

**JEWELLED GRACE OF NOVEMBER LEAVES:  
THE ELEGIAC CARNATIONS BY DAUD KAMAL  
ON DEATH OF FAIZ AHMED FAIZ**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Rendering eulogies is not a novel phenomenon. The tradition seems to be as old as the tragedy of death itself. East or West, the memory of dears-departed is commemorated through elegies or merthia-nigari (writing poems of bereavement). If the deceased person happens to be a poet, in Urdu literary tradition of epitaphs, he is showered with the poetic-carnations having references to his own poetry. Whereas in English versification of such poems is called pastoral elegies where a gradual shift from utter sense of loss, to consolation in memorable thoughts of the late-bard to a sense of resolution could be seen. This paper attempts to critically analyse Daud Kamal's poem, Ascent written on death of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. In this elegy Daud Kamal seems to combine the oriental and occidental traditions as a living example of his theory of Compass of love: "There is no /east or west /in the vast compass /of love" (Khwaja, 1988,p.50). Further, he has stylised this poem in a witty pattern of "eight" that reveals a lot about Faiz Ahmed's poetry and his own poetic person.*

**Key words:** *Daud Kamal, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Pakistani poetry, pastoral elegy*

I know  
all deaths are difficult  
but you breathe  
in the lotus-fire  
of an astronomical hope.

I only see  
petals of blood  
falling, falling.

(Daud Kamal, *Rough Hewn Beams*: lines 16-23)

Thus “weeps Daud Kamal for Faiz Ahmad Faiz”<sup>1</sup>, who died on 20th November, 1984. Though this poem does not mention Faiz by name rather addresses him as ‘you’ (following Urdu ghazal tradition) but the reference of *lotus-fire* (line 19) is self explanatory one. This metaphoric construction reminds us that period of self-exile starting in early 1978 when Faiz Ahmed became the chief editor of Afro-Asian Writers’ magazine, *Lotus* (Hasan, 2006, p.9). And yes, he did “breathe in the lotus-fire of an astronomical *hope*”. Faiz, the demagogic and extremely populist poet in Pakistan and abroad, was seen as a beacon light of hope by many. And “[with] him has gone the luminosity of hope” (Hasan, 2006, p.4).

In the second complex synaesthetic<sup>2</sup> poetic image: “I only see/ petals of blood/ falling, falling”, Daud Kamal conveys such sentiments of loss which are larger than life. There is a sense of unutterable grief, sheer helplessness, nostalgic devotedness, shattered dreams, broken comradeship, everything like “rough-hewn beams/black with the smoke of many winters” (Kamal, *Rough Hewn Beams*: lines 1-3). For in Faiz he found a living pattern of perfection of a poet, friend and mentor towards which he himself was striving and his death shattered everything.

Be in East or in West, we find exquisite examples of poetic renditions on the bereavement of fellow poets who were friends as well. From Pakistani poet, Qateel Shifai remonstrating painfully the death of his childhood pal Ibn-e-Insha, “*Yeh kis ne kaha tum kooch karo batein na banao Insha Jee/Shehr tumhara apna hai isay chor na jao Insha Jee*”<sup>3</sup> to the English Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson, deploring the demise of his university friend Arthur Hallam, “All is dark where though art not”, there is rich reservoir of literature of melancholy. In English, this genre is known as pastoral elegy. Milton’s *Lycidas*, Shelley’s *Adonais*, and

Arnold's *Thyrsis* are the famous examples that make a specific usage of pastoral imagery and lament the loss of poets, namely King, Keats, and Clough. "Accordingly, almost any poet's elegy for another poet - such as W. H. Auden's for W. B. Yeats - will display some pastoral elements" (Holman & Harmon, 1986, p. 362). A set pattern of gradual development from a sense of loss to regaining some peace could be derived from these poems.

On the other hand, *merthia-nigarior* Urdu genre of songs of sorrow is quite unique. It does not give a diary-like progression but is heavily indebted to deceased-poet's poetic imagery. Here, due to Persian influence the tradition of ghazal is very strong. *Ghazal*, being a combination of different couplets or *shers* complete and self-closed, may make some links possible but it does not give a poet the freedom for a logical flow of events. Thus, they freely borrow phrases from and give intricate references to deceased-poet's oeuvre. Qateel Shifai's poem is a classic in this regard which is almost a tragic-parody of the original: *Insha ji utho ab kooch karo, is shehr mein ji ka lagana kya/Vehshi ko sukoon se kya matlab, jogi ka nagar mein thikana kya.*<sup>4</sup>

Daud Kamal, "the consummate poet" originally composed verses in English and later translated many poems of Urdu ghazal poets including Faiz Ahmad Faiz into English language (Ghayur, 1986). He seems to synthesise the Oriental and Occidental literary traditions of elegies, when he wrote:

### **ASCENT**

*On the death of Faiz Ahmad Faiz*

Ancient gardens  
in your eyes  
and the falling snow.  
We had not broken camp-  
our horses  
were at pasture-

unsaddled.  
Restless traveller!  
Again exiled?  
The valleys unfold themselves  
for you. Birdsongs.  
Jewelled grace  
of November leaves.  
Intercede for us-  
river-forgotten  
magnetic stones.

