The term liberal Islam or progressive Islam may seem a contradiction and a paradox. For centuries, the West has identified Islam with its most exotic elements. Islamic faith is equated with fanaticism, Islamic political authority with despotism and traditions with backwardness and primitiveness. It is the construction of Europe’s other, a Manichean image. Islam has been reduced to an umbrella term for militancy and jihad. For Western orientals, Islam is timeless and unchanging. The interpretation and interpellation of the primary sources of Islam (namely the divine book Quran and divinely inspired practice of Prophet Muhammad, Sunna which together constitutes the basis of Islamic law, Sharia) is an ongoing process and is undertaken by the westerners as well as orientals for their vested interest.

The liberalist outlook of Islam can be viewed from the challenge hurled by liberal scholars and Sufis like Mian Mir (1550) and Dara Shikoh (1658). The works of these scholars contribute to the strengthening of the eclectic outlook of the eighteenth century which leads to the revival of chisti orders. In the history of Islamic tradition in India, even during the reigns of Akbar and Aurangzeb, elements of heterodoxy and orthodoxy have confronted each other. At the intellectual level also, the confrontation between the two was ever present. Thus, the Islamic theological and philosophical precepts and principles exists along with local syncretistic elements as Islam is unable to conquer indigenous religious traditions, and their total displacement can be achieved only at the cost of Islam’s own rejection. The eighteenth century is the age of growing syncretic spirit.

The revered prophet of Islamic religion is born in sinister times when religion means ceremonialism without meaning. He teaches the world simple understanding of prayer without rituals, absence of priestly class and deities and unity of God. But soon after death of the prophet, his simple faith ramifies into different sects and systems under pressure of faith and logic. The sects of Kharijia, Shia, Murjia and Qadiriya are the earliest to make their appearance. Surprisingly, some of the sects like Shias have great affinity with Hinduistic principles of man rising to status of God and later God being reduced to status of man (gurudom). Another important sect of the times is Mutazalites who proffer freedom of will and give impetus to inner will and subjectivity in opposition to the priestly semi-divine
intervention. Continuing with the same stance, my aim is to draw attention towards the
dialectical and progressive nature of hitherto demeaned as monotheistic, closed and
fundamentalist religion of Islam, as manifested in the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Kaifi Azmi
and Ali Sardar Jafri.

Religion and religious activity have always fostered literary spirit. Be it warped, in
guise of condemnation or it may be panegyric in nature, literature and religion share an
equation of stimulus response. Islam as manifested in the Sharia and Sufi practices,
antipodean to the commonly prevalent dictum, provides favorable milieu for the development
of literary activity. The impact of cultural and reformist movements like Sufism, the Bareli
school of jurisprudence, the bhakti-movement, the formation of All India Progressive
Writers Association (AIPWA) and Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) together work
for spiritual and moral uplift of the society. These organisations aim at liberating society at
large from the restraints and shackles of ritualism and communalism which spread sterility
and inaction. The critical endeavors of literary icons like Majaz, Josh Malihabadi, Kaifi Azmi,
Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ali Sardar Jafri and many others are to espouse a parallel world view,
which shows religion (Islam, Hinduism), amidst various hues and colors. Atheism,
secularism and Sufism are prominent themes in the work of these progressive poets. They
unfold the latent similarity embedded in the philosophy of Quran and Vedas, fostering a
belief in monotheism, condemning ritualism and caste system and encouraging the ideals of
religious tolerance and humanism.

**Atheism: Faiz’s Position on Religion**

Many poems written by progressives depict that the ‘other’ of progress is often religious
dogmatism. Progressives indeed up the ante as far as attacks on religion are concerned. It is
worth noting that the tradition of attacking religion that the PWA poets introduce is markedly
different from earlier traditions of religious dissent. Early Urdu poets like Mir and Ghalib also
write scathing satires on religion but their remarks are never that direct and pointed. They
make the sheikhs and ulama butt of their attack but it is never as merciless as the
progressives as they not only assault the religious prophets but also peep deeper into the
system that fosters such practices. The marxist leanings of these poets contribute to this spirit
of religious antagonism. They all are followers of socialist thought. Therefore, they view
religion and its various practices as potentially capitalistic conspiracies that lulls have-nots
into submission. They understand the opium effect of religion as understood and popularised by Karl Marx and make constant efforts to save people from habitual dependence on the shallow diktats.

The puritanical, forever-sermonizing muhtasib, waiz, nasib and shaikh representing both religious and state authority become special targets of ridicule and defiance. Indeed, the lampooning of the religious moralist, standing-in for the ulama, is one of the invariable motifs of the ghazal poets, irrespective of their own predilections. As life-principle, even a life steeped in immense agony is of cardinal faith for the poet. The upholding of life as the supreme principle is tantamount to denial of supremacy of God and religion over it. Life in turn is perceived entirely in its sensual moment, counter posed to the chilling puritanism preached by the muhtasib, (hence by religious orthodoxy), carrying with it the authority of the state.

In his famous ghazal, Faiz questions the very premise on which concepts of belief and God rest. He opens the ghazal by asking rhetorical questions: “You think cruelty will teach custom of faithfulness/ and idols point out the path to God.../ No it does not happen like this… (Trans. Kamal 50). Faiz in the poem shakes the very foundation of the sacred domain as the answers to questions are implicitly stated in the form of presentation of the arguments where he clarifies in the end that life is not a simple equation where customs and idols when added equals to faith and God. The true spirit of God lies not in these rituals but in another domain. Faiz just hints at the other higher domain but never crystalizes his stance. For him, revolution is extension of God. Faiz in his celebrated nazm. “3 Voices”, paints a very deplorable situation of our motherland where he says:

....laws are different.  
My codes are unique.  
The pious bow before abominable idols  
The tall kiss the feet of day pygmies… (Trans. Kamal 84)

In this nazm, Faiz comments on the prevailing condition of the country from three viewpoints i.e. of a tyrant, a victim and a voice from the unknown. The third section “Voice from Unknown” might mislead the reader towards spiritual intervention, but Faiz, typical of
his cynicism towards religion, shocks the reader in the concluding lines, wherein the intervention of the, ‘voice of unknown’ is shown. The voice is not of some messiah or God but it is the vocalism of the messiah of masses, of some revered revolutionary who says:

Patrons and influential friends will be of no use
Reward and punishment will be dispensed here.
Here will be hell and paradise.
Here and now will be the day of judgment. (Trans. Shiv Kumar 86)

The messiah of masses redeems the naïve people of the purposelessness associated with formal means of piety. He aims to free mankind of the baseless fears which restrict the capacities and faculties of human beings.

Faiz mocks at the hollowness and hypocrisy of the champions of falsity and insincerity (in the name of religion) as the pseudo-saints have neither heart nor soul to uncover the real faith. He says in the following couplet that this kind of mock worship is a necessary condition for the sustenance of life for them as:

Na tan main khoon farahum, na ashq ankhon mai
Namazo-shauq to wajib hai, be vazit hi sahi (Faiz, SSH 123)

[Neither does blood, nor moisture abound in the body and eyes,
For such people, fondness of prayer is but obvious] (Translation mine).

Messiah (God) in much of the progressive poetry is used for the beloved. In the poem “The Patient Breathless”, Faiz questions his beloved (who like God is controlling pains and pleasures of his life): “The patient breathless, why don’t you reclaim him?/ A strange messiah are you, why don’t you cure him? (Trans. Shiv Kumar 120). Faiz prefers beloved to God. His understanding of beloved is not based on sufistic beliefs where God becomes the seekers beloved. He belongs to that school of poets who mention God to bring forth a message that is considered ungodly by many.

