palimpsest

a manuscript page, either from a scroll or a book, from which the text has been scraped or washed off in preparation for reuse in the form of another document.

Parchment was made of lamb, calf, or goat skin and was expensive and not readily available, so, in the interest of economy, a page was often re-used by scraping off the previous writing.

Nunc videamus dicitur uer quod signis
omnibus refulgere dicunt et
omnium ceteris luminibus et impe-
rat polorum et lune orbe fulgere
et uersus omnibus planetis signis
adpropinquat hoc autem greca uox
dicitur ΑΠΟΤΥΑΣΤΑΤ Idest
uniendo et quod et propinquia et
adversa et multum pungit Cretem autem
signum uocant Ideo primum autem
uocatur quod ita fuerit dictum

Primum Librum

In astris et Cretes appellantur
ubi nigra nubes et procellae et
imbres sunt. Iuxta eum Cretum
quod dicitur est. et Boreas mur
uolucris Cretes appellat cum nimis
tumescit. unde In ipso uolue
bitur in consulatu hunc autem
Cretes appellamus primum cum de
pecus uel numeramus aliquando
dicimus quales sint. aliquando
quales sint Alter locutus
inquit uidebuntur et signis et

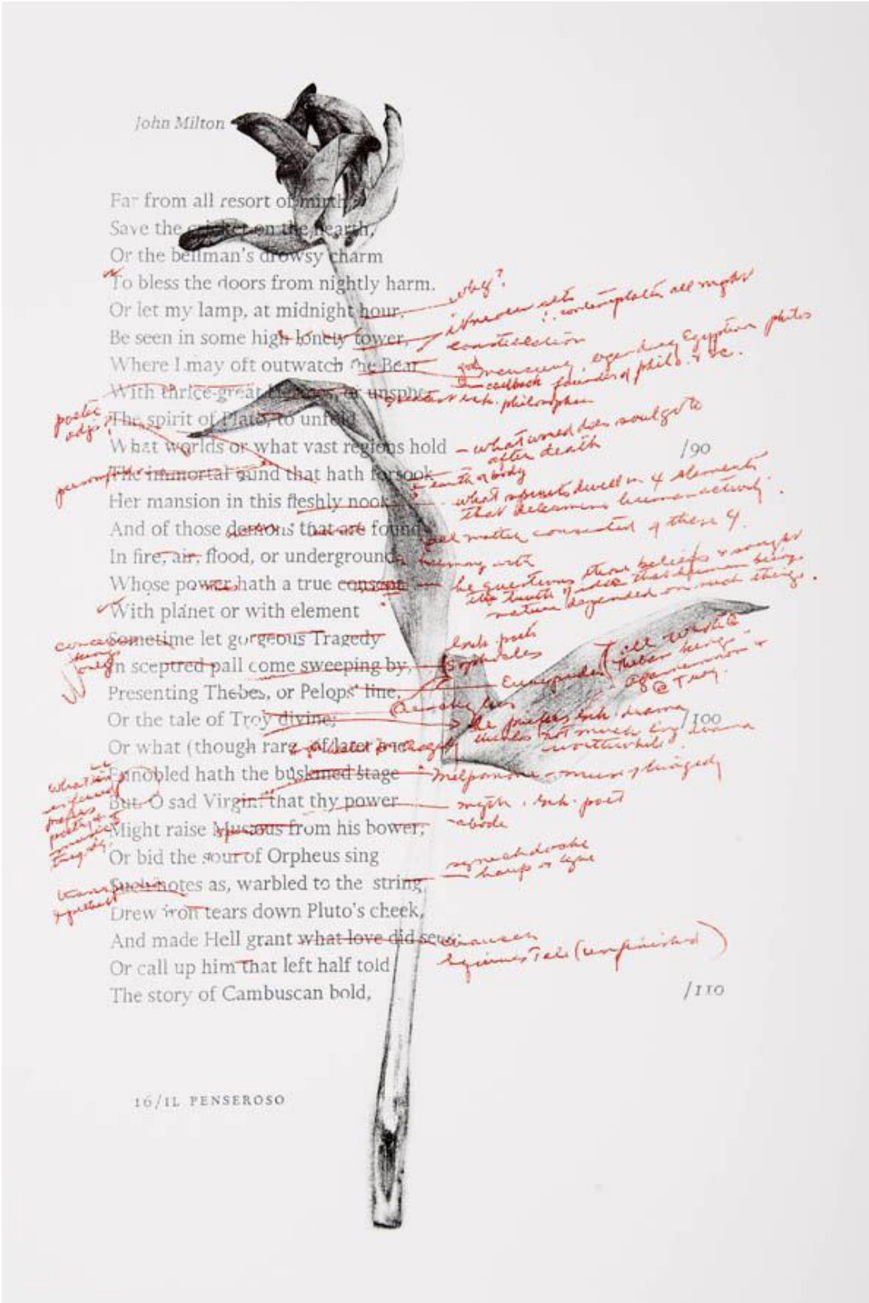
cum signis. quia ad ortum mundi tunc
dum pertinent sunt et stellae. Igitur
et limites et stellae et polus et ursae
et reliquos gyrant

Super Cretes dicta. et quod ipse et ipsum
pertinent sunt. sic et et quae quae et
uolubilia et Super uero dicitur
silua quae obstantes in ipsa. Nimpho
rophidicus Cretes in pertinent
mundi et ceteris omnibus omnibus
quales sint Ideo autem dicunt
mundi mole ipsum

Hunc obedientiam et commotus fuerit
in eo parte ubi ipse uirgo sidebat
Cum uirgo sedentibus bipennifer
luxta curdines inquiebat

Axis et sedentibus in eo parte quae medium
silum pertinet et dicitur axis
quia uertitur et uolitur ad ipsum
curdines et quod ipse uertitur Cete
olysus Cum aliquid currunt et axem hoc
et sedentibus et mutatur ipsum quomodo
appellatur et boreas

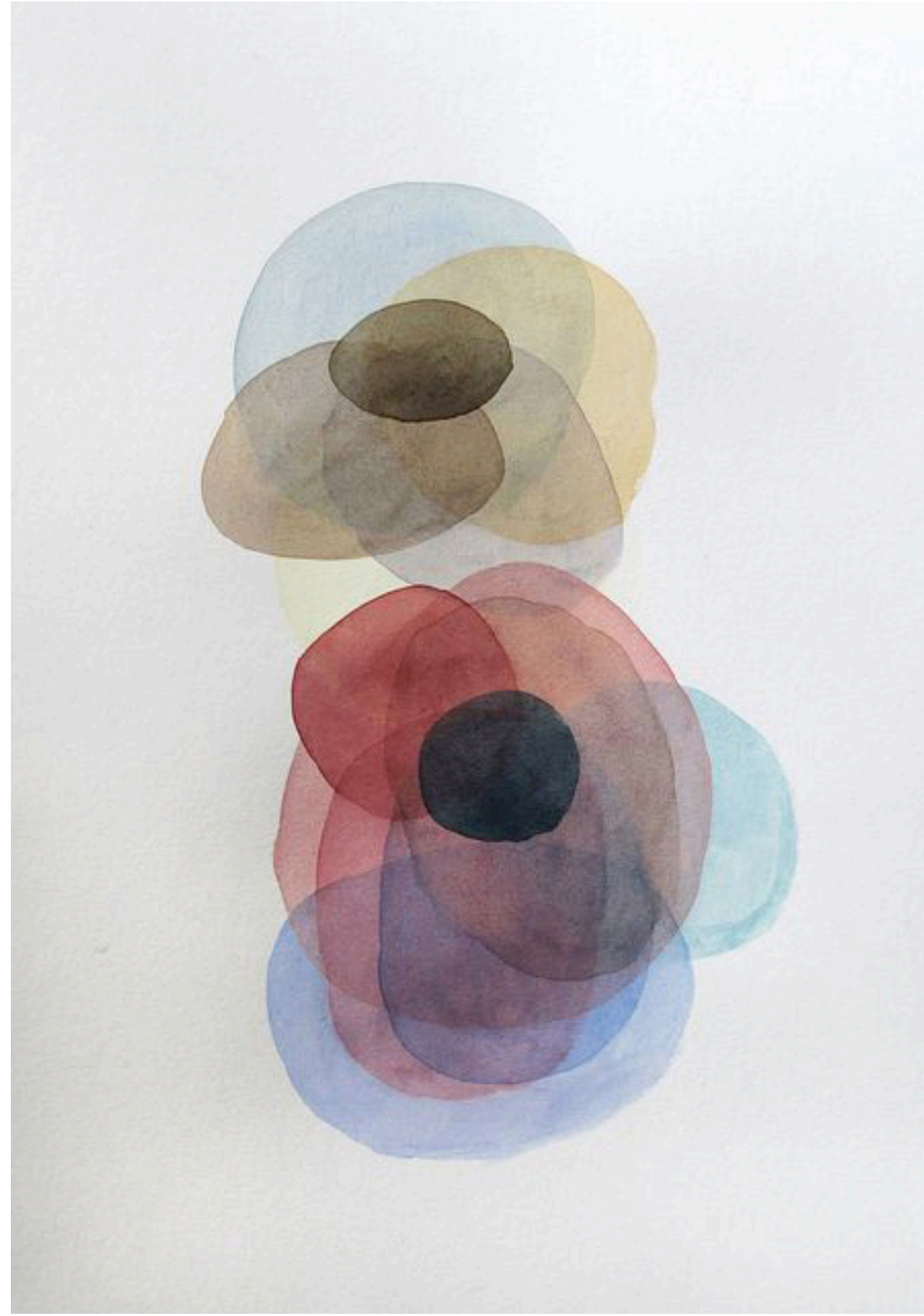
Cum

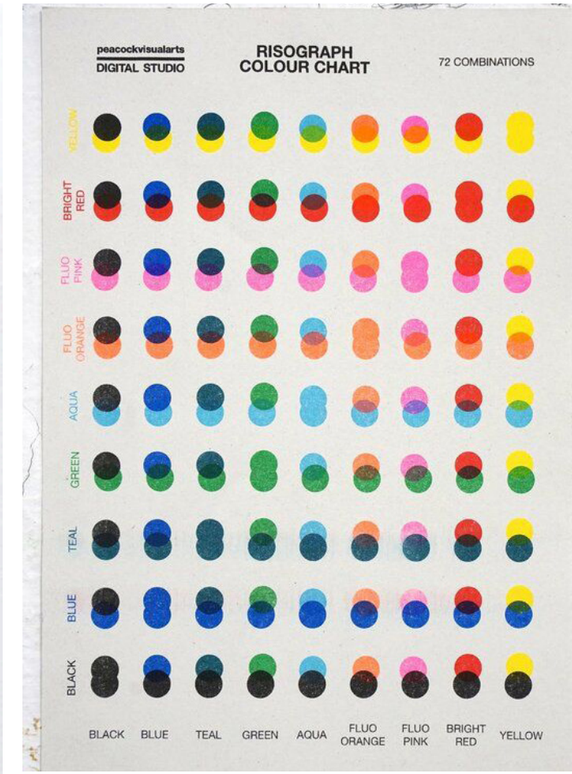


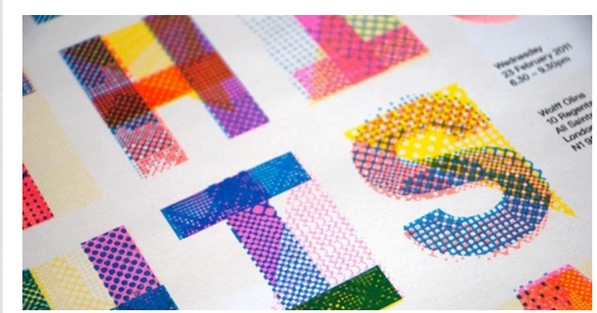
John Milton

Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the cricket on the hearth,
Or the bellman's drowsy charm
To bless the doors from nightly harm.
Or let my lamp, at midnight hour,
Be seen in some high lonely tower,
Where I may oft outwatch the Bear
With thrice-great Hermes, or unspheare
The spirit of Plato, to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold /90
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook:
And of those demons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or underground,
Whose power hath a true consent
With planet or with element
Sometime let gorgeous Tragedy
In sceptred pall come sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine; /100
Or what (though rare of later age)
Ennobled hath the buskined stage.
But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musæus from his bower,
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as, warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made Hell grant what love did seek.
Or call up him that left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold, /110

