

## REMEMBERING FAIZ AHMAD FAIZ

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### MY PERSONAL REMINISCENSES

On a one-to-one basis, my personal contact with Faiz has been fewer than a dozen times. All these meetings took place in London during the seventies of the last century. One last meeting with him was in 1983, a year before his demise at the relatively young age of 73. Let me explain. I have never publicized my friendly contact with him and, therefore, much has remained hidden. I shunned *Mushairas and Mehfiles* organized by local Urdu elite in London and kept my distance. It was either he or Chacha Mulk who gave me a phone call at my residence in Milton Keynes where I was a research associate at the British Open University. Chacha Mulk (the renowned novelist Mulk Raj Anand) didn't drive himself and he would ask me to bring my small Morris Minor, pick him up from Indian High Commission's Guest House and take him to Faiz.

Faiz was twenty years my senior; Chacha Mulk was twenty-seven years older than me. Another example is Saqi Farooqi who was a quarter century junior to Faiz as also to Noon Meem Rashid and yet had a warm and intimate friendship with both. Let me add in haste that friendship is neither bound by age nor by gender. It only partakes of common interests, concerns, conversation topics – and most important of all, participating partners' level of intellect, education, mental caliber and parlance of conversation. I believe that he was more akin to me in this respect than to Mulk. Maybe one reason was that Mulk just garbled his Urdu and was never adept in speaking that language.

The one and only exception to my rule of no public display of our sporadic contact and my reverence for him or his affection for me was the irreverent poem I wrote about him the same day that I met him 1983. I published the poem six years after his death. Titled *Aik Nadaar Mulk ka Shair*, this poem is included in my poetry collection *DAST E BURG* (1990). It was written in a somber mood. When I met Faiz that evening, I found not his usual assured self, but a fearful, broken man lurking in him. I forthwith knew that he was shattered both in his life-long belief in Communism as also in his health. His conversation with me bore testimony to this loss of faith.

He was suffering from Fistula and was in pain. He had come back from a visit to Soviet Union which was at the brink of dissolution and the chaos before its final break into bits and pieces across Europe and Central Asia. This time he was staying not at Zohra Nigah's house, but at a different location. If my memory serves me right, it was an apology of a house (so small it was!) in Bamsbury, across Kings Cross Road where it changes its name to Euston Road. Just whose property it was I never enquired. Alys, his wife and Muneeza, his daughter, both were with him. Salma wasn't there. As we know, his two daughters were married to two Hashmi brothers, Shoaib and Humair.

Leaving my personal reminiscences of Faiz's personality to the later installments of this article, I will now take up the most important aspect – his poetry, as I evaluate it now.