Faiz’s celebration of iconoclasm is apparent from the verse, “Your Old Forgotten
Memories Came Back”. In this verse, he compares the old forgotten memories of the beloved to the act of placing idols in kaba, a haram in Mecca. He even advises his saki to ring the bells as mosque goers are coming to tavern. Tavern here is symbolic of freedom of choice and will which is missing in the lives of ambassadors of mosque who over the years have made Islam and mosque synonymous with restraint and confinement. He says:

Your pale, forgotten memories
Come back to my heart
As if idols driven out
From kaba return …
Pour more wine,
Play livelier music
Ambassadors of mosque
Are coming to tavern (Trans. Shiv Kumar 136)

Faiz not only calls the beloved a messiah but also confers on her the right to retribution which shall take place on the dooms day. The celebration of freedom and exultation (associated with tavern) is quintessential trait of poetry of the progressives. What is noteworthy is how each rejoices this freedom suiting their disposition. Faiz exuberates in his atheism, Jafri in his spiritualism whereas Kaifi wallows in his humanism and secularism. Jafri’s stance on ritualism is not as fierce as done by Faiz, nor is it garbed in polemics of symbolism as popularized by Kaifi Azmi. His understanding and critique of organized religion is of subtle awakening wherein he in style of sufis aims to bring humans (crazed by religion) in close connection with themselves.

Faiz, unlike Jafri, is not in search of spiritual equilibrium but is on a mission to free his motherland from bondage of slavery in any of its form. Religion or religious dogmatism has been one of the devices of colonisers to maintain their rule. That’s why, Faiz insists on choosing the socio-political issues rather than seeking charisma of sufi path. In the poem “Today Come in Fetters to the Marketplace”. Faiz with force emphasises his belief of channelizing the exultation of a sufi for defiance against compliance and submissiveness and to crusade all forms of restrictions, exploitation and injustice.
Faiz Ahmed Faiz, an iconoclast is never afraid to portray in any poem an emotion he feels deeply. Though Faiz does not follow any particular order of sufis yet he accepts the basic premise of mysticisms and spurns the ritualism associated with visits to sheikhs and ulemas. Sufis intend rearrangement of religion which is too prescriptive. Echoing the same sentiments, Faiz in a quatrain says:

At last, I will be rid of concern for pain or loss
Also rid of the need to beseech all and sundry
Never mind if there will be no wine in hell
At least, the preacher will be nowhere round. (Trans. Lazard 99)

Sarvat Rahman in the “Poet of love and rage” says: “Faiz, brought up as an orthodox Muslim, saw himself as an agnostic but a member of Muslim society. He had, in fact, a deeply religious sensitivity. His message is, in a sense, similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi, who said ‘Purify your hearts so you can save the country’. So Faiz, carrying the cross of pain, (Christian images are frequent in his verse), in the anguish and hardship borne for the sake of the loved one or the ideal perceives the true worth and meaning of life” (109). The true worth of life does not lie in purposeless circumambulation and vain prayer.

Another very interesting feature of their poetry is how Hell (in contrast to Dantes description) is looked upon and revered. It is the only place that is not tainted by the presence of hypocritical religious bigots. Hell, tavern and wine become sites of redemption. Echoing similar sentiments is the poem “Dua” by Faiz. In this poem, Faiz delineates the iconoclasm of men like him in a laudatory tone and says:

Aiye hath uthaven hum bhi
Hum jinhen rasm-e—dua yaad nahin
Hum jinhen soz-e-mohabbat ke siva
Koi khuda yaad nahien. (Faiz, SSH 240)

[Come let us raise our hands as well
Who are unaware of the rituals of prayer
We, who do not know anything but, love

82
Not any idol or any God.] (Translation Mine)

In a nazm titled “Evening”, Faiz creates the image of a temple and priest and takes to task the passivity and inaction associated with idolatry. In the poem, Faiz makes a comparison of a desolate and dreary evening with temple and priest. The ongoing wait in the temple of the priest is highly ironic as these godmen incapable of any action wait for the spirit of revolt to spark through some magic or:

That some which shell may make outcry,
Some anklet speak,
Some idol awaken,
Some swarthy beauty opens her veil. (Trans. Kiernan 229)

The passivity associated with the habitual dependence on religion is irksome for Faiz. He insists that citizens of the country should not forgo their activism under the influence of phoney metaphysics.

The Urdu poet Ashfaq Ahmad, in his preface to one of Faiz’s poetry collections, describes him as a ‘malamati Sufi’. These are a group of sufi Muslims in the classical age of sufism, in the Middle East, who affect an apparent disobedience to the Sacred Law to prevent others from thinking of them as being pious. They feel it would be good for their efforts in trying to quell the demands of their carnal, sin-inducing souls (nafs), if people speak badly of them. Hence the name for themselves: Malamaati--the Blameworthy Ones. Explaining the impact of sufism on the writings of progressive poets, Naomi Lazard in the preface to her book, The True Subject: Selected Poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz writes that: “The true subject of poetry is the loss of Beloved is in fact a Sufi tenet. Then she says that ‘Beloved’ may “refer to a person, a home, a country- anything that is Beloved, whose meaning is love (14). The following lines of his nazm, “Ik Rhguzar Par” throw light on the varied significances of the beloved as:

Woh aankh jiski banao pe khaliq dey raae
Zabaan-e-shair ko tareef kartey sharmaeae (Faiz, SSH 143)
The shape of her eyes is looked over by the Almighty
And the poets find their words inadequate to praise her beauty] (Translation mine)

Garaz vo hasni is raah ka juzu-e-manzar hai
Niyaz-e-ishq kon eik sajda gaah maiyassar hai (Faiz. SSH 143)

[And the pursuit of her beauty is what the heart craves to witness
... a religious place is never too far for a prayer of love.] (Translation mine)

The poem stated above bears testimony to the fact that how God and his bounty is revealed in everything. The eulogy of the beloved is in fact an ode to God’s creation. The word “Prayer” has different connotations as the prayer is of love, and the worship is of beauty. Almighty has been assigned the task of bringing beauty to the world and the view is in contrast to the punishment and fear levying image of God. One should not mistake beauty of God’s creation to beauty of God itself. Faiz in the above lines does not equate God’s bounty with God. It is his beloved that he seeks and hankers for. The poem “Memory” is similar to “To Your Beauty”. As the title suggests, it is built upon the speaker’s recollection of the beloved:

In the desert [daft] of loneliness,
O Beloved of the world, tremble
The shadow of your voice, the mirage of your lips;
In the desert of loneliness,
beneath the twigs and dust of distance,
Bloom the roses and jasmine of your arms.
Somewhere nearby rises the warmth of your breath
Smoldering slowly in its own fragrance.
Far off-beyond the horizon,
shining drop by drop
Falls the dew of your loving glance. (qtd. in Coppola 164-165)

In the above lines, Faiz delineates the beauty of the beloved in the most romantic terms. The analogies of “mirage of your lips”, roses and jasmine of your arms”, “dew of your loving
glance’ and “warmth of your breath makes us evince the poem as love poem. The sufistic understanding of the poem comes in wake of the following lines where Faiz says:

With so much love,  
O love of the world,  
The memory of you has placed its hands on my heart's cheek,  
And though the morning of separation,  
The day of separation seemed to pass,  
and the night of union has come. (qtd. in Coppola 164-165)

While this poem is devoid of any language which would suggest reasons for the separation of the lovers, the use of the term “desert” (daft) can also evince mystical overtones of sufism. Here the implication is that the lover is suffering afar from the beloved in much the same way as does the soul separated from God. In order to get to their respective destinations, the lover and the sufi must traverse this desert of tribulations and difficulties. Yet sustaining the lover here are memories of the beloved (God in case of sufis), which allow him the illusion of union, even though their separation has just begun. Noami Lazard in her preface to the book on Faiz despite referring to sufism conveniently forgets to mention God, the true beloved of a sufi. The reason behind this is perhaps Faiz’s own commitment. The philosophy that Faiz strives for throughout his life does not have much room for metaphysical concepts such as God. But the sufi tenets may work well both for sufis, the marxists and even for those who believe in other kinds of love. Therefore, it is right to say that for Faiz, the sufi teaching comes to have many meanings and loss indicates many losses — loss of home, family, livelihood, country. For Faiz, his country and his people are his beloveds.

In the poetry of Faiz, the treatment of divinity takes a different perspective. In his poetry, metaphorical yearning for God becomes something new, a vital living poetry that speaks of the struggle to survive against the crushing weight of colonialism, imperial war and the injustices that strangles our lives every day. The treatment of religion is different and diverse in the poetry of the select poets of our study. Each one brings a new dimension to the cause of religion.