16/IL PENSEROSO







Chaand Ka Qarz

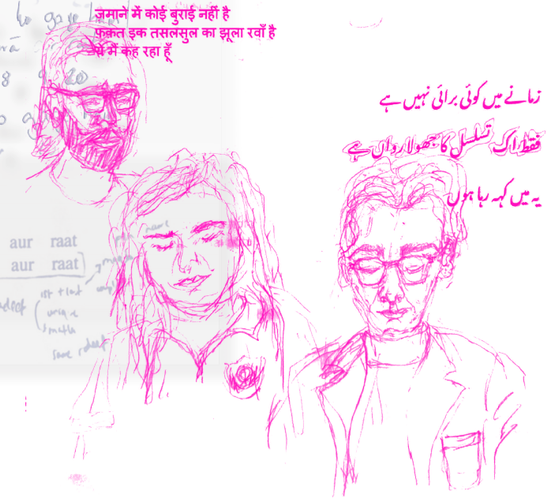
hamāre āñsuoñ kī āñkheñ banā.ī ga.iiñ
ham ne apne apne talātum se rassa-kashī kī
aur apnā apnā bain hue
sitāroñ kī pukār āsmān se ziyāda zamīn suntī hai
maiñ ne maut ke baal khole
aur jhuuT pe darāz huī
niiñd āñkhoñ ke kanche kheltī rahī
shaam doghle-rañg sahtī rahī
āsmānoñ pe merā chāñd qarz hai
maiñ maut ke haath meñ ek charāgh huuñ
janam ke pahiye par maut kī rath dekh rahī huuñ
zamīnoñ meñ merā insān dafn hai
sajdoñ se sar uThā lo
maut merī god meñ ek bachcha chhoḌ ga.ī hai

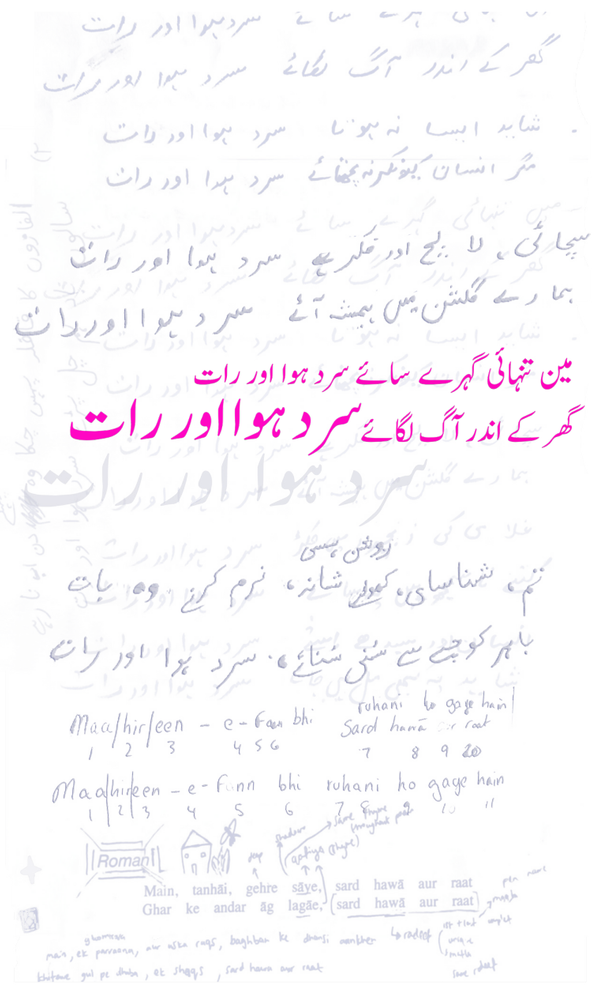
چاند کا قرض

ہمارے آنسوؤں کی آنکھیں بنائی گئیں
ہم نے اپنے اپنے تلاطم سے رسہ کشی کی
اور اپنا اپنا بین ہوئے
ستاروں کی پکار آسمان سے زیادہ زمین سنتی ہے
میں نے موت کے بال کھولے
اور جھوٹ پہ دراز ہوئی
نیند آنکھوں کے کنچے کھیلتی رہی
شام دوغلے رنگ سہتی رہی
آسمانوں پہ میرا چاند قرض ہے
میں موت کے ہاتھ میں ایک چراغ ہوں
جنم کے پہیے پر موت کی رتھ دیکھ رہی ہوں
زمینوں میں میرا انسان دفن ہے
سجدوں سے سر اٹھا لو
موت میری گود میں ایک بچہ چھوڑ گئی ہے

The eyes were made out of our tears.
We struggled with our own waves!
and separated our ways!
The stars are more closer to earth than skies
I untangled the hair of death.
and accepted the lie
The evening were separating into two colors
My moon is a debat on these skies.
My pesor is buried deep under this earth.
Stop your Prayers.
Death has left a child in my lap!

مین تنہائی گہرے سائے سرد ہوا اور رات
گھر کے اندر آگ لگائے **سرد ہوا اور رات**





اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں

تبریز لودھی

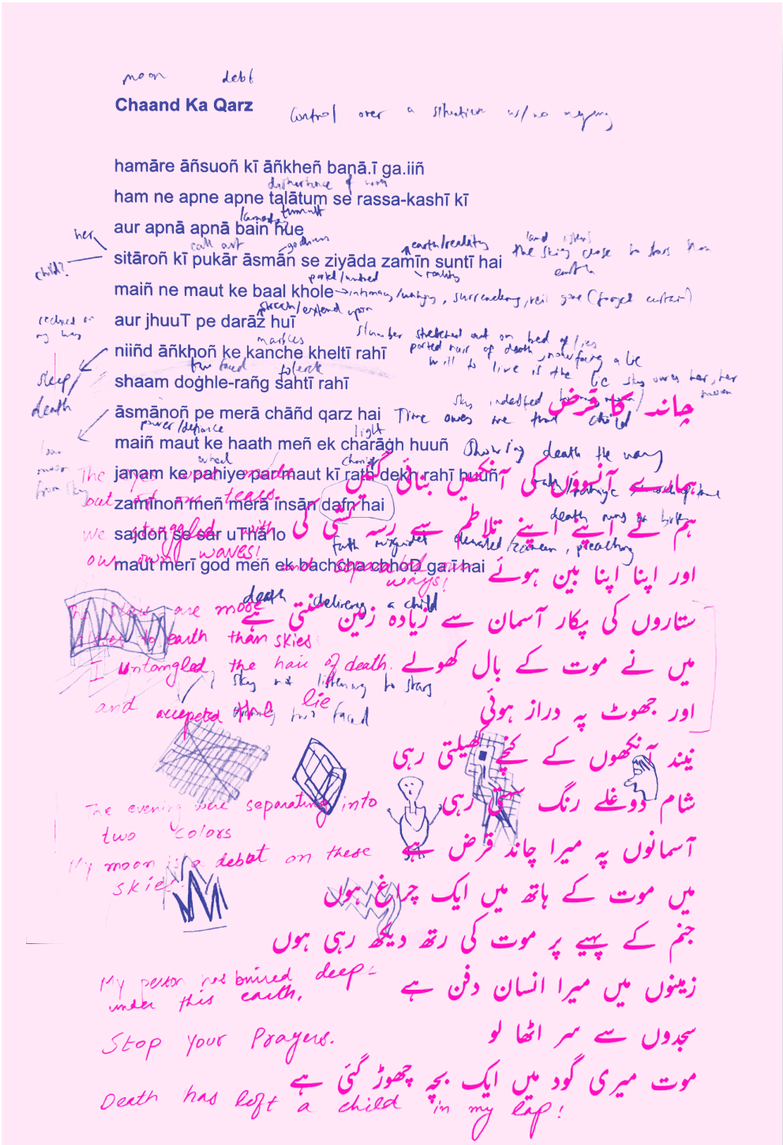
اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں
Apni zabaan ganwa kar kahin gira hun main
لب پہ اک دُعا، بے صدا پڑا ہوں میں
Lab pe ek dua, be-sada para hun main

یہ پہاڑ سکوت ہے، وہ ندی بیان
Yeh pahaar sukoot hai, woh nadi bayaan
ان دونوں کے درمیان کہیں رُکا ہوں میں
In donon ke darmiyaan kaheen ruka hun main

مور کی ندا میں اک رمزیہ زبان
Mor ki nida mein ek ramziya zabaan
لکھ لکھ کر اس کو اب مٹ چکا ہوں میں
Likhte likhte is ko ab mit chuka hun main

ہے اک شجر بہشت میں، لفظوں سے لبریز
Hai ek shajar bahisht mein, laizon se labrez
شاید ابھی ابلیس سے وہیں ملا ہوں میں
Shayad abhi Iblees se waheen mila hun main

شمس کی تجلی تو گونجتی ہے عرش پر
Shams ki tajalli to goonjti hai arsh par
خاموش مگر یہ کلام جو لکھ رہا ہوں میں
Khamosh magar yeh kalaam jo likh raha hun main



NOON MEEM DANISH: A POET BEYOND FORM AND SUBSTANCE

Samee Ahmad

While on his daily commute in New York City, Pakistani poet Noor Mohammad Danish would absentmindedly count different races on board his bus: three white people, two Latinos, 10 Black folks. But one morning, Danish realized that he wasn't counting himself as a Black person, despite his dark complexion. "I used to think: well I am Pakistani, I speak Urdu. And I forgot that I was Black in my face. I felt that I was forgetting myself."

That Danish could forget his Blackness in this way is surprising given how he has written so boldly about the reality of being Black in Pakistan. He has quietly carved out a career as one of the only Black Urdu poets working within the global Negritude tradition—a transnational literary and political movement across the African diaspora. Danish writes about feeling like a foreigner in his own country, and draws on the political crackdown and resistance in Karachi, when military dictator Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law.

