

Coming next Spring
RUSSIA

ATLANTA



**ATLANTA
REVIEW**

REVIEW

PAKISTAN

Edited by
Waqas Khwaja

VOL. XX, No. 2

Spring / Summer 2014

\$ 10.00



ATLANTA REVIEW

This Pakistan Issue is dedicated to

Malala Yousafzai and Aitzaz Hassan

*young Pakistani students whose
courage has inspired the world*

Volume XX, Issue Number 2

ATLANTA REVIEW

www.atlantareview.com

Editor & Publisher Daniel Veach

Pakistan feature editor Waqas Khwaja

Senior Editors Memye Curtis Tucker
Lee Passarella
Alicia Stallings

Managing Editor Lynn Alexander

Visit our "Home Pond": www.atlantareview.com

Atlanta Review appears in April and October. Subscriptions are \$15 a year.

Available in full text in Ebsco, ProQuest and Cengage databases.

Atlanta Review subscriptions are available through Ebsco, Blackwell and Swets.

Submission guidelines: Up to five poems, with your name and address on each. All submissions & inquiries must include a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. Issue deadlines are June 1st (Fall issue) and December 1st (Spring issue).

Please send submissions and subscriptions to:

ATLANTA REVIEW
P.O. Box 8248
Atlanta GA 31106

© Copyright 2014 by Poetry Atlanta, Inc.

ISSN 1073-9696

Poetry Atlanta, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation in the state of Georgia.
Contributions are tax-deductible.

Atlanta Review is printed on acid-free paper by the Rose Printing Company.

Welcome

It's not my place to let the *jinn* out of the bottle, but in this issue we embark on another grand adventure, on a par with past expeditions to Iraq, Iran, India and China. Two of these issues have won major national awards and been published as university press books, and you'll find this PAKISTAN Issue equally rewarding.

This issue is dedicated to Malala Yousafzai, who refused to let a Taliban bullet put an end to her education, and to Aitzaz Hassan, who gave his life to stop a suicide bomber from blowing up his school.

Waqas Khwaja offers us rare insight into this misunderstood and conflicted nation, which occupies a pivotal place in our modern world. Pakistan's poets, who grew up with English, who inherited great traditions from both East and West, are ideally situated to translate the heart and humanity of their people. So give the lamp a rub: from ghazals of passionate love to (equally passionate) present-day politics, this *jinn* will grant you all the poetic pleasure you could wish.

The first section opens in a swirl of cosmic dust, which we return to near its close. We whirl from the Pacific to the Atlantic before settling down with a heartland honey who's "Jest Lookin'" for you! Oddball fun ensues, leading to poems of childhood, and finally, just before we enter Pakistan, a poem to her most famous child, Malala.

In Lee Passarella's Special Feature Section, Beth Gylys eases our April with her cure for tax time. If you prefer a more spectacular disaster, R.T. Smith and Stephen Bluestone have you covered. Amid intimations of mortality, humorous and otherwise, Marge Piercy and Rachel Hadas ponder life's mystery and tragedy with a gentle touch. And finally, Robert King offers a beacon of light at the end of a long, hard winter. May the coming season be warm and welcoming!

Dan Veach
Editor & Publisher

Dust, St. James Church	1	<i>Stephen Windham</i>
Sight Seeing	2	<i>Kathleen Fitzpatrick</i>
Krummholz	3	<i>Lee Rossi</i>
Mansion by the Sea, Palm Beach	4	<i>Ron De Maris</i>
Jest Lookin'	5	<i>Nancy M. Boyken</i>
Haircut for the General	6	<i>Devon Bixler</i>
Tripe	7	<i>Tom Chandler</i>
Chopsticks	8	<i>Robert Rothman</i>
Points	9	<i>Clela Reed</i>
Pragmatic Linguistics	10	<i>Brad Johnson</i>
Homer's Advice	11	<i>David Salner</i>
Stippers Whom I Have Taught	12	<i>Tom Gibbs</i>
Do You Remember?	13	<i>Alice Teeter</i>
Pluto	13	
Turtle Hunt	14	<i>Charles Harper Webb</i>
The Mango Tree	15	<i>Kirun Kipur</i>
The Child Mary	16	<i>Jerry Hauser</i>
Giants	17	<i>Mary Soon Lee</i>
The Last Obstacle	18	<i>David Adès</i>
To Malala On Your Birthday	19	<i>James K. Zimmerman</i>
PAKISTAN	20	<i>International Feature Section</i>
Introduction	21	<i>Waqas Khwaja</i>
The Morning of Independence	25	<i>Faiz Ahmad Faiz</i>
We Shall See	26	
Tiger	27	<i>Moniza Alvi</i>
Partition of Hearts	28	
Qasida Sequence for Peshawar	29	<i>Shadab Zeest Hashmi</i>
Jet Lag	31	
This Face This	32	<i>Sonia Kamal</i>
A Poet's Homeland	35	<i>Hassan Dars</i>
A Poem for a Cold Season	36	
Poem	37	
The Wind is the Sea's Lover	37	
Ghazal	38	<i>Atta Shaad</i>
Ghazal	39	<i>Nasir Kazmi</i>
Ghazal	40	

Ghazal	41	<i>Munir Niazi</i>
Weariness on the Way	41	
My Companion, My Friend	42	<i>Faiz Ahmad Faiz</i>
Ode to a Sindhri	43	<i>Mina Farid Malik</i>
arranging/arrangement/arranged	44	
Naughty Eyes	46	<i>Parveen Shakir</i>
If You Are My God	47	<i>Naheed Sahar</i>
My Womanhood	48	<i>Hasina Gul</i>
Who Is It?	49	<i>Nasreen Anjum Bhatti</i>
Cripple	51	<i>Maki Kureishi</i>
The Old Man of the Banyan Tree	52	<i>Sarmad Sehbai</i>
Mandragora	54	<i>Shireen Z. Haroun</i>
Let Us Go to That Mountain	55	<i>Zehra Nigah</i>
In the Underground Train	56	<i>Fahmida Riaz</i>
Poem	57	<i>Ahmad Faraz</i>
Can't Wake Up	58	<i>Javed Shaheen</i>
I Asked the Night	59	
The Missing Season	60	
Live Long	61	<i>Mushtaq Soofi</i>
He Can Make Us Cry	63	<i>Tanweer Anjum</i>
Interview	64	
Snipers in Karachi	65	<i>Maki Kureishi</i>
names and spaces	66	<i>Bilal Tanweer</i>
Generation After Generation	67	<i>Yasmin Hameed</i>
new millenium	68	<i>Ilona Yusuf</i>
jalebi	69	
Etude	71	<i>Adrian Husain</i>
Desert Tiger	72	
Snapshot of My Father	73	<i>Taufiq Rafat</i>
Uncle	74	<i>Mohamad Athar Tahir</i>
Father's Farewell	75	
Response to Rumi	76	
Pen and Ink	76	<i>Basir Sultan Kazmi</i>
Peacock in the Forest	77	
Quail	78	<i>Taufiq Rafat</i>
Thinking of Mohenjodaro	79	

