

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Faiz Ahmed Faiz**  
**- poems -**

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# Faiz Ahmed Faiz(13 February 1911 - 20 November 1984)

Faiz Ahmad Faiz was an influential left-wing intellectual, revolutionary poet, and one of the most famous poets of the Urdu language from State of Pakistan. A rising figure and notable member of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM), Faiz was an avowed Marxist-communist, long associated member of Russian-backed Communist Party and was a recipient of Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union in 1962. Despite being repeatedly accused of atheism by the political and military establishment, Faiz's poetry suggested his complicated relationship with religion in general and Islam in particular. He was, nevertheless, inspired by South Asia's Sufi traditions.

Faiz was controversially named and linked by Prime minister Liaquat Ali Khan's government for hatching the conspiracy against Ali Khan's government, being Plot's central leader which was supported by left-wing military sponsor Major-General Akbar Khan. Having being arrested by Military police, Faiz among with others received a maximum sentence by JAG branch, although his sentence was commuted after the assassination Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951.

## <b> Biography </b>

One of the foremost poets in the Indian sub-continent, Faiz Ahmed Faiz was born in Sialkot in Pakistan. He studied philosophy and English literature, but poetry and politics preoccupied him more than anything else. For writing poetry that always antagonizes the ruling Zlite and challenges colonial and feudal values, like such rebellious writers as Ngugi of Kenya and Darwish of Palestine, Faiz had to go to jail repeatedly during both colonial and postcolonial times in Pakistan. Inspired by the Marxist ideology, Faiz's poetry exhibits a strong sense of commitment to lower-class people, yet it always maintains a unique beauty nourished by the long, rich tradition of Urdu literature. His love poems are as appealing as his political poems, and he is considered primarily responsible for shaping poetic diction in contemporary Urdu poetry. Which poems deal with love, and which ones with politics? What evidence is there that Faiz is a courageous poet? What is his attitude towards loneliness and death?

## <b> Awards </b>

Faiz was the first Asian poet to be awarded the Lenin Peace Prize, the Soviet Union's equivalent to the Nobel Prize in 1963. He used traditional meters and

rhythms to compose poetry that was a blend of Romanticism and realism. Before his death he was also nominated for the Nobel Prize.

# A Prison Evening

Each star a rung,  
night comes down the spiral  
staircase of the evening.  
The breeze passes by so very close  
as if someone just happened to speak of love.  
In the courtyard,  
the trees are absorbed refugees  
embroidering maps of return on the sky.  
On the roof,  
the moon - lovingly, generously -  
is turning the stars  
into a dust of sheen.  
From every corner, dark-green shadows,  
in ripples, come towards me.  
At any moment they may break over me,  
like the waves of pain each time I remember  
this separation from my lover.

This thought keeps consoling me:  
though tyrants may command that lamps be smashed  
in rooms where lovers are destined to meet,  
they cannot snuff out the moon, so today,  
nor tomorrow, no tyranny will succeed,  
no poison of torture make me bitter,  
if just one evening in prison  
can be so strangely sweet,  
if just one moment anywhere on this earth.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Be Near Me

Be near me now,  
My tormenter, my love, be near me—  
At this hour when night comes down,  
When, having drunk from the gash of sunset, darkness comes  
With the balm of musk in its hands, its diamond lancets,  
When it comes with cries of lamentation,  
  with laughter with songs;  
Its blue-gray anklets of pain clinking with every step.  
At this hour when hearts, deep in their hiding places,  
Have begun to hope once more, when they start their vigil  
For hands still enfolded in sleeves;  
When wine being poured makes the sound  
  of inconsolable children  
  who, though you try with all your heart,  
  cannot be soothed.  
When whatever you want to do cannot be done,  
When nothing is of any use;  
—At this hour when night comes down,  
When night comes, dragging its long face,  
  dressed in mourning,  
Be with me,  
My tormenter, my love, be near me.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Before You Came

Before you came things were just what they were:  
the road precisely a road, the horizon fixed,  
the limit of what could be seen,  
a glass of wine was no more than a glass of wine.

With you the world took on the spectrum  
radiating from my heart: your eyes gold  
as they open to me, slate the color  
that falls each time I lost all hope.

With your advent roses burst into flame:  
you were the artist of dried-up leaves, sorceress  
who flicked her wrist to change dust into soot.  
You lacquered the night black.

As for the sky, the road, the cup of wine:  
one was my tear-drenched shirt,  
the other an aching nerve,  
the third a mirror that never reflected the same thing.