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Danish was born in 1958 to a Makrani Baloch family in Lyari—a poor neighborhood in Karachi that is a center of communist politics and the birthplace of Baloch nationalism. The Makrani Baloch are descendants of the Bantu tribes of Southeast Africa who came to the Indian subcontinent mostly as slaves, but also as merchants, sailors and mercenaries, from the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries.

When Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial regime inspired opposition, Danish was asked to perform his poetry at Karachi's marches. "The traditional Urdu poets, who'd read at mushairas [poetry symposiums], would chastise me as a debater, not a poet!" he said.

Danish has revolutionized literary representations of African Blackness in Urdu. In "Badsurti ka Husn" ("The Beauty of Ugliness"), he provokes the reader to "spit on my face," comparing his dark complexion to the beauty standard that considers whiteness more desirable. Danish has also drawn on how many diasporic Africans have found a semblance of home in the ocean, which plays a crucial role in Negritude literature. This imagery is seen in Danish's work, including in his poem "Lyari," when he describes his childhood neighborhood's connection with the rest of Karachi:

It was you
who laid your head on the bosom of the sea
and first poured its love
into your own soul.
Your attachment to the sea
Your love of the sea
is not a fiction.
The cottage was the sea
where you are sleeping.
The world was the sea
where you are lost.
The sea: a cruel tyrant.
But in its heart,
there is only a mother's love for you.

At last year's Zafar Zaidi Memorial Mushaira, Danish received a lifetime achievement award. Before performing the title poem from his only collection, he told the audience: "I wrote and performed this poem 40 years ago in Karachi...the images coming out of Gaza, out of Palestine, make me think of these verses,"

"I see a jungle, in that jungle dance children, butterflies, flowers. I see a vision, in that vision are immured children, butterflies, flowers."

یہ تم تھے
وہ جس نے سمندر کے سینے پر سر رکھ کر
اس کی محبت کو
پہلے پہل اپنی روح میں اتارا
سمندر سے تیری رفاقت
سمندر سے تیری محبت
کہانی نہیں ہے
سمندر تھا کٹیا
جہاں سو رہے ہو
سمندر تھی دنیا
جہاں کھو گئے ہو
سمندر جو سفاک ہے
پر تمہارے لئے اس کے دل میں
فقط ممتا ہے

THERE IS A LANGUAGE CALLED REMEMBERING

Zainab Saeed

Mama

My mother is an Urdu teacher. She taunts me for my inability to count higher than 30 in a language she aged in, or state her age in a language she named me in.

She is my portal of entry into a world in which Urdu and Punjabi dance together. Mama jokes and scolds in Punjabi. All her reactions, her surprises, her wit, is in Punjabi. I can understand what she is saying: feel the sting of the scold or the poke of the joke. But my responses in the language hold no heart—no weight—because my grasp of Punjabi slips when I speak more than a line or two. It reminds me that I cannot see all of my mother; I cannot make her feel fully seen.

Baba

On the road that stretches through Main Seaview Boulevard in Karachi, my Baba is driving and my youngest siblings—Haniya and Ismail—are bickering. The radio plays in the background:

ک ر ب ا ن ت ا ج آ ، م ر ک ر ب ا ے ا
ں ی ک ں س ہ ں ا ج ہ و ک ں ر ب ا ن ت ا

Aye abre karam aaj itna baras
Itna baras ke wo ja na sake

"Hani, what do you think this lyric means?" Baba says, trying to distract them. We all get it wrong. Baba is kind and patient with us. He sings it back, masking it with the simplicity it needs for our virgin ears, he translates:

Oh clouds please rain
Rain so hard that they cannot go.

I'm not sure who he sings for. I like to fantasize that I am the subject here and he is discreetly asking me to stay in the home where I was born.

Baba listens to 'Hello' by Lionel Richie, and tells me about his boyhood, as well as the hearts he would apologize to if he could. He is cheery when he sings, but talks about how he wishes he spoke better. My father is an eloquent man: smooth with his compliments, interesting with his questions, and simple with his needs. His charisma translates in Urdu, Punjabi, and English. But, he finds himself lacking when he thinks about his English vocabulary. It reminds me of how I feel speaking Punjabi.

Chachu

Baba's youngest brother, Sajid Chachu, loved to sing but he wasn't any good. His nickname was *boota*, which means plant and I don't understand why everyone called him that but it seemed fitting. (I cannot explain why in English). There is a form of lame humor I call *Bongis*; the closest translation I can offer is unusual, silly, and affectionate. If someone could be crowned for inventing this type of humor, it would be my Sajid Chachu. The best *bongis* were in Punjabi, medium ones in Urdu, and the lamest (yet silliest) ones in English, but only because they made the least sense.

Chachu got blood cancer two years ago. I don't know the Urdu word for cancer. No one I know ever used it. In his most painful moments, his *bongis* continued. A few weeks ago, I lay next to Sajid Chachu, while he was hooked up to transfusion equipment and nestled between pillows. I told him to hang around the world a little longer, if only to deliver a few more *bongis*, and certainly long enough for me to get married. I couldn't imagine anyone else officiating my wedding. He sang me a song and read me a poem about the nikkah—both, in Punjabi. Three days later, he passed away. I have been trying to remember our conversation ever since. I have not been able to recall more than a sentence.

In my grief, I have dishonored his memory with my faulty Punjabi. I wonder, if he had spoken his last words in English, would they be easier to remember? This feeling haunts me. When I speak about him, and his absence, English fails me. How do I tell stories about him or quote him in any language other than the one he was funniest in?

Zainab

When I grieve, I can explain my feelings best in Urdu. I argue the best in English, but it fails me in matters of grief. English has been a language I drive points home in, but it's not the tongue that has allowed me to spill out my love. I was raised in the tenderness of Urdu. Even swear words, like *uloo ki pathi* , were said with a fondness I cannot translate. Now, my self-made terms of endearment stem from Urdu words: *Paru* from the word *pyaar* meaning love, *Mithu* from the word *meetha* meaning sweet.

THERE IS A LANGUAGE CALLED REMEMBERING
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ISSUE 01

RUMUUZ

NOVEMBER

2025

RUMUUZ is a community of friends exploring and continuing the tradition of Urdu poetry from New York City. Our perspectives start in each other's homes, where we meet on Thursdays for poetry discussions and writing workshops. At a time when writing in Urdu becomes increasingly rare, Rumuuz represents an attempt not only to preserve Urdu poetics but to think about its progression. Our contribution is this zine: A mix of Urdu and English poems, essays, and annotations. Compiled as a bilingual palimpsest, we layer our writings on top of and in relation to the works of poets we've studied.

Rumuuz is the plural for *ruuz*, meaning hint or symbol. And what symbolism does Urdu shayari offer? Its poetics present a wide palette of feeling – at once revolutionary, psychological, spiritual, and romantic. Beyond the technicalities of its verse, we seek to access the memories and associations hidden in its folds. Can the gardens (*khanaay*) symbolize just not paradise, but the confluence of man and nature? How does Urdu literature bear witness to partitions and genocides? Nor do we stop at Urdu; rather, we read in the context of other South Asian vernaculars, and participate in the radical process of translation. As important as its history, Urdu's current dynamics cannot be ignored: publishing in the language is faltering, its script romanized, mixed with English in the West, or made the other in India. Yet, new figures emerge and influence our work, from the enigmatic translations of Haider Shabbar to the poetic technologies built by Sharjeel Imam, who remains incarcerated in India for his politics.

Local contexts are just as important. In this issue, we center the poetry of our friend, Noon Meem Danish, a Makrani poet residing in Connecticut. Samee Ahmad interviews Danish Sahib and explores his writing on Black identity, while Adeeb Dholakia bases his ghazal on Danish Sahib's radeef, *sard hawa aur raat*. Elsewhere, we include ghazals on the ineffable, nazms on the nazm, essays on family, love poems, vampiric works, half translations, process notes, and sketches. With this zine, we present to you a first offering of what it means to continue Urdu poetics far from their origins, in our home of New York City.

Edited by
Javeria Hasnain
Shahaan Khattak
Sanya Mansoor
Sara Khan
Salar Khattak

Designed by
Kirat Pandher
Zainab Akhtar
Lameesa Mallic

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میں تنہائی گھیرے سائے سرد ہوا اور رات
گھر کے اندر آگ لگائے سرد ہوا اور رات

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Danish has revolutionized literary representations of African Blackness in Urdu. In "Badsurti ka Husn" ("The Beauty of Ugliness"), he provokes the reader to "spit on my face," comparing his dark complexion to the beauty standard that considers whiteness more desirable. Danish has also drawn on how many diasporic Africans have found a semblance of home in the ocean, which plays a crucial role in Negritude literature. This imagery is seen in Danish's work, including in his poem "Lyari," when he describes his childhood neighborhood's connection with the rest of Karachi.

It was you
who laid your head on the bosom of the sea
and first poured its love
into your own soul.
Your attachment to the sea
Your love of the sea
is not a fiction.
The cottage was the sea
where you are sleeping.
The world was the sea
where you are lost.
The sea: a cruel tyrant.
But in its heart,
there is only a mother's love for you.

At last year's Zafar Zaidi Memorial Mushaira, Danish received a lifetime achievement award. Before performing the title poem from his only collection, he told the audience: "I wrote and performed this poem 40 years ago in Karachi...the images coming out of Gaza, out of Palestine, make me think of these verses."

"I see a jungle, in that jungle dance children,
butterflies, flowers. I see a vision, in that vision are
immured children, butterflies, flowers."

اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں

تحسین نودھی

اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں
لب پہ کٹا ہوا ہے صدا بولتا ہوں میں

یہ پہاڑ سکوت ہے، دونوں کی بیان
ان دونوں کے درمیان کہیں کارواں ہوں میں

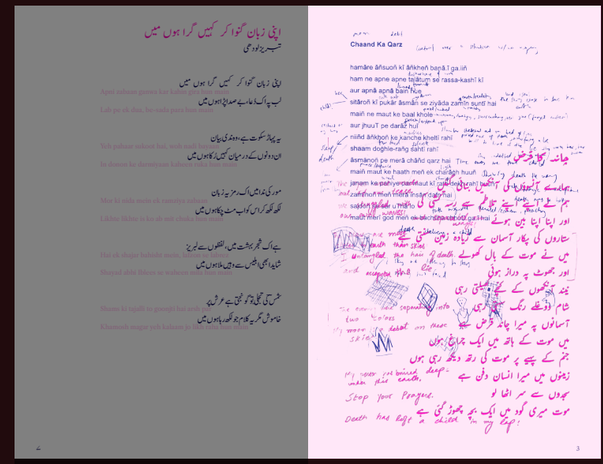
موسی کی دھن ایک مرثیہ زبان
کھو کھو کر اس کو خواب سنے پاکھوں میں

ہے ایک گنجر بات میں الفاظ کے بریج
شاید ابھی خلش سے ابھی خلاؤں میں

خشبو کی گنج تو کوئی بے خرچ
خاموش گھر میں گھر ہو کھو کر پاکھوں میں

Chaand Ka Qarz

hamāre ānsuoṅ kī ānkheṅ banā.I ga iih
ham ne apne apne takiyoṅ se rassa-kashī kī
aur apnā apnā bistar ko
sitāroṅ kī pukār āsmāṅ se ziyāda zamīṅ sunī hai
maiṅ ne maut ke baal khole
aur jhuuṭ pe darāz hū
nīlī āṅkhoṅ ke kanche khelī rahī
shaam dhoṅe-rang ḍhalī rahī
āsmānoṅ pe merā chāṅd qarz hai
maiṅ maut ke haath meṅ ek chāṅgh huuṅ
janam ke pahiyoṅ par
zaḥrīlī ho maut tālī bajā rahī hai
maiṅ maut meṅ gol meṅ ek bachchā ho gayā hūṅ



FORTALICE

Samee Ahmad

And:

While the beggar crooons falsetto,
While the cartoonist scribbles dust,

While the merchant skims coconut,
While the separatist bottles wine,

While the palmist spills ink,
While the taverner potions pills,

While the dancer shoots balloons,
While the sweeper crosses borders,

The gangster awaits with deviled bangles for his muse
In a house charmed by the ghosts of Syeds.