The question of sin and sinner (which Faiz ardently deals with) can be seen in an
entirely different light keeping in mind the aforementioned view of Faiz being a malamati sufi. Representative of his non-conformism and rebellion, Faiz challenges God and Godliness as he says: “Ik-fursat-e-gunaah mili, woh bhi chaar din/ Dekhein hain humne hausle parvardigaar ke” (Faiz, SSH 33). [A short life of sin was bestowed on to us/ I know how courageous your God is (Translation mine)].

Countering the malpractices and irrational beliefs that are fostered in the name of religion, Faiz comes out fearless glaring right in the eyes of the perpetrators of fear of the revered and says: “Woh buton ne dale hain waswase ki dilon se khudgavai/ Woh padi hai roz qayamatein ki khayal e roz-e-jaza gaya” (Faiz, SSH 104). [O! those idols have caused so much agony, that fear of the revered is gone/ Every day so many mishaps take place that fear of hell haunts no more (Translation mine)].

Adding to his belief in disbelief, he undermines all the ecstasy and sanctity associated with various exponents of religious practices. He undermines their ritualism and outrightly says: “Jo nafas tha khare gul bana, jo uthe to hath lahu hue/ Woh nishat-e-aah-e-shahar gayi, who wakare- duste- dua gayi” (Faiz, SSH 106). [Breath has become thorn of life, hands raised in prayer bleed/ Solicitation to God no more charms, hands raised in prayer have lost respect (Translation mine)].

The juxtaposition of prayer and blood has been shown in a different and new light as the bleeding hands do not indicate any sacrifice. The loss of respect of faith is Faiz’s stance on religion. He shows his preference to abr and sharab in wake of some myth known as judgment day. He wrote: “let there be some clouds, some wine/ and then if retribution follows, who cares?” (Trans. Shiv Kumar 82). Faiz disputes the very principles of the enterprise of organized religion. In his opinion, any religion and its embodiments that take life and its pleasures away is not worth our sacrifices and vows. He in the following lines clears his position on religion and says:

\[ 
Koi maseeha na irfa-e-ahad ko pahuncha 
Bahut talash pase-qatl-e-aam hoti rahi 
Yeh barhman ka karam, who ata-e-shaikh-haram 
Kablii hayat kabhi mey haram hoti rahi \] (Faiz, SSH 96)
Faiz views the quest for divine intervention as fruitless as these are mere distractions which divert humans from the real purpose of their lives.

Progressive poets like Faiz give primacy to *ishq* (love). Love for him is paramount and stand above all other antagonisms; rather it dissolves them. The demarcation between *kafir* and believers is eradicated in his poetry. *Kafir* instead becomes a term of endearment, a synonym for the sweetheart. He celebrates the creed of infidels as they not only resist the conformist code of conduct in all realms of life but also provide solace to many *sufis* and rebels like the poets of our study. Faiz in the poem, “It’s the Same Word of Passion” extols the unbelievers and belittles the sacrosanct. Cementing his belief in disbelief, he says: “Till today, whatever was held taboo in the priest’s esteem/ The same has now become the unbeliever’s credo, the soul’s repose” (Trans. Shiv Kumar 78). He emphasizes that the very foundations of such institutions are undemocratic and autocratic as in their fondness of prescriptions and proscription; human beings are devoid of their natural freedom and will. Faiz digs at the religious leaders who are so insecure that:

unko islam ke lut jane ka dar itna hai
ab wo kafir ko musalmaan nahi karne dete” (Faiz, SSH 115).

[They are so scared of losing Islam]
Now they don’t allow non-believer to be called Muslim.] (Translation mine)

Mohammad Ali Sidiqui in the article, “Parampagat Zabaan Main Ek Juda Andaz ka Jaadu” (A New Magic Casted with Traditional Language) observes that Faiz uses religious imagery for revolutionary purposes. He elucidates his stance by laying emphasis on the protest latent in the following lines, where Faiz says:

*Khuda woh waqt na lae ki sogavaar ho tu*
In this stanza, the words like ‘khuda’, ‘jabean’ and ‘sag-e-aastan’ evoke a spiritual atmosphere to bring out the inqilabi message. In the following nazm also, the conventional religious imagery is carrier of revolutionary message. Faiz in some of his poems gives shocking treatment to religious symbols. In the following lines, he juxtaposes otherwise contradictory terms like kafir and namaaz. He says:

*Har haqeeqat majzaaz ho jae*
*Kaafiron ki namaaz ho jae*
*...Tawaaf karno ko subah bahaar aati hai*
*Saba chadane ko jannat ke phool atae hain.* (Sidiqui 252)

[The real should become the authority
Non-believers should embrace prayer
…Spring becomes the season of religious circumbulation
The flowers from heaven welcome the morning breeze] (Translation mine)

*Naat* (poetry that praises Prophet Mohammad) is the last poem in the *Collected Works of Faiz Ahmad Faiz*. It is therefore, possibly, the last poem he ever writes. The following poem is also an ode in form but in terms of its content, it speaks for the deteriorated and malignant form, love for God takes. Faiz says:

---

Guroor-e-husn sarapa niyaz ko tera
Taweel raton main tu bi karaar ko tarse
Teri nigah kisi gumgasaar ko tarse
Khijaan raseeda tamanna bahaar ko tarse
Koi jabeen na tere sag-e-aastaan pe jhumke (252)

[God shall not bring such times to you
The pride of your beauty remains no more
In warm nights, you also long for comfort
None find your eyes comforting
May you also yearn for spring
And all become indifferent towards you] (Translation mine)
The rulers on their thrones are slaves to anxiety of land and wealth
Upon the dusty earth, Oh envy of the rulers of the age, is thy mendicant!
(Trans. Asif Naqshbandi web)

Faiz emphasizes how the whole edifice of Godliness had become soiled in the hands of self-seeking, corrupt people who spread all forms of malice in the name of religion. The God that used to reside in people’s heart has now been replaced by golden and silver reflection of God. He says: “There are odes in praise of the pleasures of silver and gold/ Here, only the tradition of the joy of thy countenance”. The messengers of God who wear robes of gold and silver for their vested interest now spill venom of hatred and terror as “The fire-breathing tongue of the sheikh speaks of terror and reproach/ From the tears of the way of pain of the poor, is thy cloak!/ This sinner of the world will definitely cry out/ On a Day when for justice and grace there is only thy cry!” (Trans. Asif Naqshbandi web).

The poet in the above couplet addresses God and tells him as to how the distance between God and his disciple is increasing. Sinner is a term of great mediation in the poetry of Faiz as he treats sacred as profane and vice versa. The sinner in the concluding couplet is not Kafir but people who still associate to religion even in wake of its ongoing subversion and decay. Disbelief and rebellion is celebrated in his poetry as it is the only way one can resist the demonic implications of dilapidated edifice of belief.

Islam: Sufistic Rendition by Ali Sardar Jafri

Sufism (Tasawwuf) is defined as inner dimension of Islam. The main emphasis of Sufism lies in inner subjectivity which makes devotee oblivious of everything else but God. Sufis like Rumi believe that the empty ritual of the mosque, church, synagogue or temple is not important. Divinity can best be reached through the gateway of the human heart. Several scholars are of the view that sufism has no intrinsic relationship with Islam. Rather it is hostile to ossified practice of Sharia. The varied forms of Islamic normative practice such as ablution, prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca have consistently have been condemned in sufism piety. On a closer analysis, Sufism as a doctrine seems closer to Kantian universalism and humanism.

Jafri’s understanding of religion has always shown influence of sufism. Jafri mocks at
idolatry and reverence of the so-called godmen. A believer in divine feels euphoric with the energy emanated by the very existence of things around him (God’s creation). Unlike sheikhs and mullahs, they do not desire rattle and toys to amuse themselves and bemuse the masses. Jafri questions the creed of gullible masses who unquestioningly accept existence of all forms of divinity. He says:

*Apni behaak nigahon main samaya na koi*
*Aur woh hai ki har ik taaza khuda se khush hai.* (Jafri, MS 8)

[Nothing could please our eyes
And they feel euphoric at mention of every new God]. (Translation mine)

Jafri’s antagonism towards the bewildered masses swayed by every fashionable God and symbolism is evident in the above lines.

