



Research article

Poetics of Despair: A Transnational Unpacking of Faiz's "Intesaab"

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Abstract

Unpacking resistance as a framework is crucial to locating identity in contemporary transnational contexts. Within South Asian literary traditions, resistance has long been situated in poetry by serving as both a historical template and a living archive of collective struggle. Poetry has articulated both the aspirations of marginalized communities as well as their despair, transforming grief into a shared vocabulary of defiance. This paper explores such a discourse of resistance through the lens of Faiz Ahmad Faiz's "Intesaab" (Dedication), positioning the poem as a site for theorizing transnational identity and otherness. Drawing on postcolonial and postmodern theory, as well as literary hermeneutics, the paper interrogates whether "Intesaab" can be read beyond its original context as a transnational social imaginary. The analysis begins with Faiz's poetic influences and his engagement with Marxist collectives, situating the revolutionary underpinnings of his work. The paper later goes on to contrast poetics and hermeneutics as modes of analysis, addressing issues of translation, subaltern representation, and the circulation of "Intesaab" across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The closing section reflects on the postmodern condition: how contemporary readings reshape both the meaning of the poem and its capacity to inspire resistance in new geographies. Ultimately, the paper interrogates whether despair, so often framed as passive or immobilizing, can instead be mobilized as a transnational resource for consciousness and solidarity. In positioning Faiz's work within shifting terrains of identity and resistance, the paper argues for "poetics of despair" as a vital tool for reclaiming subjectivity across borders.

Keywords: Resistance, Transnationalism, Postcolonial Theory, Revolutionary Poetry



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“Intesaab” (Dedication)

Let me write a song for this day!

This day and the anguish of this day
 For the wilderness of yellowing leaves- which is my homeland
 For this carnival of suffering – which is my homeland 4

Let me write of the little lives of office workers
 Of the railmen
 And the tonga-wallahs
 And of the postmen
 Let me write of the poor innocents they call ‘workers; 9

Lord of all the world
 Promised heir to all that is to come

Let me write of the farmer
 This Lord whose fief was a few animals – stolen
 Who knows when
 This heir, who once had a daughter- carried off
 Who knows where
 This chief whose turban is a tattered rag
 Beneath the feet of the mighty 18

Let me write of the Mothers
 Whose children sob in the night
 And, cradled in tired, toiling arms
 Will not tell their woes 22

Let me write of the little houses
 The narrow lanes and the courtyards
 Where the earth is so unclean
 Where the shadows are so deep
 That all life ebbs away like a sob, unheeded
 The carmine of her garment
 The tinkling of her bangles
 The perfume of her tresses 30

Let me write of the students
 Those seekers of the truth

Who came seeking the truth at the doorstep
Of the great and the mighty
Those innocents who, with their dim flickering lamps
Came seeking light
Where they sell naught but the darkness of long endless nights 37

Let me write of the prisoners
In whose hearts, all our yesterdays
Dawned like sparkling gems
And burning, burning through the dark winds of prison nights
Are now but distant stars 42

Let me write of the Heralds of the coming Dawn... 43

-Faiz, *The rebel's silhouette* (A. S. Ali, Trans.)1991

On May 13, 2025, cultural activists in Nagpur, India, recited Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz's famous poem "Hum Dekhenge" (We Will See) at a public memorial for actor Veera Sathidar. Police registered charges against three organizers, including the actor's widow, for allowing the recitation of Faiz's poem "at a time when the country was fighting Pakistani forces". (Shantha, 2025) Faiz's poetry is highly revered and widely used in protests in both India and Pakistan, and 'Hum Dekhenge', in particular, has acquired the status of a protest anthem with a formidable legacy of resistance. The poem was outlawed soon after it was penned during the Pakistani military regime of Zia ul Haq. It was famously performed in public by Pakistani singer Iqbal Bano in 1986 and went on to be widely used by protesters during India's 2019 CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) demonstrations across the country. Faiz could also be heard being sung at the Wagah border vigil on Pakistan and India's respective independence days, August 14th and 15th, following the military exchange between both countries in May 2025. In his essay 'Location of Culture', Homi Bhabha introduces a crucial question for any kind of postcolonial analysis: "What does need to be questioned, however, is the mode of representation of otherness." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38) If transnationalism is the study of seismic shifts in individuation, culture, politics, and exploration, it is by default, also a study in reconciling 'otherness'. By extension, if a transnational study requires us to locate exchanges, connections, and practices across borders and ideas by 'transcending' the national space as our primary locus for identity, doing so necessitates negotiating how 'otherness' is perpetuated, framed, and institutionalized to prevent such aforementioned transcendence from manifesting. Identifying as 'transnational' requires an acknowledgement of several selves simultaneously and of examining closely how the norms, values, and identities associated with these avatars shift from one context to another. As we map our trajectory of unknown spaces, we carry the contexts that shaped us into these new dimensions, but each time