Abu Simbel	80	<i>Mehvash Amin</i>
Tesseract	81	
Primer	82	<i>Waqas Khwaja</i>
PAKISTAN Contributors	83	
Special Feature Section		
Introduction	89	<i>Lee Passarella</i>
More Honored in the Breach	90	<i>Gaylord Brewer</i>
Phenomenal Body	91	<i>Angela Ball</i>
Missing	92	
Elegy For My Right Eye	93	<i>Ralph Tejada Wilson</i>
<i>Hambre</i>	94	
Strays and Recessions	95	<i>Beth Gylys</i>
"Wine, The Perfect Cure..."	96	
Layers	97	<i>Tara Bray</i>
Hot Water Return	98	<i>William Doreski</i>
Vernal	100	<i>Rachel Hadas</i>
Nap	100	
The Scenario	101	
Blackberries in the Snow	101	
Impasto	102	<i>R.T. Smith</i>
Turner's <i>Slave Ship</i>	104	
The <i>General Slocum</i> Disaster	106	<i>Stephen Bluestone</i>
The Scribe	108	
<i>Adam Bede</i> , Chapter XVII	109	<i>Rupert Fike</i>
The suicide of dolphins	111	<i>Marge Piercy</i>
Wisteria Can Pull Down a House	112	
Descent	113	<i>David Chorlton</i>
Giving Rattlesnake Advice	114	
Snowflakes on a Hardening Land	115	<i>Robert S. King</i>
Contributors	116	
Friends of Atlanta Review	119	
Poetry 2014	121	
Subscribe!	122	

Dust, St. James Church

*...every saint and sinner in the history of our species
lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.*

—Carl Sagan, *The Pale Blue Dot*

The winter sun slanting through the nave
blinds me to everything but the dust
to which in every other season I am blind,
but now I see as a galaxy of motes,
sparking as they tumble in the glare.
They flow altarward, following the procession
of bread and wine, like communicants
on their way to becoming one
with the Body and Blood, glittering remnants
of the cosmos's birth and the death of stars,
mixed with the ash of volcanoes, forest fires,
and factory exhaust; the dust of drought-dry fields,
mountains gutted for coal, and land cleared
for our roads, malls and homes.

The remains of every sinner, every saint,
rendered into dust by the work of time,
have also been taken up into this rapture
of air and light, drawn with all things
to the Host, lifted up and broken,
as one day I will rise
to join this cloud of witnesses
suspended above the worshipful,
flaring as I turn my face to the sun.

Stephen Windham

Sight Singing

Although I don't belong, I enter in
escorting her among the columns, gold
and white marble, planed with a studied grace,
repeated through the auditorium.
My only choice seems silence in this place,
or listening as sequences unfold
in compositions harmonized by hand,

written in figures I can't understand.
Each unfamiliar singer takes her part
until a hundred voices merge as one
in contrapuntal equilibrium,
or blend into a single fabric spun
on a collective loom. The sections start
or pause, mysterious as wings of birds

moving at unseen signals. Minor thirds
are held for several measures. Voices blend
towards a joyous flourish. Everywhere
a lush auricular rosarium
blooms in communion though the sacred air
surrounding her, and helping me transcend
the reservations I'd held close within.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick

Krummholz

Where the sea wind whistles without cease,
the trees seem to bend in prayer,
almost touching ground.

Simple really, just biology.
The seaward buds shrivel with cold,
while the sheltered thrive—

unbalanced growth, which the trunk
bears as best it can, growing
strong off-center,

like the stoop-shouldered man
who always seems to shrink from
his father's phantom blows.

I know that I am like these trees
but unable to see where
my spirit's muscle-bound

and where I've suffered atrophy.
All night wind rushes past and, bowing,
I dream I stand straight.

Lee Rossi

Mansion by the Sea, Palm Beach

Here is the place of flat tiles
Arranged like the steps
A giant would take
Rising out of the waves,
Striding like Hannibal
Down from the Alps,
Elephant feet
Crushing the begonias.

Here the stones shine
With a deep polish
As if a hand
Stretching for love, smoothed
Each crevice, each flaw
To unearthly perfection.

Here is the place
Where the eyes discover
What the soul fears:
There are those who lead
Bigger lives, bolder,
More grand than our own.
Such a wresting from the world
As the world allows.

Columns of light
In the vaulting ceilings, windows
Three stories high
Mirroring a continuous abstract:
The sky
With its red Kandinskys.

On the portico
A marble angel
Broods like a Buddha
And smiles

Ron De Maris

Jest Lookin'

"I am looking for a meaningful relationship with a partner with whom I can share all the beauty, wonder and excitement of life."

Well I live in a trailer park in tornado alley with my momma 'n them, and I'm lookin' for a Sugar Daddy to take care of all of us. I only have 8 kids, and they're really sweet and I promise they won't make much mess. But the double-wide is gettin' kind of full, and we need a nice big house to live in. A pool and hot tub would be nice, too, along with a nice car or two. I don't even care if you have a sense of humor, like to walk on the beach, or cuddle up next to a fire. The six dogs and three cats are part of the package too, and I'm sure you'll love them as much as you do me. Oh yeah, and the pot bellied pig, too. I hate to cook, so I really hope you can or at least can hire us a cook and a housekeeper, too, because while my kids aren't messy, I really don't like to clean or pick up after myself. Plus, I really like it when someone else makes my bed every day. My last stint in rehab got me clean... for now. I have some daddy issues but I'm working through that with the shrink, who was also my last boyfriend. He says I'm making progress. Oh yeah, and I hate my mother, so don't worry about her... you'll never have a mother-in-law that you'll have to pretend to like. I thrive on drama! Nothing gets me going like a good fight with screaming and hitting! I especially like my baseball bat for solving issues and differences of opinion. Also, my girlfriends always like to have my opinion on their spouses/boyfriends and their troubles, so you can expect me to be on the phone with that. A lot. My current interests, in no particular order are: donuts. Also, sitting on the dock of the bay, wastin' time. The last book I read was.... Who has time to read with 8 kids, six dogs, and three cats? If you want to know what my family is like, take a look at Swamp People or Honey Boo Boo. Education: 6th grade, then I started having kids and went to the school of hard knocks. Baggage: Plenty. I only have 4 exes who don't send the child support on time. Exercise: hate it. You won't see me sweating—isn't that nice? What I like to do: sit on the sofa watching tv and cracking open a few cold ones. Health: pretty good, if you can overlook the STD's. I'm down to 20 or so meds per day. My goals in life: 1. Finding that Sugar Daddy 2. Get Fat 3. Get out of Witness Protection. If you've read this far, you're probably thinking what a catch I'd be, so email me RIGHT NOW!!! I promise you won't regret it. What've you got to lose but boredom and loneliness? Let's have some fun together.

Nancy M. Boyken

Haircut for the General

I told my barber what I wanted: I want to be known, said I, for honor in defeat. For my men to fear not the broad valleys of our enemy. My barber only shrugged, fitted the number two guard to the clippers, began the usual buzzing around my head. I want to lead, said I, a regiment of ragged and half-starved rebels up a mountain in the snow, and make great cannon fire in the hills. My barber asked if I wanted a shave. I wish to be known not for valor or victory but for kindness to the sickly and captive, said I, as he lathered my neck. Monthly I sit in Reggie's chair, always the same desire: to get a trim around the ears, and see in the mirror a man fit to ride a white horse to a country parlor on a spring day in Virginia.

Devon Bixler

Tripe

The taste was all texture
not really taste at all
globby spongy
like an eyeball
I'm still not sure
if it was part of a brain
or the lining
of some ruminant's gut
though the idea
of a stomach
inside my own
was troubling
along with the notion
of a piece of mind
lodged somewhere
within me
far from home and
having second thoughts.

