiz's collection which refers to Nazim Hikmet is "*Türk şâ'ir Nâzim Hikmat ke kuch afkâr*" (Some thoughts of the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, NV: 694). Here Faiz has freely summarized some of Nazim Hikmet's—and probably, at least partly, his own—ideas and ideals. The first stanza corresponds with two lines from Hikmat's poem "Hymn to life" (Yasamak kasideleri):

Faiz:

What a pleasure it is

To die for living

And what a folly

To live for dying

جینے کے لیے مرنا

یہ کیسی سعادت ہے

مرنے کے لیے جینا

یہ کیسی حماقت ہے

Nazim Hikmet:

... not to live in order to die

but to die to live..."<sup>18</sup>

The second stanza is taken from Hikmet's famous "Epic of the War of Independence" which he began to write in 1941 and which refers to the liberation war of 1924. It appeared separately under the title "Invitation" (Davet) in 1947. These lines have since turned into a proverb in Turkish:

Faiz:

Live alone

Like a box tree

And live in company

Like a forest

اکیلے جیو

ایک شمشاد تن کی

طرح

اور مل کر جیو

ایک بن کی طرح

Nazim Hikmet:

To live like a tree alone and free

Like a forest in brotherhood

This is our dream.<sup>19</sup>

The final three lines are close to and yet not identical with ideas Faiz had expressed in several poems about the dilemma of warring loyalties. For Nazim Hikmet living life in its fullest sense and loving as much and as many times as possible went hand-in-hand:

Faiz:

Sustained by hope

I lived life with as much

ہ

<sup>18</sup> The preceding lines provide a context for this idea: "My hand thinking on my wife's flesh/is the hand of the first man./Like a root that finds water underground,/it says to me:"To eat, drink, cold, hot, struggle, smell, color ... not to live in order to die/but to die to live..."<sup>18</sup>, retrieved from: <http://www.sanjeev.net/poetry/hikmet-nazim/hymn-to-life-184211.html>, 24.11.2011.

<sup>19</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.nazimhikmet.org.tr/kronolojik3-en.asp>, 15 September 2011. I was unable to trace the translator of these lines. They have become so popular and have been translated into so many languages that they have really turned into a proverbial saying and as a slogan have been used by many different movements and individuals.



identity and their exchanges took place in an overall secular setting and atmosphere. Yet one cannot help feeling that Faiz took a deeper interest in Turkey and in the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union that he several times compared with the Northern Areas of Pakistan. To this was later added a strong involvement with the Palestinian cause.

### 3. Selected Free Verse inspired by Foreign Poets

Is there a marked difference between Faiz's ghazals and most of his *pāband nazms* on the one hand and his free verse on the other? His free verses form the smaller part of his poetic oeuvre, and as far as popularity is concerned, with some exceptions they are at the lower end of the scale. While this can be said about free verse in Urdu in general which has never gained much popularity outside the inner circles of fellow poets and literary critics, it is particularly true for Faiz who owes most of his fame to his ghazals. His ghazals are praised for their "mysteriousness", their "transcendental" and "dreamlike" atmosphere<sup>22</sup>, and in Aamir Mufti's words:

At its best, the Urdu lyric verse of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) can make available to the reader a disconcerting form of ecstasy, a sense of elation at the self being put in question, giving even the thoroughly secular reader the taste of an affective utopia not entirely distinguishable from religious feeling. (Mufti: 210)

In contrast, is it just the "sober"<sup>23</sup> intellectual effort and didactic purpose called for in the 'new' world" (Ibid.) that we find in Faiz's free verse, transposed from the concerns of the late nineteenth century into those of the 1960s and 1970s? Or can the lyric element, the deep personal involvement of the poet be traced in his free verse as well? Aamir Mufti states that Faiz's "most intense poetic accomplishments are examinations of subjective states" (Mufti: 211) which seems obvious enough and he demonstrates how Faiz achieves this lyric quality in poems written on topics such as the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 (Mufti: 226-230). Do we find the same lyric intensity and intimacy in Faiz's "internationalist" poems? An interesting idea voiced by Aamir Mufti and corroborated by Faiz's own statements and poetic practice is that his poetry "pushes towards ending the inwardness of the Urdu poetic tradition" (Mufti: 218) How much was he influenced in this by keep-