Now you are here again—stay with me.  
This time things will fall into place;  
the road can be the road,  
the sky nothing but sky;  
the glass of wine, as it should be, the glass of wine.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

## Do Not Ask, My Love.....

Do not ask, my love, for the love we had before:  
You existed, I told myself, so all existence shone,  
Grief for me was you; the world's grief was far.  
Spring was ever renewed in your face:  
Beyond your eyes, what could the world hold?  
Had I won you, Fate's head would hang, defeated.  
Yet all this was not so, I merely wished it so.  
The world knows sorrows other than those of love,  
Pleasures beyond those of romance:  
The dread dark spell of countless centuries  
Woven with silk and satin and gold bracade,  
Bodies sold everywhere, in streets and markets,  
Besmeared with dirt, bathed in blood,  
Crawling from infested ovens,  
My gaze returns to these: what can I do?  
Your beauty still haunts me: what can I do?  
The world is burdened by sorrows beyond love,  
By pleasures beyond romance,  
Do not demand that love which can be no more.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Ghazal

I am being accused of loving you, that is all  
It is not an insult, but a praise, that is all

My heart is pleased at the words of the accusers  
O my dearest dear, they say your name, that is all

For what I am ridiculed, it is not a crime  
My heart's useless playtime, a failed love, that is all

I haven't lost hope, but just a fight, that is all  
The night of suffering lengthens, but just a night, that is all

In the hand of time is not the rolling of my fate  
In the hand of time roll just the days, that is all

A day will come for sure when I will see the truth  
My beautiful beloved is behind a veil, that is all

The night is young, Faiz start saying a Ghazal  
A storm of emotions is raging inside, that is all

Faiz Ahmed Faiz



# Highway

A despondent highway is stretched,  
its eyes set on the far horizon  
On the cold dirt of its bosom,  
its grayish beauty spread

As if some saddened woman  
in her lonely abode, lost in thought.  
In contemplation of union with her Beloved  
every pore sore, limbs limp with exhaustion

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# It Is Spring Again

It is spring, And the ledger is opened again.  
From the abyss where they were frozen,  
those days suddenly return, those days  
that passed away from your lips, that died  
with all our kisses, unaccounted.  
The roses return: they are your fragrance;  
they are the blood of your lovers.  
Sorrow returns. I go through my pain  
and the agony of friends still lost in the memory  
of moon-silver arms, the caresses of vanished women.  
I go through page after page. There are no answers,  
and spring has come once again asking  
the same questions, reopening account after account.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

## Last Night.....

Last night, your long-lost memory came back to me as though  
Spring stealthily should come to a forsaken wilderness  
A gentle breeze its fragrance over burning deserts blow  
Or, all at once be soothed somehow the sick soul's distress.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Loneliness

Loneliness like a good, old friend  
visits my house to pour wine in the evening.  
And we sit together, waiting for the moon,  
and for your face to sparkle in every shadow.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# My Heart, My Traveler

My heart, my fellow traveler  
It has been decreed again  
That you and I be exiled,  
go calling out in every street,  
turn to every town.  
To search for a clue  
of a messenger from our Beloved.  
To ask every stranger  
the way back to our home.

In this town of unfamiliar folk  
we drudge the day into the night  
Talk to this stranger at times,  
to that one at others.

How can I convey to you, my friend  
how horrible is a night of loneliness \*  
It would suffice to me  
if there were just some count  
I would gladly welcome death  
if it were to come but once.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# My Interview

The wall has grown all black, upto the circling roof.  
Roads are empty, travellers all gone. Once again  
My night begins to converse with its loneliness;  
My visitor I feel has come once again.  
Henna stains one palm, blood wets another;  
One eye poisons, the other cures.

None leaves or enters my heart's lodging;  
Loneliness leaves the flower of pain unwatered,  
Who is there to fill the cup of its wound with color?

My visitor I feel has come once again,  
Of her own will, my old friend-her name  
Is Death: a friend in need, yet an enemy-  
The murderess and the sweetheart!

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Solitude

Is someone there, oh weeping heart? No, no one there.  
Perhaps a traveler, but he will be on his way.  
The night is spent, the dust of stars begins to scatter.  
In the assembly halls dream-filled lamps begin to waver.  
Small streets sleep waiting by the thoroughfare.  
Strange earth beclouds footprints of yesterday.  
Snuff out the candles, put away wine-cup and flask.  
Then lock your eyelids in this morning dusk.  
For now there's no one, no one who will come here.

Translated by Philip Nikolayev

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

## Some Lover To Some Beloved!

Down the memory lanes, on which  
you've strolled since ages past  
They will end if you walk farther a step or two  
Where exits the turn towards the wilderness of forgetfulness  
beyond which, there isn't any Me, nor any You  
My eyes hold their breath, for any moment you  
may turn back, move ahead, or at least turn to look back

Although my sight knows that the wish is just a farce  
For if ever it were to run across your eyes again  
right there will spring forth another pathway  
Like always, where ever we run into, there will begin  
another journey of your lock's shadow, your embrace's tremor

The other wish is also in error, for my heart knows  
There is no turn here, no wilderness, no mountain-range  
beyond whose horizon, my perpetual sun-of-your-Love can set  
May you continue walking these pathways, its better this way  
If you don't even turn to look back, it is okay

Faiz Ahmed Faiz



# Speak

Speak, your lips are free.  
Speak, it is your own tongue.  
Speak, it is your own body.  
Speak, your life is still yours.

See how in the blacksmith's shop  
The flame burns wild, the iron glows red;  
The locks open their jaws,  
And every chain begins to break.

Speak, this brief hour is long enough  
Before the death of body and tongue:  
Speak, 'cause the truth is not dead yet,  
Speak, speak, whatever you must speak.