we are confronted with existing power structures. As we explore 'otherness' or rather, unpack it, we add history to position ourselves in the new terrain of social imaginaries. Locating a self out of a neo-colonial space requires a perpetually moving standpoint, and it is this very standpoint that poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz captures so eloquently in his poem "Intesaab" ("Dedication"). This paper aims to analyze this piece as the topography for framing a kind of transnational social imaginary, one that allows for the potential of rekindling cross-border solidarities among hostile neighbors India and Pakistan, as well as an imaginary that eclipses borders and re-negotiates identitarian margins, offering potential areas for building solidarities. The paper will employ "Intesaab" as a unit of analysis to examine whether certain revolutionary poetics or hermeneutics can help a subject transcend or shift beyond the space and context in which it was originally conceived. How Faiz employs and mobilizes 'despair' as a rallying point is a crucial aspect of unpacking revolutionary poetry, and is therefore an important standpoint for deeper investigation into whether framing a 'poetics of despair' can serve as a useful tool for reclaiming consciousness.

This paper will examine the intricacies of said 'poetics of despair' and how it applies to the poem "Intesaab". The theoretical tools used to unpack notions of identity and otherness in the poem will include aspects of literary theory, postcolonial theory, and postmodern approaches. The first section of the paper will involve unpacking some of Faiz's poetic influences and his work as part of a Marxist poetic collective in his youth. In the middle section, literary analysis of the poem will examine the differences between employing poetics and/or hermeneutics as the primary mode of deconstruction. This section will also delve deeper into certain aspects of postcolonial theory, specifically questions surrounding problems of translation. "Intesaab" also employs continuous reference to subaltern spaces and identities, and it is essential to problematize the subaltern subject in this context. The third and final section of the paper grapples with the postmodern condition and how reading Faiz's work today changes both the work and our reading of it. Can this work transcend its origins, i.e., can "Intesaab" be configured as a formative social imaginary for a different time and space? Can an Urdu poem 'translate' across language and geography and still retain its power to 'resist' structure in other and otherized spaces?

Mapping Faiz and locating "Intesaab"

Faiz Ahmad Faiz is arguably the most well-known Urdu poet of the latter half of the 20th century, especially with regard to his revolutionary poetry. Among his many accolades, Faiz was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature and won the Lenin Peace Prize. Examining Faiz's poetry in a transnational context serves several functions; first and foremost is the notion of shifting identities ever present in his poems. Faiz constructs a veritable 'wardrobe' of identities and associated narratives to navigate space and speech in his poems. The second important function involves how Faiz constructs frames of resistance – from hope, rebellion, resistance, and despair, his work flits between these

spaces to evoke a turbulent trajectory for coming into consciousness. Faiz's deployment of despair is designed carefully to cultivate a return to consciousness after having shed all the phony platitudes of false hope. The sheer ravages of various toiling lives he cultivates in "Intesaab" are meant to illustrate how deeply institutions of power penetrate and exploit each identity under inspection and how they are rendered helpless in its wake. However, Faiz's use of despair is unlike that of nihilists such as Albert Camus, who declares, "But in the end one needs more courage to live than to kill himself." (Camus, 1942, p.118) Faiz's undertaking rather involves evoking despair so that it can ultimately lead to resolve, opening the doors for the potential of revolution. The very framing of the poem as a 'dedication' to forgotten voices and everyday shadows is a testament that Faiz does not believe these people's lives are in vain, but rather that they have been cheated of their existence. Faiz wrote "Intesaab" in 1946, a year before partition, as a dedication to the sufferings of the oppressed and dispossessed. The poem is widely considered his most explicitly Marxist-realist work and was circulated among leftist circles in both India and Pakistan through the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). Faiz was active in the Pakistan Trade Union Federation (PTUF) and "Intesaab" bears a legacy of being used in protest movements from Pakistan Women's Action Forum (WAF) (Mir, 2014) protests Zia's dictatorship to contemporary left movement protests organized by the Awami Workers Party (AWP) as well as in their first federal congress in Islamabad in September 2014. (Rashid, 2014, Sept 26) The revolutionary poetics of Faiz Ahmed Faiz can be categorized under four distinct frames of resistance: hope, reckoning, rebellion, and despair. In some ways, these four frames serve as the vertices of a container that embodies resistance in different iterations. In transnational conceptualizing, 'containers' are largely problematic because they signify one way of thinking, being, and seeing. And yet, containers that locate resistance at their center can act as powerful tools for a 'coming into consciousness' that serves to dismantle other assumptions along what Michel Foucault in *Power of Words* calls 'his search for episteme'. Thereby unpacking the unconscious assumptions that foreground 'the historical states of societies' which he states are the historical a priori premise for a construct that can 'delimit the totality of experience in a field of knowledge', define the mode of being of the objects in the field, and 'provide man's everyday perceptions with theoretical powers.' (Foucault, 1991, pp. 168-170). When analyzing these four vectors onto other famous poems by Faiz such as *Umeed-e-Sahar* (The Hope of a New Dawn), *Hum Dekhen Ge* (We Shall See), *Bol* (Speak) and *Aaj Bazaar Mein* (Let us walk in the marketplace in shackles) it becomes clear that each represents resistance in its multiple manifestations to mesmerizing effect and yet Faiz's work generally ends on an inflection of resistance that is directed against the powers that be. This is also often attributed to the fact that much of Faiz's key work was produced in direct response to the military establishment, which imprisoned him for four years. In an interview conducted with IA Rehman after his release from prison in 1984, Faiz referred to this time in these terms: "going to jail was like falling in love again." He spoke of his disillusionment and how his poetry attempted to address it in these terms:

Faiz: As I have so often said, the joy of independence was quickly washed away by disillusionment. Since most of the conscious people wanted to realize the Pakistan of their dreams, anyone who kept their dream alive had a rapport with the majority.

Rehman: And going to jail did not upset this relationship?

Faiz: On the contrary, it strengthened it. An element of glamour was added. Politicians had been going to prison, but the idea of a poet being incarcerated was something new. Besides, the years in prison formed a highly productive period in my life. Going to jail, as I have earlier observed, was like falling in love again. Not that the jail was a particularly suitable place to write, but only one had a lot of time to think and put one's thoughts in verse. (Rehman, 2017, DAWN)

This 'putting of one's thoughts into verse' was not just Faiz's act of resistance, as it had always been, but the verse itself framed and continues to frame a context for resistance for people across South Asia to date.

Gopi Chand Narang, in 'How Not to Read Faiz Ahmed Faiz', warns against prescriptive readings of Faiz's work and comments on how Faiz's enduring popularity may have unwittingly tainted his legacy to some degree. The fact that contemporary renderings of Faiz's poems across South Asia include everything from prints on canvas totes to new songs popularized through Coke Studio means that, on some level, many of his new admirers do not know 'why' they like him so much beyond the power of his poetry. Faiz's consistent framing of resistance and revolution is somewhat compromised by the quest to maintain his status as South Asia's premier Urdu poet. Narang asks, "Do they admire him because of their genuine appreciation of his text or simply because others admire him?" (Narang, 2009, pp. 250-252) Narang goes on to add,

"The popularity of Faiz, intact even today, was established in the second half of the twentieth century, and this is not a short period for the firming of a poet's significance. During this period, much has been written about Faiz, but it is a sad fact that many of his admirers admire him for the wrong reasons; they have written little about his poetic worth. In this regard, Faiz deserves our sympathy." (Narang, 2009, p.254) Here Narang observes that Faiz's left ideological readings do not fit his aesthetic structure and raises the question of how his chosen poetics deploy his ideological project. This revolutionary project can often be redirected into multiple tangents, and by some measure, it is true that a neoliberal cooptation of his work has been undertaken by Pakistan's music industry and literary circles that appreciate the beauty of the poetry but occasionally do so at the cost of its substance and subject matter. By countering Louise Althusser's concept of ideology as 'not an abstraction which people carry around in their minds or a treatise of abstract ideas' (Althusser, 2011, p. 130), Narang posits that, rather, ideology refers to human conditions of action and social formation, stating:

It is characteristic of the ideology that in a social formation, at one end of the scale lies the ideology, on the other is science & technology, and somewhere in between is the world of art and literature marked by the aesthetic effect. All the three domains are

inter-dependent yet relatively autonomous. Science leads to the 'knowledge effect', ideology to the 'ideological effect', and art and literature to the 'aesthetic effect', and this last effect holds the key to the appreciation of Faiz. All the three effects, while each playing an autonomous role in its domain in the superstructure, do overlap and play a determinant role; and despite the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in them, they do tend to resolve the inherent conflict. (Narang, 2009, pp. 256-257)

Unpacking not just how Faiz writes but why he chooses to write this way and how he is read is significant. The deployment of frames of resistance throughout his work is not merely a linguistic device. His poetics of despair serves a deeply political purpose connected with his own Leftist leanings and involvement with the South Asian Progressive Writers' Movement. Unearthing the politics of despair in "Intesaab" requires taking the reader into confidence and delving into Faiz's deployment of 'Marx as Method' for framing avenues for a discursive resistance through his poetics.

