"Hum Dekhen Ge" (We Shall See) — Performing Poetry and Cultural Memory in Pakistan and India

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Abstract

Considering the co-existence of poetry in South Asia in oral and textual mediums, my thesis considers the afterlife of the polemical poem “Hum Dehkhen Ge” (We Shall See), written by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, a Marxist Pakistan poet, against the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. While Faiz’s position as one of the most influential poets has contributed to its recurrent productions, I aim to focus on the poem itself. What happens to it in the new imaginings? How does the individual agency of the performers affect their response? And finally, how does the poem’s position in cultural memory — central to the various iterations — enable collective expression? Throughout the thesis, I seek to answer these questions by looking at subsequent iterations of the poem — in poetic textual form, as performed at the site of protest (Alhamra Music Hall, 1986; and the Anti-CAA protests, 2019-2020), and finally, under a corporate monolith’s production in Coke Studio. Drawing on the work of Performance Studies scholars such as Diana Taylor, Joseph Roach, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, I explore the poem’s temporal expansion and its place in “embodied cultural memory” (Roach 2). On the one hand, I stress that the poems’ revival leverages what Taylor terms “repertoire,” situating it as an anthem of protest in global histories of struggle. I highlight its role in creating transnational solidarities through a close analysis of the performance site and the artist-audience interaction in Iqbal Bano's 1986 performance in Pakistan and the anti-CAA protests in India. Ultimately, I argue that it collapses the binaries between audience, performer, and writer, signifying its radical afterlife. In contrast to these radical iterations, I analyze its co-option by a soft drink conglomerate that renders its revolutionary sentiments into a “spectacle” (Debord) and an

aesthetic commodity. Underscoring "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s utilization by two different camps to generate their brand of collective liberation, I illustrate the evolution of this poem both in the moment of its creation and transformation to highlight what I argue is the lived life of poetry.

Résumé

Compte tenu de la coexistence de la poésie en Asie du Sud sous forme orale et textuelle, ma thèse porte sur la postérité du poème polémique "Hum Dehkhen Ge" (Nous verrons), écrit par Faiz Ahmad Faiz, poète marxiste pakistanais, contre la dictature du général Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) par Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Si la position de Faiz comme l'un des poètes les plus influents a contribué à ses productions récurrentes, mon objectif est de me concentrer sur le poème lui-même. Que devient-il dans les nouvelles imaginations ? Comment l'action individuelle des interprètes affecte-t-elle leur réponse ? Et enfin, comment la position du poème dans la mémoire culturelle - centrale dans les différentes itérations - permet-elle l'expression collective ? Tout au long de la thèse, je cherche à répondre à ces questions en examinant les itérations ultérieures du poème - sous forme de texte poétique, tel qu'interprété sur le site de la protestation (Alhamra Music Hall, 1986 ; et les manifestations Anti-CAA, 2019-2020), et enfin, sous la production d'un monolithe d'entreprise dans le Coke Studio. En m'appuyant sur les travaux de chercheurs en études de la performance tels que Diana Taylor, Joseph Roach et Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, j'explore l'expansion temporelle du poème et sa place dans la " mémoire culturelle incarnée " (Roach 2). D'une part, j'insiste sur le fait que la renaissance du poème tire parti de ce que Taylor appelle le "répertoire", en le situant comme un hymne de protestation dans les histoires mondiales de lutte. Je souligne son rôle dans la création de solidarités transnationales en analysant de près le lieu de la performance et l'interaction entre l'artiste et le public lors de la performance d'Iqbal Bano au Pakistan en 1986 et lors des manifestations anti-CAA en Inde. En fin de compte, je soutiens qu'il effondre les binaires entre le public, l'artiste et l'écrivain, signifiant ainsi sa postérité radicale.

Contrairement à ces itérations radicales, j'analyse sa cooptation par un conglomérat de boissons gazeuses qui transforme ses sentiments révolutionnaires en un "spectacle" (Debord) et une marchandise esthétique. Soulignant l'utilisation de "Hum Dekhen Ge" par deux camps différents pour générer leur marque de libération collective, j'illustre l'évolution de ce poème à la fois au moment de sa création et de sa transformation pour mettre en évidence ce que j'affirme être la vie vécue de la poésie.

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Hum Dekhen Ge.

Introduction

Though I was taught Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry in my Grade 9 Urdu class, its performative ambit was lost to me as we focused merely on the textual and thematic analysis of the poetry. Despite hearing its performance by different *ghazal* singers when I would listen to old Hindu and Urdu songs with my family, I could not visualize his political poetry's effect on the audience and why it continued to hold a radical position. It was when I began mobilizing with feminist and socialist groups that I first saw poetry chanted at the site of protests in Pakistan and its impact on the public. The 'performance' was sporadic, beginning with a small group of people singing the first lines of the poem "Hum Dekhen Ge" ("We Shall See") along with "Dastoor" ("Law") by Habib Jalib and "Sarfaroshi Ki Tamanna Ab Hamaare Dil Mei Hai" ("The Desire for Revolution is in Our Hearts") by Bismil Azimabadi. As they sang, other attendees at the protest joined in, some for the chorus, some for other verses they knew. It emerged from the confines of their memory and drove a collective flurry of voices - all coming together in unison.

Occasionally, the singing was accompanied by plays, the beating of the *tarbooka* (goblet drum), the *sarangi* (a three-stringed instrument), or other instruments at hand. Mostly, it was driven by dissident voices coming together, resisting and hoping. I attended countless protests - against Shia-Sunni sectarian violence and the killing of Dr. Ali Haider and his 11-year-old son (2013), Mashal Khan's lynching (2017), the arrest and sedition charge against the Pashtun activist Alamgir Wazir (2019), Manzoor Pashteen's arrest (2020), Irshad Nasreen's gang rape (2020), the Supreme Court's inaction in Noor Muqaddam's murder (2021), its continued inaction in the Motorway gang rape case

(2021) and innumerable others. There are countless protests, countless ways in which the state and law failed to act, in which the law perpetuated the violence, and, similarly, countless renditions of "Hum Dekhen Ge." Each is performed when the law fails, providing hope for a new dawn. It becomes a performative ritual to "transmit traumatic memory" ("You are Here" Taylor 153) with testimonial transfers through speeches of the victims and their families. Though little evidence remains, these moments are etched in my memory and political conscience.

Although my thesis does not discuss these examples, it was shaped by my experiences with them, witnessing the affective power of "Hum Dekhen Ge" across time and space. Considering poetry's power to bear witness to oppression and fascist legacies and its ability to mobilize people into action, I became interested in this poem and its continuing life over several decades. It has been continually re-enacted and re-performed, taking on new forms under its respective agents. Although for me, the poem was rooted in a legacy of resistance, even through the Anti-CAA protests in India in 2020, in other versions, the poem was used to generate a spectacle of nationalism (Jawad Ahmed's 23rd March Pakistan Day performance) and even to sell a commodity by evoking ideas of nationalism (Coke Studio's 2019 version). Both versions are jarringly dissonant with the poem's original intention and revolutionary iterations. Ironically, even these versions are cognizant of "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s position in public imagining, as its use instantly generates recognition. Within my thesis, I aim to explore the poem's performative potential through its changing forms - as a written text, anthem of protest, and a commodified object. I read these in light of Urdu poetry's history of performative tradition and how it remains a part of the "repertoire" (Taylor 36). I question whether, in these different forms, the work still retains its original methodology of resistance. Is something added through its performance in these

capacities? Has it continued to remain a way of 'bearing witness' to the atrocities of violence? Or is there something lost in the repeats?

