

Faiz on Faiz

Ahmad Salim is compiling Faiz Ahmad Faiz' biography based on details narrated by Faiz himself. Below we post two chapters from the forthcoming biography



There were two brothers, Kala and Qadir. No one knows who they were, but a very small village bearing their name existed in tehsil Narowal of district Sialkot. Village Kala Qadir. My father saw the light of day in a destitute family of this village, a family where, to conserve the oil, the light of the clay lamp was put out early in the evening. There was a primary school nearby and some boys from our village too used to attend it. Our grandfather, Sahibzada Khan, was a small-time peasant, and too poor to afford for our father a share in the fountain of knowledge that spouted there.

My Father

Father used to tell us that he envied those children. When he saw them going to school he felt his heart would break but he couldn't do anything. In keeping with the ways of the poor he was trained to earn his living when he was five years old instead of being taught to read and write. The village people engaged him to graze their cattle, and ensured his daily bread as compensation. Early in the morning, Father would leave with the herd and tend them outside the village. While the animals grazed he sat in the shade of some tree and looked with longing at the boys in the distant school. One can imagine what went on in his heart. One day he left the cows in the field and went up to the school. The schoolmaster asked why he had come. Father replied boldly, "I want to study." The teacher looked at the cowherd's son who was waiting for his answer with expectant eyes and said, "All right, come every day."

Father was struck dumb with surprise and ecstasy. He used to tell us that he was mad with happiness. "The words, 'All right, come every day' gave me a thousand times greater pleasure than the sighting of the Eid moon. Drunk with rapture I ran to the herd and took the animals home.

Everyone in the house felt that I was changed. I could hardly contain my excitement. The next morning I collected the animals, left them in the field to appease their hunger while I strove to quench my raving thirst with the first drop of learning that the school gave me. For me the alphabet was like a beautiful dress for a naked child, a grand feast for a starving person or the gift of eyesight for a blind man.

"When the teacher gave me my first lesson it was difficult for me to hold myself still. He was somewhat perturbed and said, 'Boy, do you want to study or graze buffaloes?' I collected my wits and said, 'Sir, I want to do both.' 'Then learn to pay attention,' he said. 'This is a tough job.' The words seared my brain, 'This is a tough job.' I have never forgotten them. I began to study in school-time and revised my lesson while tending the cattle. This combination of study and cattle-grazing went on for years. Then, with a sense of thrill I sat for the final primary exam. When the result came the teacher told me I had stood first and would get a scholarship."

Father's scholarship and education

In those times the monthly scholarship was two rupees. Yes, two rupees. Father was given another two rupees every month by the village people in the form of wheat. Now this distinction further whetted his appetite for learning, but there was no middle school anywhere in the vicinity. The nearest was a few miles away in a village called Maddo. But the problem was that if Father went to that school he couldn't look after the village cattle and would lose the two rupees he received for the work. So he told his father that he would pay the scholarship amount towards household expenses, and thus prevailed upon him to agree to his admission in middle school. The village people too had no objection to this, and so Father began his new journey in life.

Father walked about four miles every day to the new school. He romped and frolicked on the way, and his old friends, the buffaloes, would look up and moo when he passed by. In middle school again he passed the final exam with credit. But again his fate seemed to be darkened by the fact that there was no high school in the entire area. I don't know how he found out that inside Mochi Gate in Lahore there was a mosque known as Chinianwali Masjid where small cubicles were available free for poor students and other destitutes and food was also provided. Father had developed a will of iron. He determined to go to Mochi Gate and "conquer" the Chinianwali mosque and secure admission in the high school there. No one in the village was pleased at this decision.

However, he made up a small package for the journey. It included some barley bread and gur and a few books, and set off for Chinianwali Masjid. He had been correctly informed. He was given permission to reside in a

hujra, and came to know that the people of the locality subscribed jointly to sending food for those staying in the mosque. While other travellers came and went, Father, the youngest of them, was to stay there permanently. Impressed by his bright intellect, the Imam Masjid got him admission in the high school. Now, apart from praying in the mosque he also began to perform its daily chores. He recited the Quran in a melodious voice. Very soon the residents of the locality became his fervent admirers, his schoolmasters doted on him, while the Imam Masjid couldn't stop praising his sagacity and good manners. Thus, in a short while he was able to achieve what I have not been able to do till now.