(Kamal, 1995, p.73 & Hasan, 2006, p.74)

This short, “neat and well-crafted, imagistic and allusive”(Khwaja, 1988, p. 34) poem dramatically shifts its focus in two brief stanzas from a deep sense of great loss to the optimistic rays of mystic hope. One can say it is short in length but not deficient in its effect. In Western vein, the poem is a pastoral, replete with words like ancient gardens and falling snow, horses, pasture, valleys, birdsongs, the jewelled grace of November leaves; and is packed with pastoral conventions (though in an imagistic style): “appearance of the poet as shepherd, praise of the dead ‘shepherd’, the pathetic fallacy, flower symbolism, bewilderment caused by grief, declaration of belief in some form of immortality”(Holman & Harmon, 1986, p. 362). And to fulfil Eastern demands it is evident that the imagery implied to convey the thoughts should be laced with the diction of the late bard. So it does, but not in an ordinary way. Kamal, a perfect stylist, attains artistic perfection in this regard.

Stylistically, when we analyse the poem number eight figures out prominently. It has two stanzas of equal length, having eight lines each. There are eight sentences which elaborate the theme of bereavement fully. The number eight, the poem *Ascent*, the lotus flower (mentioned earlier) and Daud Kamal’s name have got some stylistic inter-

connections. Kamal, meaning perfection in Arabic and Persian; is a name for lotus flower in Hindi language and a perfect lotus flower should have eight petals (Java, n.d.). The same number of books of poetry is included in Faiz Ahmed's collected poems, poetically titled as *Nuskhahai Wafa* (Faiz, n.d.). Thus Kamal, a kindred soul uses every dot in his poem proficiently. Each sentence refers to one book of poetry by Faiz; it coincides with the theme and enhances its scope by emphasis, extenuation, comment, repetition, extension, reverberation, rendition and invocation.

**Ancient gardens /in your eyes /and the falling snow.** *Ascent*, like a conventional pastoral elegy opens with Nature and the first sentence (in the context of first stanza) sounds like an announcement of late-poet's early departure. Though very imagistic and compressed - this sentence gives emphasis to the main theme of *Dast-i-Teh-i-Sang* by Faiz<sup>5</sup>. The epithet of this book is the poem *Aaj bazar mein pabjolan chalo* (Let's walk in the market with feet enchained) which ends as: *Phir hamin qatl ho aayen yaro chalo* (Let us we, O friends, be murdered again). Consider another poem *Khatm huyi Barish-e-Sang* or *The Rain of Stones*. Though it is not exactly the title-poem but has affinities with the title-of-the-book. Following lines from this poem, reverberated in translation, is the point where Kamal connects his elegy: "No more dew /in my eyes./Madness is over. /The rain of stones /has stopped". The poet has gone and with him, "The path of desire /has been ruined /like my heart". In this bewilderment, "What will happen /to the caravan of pain?" (Hasan, 2006, p. 178).

"Caravan", here used metaphorically - in literal sense is made up of many travellers, the comrades, members of the same flock or more appropriately in Faiz diction, the *yaaran*. In conventional pastoral imagery "shepherd" becomes a code word for poets and another tradition of eclogues is the use of rustic dialogue (Holman & Harmon, 1986. p. 362 & 164). **We had not broken camp- /our horses /were at pasture- /unsaddled.** Second sentence of the elegy sounds like a shepherd's reply to the epithetical poem of *Naqsh-i-Faryad* named as *Tanhayi* or *Loneliness*:

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 come again.

(Hasan, 2006, p. 150)

If Faiz Ahmed's poem is *shikwa* (a complaint) of a friend who was refused companionship *Ab yahan koyi nahin, koyi nahin aaye ga* clearly Kamal's sentence is *jawab-e-shikwa* (the extenuation): "We had not broken camp- /our horses /were at pasture- /unsaddled". Perhaps the living-bard was waiting for the master's call. Thus he shifts some responsibility to the late-bard in the form of a suggestive comment:

**Restless traveller!**

This short, terse and epithetical sentence conveys pastoral imagery and a reference to Faiz Ahmed's book *Zindan Namaat* once. Many poems included in this anthology give most vehemently a sense of restless traveller, travelling in the wilderness (Hasan, 2006, p. 122 & 194). *Muqaam, Faiz! Koyi rah mein jacha hi nahin /Jo ku-ye yar se nikly to su-ye daar chaly*. To translate this couplet that is the epithet for the book and makes usage of poet's *takhallus* (pen-name) needs exacting skills. But in essence what Faiz says is that on the grand highway of love he did not aspire for a destination; (love is taken as a formidable task) so he left *ku-ye yar* (the city of beloved) only when he has to depart for *su-ye daar* (towards death).