Borrowing from Diana Taylor's book *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2005), I read the "archive" (Taylor 21) and "repertoire" (21) in tandem with the ideological and discursive institutions that shape and govern public perception and embodied memory and their impact on "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s iterations across time, culture and locales. Utilizing her framework to distinguish between the archive and the repertoire, I stress the differences between live performances and archival residue, emphasizing their collective significance in contributing to the poem's afterlife beyond its moment of production. Taylor defines archival memory as existing in "documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs," essentially "a place where records are kept" (29). She roots the definition in questions of power and the maintenance of the archive, specifically centering *whose* history and memory are foregrounded in these 'historical' documents that exceed the 'live' moment. In contrast, the repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (20). The definition of the repertoire is especially significant in considering how poetry is imbued through mimetic acts of transfer and when applied to the collective nature of protest songs and their performance in the sub-continent. "Hum Dekhen Ge" acquired the status of a poem, an anthem of protest, and commercialized nationalism through such acts of transfer due to its poetic and performative reproduction. Each performance "reconstitutes themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next" (21).

To explore the poem's evolution and continuing position in the repertoire, I explore it through three different forms: the moment of its conception against General Zia-Ul-Haq's dictatorship, its utilization as a performative mode of protest in India and Pakistan, and finally, its commodification and sanitization by a mega-conglomerate. Though each iteration varies in either form or meaning, it showcases "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s continuing legacy in cultural memory. In my first chapter, I highlight Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) as a significant figure in establishing revolutionary, socialist imaginings through his writing, collaboration with journals, and work with the Progressive Writers Movement. I center the raison d'etre behind "Hum Dekhen Ge" as a powerful critique against General Zia Ul Haq's imposition of martial law and his dictatorial regime (1977-1988) in Pakistan and emphasize the poem's radical lyricism. In its textual form, I consider how the poem became a powerful source to depict the spirit of reformation, resistance, and utopic hope, ultimately cemented in the nation's cultural memory. By expanding Taylor's definition of the archive through Paola Hernández's discussion on how "the archive is not just what remains, but rather what can be reshaped and even reenacted" (Hernández 3), I will lay the groundwork for my later chapters considering its different reenactments.

I continue my analysis of its position in resistance historiographies by engaging with the continuation of the 'radical' life of the poem and its position in the repertoire in Chapter 2 by highlighting the position of an engaged audience. The key questions informing my scholarship are: what happens to the life of a poem in front of an audience? How does its position in memory evolve? Does the change in medium result in a shift from its intended meaning? In considering these questions, I expand on the continued life of poetry by analyzing "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s performance and subsequent mimetic imitation across public protests in different forms. This combination of

factors raises questions about the forms of resistance available to subaltern subjects and the role that vulnerability and visibility play in oppressive constitutional politics. I develop this concept by applying Performance Studies theory to an exploration of the mimetic repetition of the poem as a protest through the following examples: Iqbal Bano's performance of "Hum Dekhen Ge"(1986) and "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s usage at the Anti-CAA protests (2019-2020) in India. I focus on the theatricality of protests and the public performance of the poems, making visible the lasting trauma suffered by the citizens of the nation and how songs become "acts of testimonial transfer prove vital to an understanding of cultural agency." (Taylor "You are Here" 152). Ultimately, I highlight how their participation dissolved the effective distance between the actor and the spectator and between performer and listener, allowing them to become one with the performance.

Finally, my third chapter explores the dampening of political meaning from the poem due to third-wave capitalism and its role in the music industry. Using Aijaz Ahmad's elaboration of culture and globalization, Guy Debord's idea of the spectacle, and BKG's discussion on display, I discuss the poem's evolution into a neutral, commodified object in Coke Studio's music video. I explore how the multitude of performers, surrounded by Coke bottles, showcase a spectacle of egalitarianism whereby passive identification with the spectacle replaces genuine interaction as the poem's revolutionary sentiment is reduced to "moment "mere representation" (Debord 13).

I. Poetry and Performance in South Asia

The birth of the three nation-states - India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh - began with a history of blood and, as Faiz Ahmed Faiz would declare, a "stained dawn" (Faiz, *Nuskha Haa-e-Wafa* 112). Histories of anti-colonial resistance, separatist movements, dictatorial politics, and regional violence caused continual rifts in identity and sense of community. However, despite the constant flux, poetry — orally recited, often set to music, and published in homemade magazines and single sheets — has remained a prominent feature of rallies and processions in South Asia, whether in the anti-colonial struggle against British India, as part of the Bangladesh liberation movement, or in resistance against the Pakistani state. Nazneen Ahmed, in her analysis of poetry at the heart of the struggle for Bangladesh, emphasized "poetry's capacity for oral dissemination and its facility as a vehicle for the performance of collective expression" (Ahmed 2). Though her discussion centers around the Bangladesh liberation struggle, it can be applied to literature and resistance movements across South Asia and the "repertoire" (Taylor 21) of oral history traditions, folklore, and songs that dominated the cultural practices. Simultaneously, it has remained dominant in the "commercial" sphere through its usage in popular songs and commercial films. Though poetry in South Asia exists in different genres, my focus is precisely on its ability to enact the performative and exist in both textual and oral mediums. This duality is central to "Hum Dekhen Ge's expansion from beyond the page as it is carried forward by different performances and genres and is driven through the melding of both aspects. In this way, the poem falls under Taylor's understanding of how "writing and embodied performance have often

worked together to layer the historical memories that constitute community" (Taylor 35). The co-relation of writing and embodied performance helps ensure its continued position within the cultural repertoire.

Richard Widdess, a musicologist specializing in South Asia, states that "[e]ven when written down, texts are often recited, chanted or sung, in other words orally performed, preferably from memory, rather than read silently" (Widdess 2).[1] For example, the works of poets Amir Khusro and Agha Hasan Amanat were recited at royal courts by *tawaifs* (courtesans) and bards, as rulers were famous patrons of poetry. While the performances evolved over time and were shaped by the audience, the performer, and, in many cases, the patron, memory has remained fundamental to poetry's continuity. This is imperative to my reading of "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s sustained influence and dominance in the sub-continent. The oral characteristics of poetry significantly influence Urdu poetry as it "inherited the characteristics of orality from Arabic and Persian (and the numerous local languages in its own milieu)" (Faruqi 23). According to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi in *Constructing a Literary History, a Canon, and a Theory of Poetry,* oral poetry does not recognize time and is "remembered--by the narrator, and also by the listener. It is not just memorized; it is 'recalled from out of common sensibility and a common gestalt'" (23). To name some, *ghazals,* stories from *qissas, and qawwali* are all poetic forms that are performed in one capacity or another and have created their own singing genres

[1] *Tawaifs* (courtesans) were trained in the performing arts, including *mujra* (a dance form), *Kathak* (a classical dance form), and Hindustani classical music, as well as literature, poetry (particularly ghazal), *thumri*, and Dadra.

with their performative traditions.[23] Though their literary traditions and evolution are fascinating fields in their own right, my focus lies in unpacking their influence on the performative mode and their subsequent position in the repertoire.