Hard work & the Afghan Counsellor

Father spent the day in school. In the afternoon and evening he did routine work in the mosque. After his evening meal, provided by the mohalla people, and saying the isha prayer, he would set off for the railway station and, till late in the night, work there as a coolie. Whatever he earned from this job he sent home. One day Sardar Amir Muhammad Khan, Counsellor for Mghanistan, came to the mosque for the Friday prayer and incidentally met my father. By now Father could speak both Persian and English. The Counsellor was very pleased and began to take lessons in English from him. After some time he began to give him work of translating documents from Persian into English.

The Mghan Counsellor was a devotee of the Sirhind Sharif shrine which had also been visited once by Amir Abdul Rahman, the Mghan king. I am told that one Abdul Halim from Chiniot had built an Mghan palace there which is probably still in place. One year the Counsellor took Father along on his pilgrimage to Sirhind Sharif and later he went with him many times.

On one such visit he was saying the isha prayer in the company of Sardar Amir Muhammad Khan when he fell unconscious, and, in his dream, heard the Sirhind divine tell him that one day he would be a minister in Mghanistan. When he came to, he smiled at the state of his present fortunes, recalling the humble dwelling in Chinianwali Masjid, his bed of straw and the earthenware drinking cup. He got up to have some water and then continued with his prayer.

In Afghanistan's royal court

Then the Counsellor had to leave suddenly for Mghanistan, but he too Father with him. There he was introduced to Amir Abdur Rahman and he was given a job as translator. Gradually he became the custodian of the Icing's correspondence. His duties were to translate letters from the British into Persian and render the Amir's Persian letters into English. Maybe that is how he acquired proficiency in the two languages and became intimately acquainted with the diplomatic politics of the age. Amir

Abdur Rahman was very happy with Father's work and showered him with many gifts and rewards. He literally rolled in precious stones.

He was now a man of influence, and, with the passage of time, his fortunes multiplied, till one day he was married off to a niece of the Amir. He was also appointed tutor to the heir apparent, Mir Habibullah. But there are all kinds of persons in a royal court and jealousy breeds enemies. They began to poison the Amir's mind against Father, but he was such a favourite with the monarch that all their efforts were wasted.

Dr Hamilton

There was an Englishwoman in Kabul by the name of Dr Lillies Hamilton. She was a highly educated lady and she became friendly with Father. The two would often discuss local events and advise each other. One day she said to Father that nobody could depend on kings for ever. The monarch who is in control today can be an exile tomorrow, reduced to a nonentity and without a penny to his name. The new king may spare your life but he will certainly not be your patron. It is also possible that the conspiracies of your enemies may bear fruit, and the monarch who is so beneficent towards you today may be carried away by the poisonous words of your enemies. Therefore it is necessary that you should think of the future.

Father found wisdom in Dr Hamilton's remarks. It was decided, therefore, that all the wealth that he had accumulated should be deposited in the lady's account in a London bank so that he could benefit from it in the coming days. Thus the lady became his finance minister.

Return from Kabul and imprisonment

When Father had gone to Afghanistan he had taken with him a man from the village, probably a chowkidar. His name was Imam Bakhsh and he always remained loyal and helpful. One day Father discussed the situation with him in view of the mounting conspiracies in the court and the fact that the Amir's relations and other courtiers were now after his blood. Imam Bakhsh agreed to do whatever Father decided. One dark night they saddled their horses, changed their dress to disguise themselves and took the road to India. They rode at night only and, one morning, they crossed the border. The British government became suspicious because Father had come back without informing any of its officers so they sent him to prison as a spy of Afghanistan. On his part the Amir was also amazed at what Father had done since he wanted him back in Kabul. Father was a man of infinite resource and courage. Somehow he established contact with Dr Hamilton who was now in London and wrote her a detailed letter. That good lady managed to get him released from jail.

Journey to London

The lady insisted that he should come over to London, and Father thought this was the best way out for him. In those days there was no formality about passport and visa, nor did one require a No Objection Certificate from anyone to travel abroad. On reaching England Father took admission in Cambridge. Later he was elected Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. There was no shortage of money. The lady handed over his savings to him. Now he studied and played polo, among others with the Prince of Wales who later was crowned as King Edward VII, and moved in high society and was recognised as an important person.