Three Sikh kings compete, converge, fail
In a triangular neighborhood crowned by a fortalice.

An unsharp spear hangs on the jaundiced wall
In a religious school sawed in half by a cleric's ego.

Today I walked to the shrine of the jasmine women
In a street made sinuous, inked by blood.

نظم

زینب حسنین

شہر بہار کے پھولوں پر پڑے
شوخی رنگ میں، اور دھول مچی۔
شہر شہر کی رنگین گلیوں
اپنی کرتی کی رداء تھی۔
شہر ہی شکر بنے کا موسم
ایکلی سڑکوں کو کوتا پھرتے۔
شہر ہی کے دھوئے اعضو
جو خلا کرے کو موہاتے۔
شہر مسودے کے زخم اٹھاتا :
خان جان، آپ کب آئیں گی؟
شہر اپنا نقشوں میں پہنچے
سڑکوں کی، جنہیں کو بنی تھی۔
چاندی کی، اتنی میں تھاتی نظم
ہدایت کے راہ، کبھی بے شمر انسان کی۔
بکھرے لفظوں کو سرپرستی ہوں میں
شہر کے، ریشمی لفظوں میں بند حق۔

BONES

Hasan Khan

Cook with the meat on the bone

I rip through myself looking for bones

Authenticity, I only seek things I struggle with, God

Here are the maps my uncles prepared

The scrolls soak in tea until the borders disappear into milk

I tell other people who they are not so that I can name myself

It's what I've always wanted – a new name

Same skin, new bones, white milk, home

My uncle asks if I pray for here or home

We stay silent, suspended in disbelief

خون آشامی

ارسلان ملک

آب خلا پہ بیٹھے ہوئے شہد کے لب
مفلس گزارشات کو مٹا دیتی ہے
ہاتھ پہ ہاتھ
ہاتھ پہ ہاتھ
ہاتھوں پہ کمر
کمر پہ قلم
قلم پہ قلم
اور قلم میں اُگی ہوئے چاند کے کھڑے
کرن وری کی گرہ
میکی ہوا میں سُر جاتی چونک کے چمک کے سوکر کہتے ہیں
کھڑ ہوا اور صبح آشامی، دوزخ ہوا اور صبح نفرت
اک قلعہ اور دیواری سیتھی
دو سر اور اور دیواری کی بُرائی
اب گزارشات کو موقع ملا
مفلس کو مٹانے کا

خطوط کے راکھ

زینب الشمس

کچھ خطوط کے راکھ
کچھ لفظوں کی قربانی
اک بے پہلے دھاگے
پوشاک آزادی میں

کچھ بے اس کو دانتیں
کچھ اختیار ضمیر
گڑی اک عمر
دل کی آگ میں

کچھ زخموں کی رسم
کچھ کمزوروں کی ہمراہی
اک مسودہ زخم
زبان غیر کی روانی میں

کچھ غلطی کے حکوم
کچھ سرخی، انقلابی
قلمیں غریب تھے سب
تعمیرات کی بڑی میں

THERE IS A LANGUAGE CALLED REMEMBERING

Zainab Saeed

Mama

My mother is an Urdu teacher. She taunts me for my inability to count higher than 30 in a language she aged in, or state her age in a language she named me in.

She is my portal of entry into a world in which Urdu and Punjabi dance together. Mama jokes and scolds in Punjabi, All her reactions, her surprises, her wit, is in Punjabi. I can understand what she is saying: feel the sting of the scold or the poke of the joke. But my responses in the language hold no heart—no weight—because my grasp of Punjabi slips when I speak more than a line or two. It reminds me that I cannot see all of my mother; I cannot make her feel fully seen.

Baba

On the road that stretches through Main Seaview Boulevard in Karachi, my Baba is driving and my youngest siblings—Haniya and Ismail—are bickering. The radio plays in the background:

اے ابر جوم کے
برسا کہ اس قدر کہ تو جا نہ سکے

Aye abre baram aaj itna barsa
Itna baras ke woo ja na sake

"Hani, what do you think this lyric means?" Baba says, trying to distract them. We all get it wrong. Baba is kind and patient with us. He sings it back, masking it with the simplicity it needs for our virgin ears, he translates:

Oh clouds please rain
Rain so hard that they cannot go.

I'm not sure who he sings for. I like to fantasize that I am the subject here and he is discreetly asking me to stay in the home where I was born.

Baba listens to 'Hello' by Lionel Richie, and tells me about his boyhood, as well as the hearts he would apologize to if he could. He is cheery when he sings, but talks about how he wishes he spoke better. My father is an eloquent man: smooth with his compliments, interesting with his questions, and simple with his needs. His charisma translates in Urdu, Punjabi, and English. But, he finds himself lacking when he thinks about his English vocabulary. It reminds me of how I feel speaking Punjabi.

Chachu

Baba's youngest brother, Sajid Chachu, loved to sing but he wasn't any good. His nickname was *booto*, which means plant and I don't understand why everyone called him that but it seemed fitting. (I cannot explain why in English). There is a form of lame humor I call *Bongis*; the closest translation I can offer is unusual, silly, and affectionate. If someone could be crowned for inventing this type of humor, it would be my Sajid Chachu. The best *bongis* were in Punjabi, medium ones in Urdu, and the lamest (yet silliest) ones in English, but only because they made the least sense.

Chachu got blood cancer two years ago. I don't know the Urdu word for cancer. No one I know ever used it. In his most painful moments, his *bongis* continued. A few weeks ago, I lay next to Sajid Chachu, while he was hooked up to transfusion equipment and nestled between pillows. I told him to hang around the world a little longer, if only to deliver a few more *bongis*, and certainly long enough for me to get married. I couldn't imagine anyone else officiating my wedding. He sang me a song and read me a poem about the nikkah—both, in Punjabi. Three days later, he passed away. I have been trying to remember our conversation ever since. I have not been able to recall more than a sentence.

In my grief, I have dishonored his memory with my faulty Punjabi. I wonder, if he had spoken his last words in English, would they be easier to remember? This feeling haunts me. When I speak about him, and his absence, English fails me. How do I tell stories about him or quote him in any language other than the one he was funniest in?

Zainab

When I grieve, I can explain my feelings best in Urdu. I argue the best in English, but it fails me in matters of grief. English has been a language I drive points home in, but it's not the tongue that has allowed me to spill out my love. I was raised in the tenderness of Urdu. Even swear words, like *ulloo ki patthi*, were said with a fondness I cannot translate. Now, my self-made terms of endearment stem from Urdu words: *Jura* from the word *pyaar* meaning love, *Mitha* from the word *meetha* meaning sweet.

اے نہیں نہیں

سا کن

اے نہیں نہیں، ایسا کچھ نہیں ہوگا، بیٹا وقت ہی بچا ہے کچھ میری بارے میں کہا بات ہوئی ہے ابھی ابھی، میرے کاموں کو لیا ہے اس نے۔

تم ہاں چلتے چلے آؤ۔

اور ہاں، آج پھر وہی کاپیاں ہے، خوبصورت، تمہاری طرح۔ اس کا بھی یہی کہنا ہے کہ دوبارہ پھر موجود رہے گا، کہ تم یہاں کی روشنی میں تمہارے گھر کی چھت پر بیٹھ کر ایک دوسرے سے اور گزرے دن کی باتیں کریں۔

امید ہے سب پابند وعدہ رہیں گے۔ کوئی کان سے دغا نہ ہو، کوئی مرحلہ گراں نہ گزرے، بال نہ ہریں تنگی نہ کرے۔

بس مجھے کاپیے غریب زندہ میں کہیں اپنی پرسات لیے آؤں گی۔

صرف تمہاری۔

MY CORONATION

Asad Ali

aisa bhi koi khuda Aya — ke chalte huum jaayenge ruk?
— Poor Rich Boy, "Tootay Huay Admi"

I.
i have forty fasts neglected, marked
into my skin like tallies for when
it is time for condensation. now waiting.
now the singed scent of deposition, now
silence. now i am studying my ancestors,
my experiments.
II.
my Lord do not let this spring bloom.
do not let the vine climb any higher
or i will confuse its shadow for an
eclipse. i will puncture a leaf,
ceaseless searching for sclerosis.
my Lord why don't You grieve?
III.
there is so much noise in
my asylum & now this temple
this shelter is obsolete a building
of stone with so many etchings the
walls are thinner than the parchment upon
which i will continue to write my futile letters
IV.
now watch. i am basking in the remains
of your retired machinery & every insult
is an inverted acknowledgement of Who
i believe exists sometimes but still, it is so easy
to dissolve it is so hard to be dissolved—ego
mangled, membranes still steadfast now

آغوش میں بن بلائے سرد ہوا اور رات

ادیب احمد علی

آغوش میں بن بلائے سرد ہوا اور رات
فرق کا پیمان لے آئے سرد ہوا اور رات

نہ نجومیوں کی کمی، ہمدرد ہے ایمان
دونوں کے درمیان پھیلائے سرد ہوا اور رات

جدائی نا گزیر یہ پرانہ بھول گیا تھا
تاگزیر ہے پیدا کرنے سرد ہوا اور رات

نحو زود گزر تھیں دوام کی جستجو تھی
شب امید بھلا کیا لائے سرد ہوا اور رات

خوش لفظ تھیں جھگی کی غذا جوئیلی
شب صدا سے رخصت سنائے سرد ہوا اور رات

اگر حسنی وقتہ الہام کا طلبگار ہے
چاہیلی کے مرہم لڑائے سرد ہوا اور رات

رموز

رموز کیا ہے؟ لغت کے مطابق رموز کسی راز، اشارت، یا علامہ کو کہتے ہیں۔ خاص کر کے وہ جن کے ٹھیکے کوئی باقیل بیان بات چھپی ہو۔
لیکن یہ مقلہ ، جس کا پہلا رسالہ اس وقت آپ کے ہاتھوں میں ہے ، اس مقلے کی اقتضائی اس کی ایک شناخت مرموزیت نہیں بلکہ RUMUUZ سے نسبت کی جاتی ہے۔
یہ فرق محض رسم الخط یا پھر رومنی اردو اور انگلش کا نہیں۔ یہ فرق مدارسے وجود کا بھی ایک استعارہ ہے۔ یہ مقلہ یہ رسالہ، ہم سب ایک ایسے شہر، ایک ایسے کلب میں اردو زبان کو زندہ رکھنے کی کوشش کر رہے ہیں جہاں انگریزی زبان کا غلبہ ہے۔ جہاں ہماری شناخت بھی انگریزی میں جوڑی ہوئی ہے۔ جہاں اردو ایک زبان سے زیادہ ایک جمع بن جاتی ہے
۔ ایلی پاداں اردلی تخلیقیت اور ایلی بیان کو زندہ رکھنے اور تجدید دینے کی جستجو۔
اس ہی مجموعہ کے لیے ہم ہر دوسرے مصرعے کو شعر کے مختلف لفظوں میں جمع ہو جاتے ہیں۔ شاعری پڑھتے ہیں، ملمانے سنتے ہیں، اور اکثر خود بھی الفاظ کا رسمی دعاؤں سے کچھ تلفیق کرنے کی کوشش کرتے ہیں۔ ناقابل بیان کو بیان کرنے کی کوشش کرتے ہیں۔ انگریزی اور اردو کے کسی طلب میں۔
اس رسالہ میں اس مجموعہ کے چھوٹے چھوٹے ٹکرے ہیں۔ دو زبانوں کی ملاقات، ان کی دراڑ، ان کی ایمیزس کی کہانیاں ہیں۔

RUMUUZ ہیں۔

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2025

RUMUUZ is a community of friends exploring and continuing the tradition of Urdu poetry from New York City. Our perspectives start in each other's homes, where we meet on Thursdays for poetry discussions and writing workshops. At a time when writing in Urdu becomes increasingly rare, Rumuuz represents an attempt not only to preserve Urdu poetics but to think about its progression. Our contribution is this zine: A mix of Urdu and English poems, essays, and annotations. Compiled as a bilingual palimpsest, we layer our writings on top of and in relation to the works of poets we've studied.

Rumuuz is the plural for *ruuz*, meaning hint or symbol. And what symbolism does Urdu shayari offer? Its poetics present a wide palette of feeling – at once revolutionary, psychological, spiritual, and romantic. Beyond the technicalities of its verse, we seek to access the memories and associations hidden in its folds. Can the garden (*khanaa*) symbolize just not paradise, but the confluence of man and nature? How does Urdu literature bear witness to partitions and genocides? Nor do we stop at Urdu; rather, we read in the context of other South Asian vernaculars, and participate in the radical process of translation. As important as its history, Urdu's current dynamics cannot be ignored: publishing in the language is faltering, its script romanized, mixed with English in the West, or made the other in India. Yet, new figures emerge and influence our work, from the enigmatic translations of Haider Shahbaz to the poetic technologies built by Sharjeel Imam, who remains incarcerated in India for his politics.

Local contexts are just as important. In this issue, we center the poetry of our friend, Noon Meem Danish, a Makrani poet residing in Connecticut. Sameer Ahmad interviews Danish Sahib and explores his writing on Black identity, while Adeeb Dholakia bases his ghazal on Danish Sahib's radeef, *sard hawa aur raat*. Elsewhere, we include ghazals on the ineffable, nazms on the nazm, essays on family, love poems, vampiric works, half translations, process notes, and sketches. With this zine, we present to you a first offering of what it means to continue Urdu poetics far from their origins, in our home of New York City.

Edited by
Jawria Hasnain
Shahaan Khattak
Samya Mansoor
Sara Khan
Salar Khattak

Designed by
Kirat Pandher
Zainab Akhtar
Lameesa Mallic

Printed by
Endless Editions

NOON MEEM DANISH: A POET BEYOND FORM AND SUBSTANCE

Sameer Ahmad

While on his daily commute in New York City, Pakistani poet Noor Mohammad Danish would absentmindedly count different races on board his bus: three white people, two Latinos, 10 Black folks. But one morning. Danish realized that he wasn't counting himself as a Black person, despite his dark complexion. "I used to think; well I am Pakistani, I speak Urdu. And I forgot that I was Black in my face. I felt that I was forgetting myself."

That Danish could forget his Blackness in this way is surprising given how he has written so boldly about the reality of being Black in Pakistan. He has quietly carved out a career as one of the only Black Urdu poets working within the global Negritude tradition—a transnational literary and political movement across the African diaspora. Danish writes about feeling like a foreigner in his own country, and draws on the political crackdown and resistance in Karachi, when military dictator Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law.

Danish has only published one book, "Bache, Titli, Phool" ("Children, Butterflies, Flowers") but his poetry has appeared in many Urdu literary journals, including the notable *Shabkhoon*, under the pen name, Noon Meem Danish. He has increasingly become known for his literary criticism and innovative subject matter. "Danish was never attracted to the typical love poetry Urdu is known for. In Danish's poetry, you will find the city: characters from slums, laborers who have been oppressed, working-class folks who are stuck in cycles of poverty," said Saeed Naqvi, a fellow Urdu poet.

Danish was born in 1958 to a Makrani Baloch family in Lyari—a poor neighborhood in Karachi that is a center of communist politics and the birthplace of Baloch nationalism. The Makrani Baloch are descendants of the Baluru tribes of Southeast Africa who came to the Indian subcontinent mostly as slaves, but also as merchants, sailors and mercenaries, from the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries.

When Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial regime inspired opposition, Danish was asked to perform his poetry at Karachi's marches. "The traditional Urdu poets, who'd read at mushaires [poetry symposiums], would chastise me as a debater, not a poet!" he said.

Danish has revolutionized literary representations of African Blackness in Urdu. In "Badsurti ka Husn" ("The Beauty of Ugliness"), he provokes the reader to "spit on my face," comparing his dark complexion to the beauty standard that considers whiteness more desirable. Danish has also drawn on how many diasporic Africans have found a semblance of home in the ocean, which plays a crucial role in Negritude literature; This imagery is seen in Danish's work, including in his poem "Lyari," when he describes his childhood neighborhood's connection with the rest of Karachi.

It was you
who laid your head on the bosom of the sea
and first poured its love
into your own soul.
Your attachment to the sea
Your love of the sea
is not a fiction.
The cottage was the sea
where you are sleeping.
The world was the sea
where you are lost.
The sea: a cruel tyrant.
But in its heart,
there is only a mother's love for you.

At last year's Zafar Zaidi Memorial Mushaira, Danish received a lifetime achievement award. Before performing the title poem from his only collection, he told the audience: "I wrote and performed this poem 40 years ago in Karachi...the images coming out of Gaza, out of Palestine, make me think of these verses,"

"I see a jungle, in that jungle dance children,
butterflies, flowers. I see a vision, in that vision are
immured children, butterflies, flowers."

اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں

تسنیم زاہد علی

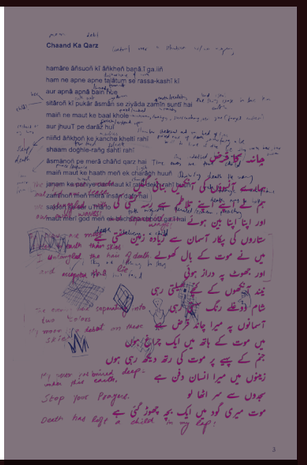
اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں
لب پر اک کھلا عاریہ صدا پڑا ہوں میں

یہ پہاڑ سکوت ہے، دونوں کی بیان
ان دونوں کے درمیان گھیر کر کھا ہوں میں

موری کی دھیں اک مرتعیہ زبان
گلگھلو کر اس کو آب منت پکا ہوں میں

ہے اک فجر بہشت میں، لفظوں سے بے پرے
شاید ابھی خدشی سے دیے ملا ہوں میں

شمس کی تجلی تو تو کچھ ہے خرچ
خاموش کی مگیہ کلام ہو گلگھلو ہوں میں



نظم

زینب حسنین ساقی

نظم بہار کے پھولوں پر پڑے
شوخ رنگ ہیں، اور دھول لگی۔
نظم شیری کے گھنے گلیوں
اپنی کرسی تی رات تھی۔
نظم ہاتی سگریٹ کا دھواں
ایکیلی سڑکوں کو توتا پھرتا۔
نظم ہی کے دھبے کا مطر
ہر خلیٹ کرے کو مہکاتا۔
نظم سمندر کے زخم اٹھاتا :
خالد جان، آپ کب آئیں گی؟
نظم اتھاتھوں میں پھیلے
ستونوں کی، جیسی گونج گئی تھی۔
چاندی راتوں میں تلاش ہے نظم
ہدایت کے روپ، کہی ہے گھر انسان کی۔
بکھرتے لمحوں کو سمیٹتی ہوں میں
نظم کے ریشمی لفظوں میں بند حق۔

BONES

Hasan Khan

Cook with the meat on the bone

I rip through myself looking for bones

Authenticity, I only seek things I struggle with, God

Here are the maps my uncles prepared

The scrolls soak in tea until the borders disappear into milk

I tell other people who they are not so that I can name myself

It's what I've always wanted – a new name

Same skin, new bones, white milk, home

My uncle asks if I pray for here or home

We stay silent, suspended in disbelief

خون آشامی

ارسلان سہیل

آپ ظلّ پر بیٹھے ہوئے شہد کے تب
مفلس کڑواہٹ کو مٹا دیتی ہے
ہاتھ پر ارادہ
ہاتھ پر ارادہ
ہاتھ پر کمر
کمر پر خم
خم پر تم
اور تم میں ذخمی ہوئے چاند کے ٹکڑے
کن وادی کڑوا
میٹھی ہوا میں سُرخ چاند کے چک کے سوز کرتا ہے
کھڑا ہوا روح آشامی اور تر ہوا روح فخرا
اک قطار دیوار کی سیاہی
دو سر ہار دیوار کی بارش
اب کڑواہٹ کو موتی ملا
مفلس کو مٹانے کا

خطوط کے راکھ

زینب حسنین

کچھ خطوط کے راکھ
کچھ لفظوں کی قربانی
اک سپنے، دھاگے
پوشاک آزادی میں

کچھ بے اس خواہشیں
کچھ اختیار ضمیر
گزری اک عمر
دل کی ناگلی میں

کچھ زبیوں کی بزم
کچھ گن کاروں کی ہمجولی
اک رموز عجم
زبان غیر کی روانی میں

کچھ تحفظ کے حکم
کچھ سرکشی واعتبالی
قلس نصیب بنے سب
تعمیرات کی بیداری میں

FORTALICE

Samee Ahmad

And:

While the beggar croons falsetto,
While the cartoonist scribbles dust,

While the merchant skims coconut,
While the separatist bottles wine,

While the palmist spills ink,
While the taverner portions pills,

While the dancer shoots balloons,
While the sweeper crosses borders,

The gangster awaits with deviled bangles for his muse
In a house charmed by the ghosts of Syeds.

Three Sikh kings compete, converge, fail
In a triangular neighborhood crowned by a fortalice.

An unsharp spear hangs on the jaundiced wall
In a religious school sawed in half by a cleric's ego.

Today I walked to the shrine of the jasmine women
In a street made sinuous, inked by blood.

THERE IS A LANGUAGE CALLED REMEMBERING

Zainab Saeed

Mama

My mother is an Urdu teacher. She taunts me for my inability to count higher than 30 in a language she aged in, or state her age in a language she named me in.

She is my portal of entry into a world in which Urdu and Punjabi dance together. Mama jokes and scolds in Punjabi. All her reactions, her surprises, her wit, is in Punjabi. I can understand what she is saying: feel the sting of the scold or the poke of the joke. But my responses in the language hold no heart—no weight—because my grasp of Punjabi slips when I speak more than a line or two. It reminds me that I cannot see all of my mother; I cannot make her feel fully seen.

Baba

On the road that stretches through Main Scarview Boulevard in Karachi, my Baba is driving and my youngest siblings—Haniya and Ismail—are bickering. The radio plays in the background:

ہے ہے ہے ہے ہے ہے ہے ہے
اپنی آنکھ میں اپنا دل ہے ہے ہے ہے
Aye ahre haram aaj itna barsa
Itna barsa ke ‘aw ja na sake

"Hani, what do you think this lyric means?" Baba says, trying to distract them. We all get it wrong. Baba is kind and patient with us. He sings it back, masking it with the simplicity it needs for our virgin ears, he translates:

Oh clouds please rain
Rain so hard that they cannot go.

I'm not sure who he sings for, I like to fantasize that I am the subject here and he is discreetly asking me to stay in the home where I was born.

Baba listens to 'Hello' by Lionel Richie, and tells me about his boyhood, as well as the hearts he would apologize to if he could. He is cheery when he sings, but talks about how he wishes he spoke better. My father is an eloquent man: smooth with his compliments, interesting with his questions, and simple with his needs. His charisma translates in Urdu, Punjabi, and English, But, he finds himself lacking when he thinks about his English vocabulary. It reminds me of how I feel speaking Punjabi.

Chachu

Baba's youngest brother, Sajid Chachu, loved to sing but he wasn't any good. His nickname was *boota*, which means plant and I don't understand why everyone called him that but it seemed fitting. (I cannot explain why in English). There is a form of lame humor I call *footage*; the closest translation I can offer is unusual, silly, and affectionate. If someone could be crowned for inventing this type of humor, it would be my Sajid Chachu. The best *footage* were in Punjabi, medium ones in Urdu, and the lamest (yet silliest) ones in English, but only because they made the least sense.

Chachu got blood cancer two years ago. I don't know the Urdu word for cancer. No one I know ever used it. In his most painful moments, his *footage* continued. A few weeks ago, I lay next to Sajid Chachu, while he was hooked up to transfusion equipment and nestled between pillows. I told him to hang around the world a little longer, if only to deliver a few more *footage*, and certainly long enough for me to get married. I couldn't imagine anyone else officiating my wedding. He sang me a *song* and read me a poem about the nikkah—both, in Punjabi. Three days later, he passed away. I have been trying to remember our conversation ever since. I have not been able to recall more than a sentence.

In my grief, I have dishonored his memory with my faulty Punjabi. I wonder, if he had spoken his last words in English, would they be easier to remember? This feeling haunts me. When I speak about him, and his absence, English fails me. How do I tell stories about him or quote him in any language other than the one he was funniest in?

Zainab

When I grieve, I can explain my feelings best in Urdu. I argue the best in English, but it fails me in matters of grief. English has been a language I drive points home in, but it's not the tongue that has allowed me to spill out my love. I was raised in the tenderness of Urdu, Even swear words, like *ulloo ki patthi* , were said with a foudness I cannot translate. Now, my self-made terms of endearment stem from Urdu words: *Piera* from the word *pyaar* meaning love, *Mitha* from the word *meetha* meaning sweet.

ارے نہیں نہیں

سب کمی

ارے نہیں نہیں، ایسا نہیں ہوگا، ابھی وقت ہے، کوئی چمتکار ہوگا، میرے لئے یہ بات ہوئی ہے، اسی الجھن نے رہنے کا وعدہ کیا ہے اس نے۔

تم اب چلتے چلتے آؤ۔

اور ہاں، آج پھر وہیں کھڑا ہوتا ہے، خوابصورت تمہاری طرف، اس کا کچھ بھی کہو، تب کہ دوارات پھر موجود رہے گا، تاکہ تم اس کی روشنی میں تمہارے گھر کی چھت پر چڑھ کر ایک دوسرے سے اور گزرے ہوئے دن کی باتیں کریں۔

اس لئے کہ ابھی کچھ بھی نہیں رہتے، رہنا میں تمہیں اپنا پرسات لیتے آؤں گی۔

صرف تمہاری۔

MY CORONATION

Asad Ali

aiza bhi koi khuda kya — ke chalte haam jaayenge ruk?
— Poor Rich Boy, "Today Huay Admi"

I.
i have forty fasts neglected, marked
into my skin like tallies for when
it is time for condemnation, now waiting.
now the singed scent of deposition. now
silence. now i am studying my ancestors,
my experiments,
II.
my Lord do not let this spring bloom.
do not let the vine climb any higher
or i will confuse its shadow for an
eclipse. i will puncture a leaf,
ceaseless searching for sclerosis.
my Lord why don't You grieve?
III.
there is so much noise in
my asylum & now this temple
this shelter is obsolete a building
of stone with so many etchings the
walls are thinner than the parchment upon
which i will continue to write my futile letters
IV.
now watch. i am basking in the remains
of your retired machinery & every insult
is an inverted acknowledgement of Who
i believe exists sometimes but still, it is so easy
to dissolve it so hard to be dissolved—ego
mangled, membranes still steadfast now

آغوش میں بن بلائے سرد ہوا اور رات

اسد علی

آغوش میں بن بلائے سرد ہوا اور رات
فرق کا پیغام لے آئے سرد ہوا اور رات

نہ خواہشوں کی کمی، ہمرہ ہے ارمان
دونوں کے درمیان چھائے سرد ہوا اور رات

جھولی نا تمرین پہ پہلے بھول گیا تھا
تاثیر ہے پہ پہلا دائے سرد ہوا اور رات

نہ زود تر میں دوام کی جستجو تھی
لمحہ امید لیکھا سے سرد ہوا اور رات

شور نظا میں جھلک کی بڑا جلیلی
خانوں نظا میں تب صدائے رخصت جائے سرد ہوا اور رات

اگر حسن واقعہ الہام کا خلیکار ہے
چاہیں کے دم پر اپنے سرد ہوا اور رات

رموز

شمارہ ۱

رموز کیا ہے؟ لغت کے مطابق رموز کسی راز، اشارت، یا علائم کو کہتے ہیں۔ خاص کر کے وہ نہیں کے طبقے کوئی باقی بیان بات چھپی ہو۔

لیکن یہ حقیقت، جس کا پیمانہ رسالہ اس وقت آپ کے ہاتھوں میں ہے، اس طبقے کی نظاقدی، اس کی اپنی شناخت ہر رموز سے نہیں بلکہ 'RUMUUZ' سے کی جاتی ہے۔

یہ فرق محض رسم الخط یا پھر رومن اردو اور تسنیفیں کا نہیں۔ یہ فرق ہمارے وجود کا بھی ایک استعارہ ہے۔ یہ حقیقت، یہ رسالہ، ہم سب ایک ایسے شہر، ایک ایسے ملک میں اردو زبان کو زندہ رکھنے کی کوشش کر رہے ہیں جہاں انگریزی زبان کا غلبہ ہے۔ جہاں ہماری شناخت بھی انگریزی میں توڑی جا رہی ہے۔ جہاں اردو ایک زبان سے زیادہ ایک جذبہ بن جاتی ہے۔ اپنی یادوں، اپنی تہذیب، اور اپنی پہچان کو زندہ رکھنے اور تجدید دینے کی جستجو۔

اس ہی جستجو کے لیے ہم ہر دوسرے جمعرات کو شہر کے مختلف کھلوں میں جمع ہو جاتے ہیں۔ شاعری پڑھتے ہیں، ناٹک لکھتے ہیں، اور اکثر خود ہی الفاظ کے رہنمائی دعاؤں سے کچھ تخلیق کرنے کی کوشش کرتے ہیں۔ ناقابل بیان کو بیان کرنے کی کوشش کرتے ہیں۔ انگریزی اور اردو کے کسی طالب میں۔

اس رسالے میں اس جستجو کے چھوٹے چھوٹے ٹکڑے ہیں۔ دو زبانوں کی ملاقات، ان کی دراڑ، ان کی آمیزش کی نقاشیاں ہیں۔

یہ RUMUUZ ہیں۔

Qurratulain Hyder
Hanif Kaifi
Gangubai Hangal
Ustad Bismillah Khan
Ahmed Ali
Ali Sardar Jafri
Faiz Ahmad Faiz
Ghalib
Mirza Ghalib
Mohammad Iqbal
Mahmud Ghaznavi
Ibn Batuta
Ibn Hanbal
Ibn Sina
Ibn Rushd
Ibn Khaldun
Ibn Arabi
Ibn Taymiyyah
Ibn Batt

ISSUE 01

RUMUUZ

NOVEMBER

2025

RUMUUZ is a community of friends exploring and continuing the tradition of Urdu poetry from New York City. Our perspectives start in each other's homes, where we meet on Thursdays for poetry discussions and writing workshops. At a time when writing in Urdu becomes increasingly rare, Rumuuz represents an attempt not only to preserve Urdu poetics but to think about its progression. Our contribution is this zine: A mix of Urdu and English poems, essays, and annotations. Compiled as a bilingual palimpsest, we layer our writings on top of and in relation to the works of poets we've studied.

Rumuuz is the plural for *ramz*, meaning hint or symbol. And what symbolism does Urdu shayari offer? Its poetics present a wide palette of feeling – at once revolutionary, psychological, spiritual, and romantic. Beyond the technicalities of its verse, we seek to access the memories and associations hidden in its folds. Can the garden (*khamaaj*) symbolize just not paradise, but the confluence of man and nature? How does Urdu literature bear witness to partitions and genocides? Nor do we stop at Urdu; rather, we read in the context of other South Asian vernaculars, and participate in the radical process of translation. As important as its history, Urdu's current dynamics cannot be ignored: publishing in the language is faltering, its script romanized, mixed with English in the West, or made the other in India. Yet, new figures emerge and influence our work, from the enigmatic translations of Haider Shahbaz to the poetic technologies built by Sharjeel Imam, who remains incarcerated in India for his politics.