Tom Chandler

Chopsticks

I like the way they work, two separate
sticks good for nothing by themselves, when hinged

by thumb and fingers open/close like a diving
bird plunging from the air, the food in beak

taken to the hungry waiting mouths
of young. I like that one stick never moves,

is always waiting, perfectly composed,
while movement is the only state the other

knows. I like the chatter, clicking back
and forth, small talk over the meal. I like

the way they rest against the dish, sometimes
touching but usually apart, each lost

in dreams of how they joined, the food they brought,
the press/release of tips, the fleeting kiss.

Robert Rothman

Points

At school we pushed the broken lead
into whirling blades and worked
the handle hard, examined the tip,
ground some more until it could
prick our skin if we let it,

twirled peppermint sticks to white
between our tongues and palates
to form spikes of brittle sweetness,
pretending they were needles
as we dodged each other's jabs.

We watched our older sisters
hang out their new brassieres,
cotton cones of circular stitching,
stiff and formidable on the line,
stabbing at the wind.

Well-pinched nibs for pens, thin
steel tips for pastry bags to write
our names in slender icing,
precise tweezers, stereo needles,
these we chose with a marksman's eye.

Have you stayed sharper than I,
as, immune to the moon and the lily,
you ignored urges to just hold the cup
and pet the cat, to surrender all arrows,
avoid the blood?

Clela Reed

Pragmatic Linguistics

Eskimos have over 300 words for snow but there's only one guy who knows them all and he's always correcting people so other Eskimos hate him, avoid

him, especially when it's snowing. He can't understand why someone claims it's hailing when it's obviously sleet. Their misplaced diphthong implies powder when it's wetter,

closer to ice. He's fine with guys ignoring him at the fishing hole, not wanting to talk; women turning their kids on his approach. He knows what it means. More than they do.

Brad Johnson

Homer's Advice

Athena disguised herself as Deiphobus, fooling Hector—
I'm sorry, but mistaking a famous goddess for your brother, that scene wasn't convincing. So Homer rescued it in live performances with a gesture to the effect that on the day they handed out brains, the Prince of Priam wasn't first in line. The words on the page weren't always that much, but Homer wasn't afraid to go over the top, morphing galvanic as a fist-pumping, triumphal Achilles, or deadpan: his fans loved the lotus eaters, the goofy smiles of stoned vegetarians, not to mention "That plant is insidious—three of my men tasted it and lost all desire for home"—*Ba-da-boom*.

Lonely men, a boatful, is an Rx for laughter, and the guffaws began with the sea breeze that brought the first notes (Homer twitched his ears like a donkey) of those oo-la-la women. As an old man, he took the stage each night, cane in hand, the original madcap Blind Poet, breaking a leg or a line for a laugh or a cry. Afterwards, he'd offer advice to poets and tellers, "Give the words *pizazz*, words are nothing without the *pizazz*."

David Salner

The Strippers to Whom I Have Taught English

The strippers, to whom I have taught English
and writing, had soft presences
and hard edges, as one might expect. Their

language was always gentle and reverent,
soft spoken, or in quiet prose. Their
words were so often like tiny birds that carried

little messages, little parts of themselves, into
the language—the woman revealed,
and the mother, alone. Their stories were as

common as those of soccer moms but with
a periphery of implied exoticism. They
knew clearly the common uselessness of men

and the rare usefulness. Theirs was a cynicism so
well perfected it was as matter-of-fact
as wisdom, and just as subtle. Though invited,

I never went to see them work, even long after
they passed on to other classes, other teachers. I'd
already seen them more naked than they'd ever be,

their lives stripped bare in a fearless dance of words
that exposed more of their grace, more of
their beauty than their bodies could ever unveil.

Tom Gibbs

Do You Remember?

setting your house on fire up there under the eaves in the dark
candles flaming at the end of the bed so far back before
the start of time together in that burning
beginning rocking that
mysterious O
in one secret room
with one window looking out
in one bed that just fit the two of us
with three candles burning in the dark
at four in the morning on the fifth of forever
we burned down the house and the whole damn town

Alice Teeter

Pluto

What child doesn't know the secret of Pluto
that we are all that icy orb so distant
as to be invisible
so far away from the blazing sun
gaining atmosphere
only to lose it
a tiny spec
not sure we are really what we say we are

Alice Teeter

Turtle Hunt

Because, the year before, plucking dewberries'
black blisters from green sticker-vines,
I spied a hook-beaked, red-and-yellow face—
and because, another time, I stumbled
on a spotted shell as I bumbled through the woods

behind my house—I hope, by linking hands
with Caralee and Teddy, to find more.
Eyes boring down, we strain to see a brown
hump speckled with sunlight; we pray to hear
the *Tsss!* of air as head and legs jerk out of sight.

Yes, we find toad-frogs, gray and still as stone
until our stomping makes them jump away.
We find brown thrashers yakking in chokecherry,
and a green-and-yellow string-tie snake
that slides under an orange, fungus-frilly stump.

But at the bayou, where dragonflies—metallic red
and blue—snap up mosquitoes over tea-stained
water full of tadpoles, crayfish, punkinseeds,
Teddy flops into a snarl of thorny weeds
and, being 5, runs home crying. Carol, afraid

to mess her dress, whines, "I've got to go,"
and scampers back to Barbie. I'm left alone
to jump a cottontail out of the tawny leaf-bed
where it rests, and poke my stick through clumps
of white flowers velvety as moths, and watch

red admirals, painted ladies, cloudless sulfurs
skip and sail through every clearing,
and a dead-leaf butterfly jink, jag, and skitter
on ragged wings until I give up and drag
home, having found nothing, I think.

Charles Harper Webb

The Mango Tree in the Neighbor's Yard

All my choices have not been choices
A good daughter makes.

And the pit is the shape of my eye, seeing
Being the hard center of life. Don't cry

For what you can't reach;
All fruit falls eventually—

That's what I learned by watching
The tree. And when no one was watching

Me, I waded into the sweet
Reek and bees, stepping

Around split gold hemispheres, smashed seeds—
Ready to take the fallen world into me.

Kirun Kapur

Child Mary

As my child learned to walk
I had to tell her many times,
“No, Mary. Your mother is not in the kitchen.”

And she would hustle back to the hallway
to crane her tender neck around another silent door frame.
“No, Mary. She is not there.”

And she would scoot into a bedroom—
scuffle about for some moments.
Then return near to where I would often sit.
And gaze at me but say no words.

“No, Mary.
Mother is not in the bedroom either.”
Then would come the kitchen.
And front closet. And the backdoor laundry room.

“No, Mary.”
In time my voice no longer trembled.
In time she no longer searched.

Jerry Hauser

Giants

They were the pillars
that held up my sky,
the gods who carried me
on their shoulders,
or crawled across the carpet
with me perched on their back.

Now there is nothing left:
no face carved in the hillside,
no marble column, no temple,
no streets named for them,
no candles lit for them,
no obituary in the paper.

The thunder long past,
and only I, still shaken,
struggling to remember
the shape of their hands,
the words with which
they said good night.

Mary Soon Lee

The Last Obstacle Finally Overcome

Here, high up the slopes of that last mountain,
that mountain rising beyond deep blue into black,
where the air is thin and getting thinner,
you need to pause every few moments for breath.

How many times have you watched this unfold
from below? Now it is your turn, come so soon
though not suddenly, and others are watching.
A breath and another breath: life's little summations.

It is about breath now, nothing else.
You have made your farewells, quietly as is your way,
so quietly they have yet to be noticed. All the old
arguments are finished, all the opinions, all the stances.