Meantime the Amir of Mghanistan came to know that he was in London and engaged in studies. He wrote to Father and offered him the post of Mghan Ambassador to Britain. He said Father need not come over to Kabul if he did not want to and work as his representative to the British government. Father accepted this and became ambassador. After finishing with Cambridge he got interested in the law and enrolled himself as barrister. This was the time when people like Allama Iqbal, Sir Muhammad Shafi, Sir Fazl-e-Husain and Sir Abdul Qadir were also in London, all aiming at becoming barristers. Father was friendly with all of them but his

was a life of pomp and luxury while they were students and always short of funds. On the other hand, Father had the wealth he had accumulated in Kabul and also received a salary from the Mghan government. He passed his law exam with ease and comfort.

Return from London

Now the question that faced him was whether he should go back to Mghanistan or to India. He decided on the latter, and leaving London, headed straight for Jhelum. On arriving in Jhelum he began practice as a lawyer. In those days Jhelum was a small town although in history it occupies a prominent status, for this is the place where Alexander had been confronted by Raja Porus. This ancient town was rather backward in its life style and its economy. Being on the route for invaders from the north-west it could not flourish to the extent that it deserved, while the British used it as a military feeding area. Anyway, Father went to the courts in a phaeton drawn by four horses. The poor town and its citizens were hardly equipped to provide Father with an income commensurate with his taste and life-style, so he decided to move --- this time to Sialkot. Here he began active practice and lived in opulence, and also married the daughter of a rich man who lived in a village close to ours. This was his fifth marriage and I was born from this wife. There is no record of the others.

Mammun the Gambler and other personalities

At that time Sialkot was known for a striking social personality called Mammun the Gambler. His real name was Muhammad Bakhsh but everyone knew him and called him by his alias. He was a sort of local Robin Hood, and patronised gambling and smuggling and was king of the underworld. At the same time he was a member of the Municipal Committee and was associated with every organisation set up for improvement of the city. He also donated generously to all good causes. A strange man really. Then there was Maulvi Ibrahim, a rich man in his own right, who had grown a beard, taken up the imamat of a mosque and had begun to teach children. He became my teacher too, and I started going to the mosque to read the Urdu primer.

Maulvi Ibrahim's classes were rather novel. Here he was teaching me ABC and, at the same time, coaching a student of the third class. Another boy is being taught the hadees, while still another is on fiqh. He gave equal attention to all. He had a commanding manner and we were terrified of him. He was a big good-looking man but at heart gentle and affectionate. He had no children of his own. You know, I learned the Quran from him with translation for full seven years~ Then there was Maulana Mir Hasan, the famous teacher of Allama Iqbal. His madressah was in another part of the city.

And of course Baba Kharak Singh was also from Sialkot. He was a great man and the founder of the Sikhs' Akali Movement. In those days the gurudwaras were all controlled by the British Indian government and the high priests of the gurudwaras were also appointed by it. Baba Kharak Singh's movement was mainly to transfer control of Sikh temples to the Sikh community. It was an anti-imperialist movement and its suppression involved firing on the workers a number of times. Later the community joined up with the Khilafat Movement and gave the rulers a tough time in conjunction with the Indian National Congress. Baba Kharak Singh is a hero of Sikh nationalism.

Personality and character

My father had a highly impressive personality. I remember once how the mirasi delegated the duty of bringing the goats for the Eid-ul-Azha sacrifice did not turn up on time. Father shouted at him why he had been so late. The poor mirasi was so overawed by his loud and peremptory manner that he fell backwards against a wall and fainted with fear. Along with his brilliant intellect and his height and girth, Father always used the power of his voice to dominate company.

He was a truly handsome man and overpowering in his effect on people. Don't try to imagine him from my height and features, for I seem to have acquired my looks from my mother's family. He loved his village and the land of his birth. Sir Abdul Qadir, Sir Muhammad Shafi and others implored him many times to shift to Lahore but he declined, and till the last never left the people of his area. He purchased much property, both

in Sialkot and in Lahore's Mochi Gate. We led a life of plenty and never knew what poverty or want could be like. Father was the presiding spirit of every organisation in the city and was the leader where welfare work was concerned. He was the first to come up with donations for schools and mosques. Among his children he loved me the most. Once he said to me, "It's good that you are writing poetry. You will bring honour to my name. But do go into the ICS." I was in third year of college at that time. That English lady wrote a novel about him which was published. It was called *The Wazir's Daughter* and is very interesting.