Local contexts are just as important. In this issue, we center the poetry of our friend, Noon Meem Danish, a Makrani poet residing in Connecticut. Samee Ahmad interviews Danish Sahib and explores his writing on Black identity, while Adeeb Dholakia bases his ghazal on Danish Sahib's radeef, *sard hawa aur raat*. Elsewhere, we include ghazals on the ineffable, nazms on the nazm, essays on family, love poems, vampiric works, half translations, process notes, and sketches. With this zine, we present to you a first offering of what it means to continue Urdu poetics far from their origins, in our home of New York City.

Edited by
Javeria Hasnain
Shahaan Khattak
Sanya Mansoor
Sara Khan
Salar Khattak

Designed by
Kirat Pandher
Zainab Akhtar
Lameesa Malik

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NOON MEEM DANISH: A POET BEYOND FORM AND SUBSTANCE

Samee Ahmad

While on his daily commute in New York City, Pakistani poet Noor Mohammad Danish would absentmindedly count different races on board his bus: three white people, two Latinos, 10 Black folks. But one morning, Danish realized that he wasn't counting himself as a Black person, despite his dark complexion. "I used to think; well I am Pakistani, I speak Urdu. And I forgot that I was Black in my face. I felt that I was forgetting myself."

That Danish could forget his Blackness in this way is surprising given how he has written so boldly about the reality of being Black in Pakistan. He has quietly carved out a career as one of the only Black Urdu poets working within the global Negritude tradition—a transnational literary and political movement across the African diaspora. Danish writes about feeling like a foreigner in his own country, and draws on the political crackdown and resistance in Karachi, when military dictator Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law.

Danish has only published one book, "Bache, Titli, Phool" ("Children, Butterflies, Flowers") but his poetry has appeared in many Urdu literary journals, including the notable *Shabkhoon*, under the pen name, Noon Meem Danish. He has increasingly become known for his literary critique of the innovative subject matter. "Danish was never attracted to the typical love poetry Urdu is known for. In Danish's poetry, you will find the city: characters from slums, laborers who have been oppressed, working-class folks who are stuck in cycles of poverty," said Saeed Naqvi, a fellow Urdu poet.

Danish was born in 1958 to a Makrani Baloch family in Lyari—a poor neighborhood in Karachi that is a center of communist politics and the birthplace of Baloch nationalism. The Makrani Baloch are descendants of the Baluru tribes of Southeast Africa who came to the Indian subcontinent mostly as slaves, but also as merchants, sailors and mercenaries, from the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries.

When Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorial regime inspired opposition, Danish was asked to perform his poetry at Karachi's marches. "The traditional Urdu poets, who'd read at mushairas [poetry symposiums], would chastise me as a debater, not a poet!" he said.

Danish has revolutionized literary representations of African Blackness in Urdu. In "Badsurti ka Husn" ("The Beauty of Ugliness"), he provokes the reader to "spit on my face," comparing his dark complexion to the beauty standard that considers whiteness more desirable. Danish has also drawn on how many diasporic Africans have found a semblance of home in the ocean, which plays a crucial role in Negritude literature. This imagery is seen in Danish's work, including in his poem "Lyari," when he describes his childhood neighborhood's connection with the rest of Karachi.

It was you
who laid your head on the bosom of the sea
and first poured its love
into your own soul.
Your attachment to the sea
Your love of the sea
is not a fiction.
The cottage was the sea
where you are sleeping.
The world was the sea
where you are lost.
The sea: a cruel tyrant.
But in its heart,
there is only a mother's love for you.

At last year's Zafar Zaidi Memorial Mushaira, Danish received a lifetime achievement award. Before performing the title poem from his only collection, he told the audience: "I wrote and performed this poem 40 years ago in Karachi...the images coming out of Gaza, out of Palestine, make me think of these verses."

"I see a jungle, in that jungle dance children, butterflies, flowers. I see a vision, in that vision are immured children, butterflies, flowers."

اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں

تسمین نودھی

اپنی زبان گنوا کر کہیں گرا ہوں میں
لب پہ اک کھلا ہوا صحرا لیے ہوں میں

یہ پیڑ سوکھ بے دھوئی یہاں
ان دونوں کے درمیان کہیں کٹا ہوں میں

موری کی داس اک مرتیہ زبان
لکھ لکھ کر اس کو اب مٹ چکا ہوں میں

ہے اک قمر بہشت میں لفظوں سے لبریز
شاید ابھی خدا سے ابھی ملا ہوں میں

شمس کی تلخ تو کہیں سے خرچ
غاموش کیا کریں ہم جو لکھ رہا ہوں میں

Apni zabaan gonwa kar kahin gira hoon main
Lab par ek khula hua sehra liye hoon main

Yeh pehaar sukhaa hua, woh mudhi hoon main
Is doosre ke darmiyaan kahin kata hoon main

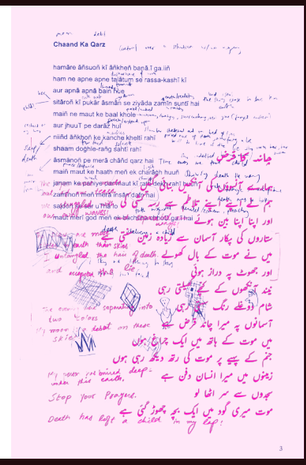
Mori ki daas ek marsiya zubaan
Likhte likhte is ko ab mit chukaa hoon main

Hai ek shajar behisht mein, lafzon se lareez
Shayad abhi khuda se wabasta hoon main

Shams ki tilkhi to kahin se kharch
Khamosh magar yeh kaisaa jo likhaa hoon main

Chaand Ka Qarz

hamāre āñsuoṅ kī āṅkheṅ banā.I ga iṅ
ham ne apne apne tajāsuṅ se rassa-kashī kī
aur apnā apnā bāṅ ha
sitāroṅ kī pukār āsmāṅ se ziyāda zamīṅ sunī hai
maiṅ ne maut ke baal khole
aur jhuṭ pe darāz hui
nīlī āṅkheṅ ke sanche khelī rahī
shaam dogha-rang ḍhal rahī
āsmāṅoṅ pe merā chāṅd qarz hai
maiṅ maut ke haath meṅ ek chāṅgh huuṅ
janam ke pahiyoṅ par maut kī jot jagā rahī hai
zaḍ-bhūt hoṅ ṭūṭe hue ḍhaṅg se
maiṅ mauṭ meṅ gol meṅ ek bachchā ban gaī hūṅ



نظم

زینب احمد ستی

نظم بہار کے پھولوں پر پڑے
شوخ رنگ ہیں، اور دھول بھی۔
نظم شیر کی رنگین گلیاں
اون کرتے کی لمبی رات بھی۔
نظم چائی سگریٹ کا دھواں
اکیلی سڑکوں کو توڑتا پھرتا۔
نظم ماں کے دوپٹے کا عطر
ہر خالی کمرے کو مہکاتا۔
نظم سوتے کے زخم الفاظ :
خالہ جان، آپ کب آئیں گی؟
نظم الفاظ کی قینچی
سانوں کی، جسمی کو نیچ کی۔
چاندی کی راتوں میں چلتی ہے نظم
ہدایت کے روپ، کبھی بے قمر ارمان کی۔
بکھرے لمحوں کو سمیٹے نئی نسلوں میں
نظم کے ریشمی لفظوں میں بند حق۔

nazm bahaar ke phoolon par pare
shokh rang hain, aur dhool bhi.
nazm sheher ki rangeen galiyaan,
unpar kat-ti lambi raat bhi.
nazm abha ki cigarette ka dhuaan,
akeli sadkon ko tatolta phirta.
nazm ammi ke dupatte ka itar,
har khaali kamre ko mehekaata.
nazm mahnoor ke narm alfaaz:
khala jaan, aap kab ayengi?
nazm alfaazon meiṅ chhupa
samaaton ki dhoomi goonj bhi.
chaandi raaton meiṅ chalti hai nazm
hidayat ke roop, kabhi be-qamar armaan kii.
bikharte lamhon ko sameṅte naii naslon meiṅ
nazm ke reshmi lafzon meiṅ band haq.

BONES

Hasan Khan

Cook with the meat on the bone

I rip through myself looking for bones

Authenticity, I only seek things I struggle with, God

Here are the maps my uncles prepared

The scrolls soak in tea until the borders disappear into milk

I tell other people who they are not so that I can name myself

It's what I've always wanted – a new name

Same skin, new bones, white milk, home

My uncle asks if I pray for here or home

We stay silent, suspended in disbelief

خون آشنائی

ارسلان سہی

آپ طاق پر بیٹھے ہوئے شہد کے لب
مفلس کزدایت کو مٹا دیتی ہے
ہاتھ پر ارادہ
ہاتھ پر ارادہ
ہاتھوں کمر
کمر پر غم
غم پر غم
اور غم میں، خفی ہوئے چاند کے ٹکڑے
کزدوئی آزدا
میکی دا میں شہر بانک کے چمک کے سوز کرتا ہے
مکڑا ہوا دوہ آشنائی دور زہو دو بی نفرد
اک قدار دوہیاری سینچائی
دو سر ارادہ دوہیاری کی لہرائی
لیے کزدایت کو موتی ملا
مفلس کو مٹانے کا
مٹھاس کو مٹانے کا

خطوط کے راکھ

زینب الشمس

کچھ خطوط کے راکھ
کچھ لفظوں کی قربانی
اک بیٹے دھاگے میں
پوشاک نے آزادی میں

کچھ بے اس خواہشیں
کچھ اختیار ضمیر
گزری اک عمر
دل کی نالی گلی میں

کچھ دیوٹی کی برم
کچھ قلم کاروں کی ہم کلامی
اک مرموز غم
زبان غیر کی روانی میں

کچھ حفظ کے حکوم
کچھ سرکش واقعاتی
قفس نصیب تھے سب
تعمیرات کی بیزاری میں

Kuch khatoot ke raakh
Kuch lafzon ki qurbaani
Ik be-parda maazi
Poshaak-e-azaadi meiṅ

Kuch be-bas khwahishein
Kuch ikhtiyar-e-zameer
Guzri ik umr
Dil ki nala-e-nakhlī meiṅ

Kuch zubaanon ki bazm
Kuch faskaaron ki kam-kalaami
Ik rumuuz-e-zaam
Zabaan-e-ghair ki rawaani meiṅ

Kuch tahaffuz ke mahkoom
Kuch sarkash-o-inqilaabi
Qafas naseeb the sab
Taameer-e-zaat ki bezaari meiṅ

FORTALICE

Samee Ahmad

And:

While the beggar crooons falsetto,
While the cartoonist scribbles dust,

While the merchant skins coconut,
While the separatist bottles wine,

While the palmist spills ink,
While the taverner potions pills,

While the dancer shoots balloons,
While the sweeper crosses borders,

The gangster awaits with deviled bangles for his muse
In a house charmed by the ghosts of Syeds.

Three Sikh kings compete, converge, fail
In a triangular neighborhood crowned by a fortalice.

An unsharp spear hangs on the jaundiced wall
In a religious school sawed in half by a cleric's ego.

Today I walked to the shrine of the jasmine women
In a street made sinuous, inked by blood.

