

# Blood and Rain



## A View from an Ex-Aristo (Mumbai, 2014)

Mother of God!  
There you stand  
tall and proud  
the blade across your torso  
angled  
like a grey black sports bra  
but you have no breasts.  
Why no breasts?  
Only straight lines  
running true  
without curving  
without bending.  
I stand for my turn  
sometimes sit waiting  
always waiting  
for you

to christen me again  
your pen  
writing my name  
in blood,  
in drops of red ink  
rolling,  
rolling with my severed head  
across the floor  
my thoughts disembodied  
stuck in limbo  
for a soul to pick them up  
somewhere  
off the mainline.  
I think they've lost my number  
I've been waiting for hours  
the never-ending minute  
seems to stretch across eternity  
like a rubber band  
carrying within it  
infinite tension  
never breaking  
always teasing  
just a little further ...  
Your blade is dull today  
it carries rust  
there is no one to whet it.  
We are saved by gravity alone  
Madame la Guillotine!  
May Thou always be  
so merciful.  
Hallowed be Thy Name.

## **Sand and Yang (Mumbai, 2014)**

The safest place in the universe  
is the eye of a hurricane.

Walls of steam rise up around me  
making havoc of buildings, trucks  
breaking trees like pencils  
carving messages into uranium

reactors that pop and fizz  
like corks and balloons  
now spurting blood  
as if some wrathful Goddess  
eyeless  
in the steam-colored garb of Isis  
drawn like oil paintings  
from the wells of fantasy  
threw a party  
for a fan following of misshapen clowns  
and half-baked misanthropomorphic entities  
hanging out  
the bored masculinity of the ancient desert  
having been assured  
that there is no water on the red planet  
and no little blue men worth waiting for  
hooded or otherwise.

The balloons we live in  
are fragile  
and yet the storm  
protects us  
for the whirlwind has no center.  
His dark anger spins Him  
in the vortex  
of memory.

And who are you  
to talk of fantasy  
said He  
you who live in the land of Bell Curves  
and Sorting Hats?

## **August (Philadelphia, 2002)**

As you walk by  
the air becomes so heavy  
I am pushed against a wall  
Is it you or is it just the heat of August?  
Hiroshima breeze  
you are so heavy

I am hanging like the leaves  
on the drying summer trees  
pulled down towards the earth  
Is it you or is it just the August air  
that makes me droop with so much longing?

The August sun was always known to burn  
us lesser mortals  
with his august glare

We sacrificed an apple for the rain  
I kissed the earth  
I heard a little girl cry out  
as if she knew the presence there  
If August comes creeping  
like a whisper  
through the hollows of your mind  
tell me, love  
then does September trudge behind?  
If you were a pebble  
in the walls of Jerusalem  
would they come crashing down?

Is it you or is it just the mushrooms clouds of August?  
Sodom and Gomorrah lifted out  
like mushrooms from our lore, our fantasies  
borne into reality  
and christened Hiroshima, Nagasaki ...  
hanging heavy in the firmament  
laden with their sixty years  
of ripened weariness  
your glance is heavy as the August rain  
shining through them and the trees.

The stares of the undying lifted through the skies  
reflecting points of consciousness  
the dying steps of the millenium  
now reborn into the new  
thunder like the heavy August rain  
and you.

## **Waiting for Rain (June, 2005, Mumbai)**

Climb, gaze  
up where the steeple meets the sky  
scribble someone's name  
into the dust-filled clouds.

Casino in the heavens  
lit by lightning  
somewhere the westerly wind  
sits poker faced  
covering diamonds  
about to be scattered  
wait for the sparkling rain.

## **Shards of Light (October, 2005, Mumbai)**

In the shredded darkness of this night  
dazzled and undeafened  
stupid  
stupid, staring eyes  
stuck in the stupor of unceasing sight  
the heaviness of nothingness plodding  
through  
tortuous miles of wakefulness  
and twisting arms of time  
tick-ticking through eternity.

Arise! Awake! Shake off your sleep!  
You swept through the room in all of your magnificence.  
An army of rays assailed us  
nailing me to shadows  
that have dared remain.

Eyelids jammed are not like doors  
the lock of sleep  
cannot be forced with chisels

chisels are at work  
carving out my name  
into each terrifying minute.

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Acknowledgments: I have quoted song lyrics by Iron Maiden and Megadeth in some of my verses.

Other Poems by Acushla Sarswat

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## Faiz Forever / Kanika Aurora



Gulon mein rang bhare  
Baad-e-naubahaar chale  
Chale bhi aao ki

Gulshan ka karobaar chale

Come bahaar or spring and we all end up quoting Faiz Ahmed Faiz conjuring up evocative and tantalizing images of a riot of flowers bursting with a million hues beseeching your beloved to come so the garden can get on with its business of blossoming.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz , the romantic, revolutionary poet extraordinaire was born in Sialkot a hundred and ten years ago on February 13th, 1911 . He shared his hometown with Pakistan's national poet, Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

Linguistically, and culturally he belonged to Urdu, but Faiz Saheb was also well-acquainted with Punjabi and English; he composed some poetry in Punjabi and earned a Master's degree in English literature as well as served as a lecturer of English and British Literature for a time at the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Amritsar (in present-day Punjab, India).An uncle of mine was recently speaking about the junoon he caused when he came to visit.

Interestingly, during his time in Amritsar, Faiz also met his future wife Alys in 1938 at the house of a colleague at the college.Faiz and Alys shared the ideals of freedom and love for humanity and justice, and even though in some ways they had the opposing temperaments, they eventually fell in love.They married in Srinagar in October 1941 and their nikah was performed by Sher-i-Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the leader of the National Conference.It is a little known fact that Alys had been christened Kulsoom, by Faiz's mother and 'Dast e Saba' which was written during his imprisonment with the above mentioned ghazal was dedicated to her making everyone wonder about the identity of this mystery woman.

Ishq dil mein rahe to rusva ho

Lab pe aye to raaz ho jaaye

Typical Faiz. Once an emotion or an idea is rendered into poetic expression, it perhaps acquires a multiplicity of meanings and gets shrouded in ambiguities,

During his lifetime, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature and even received the Lenin Peace Prize, awarded by the Soviet Union, in 1962. Posthumously, he was conferred his nation's highest civil award, Nishan-e-Imtiaz, in 1990 although during his lifetime he remained in conflict with the Pakistani government.

Faiz's early poems had been fairly conventional, romantic treatises on beauty and love, but while in Lahore he began to expand into politics and community concerns. In 1942, he left teaching to join the British Indian Army, for which he received a British Empire Medal for his service during World War II. After the partition of India in 1947, Faiz resigned from the army and became the editor of The Pakistan Times, a socialist English-language newspaper.

Poetry has the ability to rouse and soothe, lull and awaken our weary souls. Faiz's poems especially, have a remarkable ability and the potential to transcend borders, religions, language and culture. They are an important thread that attempts to suture the hopes and beliefs of peace seeking souls of the sub-continent helping us imagine how to create new futures.

Yeh daagh daagh ujaalaa, yeh shab gazidaa seher  
Woh intezaar tha jiska, yeh woh seher to nahin  
Yeh woh seher to nahin, jis ki aarzoo lekar  
Chale the yaar ki mil jaayegi kahin na kahin  
Falak ke dasht mein taaron ki aakhri manzil  
Kahin to hogaa shab-e-sust mauj ka saahil  
Kahin to jaa ke rukegaa safinaa-e-gham-e-dil

These immortal lines expressed his anguish and dismay at the colossal cost the Indian subcontinent had to pay for freedom



from the British Empire in 1947. The poem is entitled *Subh-e-Azaadi*.

This stained blemished light—this dawn  
Surely this wasn't what we we've all been longing for.  
Not the morning we had set out to find  
In the wilderness of the skies, the stars final resting place  
Somewhere there was hope that weary waves will find their  
shore  
Our sorrow laden ship would at last come home to anchor...  
Faiz ended the poem with these lines:  
Abhi giraani-e shab mein kami nahin aai  
Nijaat -e-deeda o dil ki ghadi nahin aai  
Chaley chalo ke wo manzil abhi nahin aai.

The Night's heaviness has not yet lessened  
The moment of salvation for our hearts and eyes has not yet  
arrived;  
So let us go on, that destination is yet to come...

He was imprisoned twice (1951-1955, then for over 5 months in  
1958-1959) for his support of leftist politics in Pakistan. He  
eventually fled to Moscow and spent some of his last years in  
Beirut.

Woh baat saaray fasanaay mein jis kaa zikr na tha...  
Woh baat unko bahut na-gawar guzri hai...