Death

I was still in college when my father died. As we finished with his last rites, people whom he owed money began to turn up; all the sahuqars and money-lenders of the city. Then we came to know that he had left debts to the tune of eighty thousand rupees, a lot of money in those times. He had never told us that all his generosity and philanthropy flowed from borrowed wealth. This disclosure left us stunned. Brother Tufail was a noble soul and said to me, "We'll pay all these debts," although I couldn't see how this was going to be done. People advised us to forget the matter, but my brother said a firm no to the idea. Then property began to be sold and the burden of debt began to be relieved. Finally it was all over, and we entered a life of poverty.

Part II

Birth

I was born in Kala Qadir, though I do not know my date of birth. In the school documents it is 7 January 1911 at one place and 7 January 1912 at another. I am told that in those days the dates of birth entered in school registers were invariably false. It was always calculated that a boy would pass his matriculation in such-and-such year and ~ for entry into the service of the British the age should be less than the real one. Some time ago I had requested a friend to find but the correct date from the municipal record of births. His effort revealed the date as 13 February 1911.

First day in school

My childhood was spent in Sialkot, and I went to study in the Scotch Mission School. In my studies my tutor was Shams-ul-Ulema Maulvi Mir Hasan who coached me in Arabic grammar. But I was closer to Maulvi Ibrahim Mir Sialkoti, a very learned person, who taught me the Arabic alphabet and the primers. Later he also gave me lessons in the Quran and Hadith. So that is how I passed my childhood.

I was not sent to school to start with. Father had said that I should first read the Quran, that is memorise it. Then I should go to the mosque and study Arabic and Persian. School would come later. So, assisted by a Hafiz Sahib I began to learn the Quran by heart, I had only done three siparahs when I developed inflammation of the eyes. Then I started on the alphabet with my mother. This was followed by finished the first primer of Urdu with the help of Maulvi Ibrahim Sahib in a nearby mosque. I was in the fourth class when I was finally sent to school.

This is quite a story, for whenever I recall the event I start feeling uncomfortable. For my first day there my elder sisters got me ready. I was dressed up in velvet, with a red waistcoat and matching shorts, silk socks and new fancy shoes. I had never seen a school from inside and had no idea what went on there. It was an Islamia primary school. What did I see there? There were four boys in my class, one in dirty torn clothes, another without shoes and still another without a cap, and all four sitting on the floor. They stared at me as if I was a strange animal. In those times desks were only provided in the higher classes, while children in the junior classes sat on straw matting.

I felt uncomfortable. I didn't want to sit on the floor and that too on a soiled piece of matting. The boys looked me up and down. with a mixture of sarcasm and contempt. The next day I went dressed like them and never wore that velvet suit to school again. One should look like the people one consorts with, and not so out of place as to make them feel that you are showing off your wealth and status. That is bad manners.

Oldest, dim memories

For me the years 1918 to 1920 are just a hazy memory, and the earliest, for what do dates mean at that age? World War I had ended. On their part the British rulers and their toadies were celebrating victory, with streets decorated with coloured bunting, cannon being fired, bands playing and soldiers parading; while, on the other side, the freedom movement was picking up. Every other day there was a new procession and the air was rent with various slogans like Jo bole so nihal, sat siri akal; Allah-o-Akbar; Bande mataram; Down with the toadies; and Freedom is our birthright. Famous leaders drove around the city in flower bedecked carriages. This is Moti Lal Nehru, here are the Brothers Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, now comes Maulana Azad, there is Baba Kharak Singh and Dr Kitchlew. Welcome arches have been erected all over the city and the streets and bazaars are crowded with enthusiastic onlookers. One day the city is illuminated to mark a victory of the Turks, and the next day a popular leader's arrest covers it with a pall of gloom.

Mixed with these sights and sounds are the banner headlines of dailies and the shouts of newspaper hawkers: "Czar overthrown in Russia," "Lenin sets up workers' government," "The red revolution has arrived." People all over are discussing events --- in the sitting room of our house,

in the school staff room, in the mosque of the locality, everywhere it is the talk of the town. How did the Russian revolution come about? Will the revolutionary forces also come to India to get us freedom? What is a government of workers and peasants like?

When Father left for the courts in the morning, people who had shops or ran some trade in the neighbourhood would gather on the platform outside our house where benches and stools had been paced for his clients. On sighting a customer they would hurry to deal with him and then come Allah Diya the wrestler, Chiragh Din the oilman, Allah Rakha the butcher, Khushia the barber and their pals spent 19 hours chatting and discussing Indian and world politics.

