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FROM HOME TO THE WORLD

The Internationalist Ethos

In March 1955, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, still imprisoned in Rawalpindi's Montgomery Jail where he had been interred since 1951 for 'seditious activities', wrote 'Aa Jaao Africa' (Come, Africa), based on a phrase he had heard as a rallying cry among African anti-colonial rebels:

... Aa jaao maiñ ne dhool se maatha uñha liya
 Aa jaao maiñ ne chheel di aankhoñ se gham ki chhaal
 Aa jaao maiñ ne dard se baazoo chhuda liya
 Aa jaao maiñ ne noch diya bekasi ka jaal
 'Aa jaao Africa'

Dharti dhadak rahi hai mere saath Africa
 Dariya thirak raha hai to ban de raha hai taal
 Maiñ Africa hooñ dhaal liya maiñ ne tera roop
 Maiñ tu hooñ, meri chaal hai teri, babar ki chaal
 'Aa jaao Africa'
 Aao babar ki chaal
 'Aa jaao Africa'

Come, Africa
 Come, for I have raised my forehead from the dust

Scraped away the grief from my eyes
 Broken away from the grip of pain
 Torn away the web of helplessness
 Come, Africa!

The earth's heart beats with mine, Africa
 The river dances while the moon keeps time
 I am Africa, for I have taken on your form
 I am you, and my gait is your lion-walk
 Come, Africa
 Come with a lion-walk
 Come, Africa!

If Faiz's poem is a vibrant example of the internationalist ethos of progressive Urdu poetry, it is no exception either. The internationalist commitment of the Progressive Movement was apparent since its very beginning. The anti-fascist struggles of European literary figures had enthused the Progressives, and one of the first official actions taken by the newly formed PWA, in 1935, was to send Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand as their representatives to London to participate in the conference of 'International Writers for the Defense of Culture'²⁶.

This culture of internationalism was not exactly new to Urdu literature; Mohammad Iqbal had been expanding the horizons of Urdu literature's engagement with the world for a while. The PWA poets, however, took this to new levels. The association had come into being at a time when the freedom movement was at its height, and the initial writings of its members were focused on the struggle against British occupation. Overtures to internationalism took on two forms: an interrogation and critique of colonialism and its related issues (the Second World War, for instance) and an expression of admiration for the Soviet revolution accompanied by a hope

that India's freedom would result in a similar socialist society.

The disillusionment with the consequences of Independence – chiefly, the partition of the nation-state and its resultant bloodbath – and the disenchantment with the newly formed bourgeois state, which acted decisively and ruthlessly against the militant peasant movement of Telangana, took a toll on the erstwhile optimism of the progressive poets. In the years that were to follow, they increasingly turned their attention to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles of their time. The shift of focus towards the international arena was also spurred substantially by Ali Sardar Jafri's essay in *Naya Adab* titled 'Taraqqi Pasand Sha'iri ke Baaz Masaa'el' (Some Issues Facing Progressive Poetry) in which he urged Urdu poets to give expression to and highlight people's movements in other parts of the world. Several poets responded enthusiastically to this call and composed verses about China, Japan, Burma, Malay, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, Iran, and Tunisia, among others.

The emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement at Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 (coincidentally, the year of the writing of 'Aa Jaao Africa'), concretized the idea of Third World solidarity, and provided another basis for its poetic expression in progressive poetry. The cultural exchange fostered by the Non-Aligned and Afro-Asian movements led to the translation of many of Faiz's poems in Swahili, Chinese and Vietnamese, while the works of progressive poets from around the world²⁷ were translated into Urdu.

As Carlo Coppola²⁸ points out, the progressive poets 'studied and borrowed from English literature, but unlike their fellow writers of earlier generations the Progressives also

looked to the literature of France and Germany and especially Russia for additional inspiration. No longer were writers confined to the particular problems and concerns of India; they were thrust into the mainstream of international literary and intellectual life. Literary movements and ideas in London, Paris and Moscow had immediate repercussions in Delhi, Lucknow and Lahore.'

This period of Third World solidarity saw the Progressives composing poems on issues such as the struggles of Iranian students in 1959, the McCarthy era of repression of dissent in the United States, the European student uprisings in the 1960s, the Algerian freedom movement, the Palestinian struggle and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

Internationalist sentiment within progressive poetry did not begin, of course, in this period. As socialists, the Progressives were always internationalists and the original focus of their internationalism was, obviously, the communist revolution and the international working-class movement – even Iqbal wrote paeans to it and to its heroes. Decades later (1970 to be precise), Sahir would write the following hagiographic lines on the occasion of the worldwide centennial celebrations of Lenin's birth:

*Insaan ke muqaddar ko azaad kiya tu ne
Mazhab ke fareboñ se, shaahi ke azaaboñ se*

Through you, humanity was released from its fate
And was freed from the deceptions of religion, the depredations
of monarchy

When Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953
by the US government on the charge of being Soviet

spies, Faiz wrote a lyrical tribute titled 'Hum jo tareek raahon mein maare gaye' (We who were executed on dark highways):

*Tere honton ke phoolon ki chaahat mein hum
Daar ki khushk tahni pe vaare gaye
Tere haathon ki shamm'on ki hasrat mein hum
Neem-tareek raahon mein maare gaye ...*

*Jab ghuli teri raahon mein shaam-e sitam
Hum chale aaye laaye jahaan tak qadam
Lab pe harf-e ghazal, dil mein qandeel-e gham
Apna gham tha gavaahi tere husn ki
Dekh khaayam rahe is gavaahi pe hum
Hum jo tareek raahon mein maare gaye*

In the desire for the flowers that were your lips
We were sacrificed on the dry branch of the scaffold
In the yearning for the light of your hands
We were killed in the darkening streets ...

As the evening of tyranny dissolved in your memory
We walked on as far as our feet could carry us
A song on our lips, a lamp of sadness in our heart
Our grief bore witness to our love for your beauty
Look, we remained true to that love
We, who were executed in the dark lanes

The anti-imperialist position of the PWA also found its voice during the Vietnam war. Kaifi Azmi's 'Ibn-e Maryam' (Mary's Son) implored Jesus to come back for the sake of those who were being killed by members of his flock:

*Jaao, voh Vietnaam ke jangal
Us ke masloob shahr, veeraan gaoon
Jin ko Injeel padhne vaalon ne
Raund daala hai, phoonk daala hai
Jaane kab se pukaarte hai tumhe*

Go to those jungles of Vietnam
Its crucified cities and desolate villages
That have been crushed and burnt by Bible-readers
They have been calling out to you for a while

The last major organizational act by the PWA was to hold an Afro-Asian Writers' conference in 1970, in which poets from Guinea, South Africa, Sudan, North and South Vietnam, Laos, and various parts of the subcontinent participated. This conference was a culmination of over two decades of solidarity between the progressive poets and their African counterparts. By this time, Africa had established a strong presence in the consciousness of the Urdu Progressives. Writing in the late 1960s, Ali Sardar Jafri had sought to articulate a bond with the 'Negro', claiming a special relationship between Indians and Africans:

*Habshi mera bhai
Jangal jangal phool chune
Bhai ke paaon laal gulaab*

This African, my brother
Picks flowers in forest after forest
My brother, whose feet are red
Red as roses

In this poem, Jafri's identification with the Africans and their struggles is obvious. What is lost in the English translation is the affection that accompanies this solidarity. Those who are familiar with the idiom will know that the couplet, *Jangal jangal phool chune, Bhai ke paaon laal gulaab*, is from a folk song expressing deep fraternal fondness.

And a brother's suffering compelled the poet to fashion poetry embodying a shared sense of grief and loss. When Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo and a staunch anti-imperialist, was deposed from office and subsequently murdered, Urdu poets celebrated his achievements and mourned his death. Makhdoom captured the feelings of the Progressives in his poem 'Chup Na Raho' (Be Not Silent):

*Aur oonchi hui sehra mein umeedon ki saleeb
Aur ik qatra-e khood chashm-e sahar se tapka
Roz ho jashn-e shaheedaan-e wafa, chup na raho
Baar baar aati hai maqal se sada, chup na raho, chup na raho*

On a high scaffold, hope was hanged again in the desert
And another drop of blood fell from the eye of the morn
Let the celebration of martyrs continue, be not silent
The execution grounds cry out: be not silent, do not be silent

One of the more powerful poems written on this occasion was Sahir's 'Khood Phir Khood Hai' (Blood, However, is Blood). The poem begins with an epigraph, a fragment of a quote by Nehru (identified by Sahir as simply, Jawahar): A murdered Lumumba is several times more powerful than a living Lumumba ...

*Zulm phir zulm hai, badhta hai to mit jaata hai
Khood phir khood hai, tapkega to jam jaayega*

*Khaak-e sehra pe jame ya kaf-e qaatil pe jame
Farq-e insaaf pe ya paa-e salaasil pe jame
Tegh-e bedaad pe ya laasha-e bismil pe jame
Khood phir khood hai, tapkega to jam jaayega*

*Laakh baithe koi chhup chhup ke kameengahon mein
Khood khud deta hai jallaadon ke maskan ka suraagh*

*Saazisheñ laakh udaati raheñ zulmat ke naqaab
Le ke har boond nikalti hai hatheli pe charaagh*

*Zulm ki qismat-e naakaara-o rusva se kaho
Jabr ki hikmat-e purkaar ke eema se kaho
Mahmil-e majlis-e aqaam ki Laila se kaho
Khood deewaana hai, daaman pe lapak sakta hai
Shola-e tund hai, khirman pe lapak sakta hai*

*Tum ne jis khood ko maqal mein chupaana chaaha
Aaj voh koocha-o baazaar mein aa nikla hai
Kahiñ shola, kahiñ naara, kahiñ patthar ban kar
Khood chalta hai to rukta nahiñ sangeonon se
Sar uthaata hai to jhukta nahiñ aaeonon se*

*Zulm ke baat hi kya, zulm ki auqaat hi kya
Zulm bas zulm hai aaghaaz se anjaam talak
Khood phir khood hai, sau shakl badal sakta hai
Aisi shakleñ ke mitaao to mitaaye na bane
Aise sholay ke bujhaao to bujhaaye na bane
Aise naare ke dabaao to dabaaye na bane*

Tyranny is but tyranny; when it grows, it is vanquished
Blood however is blood; if it spills, it will congeal

It will congeal on the desert sands, on the murderer's hand
On the brow of justice, and on chained feet
On the unjust sword, on the sacrificial body
Blood is blood; if it spills, it takes root

Let them hide all they want, skulk in their lairs
The tracks of spilled blood will point out the executioners' abode
Let conspiracies shroud the truth with darkness
Each drop of blood will march out, holding aloft a lamp

Say this to tyranny's worthless and dishonoured Destiny
Say this to Coercion's manipulative intent
Say this to the Laila, the darling of the assembly²⁹
Blood is wild, it will splatter and stain your garment
It is a rapid flame that will scorch your harvests

That blood which you wished to bury in the killing fields
 Has risen today in the streets and the courts
 Somewhere as a flame, somewhere as a slogan, somewhere else as
 a flung stone
 When blood flows, bayonets cannot contain it
 When it raises its defiant head, laws will not restrain it

Tyranny has no caste, no community, no status nor dignity
 Tyranny is simply tyranny, from its beginning to its end
 Blood however is blood; it becomes a hundred things:
 Shapes that cannot be obliterated
 Flames that can never be extinguished
 Chants that will not be suppressed

The Civil Rights Movement of the US was similarly a source of great inspiration to the Progressives who saw their own memories of colonial exclusion reflected in the plight of the African-Americans. Gandhi's influence on Martin Luther King and its impact on the black liberation movement had already helped establish a bond between people of the two countries. Langston Hughes, the Harlem-based African-American poet, had written:

Mighty Britain tremble!
 Let your empire's standard sway
 Lest it break entirely -
 Mr Gandhi fasts today

All of Asia's watching
 And I am watching too
 For I am also jim crowed
 As India is jim crowed by you

This powerful expression of solidarity, based on a common racial identity, is echoed by Ali Sardar Jafri's poem on Paul Robeson:

*Krishn ka geet hai, Gokhul hi haseen shaam hai tu
 Aa kaleje se lagaaleen ke siyaah-faam hai tu*

You are Krishna's song, you are Gokul's beautiful evening
 Come let us embrace, for you too, like me, are dark-skinned

Jafri's use of a racialized (non-white) identity to make a connection with the colonized communities in other parts of the world, and to implicitly place the opposition to oppression along the fault lines of race is particularly interesting when seen in the context of the fact that the Progressives had rarely deployed racial tropes during the freedom movement. This new sensibility - which coincided with the understanding of the racist underpinnings of colonialism articulated by the likes of Fanon (in *Black Skin, White Masks*), Aimée Césaire and Amílcar Cabral - emerged from an understanding of and an identification with the anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the Civil Rights Movement in the US.