Marx as Method

Faiz's work does little to conceal its Marxist leanings, and therefore, it becomes imperative to unpack how he employs his politics through poetry. As Lenin famously proclaimed, "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" (Lenin, 1966, p.369), and Faiz was well acquainted with Lenin. In fact, in the late 1930s, before partition, the progressive writers seriously debated questions of resistance posed through poetry. South Asian stalwarts such as Ahmad Nadim Qasimi, Zahir Kashmiri, Sahir Ludhianvi, Krishan Chandar, Rajendra Singh Bedi, and Upendra Nath Ashk evocatively blended Marxism with the traditional styles of Urdu poetry and successfully experimented with newer techniques of the novel as well. These writers also openly acknowledged and debated that their own class affiliations were determined by the existing capitalist order, marking them as overtly privileged, and thereby finding that they must take measures to defy their own background. Faiz's response was "Marx, Engels, and Lenin were not manual workers; not one of them had ever worked in any factory, even for a day. Much would depend on how well [the progressive writers] understand the problems of the workers, act wisely and sincerely." (Faiz, 1967, Interviews & Speeches)

Faiz held that in the absence of tangible contact with workers, the power of literary expression and the tools of creativity were adequate substitutions to propel a sense of social awakening. He concluded, "If the message of the progressive writers does not reach the uneducated workers, at least it reaches the middle classes. The war between the capitalist and the proletariat is not the exclusive war of the proletariat; it is a battle challenging all of us. Are not we part of our society?" (Malik, 1967, p. 658) "Intesaab" employs these messages in several of its dedications to railmen, postmen, tonga-wallas, and 'poor innocents they call workers' (line 7). It employs despair in his dedication to the farmer, the lord of a tiny, lost fiefdom. Despair then becomes a uniting emotive motif recurring and reasserting itself across vocations, and 'Intesaab' ends on a note that also

serves as a clarion call for hope through “the heralds of the coming dawn” (line 43), something that Faiz explores further in his poem ‘Umeed-e-Sahar’.

Before the partition of India, in the 1930s, the nationalist struggle was radicalized by the induction of the working class as an important facet of emancipation. As a direct product of this political and social situation, the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) was born, and Faiz was one of the leaders of the PWA. In his interview with Rehman, he mentions a divide in practices:

The older writers could be divided into two groups: one upholding art for the sake of art, the other bringing to its work a progressive sensibility. They already had a tradition of political rhetoric, while we were introducing a new tradition of political lyricism. They agreed with us aesthetically if not ideologically. Besides, when we held the foundation meeting of the PWA in Lahore in 1935, and the participants included writers like Mian Bashir Ahmed and Sufi Tabassum, we were working on a broad consensus. The idea was to have a movement allied not to any particular political party but to an ideal – the ideal of taking the masses towards social emancipation and progress. The formula was based on a realistic appreciation of the social situation and visualization of a free and just society. The goal was to guide the people towards freedom and to use their genius to establish an order based on social justice, an order in which an individual's status would be determined not by heredity or wealth but by his merit. (Rehman, 2017, par 19-22)

It is this intention that continues to drive Faiz's work beyond his death in 1984. This is also why Faiz's work translates effectively beyond its original conception to also lend itself to postmodern reading. After all, most postmodernists are still haunted by lost revolutionary hopes, and even though these views are often framed in the ‘negative rather than the constructive’, according to Christopher Butler, the postmodern deployment of despair lends itself to be somewhat sympathetic to Faiz's cause without conflating the two approaches. Faiz's work lends itself rather naturally to intertextual analysis, whereby work is made from other work, as mentioned previously in his creation of a ‘liberatory container’. Such a container concedes multiple avenues and constructions of liberation, and that has often been how Faiz's poetry has been interpreted and deployed, from protests to song and in performance art. The relationship between poetics naturally creates an affiliation and a deployment of despair to expand that suffering is no different in this context. As Butler states, “to read something as literature is to consider it as a linguistic event that has meaning in relation to other discourses. As a poem that plays on possibilities created by previous poems or as a novel that puts on stage and criticizes the political rhetoric of its day.” (Butler, 2002, pp. 34-36)

Here, one must interrogate how a poem like “Intesaab”, with its poetic of despair, propels a revolutionary narrative as a literary device, or is it the other way around? Does the deployment of literature as a liberatory practice serve as legitimate grounds for reclaiming identity and consciousness? How does theory interplay with poetry in this framework, and can poetry crafted to confront power also fall prey to it?