"Have you heard," one would say, "Mahatma Gandhi and the Ali Brothers have announced that within a year all British governors and commissioners and DCs will be expelled and their place taken by our own people." Another would give the news, "They say the Turkish army is coming through Afghanistan after defeating the British." "Yes," would add another, "and the Russian forces have joined the Turks and overthrown their own king. They have a new leader called Lenin who has set up an army of workers, made the king run away and distributed ail wealth among the people. They have a workers' government now." An enthusiastic listener would shout, "Buck up, you son of a lion! I say, let's ask our Agha Safdar to do something similar. (Agha Safdar was a political leader of the city.) What a great thing it would be if this could happen here. Imagine the wealth of Lala Harjan Rai, the money-lender, being distributed among us all!"

This was the first time in those old days when we heard of Russia and Lenin and the red revolution. I don't recall now what impact these words had on our childish minds and what we thought about them. As I grew a bit older, I got absorbed in my studies in school and other intere~ts, soon forgetting these foreign names and events.

Childhood

Our poets constantly complain that the world has failed to recognise their merit. This is a perennial topic with them. My case is otherwise. I am given so much honour, so much affection, by friends and acquaintances, and by those unknown to me, that I often feel guilty. I believe that in order to be worthy of all this adulation I should have done much more than what I have been able to achieve in life. And this is not a recent feeling. It was always like this from my very childhood.

When I was very small and went to school, almost the same kind of relationship had built up with the other boys. For some reason they began to treat me as a leader although I never possessed the attributes usually associated with leaders. One had to be either the aggressive type to hold sway over the boys or exceptionally clever in studies. I was all right in

class, and could also hold my own in games. But I never did anything extraordinary by way of academic distinction to make others look up to me or draw their attention.

When I ruminate over my childhood there's one thing that I recall in particular. Our house was full of women. We were three brothers. The younger Inayat and the elder Tufail never listened to these women and remained engrossed in romping about. I was the only one caught in their snare. This had a good effect as well as a sorry one. The benefit was that these ladies obliged me to spend my days as a well-behaved boy. Never would a vulgar word pass my lips, and that is true even today. But I often regret that I was thus kept aloof from the childish pranks and the carelessness that characterise that young age.

For instance, a boy is flying a kite in the street, another is spinning a top, some boys are playing marbles, but I was oblivious to all these fun-giving activities. Just a silent spectator who dare not join in these sports because they were not considered fit for boys of noble families.

My teachers were also good to me. I don't know about these times, but in our days severe beating was resorted to in schools. Our teachers were proper tyrants. I was not only spared capital punishment but was made class monitor every time. I was also delegated the function of administering punishment to my class fellows. "Pull that boys' ears," or "Give a resounding slap to that one." I found this most irksome, and, as far as possible, tried to be lenient in pulling ears and slapping my companions so that they should not feel the pain. But whenever the teacher found this out I would be admonished and told to use proper force.

Two memories are etched sharply on my mind. One that I was deprived of indulging in childish interests, and the other that I received from my class fellows and teachers the same affection and sincerity that was my lot in later life from friends and contemporaries, and which continues to this day.

I used to go to the mosque for the morning prayer with my father. My routine was to get up with the azaan before dawn, go to the mosque with Father, say my prayer, and then for an hour or two listen to the lesson from the Quran from Maulvi Ibrahim Mir Sialkoti who was a truly learned person. Then Father and I would go for a walk for about two hours, followed by school. At night Father would send for me to write his letters, for at that time he felt some difficulty in doing it himself. So I acted as his secretary. I also read out the newspaper to him. Because of being involved in these activities I gained a lot, because reading Urdu and English newspapers and writing letters was a really profitable exercise for me.

All this revives another memory.

Adjacent to our house was a shop where you could get books on hire. One paid two pice (paisas) per book. The owner was called Brother by everyone. Brother's shop was a great treasury of Urdu literature. The books that we read while studying in the sixth and seventh class are no longer to be found; books like Tilism-e-Hoshruha, Fasana-e-Azad and the novels of Abdul Haleem Sharar. I went through all these at that age. Then I went on to the verses of poets. I read Dagh, but couldn't make head or tail of Ghalib. Even the other poets were only half comprehensible to me, but they all left a kind of impact on my mind as if I was losing my breath. This variety of reading made me take to poetry instinctively and I developed a lasting interest in literature.

My father's clerk also acted as a sort of manager of the household.

