

FAIZ AS A 'MODERN' POET

(a) IMAGERY.

The first quality of Faiz's poetry that strikes me is its visual imagery that permeates into the essential musicality of his verse. After Iqbal, Faiz has this quality in abundance; the difference is *baland aahangi* (loud tenor) in Iqbal and the silk-like soft and sometimes cloyingly sweet tenor of Faiz. This quality is less apparent in other *Taraqqi Pasand* poets. Faiz cultivated the *ghazal* format in a neo-classical or post-romantic *genre* – and he brought a marriage of convenience between the classical and romantic modes. It is in this context that the second generation of Progressive poets took their content, communicability, style and even the Faiz-inspired parlance of *ghazal* to its zenith. It became almost a fad with poets. "Thus Faiz's poetic felicity, choice of words, coinages, allusions, neo-classical reliance on the true-classical patterns of *ghazal* became order of the day."

The quality that differentiates Faiz from, say Josh Malihabadi, both in his nazms and *ghazals*, is that that he leaves things unsaid or half-said or just hinted at or given a symbolic or metaphoric treatment to achieve shareable quality of modes of poetic experience with the reader. Josh, on the other hand, doesn't leave anything unsaid. I would use the words "poetry as a slogan" and "poetry as a sweet whisper" in the case of these two poets.

(b) IS HE A 'MODERN' (EXPERIMENTALIST)?

Now we will see how and why Faiz was not as new-fangled as Noon Meem Rashid. It can be said that Faiz was tradition-bound not only in the poetic parlance used by his predecessors but also in the socio-political and socio-cultural context in the post-partition days. This is borne out by his *ghazals* as also his *nazms*. A random selection of *ghazal*'s stock-in-trade metaphors will bear this out.

اک طرزِ تغافل ہے سو وہ ان کو مبارک : اک عرضِ تمنا ہے سو ہم کرتے رہیں گے
Ik tarz-i-taghaful hai, so woh un-ko Mubarak: Ik arz-i-tamanna hai so hum karte raheN-gey

Let (my beloved) willfully enjoy the stance of ignoring me: My duty is to keep on expressing my avocation of love

(Subject: Beloved's inattention and neglect. Stock-in-trade metaphors are "tarz-i-taghaful" and "arz-i-tamanna".) عرضِ تمنا - طرزِ تغافل - Indeed both are worn-out clichés.

For the source of this *mazmoon*, one might refer to Ghalib's couplet: وہ اپنی خو نہ چھوڑیں گے ہم اپنی وضع کیوں بدلیں
Woh apni khoo na chhoRen gey, hum apni waz'ae kioN badleN

She (the beloved) would never give up her neglect: Why should I change my habit?

ستم کی رسمیں بہت تھیں لیکن نہ تھیں تری انجمن سے پہلے : سزا خطائے نظر سے پہلے، عتاب جرمِ سخن سے پہلے

Sitam ki rasmeN bahut theeN lekin no theeN tiri anjamman se pehle: Saza Khataey nazar se pehle, ataab jurm-i-sukhan se pehle.

Countless were the rituals of tyranny but none (as cruel) as in your social get-together: The punishment precedes the crime of my (lovelorn look (at you): the wrath comes before even I speak.

Subject: The crime of being outspoken and the beloved's wrath about this temerity. Locale: the beloved's gathering of admirers (mehfil, anjumman). Ghazal's stock-in-trade clichés. *سختی کی رسمیں* (rituals of tyranny). *جرم سخن* (the crime of being outspoken).

جو چل سکو تو چلو کہ راہ وفا بہت مختصر ہوئی ہے: مقام ہے اب نہ کوئی منزل فراز۔ دار و رسن سے پہلے

Jo chal sako to chalo ki rah-i-wafa bahut mukhtasar huui hai: Maqaam hai ab na koyi manzil, faraaz-i-daar-o-rasn se pehle.

If you can give me your companionship, do it now, for the path of (mutual) loyalty is not long: There's no place to neither stop, nor (any other) destination, but the height of our martyrdom at crucifixion.

Subject: Togetherness, companionship (of lovers, like-minded political activists). Locale: the journey of life. Ghazal's worn out metaphors. *دار و رسن*، *دار و وفا* *dar-o-rasn, maqaam, manzil, rah-i-wafa.*

آتے آتے یونہی دم بھر کو رکی ہو گی بہار: جاتے جاتے یونہی پل بھر کو خزاں ٹھہری ہے۔
Jatay jatay younhi pal bhar ko ruki ho gi bahaar: Aatay aatay younhi pal bhar ko khazaN thehri hai.

The spring might have tarried only for a moment on its way: The winter (autumn) might have delayed its exit for a moment.

Subject, locale and the metaphors too dear to the age-old traditional modes of ghazal bespeak of Faiz's debt to oft-repeated expressions. *بہار، خزاں، دم بھر کو، آتے آتے، جاتے جاتے، آتے آتے، جاتے جاتے۔* *bahaar, khazaN, dum bhar ko, pal bhar ko, aate aate, jaate jaate* – these are so commonly used that no one can erase them from the memory register of one's racial unconscious mind in the Jungian sense. However, what might be highlighted is Faiz's unparalleled expertise in wringing the last drop of political or contemporary-contextual overtone of content and meaning in the political sense. While his predecessors had no political message to convey (except for Iqbal who used the straight pulpit style to communicate a politico-religious message to Muslims), Faiz's contemporaries (or immediate predecessors like Akhtar Shirani) had not acquired the subtlety of his style.

The answer to the question "Is he an experimentalist?" is in negative. He is an imagist in the limited sense of the word as it applies to the classical nuances of the ghazal format, but, unlike Noon Meem Rashid, he is neither an experimentalist nor a coiner of new-fangled images like the first and the second generations of poets in the early twentieth century in England.

(c) FAIZ AND RASHID

I began with an alluded comparison between Faiz and Noon Meem Rashid. One might say that they were contemporaries and moved in common circles they were poles apart. For one, Rashid was not a Communist; Faiz was. For another, in spite of a postgraduate degree in English Literature, Faiz never took his cue from modern European poets in general and British poets like Ezra Pound and T .S. Eliot in particular, while Rashid did. For yet another, Rashid was not a ghazal-lover. He shunned it completely. Faiz, on the other hand, not only loved the genre of Ghazal, he brought its traditional mode to nazm also.

It may be said even at the cost of repetition that Rashid could not leave behind a ‘school’ of poets. His contemporary Meera-ji was one of his admirers and some years later some others followed suit. These included Majeed Amjad and Wazir Agha in Pakistan (who both kept their angularities intact), Akhturul Iman in India (only in a limited sense), then again Balraj Komal and Satyapal Anand, who took their cue from him but never wore the school cap of Noon Meem Rashid.

One reason is that Rashid was more of an ‘individual’ than a ‘type’. That Rashid could not leave behind him a ‘school’ but Faiz could prove not the greater significance of one or precedence one over the other, but the fact that in terms of T. S. Eliot’s celebrated dicta, experimentalism cannot be held in a void: it has to have a traditional mode of thought and expression to experiment with. In the laboratory you need to have a body on the table to cut it open and see what you can do with it. Without it you cannot do anything. Faiz understood this truth while Rashid did not.

IMAGE CLUSTERS AND COINAGES

Faiz’s image clusters, unlike the European imagists of the first half of the twentieth century or even now when much of the organic unity has flittered away, are still purely classical ghazal-based and take their cue from Persian rather than from the local linguistic entities in India, particularly his mother-tongue Punjabi which has a rich tradition of Sufi literature going back a thousand years against the paltry count of three hundred years or so for Urdu. The four image clusters will bear this out.

صحنِ گلشن میں بہرِ مشتاقاں : ہر روش کھنچ گئی کمان کی طرح
Sehn-i-Gulshan maiN behr-i- mushtaqaN : Har rawish khinch gayi kamaN ki tarah
For the pleasure of the onlookers, each row (of flower plants) stretched itself as a bow.