Jafri being a true adherent to sufism refuses to be won over by the ever appealing and fear instilling concepts of bahisht, firdaus, dozakh and roohaniyat. He in one of his ghazals shows how ineffective these formulas have proven in his own life as:

*Inhi rahon main shaikho-muahatsib hain rahe aksar*
*Inhi rahon main hurane bahishton ke khayaam aye*
*Nigahen mutuzir hain ik khurshida tamanna ki*
*Abhi tak jitne miho- mah aaye natamaam aye* (Jafri, MS 89)

[In these lanes, the godmen-accountants have stayed mostly
In these lanes only, fairies and heaven were fancied
Our eyes are waiting for the desire to touch the sun
Till now, all the great men have failed in their purpose.] (Translation mine)

The ghazal shows as to how Jafri manages a life of sanity and sanctity despite being in close quarters with demented masses crazed with the homilies of shaikh, hoor and miho-mah.

Jafri holds the same view towards fake religion. He admonishes mosque goers for having
abandoned the *kaba* which lies in their own hearts. He digs at the wasteful ritual of
circumambulating in mosques and temples and says:

\[
\textit{Kaash kar lete kabhi kabe dil ka tawaaf}\\
\textit{Woh jo pathar ke makanon ko khuda mante hain.} \text{(Jafri, MS 134)}
\]

[I wish they had revered their own heart.]

Who, have mistaken stone edifices for God.] (Translation mine)

The poet addresses the ritualism attached to religion. According to him, this superfluous
endeavor distances them from their true Mecca i.e. their heart. *Sufism* is religion of heart.
For them, recognition of one’s feeling is most important as it is paramount to the feeling of
God. For *sufis*, to realize every impulse of love that rises in one's heart is a direction from
God; it is the realization of the divine spark in one's heart that illuminates the path of one's
life.

Progressive poets writing in the vein of mystics ushers a *sufistic* understanding of
Islam by incorporating indigenous concepts in order to underline the difference between
Scriptural/Spiritual, Religion/Metaphysics and Mysticism/Ritualism. The works and
messages of mystics of eighteenth century like Mian Mir Dara Rumi contribute to the
strengthening of the eclectic look of progressive poets. Rumi, the great *sufi* saint of twelfth
century held that all religions are one. He paves the road for secular philosophies to evolve
and flourish in and alongside with otherwise prescriptive Islam.

Ali Sardar Jafri extensively quotes Rumi in his verses and Rumi’s brand of mystical
spiritualism echoes in his works. In one of his celebrated poem “My Journey”, Sardar Jafri,
embraces the *sufistic* tradition of “*Wahadat ulwajood i.e hamah oost*” maintaining that God is
manifested in every particle of creator’s creation and death is neither feared nor escaped.
Jafri in vein of the real *sufis* laughs at death as he firmly believes: “What strikes the oyster
shell does not damage the pearl”. He envisions himself to be a fleeting moment, yet his spirit
will travel till eternity as he can be heard in children’s voices, call of the birds and can be
seen in the “all the golden streams of the earth, all blue lakes of the sky” (Trans. Bakht &
Jaeger 194).
In the poem, “A Hundred Faces”, he expounds the omnipresence of the power in every particle of this eternity. God is seen as pervading not only gardens, tresses, dancing belles and taverns but God’s presence is also felt in the sword taken to battle, steel of the sword and adze in glass maker’s shop. The last couple of lines surprise us as Jafri instead of castigating the Butparasti (Idol worship) of the believers says: “Busy in worship in the temple of the world/ I am like a Brahmin surrounded by idols” (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 178). The beauty of the couplet lies in how Jafri situates himself as a believer amidst all sorts of blasphemy prevalent in the name of religion. The pseudo religion and its practitioners cannot displace him from his path of divinity. It has been believed that sufism incorporates all other progressive and tolerant sources but Islam. All means of formal piety associated with organized religion is condemned by the sufis.

Ishq for Haqiqat (God) is central to the doctrines of sufi movement. God is loved and treated as one’s beloved. Ishq Allah, Ma’bud Allah (God is love, lover and Beloved) is one of the central principles of sufism. In one of his Ghazals, Jafri mediates communion of God and man leaving behind all doubt and fear. He calls his mashooqa (God):

Come to me.
Come up to me where I call you pass through my eyes, and
Come up to the depth of my heart. (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 176)

Jafri’s unfaltering trust in and love for his beloved God is evident in his poetry. He desires a union with God. The word ‘beloved’ also has different connotations for the poets of our study. Beloved takes form of God for him whereas Faiz treats his country and revolution as his beloved. This is not to say that Jafri is not a revolutionary. Jafri being a socialist at heart has always dreamt of a new dawn for the country but his belief has always been situated in self-ablation. In the poem, “Flame and Dew”, Jafri addresses his God-beloved in the most notably romantic terminology calling out that: “you are my murderer;\ you are my deliverer?” (Trans. Bakht &Jaeger 222). These metaphors remind us of the most romantic compositions of Faiz where similar metaphors have been used for carnal love. Faiz asks his beloved who is also his assassin and sweetheart to stay with him in these dark times when: “… after drinking the sky’s blood….this dark night moves on” (Trans. Shiv Kumar 130).
Harbans Mukhia in his article “Failure as Dissent in Urdu Ghazal” observes that, in the Persian ghazal compositions of the sufis, God is mostly portrayed as the woman, the beloved and man as the lover. The everlasting longing of the sufi soul for union with God finds utterance in the longing of the lover for the beloved. According to him:

... The expression of intensely emotional devotion to God in terms of the human feelings of love between man and woman points to its popular origins, similar to expressions in other cultural zones, such as the Radha–Krishna legends in literature, painting and sculpture. The Radha–Krishna relationship, however, goes further than longing and the ecstasy of their union often finds expression in the orgasmic ecstasy of lovers after a life-long waiting and pining. In the Ghazal, however, there is to be no union; for the poet, longing itself is the ecstasy, a value, an end. (873)

Thus gam (literally sorrow or pain, but better understood as ‘eternal longing’), central to the ghazal, is celebrated and courted rather than lamented and averted. Sufis also take gam to be a stepping stone in the realm of eternity. Faiz extensively uses the gamgeen images in a way celebrating the hijr (separation) which is a step forward in the metaphysical terrain. He regards pain, sorrow in higher platform as it is only sorrow and pain that can make one’s life fuller. In the following couplets, he says that he has no regrets and complaints from life in terms of ungenerous treatment meted out to him as far as materialistic things are concerned. At the same time, he is contented that one thing that he has in abundance in his life is sorrow and pain and it is the wine of sorrows that will keep him company in the tavern of life.

_Bahut milaa na milaa zindagii se gam kyaa hai mataa-e-dard baham hai to besh-o-kam kyaa hai_  
__...sajaao bazm ghazal gaao jaam taazaa karo bahut sahii gam-e-getii sharaab kam kyaa hai__ (Faiz, SSH 396)

[Less or more I get, I have no complaints from life.  
If pain is a companion, then nothing is less.  
Let’s recite Ghazals, let’s clink glasses.  
Hurrah! wine of sorrow be with us.] (Translation mine)
In his famous quatrain, he expresses gratitude towards sorrows of the world as sans pain, the course of his life would have become very dull. So, he questions: “O pain of love, where are you today?” (Trans. Shiv Kumar 10). *Gam* is considered a gift, an offering as Faiz says: “your offering of pain you forget/ while I cherish what you have gifted me” (Trans. Shiv Kumar 14).

Faiz does not refer to *gam* as a stepping stone into eternal paradigms. Instead for him, *gam* ennobles his spirits as he is able to empathise with the pain of others and sing songs of suffering that is collective and shared. In the *nazm* “Reflections”, Faiz reflects upon this shared aspect of sorrow and crystalizes the universality and inevitability of sorrow in life. He says:

What if my heart is sorrowful,
Sorrow looms over the entire world.
This pain is neither yours nor mine,
It’s every human’s inheritance, O Love. (Trans. Shiv Kumar 8)

He even spurns ‘Ishq- e-mehboob’ as he opines that “tajhse bhi dilfareb hain gam-e- rozgar ke” (more alluring are the woes of life) (Faiz, SSH 33). This poem is infused with sentiments that make him write his oft quoted poem “Don’t Ask Me for That Love Again”. Kaifi azmi uses the word *gam* in his couplet:

*Inna to zindagi me kisi ki khalal pade.*
*hansne se ho sukun na rone se khalal pade.*
saki sabhi ko hai gam-e tashnalabi magar..
mai hai usi ke naam pe jiis ke ubaal pade..(Azmi, CNGS 26)

[May there be at least so much turbulence in one's life that laughter should give one no comfort nor crying any solace
O Cup Bearer! All have sorrows
But cups are raised only for those who suffer.] (Translation mine)
In this poem also, *gam* is considered important as suffering dignifies efforts and spirits of human beings. For each of our select poets, *gam* has a different connotation. Faiz makes it important for empathy, Kaifi for sympathy and Jafri for spiritual ecstasy.