If I managed to displease him in something he would threaten to tell Father that I secretly read novels and other useless books instead of school books. I used to be afraid of him and would beg him not to tell Father, but one day he did report me. Father called me and asked me if I read novels. I admitted that I did. On which he said, "If you must read novels then read those of English. Urdu novels are not good. Go to the fort library in the city and get English novels from there."

Thus I began to read English novels. I went through the whole of Dickens and Hardy and God knows what else. In this case too I could comprehend only half of what I read, but this vastly improved my English, By the time I was in tenth class I began to catch my teachers making mistakes of English and ventured to correct them. I didn't get a beating on this but they did feel annoyed and used to say, "If you know better English why don't you take this class? Why learn from us?"

The bed-bugs of Abbottabad

The bed-bugs of Abbottabad were famous all over. I remember them from the time when I once visited Abbottabad in my childhood. What a long time ago that was but it seems like yesterday. Hameed Bhai's only sister, a very beautiful girl who died when she was still young, was married in Hazara. My brother Tufail and I once went to her place for the summer vacations, and her husband's pir sahib took us on a trip to Abbottabad. The bed-bugs there were so virulent, and in such profusion, that I was badly bitten all over the body. As a result I got high fever and was laid up for many days.

I had never before seen mountains and streams and fresh-water springs and I was simply enchanted. Everything was pleasurable. In the courtyard of the hujra, my cousin's husband, who was a local khan, is practising with his pistol, The verandah and rooms are decorated with swords and

daggers and other old weapons, Pir Sahib's aged mother is dishing out amulets to village women, and when the men were out of sight the belles of the village could be seen bathing, in scanty dress, in the hill stream.

An adventure

What memories of our ancestral village! The intoxicating aroma of a sugarcane field, the sight and smells of citrus blossoms, the golden tassels of the amaltaas flower, the sun-drenched wheat crop and mustard flowers reminiscent of Van Gogh's paintings, the henna-coloured light of the day after a shower, the cool air in the heat under the shisham trees, the feel of soft grass on the body --- all these created the same excitement that one felt at that age on hearing the whistle and chuck-chuck of the railway engine or by floating paper boats in flowing water. Days that made you hold your breath with rapture. Also days that were sometimes darkened by fear and sometimes seemed as sharp as a sword because of illness.

I went to our village for the first time as a rich boy along with elder brother Haji Tufail Ahmed. Brother Tufail was commonly addressed as Haji because when he was very small Father had taken him along for the holy pilgrimage. We were the sons of a Khan Bahadur but our relations in the village were poor. In any case everyone in the village could not be a Khan Bahadur. We were cosseted and made much of and everyone paid his tribute in the form of affection and genuine adulation, especially the women. This was a novel experience for me. We had been raised in luxury and opulence while our relations presented a picture of poverty and deprivation, living in dark hovels with nothing to distinguish them as homes. Most of them were barefooted, dressed in a single piece of clothing, with the men wearing a tattered piece of cloth as turban and women whose dopattas were in shreds.

These were men and women whose bodies smelt of the original human odour, who had never known a soap or a detergent, who scrubbed their dirty utensils clean with the grit of fire-ash and sometimes washed their hands too with the same ashes. They came in hordes, somewhat abashed and fearful, blessing us with both hands while looking into our eyes. Boys and girls of our age, pale and lean, dressed in rags and without shoes of any kind, glared at us from a distance and giggled among themselves. God knows what they said about us and what made them laugh. We were at a loss in all this, but the fear and hesitation of the poor people soon turned into a deluge of love. Moved by these waves of affection a woman kissed me with a loud smack that could have been heard ITom afar; I came to know what a kiss could be. Someone said, "Faiz, this is your aunt, your father's sister."

I almost fainted with this new experience. For the first time in my life I realised why kings were kings, and how kings transform the poor like these into naive and oppressed human beings full of love and devotion to

royalty. I learned at that young age how easy it is to be a prince or princess. All that is required is the seed of a monarch. But what a lot of sacrifice and artless sincerity is needed to become like these poor souls! All of a sudden I began to look down upon my father's title of Khan Bahadur and it became irksome to me. At the same time my heart went out to the common man. Our aunts in the village gathered me to themselves, and I too felt a kinship for them. Women of all ages have always appealed to me. Truly, womankind is a great blessing.

