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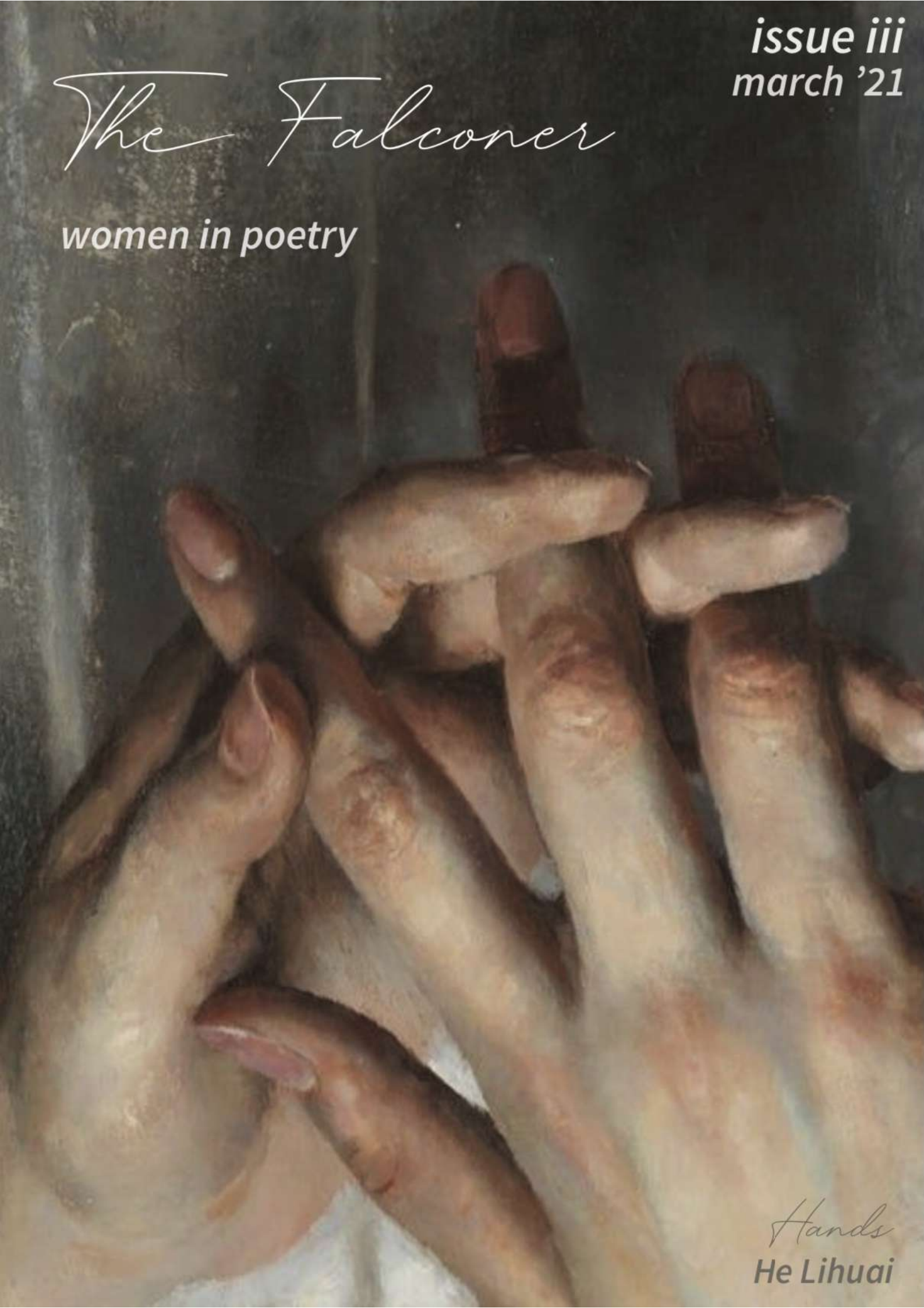
The Falconer

women in poetry



Hands
He Lihuai

From the Sub-Editor's Desk

For as long as I can remember, poetry has held the power to enthral me completely. Even as a child, something about the rhyme and rhythm, the adjectives and images, always tugged at my heartstrings. More than anything else, poetry has held the sheer power of inducing within one an inescapable sense of singularity – that we all are one people, and all our experiences are one and the same. But to me, the oneness that I experienced was always incomplete. It was a fact known to all- poetry always meant Ghalib, Dard, Mir, Faiz, and Faraz. It meant the intricately woven rhyme of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Frost. It never occurred to me that I was only reading from the perspectives of men. Not only that, it was written from the perspectives of men who I had little to nothing in common with, and the experiences that I related to were mere figments of their imagination – an arbitrary approximation of my womanhood. When I did realize this, a dichotomy bloomed – male poetry versus female poetry. The identity crisis that then ensued has yet to find its resolution.

But where were the women?

The answer to this question I only understood when I had to scour for the collections of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, but found only the Complete Works of Shakespeare, Browning, and the Romantics to be readily available. It was then that I realized – the women were right there all along. They were just buried under a mountain of anthologies that only glorified men and their verse.

Whenever I talk about women and feminism, the usual reaction that I receive is my dismissal as a mere "reactionary" voice. I am told that in trying to end misogyny, I am giving into misandry. But that is not true. I understand the importance of Homer's Iliad and Shakespeare's Sonnets. I admire Wordsworth with the same fervour that I read Emily Dickinson with. But the fact remains - that much of our collective progress lies in reclaiming the representation that we have been subjected to; that we have been told is the universal feminine experience yet comes primarily from men.

I like Keats' Isabella, but she is no Aunt Jennifer. I understand why Proud Maisie, that in the woods danced, went into the dateless night so tragically,

but the fact remains the same- I do not identify with her like I identify with Lady Lazarus.

What we are then trying to do with this issue is reconcile the Poetic with the Feminine - *Women in Poetry*. The issue includes poems by poetesses from the East and the West, women writers and their universal predicament, and the experiences of women in our midst. We recognize the power men and women, in the domain of poetry and outside of it, collectively hold and how that should remain so, but this issue focuses primarily on the women who are shunned to the peripheries while men stand at the very center of the stage. Women that we otherwise believe to be impulsive, hysterical, and overly emotional. This is us reclaiming the masculinized feminine voice.

With this, we give you the third instalment of The Falconer, wherein we probe into the archetype of the Vamp and the Victim, and expand from within, in hopes that people of the department would understand the running need of such a discourse, as well as stand in solidarity with the female poets that never wrote.

Zonera Asim, Sub-Editor (2nd Year, Morning)

Women in the Primary: Patriarchy, Partition, and Poets

At the mention of Urdu poets of the twentieth century, one gets reminded of the popular names like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Meeraji, Habib Jalib, Nand, and the likes. These poets are canonical in every sense of the word. And as the tradition of the literary canon goes, they are all men. One cannot help but wonder: *were there no women writing poetry against the chaotic backdrop of the partition then?*

Up until the beginning of the 20th century, writing, particularly poetry, was largely limited to men. Naturally, women had no business in it. Regardless, women still wrote. They continued to produce brilliant verses from within their twenty-foot courtyards. Some chose to hide away their art in the worn-out *pallus* of their stained *saaris*; others would hide their poems away at the very sound of the evening doorbell. This is not to say that there were no women who got published, but not without compromising on their feminine identity in an otherwise *man's world*. Zahida Khatoon Shervaniya, for instance, published her poetry by her initials ز خ ش (*Ze Khe Sheen*).

Poetry, in one of its traditional forms, *ghazal*, was used as a means to marvel at the ideal of feminine beauty; to express the longing for one's beloved and to cry over their infidelities. Transformed into mere objects that the poets loved and adored, women in these ghazals were devoid of any real personality. Another form of poetry, *Rekhti*, which emerged and gained popularity in the 19th century, had a more *liberated* expression of women's desires. And although it carried within itself the persona of a female, it was still written by men and through the somewhat narrow lens of their understanding of womanhood. Naturally, it reflected only what men thought women felt at the time. What *they* thought women wanted. How the patriarchy saw, or rather *wanted* to, see things.

Sajid Sajni, in one of his Rekhti couplet, writes:

طلاق دے تو رہے ہو عتاب و قہر کے ساتھ
مرا شباب بھی لوٹا دو میری مہر کے ساتھ

As time went by and chaos started stirring up in the subcontinent, a number of poets masterfully expressed the political and social turmoil – the uncertainty, the chaos raging on along with all the destruction, barbarism, abuse, killings, and the endless bloodbath following the partition. We get, on gold-gilded platters as our heritage, only a man's view of our history.

Subh-e-Azadi by Faiz , *Yahan Bhi Wahan Bhi* by Nida Fazli and *Azadee* by Mehjoor could be the most popular, but are certainly not the only great pieces of partition poetry. Filled with the same agony, if not with more poise and intensity, is Amrita Pritam's ode, *To Waris Shah*.

اج آکھاں وارث شاہ نوں، کتھوں قبراں وچوں بول
تے اج کتابِ عشق دا کوئی اگلا ورقہ پَھول
اک روئی سی دھی پنجاب دی، تُوں لکھ لکھ مارے وین
اج لکھاں دھیاں روندیاں، تینوں وارث شاہ نوں کہن
اُٹھ درد منداں دیا دردیا، اُٹھ ویکھ اپنا پنجاب
اج بیلے لاشاں وچھیاں تے لہو دی بھری چناب

Zeb Usmania, on the other hand, writes about peace and love

ہم صلح و مروت کا جب ہاتھ بڑھا دینگے
ایک عمر کے روٹھوں کو آپس میں ملا دینگے

Zehra Nigaah, one of the many talented poets and winner of several awards including Pride of Performance, in her poem, *Suna Hai,* has captured the uncertainty and desperation – the running urgency of the times, by comparing the system to the "laws of the jungle" in a way that is simple and straightforward, but in equal parts as moving as any other poem written at that time.

سنا ہے جنگلوں کا بھی کوئ دستور ہوتا ہے
خداوند! جلیل و معتبر! دانا و بینا منصف و اکبر
میرے اس شہر میں اب جنگلوں کا ہی کوئ قانون نافظ کر

Ada Jafri, who became the first female voice of the subcontinent, wrote poetry in a way that is unarguably soft but stabs like a two-sided dagger. She rebelled against the norms but also stuck with the traditional style in poetry all the same. Perhaps her most celebrated verse is:

ہونٹوں پہ کبھی انکے مرا نام ہی آئے
آئے تو سہی بر سرِ الزام ہی آئے

Another beautiful couplet by Ada Jafri:

جس کی باتوں کے فسانے لکھے
اس نے تو کچھ نہ کہا تھا شاید

As the years went by, more and more women started entering the male-dominated *primary* of Urdu poetry. They addressed more serious issues, even those which were traditionally considered taboo - issues such as relationships, sexism, discrimination, consent, etc.
As Bilqis Zafarul Khan writes:

خود پہ یہ ظلم گوارا نہیں ہوگا ہم سے
ہم تو شعلوں سے نہ گزریں گے نہ سیتا سمجھیں

Parveen Shakir, one of the most celebrated poets, had a very distinctive, passionate and expressive way with her poetry. Topics like love, compassion and feminism can be found in her poetry.

اس کے یوں ترکِ محبت کا سبب ہوگا کوئ
جی نہیں مانتا وہ بے وفا پہلے سے تھا

Though her diction is quite simple, her words- in their clarity- resonate with the reader for a long time

میں سچ کہوں گی مگر پھر بھی ہار جاؤں گی
وہ جھوٹ بولے گا اور لاجواب کر دے گا

Running against their pre-decided fates as women and poets, these were the pioneers who stood up and unshackled their feet. They defied the rules that othered them and published their writings. Not only did these poetesses speak of their fundamental rights - the right to speak and the right to be heard – they snatched them from the clutches of patriarchy. Today, we remember the likes of Ada Jafri, Zehra Nigaah, Parveen Shakir, Fehmida Riaz, Zeb Usmania, and their contributions to Urdu literature. We remember them for their passion, poise, and poetry. Most importantly, however, we remember them for their refusal to be forgotten.

زخم کو پھول کہیں نوحے کو نغمہ سمجھیں
اتنے سادہ بھی نہیں ہم کہ اتنا نہ سمجیں

Emily Dickinson and the Rise of The Medusa

Fareha Bangash (4th Year, Morning)

There are plenty of great poets that we remember, but Emily Dickinson is one of the names that sticks out as the most prominent. Often heralded as the greatest woman poet in the English language, the first volume of her poetry was published posthumously in the last decade of the 19th century, and it was met with stunning success. Her works had a huge impact on the Second Wave of Feminism in 1969. The consciousness of her feminism is reflected consummately in the themes that she explores – death, life, nature, love, and marriage.

Similar to writers such as Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dickinson crafted a new type of persona in her work. The speakers in Dickinson's poetry, like those in Brontë's and Browning's works, are sharp-sighted observers who see the inescapable limitations of their societies as well as their imagined escapes. For instance, in the following poem by Dickinson:

They shut me up in Prose –

As when a little Girl

They put me in the Closet –

Because they liked me "still" –

It is a very rebellious poem – a piece that instantly grips you. In the time when Dickinson used to write, it was considered that in order to write poetry a person needed to have a high intellectual level which women were devoid of and only men possessed. Therefore, only men were supposed to write poetry. Her poem, *A Solemn Thing*, criticizes the social framework in which Dickinson, as a woman, was expected to live. She sees it as too limited and restrictive.

In the context of other nineteenth-century women poets and the feminist tendencies of their works, Dickinson and contemporaries like Lydia Sigourney, Louisa May Alcott, and Helen Hunt Jackson developed in their writing a rhetoric of duplicity that enabled them to question conventional values but still maintain the propriety necessary to achieve publication. But Emily was not writing for publication. In her own words, 'Publication is the Auction'. She differed from other female poets in her refusal to allow her

work to be published. Mainly because she wrote about matters most did not venture to talk about, and being a highly sensitive introvert, Dickinson seemed to live in fear of being noticed.

Dickinson crafted a new and powerful means of expression that was unique and original. She stepped out of the conventional investigative grids of poetic art and experimented with a variety of metrical and stanzaic forms. Dickinson's employment of Slant rhyme was not common at that time, as it is common in modern poetry. While 'I Taste a liquor ever brewed –' illustrates her devotion to rhyme, it also shows her maverick disregard for it. One of Dickinson's special gifts is to describe abstract ideas with concrete images.

Late 19th century was a time when women were actively searching for more "literary" ways of self-expression. The demand for spontaneity and sincerity from female authors, and the devaluation of experimentation and craft, were the ever-present barriers in front of Dickinson. But her spirit to generate and write in her own expression was unwavering.

Dickinson's work is at once enigmatic and accessible: you can keep tunnelling through it for years, and yet not catch the gist of it. Her unusual use of language has been taken as a precursor of modern poetic style. In many ways, she was truly the "breaker of automatisms" that Cixuous talked about only a few decades later – a true Medusa.

In Conversation with Miss Nishat Wasim: Poetry, Publication, and the Problem with the Contemporary Poets.

Thank you for sitting down with us for this. Since this month's theme is *Women and Poetry*, we thought it would be great for the students of the

department to get to know you outside of the classroom - as a published poet. To start off, were you always into poetry or is it something that you developed a passion for over the years?

I had always enjoyed reading poetry, but I only started writing it after I came to KU. One of my mentors perhaps saw something in me, and he suggested that I should try my hand at writing. He introduced me to the works of Daud Kamal, one of the first Pakistani writers to have garnered international attention for his English poetry, and that turned out to be the driving force for me. It was at this point that I started writing. I have since written regularly, so to say. I do have periods of dormancy, where I do not feel like I have the inspiration to write. Sometimes that takes days or a few weeks, other times it goes for years on end. But I believe reading helps, especially serious poetry. All it takes sometimes is a word or an image – it just clicks.

You have been teaching poetry for over 15 years now. Do you think your time here has helped you hone your craft?

It definitely has. I started writing poetry in a simple manner, no intricate meter or rhyme pattern, more of a personal response; and while that has remained generally unchanged, I believe I have grown a lot as a writer since then. For instance, whatever poet that I am teaching, I find myself borrowing a few words and phrases from them. It is quite natural for writers to do that, I believe. Readers are always influenced by the writers that they read and admire, albeit unconsciously. That is how we grow and develop our own poetic style.

But between teaching and other responsibilities, that we can only assume must keep you busy for the greater part of the day, has it been hard for you to scramble for the time to sit and read or write?

It is hard for everyone, I believe, writer or not, to find *me-time* when they are so preoccupied with the daily grind of life. For a long time, I had to prioritize other things over poetry. It was very hard for me to sit down and give poetry my undivided attention. But for the last four years, since my daughter's marriage and the natural procession of passivity that is normal for life after one's children have all grown up, I have been writing more. Before

that, it would sometimes take me years to complete one poem on average. It now takes me only a few weeks if I have the overall foundation laid.

You said that writers are influenced by the poets that they read and admire. Who are the poets that have influenced you and your individual poetic style?

I would say the Romantics, especially Coleridge. I have always loved him. I also feel the influence of Keats in my works, some phrases or images. But beyond that, I do not think I can pinpoint any one poet who has had the greatest impact. I think, for me, it changes with time. Whichever poet that I am teaching, I can see a silent reflection of their art in mine.

Most of the English poetry that we admire today comes from male poets. Up until a century or so ago, there were scarcely any female poets in the mainstream. Naturally, then, we see that most of these poems are largely androcentric in nature. Even the poems that have female personas carry a tinge of that innate masculine touch. As a woman, how has that impacted your reading, understanding, and writing of poetry?

Well, we are taught poetry that is written primarily by men because poetry was considered to be a discipline only for them. We scarcely see any poems by female poets in the anthologies that we commonly use. With the exception of Dickinson, I do not think we read any other female poets when I was a student here either. So yes, I do traverse through poetry from a woman's perspective and my experiences do define it. But beyond that, I do not think it has influenced my expression as such. I would not say I am overtly feminist, so I think that is one reason. I have always enjoyed relative freedom to exercise my faculties. At the end of the day, we do live in a patriarchal society, so one always has to work within that frame. You will have to read my poetry to see if I have that female voice, I guess.

On that note, let us talk a bit about your work. We see that today, with the rise in social media promotions, self-publication has become an

effective alternative to the tedious process of traditional publishing. We can only assume that things were different 20 years ago. What was it like getting published for the first time back then?

It was incredibly hard. There were virtually no resources as such. We did have a literary section in Dawn where their contemporaries would publish a poem or two, but even that has been removed since. I think it is still not easy, if not harder. Yes, self-publication is comparatively easier and most writers, even the established poets who have garnered an organic following internationally, go for it now. But I feel that the problem is not with publication per se, people generally do not read poetry anymore. It is a dying art. It does not sell. In countries like the UK, you still have poet laureates and all that, so you know a little about the current poets. It is different in Pakistan. We do not have any such categories, and there is virtually no recognition whatsoever. I was lucky enough to hear about the Oxford anthology back in 1997 and sent in some of my poems. They must have liked them. But even then, you had to have contacts to get published. It was quite disillusioning.

But at the same time, we see writers like Rupi Kaur publishing one book after the other. This wave of Instagram poetry has, according to some analysts, revived poetry to some extent. But should this be considered poetry? We see in the works of Rupi Kaur and her likes, a complete break from the continued poetic tradition. Do you think, at a time when serious poets are struggling to stay afloat, the amount of Instagram poetry that is being published is a good step forward?

Rupi Kaur writes what we call popular poetry. Her art is simple. Accessible. It is in no way literary or serious, and does not move the reader – a serious reader at least. From what I have read of her work, I find it to be quite average at best. It may be that we are too highbrow as literature teachers, yes. Maybe people are coming to accept this form of poetry as the new benchmark. These things change with time. But in my opinion, we have become too superficial to care about good poetry, so it has equally to do with the consumers of poetry. A full understanding of art requires the reader to meet the artist halfway, which we have stopped doing. We read three or four

lines of this new form of poetry and that is it. We do not want to put in any effort, so this new wave of poetry is ideal for us. As for the tradition of poetry, I guess we will just have to wait and see. Whether Rupi Kaur will die out or become the new pioneer, only time can tell. But I do hope she does not stay on for long. It is not a very high benchmark.

Definitely. To sum it up, would you like to offer any advice to your students who write poetry and aspire to get published one day?

Read. That is one thing you will get from most teachers of poetry and literature in general. You know the saying, good readers make good writers, so read. It helps to see what has been said and done. Again, you never know when an image or a phrase might click. As for publishing, I will let you know once I have figured it out myself. Self-publication is always an option. There are publishers in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. Big names today get published through them, so we know what they are good for.

The shrill cry was music to my ears.

By Nishat Wasim

The shrill cry was music to my ears.
You lay on my chest-
skin to skin-
my heart overwhelmed with joy
love, like I had never known before
enveloped me.

As I gently stroked the silky soft thatch
tenderly trailing my fingers
over your eyes, cheeks and lips
your tiny fist grasped my finger

In that moment
time stopped
the world faded
there was only love.

History of English: Poetry in 23 Women

Sappho (610 - 580 B.C.E.)
Again love, the limb-loosener, rattles me
bittersweet,
irresistible,
a crawling beast.

Ono no Komachi (825 - 900)
In my desolation
I am as duckweed:
Cut my roots and
Take me away-would the water do it,
I should go, I think.

Marie de France (about 1160 - 1190)

They are cowardly dogs that bite,
mean, malicious, and full of spite.
But I refuse to be deterred as,
line by line and word by word,
I do my best to compose my lay,
whatever the jealous critics say.

Vittoria Colonna (1490 - 1547)
I feed me hourly with the heavenly dew,
And with my falling tears refresh the root.
Thou saidst, and thou art truth, thou 'dst with me be:
Then willing come, that I mav bear much fruit,
And worthy of the stock on which it grew.

Isabella Whitney (1548 - 1624)
So fare thou well a thousand times,
God sheelde thee from thy foe:
And styll make thee victorious,
of those that seeke thy woe.

Mary Sidney Herbert (1561 - 1621)
Thy testimonies as mine heritage,
I have retained still:
And unto them my heart's delight engage,
My heart which still doth bend,
And only bend to do what thou dost will,
And do it to the end.

Anne Bradstreet (1612 - 1672)
There's wealth enough, I need no more,
Farewell, my pelf, farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

Zeb-un-Nisa / Makhfi (1638 - 1701)
I turn to flee, but fall; for over me he casts his snare,
Thy perfumed hair.

Who can escape thy prison? No mortal heart is free
From dreams of Thee.

Phillis Wheatley (about 1753 - 1784)

So shall the labours of the day begin
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.
Night's leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,
Then cease, my song, till fair Aurora rise.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 - 1861)

Our blood splashes upward, O our tyrants,
And your purple shews your path ;
But the child's sob curseth deeper in the silence
Than the strong man in his wrath !

The Brontë Sisters (1816 - 1855)

Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers,
From those brown hills, have melted into spring:
Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!

Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886)

Wild nights - Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Christina Rosetti (1830 - 1894)

Talk what you please of future spring
And sun-warm'd sweet to-morrow:—
Stripp'd bare of hope and everything,
No more to laugh, no more to sing,
I sit alone with sorrow.

Toru Dutt (1856 - 1877)

Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;

Sarojini Naidu (1879 - 1949)

What are the sins of my race, Beloved,
what are my people to thee?
And what are thy shrines, and kine and kindred,
what are thy gods to me?

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks (1917 - 2000)

And if sun comes
How shall we greet him?
Shall we not dread him,
Shall we not fear him
After so lengthy a
Session with shade?

Maki Kureishi (1927 – 1995)

We are bodies of passers-by
Flung about like toys.
Starved out of besieged homes
Gunned down
By killers who are half-machine
And pray five times.

Anne Sexton (1928 - 1974)

I have ridden in your cart, driver,
waved my nude arms at villages going by…
A woman like that is not ashamed to die.
I have been her kind.

Maya Angelou (1928 - 2014)

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Sylvia Plath (1932 - 1963)

Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle,
Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.

Thirty years now I have labored
To dredge the silt from your throat.
I am none the wiser.

Kamala Surayya (1934 - 2009)
You and I are big flops.
We are too sentimental
For our own
Good.
Lights are moving on the shore.
But I shall not return.
Sea, toss my body back
That he knew how to love.

Audre Lorde (1934 - 1992)
I have been woman
for a long time
beware my smile
I am treacherous with old magic
and the noon's new fury.

Joyce Carol Oates (1938 –)
the telephone answered on the twelfth ring:
silence without breath, cunning, stark.
and then he hangs up.
and you stand there, alone.
then you forget.

Who Killed Porphyria?

Manal Fatmi (3rd Year, Evening)

When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;

Last year, amidst the static of a not-entirely-stable internet connection, I had heard these words read out to my class in the booming, if not physically distant voice of my teacher. This was not a normal class; KU had just started online learning - an endeavour that despite being embarked upon steadily, was miles away from perfection. Between the static cracks in his voice, and the fight that my siblings were having in the room beside mine, I felt something inside me shift. *Turn*. *Rumble*. With the blink of an eye, months had passed me by, yet the enigma of Porphyria's lover remained. In the way that even the most tumultuous of storms come to pass, however, Porphyria, along with her megalomaniac lover, had melted away into some dark recess of my mind; dissipated, yet not entirely gone. It was only after a couple of months had passed, when I heard from my friend (a chirpy, friendly fourth year student) that her research paper was going to be about Porphyria herself, that I let myself sink deeper, only to find myself be consumed by Porphyria- and Porphyria alone.

This consummation was never going to be an easy process. I suppose my prior agitations with the poem had partly been a result of me foregoing the subject of Browning's poem entirely. I saw, as most second year students of literature do- only the demented lover who told her 'story.' After reading my friend's research paper, which applies features of The Medusa Complex on Porphyria and hypothesizes that she suffers "from a temporary stupefaction of the senses," which ultimately results in her death; I had what you could call a severe crisis of faith. All this time, I had been viewing the ever-pliant Porphyria only in relation to her lover. I had no idea who Porphyria was; what she wanted, or the voice that she could have had. Throughout the course of the poem, she utters not a single word, yet it is her actions that paint the picture of a woman; as equally nuanced as her lover, albeit eternally silenced and confined to the coldness of the cottage that she brings temporary warmth to.

The next step for me was to decipher who Porphyria was, without her lover. *Could Porphyria even exist without her lover?* It was only after some time that I realized that Porphyria, like so many faceless women and muses in her time, was, and continues to be, marked by an absence, rather than a presence. Having said that, however, despite being an obvious source of gratification for her nameless lover-cum-murderer, Porphyria, for all her pliancy, embodies an indescribable quality that keeps the reader intrigued and possessed. Perhaps it might have been unintentional, or perhaps it is exactly as Browning imagined it to be - Porphyria, in her many absences, lives on. It is a strange existence, but it is one that I have found myself relating to on several occasions. From pitying Porphyria to being consumed by her mystery, to relating to her misery - it is in the vacant spaces and questions between the lines of *Porphyria's Lover*, that I have found myself the chance to lament the loss of Porphyria's identity. Today, I wonder - was this loss a result of a man writing a woman; or is Porphyria, much like the lover who cradles her dead body, inextricably tied to the tragedy of a great, and doomed love? The answer, much like Porphyria, remains unvoiced.

In Conversation with Miss Aamna Motala: Women in Poetry

Sabika Hassan (3rd year, Evening)

Pertaining to our theme of 'Women in Poetry,' and the fact that you are our poetry teacher, we wanted to ask you of your inspiration in writing poetry. In your classes, you often discuss the idea of the *Muse* - do you have a muse?

If I'm being honest, the idea of having a muse seems completely foreign to me personally. I write poetry rarely, and when I do, I am not writing with purpose, or thinking of any *muse.* In fact, when I do finally pick up the pen with the intent to write a poem, I am only thinking of myself and the world around me. In other words, the world as I see it. As a woman, I feel that my perspective towards the world alters in uncountable ways and writing poetry serves as an immaculate means to express that ever-changing tumult.

As students of poetry, we have all come across the term "female poetic voice". I remember reading about it in an article once, which was followed by comments of faceless men, claiming that the "female poetic voice" was nothing more than a sham. While it may be foolish to pay heed to anonymous comments left on the internet, we believe that this, in itself, is a topic worth exploring. Do you believe in the female poetic voice? If yes, then how is it different from the general poetic voice and attitude?

The way I see it, the most basic definition of poetry for me is self-expression. If you think about it, women today have so many restraints on

them, so many expectations, so many burdens, that expression becomes a privilege not everyone can enjoy. I have seen women at home, at workplaces, outside and in professional places, that just put up a masculine face to battle those biases and stereotypes. Even women at home are not given the space to express themselves for a multitude of reasons.

So, I believe that when a woman sits down to write poetry, that is going to be her single, most authentic, outlet for self-expression, and a lot of female writers do that. They express themselves, their identity; and this may or may not be a feminist identity, but it is indeed an identity that is personal to them. When this identity cannot be expressed in any other way, it comes out in poetry and that form is called the 'female poetic voice'. To call it a sham is absurd to me because we are all using poetry as an outlet here and that may be a man or a woman, since everyone has a right to self-expression here. I remember reading a very obscure poem by Emily Dickinson once:

They shut me up in Prose –
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet –
Because they liked me "still" –

I think this poem perfectly describes the binary between prose as something 'masculine' and poetry as something 'feminine'. The line about stillness is one that I feel brilliantly captures that essence of being able to express yourself freely in poetry. If this is not a female poetic voice at work, then what else could it possibly be?

Taking into account the recent spike of "insta poetry", with poets like Rupi Kaur outselling Homer, who have garnered global acclaim for themselves. How do you think the surge of insta-poetry paves the path for poetry in future?

My first reaction to insta-poetry had been of disgust. Disgust in the sense that as students of literature, we are trying to look in the forms of poetries that we have studied, even in blank verse and free verse, some structure and balance. Although insta-poetry claims to be formless and accessible, it does

limit itself to the standard 4x4 form. The poem, for all of its accessibility, still needs to be able to fit onto a mobile screen and needs to be instantly "clickable."

However, beyond that initial distaste, we must realize that insta-poetry has gained a momentum and it is appealing to the masses more than Homer might today. Not everyone links with and understands *The Iliad* nowadays and that is completely fine. Even in Pakistan, insta-poetry is on the rise with poets like Noor Unnahar publishing several collections. One argument in favour of insta-poetry is that at least people are reading *something*. While I do believe that the distinction between reading good literature and insta poetry is one that we need to acknowledge, I do not think that conventional poetry is in any way threatened by this new wave of poetry. I suppose the comparison is a lot like the comparison between CDs and Vinyl's. While CDs have made music a lot more accessible to the masses, there are still a lot of people who would prefer to listen to their records in the Vinyl form.

As a female who consumes poetry, how do you feel that this consumption has altered your outlook on poetry as a whole?

Yes, reading poetry has definitely changed my outlook on life and the world as a whole. I would give credit to both male and female poets for that. Sometimes the simplest forms and simplest lines just stick in your mind and just reach out to your heart. A single verse repeats in your mind in a different context. There's a poem by Kaleem Umar – Love it. It is my favourite poem and there is this repeating line, "it will not do". Just that one line echoes in my mind all the time. Whenever I see some injustice, or something wrong happening in the world, that line, like an old familiar face, flashes in my mind.

Who would you say are your favourite female poets?

There are so many. Emily Dickinson, Alys Faiz, Anna Akhmatova— but, I guess, I especially enjoy Akhmatova. She was a Russian poetess and I have read many of her translated works. I remember during last year's lockdown, when I had hit an all-time low, I would just lie in bed and read one collection of poetry after another. I suppose poetry has a healing power like that, it makes that dark place in your mind somewhat habitable – even comfortable.

As a teacher of poetry, do you have any advice for your students? Or any words of wisdom to students who write poetry?

I'll answer that with an example. When 'The Wasteland' by T.S Elliot was first published, another version was published with all the annotations that showed what the poetry was referred to. I did not give the students that annotated version when studying this poem because I wanted the students to learn to interpret the poem and gain some meaning from it. When you study a poem, try to approach it as a human first, and as a student next. Let the words sit with you for a while before you dissect the syllables and rhymes for any meaning at all.

As for those who write poetry, I would like to suggest that sit and let all the ideas flow to your head. Try to sit with what you are feeling before rushing to express it. Good poetry comes "naturally as leaves to a tree," but before picking up the pen, gain some insight into what it is that you're feeling. In other words, ask yourself: *What am I actually trying to tell myself?*

The English Department's Original: Women in Poetry

Roses smell like death,
Like white, the color of the end.

The gradual sense of blackness around,
I hope you go gently through the white noise.
The night song of ravens in daylight turned,
I hope you slumber gentle into the rusted poise.
The orphic cynicism of my aesthetic mind,
I hope they embellish you well; the inordorous garlands of your sweet demise.
The tedious compassion of my pint yearning wilted,
I hope you rest well among the golden gates and these silver lies.
The December of all the lost autumn and all the worlds upon snowed,
I hope you stay well among all the purples, oranges, and howbeit my blues.

For our soul hues within white in the end,
And our death scents of roses withereth.

Syeda Soha Irfan (3rd Year, Evening)

Watching them dancing on screen
I smile for all the things I couldn't be
From yearning to fly to gathering leaves
None saw an ending, now I weep
Laughs that break glasses
Tears that curve gravity
I remember last Friday
I walked abreast a cold breeze

Standing on the green barefoot
The blue spreads before me
Eyes catch the fish swaying
Whispers that mourn
Oh, we forgot the baits back home
The orange slithers away
I squint, ease my tears
to roll down, create a ripple effect
Unwrinkled, the surface remains
Its reflection in my eyes, mine's in its
Who's who? Together we exclaim

Ayemun Imran (3rd Year, Evening)

Their accusations hurled at her

Like hail in a blizzard
She tried to raise her voice
But the *cacophony*

Every effort of hers
Her heart bled
Her soul lost
Because they couldn't see
Beyond the covers of the book
Shattered dreams and stifled screams
And all that she saw with her open eyes
Bore witness to those stressed nights

Once more she tried to raise her voice
Above the loud calls
But the defiant ones
Drowned her mews

She's not above begging
For she is the rightful heir
To the symphonies she hears.
Let us not tear, out of the fear
Of sirens calling and spirits falling
Followed by utter brawling

Her ambitions drive her to her pleasure
Grab a firm hold of your treasure
They may not see it
But your heart knows it

So hang on you must
For letting go of your dreams,
Will find you falling
Down, down, down
Into the deepest depths

Khansa Irfan (2nd Year, Morning)