**Again exiled?** This rhetorical questioning is a simple repetition of the title poem of the book *Meray Dil Meray Musaafir*. "O my heart! /O my traveller! /Once again they have ordered us exiled;" and last lines of this poem show the dilemma of modern life: "Death I do not fear, /But I do not want to die every night" (Hasan, 2006, p. 224). These lines are so apt

that one wants to recite them tellingly: *hamein kya bura tha merna/agar aik baar hota!*

Next sentence of *Ascent* is an extension of the main theme of *Dast-i-Saba*. Faiz Ahmed wrote this book and signed the preface in September, 1952 from Central Jail, Hyderabad. Following is the epithetical *maqta'* (a cutting of the poem) for this book:

The window of my cell is no longer open,  
But what of it, for I think of the stars and you.  
And when they put fetters in my feet,  
I think of the morning sun on your face.  
We are prisoners of our days and nights,  
Living behind closed doors and shuttered windows.

(Hasan, 2006, p. 202)

If the imagery of “cell” by Faiz metaphorically reflects this life, then its “prisoner” is given an “escape from time and space” after death (Salim-ur-Rahman, 1985). Thus Daud Kamal says: **The valleys unfold themselves /for you.** Typically this sentence is another image of pastorals, of pathetic fallacy -nature denoting the emotions of human beings, the valleys giving a warm-welcome to newly-deceased poet (Holman & Harmon, 1986. p. 364).

And there also are, **Birdsongs.** This one-word-sentence is a consummate example of typical Kamalean imagery; a metaphoric substitute, a reverberation for the title of the book *Sham-i-Shehr-i-Yaraan* which is full of songs. Amongst them one most-dearly-remembered-song by many Faiz-lovers is, *Bahaar Aayi*:

And it was as if, with the returning life  
There returned, from the world beyond  
All the dreams and all the passions;  
All the dreams and all the passions which had

Lived for the love of you

And which in death, had found life anew.<sup>6</sup>

Surely the poet also “in death, had found life anew” but for the dwellers of earth it is the month of November, the season of *patjhar* or autumn. In essence, November has become a darling month for grief and bereavement. Edmund Spenser in his twelve-monthly poem, *The Shepherdes Calendar* wrote November-eclogue as a pastoral elegy (Holman & Harmon, 1986, p. 362) and every year, Remembrance Day in November is celebrated for those who were killed in world wars. Ustad Fateh Ali Khan Sitar Nawaz also died in this month and Daud Kamal wrote a small poem as a requiem in his honour (Rahman, 1997, p.34).

In the same vein, he makes usage of ‘November leaves’ as a motif for gloom and sorrow in the second-to-last sentence of *Ascent*. **Jewelled grace /of November leaves.** Leaves descend from trees but under the layers of frost and dew-drops glitter like jewels - that forcefully reminds us the tears that glow in the griever’s eyes. This image makes a perfect usage of poetic synaesthesia where colours, lights, liquids, and shades melt and mingle with each other in an illumined-shadowy-panoramic manner. Hence, the pastoral demand for “flower symbolism” has gracefully been satiated through foliage-imagism. And in Eastern vein, “Jewelled grace of November leaves” is a poetic rendition of the title of *Ghubaar-i-Ayyaam*, the last book of poems by Faiz (in chronological order). The book contains a ghazal that Faiz Ahmed wrote in November 1984, maybe a few days before his death. Its line, *Ajal ky haath koyi aa raha hy perwana* (A moth is being transfigured into smoke) can be taken as a poetic prophecy for his own death but the next one, *Na jany aaj ki fehrisht mein raqam kya hy?* (What else is, in Death’s blacklist, God knows) is intriguingly meaningful (Faiz, n.d. p. 702).

Even more engagingly meaningful is the coda or the last sentence of the poem. **Intercede for us- /river-forgotten /magnetic stones.** Written in “an intensely concentrated, condensed and succinct style, each scrupulously chosen word packed with a wealth of meaning” (Ghayur, 1986) makes the interpretation of this sentence a very difficult task. But



what any reader having faith in the Hereafter can understand instantaneously is the concept of intercession and through that a hope for salvation. Usually towards the closing of pastoral elegies one can find the notes of calm and peace and a hope in divinity. Shelley visualises Keats enjoying the Eternals' company after his death, "The soul of Adonais, like a star, beacons /from the abode where the Eternals are". And Tennyson in *In Memoriam* resolves about Hallam, "That friend of mine who lives in God", in a faith whose keystone "rests ultimately ... on the soul's instinct for immortality" (Long, 1909, p. 464). Daud Kamal also strikes a chord of faith and concludes his poem "on an optimistic note with hope for the future" (Ghayur, 1986).