In the village I saw a flour-mill, a chakki, for the first time. What a strange device it seemed, grinding grain of all kinds, and that too through the strength of a woman's hand! One night the two of us decided to rotate it ourselves. I took up a fistful of grain while Bhai Tufailifted the heavy top-stone of the mill. Before I could pull away my hand the top-stone fell from my brother's hand and one of my fingers was crushed under it. Blood streamed from the chakki instead of flour. Brother Tufail was terribly frightened, and so was I. We agreed that no one should know about this, and not the Khan Bahadur in any case.

Silently we lay down in our beds. I think Brother went to sleep worrying about what would happen in the morning and making schemes to face the situation. I couldn't think of anything for the pain which was intense and was spreading all over the body. I didn't sleep a wink. In the morning I saw that my aunt's snow white bed-sheet was soaked in blood. It seems that my finger had bled the whole night but I lay quietly without making a sound. When my aunt and other women came to wake me up I was lying with my eyes open and didn't say anything. They were bewildered by the sight. Anyway we were caught, and when asked about what had happened told the truth.

Another childhood memory

I recall how under the dense trees in the Eidgah, my father is reading out the khutba. (Always it was he who delivered this Arabic sermon.) Tufail and I are seated in the front row, wearing velvet coats. After the Eid prayer our phaeton leaves the place of congregation. The bells in the harness of the horse tinkle merrily. The coachman is throwing fistfuls of small change on both sides of the road, and excited screaming children are running along with the carriage. Then I recall the moment when we enter the courtyard of the zenana which is jam-packed with women --- our sisters, their children, serving maids, and the poor female guests from the village.

As soon as Father enters the courtyard there is pin-drop silence. Everyone kisses his hand by turn. Then our grandmother gropes her way out of her room and our father bows his haughty head before her. She places her hand on his head and gives him her blessing, after which he leaves the courtyard for the male quarters. The silence breaks and then

everyone starts talking and laughing and shouting to their hearts' content.

Beginnings of poetry

I ventured into versifying when I was in Class VII. It was like this. My elder brother, who is now dead, had a friend by the name of Nazir Ahmed Mahmud, who later became a judge of the High Court. They were both in tenth class. This Nazir Ahmed said to me one day, "I say, you are so good at Urdu, have you ever made any verses?" I replied that I had never "made" any verses. So he wanted me to make some. On my asking how that was to be done, he said, "There is a boy in our class called Chhaiju Ram. He is a nuisance for us. You write me a poem against him. It should have verses that compare his head with a cooking pot, his stomach with a pitcher, his legs with stalks and you must say similar things about his hands and his eyes and his nose."

I "manufactured" a poem of seven or eight lines. Nazir Ahmed read it out in class and it became famous in the whole school. Then I thought that I had not been fair to Chhaiju Ram as all those derogatory verses must have hurt him. I should go and apologise to him. I asked my brother to show me the Chhaiju in question. So I went up to him and said, "Friend, you must forgive me. I don't even know you and I have written all that rot about you." But Chhaiju asked me not to apologise and said, "There is nothing to be sorry about. Because of you I have become known in the whole school. In fact I am very happy." That is how it was, though it was after a long time that I actually started writing poetry.

Again, in school one day our headmaster had the idea that there should be poetry competition among the boys. Well, not exactly poetry but versification. He gave us a verse which we were to use as the rhyme, a misra-e-tarha. In the first competition of the kind the judge was Shamsul-ulema Maulvi Mir Hasan Sahib. By chance I was judged the best and received a cash award. More than that I cherished the medal that I was given. I remember that the award was one rupee.

These two events caused me to misunderstand that I could do something in this line. Next to our house there was a palatial mansion, an old-fashioned haveli, where poetic symposiums, mushairas, were regularly held. In those days in Sialkot there was a gentleman by the name of Munshi Raj Narayan Armaan Dehlvi. Maybe you have heard of him. Later he went away to live in Lahore. Well he had set up a poetic society and this society arranged mushairas on a regular basis in the haveli which were presided over by the late Munshi Siraj Din, a friend of Allama Iqbal's. (His name is mentioned in some of the Allama's writings.) He was mir munshi in the residency in Kashmir and he used to move over to Sialkot with the residency. A flood of mushairas would start with his arrival. For five or six months poetry would flourish.

