

The invocation

By Rizwan Akhtar

*Oh Thou whose home is every melancholy heart
I have brought other homes too just for thy sake.
(Faiz Ahmad Faiz)**

Men wear self-patronising smiles
and starched white clothes
in running waters wash
their furling beards

the heart is their prayer mattress
arteries clogged with straws
here and there foreheads brush
the blood-pumping edges tremble
the rind-crusts skin throbs

finger indexing upwards
he dances to the Arabic lilt
the azan makes its way
through streets of Lahore

in the dusty horizon
the cloudy peripheries
(cast by the twilight)
diminish
he collapses on the footsteps
with melancholic ease
someone acknowledges
his refusal
to join the congregation

eliminated from the ranks
his beggarly patched body
cudgelled and cursed
laughingly he asks for 'more'...

evening touches

the Badshahi masjid*
the fragrance from the relics*
travels out of the arched openings
the moon forgets its shadow
on the cave's spidery mouth
he picks the footprints silently.

* literal translation of the couplets taken from the last poem of Faiz Ahmad Faiz from *Nuskha Hai Wafa-Kulliyat e Faiz* (Oeuvre). It is a *naat* written in Persian. The *naat* in Urdu is written in praise of Muhammad (pbuh).

*allusion to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) relics preserved in the Badshahi Masjid

*the mosque commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1671 and completed in 1673 in Lahore.