پھر لہو سے ہر ایک کاسہ داغ : پر ہوا جامِ ارغوان کی طرح
Phir lahu se har aik kasah-i-daagh:Pur hua jam-i-arghwaN ki tarah
Each pock marked bowl (begging bowl?): Like wine was filled but with blood.

یاد آنے جنونِ گم گشتہ : بے طلب قرضِ دوستاں کی طرح
Yaad aaye janoon-i-gum gashta: be talab qarz-i-dwstaN ki tarah.
I recalled my crazy distractions, now lost forever: Like friends’ debts of gratitude un asked for.

جانے کس پر ہو مہرباں قاتل : بے سبب مرگِ ناگہاں کی طرح
Jaaney kis par ho mehrbaN qatil: be sabab marg-i- na gahaN ki tarah
Who might be the chosen one for the assassin’s kindness, no one knows: Death, sudden and not for any reason,

The poetic parlance in these couplets, composed of words oft-repeated by *ustad*-poets of bygone ages, make it difficult for us to identify them with Faiz, and yet his fresh approach to shift and counterpoise the level of meanings leaves these couplets with his visible signature. Words like صحنِ گلشن، روش، کمان، لہو، کاسہ، داغ، جامِ ارغوان، جنونِ گم گشتہ، قرضِ دوستاں، بے طلب، مرگِ ناگہاں، مہرباں، قاتل، بہرِ مشتاقاں

and his *ad-infinitum* use of such words as جنون، دار، لہو، دشمن، فراق، شام، گل، جام، داغ، سنگ، خواب، سحر، بجر، وصال (all nouns) denoting a visual image or a concept makes him claim kinship with his predecessors, hallowed

names like Meer, Ghalib, Zauq, Hasrat, even Fani and Seemab, and highlights the continuity of tradition of the classical mould. It is, however, his coinages (using these very words) that tell him apart. The irony as well as the tragedy of this innovative quality is that these coinages occur mostly in his ghazals.

حرفِ لطف، سرِ کونے دلفگاروں، پیمانِ جنوں، لبِ مشکبو، خونِ دلِ وحشی، شامِ وعدہ، جنوںِ رخِ زبیا، شامِ نظر، قامتِ جانان، شاہراہِ فراق، خمارِ آغوشِ مہ و شان۔

These words are his own coinages, never used before him in Urdu poetry – and yet they read and sound like they are borrowings from the classicists. This inter-textuality (بین المتونیت) makes his poetry both neo-classic and post-romantic. Added to this is the subterranean level of political meaning which only discerning ears can hear.

FAIZ AS A “POET’S POET”

The term “Poet’s Poet” was first coined by T. Eliot for denoting Edmund Spenser’s influence on a generation of poets who came after him. Faiz could also be termed as a Poet’s Poet. A host of lesser poets followed his pattern but they had to rest contented with repeating some of his coinages and what they did on their own could not win recognition. Many of the lesser poets including Sahir, Kaifi, Jan-Nisar Akhtar, Jazbi, Wamiq, even Sardar Ja’firi who excels Faiz in some of his compositions but by and large remains a camp follower, could not reach his excellence.

One celebrated example is Faiz’s renowned line.

یہ داغِ اجالا، یہ شبِ گزیدہ سحر۔ کہ انتظار تھا جس کا یہ وہ سحر تو نہیں!

Lo and behold this spotted, soiled light, this morn with night hanging over it: The morning we had all anxiously waited for – No, it is not that dawn!

These lines can be seen, now in our hindsight, as an echo of Stalin’s refusal to accept the dawn of independence in the Indian subcontinent, the CPP and the CPI’s tirade against “reactionary” governments in India and Pakistan. It makes a lot of sense. But what concerns us here is the coinage *داغِ اجالا* never used in Urdu poetry before and the elongated compound *شبِ گزیدہ سحر*. Both expressions found immediate acceptance by the lesser poets writing on the theme of “False Freedom” (words borrowed from Banney Bhai, Sajjad Zaheer). A scholar who made a frequency chart of expressions like these two, as a follow-up program of a project coordinated by the present writer, found its use as many as 249 times by 48 poets of India and Pakistan in three years after these lines were published back in 1948.