Oral tradition's continuation in the gestalt has a dominant form in South-Asian literary culture: the close link between music, singing, and poetry. *Ghazal* singing, for one, is a dominant poetic genre In Pakistan and the Islamicate cultures of North India that are either set to music or chanted in six vocal genres (See Table 1): *Tarannum* (solo chanting of poems, mainly by poets, *Salam*, *nauha* and *matam* (three hymn types performed primarily in the commemorative assemblies of Shi'a Muslims; *na'at* (a hymn in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, mostly chanted solo; *ghazal* art song (solo with melodic and rhythmic accompaniment), *qawwali* (performed in a gathering of [spiritual] listening (*mahfil-e-sama*); sung by a group with melodic and rhythmic accompaniment) and finally, the recorded *ghazal* (a popular song genre sung with both lyrical and rhythmic accompaniment) (Qureshi 458-460). Though the poem's textual form reflects the poet's intention, "In performance, oral reciters and singers order the verses of a ghazal ... and ... almost always omit a good number of them" (Pritchett, "A Desertful of Roses"). The reordering showcases the singers' agency in reformulating the poem, the mutability of the form, and, essentially, the changes in the text's affective potential.

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[2] Punjabi *qissas* in essence are a tradition of Punjabi language oral story-telling emerging in eastern Pakistan and northwestern India. Folktales such as *Heer-Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, Sassi Punnun* and *Mirza Sahiban* are popular tragic romances that have inspired folk music, poetry, and films with continuing revivals across the years. Other stories from qissas have similarly performed across time immemorial.

[3] For a detailed study on the Urdu qissa in South Asia, see Pasha M. Khan's *A Handbook for Storytellers: The Ṭirāz al-akhbār and the Qissa Genre.* For detailed study on the Punjabi qissa in South Asia, see Farina Mir's *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* and Sara Kazmi's *Writing Resistance in the Three Punjabs: Critical Engagements with Literary Tradition.*

TABLE 1

Ghazal Genres and their Performance Contexts

	CHANT (without instruments)	SONG (with instrumental accompaniment)
SECULAR	*Tarannum* Poetic symposium (*mushāira*)	*Ghazal Art Song* Salon concert (*mahfil, mujrā*) *Recorded Ghazal*
RELIGIOUS	*Nauha, Salām, Mātam* Shi'a mourning assembly (*majlis*) *Na't* Sunni devotional assembly (*mīlād*)	*Qawwālī* Sufi mystical assembly (*mahfil-e-sama'*)

Fig 1: *Ghazal* Genres and their Performance Contexts, taken from Regula Burckhardt Qureshi *Musical Gesture and Extra-Musical Meaning: Words and Music in the Urdu Ghazal,* pg.459 Accessed 18 April 2024.

At the broadest level, the performance of poetry turns it into a distinct idiom of performance to make it understandable to the listeners through the shared expectations of the performance occasion. It shares "textually based structural features, reflecting a strong ethos of textual precedence and musical subordination" (Qureshi 461). Many poems have been revitalized through lyrical performances in songs across the years; for example, the recorded ghazal has been featured heavily in films. The poems "Dil-e-nadan tujhe hua kia hai" ("Oh innocent heart, What Has Happened to You") by Mirza Ghalib (a 19th-century poem used in the film *Mirza Ghalib* 1954), "Tum itna jo muskara rahe ho" ("Oh you who are smiling so much") by Kaifi Azmi (in *Arth* 1982), and "Tang aa chuke hain kashmakash-e-zindagi se hum" ("I Tire of the Quandaries of Life") by Sahir Ludhianvi (written for the film, *Pyaasa* 1957). More recently, "Aaj ke Naam" ("Dedicated to Today") and "Hum Dekhen Ge" ("We Shall See") were put into music and included in the movies *Haider* (2014) and *The Kashmir Files*

(2022), respectively representing diametrically opposed politics. In some examples, the audience even associates the poem with the singer, not the poet. For example, the two poems "Ranjish Hi Sahi" ("If Anguish Is My Fate, So Be It"), written by Ahmed Faraz, and "Wo Jo Hum Mei Tum Mei Qarar" ("That Solace as once breathed among you and I") by Momin Khan Momin, are now associated primarily with their singers, Mehdi Hasan and Begum Akhtar, in "non-literary" circles. As time progresses, these same poems, rather than remain rooted in the classical music tradition, are being adapted to new musical forms utilized as modes of remembering, meditating, and reviving these poems.[4] The oral and performative recurrence of these classic texts thus remains rooted in cultural memory and is passed on, expanding their temporal continuity.

Another common mode of "performing" poetry is at *mushā'irahs* (oral poetry symposiums). Though they have been part of the Indo-Persian cultural landscape since the 16th Century and were central to the Muslim community, poetic performances and their reception by the audience have continued to play a seminal role in the cultural and spiritual life across religions. It reportedly came to India in the 14th century as "a gathering of poets for the purpose of reading poetry before an audience" (Naim 167) and "a gathering of poets and patrons for recitation, appreciation, and literary discussion" (Pritchett, "A Desertful of Roses"). However, a *mushā'irah* signifies not only the poets reading out their works but the whole audience — poets and listeners — where each is very much a participant in bringing the poem to life. Within this space, the poem can be recited or sung (without music). As it is recited, the listeners focus on one couplet (*sh'er*) at a time as the poet reads the first line

[4] The Punjabi *Qissa* Heer-Ranjha, considered immortalized by Waris Shah's writing in 1722, has since been performed as songs and have been reinterpreted in modern imaginings i.e 'Ranjha' by Punjabi MC, a British-Indian rapper.

(*misra*) and pauses to wait for the audience's response. The audience responds in different ways; they either repeat the verses while the poet recites them or laud them by utilizing phrases like *wah-wah* (bravo) and *mukarrar* (say it again).

These differing performative modes associated with the poem bring me to a reading of "Hum Dekhen Ge" — as text, song, chant, protest anthem, art display, and commercialized song. I build on the oral performance tradition to analyze each in its own rights. To acknowledge limitations within this, I do not aim to provide either a monograph on a single performance tradition or a general overview of Faiz's poetry. Instead, I aim to provide context-specific analyses of the selected contemporary enactments to highlight the presence of "Hum Dekhen Ge" in everyday life and explore what changes through its performance in these capacities. I hope to emphasize that the poem is no longer, to borrow from Paola Hernández, a "backdro[p] for action or containers for the past.... [Rather it is a] fluid mosai[c] and momen[t] of memory, matter, scene, and experience that create[s] and mediate[s] social space and temporalities." Essentially, I consider its impact on public memory at the time of its conception and in its reenactments.

Chapter 1: Under Dictatorial Eyes: Resisting Censorship

"Matta-e-lauh-o-qalam chhin gayi to kya gham hai	"So what if my pen has been snatched away from me
Keh khoon-e dil mein duboli hain ungliyaan main ne	I have dipped my fingers in the blood of my heart
Zubaan pe mohr lagi hai to kya, ke rakh di hai.	So what if my mouth has been sealed; I have turned
Har eik halqa-e zanjeer mein zubaan main ne"	Every link of my chain into a speaking tongue"

-Faiz Ahmad Faiz[5]

Introduction

The year 1979 was a watershed at the apex of the global Cold War, with entrenched rivalries between the US and USSR perpetuating proxy violence throughout the Global South. The SWANA region and South Asia were sites of major political upheaval and bloodshed: the Iranian Revolution (1979), The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the Iranian Hostage Crisis (1979-1981), the establishing year of General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship in Pakistan (1977-1988), and the Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989).[6] In this year, Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote the poem "Hum Dekhen Ge" (We Shall Overcome)

[5] Translation taken from Ali Husain Mir and Raza Mir's *A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry: Anthems of Resistance.*

[6] SWANA is a decolonial term referring to communities in Southwest Asia and North Africa. It is a way to distinguish the region in geographical terms, rather than "political terms" defined by the West such as Near Eastern, Arab World or Islamic world that have colonial and Eurocentric origins.

