

“FAIZ FEHMI”: Understanding Faiz with Style Review by Qaisar Abbas

Faiz Fehmi, Tehqiq o Tanqeed, Dr. Syed Taqi Abedi, Ed. Pages 1403.
Lahore: Multimedia Affairs, 2011.

In an event in Dallas a couple of months ago, I had a rare chance to meet the last survivor of the famous Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, Zafarullah Poshni, who was also incarcerated with Faiz Ahmed Faiz in 1950.

Recollecting the memories of the days he spent with Faiz in confinement, he discussed with me his upfront and honest recollection of the days he spent in jail with Faiz. He said he was the youngest of all inmates who were confined in the famous Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case and Faiz saheb was always kind and caring to him. While most of the people in jail could not control their rage as a result of psychological distress in confinement, Faiz was always cool, well mannered, and respectful to others, he recalled.

“At times when Faiz looked miserable, silently smoking cigarettes walking back and forth, thinking and writing, we knew a poem was in the making and we started planning for a Mushaira” he said, “and those were the most precious moments of our internment.”

Speaking in the event organized to honor him that evening, he said, technically there was no legal justification for a conspiracy case against us. The group met at the residence of General Akbar to discuss the possibility of a coup but the plan was rejected as it was not realistic and practical. The government, on the other hand, using some people as witness, by hook or by crook, tried to prove in the court that a conspiracy to stage a coup was hatched.

Comparing 2011 to the 1950s, he said, intolerance is creeping in our society to the extent that bigotry has replaced civility and violence has taken over common sense in our society. As the last survivor of the Rawalpindi conspiracy case, Zaffarullah Poshni, still in good health at his age, represents an extraordinary

group of individuals who cared about the miseries of people and struggled for their rights through a peaceful movement.

Zafarullah Poshni is also represented in the new book “Faiz Fehmi” with his article “Faiz or Zindan” (Faiz and the Prison). He concludes the article with paying glowing tributes to Faiz and Sajjad Zaheer, his friend: “I learned a lot from both of these and the knowledge I gained from them during confinement made the rest of my life a real ecstasy and delight.”

In this new book, Dr. Syed Taqi Abedi, the editor, has documented life, legacy and poetry of the same legendary poet of the 20th century who was part of the so-called ‘Conspiracy’ group.

Published by the Multi Media Affairs in Lahore, the book is an astonishing anthology of articles, research papers, interviews, personal memories of his friends, and family members, and photographs and illustrations on his life and work. A voluminous work of over 1,400 pages with color printing and the fine paper quality, adorned with a leather cover, the book surpasses all other publications on Faiz in its quality, content and finesse.

In an era where you rarely see quality publications on the poet, the new book looks like an unexpected gift to Urdu literature and Faiz lovers. Although some of the articles are reproduction of published materials, most are new on contemporary topics. In fact, the editor claims in the preface:

“This document has been published to meet the demands of the 21st century so we can view his life and work from every possible perspective. We know that so much has been written on the poet and his life but we are also aware that there is a lot to write on the lament of his verse and the narrative of his prose.”

It is in this context that the book attempts to fill a huge gap of quality work on Faiz and his poetic discourse. The editor also tried to keep up with the quality saying:

“We have consciously avoided ‘cut-and-paste’ articles using published materials without citations as we did not want to demean these writers.”

The anthology includes articles of stalwarts of Urdu literature from across the world including India, Pakistan, Russia, England, Canada, the United States and other countries. Articles of several English and Russian writers such as George Fisher, Alexander Surikov, Lyudmila Vasilyeva and world leaders like Yasser Arafat also embellish the book.

The list includes Gopi Chand Narang, Syed Ahtesham Hussain, Kaleemuddin Ahmed, Mirza Khalil Baig, Sharib Ridolvi, Shamsurrehman Farooqi, Al-e Ahmed Saroor, Mlik Raam, Ali Abbas Hussaini, Indar Kumar Gajral, Kirishn Chandr, Knahiya Laal Kapur, Ali Sardar Jafri and Syed Sajjad Zaheer from India.

A number of writers from Pakistan are also represented such as Shanul Haq Haqqi, Ahmed Nadim Qasmi, , Ziaul Hasan, Zafar Iqbal, Abul Lais Siddiqi, Wazir Agha, Mohammad Ali Siddiqi, Jamil Jalibi, Qamar Rais, Muftaba Hussain, Sahar Ansari, Karrar Hussain, Intizar Hussain, Sufi Ghulam Mustafa Tabbassum, Fariqh Bukhari, Syed Sibte Hasan, Iftikhar Arif, Qudratullah Shahab, Mirza Zafarul Hasan, I.A. Rehman, Noon Meem Rashid, Hilal Naqvi, Sadiq Naqvi, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Mushtaq Ahmed Yousfi, Abullah Malik, Fateh Mohammad Malik and Safder Meer, to mention a few.

A unique section has been devoted to personal reflections of family members of Faiz including articles of his wife Alice Faiz, two daughters, Saleema Hashmi and Muneza Hashmi, and his son in-law Shoab Hashmi.

The book also includes five articles by Faiz himself on a variety of topics including the progressive literary ideology, Josh as a revolutionary poet, films and culture, Beirut under the Israeli attack when Faiz was there, and his speech at the Lenin Peace Award ceremony in Moscow which was in Urdu.

Of the 162 articles on the poet, about one third (42) are written by the editor himself, Dr. Taqi Abedi. Thematically, the book has about 30 articles on the poet’s life, interviews and personal memories of his friends while 132 articles are critical reviews of his poetry and work.

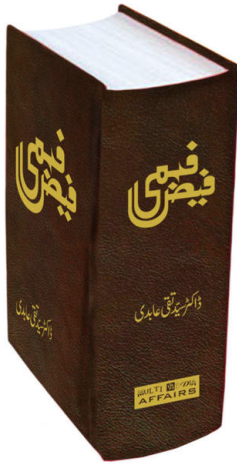
Unfortunately, the book is a limited edition not for sale which might be disappointing for a large number of readers. But the good news is the editor intends to publish a paperback edition to make it available to everyone, as he told me.

Because of its huge size, however, the book might be published in the following three thematic volumes:

1. Volume I with new and unpublished articles.
2. Volume II on poet's life and memories of his families and friends with illustrations and pictures.
3. Volume III with all previously published articles.

Publishing these volumes on paperback will make them more accessible and affordable to common readers and researchers everywhere.

In launching the book in Canada, Gopi Chand Narang declared "Faiz Fehmi" as magnum opus of Urdu literature, a rare and unprecedented work of art. Without any doubt it is a milestone work for which the editor, who spent a huge amount of funds from his own pocket to publish it, deserves recognition and felicitation.



Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies Vol. 4, No. 2 (2012)
