

Selections From Modern Urdu Poetry

MUNIR NIAZI

LET A FEW THINGS REMAIN UNSAID¹

Let a few things remain unsaid
Let a few things remain unheard

What shall be left if all is said?
What shall be left if all is heard?

Leave the bough heavy, unbloomed

In a colorful, uncreated world
Leave the window unopened

A PRAYER I HAD FORGOTTEN²

O Bird of Joy
Come to my abode, Fly!
Fly away from some tree

With your call of joy
Joyous let my house be

¹“Kuĉĥ Bātēñ An-kahī Rahnē Dō,” from the poet’s collection *Ĉhe Rañgīn Darvāzē*, in his *Kulliyāt-e Munir* (Lahore: Māvarā, 2005), 486.

²“Ēk Du‘ā jō Maiñ Bhūl Gayā Thā,” from the poet’s collection of the same name, in *ibid.*, 717.

Let the sorrowful city watch us
With joy and glee

PARVEEN SHAKIR

AFFECTION³

Spring's cloud held the flower
in its palms and
kissed its face
in such a way that all its tears
poured out as fragrance

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ

MEMORY⁴

In the wilderness of solitude, O dear one,
echo the shadows of your voice
the mirages of your lips

In the wilderness of solitude
among the dusty desiccated steps of distance,
bloom the fruit and roses of your arms

Ah, from nearness rises,
smoldered in its own scents,
the warmth of your breath, soft and faint

And upon the far horizons sparkle, drop by drop,
the falling dewdrops of your dear glance

³"Pyār," from the poet's collection *Khushbū* (Islamabad: Murād Publikēshanz, 1994), 33.

⁴"Yād," from the poet's collection *Kalām-e Faiẓ* (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1994), 158.

With such tenderness, dearest,
 your memory's palm so touches my heart's visage
 that although it is the morn of separation
 I dare to think it is the night of union, already

WHEN IN YOUR OCEAN EYES⁵

This shore of sunlight on
 The slopes of evening,
 This meeting of times:
 Not day or night
 Not today or tomorrow—
 In a moment eternal, in a moment fume

Moments on this shore of light—
 The spark of lips
 The clink of arms—
 Our intimacies,
 Not lies, not truths

Why should I secret this, why should I blame?
 For what should I lie:

When in your ocean eyes
 This evening's sun shall set

The home shall find its sleep
 And the traveler will walk his way

QUATRAIN⁶

No image, no word
 Nothing now, said or heard
 Not even some comforting deception—

⁵"Jab Tērī Samandar Āñkhōñ mēñ," in *ibid.*, 321–22.

⁶"Qif'a," in *ibid.*, 292.

And the longing is prolonged:

Beloved's yearning, the eagerness of sight, the color of
pain
Let's keep silent tonight, for the heart is sad

EXTRACT⁷

Those shadows shimmering around the distant lamps:
Who knows if these are assemblies of pain or
gatherings of wine and drink

Those scattered colors on every wall, every door:
The distance doesn't divulge
if these are petals or blood

HABIB JALIB

DANCE OF CHAINS⁸

You, alas unbeknown to you,
the etiquettes of slavery:
You can dance, even in chains

Rebel woman! Today on the killing field,
the executioner demands that you perform death's
dance:
And for the world, you shall be whipped to dance

Thus tyranny's tribute is paid
and you can dance, even in chains

⁷From the poem "Yahān sē Shehr Dēkhō," from the poet's collection *Sar-e Vādiy-e Sīnā*, in his *Nuskhahā-e Vafā* (Lahore: Maktaba'-e Kārvān, 1984), 399–400.

⁸"Raḡs-e Zanjīr (Gīt)," in *Kulliyāt-e Ḥabīb Jalīb* (Lahore: al-Ḥamd Pablikē-shanz, 1996), 13–14.

Dare! Lift those feet! Don't plead or bow!
What others shall do tomorrow, you must do now:
Dance for freedom, dance till death

For the limit of love is living by deaths
And you can dance, even in chains

N. M. RASHED

OVERTURE⁹

Aye Death,
Here, meet these people,
Artless people

People
Not of the book
nor of wine

People
Not of letters
nor of numbers

Nor the letters—

People
Not of books
nor of machines

Not of space
nor of the world

People of doubt

Death, do not veil yourself!
Death, meet these people!

⁹“Ta‘āruḥ,” in *Lā=Insān* (Lahore: al-Miṣāl, 1969), 76–77.

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Step up! You all as well!
Greet Death!
Step up with your beggary
Step up don't hide your mercy bowls
You have nothing left to say for life
Laugh of Death! Laugh with Death!
Step up! You people of the world,
Step up! People of possession!

Death, all these men are negatives
Greater negatives, lesser men
Upon them look with favor!

—*Translated by Bilal Tanweer*