Theorizing Despair

One must approach the mapping of theory to locate the emergence of consciousness with caution. The reason for this is that the subject of identity and its representation can easily scale into the territory of encroachment, whereby subaltern identities are either obliterated by narrative or fetishized by it. A second danger emerges with regard to problems surrounding translation or work into other languages, as with most 'trans' shifts and movements of subjects, language can prove to be both an essentializing factor or a liberating one, and it is a tricky business unpacking how a subject operates in different spaces. "Intesaab" itself sifts through spaces insidiously, flitting from one identity to another, like costumes attempting to pinpoint a locus of common grief. And yet, this perpetual code-switching serves a purpose; it identifies multiple inroads into grief as well as potential avenues out of it. However, in its attention to illustrating variety, how do the identities it employs fare? Do they demand or deserve specificity over commonality? Is their despair the same? After all, this carnival of suffering does not feature all acts equally, and some identities are flattened in the process, where the grief of one can take precedence over the other. Indeed, it leaves some out entirely, the suffering of the farmer who once had a daughter carried off 'who knows where' (line 15) is told from the perspective of the farmer whose daughter was kidnapped by bandits, in Urdu, the phrase employed is '*jis ki beti ko daku utha le gaye.*' The following shaming of the farmer calls upon the 'loss of honor he experienced', a tragedy to be sure, and one that is mired in despair. However, the daughter who was kidnapped remains invisible; her own despair is rendered irrelevant. The same case applies with the despair depicted by little houses and unclean, narrow lanes that paint pathos in places, but does it equate to the despair of the prisoners, in whose hearts all our yesterdays burned until they fermented? (line38) Such exhaustive analysis is often overlooked by proponents of structural approaches and even cultural theory, but it serves an integral purpose of contextualizing Faiz for an audience beyond the one he envisioned.

The mimesis of "Intesaab" must be reconciled with a consciousness that can finally 'write of the Heralds of the coming Dawn' (line 43) because mimesis forces one to locate some sort of essence. This necessitates locating Faiz in literary practice because, while despair without hope is nihilistic, when used as a cleansing agent, despair can serve as a powerful tool for organizing. Jorge Luis Borges claimed, "I am not sure that I exist, actually. I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited." (Borges, 1981, p.243) In a way, peeling Faiz's work apart layer by layer is an essential service to unpack not just his own poetic and political leanings but where they can take the reader. In *Kartography* (2001), Kamila Shamsie references Faiz to highlight how despair can serve as liberation in his work

... and that's why they leave, isn't it? Because they have to see themselves in the context of something larger than just the two of them. It's like that Faiz poem, you know, *mujh say pehli si muhabat*, when you've seen the sorrows of the rest of the world, you can't go on pretending none of it matters, you can't pretend two people

can really live in isolation telling themselves their love is all that matters in the world. And that two of them, when they come back to the city, that's when they find out that their love was imperfect because it couldn't bear the knowledge of everything that lies outside.... (Shamsie, 2002, p.161)

It is this 'everything that lies outside' Shamsie alludes to, that really confines and defines the world Faiz's many subaltern avatars inhabit in "Intesaab". The poem's mimesis operates along invisible margins that are constantly trying to assert themselves as well as their agency, but it is their very position in society that makes this visibility a violent experience. Much like the proscribed invisibility of the multitudes of suffering poor in South Asia, the act of humanizing collective pain and despair eludes them, and giving this despair a vocabulary is but a first step to trying to articulate their suffering. The everyday life of class struggle is ever-present but simultaneously invisible; it operates along a paradoxical social contract where poor people are 'seen but not heard' and, with enough time, even their visible presence becomes blurred into a pedestrian landscape where suffering is akin to survival. Faiz's insistence on seemingly pulling them up from a lineup and into a spotlight where their story will be told and even more significantly heard, and sung, is a humanizing act. Humanizing the poor and oppressed is perhaps the most revolutionary act there is. Here, the affective turn of each tale involves turning grief into solidarity – Faiz is therefore framing a double act that simultaneously mirrors and mobilizes pain.

Poetics & Hermeneutics

Literature can be considered an arrangement of language that reframes what language can mean. The aesthetic function of language and the political purposes this very aesthetic can be crafted to serve constitute literature as a subset of linguistic organization. Barbara Fuchs, in *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam and European identities* (2001), states

...the literary problems are traditional, the status of representation in the period, the translation of established forms of new and potentially disruptive contexts. Less familiar is the overriding crux, a new conception of imitative representation. Mimesis emerges as both a powerful rhetorical weapon and cultural, i.e., not simply literary, phenomenon... Ideology pirated or ventriloquized becomes surprisingly vulnerable; instead of reproducing it, purposeful mimesis undermines imperial claims to original authority. Recent theorists argue that works are consistently made out of other work, which they react to, take up, challenge, transform, or revisit. A work of literature is hereby in a consistently shifting state because of how it is read and what it is read in relation to; by this definition, literature is essentially transnational. (Fuchs, 2001, p.7)

A major subject of concern in literary theory is the mode of analysis – this necessitates observing one's subject matter from two large frameworks, that of cultural studies or literary studies. Under the banner of cultural studies, Jonathan Culler has stated, "Although there is no prohibition against close textual readings in cultural studies, they are also not required." (Culler, 201, p. 21) Such disregard for close reading has often

alienated literary critics. Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure declared that 'language is a system of differences', thereby identifying the facet of language as drawing contrast between various elements. Read discursively, one could claim that by this understanding, language itself is an exercise in 'othering'. Saussure states of the linguistic sign that 'its most precise characteristic is to be what the others are not' and the arbitrary nature of the sign: both the signifier (form) and the signified (meaning) are themselves conventional divisions of the place of sound and the place of thought, respectively. (Saussure, 1959, p.120) Thereby, languages divide up the plane of sound and the plane of thought differently. This aspect of language is especially important to consider for languages such as Urdu, which combines Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit.