Rasping, keeping departure at bay just a little longer,
you summon the gathered patience of decades
and wait for a moment, the perfect moment
when the room is at last empty, the perturbed air

at last still, the audience departed: the audience
for whom you save your final courtesy.

David Adès

To Malala On Your Birthday

*One child, one teacher, one book
and one pen*

—M. Yousafzai

no light shines
louder than a quiet
voice speaking truth
to the looming face
of darkness

no breath is drawn
deeper than water
flowing softly over
the stony face of fear

and here you are again
gentle heart beneath
the spreading wings
of freedom, words
ringing out from the bell
of your glowing soul
teaching us all:

I will not go away
you say, I will never
go away

James K. Zimmerman

PAKISTAN

Edited by

Waqas Khwaja

Introduction

In many ways, poetry from Pakistan may be very much like poetry everywhere. The human, humane, interest is central to it. The individual voice, quietly making its presence evident, ruminative or forthright, but never assertive, often colloquial and conversational, but sometimes mildly mannered in the cultural tradition, is another noticeable feature, just as it would be in poetry that moves us from anywhere else in the world. There is no grandstanding, no desire to draw attention to itself, no ostentation. Surface wizardry and verbal pyrotechnics are shunned, and though wordplay and irony are employed as salient poetic devices, they are almost never used for their own sake, but for a larger goal or objective in view. Indeed, sometimes, "a palpable design" may very well be discernable, but it is often embedded in self-reflection and exigencies that unfold themselves in a slow or sudden disclosure that is as much a vision of understanding for the poet/persona as for the reader.

Where, then, lies the difference from, say, modern, or mainstream, Western poetry? It can be said that very little in the way of "art for art's sake" may be found in Pakistani poetry in any of its language traditions. Not that art, in the sense of form and craft, as aesthetic experience, is neglected, but it is seldom, if ever, the sole intent and objective of a poem.

Like wordplay, linguistic experimentation also is hardly ever the constitutive structure and *raison d'être* of a poem. In Urdu poetry, in particular, themes of loneliness and separation from the beloved (in its various connotations of lover, self, friend, the Divine Being, Truth, country, the country's future, etc.) abound, and are often expressed in imagery that has come down through successive generations of poets in the Perso-Indian tradition but has evolved from its romantic and mystical import and implication to acquire a political and social resonance.

Crucially, though, it may be the approach to poetry that is different, for poetry is not considered to be an autonomous or esoteric art form that is disjunct and detached from daily life in Pakistan. It is, in fact, integral to everyday life in all its forms and ramifications, quoted in a hundred different situations a hundred times a day. Truly, Pakistanis are heir to a cultural legacy where everyone of any wit and intelligence knows, says (in the sense of composes), and quotes poetry. Often, even the unlettered are familiar with a wide variety of poems simply because

they have been set to music and sung by famous singers across the country. *Mushairas*, poetry reading events that often last the whole night through, are hugely popular in the cities and towns and are attended by thousands of avid enthusiasts. In the villages too, poetry and storytelling is frequently shared at evening gatherings, and the oral tradition is still alive and active.

It is partly the dynamics of this cultural heritage that dictate the style and kind of poetry written, composed, and recited in the country, and partly the socio-economic conditions within which the writer lives. Considering political, economic, and social instability; frequent interruptions of the political process by authoritarian military generals; endemic corruption; extremes of economic disparity; feudalistic thinking; incompatible ideological divides; vicious religious, sectarian, and sexist prejudice; and implacable hostility between clashing education systems prevalent in the country, poets from Pakistan have plenty of material to keep them occupied. Every class, group, and community has its cause, and the poet may feel that not to engage with it would be an abdication of social responsibility. In such an environment, even "art for art's sake" would be a political statement of sorts, though it could foreground an appalling lack of moral consciousness as well.

Behind all this untidiness lies the memory, no, not just the memory, but the protocols of colonial practices and history stubbornly lodged in the *mores* and thinking patterns of a people and society feverishly striving to emerge out of the shadow of colonialism. Many of the elite from various strata of society wear the badge of admiration for the former colonial masters as a totem of honor. That is who they aspire to be, and it is the handed-down vision of British rule that confines their view of society to a hierarchical structure of the "naturally" entitled and the common herds that need to be managed and ruled.

Such a view is most evident in the classes and institutions that were markedly privileged during colonial times: the military, the higher bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the feudal class, all mostly educated in elite English-language schools. Their sense of privilege, being rather at odds with representative government, self-rule, and democratic institutions, ends up repeatedly undermining the political process. Significantly, the law codes of the country remain in English, despite 66 years since Pakistan became an independent country, though it has its rich vernaculars and hardly 10 percent of the population are able to read an English-language newspaper.

On the other hand are the disintitiled common people, a very large percentage of whom either have no access to education or are able to find it only through anachronistic madrassas with narrow, antiquated curricula, or in poorly equipped Urdu-language government schools. For them, the departure of the British has led only to the establishment of the same old colonial regime of exclusion and deprivation under new masters, the local brown sahibs instead of the *gora Angrez*. There is no crossover between the two classes, the privileged and the disintitiled, artificially separated by their institutional affiliation and schooling, or lack thereof, while those who lie between these two, the much-maligned, perpetually threatened middle class(es), all aspire to move upwards rather than the other way.

Compounding all these class and institutional differentials are the provincial divisions: four main provinces, Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab, and Khyber-Pakhtukhwa. Each has its own distinct culture and language: Sindhi, Baluchi, Punjabi, and Pashto (in some instances more than one language, as, for instance, Hindko and Seraiki in the Punjab, Urdu in Sindh, and Persian in Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtukhwa). Each struggles to maintain its individuality and character. Urdu, a language not native to any part of Pakistan, was imposed as the national language over all these regions and their vernaculars in 1947.

No wonder it is seen by many as a form of colonial imposition, just like English, and was one of the major reasons for the breaking away of Pakistan's Eastern wing to become the independent country of Bangladesh in 1971. The politics of language remains strong in present-day Pakistan, with several provinces fighting for linguistic as well as political autonomy. Thus, there are all kinds of constituencies of disaffection, disgruntled and discontented with each other, an unsavory reminder of the country's afflicted genesis in the colonial past.

What is a poet to do in these circumstances? Is it even possible for the poet to project a national voice of sorts in these conditions? Would it be more appropriate to strike some universalist note, given the vexed and vexing situation? And what about the poet's inner voice, the sensibility, aesthetic sense? How can these find expression in a society as volatile as Pakistan is, and has been, for some time?

The small selection of poems collected here will give the reader an idea of how the poets of Pakistan have dealt with these questions and issues, and with the derangement of the times they have lived or are living through. It is a matter of some pride and gratification that the

poets have not shied away from engaging with what they observed around them, perceptions and experiences that mattered to them at the personal level as well as issues that afflicted the public consciousness and incensed their moral sense; that, without abandoning or jeopardizing their aesthetic values, they have yet managed to convey a sense of urgency and direction for a society losing its bearings in the confusions and corruptions of the period.

Yet, these poets are also all so different in the way they approach their subjects, in the way they write, in their language, in the contingencies and actualization of their art. It is my hope that both the courage of their creative spirit and the significance of their accomplishment will find appreciation in an audience far removed from the travails of the post-colonial society that has produced them, but not unaware that the best work often comes out of the worst kind of adversity.