I too used to go to these sessions. Ghazals had to be composed on a misra-e-tarha. For a long time I could not pick up courage to participate for fear of Munshi Siraj' s biting sense of humour. It usually happened that as a poet's turn came and he read out a couplet, Munshi Sahib would fire away a dozen couplets of the masters on the same subject. One day I did venture and read out a ghazal. Unexpectedly Munshi Sahib exclaimed, "Young man, that was not bad." But it was more or less a shot in the dark at that age. Urdu and Persian were commonly spoken at home. I was of a tender age when I built up a world of the intellect in my mind and began to write poetry. But from the very beginning the words and sounds of Punjabi songs echoed in my memory. During the First World War people used to go about in the streets singing popular songs. It is only now that I have given Punjabi poetic form to the tunes that lay buried in my consciousness. I am a Sialkoti, but Father had lands in Sargodha. There the tenants joined in singing Punjabi folk songs at night. And there I listened to Waris Shah's Heer, and the kafis of Bullhe Shah, and the epic poems Sohni Mahinwal and Mirza Sahiban. I very much wanted to write in Punjabi but then how could I match the old masters? Actually I had not read the Punjabi poets in depth, but from whatever I had listened to I knew I could never write like Waris Shah.

In those days I was sometimes overtaken by a strange feeling. It was as if the colour of the sky had changed, and some things have distanced themselves from me, the sunshine had acquired a henna-like hue, and whatever was in the range of my sight had taken a different form. It was somewhat like a motion picture. This feeling would occur now and then, but I experience it no longer. Meeting with Iqbal I had the honour and pleasure of meeting Iqbal many times. For one we were from the same city, and he was also my father's friend and contemporary. In England too they had been together. I first saw him in my childhood, when I was six or seven years old. I recollect clearly the annual sessions of the Anjuman-e-Islamia in Sialkot. The Anjuman had a school of its own and the Allama sometimes came to attend its annual day, as also the functions of some other schools. My first sight of him was at the annual session of the Anjuman. I was required to be there because I was a student of its Islamia School and had to recite from the Quran at the session. I recollect that someone lifted me up and stood me on the table.

References Part I:

1. Faiz' s great-grandfather was called Sarbuland Khan and grandfather Sahibzada Khan.
2. Dr Ayub Mirza, Ham ke thehre ajnabi, pp 36-37
3. Ibid pp 37-38 4. Ibid pp 38-40 5. Ibid pp 40-41 6. Ibid pAl
7. Dr Ayub Mirza names this lady as Sahir Jan. According to Faiz's eldest sister Bibi Gul her name was Sair Jan and she was the daughter of Sardar Muhammad Rafi Khan and a niece of Amir Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan. She died two years after the marriage and was buried at Budh Khak, a place four miles from Kabul. (Khaleeq Anjum' s book FaizAhmed Faiz, A Critical Analysis, p.19)

8. Ayub Mirza pp 41-42
9. According to Bibi Gul the lady was a niece of Queen Victoria (Khaleeq Anjum's book, p.17)
10. Ayub Mirza pp 42-43
11. Ibid pp 44-45 12. Ibid pp 45-46 13. Ibid pp 46-47 14. Ibid pp 48-49 15. Ibid pp 49-50 16. Ibid pA9
17. Ibid pp 48-49 18. Ibid pA7 19. Ibid p.50 20. Ibid pp 50-51 21. Ibid p.50

References Part II:

1. Dr Ibadat Brelvi, Prof Ralph Russel: From Mataa-e-Lauh-o-Qalam, Compiler Mirza Zafrul Hasan, Maktaba Danyal, Karacht p.112 .
2. Khaleeq Anjum, Faiz Beeti, p.21
3. Dr Ibadat Brelvi, Prof Ralph Russel, pp.112-113
4. Khaleeq Anjum, p.21 .
5. Dr Ibadat Brelvi, Prof Ralph Russel, p.113
6. Monthly Umang, Faiz Number, p.187
7. Ibid p.40
8. Khoon-e-Dil ki Kasheed, Compiler Mirza Zafrul Hasan, Karachi 1983, pp.9-11
9. Ibid pp.225-226 10. Dr Ayub Mirza, Ham ke Thehre Ajnabi, Islamabad 1996, pp.27-30
- II. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, To Alys from Saleeben mere dareeche men, pp.162. 163
12. Monthly Umang, p.187
13. Dr Ibadat Brelvi, Prof Ralph Russel, pp. 114-115
14. Khaleeq Anjum, p.298
15. Mirza Zafrul Hasan, Khoon-e-Dil ki Kasheed, p.II
16. Mirza Zafrul Hasan, Mataa-e-Lauh-o-Qalam, p.117

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