Keeping this method of classification central to language in consideration, one can frame language as a decoding mechanism. Different languages divide the world up differently, some by tone, others by space, rhyme, or meter. Language does not just categorize existing subjects and objects; it creates categories for categories. A mimesis that occurs within the framework itself, and this is central to how language produces or reproduces identity. In this regard, the language, metaphors, and motifs that Faiz deploys to articulate his 'Intesaab', to whom he dedicates his words to and how he calls upon them, are central in demonstrating how Faiz maps and navigates the aforementioned 'system of differences' - by foregrounding the most marginalized and overlooked members of society.

When considering "Intesaab," it is essential to unpack the interplay of linguistic poetics and/or hermeneutics. There is a basic distinction to consider here: poetics takes meaning to have already been accounted for and tries to gauge its effect, whereas a hermeneutical approach requires unpacking what meaning emerges from language and framing. Poetics starts with meaning to illustrate how texts work, and hermeneutics opens with the text to decipher new meanings. Linguistic theory prefers the track of poetics and working one's way from the outside in, which would involve taking Faiz's intentions behind his framing of despair and his Marxist leanings at face value while gauging his popularity on these points. However, modern critique leans heavily on hermeneutics to interpret texts in new spaces and for new audiences and readership. Here, there is an attempt to combine both approaches, not just underpinning how "Intesaab" is located as a text in poetic tradition but also how it can transcend this meaning in other contexts as and when needed. Combining a hermeneutical and poetic practice involves probing "Intesaab" not just for its social and poetic effect but also for what it communicates about the human condition and how the deployment of 'despair' as a narrative tool operates in a larger framework. Faiz's choice of revolutionary poetry to undertake the heavy burden of his politics itself merits consideration. Faiz was also a brilliant essayist and journalist and contributed significantly to Pakistan's prose, but it is his poetry that was earmarked for his message to the public, and this is significant. Aristotle himself asserted the value of poetry by focusing on mimesis rather than rhetoric and suggested that poetry provided a release of intense emotions. (Aristotle, trans. 1995, p. 10) It is key here to examine that, given the

subject of Faiz's poetry, the poor and beleaguered, an outlet for frustration was a driving force in the selection of poetry as his choice medium for his messaging. The framing of "Intesaab" of the student as 'those seekers of the truth' (line 32) and of their innocence to seek light in spaces where 'they sell naught, but the darkness of long endless nights' demonstrates his need for poetry to illustrate and establish common cause with his readers.

When contextualizing literature, there is always a question of whether discourse represents identities that already exist or whether it produces them. Here, identification also plays a key role in establishing groupings of otherness. Faiz's organization of despair groups together mothers, workers, prisoners, and students, all bound by their suffering, and we are charged with using this common despair as a rallying point to frame a new consciousness for ourselves. For the historically oppressed or marginalized groups, identification is a very crucial premise of identity. Amartya Sen states, "Identifying with others, in various ways, can be extremely important for living in a society. It has not, however, always been easy to persuade social analysts to accommodate identity in a satisfactory way." Sen goes on to discuss the reductionism of 'singular affiliation', which often assumes that any person permanently belongs to one collectivity only, 'no more, no less'. (Sen, 2007, pp.18-22) "Intesaab" does fall into this trap somewhat; its classification of human consciousness and suffering is ubiquitous, but the purpose behind framing this collective consciousness is to create a sense of shared pain.

Thereby, most theoretical debate in the arena of language and identity has focused on the desirability and usefulness of different groupings. And while these groupings can be somewhat termed as essentialist, there is also a liberatory practice at work here that is often overlooked. The question here is one of choice, as Sen states, "the freedom to determine our loyalties and priorities between the different groups to all of which we may belong is a particularly important liberty which we have reason to recognize, value and defend." (Sen, 2007, p.19)

When the categories in question are universal rather than national or local, they can serve as communities in transnational contexts. Here, 'workers' can be constituted beyond Pakistan and for the world, as can 'students' and 'prisoners'; the largesse of the context in and of itself allows for its reimagining in different spaces and across time.