Translated by Azfar Hussain

Posted By Muhammad Atif Ch.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Stanza

If they snatch my ink and pen,  
I should not complain,  
For I have dipped my fingers  
In the blood of my heart.  
I should not complain  
Even if they seal my tongue,  
For every ring of my chain  
Is a tongue ready to speak.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# The Incarceration Of Loneliness

On the far horizon waved some flicker of light  
My heart, a city of suffering, awoke in a state of dream  
My eyes, turning restless, still dreaming,  
the morning, dawning in this vacuous abode of separation

In the wine-cup of my heart, I poured my morning wine  
Mixing in the bitterness of the past, the poison of the present

On the far horizon waved some flicker of light  
far from the eye, a precursor to some morning  
Some song, some scent, some unbelievably pretty face  
went by unknowingly, carrying a distressful hope

Mixing in the bitterness of the past, the poison of the present  
I proposed a toast to the longings on this day of prison-visit  
To the fellow drinkers of my homeland and beyond  
To the beauty of the worlds, the grace of beloved's lip and cheek

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Tonight

Do not strike the chord of sorrow tonight!  
Days burning with pain turn to ashes.  
Who knows what happens tomorrow?  
Last night is lost; tomorrow's frontier wiped out:  
Who knows if there will be another dawn?  
Life is nothing, it's only tonight!  
Tonight we can be what the gods are!

Do not strike the chord of sorrow, tonight!  
Do not repeat stories of sufferings now,  
Do not complain, let your fate play its role,  
Do not think of tomorrows, give a damn-  
Shed no tears for seasons gone by,  
All sighs and cries wind up their tales,  
Oh, do not strike the same chord again!

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# Wasteland Of Solitude

In the wasteland of solitude, my love, quiver  
shadows of your voice, illusions of your lips.  
In the wasteland of solitude, from the dusts of parting  
Sprout jasmines and roses of your presence

From somewhere close by, rises the warmth of your breath  
and in its own aroma smolders, slowly, bit by bit.  
Far-off, across the horizon, dropp by glistening drop  
Falls the dew of your beguiling glance.

With such overwhelming love, O my love,  
your memory has placed its hand on my heart's cheek,  
that it looks as if (though it's still the dawn of the adieu)  
the sun of parting has set; the night of union has come.

Translated by Zafar Iqbal Syed

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# We Shall See

We shall see  
Certainly we, too, shall see  
that day that has been promised to us

When these high mountains  
Of tyranny and oppression  
turn to fluff and evaporate

And we oppressed  
Beneath our feet will have  
this earth shiver, shake and beat  
And heads of rulers will be struck  
With crackling lightening  
and thunder roars.

When from this God's earth's (Kaa'ba)  
All falseness (icons) will be removed  
Then we of clean hearts-condemned by Zealots those keepers of  
Faith,  
We, will be invited to that altar to sit and Govern-  
When crowns will be thrown off- and over turned will be thrones

We shall see  
Certainly we, too, shall see  
that day that has been promised to us

The God's name will remain (Allah will remain)  
Who is invisible and visible too  
Who is the seer and is seen  
There will rise one cheer- I am God!  
Who I am too  
and so are you

Then the masses, people of God will rule  
Who I am too  
and so are you

There will rise one cheer- I am God!  
Who I am too

and so are you

Faiz Ahmed Faiz

# We Who Were Executed

I longed for your lips, dreamed of their roses:  
I was hanged from the dry branch of the scaffold.  
I wanted to touch your hands, their silver light:  
I was murdered in the half-light of dim lanes.

And there where you were crucified,  
so far away from my words,  
you still were beautiful:  
color kept clinging to your lips–  
rapture was still vivid in your hair–  
light remained silvering in your hands.

When the night of cruelty merged with the roads you had taked,  
I came as far as my feet could bring me,  
on my lips the phrase of a song,  
my heart lit up only by sorrow.  
This sorrow was my testimony to your beauty–  
Look! I remained a witness till the end,  
I who was killed in the darkest lanes.

It's true– that not to reach you was fate–  
but who'll deny that to love you  
was entirely in my hands?  
So why complain if these matters of desire  
brought me inevitably to the execution grounds?

Why complain? Holding up our sorrows as banners,  
new lovers will emerge  
from the lanes where we were killed  
and embark, in caravans, on those highways of desire.  
It's because of them that we shortened the distances of sorrow,  
it's because of them that we went out to make the world our own,  
we who were murdered in the darkest lanes.

English Translation By Agha Shahid Ali

Posted By Muhammad Atif Ch.





# When Autumn Came

This is the way that autumn came to the trees:  
it stripped them down to the skin,  
left their ebony bodies naked.  
It shook out their hearts, the yellow leaves,  
scattered them over the ground.  
Anyone could trample them out of shape  
undisturbed by a single moan of protest.

The birds that herald dreams  
were exiled from their song,  
each voice torn out of its throat.  
They dropped into the dust  
even before the hunter strung his bow.

Oh, God of May have mercy.  
Bless these withered bodies  
with the passion of your resurrection;  
make their dead veins flow with blood again.

Give some tree the gift of green again.  
Let one bird sing.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz