



## **Ask not of me that old love, Beloved: The aesthetic of subversion in the poetry of Faiz**

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The poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz is often proclaimed as revolutionary on the basis of his avowed socialist ideals. Such labelling, as the famed Urdu critic Shamsur Rehman Faruqi is merely 'intentional fallacy', a lazy method of doing criticism. He asserts it is not enough to suggest that Faiz imparts new meaning to stock symbols of ghazal tradition, just on the basis of biography. Rather, if the idiom of Faiz is acknowledged as revolutionary, it must pass the test of what Ghalib termed "*Ma'ani Afreeni*" – roughly translated as multiplicity of meaning.

This paper proposes to demonstrate this assertion by a close study of selected poems by Faiz. The very popular "*Mujh say Pehli si Mohabbat meray Mehboob na maang*" (Ask not of me that old love, Beloved) will be read as a classic prototype of Faiz's oeuvre. Drawing from a comparison of Faiz to other poets of the ghazal tradition like Meer and Ghalib, the paper will argue Faiz appears first to draw first from the classic ghazal tradition. However, soon Faiz introduces a subversive movement that simultaneously foregrounds the disconnect of the tradition with the colonial and neo-colonial world, but also highlight the complicity of art in perpetuating material and cultural inequality. The use of '*Tilism*' for example in the line '*Anginat sadiyon say tareek Bahimana Tilism*' translated as '*Dark fearful talismans, come down the centuries*' employs '*Tilism*' not only to indicate an enduring history of exploitation, but also to suggest the permanence of 'class difference' - an interesting inversion of 'talisman'. The magic resident in the talisman works not merely as a protection, but a safeguard of exploitative forces. This is a subtle criticism of the whole literary tradition that relies on false themes, and therefore produces a 'false consciousness' challenged by the poem. Similarly, "Bodies that have passed through the furnace of ills/with putrid ulcers which their humours spill" provides an alternate description of poverty that inverts its traditional depiction by evoking disgust. This disgust can be read as exposing the habitus of ghazal production, and its exclusion of 'contagion' that threatens the symbolic wealth invested in the 'shurfa' or the intellectual class. Another Nazm, *tum yeh kehtay hau who jung hob hi chuki*: You claim the war is long over, will be read in light of the first line, and more specifically the verb 'claim' as allowing an ambiguity that critiques celebratory post-colonial nationalism by use of a semantic past, rather than a syntactic past. The poem imagines a future deeply rooted in the distant past interweaved with the present and future. It allows for the demolishing of the spatial time and space – a deconstruction as it were. Liberated from the notions of spatial time, the poet can peep into the past in light of the future and vice versa and question its validity or truthfulness. In this sense the poet assumes the role of an omniscient narrated narrator who can doubt or question the linguistic truth arrived at by social agreement.