In his poem Intesab, he writes:  
Aaj ke naam  
Aur Aaj ke gham ke naam  
Aaj ka gham ki hai zindagi ke bhare gulistaan se khafaa  
Zard patton ka ban  
Zard patton ka ban jo mera desh hai  
Dard ki anjuman jo mera desh hai

Let me write a poem for this day  
This day and the anguish of this day  
The sorrow that does not acknowledge life's beauty

For the wilderness of dying. dry leaves which is my homeland  
For the carnival of suffering which is my homeland...

Some of his finest work, however was written during his imprisonment.

“Aaj bazaar mein pa ba jaulan chalo” (“Let us walk with fetters in the street”) which has a rather fascinating incident associated with it.

It is said that when Faiz was being taken from the jail in Lahore, in chains, to a dentist’s office in a horse cart (tonga) through the familiar streets, people recognized him and began following his tonga.

Chashm e nam jaan e shorida kaafi nahin

Tohmat e ishq e poshida kaafi nahin..

Tearful eyes and a restless soul are sadly not enough. Being charged for concealing love is also not enough, he wrote.

Another glittering gem of a poem, Zindaan ki Ek Shaam has been exquisitely translated by Agha Shahid Ali.

Shaam ke pecho-kham sitaron se

Zeena-zeena utar rahi hai raat

Yun saba paas se guzarti hai

Jaise keh di kisi ne pyaar ki baat.

Sahne-zindan ke be-vatan ashjar

Sar-nigun mahw hain banane mein

Daman-e-aasman pe naqsh-o-nigaar.

Shaan-e-baam par damakta hai

Meherban chandni ka dast-e-jameel

Khaak mein dhul gayi hai aab-e-nujoom

Noor mein dhul gaya hai arsh ka neel

Sabz goshon mein nil-gun saaye

Lahlahate hain jis tarah dil mein

Mauj-e-dard-e-firaq-e-yaar aaye.

Dil se paiham khayal kahta hai

Itni shireen hai zindagi is pal

Zulm ka zahar gholne wale  
Kamran ho sakenge aaj na kal  
Jalva gaah e-visaal ki shamein  
Vo bujha bhi chuke agar to kya  
Chand ko gul karen to hum jaane.

A Prison Evening trancreated by Agha Shahid Ali proceeds as follows:

Stars spiral into the evening –  
staircase the night descends –  
and the wind comes near, then passes,  
as though someone spoke of love.  
In the courtyard, the trees are exiles  
who keep themselves busy  
embroidering the sky.  
The roof shines; the moon  
scatters light with generous hands;

the glory of the stars mingles with dust  
and light polishes the blue sky silver.  
In every corner shadows ebb and advance,  
as though the heart were lifted

by a wave of separation.  
This is the thought the heart returns to:  
that life, in this moment, is sweet.  
Let tyrants prepare their poisons,  
they will never succeed.  
They may snuff out the lamps  
in the rooms of lovers,  
but can they extinguish the moon?

“Going to Jail”, Faiz once famously said, “was like falling in love once again”.

And lest we forget, very few poets express love in its myriad mysterious, mystical and mesmerizing moods as Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Raat yun dil mein teri khoyi hui yaad aayi

Jaise veerane mein chupke se bahaar aa jaaye  
Jaise saharaon mein haule se chale baad e naseem

Jaise beemar ko bewajah qaraar aa jaaye

Translated by Vikram Seth it reads:

Last night your faded memory came to me  
As in the wilderness spring comes quietly,  
As, slowly, in the desert, moves the breeze,  
As, to a sick man, without cause, comes peace.

Other iconic poems such as Raqib se, Rang Dil Ka Hai Mere and Mujh se pehli si mohabbat Mere Mehboob na Maang have attained almost cult status in the hearts and minds of his followers.

Faiz shall continue to be celebrated for his poetry, his ideology and his unmatched talent to include political and social issues within the traditional frameworks of ghazals and nazms brimming with passion and rebellion.

Words that can galvanize us into action and wake us up from our complacent stupor. Words matter. Words that ought to be spoken in defence of the downtrodden. Words that heal, words that nurture, words that continue to inspire and encourage us to speak up.

Bol ke Lab Azaad Hain Tere, said Faiz.  
Speak up – for your lips are free!

Viva la Love. Viva La Revolution. Viva La Faiz.