Problems of translation and the subaltern

At this point, one must consider concerns surrounding the agency of poetic subjects. Do Faiz's avatars make their own fate, or do they suffer it? How does "Intesaab's" attempt to build a fraternity with a dialectic use of despair fare when examined in a postcolonial theoretical framework? How does Faiz frame his poetics? How does he ration despair and balance it with hope? Does "Intesaab" serve as a positioning for eventual resistance and reemergence, or does it topple into self-negation and alienation? The underlying message here is that choices will reveal themselves when those receiving the dedication 'come into consciousness' and no sooner. The heralding of the dawn is conditional because the

subjects are bound in servitude, exploited, and held hostage by a State.

Before moving to problems of translation, Robert J C Young's framing of the term 'Rai' (Young, 2003, p. 138) is a useful frame to unpack subaltern positions in "Intesaab". Rai is an Arab musical instrument used to perform revolutionary poetry in several Arab countries, but is primarily performed in Algeria. Literally translated, 'Rai' means 'an opinion', 'a point of view', 'a way of seeing things', and can also be taken to mean 'aim'. In her essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak problematizes the subaltern consciousness by stating:

To investigate, discover, and establish a subaltern or peasant consciousness seems at first to be a positivistic project – a project which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to firm ground, to something that can be disclosed. This is all the more significant in the case of recovering a consciousness because, within the post-enlightenment tradition that the collective participates in as interventionist historians, consciousness is the ground that makes all disclosures possible. (Spivak, 1988, pp.288-290)

However, as Spivak notes, even such an emerging 'consciousness' is a contradiction in terms, because it is historicized outside of the norm as an 'other'. Othering is an exercise predetermined in the struggle of translating literature. As Robin Blaser claims

As the image wears away

There is a wind in the heart

The translated men

Disappear into what they have translated

Robin Blaser, Image-Nation 5 (erasure)

While there is no doubt that the idea of translation emerges to unite diverse issues, contexts, and situations, there is always a layer of power that is in play. There are 'postcolonial translations' that frame a practice in how language is communicated outside of how it is originally conceived. Young notes:

Nothing comes closer to the central activity and political dynamic of postcolonialism than the concept of translation. It may seem that the apparently neutral, technical activity of translating a text from one language into another operates in a realm very distinct from the highly charged political landscapes of the postcolonial world. Even at a technical level, however, the links can be significant. Literally, according to its Latin etymology, translation means to carry or to bear across. A colony begins as a translation of sorts. Of culture and practice and peoples. (Young, 2003, p.140)

The act of translating language is also an act of displacement as words lose not just their original rhythm and meter but also their arrangement and tenor. Some languages are tonal and rhythmic, others practical, and others yet economical. Translating across these is problematic enough without compounding the problem by exercising power. Changing and transforming text across languages involves shifting its material identity, its physical

text, arrangement, and meaning. As with colonialism, where the transformation of an indigenous culture was reframed into a subordinated one, and for this reason, even though translation often begins as a matter of intercultural communication, the subject of power ensures that certain languages are translated 'for' certain benefits by certain people. Young adds,

Languages like classes and nations exist in a hierarchy, as does translation itself, traditionally thought of in terms of an original and inferior copy. Under colonialism, the colonial copy becomes more powerful than the indigenous original, that is devalued. It has even been claimed that the copy corrects deficiencies in the native version. The colonial language becomes culturally more powerful, devaluing the native language as it is brought into its domain, domesticated, and accommodated. (Young, 2003, p.141)

However, an interesting dimension to analyzing Faiz's work beyond such postcolonial framing has been explored by Taimoor Shahid, who problematizes that his poetry offers several layers of meaning beyond the postcolonial analytical paradigm:

His poetry is deeply rooted in its antecedents of the Persio-Arabic, Indo-Persian, and Urdu literary traditions and emerges out of these varying genealogies, which are *precapital / precolonial* in nature. The stark presence of these traditions in his oeuvre makes him much more than a mere revolutionary poet.

Shahid states that examining Faiz beyond his association with the Communist Party and the Progressive Writers' Movement allows us to posit unique questions about his work. In many ways, this layer is essential in humanizing his work and its applications beyond some of their origins.

In a *truly* Gadamerian gesture of interpretation, I will try to excavate various precapital/ precolonial genealogies of his work to liberate him from the provincial historicism of critical discourse based on an uncritical adaptation of European models of postcapital thought and coloniality to the South Asian context. (Shahid, 2013, pp.45-47)

However, there is a problem of 'resistance' underpinning Shahid's approach, where he claims that limiting Faiz's work to its unique postcolonial subjectivity is a form of epistemic violence that is standardized in scholarship on South Asia. Faiz himself took pains to frame his positions, and therefore, one cannot deny him his poetic agency so blatantly. In his interview with IA, Rehman Faiz remarks.