A poem that counterpoised one’s (indeed, the poet’s in his first person pronoun!) love for his beloved and his love for the struggle to bring about Revolution (with a capital R) made history in terms of its wide influence on poets of a lesser degree. The poem had these memorable lines but it was the last line that made poets follow suit in their own composition, using the same theme, the same topic and – sometimes - even the same words.

ان گنت صدیوں کے تاریک بہیمانہ طلسم
ریشم و اطلس ہو کمخواب میں بنوائے ہوئے
خاک میں لٹھڑے ہوئے، خون میں نہلائے ہوئے
جسم نکلے ہوئے امراض کے تتوروں سے
پیپ بہتی ہوئی، گلتے ہوئے ناسوروں سے
لوٹ جاتی ہے ادھر کو بھی نظر کیا کیجے
اب بھی دلکش ہے ترا حسن مگر کیا کیجے

In the years after this poem had been published, umpteen Urdu poets used the same subject, a comparison with two avocations so dear to the poet, his love for his beloved and his love for the political activism. It would be of historical interest to a scholar to pin-point such compositions which were written as a crib, plagiarism or wholesale copying of Faiz's poem, changing a word here or a word there. The following lines know for their lucidity and visual image of a worn-out upper garment *مفلس کی قبا* also became the stock-in-trade of these followers of Faiz.

زندگی کیا کسی مفلس کی قبا ہے جس میں.....ہر گھڑی درد کے بیوند لگے جاتے ہیں۔ لیکن اب ظلم کی معیاد کے دن تھوڑے ہیں۔ اک ذرا صبر کہ فریاد کے دن تھوڑے ہیں۔

These lines gave a hope for the future. Bound together in the same couplets a sordid present-day reality and the ray of hope for the future, once again, became the hall-mark of Faiz's poetry and dozens of lesser poets used the same technique.

SOME MORE PERSONAL NOTES

In the beginning of this short essay, I wrote about my personal contact with Faiz. Though short and sporadic, these meetings left an indelible impression of this great man on me. Many people who did not meet him on a one-to-one basis don't know that he had the rare quality of talking in verse. More often than not, Urdu sentences issuing forth from his mouth were lines of verbatim Urdu verse, what is called *fil-badeeh*. When he repaired to English, which he often did like all of us, this quality vanished. I was a student and teacher of English literature and I would often quote English verses from memory. He was very often bamboozled as to how I could do it. He could quote from classical Urdu or even Farsi poets with ease, but when it came to an English poet, and a line or two to be picked out of his memory, he fumbled and then looked helplessly at me to help him out of predicament.

Saqi Farooqi has written much about Faiz's habit of kissing women friends. He has even gone to the extent of saying that when his own wife Gundi took Faiz to show him their house, on the stairs Faiz kept on kissing her with loud smacks. Well, a little that I know is that unlike some other popular poets (Faraz is a celebrated example); Faiz was pretty strict when it came to seriously compromising his standing and stature for the sake of an evening of illicit sex. He would take recourse even to turning his back on such women. I have witnessed at least two such occasions where the female company was bent on winning him over for consensual sex, and he spurned them in a delicate way.

If Faiz had been alive today we would have been celebrating his century of life. Centenary celebrations, after one's demise, do not reach the height and glory of a person when he is alive. I still remember Chacha Mulk once saying that he would live to be hundred years old. Alas, he too could live only up to 99 plus and didn't quite reach the three figure optimum.

Let me end with a couplet from Faiz himself.

حلقہ کیے بیٹھے رہو اک شمع کو یارو
کچھ روشنی باقی تو ہے ہر چند کہ کم ہے