

## KHALID SOHAIL

### FAIZ, WOMEN AND JEALOUSY

Faiz was a romantic poet, and like many other poets, loved beautiful things and beautiful people, especially women. He was shy and reserved socially, but he was passionate and expressive in his poems. His fascination with women lasted all his life. Some of those women became his muses and inspired him to create his masterpieces.

When Faiz was a child, he was cared for by many women, including his mother and stepmothers, as his father, who was also an incurable romantic, had multiple wives. (Ref 4, p 6) Being nurtured by many women at an early age must have played a significant role in the development of his own nurturing personality.

When Faiz was a teenager, he fell in love for the first time. He and his beloved adored each other but could not get married because of their traditional, conservative and religious families, where arranged marriages were more prevalent than love marriages. When the family of Faiz's first sweetheart arranged her marriage to a stranger, he was heartbroken. Being a creative person he transformed his pain into poems about love and loneliness. One of those poems is titled

#### Loneliness

There is someone at the door, dear heart

Nay, there is none...

Or might be a wanderer...

He will go hence, plodding his weary way.

Night is done

And evaporates in the thin air of the starry mist.

In palaces quiver the sleeping lamps

Hanging by their chains of gold.

The solitary paths are sunk in despair

And the unfriendly dust

Has obliterated the footprints.

Fill the cups and drink to the lees

The bitter wine of loneliness.

Lock up your slumberless doors, dear heart!

For, now no one will ever ever come again.

(Translated by Daud Kamal) (Ref 2, p. 30)

When Faiz was in his twenties he was introduced to the Progressive Writers Movement and Marxist literature which raised his social and political consciousness, and he got involved in the freedom movement and the class struggle of the masses. He broadened the scope of his love

and began a life-long love affair with his motherland and revolution. While meeting many socialist leaders older than himself, he met a tall charming young English woman Alys George, who was visiting her sister in India. Alys was the sister in law of Faiz's dear friend Dr. Taseer. When Faiz and Alys began to exchange ideas, they became good friends and started dating. Those dates were as much philosophical as romantic. Their courtship lasted several long years as Faiz had to convince his traditional family that he wanted to marry a woman from a different country, culture and religion, who did not speak his mother tongue. Finally the family agreed on the condition of her becoming a Muslim and having a traditional religious marriage ceremony, a nikah. Although Alys was a Communist, she accepted Islam and the Islamic name Kulsoom to be with Faiz. It was a great sacrifice on her behalf as she was an assertive, outspoken feminist. The couple struggled financially and socially as it was a mixed marriage. To integrate into that culture Alys learnt to speak Urdu and wear Indian attire.

Faiz and Alys had two daughters, Saleema and Muneeza. Faiz was a wonderfully nurturing father who played a significant role in their upbringing. Alys had to look after those children and earn a living as a journalist when Faiz was imprisoned for a few years. During his imprisonment he missed the role of husband and a father and wrote wonderful love letters to Alys.

As Faiz's fame grew and his revolutionary poetry became popular, he was sought out by charming and creative women. Those women not only liked and adored him, they worshiped him. He had a long list of female admirers. There were times when Faiz was walking on the streets of Moscow and women would come running towards him, give him a rose and then, shy and bashful, would run away. Faiz was loved by many women. Some kept it a secret while others, including Alys Faiz, Ludmila Visilva and Begum Sarfaraz Iqbal, shared it in articles and books about him expressing their love and adoration.

Faiz being a kind, caring and loving person, reciprocated their love with love. It seems as though he believed that when you love more than one, love multiplies, it does not divide. Alongside the bright side of love, there was also the dark side of love...jealousy. That jealousy was a double-edged sword that cut into the hearts of his lovers. Alys was jealous of other women who adored Faiz, (Ref 1, p. 121) and there were jealous husbands who were perturbed by the love that their wives showered on Faiz.

Most of the jealousies were innocent and harmless but there were times they became painful and dangerous. One such example was when Faiz visited Moscow. A young journalist Anwar Azeem shared the story of a jealous husband in his essay: A Night in Moscow. (Ref 3. p. 793) He wrote,

"Snow was falling. It was a mysterious night in Moscow. Our car was moving fast from Ucharina Hotel to Natasha's house. One could see freshly fallen snow on the ground.

Natasha and Faiz were sitting on the back seat. Her long curly hair was spread on her shoulders. Natasha was mesmerized by Faiz's poetry and personality. Since Faiz was planning to go back home in a few days, Natasha had arranged a party in her house that evening so that Faiz could meet her family, friends and admirers.

On arrival Natasha's husband welcomed his guests graciously. He served food and drinks and took pictures to keep a memory of his Indian and Pakistani guests. We were impressed by Natasha's hospitality. She was an intelligent woman and her brightness was making her face radiant.

After dinner and coffee, when Natasha was traveling in the car to drop us off at the hotel I teased her.

'It is late at night and snow is falling. Your husband must be a really nice guy to let you come with us.'

'After dropping you people off, I will go straight home. He can wait for a while,' she said in a mischievous way, referring to her husband.

Faiz interrupted her and said in his gentle voice, 'Be careful Natasha, your husband will kill you. I saw blood in his eyes. Natasha laughed and did not take him seriously.

A few days later, Faiz went back home. I was still in Moscow and in touch with Natasha. She told me that one of Faiz's poems had been translated into Russian and it was a beautiful poem.

When I met Natasha she told me that Faiz was a wonderful human being. That is why he was also a wonderful poet.

After a few days I received a surprise call from Natasha's friend. She shared shocking news.

'I cannot believe it, I said. I reminisced about that mysterious night, about the snowfall and what Faiz had told Natasha. 'Be careful Natasha, your husband will kill you.'

And Natasha's husband had killed his beautiful wife."

There is no record of Faiz's reaction when he learned that his prophecy had come true. Faiz had seen blood in the eyes of a jealous husband. I am sure he was not the first jealous husband Faiz had encountered in his life. All the women who loved Faiz had to make sacrifices, some more than others.

In the end I would like to share a dialogue that took place between Amrita Pritam, a legendary Punjabi poet and Faiz Ahmad Faiz, a legendary Urdu poet, that captures the essence of Faiz's romantic encounters with women. She wrote,

"Faiz said, 'I fell in love for the first time at the age of 18. All my poems of Naqsh-e-fariadi are inspired by that love.'

'Why did you not spend your life with her?'

'We were not brave enough. She was married off to a landlord. My second love was Alys, ten years after the first one.'

'She is your wife now.'

'Yes, she is. I think I did the right thing marrying Alys. Any other woman would not have been able to tolerate the hardships and the ups and downs of my life, especially when I was in jail for a few years.'

'Any other love?'

'I used to like a young girl. Then she became a young woman. I adored her but she married a young officer. She got scared of love and the pain associated with it.'

'You have written a poem Rival. Is it about her?'

'No, it was about my first love.'

'Any more love affairs?'

'When I was in prison, I was admitted to a hospital. Over there a lady doctor fell in love with me.'

'Does Alys know about all of your love affairs?'

'Yes, she does. She is not only my wife, she is also my friend. That is why we could stay together for so long. Love is painful, friendship is peaceful.'

After sharing all that, Faiz put his cigarette in the ashtray and became serious. He paused for a while and then said, 'Now I have decided not to fall in love with any woman ever again. I will make her my friend, provided she was worthy of friendship.'" (Ref 5, p 54)

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