The intricate concluding sentence covers yet another dimension of pastoral threnody. In their discussion on pastoral, Holman and Harmon hold, "Often, in Judeo-Christian environments the pastoral will include some recollection of the imagery of the Psalms and other parts of the Bible" (1986, p. 361). Since Daud Kamal belongs to "the culture of cultivated Muslim in the sub-continent", (Rahman, 1987) subconsciously his poetic mind has flourished this metaphoric construction having "some recollection of the imagery of the [Qur'an]". Thematically, it is mystic-metaphysics, an appeal to plead on behalf of those "river-forgotten magnetic stones" who amid materialistic pursuits of modern age have forgotten the real purpose of life. Stylistically, it has the same number of syllables (i.e. 14) that is therein the reminding-incantation we Muslims recite when we learn about someone's death: *Inna lillahi wa inna ilaih-e raji'un!* Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return. (Surah Al-Baqarah: 156). The invocatory tone of Daud Kamal is in line with Faiz Ahmed's *Sar-i-Wadi-i-Sina*, and spiritually connects with its poem, *Du'a* or Prayer:

Let us raise our hands in prayer,  
 We who do not [know] how to pray,  
 Who recall nothing except love's pain,  
 Who remember neither idols nor God.

(Hasan, 2006, p. 274)

To conclude, not only the text but the title of the poem is also very significant. Etymologically, the word 'ascent' is derived from Latin *ascendere* 'to climb'; in Muslim terminology it is equivalent to *Mi'raaj*-someone ascending in *darajaat*(hierarchical steps). In the process of reading this poem, our gaze descends gradually towards the ending of the poem while the addressee seems to ascend to that zenith he has acquired after going beyond the portals of death. For, Faiz is a man who suffered for mankind, and braved prison, exile and other trials throughout his life. His death is not a mere exoneration from worldly grieves but a complementary act to make him eligible to intercede!

Three years after the death of Faiz, we are informed that Daud Kamal was on one-month-tour of the States starting "from November 1 (Rahman, 1987, p.3)". Later, this November-visit became a preamble for his final voyage to "the other shore(Kamal, 1995, p. 71)". So, in this melancholic epitaph: "Jewelled Grace of November Leaves", for whom does he eulogize \_ for Faiz? for the victims of Great War? for the one who was a Sitar Nawaz? or for his very own, "grey... graceful absence"<sup>7</sup>?

One recites with the poet in unison: "Intercede for us-/river-forgotten /magnetic stones", lest the carnations wither in our negligence<sup>8</sup>!

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On analogy of Adonais, written by P.B. Shelley on death of John Keats that starts as, "I weep for Adonais -he is dead!"

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Fogle opines: "The function of all poetic imagery is to order, relate, and unify disparate modes of physical, mental, and emotional experience. Synaesthesia is a particular species of imagery which purposes chiefly to establish relationships between the different modes of sensation, finding, for example, analogies between colour and music, music and odor, odor and colour"(1949, p. 101). Daud Kamal here combines visual, olfactory, tactual, organic sensations to achieve special poetic effect, where intellect, sense and emotion are in a harmonious blending.

<sup>3</sup> Since the poem has got mystic-philosophical intricacies, it is very difficult to translate. There is an amateur's attempt:

Insha ji! Who has asked you to depart

Do not pretend helplessness

This city is your chosen abode

Do not leave it for nothingness

<sup>4</sup> Insha ji! Let us depart this city for good

No need to develop a love for place

What a wanderer has got to do with peace?

Which settlement is called a mystic's abode?

<sup>5</sup> For the ease of analysis the lines of *Ascent* and the titles of Faiz Ahmed's books are typed in bold-face. The word sentence is used for any collection of words between two dots.

<sup>6</sup> Bank Alfalah Limited, Pakistan gave a tribute to Faiz Ahmed Faiz by publishing a dairy in 2002, and named it as Umeed-e-Seher. This beautiful translation is one of many that beautify the title pages for different months.

<sup>7</sup> Daud Kamal's daughter, Ayesha, went through a two-fold tragedy; she lost her husband and her father in the span of one year. In her poem 'Polarized dreams' (Khwaja, 1988, p.92) she identifies the colours of her dreams on canvas in a suggestive manner: "Grey is your graceful absence".

<sup>8</sup> Same year he was awarded with the Faiz Ahmed Faiz award posthumously.

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