against the Islamic fundamentalist dictatorship of General Zia-Ul-Haq. The anti-authoritarian poem quickly became a resistance anthem. Though explicitly written against Zia's fascist regime, its verses could be applied to any form of global oppression, including the regimes mentioned earlier. For example, the following verses testify to its ability to speak truth to power across geographic and regional borders, serving as a testament to its universal power to bear witness to tyranny:

"Jab zulm-o-sitam ke koh-e-giran	"When the mountains of oppression and cruelty
Ruii ki tarah ud ja'enge	Will be blown away like cotton wool
Hum mehkoomon keh paon tale	Underneath the feet of we, the oppressed
Jab dharti dhad-dhad dharke ki"	When the earth will shake" (Faiz, Lines 5-8)

Though I explore these variances in my latter chapters, my focus here is to highlight "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s role as a powerful critique against General Zia Ul Haq's imposition of martial law and his dictatorial regime (1977-1988) in Pakistan. In its textual form, I consider the poem's radical lyricism and subversion of Islamic metaphors to showcase how it became cemented in the nation's cultural memory through its depiction of the spirit of reformation, resistance, and utopic hope. Ultimately, I explore how this poem became a fundamental part of the "repertoire" (Taylor 21).

I. *"Pakistan ka matlab kya? Phaansi, kore, General Zia!"* ("What does Pakistan stand for? Hangings, lashings, General Zia!")[7]: Hum Dekhen Ge Under Dictatorship

[7] Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan*. A play on the slogan, *Pakistan ka matlab kya, La Illaha Illal Allah* (*What does Pakistan mean? There is no God but Allah*) which was coined by Urdu poet, Asghar Sodai in 1943. It had been dominant during the struggle for independence and continues to be used to this day by popular political parties. This variant became a popular political slogan during the Zia regime.

General Zia Ul Haq took over in a coup d'etat on July 5, 1977, suspending the constitution and deposing Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1971-1973). After declaring martial law, he established a military council, ensuring that martial law regulations could not be challenged, and with this, entrenched the army's absolute authority. With his rule, an era of repression began. Political activists and journalists were arrested, flogged in public, and sentenced by military court. His establishment of the Federal Shariat Court further increased human rights violations—amputation of the left hand for theft, flogging, and executions and, most significantly, the Hudood Ordinances, which equated rape with the punishment for adultery (Kennedy 70).[8] Under Zia-Ul-Haq's severe suppression, literature and poetry became vehicles for dissent: "part of the cultural institutions and historical existence of a people, is itself an arena of struggle" (Harlow 33). For example, Habib Jalib was jailed for long periods due to his staunch anti-authoritarian poetry. Zahoor Hussain Zahoor was arrested and tried by a Military court on the charge of reciting a Punjabi poem, "Balle Balle" ("Hurrah, Hurrah") (Kalra and Butt 11). Feminist poet Fahimida Riaz was blacklisted and charged with sedition under Section 124A of the Pakistan Penal Code. And Faiz Ahmad Faiz, a preeminent poet in postcolonial South Asia, was forced into exile in Beirut.

In this turbulent environment, when the country was ablaze with an intense and desperate cry for political liberation, Faiz Ahmad Faiz responded with 'Hum Dekhen Ge" in 1979 while in exile. It acquired its first publication two years after in its seventh poetry book, *Mere Dil Mere Musafir* (My Heart, My Fellow Traveller), which was dedicated to Yāsir ʿArafāt, chairman of the Palestinian

[8] In 1983, Lal Mai became the first woman to be publicly flogged (Mumtaz and Shaheed).

Liberation Organization.[9][10] The poem acts as a synecdoche for the first phase of protest against the severe repression of freedom under Zia-ul-Haq's regime. That is its interpolation with anti-authoritarian, leftist politics represented by Faiz's poetic oeuvre as a humanist, a committed Marxist, and a poet of the oppressed. The poem was originally titled "Va Yabqá Vajhu Rabbika" ("The face of your Lord'), a Quranic verse from Surah [chapter of the Quran] Ar-Rahman. However, because of the popularity and affective potential of its refrain, "Hum Dekhen Ge" has since become the title in historiography and the popular imagination.[11] The original title comes from verse 27 of the Quran: "wayabq̊ay̠ waǰhu rabika dẖū ạl̊jalāali wāl̊ạ̧k̊rāmi" ("all that remains is the Face of your Lord, full of majesty, bestowing honor") (Haleem 532).

Though the Surah emphasizes the everlasting nature of God, in the poem, Faiz uses it in the poem to showcase the truth's triumph over false idols, namely General Zia-Ul-Haq's government. He signifies the inevitability of a socialist, revolutionary uprising through the poem's refrain, "Hum dekhen ge/ Lazim hai keh hum bhi dekhen ge" ("We shall see/ inevitably, we shall see") (Faiz 1-2). In this, the categorically firm words "hum dekhen ge" (we shall see) and "lazim hai" (inevitably) leave no room for doubt that it shall come to be. He uses the refrain to frame the succeeding verses, visualizing

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[9] Though publicly available on the Internet, this poem is missing in most editions of *Nuskhahā-e Vafā,* his complete works.

[10] It has since been removed from the volume reportedly because it is similar to another poem in the collection, "A song for the Mujahideen of Palestine" as this poem's frst two lines "Hum jeetengey, Haqq hum idk din jeetay ge" ("We will be victorious, Indeed, we will be victorious") (Dubrow, "Faiz, India and Protest").
Jennifer Dubrow, citing Andy McCord further elaborates that after first being published, the poem has "suffered an unusual textual history. Faiz removed "Hum Dekhenge" from his collected works, *Nuskhah Haa-e-Wafa* published in 1984 by Maktaba-i-Karvan in Lahore. The reasons for this omission are unclear. According to one source, Maktaba-i-Karvan asked for the poem to be removed because of its religious imagery"

[11] I will henceforth refer to the poem with this title as my focus is on its lasting impact in cultural memory. All translations are by the author unless stated otherwise.

the violent upheaval of the Revolution through the imagery of the Day of Judgement *(Qayamat)* throughout the poem. The following six verses generate both visual and auditory effects as the listener can both see and hear the imagery of *Qayamat*:

"Jab zulm-o-sitam keh koh-i-girran	"When the mountains of oppression and cruelty
Ruii ki tarah udh ja'enge	Will be blown away like cotton wool
Hum mahkumon ki panv-tale	Under the feet of us, the oppressed
Jab dharti dhad-dhad dhadkegi	When the earth will thump and shake
Aur ahl-e-hakam ke sar upar	And above the head of the ruler
Jab bijli kad-kad kadkegi"	Lightning will thunder and strike" (Faiz 5-8)

The verses showcase the Quranic tropes about the oncoming of Judgement Day narratives as present in Surah Al-Qari'ah (101.4-5). The imagery of the "mountains" and "wool" is taken directly from Al-Qari'ah (101.4-5): "Yauma ya koonun naasu kal farashil mabthooth. Wa ta koonul jibalu kal 'ihnil manfoosh" ("On a Day when people will be like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of wool") (Haleem 600). Here, tufts of wool and *ruii* (cotton) could be considered the same. Similarly, lightning evokes God's power, as referenced in different Surahs: Surah Al-Baqarah (2.19) and Surah Ar-R'ad (13.12-13). Here, lightning evokes both fear and hope, as Verse 13 emphasizes, "He sends thunderbolts to strike whoever He will. Yet still they dispute about God" (Haleem 250). Under this

reading, “the mountains of oppression and cruelty” further the Judgement Day imagery, signifying the penultimate violence that shall necessitate its oncoming. By drawing on Islamic metaphors, Faiz aims to equate revolution with Judgement Day to symbolize Zia-Ul-Haq’s reckoning for his reign of terror, which restored “order” through a “few more hangings” (Noman 122). He not only describes them but allows us to hear them through alliterative onomatopoeia in “dhad-dhad dhadkegi” (translated as ‘shake’ but is the sound of a beat) and “khad-khad-khadkegi” (thunder). Though the English translation fails to evoke this auditory quality, the original Urdu evokes the loud clamor accompanying Judgement Day and resistance in the streets. Without explicitly using the word for heart in Urdu, Faiz implies through “dhad-dhad” (the sound of a beat) that humanity will come to possess a ‘true’ empathetic heart, expressing individual and collective solidarity when the socialist revolution ultimately breaks. Subsequently, the combined power of their feet will cause the Earth to shake and break apart, ending the old oppressive order.

In creating the synonymity between revolution and Judgement Day, Faiz veils his critique by subverting the language adopted by the oppressor — Zia-Ul-Haq — to establish his authoritarian regime. This was a significant move in light of the severe censorship wherein it was "impossible to call things by their right names” (Lazard xvii) and placed his work within a long-running Urdu literary tradition of concealing politics in symbols.[12] Faiz “manifest[ed] in [his] poems a consciousness of the larger arena within which [he] wrote” (Harlow 46), thus creating a “new pantheon of letters” (46). The

[12] For example, in nineteenth-century Urdu poetry, the ‘stock’ figure of the executioner often represented the British, which allowed poets to slip through the censors and avoid the gallows. It presumably stemmed from the 1857 rebellion or ‘mutiny’ as it is termed by the British, where the British officials hung almost thirty thousand people from the trees of Delhi to punish the Indian population.

Islamic metaphors further offered a possibility to circumvent the censor board and appeal through imagery and conceptual vocabulary understood by the Muslim-majority country, attempting to mobilize the masses into action. Faiz uses metaphors of a collective, i.e., "jo mai bhi hun aur tum bhi ho" ("which is both you and I") (Faiz 23), twice in the poem after verses with clear allusions to revolutionary chants ("uthe ga An'al haq ka nara") ("The cry of I am the Truth rings") (20) and the establishment of a new regime ("aur raaj kare gi khalqe khuda") ("And each one of God's creatures will rule") (22). Their message reminds the reader that the new reign (*raaj*) should be a government of the people without hierarchies.[13]

By constructing this image, the poem foretells the oncoming revolution. It emphasizes not only liberation from Zia-Ul-Haq but rather a "new humanism" (Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* 9) or "true humanism" (Cesaire 73) of Global South peoples through the images of collective, unified liberation. By universal humanism, here, I expand beyond a conception of Eurocentric humanism perpetuating Western hierarchy and marginalizing non-Western modes of knowing.[14] Instead, citing Mbembe here, I argue that "Hum Dekhen Ge" stresses "the universal right to breathe" (Mbembe S61), militated "against utilitarian or nominal freedom while retaining an emphasis on universal humanism" (Majumder 24). He effectively builds the image of revolution as opposed to a predominantly European episteme and, instead, as emerging through cultural traditions. Though Faiz wrote the poem in

[13] The lines, "uthe ga an'al haq ka nara" are omitted in the editions that do carry this poem. According to Ali Hashmi, Faiẓís grandson, the publisher censored these lines without the consent of Faiẓ or his family. The complete poem can be found in Sārē Sukhan Hamārē, a collection of Faiẓís work published from London in 1982 under Faiẓ's supervision.

[14] For a detailed reading, see also Frantz Fanon *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) . I term this brand of 'humanism' as Aime Cesaire does "pseudo-humanism" (Cesaire 37). In contrast, I place "universal humanism" in the vein of anti-colonial theorists, as "a humanism made to the measure of the world" (56).

response to Zia's dictatorship, it appears relevant to the establishment of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini in the same year. Even during exile in Beirut, Faiz saw the 1979 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and had to flee during the subsequent invasion — the 1982 Lebanon War. "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s vision of a world where oppressive structures are dismantled and focus on the collective through phrases like "both you and I" suggests Faiz's consideration of these movements while writing it.[15] Through the metaphors of inclusion, the poem brings social consciousness beyond one historical moment to the fore, underscoring the common humanity (and solidarity) yet to be found. Combining the political context with Faiz's involvement in Afro-Asian literary and resistance movements globally encourages this reading of the poem that hopes to visualize universal human emancipation.

In the remaining verses of the poem, the thread of Islamic imagery and resistance continues as allusions are made to different Quranic chapters and events from Islamic history. Faiz directly references the conquest of Mecca in 630 AD and the victory of Muhammad and his disciples over the Quraysh in the verses "Jab arz-e-khuda keh ka'abe se/ Sab but uthva'e jayein ge" ("When from the Ka'aba of God's earth/ All [false] idols will be removed" (Faiz 11-12). The reference to the removal of idols from the Ka'aba (House of God) alludes to Muhammad's entry into the Ka'aba and the destruction of the 360 idols of the Quraysh (Ibn Isḥāq 552) — a major milestone in the establishment and spread of Islamic faith.[16] While destroying them, he recited verse 17:81, "The truth has come, and

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[15] Given Faiz's political poetry like "Bol keh Lab Azaad hai" ("Speak for your Lips are Free"), Lori Palestinian Bache ki Liye" ("A Lullaby for a Palestinian Child"), "Dhaka se Vapsi Per" ("Upon Returning From Dhaka") and "Dagh Dagh Ujala" ("This Stained Dawn") and his critique of global oppression and totalitarian regimes, this reading becomes more significant.

[16] Ibn Ishaq in *The Biography of the Prophet* writes how the Prophet "he pointed at the .. [idols] with his stick, and the [idols] collapsed on their backs one after the other" (Ibn Ishaq 552) and details the process of Islam's expansion within his lifetime.

falsehood has vanished away; surely falsehood is ever certain to vanish" (Haleem 290), an image which is reconstructed through similar words in the poem's verse. In referring to the ultimate victory for Muslims during the Prophet's time, Faiz envisions and foreshadows the dictatorship's end and, with it, the possibility of Global South liberation with each falling regime. By comparing the regime to the destruction of "false idols," Faiz does not privilege Islam as a world religion but rather likens Zia and his army generals' totalitarian power to these idols and their inevitable obliteration. Similar to the Quranic title of the poem, through the line "Bus naam rahe ga Allah ka" ("Only Allah's name will remain") (Faiz 17), Faiz questions Zia's presumed absolute authority. It emphasizes the illegitimacy of Zia's rule and his exploitation of Islamic beliefs for political gain, suggesting that after the revolution, "truth" will ultimately prevail.

The concept of inevitable truth reappears in the poem with the line "uthe ga An-al-Haq ka naara" ("The cry of I am the Truth rings"). The phrase references a declaration by Sufi mystic Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922 AD) expressing the complete annihilation (*fana)* of the self in pursuit of spiritual union with God, a central idea in Sufi tradition (Abu Hanieh 29).[17] In the poem, this declaration is linked to the emergence of social, revolutionary conscience in the masses, leading to "true rule" through collective liberation. Similar to the spiritual exaltation after union with God, the revolutionary conscious will generate "a mutual current of enlightenment and enrichment" (Fanon 114) for the collective. While the parallel between conscience raising is significant, Faiz's inclusion of the phrase also

[17] For details on Al-Hallaj's life and interpretation by Muslim scholars, see Yusri Mohamad Ramli "Martyrdom of al-Hallaj and Unity of the Existence: the Condemners and the Commenders"*International Journal of Islamic Thought*, vol.3, Accessed through https://www.ukm.my/ijit/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/10-Yusri-Mohd-Ramli-IJIT-Vol-3-2013.pdf.

draws on historical events following Al-Hallaj's evocation. Though it signified finding a true form of being, even during its time, the phrase, *An-al-Haq's* (Truth) close association with *Al-Haq* (the Truth) — one of Allah's ninety-nine names in the Quran — resulted in its misinterpretation as Al-Hallaj's literal claim of divinity and as blasphemous to *Tawhid* (central tenant of Islam: a belief in the oneness of Allah) by many Islamic scholars and authorities. Significantly, the controversy, aided by political motivations and accusations of being "a Qarmatian (a revolutionary Shia sect ....[opposing] ..... the authority of the Abbasid caliph), a Zindiq (heretic or atheist) and of stealing the secrets of divine power" (Abdul-Hamid 284) led to his execution in 922 AH (Schimmel 11).[18] The allegations underscore the sectarian tensions between orthodox, majoritarian (Sunni) Islam and other branches of Islam, and in the poem, their exacerbation under Zia's regime. In this vein, Al-Hallaj's story acts as a synecdoche for the political weaponization of Islam under Zia, motivated in part by his severe modifications of the Blasphemy law, resulting in increased sectarian violence and minority persecution.[19] Though the law itself was inherited from the British colonial rule, under his reign, five additional clauses were introduced influenced "by Islamist ideology, and anti-Ahmadiyya as well as

[18] Louis Massignon in *The Passion of Al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam* (1982) disccused allegtations against Hallaj of being a missionary of the Carmathians, and that such accusations led to the first process against him in 912. The book further highlights political turmoil and controversies against Al-Hallaj under Calliph Al-Muqtaddir. In another book, *Sufism and Sufi Orders: God's Spiritual Paths Adaptation and Renewal in the Context of Modernization,* Hassan Abu Hanieh elaborates on different strands of Islamic sufism and the rise of hostility against them after "2.A.H....[where] ..the circles of hostility and antagonism against the Sus would continue to grow in Egypt, Syria and Iraq" and would lead to accusations, persecution and execution of Sufis such as Al-Hallaj (Hanieh 44). He identifies Islamic jurists (*faqih)* like Ahmad Bin Hanbal (d. 855 AD) as "one of the most renowned opponents of Sufism" (44) and his influence on his followers.

[19] Zia's modifications to the law continued on Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's constitutional amendment, Article 260 (3) that declared the Ahmadiyya community non-Muslim following the 1974 Anti-Ahmaddiya riots and hereby ensured the illegality of their Muslim status. These further impacted statehood and the confines of citizenship. For the lasting impact on Islamist mobilisation, see Cf. A.I. Butt, "Street Power: Friday Prayers, Islamist Protests, and Islamization in Pakistan", Politics and Religion, vol. 9, no. 1 (2016), pg. 1-28.

anti-Shia sentiments..... in order to justify the dictatorial authority" (Badry 97).[20] The divisive sentiments changed conceptions of citizenship, constructed the image of a "true" Muslim, and adopted tactics creating "zones of non-being" (Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* 37-41), cementing their "difference."[2122] Faiz's allusion demonstrates the regime as one predicated on *"zulm-o-sitam"* (cruelty), as highlighted earlier in the poem, placing it in opposition to the "truth" in both the religious and political sphere. It further acts as a synecdoche for the repressive legislation's de facto legitimization of the harassment of minority sects through its abuse and signifies the divisions between the religion itself.[23] Including the Sufi proclamation within broader Islamic metaphors in the poems attacks the constructed divisions and places Sufi, and by extension, other sectarian beliefs at par with Islamic tenets common across different sects.

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[20] See Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), 1860. Article 295-C at: https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/1860/actXLVof1860.html. The PPC was originally prepared by Lord Macaulay in 1860 on behalf of the Government of British India as the Indian Penal Code. According to Badry, "as a result of communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims before the partition, the British rulers had incorporated further sections in 1927 (295-A, 297)" (Badry 5).

[21] These were followed by a 1984 legislation prohibiting Ahmadis from claiming themselves as Muslims and from using Islamic symbols to describe "their religion or places of worship, making it a crime punishable by death, imprisonment, and/or heavy fines" (Saeed 140).

[22] In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon defines "zone of non-being" as "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (10). While there are different interpretations of the phrase(Sexton 2016; Hook 2020), I use it to emphasize the broader consensus that it refers to the colonialist's physical and mental dehumanization of the oppressed. The blasphemy laws' origin in British colonial law facilitates this reading considering its use alienating and persecuting minorities. I further expand the phrase to refer to the authoritarian state's dehumanizing power. Using it in context of the poem, Fanon's elaboration on its role generating revolutionary consciousness and upheaval (10) furthers its application in 'Hum Dekhen Ge" and its broader quest for universal liberation.

[23] According to the Human Rights Commision of Pakistan's report, "between 1987 and 1992, 106 Ahmadis were charged with religious offences on grounds of practising, preaching and propagating their faith" (Amnesty International 10).

Through the continual references to Islam, resistance in the poem is likened to *Qayamat,* the Day of Judgement. Similarly, even "Allah" symbolizes the continuity and presence of revolution and "true existence" — that of equality. *Qayamat* thus transforms into the Day of Revolution, and "Allah" becomes "Revolution," inevitable and inescapable. Through the re-imagination of the religious and sacred metaphors of Islam, he once again, as is common in his poetics, "enables the time-worn cliches of the Persian and Urdu ghazal to acquire a renewed sensitivity and to be recharged with meaning, so that the solitary suffering of the disappointed romantic lover is transformed into the suffering of humanity at large" (Rashid qtd. in Mir 37). The metaphors become symptomatic of a shift towards emancipatory politics of the dispossessed. Within its historical moment, the poem refers to the liberation of the downtrodden under Zia. Their remediation demonstrates how Faiz "created contrapuntal rhetoric and rhythm whereby he would use classical forms *(qasida, ghazal, masnavi, qita)* and transform them before his readers rather than break from the old forms. You could hear old and new together" (Said qt. in Faiz, *The Rebels' Silhouette* xv). Essentially, his poetic prowess allowed him to transform traditional metaphors within the literary sphere and bring new associations into being, changing them based on the political context.

While the use of Islamic imagery is significant in purporting unification, it is especially impactful in emphasizing the false power held by authoritarian regimes. For example, proclaiming Zia's dictatorship as equivalent to the Quraysh control of the Ka'abah further critiques the illegal coup d'état and destruction of democracy during his takeover. In addition, Faiz's theological argument centers on binaries between the visible and the invisible, embodied and archival knowledge, and idolaters and true believers. Towards the end of the poem, Faiz defines god as a series of paradoxes, an elusive

simultaneity that cannot be beheld in conventional ways: “Jo ghayab bhi hai aur hazar bhi /Jo manzar bhi hai nazir bhi” (“Who is both absent and present/ Who is both the vision and the beholder”) (Faiz 18-19). Continuing the earlier reading of god as revolution, it signifies its continuing presence in the lived reality of the nation and, subsequently, to return to the refrain, its “inevitability.” He is ultimately able to blur the hierarchical distinction between humanity and god, between different religious sects through the last verses, “Uthe ga An-al-Haq ka naara/ Jo mai bhi hun aur tum bhi ho/ Aur raaj kare gi khalke Khuda/ Jo main bhi hun aur tum bhi ho” (“When the cry of I am Truth will rise/ Which is both you and I/ And each one of God’s creatures will rule/ which is both you and I”) (20-23). In suggesting this connected oneness, Faiz aims to do away with master-slave hierarchies, the distinction between god and humanity, and ultimately, Zia-Ul-Haq’s claims of absolute authority. The verses encourage a utopic egalitarianism, where the people are united and ultimately act “as a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and domination and as a repository for popular memory and consciousness” (Harlow 34). It ends the poem with the material possibility of collective rule and people power as Faiz emphasizes, “each one of God’s creatures will rule.”