---

<sup>22</sup> "pur asrāriyat, mā varā'iyat, khvābnākī", Mujtabā Husain in "Surx bar siyāh", in *Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Faiz Sadī: muntakhab mazāmīn*, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> How "sober" the poetic products in Urdu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries really were is debatable, though. Whatever the underlying purposes, the results were often highly emotional, not seldom bordering on the sentimental.

ing company with other writers? As he states in *Mah-o-sāl*, the most important factor was the company of Soviet and other writers which also served as an impetus and inspiration and provided new perspectives and patterns of writing. The poem “*Intisāb*”, for instance, written over a span of several months, partly in Moscow, partly in Sochi, was inspired by Pablo Neruda. “*Rang hai dil kā mire*”, “*Āhista*” and some others were written in the mode (*rang*) of Nazim Hikmet.

There can be no doubt that the number of free verse or less *pāband* poems increased in Faiz’s collections published from the 1960s onward. It seems quite likely that this was in part due to his longer stays in London and his frequent visits to Moscow and other countries and his close contact with writers of other languages. Free verse had been practiced in Urdu before, but perhaps Faiz’s poetic temperament was more inclined to classical forms which he continued to write until the end of his life. Was there any marked difference between poems in more rigidly structured forms and his free verse? The answer is yes and no. It really depended on the theme and content of the poems which I will try to illustrate by a few examples.

The poems “*Rang hai dil kā mire*” (Such is the color of my heart, Moscow 1963) and “*Manzar*” (A scene, Moscow 1964) which according to Faiz were written in Nazim Hikmet’s *rang* are very personal, intimate poems about human relationships, loneliness, separation and longing. They are indeed quite close to the mode and atmosphere of many corresponding poems by Nazim Hikmet, but at the same time deeply steeped in the classical tradition of Urdu. As in the poems discussed by Aamir Mufti (Mufti: 240), here again we find quotations from and allusions to Ghalib (Faiz: “*rang hai dil kā mire ‘khūn-i jigar hone tak’*”, NV: 360, Ghalib: “*dil kā kyā rang karūn khūn-i jigar hone tak’*”), also in the poem “*Pās raho*”<sup>24</sup> (Stay close, Moscow 1963, NV: 362-363, MoS: 100-101) following immediately after “*Rang hai dil kā mere*” (Ghalib: “*kām vah ān parā hai ki banā’e na bane*”, from the ghazal “*Nukta cīn hai ġam-i dil*”, Faiz: “*jab ko’ī bāt banā’e na bane*”, NV: 363, etc). And see how beautifully Faiz’s “*Manzar*” echoes Valī Dakhinī’s famous ghazal “*Kiyā mujh ‘isq ne zālīm kū āb āhista āhista*”. It is interesting to see how successfully Faiz has combined conventional Perso-Arabic poetic expressions such as *mahtāb*, *halqa-i bām*, *qabā*, *śīśa-o-jām* with more colloquial Indic words such as *jhīl*, *nīl*, *cupke se*, *pal* and verbs such as *tairnā*, *phūtnā*, *dhalnā*, thus creating a very mellow, intimate atmosphere (NV: 368-369):

---

<sup>24</sup> In *Mah-o-sāl* the title was changed to “*Tum mire pās raho*”.

رہ گزر، سائے، شجر، منزل و در، حلقہ بام  
بام پر سینہ مہتاب کھلا، آہستہ  
جس طرح کھولے کوئی بند قبا، آہستہ۔۔۔

A road, shadows, trees, houses and  
doors, a roof  
The moon rose over the edge of the  
roof, slowly  
Like a closed gown opens up, slowly  
My heart repeated a pledge of faithful-  
ness quietly  
You said: “Softly!”  
The moon bent down and said:  
“More softly!”