THERE IS A LANGUAGE CALLED REMEMBERING

Zainab Saeed

Mama

My mother is an Urdu teacher. She taunts me for my inability to count higher than 30 in a language she aged in, or state her age in a language she named me in.

She is my portal of entry into a world in which Urdu and Punjabi dance together. Mama jokes and scolds in Punjabi. All her reactions, her surprises, her wit, is in Punjabi. I can understand what she is saying; feel the sting of the scold or the poke of the joke. But my responses in the language hold no heart—no weight—because my grasp of Punjabi slips when I speak more than a line or two. It reminds me that I cannot see all of my mother; I cannot make her feel fully seen.

Baba

On the road that stretches through Main Seaview Boulevard in Karachi, my Baba is driving and my youngest siblings—Haniya and Ismail—are bickering. The radio plays in the background:

کہ اے بوندا، یا رب اس بار برسا جا
یہاں کہاں ہیں ہم، وہاں کہاں ہیں تیرے
Aye abre barsan aaj itna barsa
Itna barsa ke wo ja na sake

"Hasni, what do you think this lyric means?" Baba says, trying to distract them. We all get it wrong. Baba is kind and patient with us. He sings it back, masking it with the simplicity it needs for our virgin ears, he translates:

Oh clouds please rain
Rain so hard that they cannot go.

I'm not sure who he sings for, I like to fantasize that I am the subject here and he is discreetly asking me to stay in the home where I was born.

Baba listens to 'Hello' by Lionel Richie, and tells me about his boyhood, as well as the hearts he would apologize to if he could. He is cheery when he sings, but talks about how he wishes he spoke better. My father is an eloquent man: smooth with his compliments, interesting with his questions, and simple with his needs. His charisma translates in Urdu, Punjabi, and English. But, he finds himself lacking when he thinks about his English vocabulary. It reminds me of how I feel speaking Punjabi.

Chachu

Baba's youngest brother, Sajid Chachu, loved to sing but he wasn't any good. His nickname was *booto*, which means plant and I don't understand why everyone called him that but it seemed fitting. (I cannot explain why in English). There is a form of lame humor I call *Bongis*; the closest translation I can offer is unusual, silly, and affectionate. If someone could be crowned for inventing this type of humor, it would be my Sajid Chachu. The best *bongis* were in Punjabi, medium ones in Urdu, and the lamest (yet silliest) ones in English, but only because they made the least sense.

Chachu got blood cancer two years ago. I don't know the Urdu word for cancer. No one I know ever used it. In his most painful moments, his *bongis* continued. A few weeks ago, I lay next to Sajid Chachu, while he was hooked up to transfusion equipment and nestled between pillows. I told him to hang around the world a little longer, if only to deliver a few more *bongis*, and certainly long enough for me to get married. I couldn't imagine anyone else officiating my wedding. He sang me a song and read me a poem about the nikkah—both, in Punjabi. Three days later, he passed away. I have been trying to remember our conversation ever since. I have not been able to recall more than a sentence.

In my grief, I have dishonored his memory with my faulty Punjabi. I wonder, if he had spoken his last words in English, would they be easier to remember? This feeling haunts me. When I speak about him, and his absence, English fails me. How do I tell stories about him or quote him in any language other than the one he was funniest in?

Zainab

When I grieve, I can explain my feelings best in Urdu. I argue the best in English, but it fails me in matters of grief. English has been a language I drive points home in, but it's not the tongue that has allowed me to spill out my love. I was raised in the tenderness of Urdu. Even swear words, like *ulloo ki patthi*, were said with a fondness I cannot translate. Now, my self-made terms of endearment stem from Urdu words: *Piyaar* from the word *pyaar* meaning love, *Mitha* from the word *meetha* meaning sweet.

ارے نہیں نہیں

سب کہیں

ارے نہیں نہیں، ایسا کچھ نہیں ہوگا، جانے وقت ہی پہنچے گا میری بارے میں کیا بات ہوئی ہے ابھی ابھی کہ رہے تھے وہ کیا ہے اس نے۔

تم اب چلتے چلتے آؤ۔

اور ہاں، آخری چیز جو میں کہنا چاہتا ہے، خوبصورت، تمہاری طرف۔ اس کا کچھ بھی کہنا ہے کہ دوبارہ پھر موجود رہے گا، کہ تم ہمارا اس کی روشنی میں تمہارے گھر کی چھت پر بیٹھ کر ایک دوسرے سے اور گزرے ہوئے دن کی باتیں کریں۔

امید ہے سب پلیئر دعوہ رہیں گے۔ کوئی لڑکا ہے وقت نہ ہو، کوئی مرحلہ گزرنا نہ گزرے، بال نہ ہو میں تنگی نہ گزرے۔

بس مجھے کہا ہے چلتے چلتے، خوبصورتی رہا میں تمہیں ہمیشہ یاد رہے گی آں گی۔

صرف تمہاری۔

MY CORONATION

Asad Ali

aisa bhi koi khuda kya — ke chalte haam jaayenge rukk?
— Poor Rich Boy, "Tootay Huay Admi"

I.
i have forty fasts neglected, marked
into my skin like tallies for when
it is time for condensation. now waiting.
now the singed scent of deposition. now
silence. now i am studying my ancestors,
my experiments.
II.
my Lord do not let this spring bloom.
do not let the vine climb any higher
or i will confuse its shadow for an
eclipse. i will puncture a leaf,
ceaseless searching for sclerosis.
my Lord why don't You grieve?
III.
there is so much noise in
my asylum & now this temple
this shelter is obsolete a building
of stone with so many etchings the
walls are thinner than the parchment upon
which i will continue to write my futile letters
IV.
now watch. i am basking in the remains
of your retired machinery & every insult
is an inverted acknowledgement of Who
i believe exists sometimes but still, it is so easy
to dissolve it is so hard to be dissolved—ego
mangled, membranes still steadfast now

آخر سشن میں بن بلائے سرد ہوا اور رات

ادیب احمد علی

آخر سشن میں بن بلائے سرد ہوا اور رات
فرش کا پیمان لے آئے سرد ہوا اور رات
نہ خواہشوں کی کمی، ہمراہ ہے ارمان
دونوں کے درمیان چھایا ہے سرد ہوا اور رات
جدائی ناگزیر یہ پرہانہ بھول گیا تھا
ناگزیر ہے پیدا ہوا ہے سرد ہوا اور رات
نہ زود گزر میں روم کی جستجو تھی
جب امید بنا چھائے سرد ہوا اور رات
خوش نما میں جھگی کی نما جوئیلی
جب صدائے رخصت سنائے سرد ہوا اور رات
اگر حسنِ واقعہ الہام کا طلبگار ہے
چاٹیل کے دم لڑائے سرد ہوا اور رات

Aakhir sashan meiṅ bin bulāye sard hawā aur rāt
Farsh kā paimān lāe āye sard hawā aur rāt
Firāq ka paighaam le aaye sard hawā aur rāt

Na khwāhishon kī kamī, hamrāh hai armān
Dono ke darmiyān chhāyā sard hawā aur rāt
Armaanon ke darmiyaan chhaaya sard hawa aur rat

Judāī nāgzeer yeh parwāna bhūl gayā tha
Nāgzeer hai yeh yaad dilāyā sard hawā aur rāt
Nāgzeer hai yeh yaad dilāyā sard hawā aur rāt

Lamha zood-guzar meiṅ rūm kī jastajū thī
Jab umeed-e-baqā lajhāye sard hawā aur rāt
Jab umeed-e-baqa lajhaaye sard hawa aur rat

Khamosh fiza meiṅ jhīlak kī nidā jhūlī
Tab sada-e-rukhsat sunāye sard hawā aur rāt
Tab sada-e-rukhsat sunaaye sard hawa aur rat

Agar husn-e-waqā injām kā talabgār hai
Chalo pal ke dam par agvāye sard hawā aur rāt
Agar husn-e-waqa injaam ka talabgar hai
Chalo pal ke dam par agvaaye sard hawa aur rat

رموز

رموز کیا ہے؟ لغت کے مطابق رموز کسی راز، اشارت، یا علامتوں کو کہتے ہیں۔ خاص کر کے وہ جن کے ٹھیکے کوئی ناگفتہ بیان ہاتھ چھپی ہو۔

لیکن یہ علقہ، جس کا پیمانہ اس وقت آپ کے ہاتھوں میں ہے، اس ٹھیکے کی نقادی، اس کی اپنی شناخت رمزوں سے نہیں بلکہ RUMUUZ سے کی جاتی ہے۔

یہ فرق محض رسم الخط یا پھر رومن اردو اور تنقیدل کا نہیں۔ یہ فرق تدریسے وجود کا بھی ایک استعارہ ہے۔ یہ علقہ، یہ رسالہ، ہم سب ایک ایسے شہر، ایک ایسے ملک میں اردو زبان کو زندہ رکھنے کی کوشش کر رہے ہیں جہاں انگریزی زبان کا غلبہ ہے۔ جہاں ہماری شناخت بھی انگریزی میں توڑی ہوئی ہے۔ جہاں اردو ایک زبان سے زیادہ ایک جنجھ بن جاتی ہے۔ ایسی پادشاہ ایسی تخریب، اور اپنی پہچان کو زندہ رکھنے اور تجدید دینے کی جنجھ۔

اس ہی جنجھ کے لیے ہم ہر دوسرے جہرت کے شہر کے مختلف نقوں میں جمع ہو جاتے ہیں۔ شاعری پڑھتے ہیں، لکھتے ہیں، اور اکثر خود بھی الفاظ کے رہنمائی دھاگوں سے کچھ تخلیق کرنے کی کوشش کرتے ہیں۔ ناگفتہ بیان کو بیان کرنے کی کوشش کرتے ہیں۔ انگریزی اور اردو کے کسی ملاپ میں۔

اس رسالے میں اس جنجھ کے چھوٹے چھوٹے ٹکڑے ہیں۔ دو زبانوں کی ملاقات، ان کی دراڑ، ان کی آمیزش کی نشانیاں ہیں۔

RUMUUZ ہیں۔

شمارہ ۱

رموز

نومبر

۲۰۲۵

Borges
Langston Hughes
Meeraji
H.A.Z
N.M Rashid
Mao Zedong
Qurratulain Hyder
Parveen Sh.
uses the same lipstick
Marx
Lenin
Ifti Nasim
Gulzar
N.M Danish
Jaun Elia
Ho Chi Minh
Ahmad N. Qasmi
friends
Yasmin Hamid
S.R Faroqqi
Naiyer Masud
Kishwar Naheed
Fahmida Riaz
Ahmad Faraz
Ali Sardar Jafri
Mir Anees
Amrita Pritam
Ghulam Abbas
Chekhov
Manto
Sahir Ludhianvi
Iqbal
Ali Shariati
Majeed Amjad
Ismat Chughtai
Faiz
Jalib
Khalida Hussain
Intezaar Hussain
Lenin
Munir Niazi
Sara Shagufta
Ghalib
loves reading
Mir
Khusrow
Kafka