Jafri synonymies *gam* with distinctive mystical nuances as he attributes the flight of his imagination to the effervescence of the *gam* that is radiating on the face of the beloved. The following quatrain of Jafri sums up his *sufiana* understanding of *gam*:

Grief’s pearls
Hide them inside
Why flaunt your wealth?
This is a world of thieves. (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 216)

Within *sufism*, longing is the sweet pain of belonging to God. Once longing is awakened within the heart, it is the most direct way to his real abode. This is why the *sufi* mystics have always stressed the importance of longing. Rumi expresses the same truth in simple terms as he signifies that thirst is very important in life. Jafri, an ardent admirer of Rumi emphasise the relevance of this thirst, longing and yearning. He says that thirst is as embracing and vast as an ocean, and the streams of pain and river of grief merge into it. It is the force of the stream of pain and river of grief that the wave of the ocean strives to touch the almighty moon. Only Jafri is capable of using the idyllic description of a moon blanched evening (near the sea shore) to bring forth the powerful message of *hasti-e-danish*.

In another celebrated *nazm* by him titled ‘A Name for you’, Jafri extends pining, yearning and longing associated with lover to God, as the last two lines of the verses beautifully expound the *mashooq-mashooqa* relationship between the seeker and God. He says: “The passion of thirst/ Is also a name for your love” (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 212). In accordance with the *sufi* understanding, the seeker finds reflection of God in everything. Love for the beloved is another name of their passion and devotion towards God. Different forms of relationship between God and *murshid* (seeker) in *sufism* re-echoes the premises of Bhakti-movement. The merging of ones identity with God (*fanma*) and complete dependence on God (*tawakkul*) find ample voice in the literature and writings of both Hindus and Muslims. Like the Hindu philosophy, the tradition of *sufism* rests on the premise that only revelation,
prophetic or personal can take us towards God. It is possible to know God because God’s nature is no different in essence from that of man, and that human soul partakes of the divine and will after death return to his divine source. The sama for sufis is adaptation of Hindu concept of samadhi. When Jafri and other progressive poets talk of sufism, one must remember that sufism is not referred to as Islamic theological doctrine. Instead sufism is revered and cherished for its tolerance and secularism. G.A Lipton in his article “Secular Sufism: Neo Liberalism, Ethnocentrism and the Reformation of the Muslim Other” quotes Pattersons highly racist remark as to how Sufis are “…almost like a hybrid, almost westernized” (427). This remark though biased has some validity in it as sufism is a hybridized, and not essentialized normative Islamic concept. It believes in all the theologies that advocate tolerance and humanism. Post-modern scholar William Darlymple in his article, “The Muslims in the Middle” published in the New York Times concludes; “…with its emphasis on love rather than judgment, Sufism represents the New Testament of Islam” (A27).

Sufis are in love with themselves, as the beloved is within them. The journey is from world of creation to world of creator (Safar dar Watan) and followers of this path do not have to observe rituals. One gaze of the Haqiqat (God) takes them to their destination. In the nazm titled “Remembering You” by Jafri, the seeker calls out for his beloved, (God) and says:

Pain like you
Is both fire and light
Enemy, friend, Beloved
All fires in one. (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 214)

Sufism is essentially the Path of Love, and the seeker is the lover in search of the eternal beloved. When the lover and the beloved unite, all that remains is love. God is used as an umbrella term for emotions of all kinds like envy, love, friendship and pain.

Majnun, the folk character is of special importance to sufism. Majnun is consumed by madness of love for Laila. He becomes an exile from the land of happiness, good or evil, right or wrong has no meaning for him. He is simply a lover. He becomes the proverbial madman who has lost consciousness in the face of his beloved. He is the lover who is totally
annihilated in the beloved’s being. This annihilation is the secret to union. This infatuation of Majnun in sufi sense is understood as yearning for the divine. Majnun (the one possessed, the one obsessed with love for his beloved Laila in the Arab legendary romance) becomes the role model for the ghazal poet. He is a man in tattered clothes, the very image of total failure in life and even in love. Because of his obsession with love to the point of insanity, stones are being cast at him and he is a subject to social defamation. Majnun still evokes a silent admiration for his magnificent obsession, his contempt of temporal success by the ghazal poets. Majnun of the ghazal is the very embodiment of gam that the poet longs for. Jafri in his poem “Robes of Flame” announces the arrival of a mad tramp with tattered clothes. Jafri questions the persistence of such ecstatic Majnun in today’s world as that Laila has been cast away. He concludes the poem saying if such a man exists today then: “It is clear, his punishment must be Death by stoning!” (Jafri qtd. in Sehgal 128). The Urdu progressive poets empathise with this mad figure as they are of the view that the madness of Majnun is the need of the hour. Only a fearless man like him can herald a new dimension to the life of masses crazed by religion. In the following Ghazal, we also sense an overtone of passivity in the life of self-seeking masses that are distancing themselves not only from God but have also been estranged from the revolutionary spirit in them.

In their verses, imagery of intoxication and wine drinking is extensively used to describe state of ecstasy experienced by a sufi. Sufis experienced ecstasy by divine love and after drinking from the cup (pyala), the wine (mai) of love, the reality of religion is revealed to them. Mai is not an object of spiritual exultation for Faiz instead mai in his poetry provides an antidote to the proscribed life of sheikh-o-haram. In the following lines, Faiz sums up spirit of defiance which he associates with mai (wine) and maikhana (tavern) and says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hum parvishe lauho kalam karte rahenge} \\
\text{jo dil pe guzarti hai rakan karte rahenge.....} \\
\text{maikhane salamat hain to hum surkhee-e-mai se} \\
\text{tarzene-daro-bame–haram karte rahenge (Faiz, SSH 167)}
\end{align*}
\]

[We shall keep on penning down our life 
will go on scripting our heart’s woes 
If tavern is safeguarded, we too are safe with wine]
We shall forgo the threats from the keepers of faith.] (Translation mine)

In the poem “Nearness”, Jafri recounts to his beloved, “You are a glass of wine/ A cup of honey” (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 234). Writing in the ghazal metaphor, Kaifi Azmi triumphs the craft by stationing masjid and maikada together. In his famous ghazal he writes: “O, rulers of the town, what sort of town is this?/ The mosques may be closed, let the taverns run on” (Trans. Varma 83). Tavern and wine, the quintessential ghazalic images are implicit codes to celebrate non-conformism, rebellion and ecstasy. Hence, these symbols are invoked and evoked exuberantly in the poetry of the progressives.

In one of his ghazals (mentioned below), Jafri traces the world geographically to accentuate the belief in the power of human being cornering all the nihilistic interventions as for him the only reality resides in human heart, everything else for him is afsana. He says:

\[\text{Yahan Kashmir bhi, Dhaka bhi hai, Kashi bhi, Kaba bhi} \\
\text{Zameen ke husn bhi aur jalweh e arshe muallah bhi} \\
\text{Yahien Jhelum bhi hai, Dajla bhi hai, Dainyub o Ganga bhi} \\
\text{Akab main door tak dashte tamanna bhi} \\
\text{Sarod e manzil ma kibriya uska tarana hai} \\
\text{Haqiqat hai fakat insaan, baki sab fasana hai (Trans. Bakht & Jaeger 149)}\]

[Kashmir, Dhakha, Kashi, kaba all are here 
The pleasures of earth and heaven are also here 
Rivers Jhelum, Dajla, Dainyub and Ganga are also here 
Human and his heart is the only reality, rest everything is imaginary.] (Translation mine)

\textit{Sufis} are of the opinion that true spirit of their doctrine lies not in Islam but in human heart. They insist on giving primacy to inner wisdom, voice of heart as heart holds the key to consciously living life in the presence of God.

