

This event took place on Saturday, 17th September 2011 at SOAS, University of London.

The Speakers included Iftikhar Arif, Salima Hashmi, Amer Hussein, Amir Mufti, Christina Oesterheld, Geeta Patel, Shahid Ali Syed and Amina Yaqin, with a specially curated exhibition by Maria Syed.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz has had, and continues to have, a national following as a people's poet in Pakistan. He also remains a figurehead for the present generation of Urdu poets. He excelled in interweaving the classical ornamental style of an aristocratic Urdu rhyme and metre with modern social realism. He was a poet, a journalist, a policy advisor and cultural commentator whose career spanned the period of anti-colonial resistance and the aftermath of a post-partitioned state.

The conference addressed some of the following research questions:

Tradition and modernity in Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry. Aesthetics vs politics. Can the two co-exist.

Progressivism and nationalism in Faiz's writings.

How can we understand Faiz's poetic voice in a contemporary Muslim context?

What was the impact of modernism on Faiz's early poetic development?

What kind of a postcolonial resistance is articulated by Faiz? What are some of the intersections and differences in his work with other postcolonial intellectuals and poets?

Comparative approaches to the central themes of exile and loss in Faiz's poetry.

His reputation and reception. Responses from his contemporaries. His successors.

Iftikhar Arif

Iftikhar Arif is a renowned Urdu poet from Pakistan. Born in Lucknow in 1943, he completed his postgraduate studies at Lucknow University before migrating to Pakistan in 1965. In Karachi, he started his career with the Hindi and Urdu services of Radio Pakistan, before moving to Pakistan Television, where he was the Scripts Editor and quickly grew into a great television personality. Iftikhar Arif is the recipient of numerous national and international awards, inter alia, Hilal-e-Imtiaz, Sitara-e-Imtiaz, Pride of Performance, Baba-e-Urdu Maulvi Abdul Haque Award, Faiz International Award and Allama Iqbal Award. Several of his poetry collections have been published in Pakistan and abroad, in Urdu as well as translations in Pushto, Sindhi, English, Persian, Hindi, Bhasha, Russian, Chinese, French and German, along with audio and video recordings of recitations and songs of his poetry. His most widely read collections in Urdu are Mehr-e-Doneem, Harf-e-Baryab, Jahan-e-Maloom; Kitab-e-Dil-o-Dunya, Sheher-e-Ilm kay Darwaazay Par; and in English: Twelfth Man and Written in the Season of Fear.

Abstract: Faiz Ahmed Faiz – the relevance of his poetry today

Faiz Ahmed Faiz is a great national personality. His cultural contribution is diverse, pragmatic and intellectual. Every great literary personality raises challenges to literary belief and tradition. Faiz's poetry brings upon such challenges as well. Critics in every generation of have discussed his poetry and no doubt this analysing will continue into future generations. Faiz's poetry is unique in terms of its high technical and nostalgic nature. The presentation will assess the poetry of Faiz and emphasise its relevance today. It also refers and renders from authentic intellectual sources such as Karl Marx, Hafiz, Edward Said, Elliot and Ezra Pound. It dwells on the words of Faiz, 'I believe that humanity has never accepted defeat against its enemies and will be victorious in the end. And war, hate, oppression and prejudice shall one day be replaced by what Hafiz, the great Persian poet, proclaimed love as the ultimate and immaculate basis of human relationships.'

Salima Hashmi

Salima Hashmi is Dean of the School of Visual Arts and Design at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. A painter of international repute, she has also curated exhibitions of contemporary art and traditional textiles within Pakistan and abroad. Her many publications include Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan (2002) and the co-authored Memories, Myths, Mutations – Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan (2006 ). She

was educated at the National College of Arts (NCA), Lahore, the Bath Academy of Art, U.K., and the Rhode Island School of Design, USA. She taught for 30 years at NCA, Pakistan's premier art institution, and retired as its Principal. She is a recipient of The President's Award for Pride of Performance, Pakistan. Her recent publications are *Hanging Fire – Contemporary Art from Pakistan* catalogue for Asia Society Museum, New York. *A Song for this Day– 55 poems* by Faiz Ahmed Faiz (illustrations only) Sang-e-Meel Publishers, Lahore 2009.

Abstract: Two loves – Faiz's Letters to Alys – A Review

Faiz's letters to his wife from jail (1951-55) were published in 1976. Titled 'Saleebain Meray Dareechay Mein' (Crucifix in my window) they were translated into Urdu by Faiz himself. The originals, stored in his house in Lahore, were thought destroyed by termites during his exile in Beirut. Thirty five of them were discovered among Alys' papers in 2009, restored and published in 2011. These form a small part of the correspondence between Faiz and Alys, which spans four decades. The earliest letters date from 1939 when they were courting and the last written in 1984, the year Faiz died. The letters are now in the process of conservation, which will take the better part of two years. As they become available to scholars, they will be a valuable source of information and insight into his personal reflections and his milieu. The presentation which dwells mostly on the Faiz's jail letters, includes a cursory look at letters ranging from the 1940's to the 1980's.