دل نے دہرایا کوئی حرفِ وفا آہستہ  
تم نے کہا، “آہستہ”  
چاند نے جھک کے کہا  
، “اور ذرا آہستہ”

Iftikhar Jalib in 1966 had aptly described Faiz’s use of the word *āhista* in the poem as a descend in nine stages from the rooftop to the interior of the house and the meeting place of lovers.<sup>25</sup>

The poems mentioned above are lyric poems in the best sense, expressive of intense personal feelings. Similarly emotional and intense, but on another plane, is the slightly later poem “*Socne do*” (Let me think, Moscow 1967, NV: 417-419) which is dedicated to the eminently unconventional experimental Russian poet Andrey Voznesensky (1933-2010)<sup>26</sup>. In this poem, the personal anguish extends to conditions beyond the private sphere which are only subtly implied in the poems mentioned above, but explicitly named here (NV: 417-418):

خون کا قحط پڑا  
گل کی شہ رگ پے  
کڑا وقت پڑا  
سوچنے دو

There is a scarcity of blood  
The artery of the rose  
Is facing hard times  
Let me think

<sup>25</sup> Cf. his article in Iftikhar Jalib (ed.), *Na’ī šā’irī*, Lāhaur: Idāra Na’ī Matbū’āt, 1966, 263-264; quoted from: *Bunyad*, Vol. 2:1 (2011), Lahore: LUMS, 51-53.

<sup>26</sup> English translations of some of his poems can be found at:  
<http://vagalecs.narod.ru/Vozncoll.htm#THE%20%20ANTIWORLDS>

I do not know the exact circumstances under which the poem was composed or the question(s) it answers, but without knowing the context one may relate it to the political conditions in Pakistan, the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965 or to the events of the Subcontinent's partition. It can have a universal appeal referring to situations of estrangement, disillusionment, or homelessness, most directly in the following lines (NV: 418):

ہم سے اس دیس کا تم نام و نشان پوچھتے ہو	You ask me about a country
جس کی تاریخ نہ جغرافیہ اب یاد آئے	Whose name and geography I no longer remember
اور یاد آئے تو محبوب گزشتہ کی طرح	And should I ever remember it would be as embarrassing
رو برو آنے سے جی گھبرائے۔۔	As meeting a former beloved

Whatever you may read in the poem, it successfully evokes a sense of sadness, regret or resignation. The answers given in the poem are deliberately ambivalent. As in any good poem, it is impossible to extract any single meaning from the text or to paraphrase its impact on the reader. An even more personal note is struck in the final lines of the poem (NV: 419):

ہم اب اس عمر کو آ پہنچے ہیں جب ہم بھی یونہی	I have now reached an age which makes me meet
دل سے مل لیتے ہیں بس رسم نبھانے کے لیے	My heart just for the sake of propriety
دل کی کیا پوچھتے ہو	What do you ask about my heart
سوچنے دو	Let me think

In contrast to the poems mentioned right now, a similar lyric quality and emotional intensity are hardly to be found in the famous "Intisāb" (Dedication, NV: 389-392) which according to Faiz was inspired by the famous Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). It is a kind of confession, a political statement, enumerating the underprivileged of Pakistan and the world and describing their grievances, but the personal touch is missing. It is a popular poem, no doubt, and has been used as a

kind of political weapon to make a statement, for instance by Sheema Kirmani<sup>27</sup> in one of her dance performances. This type of poetry has a practical value of its own, as had the *Agit-Prop-Literatur* of Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. The poem expresses a deeply felt pain about the wrongs done to the common people, and yet it feels more intellectual than emotional, perhaps because of the missing link to the poetic persona. Does the fact that the poem is incomplete perhaps indicate that Faiz was aware of this? Whatever the reason, this poem has a “Gebrauchswert” (practical value, Bertolt Brecht) which is completely different from his lyrical poems. It can easily be utilized for mobilization in public functions, rallies and the like—a function the other poems quoted above would hardly lend themselves to. It is thus much closer to the “sober intellectual effort and didactic purpose” of earlier reformist and revolutionary Urdu poetry. The lyrical poems, on the other hand, are perfect material for an individual reading which would allow the reader to reread any line as often as she/he wants and to ponder about them at her/his own leisure. There are no other poems said to be inspired by Pablo Neruda in Faiz’s collections. Neruda besides being a very versatile, highly acclaimed poet enjoyed much respect and sympathy for his clear political stance, his courage and steadfastness. He had turned into a legend already in his lifetime. That Faiz did not try to translate any of his poetry may point to the fact that he did not establish as close a personal accord with him as with Nazim Hikmet, Rasool Hamza or Olzhas Sulaimanov, but this is only guesswork.