It was no surprise then that Martin Luther King became a celebrated hero for the Progressives and that his assassination, in 1968, prompted Makhdoom to write this poem, celebrating King's life, mourning his death and placing his politics within the broader context of other international struggles such as Palestine and Vietnam:

*Ye qatl qatl kisi ek aadmi ka nahin
 Ye qatl haq ka, masaayaat ka, sharaafat ka
 Ye qatl ilm ka hikmat ka aadmiyat ka
 Ye qatl hilm-o muravvat ka khaaksaari ka
 Ye qatl ek ka do ka nahin, hazaar ka hai
 Khuda ka qatl hai, qudrat ke shaahkaar ka qatl
 Hai sham-sham-e ghareebaan, hai subha subh-e Hunain
 Ye qatl qatl-e maseeha, ye qatl qatl-e Husain*

Voh haath aaj bhi maujood-o kaar farma haiin

*Voh haath jis ne pilaaya kisi ko zahr ka jaam
Voh haath jis ne chadhaaya kisi ko sooli par
Voh haath vaadi-e Sina mein, Vietnam mein hai
Har ek gardan-e meena, har ek jaam mein haiñ*

*Kamina shart-e wafa tark-e sar buvad Haafiz
Baro guzaar-e tu eeñ-kaar gar nami aayad³⁰
This is not just the murder of one man
This is the murder of truth, of equality, of nobility
This is the murder of knowledge, of wisdom, of humanity
This is the murder of clemency, of chivalry, of humility
This is the murder of the alleviators of oppression
This is not just the murder of one or two, but of a thousand
This is the murder of God, of God's masterpiece
This night is the night of the wretched³¹, this morning the morning
of Hunain³²
This is the murder of the messiah, this the murder of Husain*

*Even today, those hands remain and wreak havoc
Those hands that raised the poisoned chalice to someone's
lips
Those hands that pushed someone to the gallows
Those same hands are still at work in the valley of Sinai, in
Vietnam
Around the neck of every flask, around every goblet*

*Fidelity demands, at the least, the willingness to sacrifice oneself,
Hafiz
If you are not capable of this, then leave!*

The mention of the valley of Sinai in Makhdoom's poem was no isolated incident. Over a period of time, the Palestinian struggle for a nation-state had become an issue close to the hearts of the Progressives. Following the defeat of the Arab forces in the June 1967 war, Faiz wrote 'Sar-e Vaadi-e Seena' (Atop the Sinai Valley), which was, among other things, a scathing indictment of the hypocrisy of elitist pan-Islamists

that urged his readers to cast off the chains of theocratic exploitation:

*Phir barq farozaañ hai sar-e vaadi-e Seena
Ai deeda-e beena
Phir dil ko musaffa karo is lauh pe, shaayad
Maabain-e man-o tu naya paimaan koi utre
Ab rasm-e sitam hikmat-e khaasaan-e zameen hai
Taa'eed-e sitam maslehat-e mufti-e deen hai
Ab sadiyon ke iqraar-e itaa'at ko badalne
Laazim hai ke inkaar ka farmaan koi utre*

*Yet again, lightning shimmers atop the Sinai valley
O seeing eye
Ask the hearts to line up again
That between you and I, a new promise may descend
For now, the elite of the earth have decreed Tyranny to be
normal
And the mufti has pronounced oppression worth obeying
To break this centuries-old cycle of acquiescence
A new proclamation must descend, the proclamation of dissent*