Aamer Hussein

Aamer Hussein was born in Karachi and has lived in London since 1970. Renowned for his four collections of lyrical short stories - most recently *Insomnia* - Aamer Hussein has also published two critically acclaimed novels: *The Cloud Messenger* (2011) and *Another Gulmohar Tree* (shortlisted for the Commonwealth Prize 2010). His fictional oeuvre is especially notable for its international cast of characters, not just from his native Pakistan or adopted nations of Britain and India, but from almost every continent. Aamer is a Professorial Writing Fellow at University of Southampton and the first Pakistani Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He is also a former graduate of SOAS, and has been writing and publishing fiction, reviews and criticism since the mid-eighties.

Aamir Mufti

Aamir Mufti is Associate Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, UCLA. He pursued his doctoral studies in literature at Columbia University under the supervision of Edward Said. He was also trained in Anthropology at Columbia and the London School of Economics, and his research and teaching reflect this disciplinary range. His work reconsiders the secularisation thesis in a comparative perspective, with a special interest in Islam and modernity in India and the cultural politics of Jewish identity in Western Europe. His areas of specialisation include: colonial and postcolonial literatures, with a primary focus on India and Britain, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Urdu literature in particular; Marxism and aesthetics; Frankfurt School critical theory; minority cultures; exile and displacement; refugees and the right to asylum; modernism and fascism; language conflicts; global English and the vernaculars; and the history of Anthropology. His most recent contribution to the study of secularism is a book, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton University Press). Current work includes two book projects—one concerning exile and criticism and the other, the colonial reinvention of Islamic traditions.

Christina Oesterheld

Christina Oesterheld is currently a senior lecturer in Urdu, South Asia Institute, Department of Modern Indology (Modern South Asian Languages and Literatures), University of Heidelberg. Dr Oesterheld speaks chaste Urdu without throwing in words of other languages in her speech. Born on October 22, 1952, in Germany, Dr Christina Oesterheld did her master's in Indology Urdu being the first language from the School of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin, in 1975. She then completed her PhD in Urdu literature from the same university in 1986 on Qurratulain Hyder's novels, *Mere bhi Sanamkhane*, *Aag ka Darya* and *Aakhir-i-Shab ke Hamsafar*. Her thesis is a study of their literary styles. Her main research interest is in Urdu fiction from the nineteenth century to the present. She has also translated Urdu short stories and poetry into German.

Geeta Patel

Geeta Patel is an Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Virginia. Her research has engaged with the politics, poetics, and economics of violence, loss, and transgression. Her book, from Stanford University Press, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: Gender, Colonialism and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry* (2002) focusing on a renegade writer, Miraji, reads gender and

sexuality in twentieth century Urdu poetic movements that emerge out of the lyric of loss. She has translated widely from prose and poetry composed in Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindi, Braj and Awadhi. Patel's most recent manuscripts on South Asia, Homeliness and its desserts : Rethinking Ismat Chughtai and Billboard Intimacies: Gendering the Global Nation are informed by queer/gender theory, political economy, postcolonial/diaspora/subaltern historiography, and crossover questions from cyborg feminism and physics. Her current project Insuring Selves, Assuring a Future: The Poetics of Finance (manuscript in progress) insurance, pensions, transnational capital, rights and state formations (from 1750-2002) in South Asia, works through gender to grapple with the liaisons between capital, subjectivity and loss.

Shahid Ali Syed

Shahid Ali Syed graduated from Punjab University in Lahore and is a Chartered Accountant by profession. He is a promoter of Urdu literature and an organiser of cultural activities. As the founder member of the Faiz Cultural Academy he has put together a number of international events to promote peace and cultural harmony with a particular emphasis on literature. One of these events was a two-day symposium held on Faiz in 1984 where Faiz himself also took part along with many other scholars from various countries. Shahid also launched the Urdu mushaira (poetry symposium) as an institution in the mainstream literary world. These mushairas were held in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1996 and 1997, during which legendary Urdu poets read their poetry. Both events attracted entrance-fee paying audiences in their hundreds. Beyond literature, he has also been involved in various voluntary organisations specifically dealing with running campaigns against racism and inhuman immigration and nationality laws.

Amina Yaqin

Amina Yaqin is lecturer in Urdu and Postcolonial Studies and Chair of the Centre for the Study of Pakistan at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). She has recently co-authored (with Peter Morey) Framing Muslims: stereotyping and representation after 9/11 (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011) and co-edited a special issue of Interventions entitled, 'Muslims in the Frame', July 2010, 12: 2. A co-edited volume Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing is in press with Routledge. She is currently working on her next project entitled, Imagining Pakistan.