Quite a substantial part of Faiz’s poetry is dedicated to the Palestinian cause with which he came into even more immediate contact when he shifted to Beirut as editor of *Lotus*. Faiz had been “a passionate advocate” of the idea of an Afro-Asian literary journal and already in 1963 had toured a number of countries to explore possibilities of its publication (Faiz 1986: 9). When the journal was finally founded in 1968 he was unable to leave Pakistan, but later on he established contacts with many Afro-Asian writers even before becoming the editor of *Lotus* in 1979. He was well aware of the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and other Palestinian writers whose works were regularly published in *Lotus* in English and French translations. In Beirut the editorial offices of *Lotus* were housed in the premises of the PLO which also provided equipment and transport as well as residential accommodation for the Chief Editor (Faiz 1983; 16). This arrangement lasted until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the sack of Beirut in 1982. The

---

<sup>27</sup> Sheema Kirmani is a famous classical dancer from Pakistan who is committed to the freedom of art and culture and the empowerment of women and is one of the founder-members of the theatre group Tahrik-i Niswan (Women’s Movement).

offices were then shifted to Tunis, but by that time Faiz had already returned to Pakistan.

In some of his poems dealing with Palestine the imagery includes a high amount of Arabic and Persian expressions, thus for instance in the title poem of “*Sar-i vādī-i sīnā*” (At the Sinai, written after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, NV: 461-462), and sometimes also allusions to Muslim prayers and other religious vocabulary, as in “*Ek tarāna mujāhidīn-i falistīn keli’e*” (A hymn for the fighters of Palestine, Beirut, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1983, NV: 680-681). This text which right from the first line onward asserts the final victory (“*ham jīten ge*” – we will win) abounds in the terminology of holy war, martyrdom etc. Faiz’s Palestine poems deserve a separate study which is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that Faiz had already used religious vocabulary in other contexts, with “*Ham dekhen ge*” (We shall see) perhaps being the most popular example where the idea of overcoming tyranny and injustice and establishing equality and peace is linked with the concept of a righteous, divinely-ordained order as the final destiny of man. Interestingly, these allusions were missing in an earlier version (“*Tarāna*” (Hymn) published in *Dast-i sabā*, 1952, NV: 138) where there also is more stress on personal action and defiance, expressed in a number of imperatives (*uth baitho, calo, kholo*), advocating protest as in “*Bol*” (Speak, NV: 81-82). In the earlier poem the overall setting is thus more secular than in “*Vayaqba vajhu rabbika*”, the famous hymn with the refrain “*ham dekhen ge*”. It seems that with maturity Faiz returned to popular images and cultural symbols of his upbringing and his original surroundings. In an interview he stressed that “The actual meaning of religion is that it should be for the better and welfare of the common people.” (“*Dīn ke sahīh mā’nī yahī hain ki vah khalq-i khudā kī bahtarī aur bahūd ke liye hai.*”, Faiz 2010: 603) There can be no doubt that he was aware of the mass appeal of religious concepts, particularly of a popular Sufi variety, and several remarks in *Mah-o-sāl* indicate that he felt comfortably at home in a Muslim cultural environment. In Beirut he witnessed the Palestinian struggle very closely, and particularly the merciless bombing of Beirut and the Palestinian camps by the Israeli army in 1982 in which the offices of *Lotus* were razed to the ground. For several days he stayed in the house of the Palestinian poet Mouin Besieso where they were also joined by Mahmoud Darwish who had come from Paris<sup>28</sup>. The years in Beirut probably intensified Faiz’s identification with the Palestinians which made him couch their battles in the terminology of a holy war. But as stated above, the whole corpus of Faiz’s Palestine poems calls for a separate analysis.

---

<sup>28</sup> Faiz has given an eye-witness account of the events in an interview with Safdar Mir and others, see Faiz 2010: 589-616. In this interview he sharply criticized the inaction of other Arab countries.