Men of vision should be able to point out the way to salvation, but whether they can themselves lead on the path, at the head of a vanguard, depends on a host of objective factors, especially on the existence of a body of men who have been stirred up for decisive action. Even one's perception is clarified and burnished by a dialectical relationship with the collective perception. When, for any reason, one is isolated from the collective ethos, one goes barren (*banjh*). I think quite a few of us are suffering from a lack of any positive impetus which comes from fruitful and productive assertion of

people's genius, not only in politics but in all fields of human endeavor. (Rehman, 2007, para 41-43)

Faiz's overall framing of his poetics echoes Homi Bhabha's evocation of the 'beyond' in his Location of Culture:

The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years, but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *audela* – here and there, hither and thither, back and forth. (Bhabha, 1994, pp.1-2)

Faiz's own recurring metaphors of a Dawn conflated with a collective hope are therefore not necessarily linear; it is an iteration beyond time that is inextricably linked to action. The elusive, liberatory dawn being sought is not heralded by each sunrise but is dependent on an overhauling of the many shackles that uphold the present and have defined the past. Perhaps this is the intention behind framing resolve through despair, the idea that despair is ever-present and transcends time, space, and ideology. Then again, so must we resolve in the face of it.

A Dedication for Now

How Faiz's work translates in the present largely rests on how his work can be negotiated within the postmodern method and discourse. Even though many would claim that there is an inherent power imbalance in demanding conformity of postcolonial subjects in such a fashion, when the question pertains to the *translatationality* of his work, the success of such negotiation is deeply significant.

A great deal of postmodern theory is predicated upon skepticism and especially skepticism in the face of grand narratives such as Hegelianism and Marxism. On this surface level, one might assume that Faiz's negotiation with postmodernity is a lost battle from the onset; however, it is Faiz's enduring, even increasing popularity, that constantly calls this into question. And while postmodernity is often contextualized as incredulity towards master narratives, it is by no means incredulous to discursive approaches from the perspective of the left. Also, much of postmodern ambivalence and resistance to grand narratives emerges from the reasonable fear that such totalizing ideals lend themselves to authoritarianism and alienate the individual. Faiz's work expressly resists authority, even if it does not locate the individual in the same manner as most Derrideans do. The Derridean framing only considers explanations in terms of their relationships to various systems that frame them, and poses that we are at best relativists – Faiz's dialectic of despair allows for exactly such framing. Christopher Butler argues the Derridean turn:

We tend to privilege, or rely upon, what Derrida calls particular 'transcendental signifiers', such as 'God', 'reality', and the 'idea of man', to organize our discourse. The conceptual oppositions we tend to employ to do this organization for us –

speech versus writing, soul versus body, literal versus metaphorical, natural versus cultural, masculine versus feminine – make us get lots of fundamental relationships wrong, or at least too rigidly fixed. In particular, we tend to put one of these terms above the other in comparative modalities. (Butler, 2002, p.78)

This is the idea that premised the notion of the 'death of the author', demanding literary readings beyond the creator of literary work, seeking that language neglect the intentions behind the creation of aesthetic work. Faiz fits into this notion rather interestingly in the current contemporary rendering of his poetry, as it is now taken up by young pop musicians and as "Intesaab" is sung as an anthem in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Pakistan.

One might even posit that Marx's own work on 'false consciousness' preempts a postmodern critique, in that it still posits power relations as a consistent oppositional framework. Butler states

that an exact correspondence between narrative and 'the past' is not possible. We can describe the 'same' event in many different ways; our access to the evidence is always mediated, nothing is simply transparent, and there are always absences and gaps and biases to deal with. But narratives can still be more or less adequate to the (interpreted) evidence, and new evidence can still overturn narratives. (Butler, 2002, p.92)

Here, one would hope that the postmodernist would reconcile with the revolutionary aims of Faiz's dedication. "Intesaab" serves as a framework for resistance in all three iterations of power as framed by Eric Hobsbawm in *Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the Twentieth Century* (2014). He states that there are three demands that power usually makes on art, and which absolute power makes on a larger scale than more limited authorities. The first is to demonstrate the glory and power of triumph or power itself; if anything, Faiz's dedication is a positing of power as criminality and coercion. The second major function of art under power was to organize it as public drama, and Intesaab's calling for a new Dawn in the face of present despair subverts organizing in service for the state, but rather as a reaction to it. Finally, "... a third service that art could render power was educational or propagandist: it could teach, inform and inculcate the state's value system." (Hobsbawm, 2014, pp. 98-101) Here it is the poem's call to the student and the prisoner that bears reiterating "Let me write of the prisoners in whose hearts, all our yesterdays dawned like sparkling gems." (line 38) There is a lull, while the yesterdays burn and forge distant stars. And it is these stars that shine light to herald a new dawn, a new reading, and a new framing of despair for hope.

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