Through these techniques, Faiz emphasizes the overarching message of the poem — that of the role played by the oppressed and the marginalized who continue to ‘hold faith’ and work for a revolution. Considering Zia’s version of Islam and censorship, in this vein, Faiz “wrest[ed] that expropriated historicity back, reappropriate it for [the people and] .. reconstruct a new world-historical order” (Harlow 33). More broadly, the poem underlines a global, anticolonial humanism, constructing a universally egalitarian world attempting to unite groups divided by authoritarian regimes. The imagery utilized across the poem furthers his message, necessitating, as Fanon highlighted, the active

"work of the masses [and] their determination to conquer the scourges that for centuries have excluded them" (Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* 142) in dismantling them, rebuilding society on egalitarian principles. Faiz promises that the people will be restored to their rightful place, as is evident in the lines that are most evocative of revolution:

"Hum ahl-e-safa mardud-e-haram	"When we – those who believe, and those who have been barred from the sacred sanctuary [Mecca])
Masnad pe bi'thai ja'enge	Will be seated on the highest seats
Sab taaj ucchale ja'enge	All the crowns will be tossed
Sab takht gi'rae ja'aenge"	All thrones will be brought down. (Faiz 13-16)

Notably, these verses could be applied in any political context — the destruction of the crown, overthrow of regimes, and ubiquity between individuals are all familiar images across resistance poetry. The poem became part of the archive through its universality as "not just what remains, but rather what can be reshaped and even reenacted" (Hernández 3). Though his poetry definitively brought hope to people under dictatorship even while he was exiled, even during its time, "Hum Dekhen Ge" was taken up in different political, cultural, and even linguistic contexts. As Edward Said writes on hearing Eqbal Ahmad and Faiz Ahmad Faiz recite poems in Beirut, "After a time, [Faiz] and Eqbal stopped translating his verses for my benefit, but as the night wore on, it did not matter. What I

watched required no translation: it was an enactment of a homecoming expressed through defiance and loss as if to say, 'Zia, we are here'" (Said 181). This purported universality of Faiz, through his poetry, will be the focus of the forthcoming chapters, as I will consider the poem's continuing legacy in contemporary Pakistan and India and its usage for both resistance and commercialization.

Chapter 2: The 'Repertoire' of Resistance: "Hum Dekhen Ge" at Protests

Introduction

Both in his life and death, Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poetry continues to be performed — a testament to its universality. As his niece, Sabiha T. Aydelott, highlights, his poems were not just recited at *mushairas* (poetry recitations) but were set to music per the tradition of *ghazal* singing. She describes how these musical renditions go beyond mere recitations, finding new life as they are "aired over the radio, blaring over loudspeakers, and are listened to by millions in the fields, workplaces, inside the quiet of homes, and at the kiosks on the streets" (Aydelott 306). Embodied through different mediums — writing, performance, art — they have come together to "layer the historical memories that constitute community" (Taylor 35) and unite people across borders, religions, and, most significantly, time. Through the transformative power of performance by renowned ghazal singers like Nur Jehan, Faiz's poetry evolves beyond his voice, belonging to a collective imagination that spans generations and cultures. It further points to how "musical material is memorized" (Widdess 5) and the role of the *ghazal* singer, wherein "Pakistani ghazal singers did not merely help in the popularization of certain lesser-known Urdu poets, but many also became associated with specific lyrics" (Saeed 243). Even Faiz acknowledged the force of these iterations in his lifetime. When asked to recite his poem "Mujh Se Pehli Si Mohabbat Mere Mehboob Na Maang" ("My love, do not ask me for the love I once gave you") at a *mushaira,* instead of reciting it, he responded, "The poem was no longer his, it belonged to Nur

Jehan!" (Aydelott 306).[24] Through singing, as much as the poetry belongs to the poet, it came to belong to the singers and, ultimately, transcends to the collective imagining of the masses.

In this manner, the temporal continuity of Faiz's poetry positions it uniquely in both "archive and the repertoire" (Taylor 22), depicting a learned repertoire through its continuation through memory and embodied practice. While the musical reiterations are significant, my focus in this chapter is "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s position at the heart of political performances in India and Pakistan as a protest song. In both countries, protest songs are collective and imbued through mimetic "acts of transfer" (Taylor 2). They offer truths that challenge power structures, empower participants and other listeners to fight, spread information that builds the mass of the movement, and, overall, can facilitate social change (Cort 7). Consequently, the poem has acquired an unquestionable status as both a poem and protest anthem due to its poetic and performative reproduction in a "constant state of againness. The performances reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next" (Taylor 21). "Hum Dekhen Ge" evolved even during the dictator's regime, from a poetic force to eventually performed as songs and chants at protests and *mushairas* alike, taking on a life of its own. More than this, however, it became embodied in cultural memory and remains relevant even today.

Using the work of performance studies scholars such as Diana Taylor and Joseph Roach, I explore the poem's temporal expansion and continued relevance in contemporary politics, positioning it within "embodied cultural memory" (Roach 2). By analyzing its performance at protest sites in Iqbal

[24] According to his Aydelott, he was referring specifically to Nur Jehan's performance at a musical evening in defiance of Zia-ul-Haq's disfavor and ban on Faiz's poetry. Her resistance and the audience's participation allowed the poem to be immortalized with her and serve as reference points, even for Faiz himself.

Bano's 1986 performance and the anti-CAA protests (2019-2020), I will stress "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s revolutionary potential and radical afterlife. Through these performances, I signify it's evolution through visual and auditory modes and underscore its position in the "repertoire" (Taylor 21) of both nations.

I. Iqbal Bano's Performance at Alhamra Music Hall

The threat perceived by Faiz's poetics continued after his death in 1984, as General Zia-Ul-Haq continued the ban on his poetry, dissemination, and performance to maintain his power and suppress resistance. In the 1984 referendum, General Zia-Ul-Haq re-established himself as Pakistan's head of state by framing the vote in such a way that a vote against Zia was a vote against Islam (Talbot 260-261). Even the 1985 general elections were a democratic facade, given the ban on political parties and their mass boycott. His unchecked power, along with the *zina bil-e-jabr* (rape) Law of Evidence, created an environment of unfettered disenfranchisement, especially for women. Out of this abyss emerged Iqbal Bano (1928-2007), the *Malika-e-Ghazal* (The Queen of Ghazal), who clad in a black *sari,* powerfully sang "Hum Dekhen Ge," situating it firmly as an anthem of protest forever.