Waqas Khwaja

The Morning of Independence

August 1947

This stained and sullied light, this night-ravished dawn
This is not the dawn we were looking for
This is not the dawn that we had set out to seek
In hopes that across the sky's vast wilderness
Would lie somewhere the ultimate destination of stars
Somewhere this slow flowing night must find its shore
Somewhere the heart's boat of sorrows must come to rest

When, friends, we started out
On the mysterious avenues of our youthful romance
How many pulled at our sleeves to hold us back
From ardent bedchambers in the land of beauty
Arms stretched out for us, warm bodies beckoned
But our devotion for dawn's bright face was dearer
And the skirts of the maiden of light, it seemed, within our grasp
Desire was hot, and weariness a distant thought

We hear that light and darkness are already parted
And place and destination have converged in consummation
Already, the overtly aggrieved are altered beyond belief
For them, the joy of accomplishment is paramount
To speak of the horror of parting, an abomination
The deep corrosive fire, the eye's dreaming, the heartburn
On none does the nostrum of separation work at all
What produced this illusion of morning breeze? Where did it go?
The wayside lamp has no inkling of it whatsoever
Night's heavy burden is not lightened yet
The moment of deliverance for the dreaming eye and heart is not yet
Keep moving, for that destination is not here yet

*Faiz Ahmad Faiz
translated from Urdu
by Waqas Khwaja*

We Shall See

We shall see
Indeed, we too shall see
The day that is promised
Inscribed on the Tablet of Eternity
We shall see

When towering mountains of tyranny
Shall scatter like cotton wool
The earth rattle and shake
Beneath our shackled feet
And above the heads of those who rule
Lightning peal and thunder
We shall see

When from the Sanctuary of God's earth
All idols shall be removed
We, inhabitants of the margins, rejects of the Sanctuary
Be ceded the seat of honor
All crowns shall be tossed away
All thrones brought to dust
We shall see

The name of God alone persist
Absent from view and present still
Spectator Itself and Spectacle
The cry of An-al-Haq resound—
The Truth, it is I—
It is I, and it is you
And God's multitudes shall rule
Among them I, and among them you

We shall see
Indeed, we too shall see
The day that is promised
We shall see

*Faiz Ahmad Faiz
Translated by Waqas Khwaja*

Tiger

*Inspired by Lady Charlotte Canning's journals
and her watercolour of the sitting-room at
Government House, Barrackpore, 1859.*

She ordered 450 yards of her favourite
blue-striped chintz with rosebuds—
it was all very *pretty, cool and English*

though the twenty foot high ceiling
was hung with punkahs, those strange fans.
And there were so many doors,

thirteen in all, and at each one
a watchful, turbaned servant, hands
joined, as if in prayer.

Jhilmils, just like Venetian blinds,
and *tatis*, wetted grass veranda screens,
kept out every chink of sun.

But nothing could keep out India.

Like a tiger

it roared through boredom
roared through Englishness and British rule

more ferocious than the Hot Weather
it tore through ceremony and certainty

its jaws aflame—

Cawnpore, Lucknow, Bibighar, Allahabad—all fell.

Fighting & guns & murders...

And then the retribution—the rallying cry:

"Remember Cawnpore!"

Dear Lady Canning wrote Queen Victoria
Our thoughts are almost solely occupied with India.

But what did the tiger know or care
about thoughts or letters
or chintz or watercolours?

Moniza Alvi

Partition of Hearts

They called it the Partition of Hearts,
this dark side of Independence.

Blame the British, blame Congress,
blame Nehru, blame Jinnah.

But what was the point?

They called it the Partition of Hearts.

Yet connections had not been broken,
not quite—

between Pakistan and India
the living and the dead

the families and the missing
the people and themselves.

They called it the Partition of Hearts—
this Partition of reinforced glass.

Moniza Alvi

Qasida Sequence for Peshawar

Qasida of the Caravanserai

Persimmon feast of the sun, juice-rubbed sky—
I let the bird out and fill his old cage
with ink and paper, fill the many cracks
of the samovar with songs of another
galaxy. By night I bury gleaming
knives to the sound of bubbling milk, baby
stirring in the cot. Tea brews and horses
warm up to new hay. Put the gunpowder
to sleep and come, let's tempt the fakir with
silk that matches her eyes—topaz windows.

Qasida of the Storytellers' Market

Nightly, the silk recalls being mulberry,
the lanterns revert to pools of melted
copper; our wares have dreams of their own, heaped
like tired children, have entered bargains
in the field of wonder; ledgers rolled up,
we eat innocence like Anatolian
snow, watch tea leaves float to songs of crickets.
It is the time of Yak fur, molasses,
Bamboo cots; not barracks and mass murder—
In stories, our moonlit roads meet all night.

Qasida of Jamrud

The tangerine dictum, diaphanous
as a tart balloon on old Jamrud Road,
petrol musk eloquent, fumes from packed
Russian buses, rickshaws, from consulates
to bazaars, willowed train tracks where Kipling's
ghost ambles in a smart summer jacket,
asking for a light around *gora* graveyard.
This road ends in war-torn limbs, sweet lemon
groves, down at the tandoor where boys, full of
song, wrap in newspaper: loss and hot bread.

Qasida of the Bodhi Tree

Because the tulip, the nest-shaped tulip
folds the beloved's name in its upright
velvet, you forget, you forget love's tug,
its thirst for saltwater south of here, musk
melon, persimmon groves north: The prayer
carpet with the interlocking design
won't do for love. The air fringed by air
in every worshipful word returns to
where it was remembered in the peace of
the Bodhi tree—its deep and somber shade.

Qasida of the Lost Sweet

Erasure, like phrase diminished to foam,
mouth crook-locked, map faded, drummed out,
dissolved. Erasure lit, match by match, red
and high on hunkered history. Sorry,
you lost your street in the conflagration,
your spouse, school. Memories torched with foreign
petrol. Sorry about the child not coming
back, about the sad glass of windows
shattered by bomb blasts. My sweet, my lost,
my pile of chewed up sugarcane. Sorry.

Shadab Zeest Hashmi

Peshawar, an ancient city and an important outpost of the Silk Road, attracted traders and invaders, as well as saints, poets and pilgrims from Asia and Europe. Its Qissa Khani bazaar ("market of the storytellers") is a historical site, a merchants' hub. The city features in the writings of Rudyard Kipling who traveled to Peshawar as a journalist in the late 19th century. The region has been affected by numerous conflicts, most recently the Soviet war and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

Jet Lag

No matter where,
I wake at 3 a.m.
when hemispheres
close like lips.
This is the fracture line
where the old country
meets America,
arrives in the regalia of a tea trolley
loaded with cream rolls, winter melons
samosay, jalebi, cumin biscuits,
a "mix chai" teapot
covered with a tea cozy of mirror-work,
china clattering
in a soothing high pitch
like a nurse maid's.
This, the other half of my longing
locks into place
where my children are carrying back
their day from school
in oversized backpacks,
filling up the car with various pitches
gently shaded by the country
that takes twelve hours to catch up
with the sun.
We are making our way
to cold cereal
and afterwards,
a soccer field
as green as paradise.

Shadab Zeest Hashmi

This Face This

The other day in Atlanta the waitress talks to me in Spanish.
I don't speak your language, I say.
The same happens with Mexicans.
I've been confused for Italian once. Also Greek.
In Baltimore a Native American woman asks, "Are you Cherokee Indian?"
"No."
She's supposed to read my palm; instead she touches my face.

I touch this face at home, this face that seems to belong to others too:
Native America, Spain, Mexico, Italy, Greece; my face in these places,
in these races, surprises me.
It's India I'm used to.

