

## Poetics of Union

By Sobia Khan and Talmeez Fatima Burney

### About Ishrat Afreen

Ishrat Afreen is an Urdu poet and women's rights activist named one of the five most influential and trend-setting female voices in Urdu Literature by NIPA. Ishrat Afreen identifies strongly with the poetic Urdu legends Muhammad Iqbal and Faiz Ahmed Faiz. She uses their polished, traditional style and skillfully redirects it to create defiant progressive messages of individuality and rebellion against patriarchal and oppressive social norms. She was born in Karachi in 1956, Pakistan and completed her Masters of Arts in Urdu from Karachi University.

Afreen has published two collections of poetry entitled *Kunj Peeleh Poolon Ka* (1985) and *Dhoop Apne Hisse Ki* (2005). Amongst others, she has been included in the prestigious anthology *We Sinful Women* and inspired the well-known anthology *Beyond Belief: Contemporary Feminist Urdu Poetry*. *Ishrat Afreen ki Shairi* was a book written solely on Afreen's poetry by respected senior novelist and literary critic Mr. Ikram Bareilvi. Additional work has been published on Afreen by Rukhsana Ahmed. Her work has been translated into English, Japanese, Sanskrit, Hindi, Norwegian, and other languages. It can also be found in Urdu literature coursework at universities across the world.

Afreen was honored with many prestigious awards including the Sajjad Zaheer Award in 1986. Afreen received this honor on the 50th anniversary celebration of the Progressive Writers' Association of India in New Delhi. She also received the Ahmed Adaya Award from Urdu Markaz International in Los Angeles, California on December 9, 2006 after her book, *Dhoop Apne Hisse Ki* was selected by the International Urdu Jury as Best Urdu Poetry Publication of 2004-2005.

Afreen has been invited to attend many International Conferences and Festivals. She was selected to represent Pakistan in the Kavita Asia Asian Poetry Festival of 1988 in Bhopal, India, which celebrated the greatest literary minds from across the Asian continent.

In September 1999, she partook in the International Poetry Festival in Stavanger, Norway. Currently, she teaches Urdu at Startalk a program for international languages by University of Maryland and Department of Education.

Today, she continues to lecture, hold workshops, attend conferences and read her poetry at Mushairas across America, Europe and Asia. She resides in Texas with her husband, Indian lawyer Perwaiz Jafri, and three children.

**Ishrat Afreen has graciously given Talmeez Fatima Burney and Sobia Khan Permission to translate her work.**

**Creative Statement:**

The three poems, “Age of Sorrow,” “The Messenger,” and “Poetics of Union” were chosen by the translators because they reflect a strong feminist voice and a yearning for romanticism. Translating literary Urdu into English was a task that demanded attention to multiple aspects during the translation process. For one, understanding the nuances of Urdu poetry, particularly since Urdu poetry alludes to ideas indirectly by using words of the language that are variations of the original root word. Understanding the implied meaning at the word level, at the line level, and as a whole poem was a taxing task as little punctuation and stanza breaks indicate a shift in perspective and tense. Translating gendered nouns and verbs into English without altering the poet’s intent meant that the translators had to decide whether they wanted to remain true to the original gendered source text or privilege conveying the general idea into the reader’s target language. For example, “Age of Sorrow” is about menopause, the translators keep this in mind as they translate the poem while also highlighting the nuanced meaning of the poem. In each poem word choices by the translators reflects the overall message and tone of the poem. The translators have chosen to privilege the source text as they felt making too many liberal creative changes would alter the nuances and the implied meaning of the poem.

**TRANSLATIONS**

**Poetics of Union**

The poem which I wrote on you  
That couplet written with my lashes on the pages of my heart  
The poem which you wrote on me

Our relationship grew out of droplets of moist earth  
That poem which is our embrace  
And when it laughs in our arms—  
The couplet at your feet  
When it walks in harmony  
I think that on this Earth  
There is no other poet like us

**The Messenger**

It is a messenger  
It labors to deliver messages  
But what of the startled tearful eyes  
Stagnant dreams  
Placid lips  
On which prayers become agony  
Which words will transmit that message?

**Age of Sorrow**

A horrific news  
Which I was denying from myself  
this strange news  
I was hesitant to admit—  
a peculiar sorrow awakened within me.  
From my beloved,  
Avoiding his gaze as if  
A crime had occurred within me.  
Strange news  
which my heart refused to accept  
But bowed to reality.  
The season of blossoming, the stem of life,  
The time to say farewell is upon me,  
That time when streams run dry  
On the bed of which,  
Thousands of creations were hidden beneath  
river of life.

That boundless river of happiness and life  
Sunken in the waste of Earth, decay of day and night,  
Time which passed me by.  
So I think as I go on  
Let me ask my Creator  
My Concealor  
Protector of chastity—  
One of your attributes is being Just  
So why then this difference between me and my beloved?  
In the chemistry of being?  
Why is barrenness a punishment for me alone?  
This proclamation of my destitution  
Why this naked decree of my drought for me alone?  
Oh, my Concealor, my Alchemist  
Why this test of day and night for me alone?

۸۷ دھوپ اپنے صے کی

## نامہ بر

وہ نامہ بر ہے  
اس کا کام ہے پیغام پہنچانا  
مگر بھیگی ہوئی آنکھوں کی حیرانی میں  
ٹہرے خواب  
ساکت لب  
دعائیں جن پہ آ کر درد بن جائیں  
وہ کن الفاظ میں بھیجوں

۱۱۱ دھوپ اپنے صحنے کی

## سنِ یاس

عجیب سی اطلاع تھی وہ  
جسے میں خود سے نہ جانے کب سے چھپا رہی تھی  
عجب خبر تھی کہ جس کی بابت  
میں خود سے سچ بولتے ہوئے ہنکچا رہی تھی  
عجیب دکھ تھا کہ جس کا احساس جاگتے ہی  
میں اپنے محرم سے  
اپنے ہدم سے ایسے نظریں چرا رہی تھی  
کہ جیسے مجھ میں کہیں کوئی جرم ہو گیا ہو  
عجب خبر تھی  
جسے مرادل قبول کرنے سے منحرف تھا  
مگر حقیقت کا معترف تھا  
کہ شاخ جاں پر گلاب کھلنے کے موسموں کو  
وداع کہنے کی ساعتیں اب قریب تر ہیں  
قریب تر ہے کہ خشک ہو جائیں گے وہ سوتے

## ایک مشترکہ نظم

وہ نظم جو میں نے تم پہ لکھی  
وہ شعر جو میں نے پلکوں سے دل کاغذ پر تحریر کیا  
وہ نظم جو تم نے مجھ پہ لکھی  
جو بوند برابر رشتے سے نم مٹی میں پروان چڑھی  
وہ نظم ہماری بانہوں میں  
جب بانہیں ڈال کے ہنستی ہے  
وہ شعر تمہارے قدموں سے  
جب قدم ملا کر چلتا ہے  
میں سوچتی ہوں اس دھرتی پر  
ہم دونوں جیسا شاعر کوئی اور نہیں