Faiz, the second poet of our study who is recognized and renowned for his atheism, himself did not undergo a \textit{sufi} transformation but experienced a constant liberation which led
him to the edge of great disillusionment with not only the world constructed by man but also with God and God’s own creation. A disbeliever by nature and principle, Faiz only once in his entire poetic oeuvre, did directly refer to sufistic premises of (Ishan) and (Ana-l-Haqq). In his nazm, “We Shall See”, he refers to the sufı doctrines of Ana-l-Haqq (I am God) instead of Ana-l-abad, (I am slave of God). In Ana-l-Abad, two existences i.e. God and his own are affirmed whereas in Ana-l-Haqq, the seeker himself is non-existent as he gives up himself completely to God. He is trying to show that there is no being but God. This again emphasizes the surrendering of one’s ego, so that he (God) alone remains. At a deeper study of Faiz’s nazm, “We shall see”, one concludes that mention of Ana-l-Haqq is not to emphasize the communion with God but to celebrate the non-conformism and radicalism of the sufı saint, Hussain Mansur Hallaj who was executed for raising so called blasphemous slogan of Ana-l-Haqq. Progressive poets in the mid nineteenth century created a sufı like soma churning the spirit of true Islam. The old standards and yardsticks which were once rooted in absolutism were considered obsolete.

Secularism: Hallmark of Kaifi Azmi’s Poetry
The progressive poets of our study namely Kaifi Azmi, Faiz Ahmed and Ali Sardar Jafri are divided in their treatment of religion but their individual poetic struggle is to achieve a unified and common aim of recommendation of secularism, humanism and liberty. The imagery, metaphor, color and tenor of their poetry are markedly secular and plural. The themes of divine love, relation of man with God, contentment, mutability of human existence, its joys and sorrows and its deep impact on religious life have been aptly yet differently dealt with, in progressive poetry. The progressive ideal of assimilation of religious symbolism is for not only religious but also political and cultural uplift of the society.

Premchand (while presiding over the sessions of the Conference) also delivered an address on the nature and purpose of literature in which he denounced religious revivalism. He says that:

Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, all the prophets, tried without success to lay the foundation of their equality on moral precepts without any success. Today the distinction between high and low, rich and poor is manifesting itself with a brutality which has never been surpassed before... We shall fail again if we
Kaifi Azmi, though belonging to an orthodox Muslim family rebels against orthodoxy and status quo and took religion to abstraction, symbolism and metaphysics. His attitude towards religion is of complete assimilation. Unlike Faiz, he does not rip apart religious faith into pieces nor like Jafri does he invoke God and Godliness in his verses. His symbols are not pan-Islamic rather he invokes symbols from all mythologies. He uses these mythological allusions to oppose all kinds of exploitation, oppression and fundamentalism. *Ravana, Sita, Rama, Yusuf, Laxman and Bible* are culturally diverse symbols which find synthesis in the poetic enterprise of Kaifi Azmi.

In the poem by Kaifi Azmi titled, “Lucknow could it be?”, Azmi takes to task the bigotry spread in the name of religion. He after being exposed to the dismal and blood stained condition of Lucknow, (which once was epicenter of learning and composite culture tradition) is forced to put the question, “… Islam’s blood could it be?” (Trans. Varma 19). In the poem “My Past Sits Heavy on My Shoulder”, Kaifi Azmi recounts the image of Partition and is immersed in the memory of men becoming beast. The imagery of carnage also addresses the “centuries of bloodletting…” (Trans. Varma 7) as innocent people are slaughtered in name of religious dogmatism. One is reminded of Thomas hardy’s poem “The Man He Killed” when we read the following lines by Kaifi Azmi.

Those whom I neither hate nor love
I hunt them
I pounce on them
And yield to the corporeal lust for survival. (Trans. Varma 7)

Kaifi Azmi here is critical of war spearheaded in the name of religion, which with years of indoctrination and tutoring has become synonymous with Islam. Though the latest instances of Hindu fundamentalism (the Malegaon blast case) and Christian fundamentalism (Norway bomb blast) he offers defiance to this commonly held belief. In the last stanza of the same poem, he elaborates on the futility of spiritual ablution in this case as: “Many incarnations with a torch held aloft/ Have failed to wash this stain of past” (Trans. Varma 7).
Disillusioned by this fanaticism and corruption inbuilt in all facets of human cosmos, Kaifi Azmi goes for a search of “A new earth, a new sky I cannot find”. He mouths this catastrophe vociferously: “It is no great calamity if God cannot be found/ a trace of my own footprints I cannot find” (Trans. Varma 15). Kaifi Azmi is not a disbeliever like Faiz but cognizant of the present scenario, he realizes the urgency of discovering one’s own true self and identity instead of vainly hankering after God and Godliness. In the poem “Somnath”, Kaifi Azmi equates the ‘idol’ to his ideological ‘ideal’ as he says: “If idols break, we can piece them together/ Their shards embrace to our hearts/ Adorn with them, once again, our broken dreams” (Trans. Varma 57). In the concluding stanza of the poem, Kaifi clearly emphasizes this thought process by saying that in every heart some or the other ideal is seated and not necessarily it may be God for everyone. The very title of one of his well-known anthologies Awara Sajde speaks volumes for his ideological commitment as the place for Sajda or worship for him is not a temple, a mosque or a church but communist party office. He also shows doubts and fears of reconstruction of the lost ideals in hands of priestly class. That is why he says:

If you were to make him, who knows how you make him
If like yourself, it would be a calamity
The world will have neither love nor amity
There will be acrimony, no dearth of enmity
Such a God will not have our fealty. (Trans. Varma 57)

The secular imagery in the poetry of Kaifi Azmi is displayed in the juxtaposition of Ram-Rahim, Quran-Vedas, Karbala-Somnath, and Christ-Mohmmed. In the poem “Chameleon”, Kaifi Azmi in single stanza synthesizes varied cultural and religious symbols namely, azaan, conchshell and cross. He holds on to his secularism even in dangerous times facing threats like communalism and materialism where chameleon is a lone survivor. He says:

Windswept, I have still called the azaan
Blown the conchshell in the ink-black nights
Hung the cross outside for all to see
I have sought to remove it from every home
Taken it to throw far away from town. (Trans. Varma 65)
In the poem “Ibn-e-Mariam”, Kaifi asserts his belief in any messiah. God, Godmen as long as they promise peace and truthfulness in this planet where for centuries dishonesty has succeeded. He reports the threatening darkness of the people who “sow peace and reap war”. He evokes a dismal picture of this planet torn and divided by:

- God, demons, slaves, priests,
- Innocents, drunks, guides, looters
- Pundits, preachers, padres, mendicants. (Trans. Varma 119)

He suggests the presence of all these pantheons amidst crisis of real messiah “who would have gladly ascended the cross?” (Trans. Varma 119). Kaifi concludes the poem by arousing the messiah to the exigency in Vietnam, (the “crucified cities” of the “Bible readers”). The adjectives “crucified” and “Bible” are of utmost importance here as Kaifi is kindling the masses and messiahs to the problems that their country is facing despite being crowded by all sorts of pantheons. What annoys Kaifi most is the parasitic dependence of human beings (which is blessing of religion) as human beings still seek answer to the question as to who will ascend the stake for them.

The poem “Circle” starts in a matter of fact manner harping on the quintessential loneliness which is by product of the nihilism of present age where he questions the shape and future of our country as mosques, (residences of orthodoxy, and retrogression) are mushrooming everywhere. He has used symbols as diverse as Quran, Geeta, Sita, Ram and Ravan together to give the message of peaceful co-existence in the times of barbaric savagery prevalent in the name of religion. Kaifi Azmi’s poem “Doosra Banwas” reflects on the neo-tribalism, in the form of the savage forces of Hindutva who mount a systematic assault on the secular charter of the country. Kaifi Azmi is shaken by the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, and is prompted to write a deeply moving poem, “Doosra Banwas” (Rama’s Second Banishment). The carnage in Ayodhya marks the beginning of the end of the secular republic, as envisaged by the Constituent Assembly, a process that has culminated in the hideous triumph of the murderers and rapists who have challenged constitutional order with impunity in Gujarat. Asghar Ali Engineer in his book Lifting the Veil comments as to how in multi-religious societies like India, secularism enters disputed terrain. He is of the view that in India, even “history is sought to be interpreted through
ideological blinkers” (59). History has become a very powerful tool in the hands of communalist today. The communalists have glorified the past in case of Babri masjid-Ramjanamboomi issue in order to establish supremacy over the other. Kaifi Azmi throws light on paradoxical nature of such communal incidences as in the name of God, the communalists incite people to slaughter children of God.