## Conclusion

To sum up, it appears that Faiz was extraordinarily successful in translating or adapting poetry of those writers with whom he shared personal experiences, commitments and persuasions, and was able to incorporate himself in the translation. Rasul Hamza's, Olzhas Sulaimanof's and Nazim Hikmet's works are a good case in point. The resultant texts are Urdu poetry without any trace of peculiarity or strangeness. Faiz picked up some new ideas and images from the originals, sometimes he also tried to recreate the rhyming patterns, but inevitably put the stamp of his own poetic sensibility on every text. In doing so he deployed the whole range of the Urdu lexicon, choosing words and tropes according to the theme and the persona of the poem. The authors whose works he chose for his translations and as a source of inspiration were either critical members of the Soviet literary establishment or communist writers and activists such as Nazim Hikmet and Pablo Neruda, but barring the Neruda inspired example the texts he engaged with were not overtly propagandistic or ideological. He thus succeeded in creating highly lyrical, sensual and deeply humane poems which could appeal to readers across a wide spectrum of persuasions and worldviews. And yet one never loses sight of a fundamental critical undercurrent which appears in the form of an absence. The sense of loss, separation, incompleteness and estrangement which pervades most of Faiz's lyric poems, apart from strictly personal deprivations and separations, is to a great deal based on dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in our world, and this is also the main factor providing the common ground for our appreciation of his melancholy and sadness, sharing which strangely enough is a source of aesthetic pleasure, catharsis and a feeling of communion.

## References:

- Ansārī, Z., *Soviyat yūniyan ke pandrah śā'iron kā muntakhaba kalām*. Moscow 1974.
- Faiz Ahmad Faiz, *Mah-o-sāl-i āśnā'ī* (MoS), Moscow 1979.
- , "15 Years of Lotus Magazine", in *Lotus* No. 53 (1983): 15-17.
- , *Nuskahā-i vafā* (NV), Lahore 1984.
- , "The Artist's Circles of Being", in *Lotus* No. 57 (1986): 8-11.
- , "*Faiz Sāhib kā intarvyū*", in *Faiz Ahmad Faiz. (Faiz Sadī: muntakhab mazāmīn)*, Islamabad 2010: 589-616.
- Hasan, Yūsūf, Raviś Nadīm (*murattibīn*), *Faiz Ahmad Faiz. (Faiz Sadī: muntakhab mazāmīn)*, Islamabad 2010.

- Hikmet, Nâzım, *Hasretlerin Adi. Die Namen der Sehnsucht*. Zürich 2008.
- Husain, Mujtabā, “*Surx bar siyāh*”, in *Faiz Ahmad Faiz. (Faiz Sadī: muntakhab mazāmīn)*, Islamabad 2010.
- Jalib, Iftikhar (ed.), *Na’ī šā’irī*, Lāhaur: Idāra Na’ī Matbū’āt, 1966, 263-264; quoted from: *Bunyād*, Vol. 2:1 (2011), Lahore: LUMS, 51-53.
- Kraft, Gisela; “Nachwort“, in Hikmet, Nâzım, *Hasretlerin Adi. Die Namen der Sehnsucht*. Zürich 2008, 311-352.
- Mufti, Aamir R., *Enlightenment in the Colony. The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton and Oxford. 2007.
- Ram, Harsha, “Imagining Eurasia: the Poetics and Ideology of Olzhas Suleimenov’s *Az i Ia*”, in: *Slavic Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Summer 2001), 289-311.

**Online Sources:**

- <http://www.youtube.com/user/radiopakistanonline> (Interview with Faiz Ahmad Faiz, 5.10.1974), 22.-25.11.2011
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pust%27\\_vsegda\\_budet\\_solntse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pust%27_vsegda_budet_solntse), 15.09.2011
- <http://ljllehrman.artists-in-residence.com/translations/DoTheRussiansWantWar.html>, 15.09.2011
- [http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/nazim\\_hikmet/biography](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/nazim_hikmet/biography), 22.09.2011
- [http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/nazim\\_hikmet.html](http://www.cs.rpi.edu/~sibel/poetry/nazim_hikmet.html), 22.09.2011
- <http://www.sanjeev.net/poetry/hikmet-nazim/hymn-to-life-184211.html>, 24.11.2011
- <http://www.erlanidrissov.com/?p=148>, 14.10.2011
- <http://www.nazimhikmet.org.tr/kronolojik3-en.asp>, 29.03.2011
- <http://vagalecs.narod.ru/Vozncoll.htm#THE%20%20ANTIWORLDS>, 15.09.2011