Year one: Are you from India?
I smile. From a country next to it actually, Pakistan.
Year two: You Indian?
I shake my head. Pakistan.
Year three: Indian? Delhi, right?
No. I'm from Pakistan. Lahore.
Year after year after year until I'm at home with being mistaken for India.

After fourteen years of living in America, one Iranian gentleman gets it
right (or wrong?)
You are Pakistani? he asks.
How did you guess?
It's in your face, he says, adding *As salaam a laikum*.
I reply: *wa lai kum as salaam*

Naam-us-tay. The middle age *baba* behind the counter at Starbucks says
every time I get my tall coffee in a grande cup because my milk needs
the extra space.

Naam-us-tay, he says bringing his palms together.
Uhhh...I'm from Pakistan.
Well, *sul-laam* then, young lady, he says.
Just once. Then he forgets or does not remember.
I've given up. *Namaste* to you too, Starbucks Uncle.

Chances are it's not important to Starbucks Uncle to remember there is
a difference. Chances are he forgets that these two countries are not one
and the same.

Pakistan-naam-us-taay-india-sul-laam

I long to ask Starbucks Uncle: "You from Canada?"
Just to hear him say "Nope, America."
(He won't need to specify North, Central or South—he won't need to
because he's white and because he's got an American accent.)
So do I: sometimes. That's what the Pakistanis say. Though Amy from
little town Maryland says I've got such an un-American accent. It's more
British she says. More sophisticated. (History shares us, Amy, history
spares neither your tongue nor mine because no matter how our accents
differ, Pakistan and America still have in common the "Brit is classier"
colonial hang up)

Had 1947 not happened, this face—my face—would be Indian.
This fact of partition my passport clearly embodies.
My face is another story.
My face is having a hard time breaking apart into
yehan say yah wahan say yah kahan say
from here or from there or from where

The other day a Bangladeshi woman asked me in an e-mail where I was
from **originally**. Originally Daddy belongs to a village called Plaknah
outside of Aligarh in India.
And Mummy is from Srinagar, Kashmir, located in India too.
One day Mummy and Daddy migrated to Pakistan, therefore we're
Pakistani, I'm Pakistani. In the return e-mail I am an "exotic combo."
Hindustani + Kashmiri is equal to me being a real beauty.
I am asked to e-mail my photos, pronto.

But I have yet to. Because I'm scared the combo will fail her,
fail me,
my face will fail my race
this face will bypass my origins; I might be fake.

Something about me is fake—the space inside my mouth, the shape
between my un-plucked brows, the flagpoles in my eyes. Neither Hindu-
stani, nor Kashmiri, nor Pakistani, nor Englistani and neither, I'm learning,
can I qualify for Americanistani. I'm a new breed like a designer dog:
part beagle, part poodle.

A poogle that looks like both parents but looks like neither one.

Pakistan. Lahore. Gulberg. Mid-afternoon. Sunshine lazing in a sleepy
"A" level English literature classroom. Chaucer. *Canterbury Tales*. Prologue
A strange hard voice on the tape player recites in Middle English:
Whan that aprile with his shoures soote
Fucking hell. It does not sound like English at all.
Kamil from Karachi leans over a wooden desk and hisses to me
under his breath: *Hindooo-stani*.
My hand rises and gives him a nice big shock of a slap.
Ms. Kamal! Shrieks Mrs. Wilson, a Midwestern American who is more
Pakistani than Pakistanis can be. She's quite put out. She runs gold-ringed
ivory fingers through hair hennaed a fiery orange (the choice of orange hair
dye bridges, in my mind, any divide between the literates of America and
the illiterates of Pakistan).

"Ms. Kamal, good girls keep their hands to themselves. Good girls simply
do not slap boys. Off to the Principal's office with you."

"But he called me Hindustani," I tell my parents later that day.
"Tho kya hua? So what?" My father explains to this daughter of his, recently
returned to Pakistan from England and Saudi Arabia. "In Pakistan, Hindustani
is what Pakistanis call Urdu-speaking people who've migrated from India."
"But I speak only English," I say. And I think: Would I have slapped Kamil
if he'd called me Englistani?

Was it Hindu that made "Hindustani" a slappable offence?
Was it Kamil's hiss making it a dirty word?
Was it the shock of having the hymen of identity pierced: i.e. what matters—
the face I see in the mirror or the place people say they see in this face:
Indian, Pakistani, Hindustani, Englistani, Native America, Spain, Mexico,
Italy, Greece.

Never just American though.
America cannot yet see Just-American in my colored face.

But show me anyone, from anywhere, who really can.
Including me.

Sonia Kamal

A Poet's Homeland

A poet's homeland
Is in his eyes
He stands on dry land
Memories seek him out, come to him
Like sea waves
He writes few words He gets angry often
He doesn't know what he wants
He turns to the village each time
And today also
He is thinking
In the narrow lanes of the village
How good must life be!
On a marble grave
Moonbeams must be pouring out their light
He is thinking
The barrel of his brother's gun
Must still be warm
And a few birds
In the throes of death
At the lake's edge
His brother's red pony
Restless at the sound of gunfire—
Suddenly, he goes further
"Life is Elsewhere"
It seems that he is walking
With Milan Kundera's silence
He peeps inside a Prague home
Where a Czech girl
Is curled up naked on a bed with a foreigner
Kundera, you live in Paris
But "Life is Elsewhere"
Yes, it is at the point
From where Solzhenitsyn's exile
Rises like the sun
Or, even further ahead—
Where the wind sings
In a voice sweeter than Umm-e-Kalthoom's

In the date palm trees once owned by
Mahmoud Darwesh's grandparents

Hassan Dars

A poem for the cold season

Warm waters of love spring from my heart
How cold it is now
It was never so cold before
Not even in the days
Of frost and snow
Warm waters of love spring from my heart

Girl, beautiful as birds
from a cold land

My ten fingers
Are lit up like lamps
Then why does silence reign in the land of your soul
And why is it
Cold as death?
Whatever conversation
My hands have
With your body
Is all fire
Then why are you silent
Why are you not a song
Why are you not an aria
Before you turn into
A snow-woman lying at home
Let us take a walk to hell

Hassan Dars
both translated from Sindhi
by Asif Farrukhi and
Shah Muhammad Pirzada

Poem

Everybody has a little bit of the sea
Every lover has a seashore
Every sea knows the taste of waiting in vain
In every moment of waiting
A wave dances in the rain
Ideas come to everybody
Years come to everybody—
huffing and puffing across centuries

There comes a fear
In that fear, in situations, desires
Apart from the fear
A smoldering language
In everyman dances a peacock
In everyman lurks a thief
Across everyman's throat
Glitter epochs of the knife and sword
Each epoch a riddle
Everyman a riddle

Hassan Dars

The Wind is the Sea's Lover

You think that marriage
is the ultimate reality
which will take you away from me
but, don't you think, it is enough
that the sky is a friend of clouds
trees are the sons of earth
wind is the sea's lover
waterfalls are the laughter of mountains
and you
my beloved

Hassan Dars
both translated by Asif Farrukhi
and Shah Muhammad Pirzada

Ghazal

All truthful, liars all, all right, all wrong, I, the heart, and the mirror
Endlessly breaking and mending ties, I, the heart, and the mirror

An age since the same season, the same scene, with many names
We watch the spectacle every day, I, the heart, and the mirror

A drizzle of dew on fire, the alarm of passing time on mind
We listen and remain silent, I, the heart, and the mirror

Some stone of sound will ring, the pickaxe of word resound
How long will we remain tongue-tied, I, the heart, and the mirror

Every moment our face, every shadow our reflection
We are afraid of the mirror, I, the heart, and the mirror

A leap of the lamp flame, and until night ends, day breaks
We become the sun and think, I, the heart, and the mirror

Shaad, the world is a river, a swelling, declining river
All of us are moon and stars, I, the heart, and the mirror

*Atta Shaad
translated from Urdu
by Shiza Sophia Sabir*

Ghazal

Again rain-heavy breezes blow.
I think of you.
The anklet of leaves flutters.
I think of you.