Faiz, exiled to Lebanon under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, wrote several poems dealing with the Middle Eastern conflict: a piece on the city of Beirut ('Ishq Apne Mujrimon Ko Pabajaulaan Le Chala'/Love Leads its Prisoners Away in Chains), an anthem for Palestinian freedom fighters ('Ek Taraana Filastini Mujaahidon Ke Naam'), a dirge for those Palestinian martyrs who died in foreign lands ('Filastini Shohada Jo Pardes Mein Kaam Aaye'), and perhaps the most famous, a lullaby to a Palestinian orphan ('Mat Ro Bachche'/Weep Not, Child), and even dedicated his book 'Mere Dil, Mere Musafir' (My Heart, My Wanderer) to the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

In response to his call, a legion of Pakistani poets wrote with great feeling and empathy about Palestine³³, comparing the fate of the Palestinians to their own oppression under the dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq. The most vocal of these was, of course, Habib Jalib, who taunted Zia-ul-Haq in a ghazal that quickly became a popular anthem:

*Jahaan khatre mein hai Islaam, us maidaan mein jaao
Hamaari jaan ke dar pe ho kyoon, Lebnaan mein jaao
Ijaazat maangte haiin hum bhi jab Beirut jaane ki
To ahl-e hukm ye kahte haiin tum zindaan mein jaao*

Go to the battleground where Islam actually is in danger
Why are you after our lives? Go to Lebanon
And when we ask for permission to go to Beirut
Our rulers instead tell us to head for the dungeons

Jalib was, of course, exposing the hypocrisy of the Zia regime whose battle cry (both before it usurped power and afterwards when justifying the need to 'Islamize' Pakistani state and society) was 'Islam in danger', but which refused to even pay lip service to the actual struggles of the people of Lebanon and Palestine.

Ultimately, the internationalist vision and solidarity of the Progressives came directly out of their politics and the general sensibility of the time. The realities of colonialism, and later neocolonialism/neo-imperialism, both required and provided a global frame of reference and a basis for shared political engagement with other colonized and/or oppressed peoples. Internationalism in this period, however, was not of a piece; the internationalism of the Progressives, for example, was a far cry from the pan-Islamism of Iqbal and his followers. It was

instead informed by an understanding of the shared material conditions of oppression and struggle and was inspired by the international working-class movements and the struggles of colonized peoples across the world. There were other Urdu poets who wrote paeans to the Algerian freedom fighters and the Palestinian cause, but from within a pan-Islamic sensibility. Not so the Progressives, for whom internationalism meant a common struggle against imperialism and for a new world order.

ابھی گرائی شب میں کمی نہیں آئی
نجات دیدہ و دل کی گھڑی نہیں آئی
چلے چسکو کہ وہ منزل ابھی نہیں آئی

سلام سُرخ شہیدوں کی سر زمین سلام
سلام عزم بلند، آہنی یقین سلام
مُحباہوں کی چسکتی ہوتی جبین سلام
دیار ہند کی محبوب ارض چین سلام

اُو کہ آج غور کریں اس سوال پر
دیکھے تھے ہم نے جو وہ حسین خواب کیا ہوئے؟
بے کس برہنگی کو کفن تک نہیں نصیب
وہ وعدہ ہائے اطلس و کھنوزاب کیا ہوئے؟
جمہوریت نواز، بشر دوست امن خواں
خود کو جو خود دینے تھے، وہ القاب کیا ہوئے؟

کوہساروں کی طرف سے سُرخ آندھی آئے گی
جا بجا آبادیوں میں آگ سی لگ جائے گی
اور اس رنگِ شفق میں باہزاراں آب و تاب
جگمگائے گا وطن کی حسرت کا آفتاب

اُنٹو میری دنیا کے عشریوں کو جگادو
کاخِ اُمرا کے در و دیوار ہلا دو
جس کھیت سے وہقال کو میسر نہیں روزی
اُس کھیت کے ہر گوشہ گندم کو جلا دو

وہ بھگت سنگھ جس کے غم میں اب بھی دل ناساد ہے
اُس کی گردن میں جو ڈالا تھا وہ پھیندا یاد ہے
ذہن میں ہوگا تازہ یہ ہند یوں کا داغ بھی
یاد تو ہوگا تمہیں جلیان والا باغ بھی

اپنا گلا خسروشِ تر تم سے پھٹ گیا
تلوار سے بچا تو رگِ گل سے کٹ گیا