Consequently, in this poem, Kaifi Azmi shows Lord Rama surveying the carnage that took place in his name in his land, Ayodhya. Kaifi Azmi feels that Lord Ram after witnessing the untamed violence that took place in his name would have smouldered and cursed himself for setting up such a religious site. He expresses Lord Ram’s predicament in the following lines. He says:

Ram banwas se laut kar jab ghar main aye Yaad jungle bahut aya jo nagar main aye Raqsee deewangi aangan main jo dekha hoga, 6 december ko shri ram ne socha hoga Inne deewane kahan se mere ghar main aye? (Azmi, CNGS 111)

[When Ram returned home after exile
He was nostalgic about the jungles after coming home
After watching the mad passion flushed in his name
Shri Ram might have thought on 6 December
From where have these zealots come?] (Translation mine)

In the second line, Kaifi places nagar and jungle together so as to bring out preference of Lord Rama. Lord Rama definitely preferred jungle to his own birth land where human beings have become more frenzied and dangerous than wild animals. The last stanza of the poem is touching as Kaifi brings out the remorseful and pensive mood of Lord Ram that adjudicates him to take a second exile.

Paun Sarjoo main abhi Ram ne dhoye bhi na the Ke nazar aye wahan khoon ke gehre dhabbe, Ram yeh kehte hua apne dware se uthe,
Deewangi, another name for passion leaves Kaifi pondering over its significance in present times. He opens one of his ghazals by interrogating the raqs-e-deewangi of the idols of stones who are present in abundance. But their presence is namesake as they lack conviction, commitment and madness that once was associated with men. They can be spotted all around us, but are incapacitated to endure the strong wind of the jungle. The ghazal begins with the quintessential description and juxtaposition of masjid and maikhana in presence of a lunatic figure that in ecstasy stagers his way in to the alleys of his beloved. The simultaneous positioning of sacred (masjid) and Profane (maikhana) is a deliberate attempt on the part of the poet. Intoxication of love of God is needed to make this world a better place. For him, presence or absence of God is not matter of paramount concern. He is looking for human beings, who possess humane qualities. His aim is to lay foundation of such a society where different Gods, religions and faiths co-exist amicably. It is to emphasise on this sentiment that he writes the following couplet:

It is no great calamity if god cannot be found. 
A trace of my own footprints I cannot find. (Trans. Varma 15)

Kaifi’s poetry cannot be clubbed under the headings of atheism (associated with Faiz) or sufism (Jafri’s inclination). He belongs to school of secular humanism where all symbols, Godly, agodly and ungodly are directed towards mission of amicable co-existence. What is noteworthy is how same symbols (mosque, tavern, wine etc.) despite being sites of redemption provide us an insight into the difference in their outlook and treatment of the same subject.
Garam Hawa, movie written by Kaifi Azmi, was the first film to grapple with the experience of Indian Muslims after Partition of the country. It is a socio political drama and Kaifi wrote the screenplay and lyrics of the movie. The movie is steeped in secular tradition and in order to bring out the syncretic lineages of the Hindus and Muslims, a sufi qawwali is introduced in the movie, which teaches us the message of love, compassion and co-existence. The song evokes Maula Salim Chishti, Aaga Salim Chishti (Azmi, MAS 179) which is symbol of unity, integration and solidarity of Hindus and Muslims who have stayed cheek by jowl since times immemorial. Kaifi Azmi also shares the same concern without mincing words in the poem, “Chameleon” in which he says:

Life today has a name- Fear
Fear is a ground on which
Communalism grows, differences sprout
And waves leave the ocean to make their own way. (Trans. Varma 65)

The very next stanza highlights the nature and characteristics of bigots (chameleons) who spread hatred in the name of religion. The chameleon, symbol of fanaticism himself confesses that as long as fear lurks in the heart of human being, they can be easily led astray. Chameleon in the poem personifies different avatars of satan in the society. Chameleon acts as a messenger of evil when it says:

All I need to do is change my face
Change my idiom, the tone of my speech
None can then destroy me
Or celebrate the festival of man. (Trans. Varma 65)

Kaifi Azmi in the above poem asserts cogently that humanity can never prosper till the time they rise and remove ice of fear, superstition and narrow mindedness from their heart. Until human being free themselves of these vices, some or the other chameleon in some or the other form will keep on pricking and piercing them.

In the poem, “Lamps” which he wrote on 26 January 1947, he is shown having lit 26 lamps to celebrate the Independence of the country. Ironically, these lamps cannot illuminate the
country rather they are capable of torching the country to ashes as these lamps lay bare the
nakedness, poverty, animosity and communalism that is being dispersed in the name of
freedom, prosperity and unity. He spotlights the communal tension of the country as
everywhere: “we saw a mother’s shelter breach/ its joints coming apart simultaneously”
(Trans. Varma 91). In these lines, Kaifi Azmi alludes to the bi-furcation of the country done
in the name of religion.

Naresh Nadeem in the article “Leaving the Land in Your Care, Friends”, talks about Kaifi’s
much controversial poem, “Peer e Tasman Pa”. Quoting a few lines from the most important
poem of this genre, Kaifi lambasts the agents and agency of communal violence when he
says:

Riding my shoulders, someone chants
Bible and Vedas and Quran
Flies keep buzzing near my ear;
With mine ears so injured,
My own voice how can I hear!'(Trans. Nadeem web)

The poem uses the symbolism of an old man forcibly riding Sindbad the sailor's shoulders,
crushing him under the dead weight of myths. The poem censures both Hindu and Muslim
bigots. But Muslim clerics took exception to the reference made to the Prophet's journey to
the moon and compelled the government to ban Awara Sajde (1995) when it came out. The
poem is missing from the anthology Sarmaya (1994), too. The following couplet from the
same poem throws light on how freedom of speech is being curbed. Kaifi says: “Wa hasrata
kitne sukhan-haye-guftan / Khauf-e-ataab-e-khalq se na-gujta reh”.[How sad that a number
of things worth talking about/ couldn't be talked because of the fear of people's outrage!]
(Trans. Nadeem Web).

The couplet passes the test of time as today also we witness how fringes control and hijack
our secular and personal spaces. The fatwa issued against arrival of Salman Rushdie and
reading of his books by different authors in the Jaipur literary festival, the ban on all girls
rock band in Kashmir attests the continuation and domination of such retrogressive forces in
our country. Kaifi begins a later poem Saamp (Snake) in defensive terms. He deploys the
snake as a symbol of fundamentalism:

Ye saanp aaj jo phan uthaaye
Mere raaste mein khadaa hai
Padaa thha qadam chaand par merajis din
Usi din use maar dala thha maine

[This snake that blocks my way,
Poised to strike
I had killed it the day
I set foot on the moon] (Trans. Mir Ali Raza web)

However, in the poem mentioned above, Kaifi delves deeper into the problem and describes how the wounded snake of orthodoxy takes refuge in a temple, a mosque and a church, where it is progressively treated and made stronger. So far, it appears quite conventional. But by the end of the poem, Kaifi acknowledges that the fault does not lie only with religion as the roots of the problem are much deeper:

Hui jab se science zar ki ghulam
Jo thha ilm ka aitbaar nth gaya
Aur is saanp ko zindagi mil gayi

[Ever since science has become capitalism’s slave
Knowledge has been proven untrustworthy
And this snake has found life.] (Trans. Mir Ali Raza web)

Kaifi throws light on the evil designs of capitalists who are the real showmen behind the communalist allegiance. The impact of socialism is so overwhelming on them that they view religion and religious dependence as an extension of their Marxist dialectics.