Cranes call once more
From green seas of grass:
The season, now, of yellow flowers.
I think of you.

In desolate backyards
The raven croaks again.
Nectar sap falls.
I think of you.

At first I shrieked in pain,
Then laughed.
Clouds thunder, lightning gleams.
I think of you.

All day I was beguiled
By worldly things;
When sunlight slips from walls
I think of you.

*Nasir Kazmi
translated from Urdu
by Waqas Khwaja*

Ghazal

Even your name sickens me, occasionally
So too is my temper discomposed, occasionally

Not many experience such delirious distress
This contentment in life comes but occasionally

In a state of distraction, in cascades of pain
Your face dissolved in a torrent of tears, occasionally

Your proximity brought the heart no peace either
This desolation also I have known, occasionally

Insensible to myself, oblivious wholly of you
I have spent such nights of separation too, occasionally

Despite renouncing my love for you, my friend
I have felt your absence, I admit, occasionally

*Nasir Kazmi
translated from Urdu
by Waqas Khwaja*

Ghazal

A stream of flowing tears, and I, friends
The city of that unfaithful one, and I, friends

Those strange destinations, recollections of fellow travelers
The poison of loneliness, and I, friends

They bear the musk of days gone by
The devastation of monsoon rains, and I, friends

Flushing my heart with the wine's warm breath
Late nights, and I, friends

A gust of air drifting from place to place
This wanderlust, and I, friends

The dust of lost friendships flecks the eye
The warning house of calamity, and I, friends

Munir Niazi

Weariness on the Way

No village or river close by and clouds hanging overhead
Evening too arrives as if steeped in some ancient dread
Lightning flashes constantly, none around for miles on end

For all the labor, sweat and toil, how far apart we have remained
Walking, I am tired out, still the journey has no end
The wind is wounded and the heart flutters hopelessly constrained

*Munir Niazi
both translated from Urdu
by Waqas Khwaja*

My Companion, My Friend

If I could believe this, my companion, my friend
If I could believe, that the weariness of your heart
The sorrow of your eyes, the burning in your breast
With my words of comfort, with my love, could be allayed
If my word of sympathy were that prescription which
Would revive once more your bleak, unlighted world
Wash from your brow the marks of shame
Heal at last the affliction of your youth
If I were sure of this, my companion, my friend
Day and night, morning and evening, I would amuse you
Sing for you songs, tender, unutterably sweet,
Of waterfalls and springtime, of gardens in bloom,
Songs of breaking dawn, of the moon and the spinning planets;
I would recount to you the parables of love:
How the cold flesh of proud young women
Melts utterly beneath the warmth of hands
How the settled lines of a familiar face
Transform suddenly under your very eyes
How the peerless crystal of the lover's cheek
Momentarily burns with the liquor's stain
How the bough itself bends for the flowering rose
And the pavilion of night lights up with fragrances
I would sing for you just so without rest
Rhyming away at your feet eternally
But my poems are no remedy for your pain
A song is no surgeon, familiar though it may be, and friend
Though a salve for the wounds, it is no lancet either
And your wounds have no cure but the sharp, clean lancet
And this ruthless deliverer I do not possess
None living in this world possesses it
Yes, no one, but you alone, you

Faiz Ahmad Faiz
translated from Urdu by Waqas Khwaja

Ode to a Sindhri

eating a perfect

ripe

yellow-orange sindhri

is a gift only summer can give. you
hold the curving firmness of it in
your palm and gently stroke

a knife beneath the thin, thin skin
and as it peels off in a curled sweet spiral,

you might take a moment to lick the
honeyed juice about to trickle
off your wrist

and slicing neatly, deftly, the mango
falls into scimitar-curved pieces into
a bowl, and then

you find a fork.

Mina Farid Malik

arranging/arrangement/arranged

I

this is what i want: to kiss you
when i please, and have nobody else
see.

II

to not have to divulge each detail of
my life to you, to place these
unspeakables timidly before your

acidic searchlights and then bristle,
defensive and yet compelled to
speak

this is what i want: to rub my
cooperation in your face with a cackle
because it is not submission

and you will not cow me into it
either. You keep saying *no*
pressure

and in the same breath: *i must be engaged by december*

after keeping myself under key, if not lock,
for twenty-three years do you really expect

i will decorously ignore the opportunity to be
kissed so as to keep myself Pure for
the mysterious boy whose mouth *will* bear the stamp

of many other lips? why should i go gentle
into this good night of wifehood and
motherness?

III

no pressure means nothing. i say otherwise
to friends and people who love me so
i don't sound like an accomplice to bourgeois decency

but i have a shoulder to this constant sliding weight of
forced jollity, of dissections of family and background
and height

and whether one should excuse a temper for
generosity with the money. i remain

mute, utterly silent.

i have no opinion but
since everyone else does

mine doesn't matter

IV

i would like to sleep with you until
noon when lazy sunday begins

V

i think it also means: if we don't like him
and you don't it's fine, but

if we're keen and you aren't then
we won't force you (because we are
civilized)

but if you don't we will hold it
against you if not forever

then for a long enough time (particularly
when the Good Ones dry up and it will
be I Told You So, and Now You

Will Be A's Cousin, who was Dumped
By a Hindu and Is Very Drunk At
Parties (hilaire belloc is

having a field day)

Mina Farid Malik

Naughty Eyes

Like stars they sparkle.

My home overflows with the light of your laughter.

These small hands that do not leave
anything now in the house in order,
no cosmetics or makeup in place,
no flowerbed

no flower undamaged;
these mud bespattered feet
that in a moment soil
my spotless, white bedsheet;
but not a wrinkle creases my brow.

Sometimes with a spray of colors
dousing the whole body,
hiding sometimes my scarf;
at times stealing up from behind,
shutting my eyes with both hands,
asking:

Do you know who I am?
Tell me if you can!

What should I say to you,
who you are,
what you mean to me,
my naughty little child god?

All I know is
that this disarranged, disheveled house
does not strain
my natural sense
of neatness and balance.
Without you,
despite the order and display
of this house of glass,
there would be nothing here
but dismal gloom!

*Parveen Shakir
translated from Urdu
by Waqas Khwaja*

If you are my God

I
If you are my God, I deny you
If I have another, I hope
He will cherish me better

II
You have been away long, my dear
Oh, there is some sustenance, of course
No one dies of hunger in one's country

III
God protect our homeland
Say, how will our condition improve
When everyone wishes to have the law in his hand

IV
The leader became a minister, got a chair
He said, "I will fulfill my promises
First for myself, then for the people"

V
It is nature
If there is a fruit tree in the yard
It will become the target of stones

VI
Their laughter is deceptive
The vagaries of custom destroy them
I weep for the daughters of Eve

VII
The homes of our grandfathers, others own
The homes of our husbands, our sons own
What a destitute species is ours

VIII
If your status is godlike
I too have paradise under my feet
O son of Adam, think not I am so low

IX

When brave youths fail
It is the girls who help their fathers
Your daughters and sisters are not frail

X

They respect their honor
Pakhtun women are not faithless
It is tradition that has bound them in chains

Naheed Sahar

My womanhood

I am a woman
My nature is the nature of a woman
My distinction, the distinction of womanhood
My passions are the passions of a woman
In someone's home I am a daughter
For someone I am a sister
I may appear incomplete
Only perhaps because I dream
Of motherhood, of a kind
The motherhood of a Pakhtun Mary
An Unseen Power to woo me as my mate
To fulfill and bring me to completion
So that the passions
Within the home of my body
Are impelled
To give form and shape to a Savior
A Pakhtun Christ
Son of the revolution

*Hasina Gul
both translated from Pashto
by Pervez Sheikh*

Who is it?

Hey, who are you weaving my bed with my insides
Place my heart at the foot and my eyes at the head
I have to embroider flowers on the pillow
When the earth's neck is bowed
You don't load the sky on it
Baba, produce some serpent
And if it is scaly, let it bite me
It is mine after all
You said it, didn't you, that we give daughters
Snakes and serpents in dowry
So do it
Baba, why are daughters and sons not equal and alike in worth
If the daughter is older, you gnaw at her
Till she is reduced to the size of her brother
If the son is older, then again the daughter, a quarter, half, damaged
Baba, a serpent sits on the Cross, there will be a storm
Vultures are getting restless
Daughters, afflicted ones, are getting nervous
In a frock of lace filigree made of tongues
I leapt the wall
But I still could not learn to speak
Baba, O Baba, a snake has settled on the earth's neck
Flecked and mottled
It sits on the necks of my brothers too
We are better off as daughters, better off one-fourth
When the *peelu* ripened on the debris of our bodies
We passed from hand to hand to the marketplace
Our teeth broke biting quarters
Whose milk should we mourn
Who gives change for twisted quarters
Who is this that batters my broken sides
Hey, place my eyes on the pillow-side
I must embroider flowers on the pillow
The lovers' lobes are drilled in this world
O heedless one! Let me wash my hands
Let me nip one more year from my body

Don't you know I have advanced today to the next form
 And, also, our brindle has given birth to a calf
 You say we will go away from here now
 Otherwise bloom from sheesham trees will begin to fall
 And block all paths
 But even the earth allows snakes to move about freely
 We will get through tunneling our way underground, right, Baba
 You will return me my kids, won't you
 In the coming year they will catch chickenpox and you will say
 Grandchildren, greedy as locusts
 Daughter's children, deceitful, perfidious
 She took our embroidered pillows, and bedcovers
 Our blankets and chadors, even the season
 A plague on the passing year, leprosy on the coming one
 Put my Today on the palm of my hand, Baba
 Place my Truth on the palm of my hand, Baba
 In the middle of the night you will again tell mother
 Go sleep inside where the dowry is if you wish to get
your daughter married
 And yourself jump under my blanket
 But I will not let it be midnight
 A snake sits on my neck tonight

Nasreen Anjum Bhatti
translated from Punjabi
by Waqas Khwaja

Cripple

She is eighteen. A pretty girl
 if you look at the face.
 Fair skin—a point in favor. Nice smile.
 Talented too, she sings.
 She could have married well with those looks.

But the fine map of her face misleads.
 Beyond it no one ventures.
 Eyes turn back embarrassed by a wrong address.
 He body is a country
 uprooted by earthquake. A landscape of stumps.

Who will volunteer joy to this ruined
 bequest, or risk his neck
 in a noose of those dwarf and twisted arms?
 Waiting for visitors
 she sits, tied to a chair by rag doll legs.

She always smiles. Her face wears bright uniforms—
 a government in exile
 without courage to advertise despair.
 Negotiating self-deceit
 we speak cheerfully of recovery

as if she had a cold. Tied to its chair,
 her smiling image waits
 every day for what cannot happen.
 Nagged by an odd discomfort
 we resolve never to visit her again.

Maki Kureishi

The Old Man of the Banyan Tree

The old man of the banyan tree,
stood with his young daughter in the square,
pleading, "Is anyone there,
who'll exorcise the shadow
hovering over my daughter's head?
Gentlemen, sir, listen."
No one listened
They all went by, gathering their shadows with them.

It so happened one day,
a *maulvi* came and said,
"Old man, bring me the innocent child,
and Allah's grace will set your daughter free."

At midnight in the square,
the *maulvi* lit a lamp and asked,
"Child, what do you see in the flame?"
"Nothing!"
The *maulvi* recited a prayer and said,
"Speak, child, speak!"
Thousands hung on the child's lips.
"Maulvi sahib, I see a face."
"Good. Can you recognize this limb of Satan?"
The child lifted her eyes a moment,
"Mmm Maulvi sahib," she stammered, "It's your face."

"Away, you infidel's seed,
bastard! Get out of my sight."
The *maulvi* brandished his shoe.

"It's the *maulvi*'s shadow that troubles the girl," jeered the crowd.
And they all went off, gathering their shadows with them.

"Is there any charitable man?
Someone?
Anyone?"

Now a necromancer drew a circle around the girl,
and went about in a loincloth, chanting,

"In 90 days the ring will break
and the girl will be free of the jinn."

The ninety days passed in a wink,
and lo, the sage was in, and the girl circling.
"Help, help," he cried, "the spell's overturned."

He ran off leaving his clothes behind.
The crowd jested, "the jinn is out, the sage in."
And they all left, gathering their shadows with them.

"Is there any charitable one?
Is there? Is there?"

Years passed and no one came.
At last, one day,
the old man took his girl by the throat and cried,
"Who are you?
Unveil yourself.
Why do you trouble this innocent girl?"

Her body trembled
the eyes relaxed,
and slowly her lips parted,
the old man's voice came back to him, "Who are you?
Unveil yourself
why do you trouble this innocent girl?"

Sarmad Sehbai

Mandragora

March returns,
summer month
trailing its pearly clouds, placebos.

Demeter calls her daughter from the dark.
Look, I awake
neither with passion nor profundity—
bridge of self-love, I step across
the river of the stimulant

buoyed up for the occasion
how I jump
at garden parties like a bungee-man,
balancing tea and sandwiches
in a diaphanous dress

and do I really care
for larkspurs, potted pansies, peonies—
dusk comes:
the insulated English garden sleeps
growing more incoherent
as I grow weak.

Yet I persevere
with your solicitude,
fraternal hand—
for you procure me dreams
without duress—
substance, substanceless
but a kind of grace.

From nowhere, the fleshy mandrake root
surfaces at dead of night
and in an undertone
to me
denies his own malignity.

Shireen Z. Haroun

Let Us Go to That Mountain

Let us go to that mountain now
from which no one
ever returns.

It is rumored
that a stranger's eye welcomes warmly
all who arrive there;
down into darkness it takes
them with it
and sinks
to the very bottom.

This is that path where
no shadow ever ventures
from which no one
ever returns.
Let us go to that mountain.

If you wish to know the truth
you and I have always lost in life
have always trembled
at every suggestion of doubt
always covered ourselves up
with garments of fear
always loved each other
in others' shadows.

What, then, is the harm
if we lose ourselves
in the embrace of that mountain
from which no one ever returns?

Come, let us go.
Let us go to that mountain!

*Zehra Nigah
translated from Urdu
by Waqas Khwaja*