**Secularising Karbala**

Karbala becomes a very potent symbol in the process of secularization of Hussain. Hussain then no longer remains an exclusively Islamic denomination but the progressive
characterization of Islam paves way for celebration of Karbala as a universal lingam enshrining the ideas of universal justice, resistance to colonial and postcolonial categories and building of trans-national solidarities.

The Battle of Karbala takes place in present day Iraq. On one side of the highly uneven battle is a small group of supporters and relatives of Muhammad's grandson Husain Ibn Ali, and on the other is a large military detachment from the forces of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph, whom Husain has refused to recognise as caliph. Husain and all his supporters are killed, including Husain's six months old infant son, and all the women and children were taken as prisoners. The dead are regarded as martyrs by Muslims, and the battle has a central place in Shia history and tradition, and has frequently been recounted in Shia Islamic literature. The theme of suffering and martyrdom occupies a central role in the history of religion from the earliest time. Sacrifices are a means for reaching higher and loftier stages of life; to give away parts of one's fortune or to sacrifice members of one's family enhances one's religious standing. The Biblical and Quranic story of Abraham, who so deeply trusts in God that he, without questioning, is willing to sacrifice his only son, points to the importance of such sacrifice. Taking into account the importance of sacrifice and suffering for the development of man, literature has given a central place to the death on the battlefield of Muhammad's grandson Husain Ibn Ali.

Faiz and Jafri both interpellate the symbol of Karbala into trans-religious form, giving a call for justice and action. Karbala becomes a symbol of revolution, reform and sacrifices that appeal to both Muslims and Non-Muslims. Ali Sardar Jafri writes a poem titled “Karbala" and despite his unabashed endorsement of marxism, he acknowledges relevance of Karbala to his progressive thinking. Jafri admits that:

There is a need to secularize Hussain so that he does not become an Islamic commodity. For him, Hussain’s position is different from other Martyred imams of majlis and qawwalis as the others were preoccupied by after-life. Hussain on the other hand wanted to change the world (constituted by Muslims and Non- muslims). The battle of Karbala is not a thing of past but continues today in form of various ongoing movements and struggles against
Common and Catholic enemies of Communalism, capitalism and imperialism.
(qtd. in Hyder 185)

In some or the other nook and cranny of the world, rebels are fighting their battles of Karbala against oppression, injustice and neo-colonialism. Jafri writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Arsh-e-roo-onat ke khuda} \\
\text{Arz-e-sitam ke devta} \\
\text{Yeh tean aur lohe ke but} \\
\text{Yeh seemo-zar ke kirbiyan} \\
\text{Barood hai jin ki kaba} \\
\text{Rocket ki lai jin ki sada} \\
\text{Toojane gam se bekhabar (Jafri, MS 117)}
\end{align*}
\]

[The lords of arrogance
The Gods of lands of oppression,
These idols of tin and iron,
The deity of silver and gold,
Clad in garment of gunpowder,
Their voices like the sound of rockets,
Indifferent to the storms of sorrow] (Translation mine)

Jafri has given a picture of modern day Karbala of rockets and gunpowder where questions perturbing humanity are not simple such as old concerns of faith but the issues at hand are highly complex which are: greed, of lust of power and gold. Syed Akbar Hyder is of the view that:

By invoking Karbala, Jafri embarks on his own battle, singing the rallying song in these battles are the rivers of God’s natural creation- the Euphdrotes, the Ravi, and the Ganges. They all stand in opposition to the Yazids, the Humulas and Shimrs of the present day”. Jafri views that such authorities cannot surface on God’s earth without uprisings also surfacing. After all, the earth is very much alive and strong, sustained by matyrs blood. Unlike Eliot’s
Wasteland, Jafri portrays a hope in mountain skewer like Farhaad who hewed the mountain so as to make a river flow through it. (189)

Modern day Farhads are the youth, the students, the actual vanguards of a country who will wage a battle against royal falcons and instead of being eunuch of words and sweet nightingales, they will act as potent tools and forces of heralding change in the country. Jafri in this epic poem like a hard task master hits cogently at the kasamwado-kamhunar (less talented and inept) civilisation where “Ilm-o-hunar ke maikade” (universities: the taverns of knowledge and talent) have been transformed into “kargason ke ghosle”. (nests of vultures) (Jafri, MS 117). The usage of the word tavern for universities is stirring as it not only takes us back to emblematic Urdu ghazalic topography but also throws light on the situation of present day academia. Unlike olden times when tavern was a symbol of freedom, unconventionality and prowess, it has now been reduced to a place of debauchery and orgy of words and belles letters in this case.

Ali Sardar Jafri shows a marked shift in treatment of the subject of Karbala as he himself has mourned the loss of Ali in one of his marasiyas written in his youth and he reduces Karbala to a pan Islamic symbol. But later on, in his mature works, he transcends the metaphor of all boundaries and limitations.

On the issue of Palestine and Third World, Jafri and Faiz invoke the battle of Karbala. Kaifi Azmi, versifies the plight of Palestine and Lebanon in idiom of Karbala, Hussain and Yazid. On the issue of Palestine and Third World, Jafri and Faiz invoke the battle of Karbala. Faiz’s commitment to the stance of Hussain is evident in his verse in which he writes, what he believes to be Husain’s last words....

We desire neither power nor authority,
Nor do we desire grandeur
We side with virtue, justice, humanity,
if we oppose the oppressor, its because we help feeble.
He who does not resist tyranny, is himself a rejecter of religion. (qtd. in Hyder 192)
In the hands of progressive poets, Karbala is moulded in such a way that it neither remains a divided dialectics nor an abstract metaphysical experience. Karbala extends out of premise of Shia, Sunni, Sufi, Hindu, Muslim, and Diaspora equally. When Faiz Ahmed Faiz visits war stricken Beirut in 1982, he compares the carnage to Karbala in the poem “A song for Karbala”, he drew similarity between children dying in Lebanon and those martyred in Karbala:

Those mirrors of children’s laughing eyes- shattered  
Now by the flames of those burning lamps  
The nights of this city are lit  
And the land of Lebanon is resplendent. (qtd. in Hyder 191)

Many other Urdu poets like Ahmed Faraz have employed images of Karbala in the discourses mourning the destruction of Lebanon during 1970s and 1980s. Kaifi Azmi also celebrates Hussain in some of his poems but in the more mature poems by him, Karbala is seen as the battle for justice and rebellion. He concludes his ghazal with the following couplet: “Cemeteries simmer under the awning of blood/ To the farat riverbanks the thirsty returns again” (Trans. Varma 35). The thirsty people are the ones thirsty for justice and secularism who will not waste their lives being misled in name of “…Gods of stone” (35). Kaifi rightly puts the need for another battle of Karbala as:

hurriyat ko aaj phir hai ibn-e-Haider kii talaash  
vaqt ko phir hai karoron men behtar kii talaash  
zindagi ko phir ek jaan-baaz rukbar kii talaash  
phir jawaani khone ko hai vo nishaan-e-hurriyat  
phir huii hai dosh-e-Abbas dilaav kii talaash  
phir hummiyat uthi hai phir hai izzat garm-o-kaar  
phir huii hai zindagii ko josh-e-Akbar kii talaash  
dekhnaa Kaifi nishaan-e-Hurriyat lahraaegaa  
jab jaahaa ko azm-e-Sher-e-Karbala ko mil jaaye (qtd. in “Kaifi Azmi’s Nazm on Hazrat Imam Hussain” web)

[Humanity searches for another Haider]
Time is seeking better moments
Life seeks a fearless leader
Humanity is about to lose its youth
Search for “The One” had begun
Life again seeks its lost zeal
Let’s see kaifi, when the new flag will fly
Only when world will find its new Karbala.] (Translation mine)

The predicament as well as achievement of a progressive poet is the usage of religious symbols like Karbala for rejection of religious orthodoxy and bigotry.

In the hands of the progressive poets and writers, religious terminology becomes tool for arising class consciousness. Despite all the poets of our study being Muslims, they have nothing to do with Islam as none of them practices religion. Instead they expend religion and religious imagery to meet the needs of the progressive constitution. Their preference for revivalism and their efforts to present religion in a new light is in reality a way to promote rationality and democratic ideals.

Notes
Naat is poetry that is written to praise Islamic prophet, Muhammad. The practice is popular in South Asia (Pakistan and India). It is commonly written in Urdu and Panjabi language.