Bano performed the poem on February 13, 1986, at the first *Faiz Mela* (Faiz Festival) commemorating Faiz's death at Alhamra Music Hall at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore, to a crowd of 50,000.[25] Her stage presence and performance heightened its revolutionary characteristics in three seminal ways: by violating Zia Ul Haq's ban on Faiz's poetry, opposing his 1985 ban on *saris* (Grewal 2020) and on public gatherings, and finally, resulting in the poem's positionality as a song of defiance

[25] There are differing accounts on audience numbers, 50,000 is the most commonly cited. Although other accounts such as Hashmi's cite the capacity of the hall as 600.

and resistance across protests. It further blurred the boundaries between the audience and the performer, making its memorialization a collective process. The performance took the poem beyond the phenomenon of writing and textual archive to one of an unmediated collective imagining and resistance. It depicted a necessity in formulating the repertoire — that of people's presence in its replication.

a) Performance

The performance was two years after Faiz's death at the first *Faiz Mela* (Faiz Festival) established by his family to commemorate the revolutionary poet's birth anniversary on February 12. The festival has since become an annual event, now termed *Faiz Aman Mela* (Faiz Peace Festival), in Lahore on the eve of Faiz's birthday. It is attended by the core constituency of Faiz — socialists, poets, authors, workers, laborers, and women. The typical setting is an open-air theatre, where the audience members sit on mats, sing Faiz's poetry, and dance to drum beats, interspersing these with revolutionary chants. Even today, the open-air mela is held in daylight hours, with a concert in the evening at Alhamra Arts Council — where Bano's performance took place. As a result of the performance, the festival site became associated with counter-resistance and was established as an annual event. Bano's performance has become synonymous with "Hum Dekhen Ge": when people consider the poem, they return to her 1986 rendition. Their collective recurrence and performance serve "as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called "Restored behavior" or ''twice-behaved behavior." (Taylor 2).

Her acclaim as one of Pakistan's most remarkable *ghazal* singers contributed to the iconic position of "Hum Dekhen Ge." However, several factors elevated the performance to the repertoire. Specifically, the combination of Iqbal Bano's presence, her outfit, and the audience made visible the links between the historical, individual, and cultural, offering "an immediate response to current political problems" (Taylor 247).[26] Though a familiar dress in South Asia, Bano's decision to wear a black *sari* at the concert was a staunch act of resistance against General Zia-Ul-Haq's dictatorship. During his regime, he banned the public performance of Faiz's poetry and severely restricted women's appearance in public performances. Zia-Ul-Haq also enforced a cultural shift that mandated women's clothing— a veil, a burqa, or shalwar kameez — and ultimately banned the *sari* in 1985.[27] In the face of this, Bano emerged, clad in her *sari*, performing Faiz's poetry, as a powerful rupture to Zia's restrictions. Carriger notes that the "performer in costume can transform an ordinary public space into a performance space simply by entering it" (Carriger 44). In this performance, the *sari* symbolized defiance against the imposed restrictions. Through the intersection of gender and attire, the performance became "larger than life" (Carriger 45), becoming a powerful statement against women's

[26] In addition to contributing to the audience's evocative response, the performance facilitated the rise of feminist political organizations like Women's Action Front and Tehrik-e-Niswan and an upsurge of political dissent and protests against the Hudood ordinances and the imposition of the veil.

[27] While the sari was worn by many women following Partition, in 1973, the shalwar kameez was declared the 'awami libas' (people's dress) and came to be stated as the national dress in textbooks and on state media. From being the dress of the working classes and rural people, it was popularised under Bhutto and made into a populist political statement. These changes resulted in the downturn in the practice of wearing sarees in Pakistan. However, it was in the 80's that a drastic shift occurred and *shalwar kameez* came to be associated with Islam. This led to the villainisation of the sari and a ban in 1985 under Zia. Simultaneously, he made it compulsory for government and state officials to wear shalwar kameez to work (Ali Banuazizi in State, Religion & Politics in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) and even went so far as to ask the state-owned TV channel, PTV, to depict the 'good' characters in shalwar kameez and the 'bad characters' grabbed in Western clothes.

confinement to the domestic sphere, symbolized by *chaadar aur chaar dewari* (the veil and four walls).[28]

Due to these factors, the performance became iconic as Bano continued singing numerous poems by Faiz during the concert. However, her rendition of "Hum Dekhen Ge," performed after her set, resulted in the loudest cheers (Hashmi and Media). Although the concert was over, she returned at the audience's request to sing it. This encore performance, reflecting "twice-behaved behavior," reiterated and built the revolutionary atmosphere. The audio recording, uploaded on YouTube by the account @bhartigahtori, vividly captures the tumultuous atmosphere, showing that "her performance had to be stopped repeatedly to allow the cheers and loud slogans of *"Inquillab Zindabad"* ("Long Live the Revolution!") to subside before she could carry on singing" (Hashmi and Media).[29] The music, a harmonious melody of the *tabla, sarangi,* and harmonium, begins with all instruments coming together for 19 seconds until Bano sings the first verse, "Hum Dekhen Ge" ("We Shall See").[30] The crowd, consisting of workers from political parties, peasants, trade union activists, students, teachers, men, and women from all walks of life, erupted into thunderous applause as they recognized the poem. Her performance amplified their voices and critique of the dictatorship, even though their right to protest was silenced. She continues:

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[28] *Chaadar aur Chaar Dewari* (The Veil and Four Walls) was a slogan used by General Zia-Ul-Haq's military regime in the 1970s and 1980s to reduce women's mobility in public. It supported his Hudood Ordinances and reduced the rights of women. See Rubina Saigol, "Decades of Disaster: Islamization and the Women of Pakistan," The Middle East Institute Viewpoints: The Islamization of Pakistan, 1979-2009.

[29] a leftist slogan broadly used across protests groups in South Asia.

[30] In my research, I have been unable to find an account of the musicians at the performance. However, based on other video's of Iqbal Bano's performance, it is evident that the three instruments are usually present in performing "Hum Dekhen Ge". I will note however that their melody is markedly different.

“Hum dekhenge	“We Shall See
Lazim hai keh hum bhi dekhein ge”	Inevitably, We Shall See (Faiz 1-2)

Bano repeats the refrain three times as the audience claps with the music and modifies the arrangement to increase the poem’s melodic and affective potential. For example, she sings “Vo din keh jis ka vahda hai” (“The day that has been promised to us”) (3) and repeatedly alternates it with “hum dekhen ge” (“We shall see”) (1), varying the rendition until minute 2:00. She continues singing the subsequent verses until the crowd erupts in unconstrained cheers after the following verses at 3:00:

“Hum mehkoomon ke paaon tale	“Beneath the feet of we, the oppressed
Ye dharti dhar dhar dharkegi	The earth will thump and shake
Aur ahl-e-hakam ke sar oopar	And above the head of the rulers
Jab bijli khar khar kharkegi”	The lighting will thunder and strike” (7-10)

The verse “hum dekhen ge” was next, as indicated by the music’s melody changing to almost sound it out. However, she could not sing it because the cheers were so loud. Throughout the recording, the audience continues to clap and cheer — their affective responses riddled through the song, showcasing how protest music affects listeners emotionally and conceptually. Using R. Serge Denisoff’s term ‘magnetic song of persuasion’ (Denisoff qtd. in Neuman 2), Neuman signifies the interwoven nature of political songs, generating an effect on the listener. Denisoff defined a magnetic song of persuasion as one that appeals to “the listener for the purposes of attracting the nonparticipant listener to a movement or ideology or within the ranks of adherents, of creating cohesion and morale in the movement which a priori supports the goals expressed in the songs” (Denisoff 584). The song’s impact on the audience, both while it was performed and after —their cries accompanying her singing and

their effort to ensure a recording of the performance remains — all showcase its continuing revolutionary effect.

Throughout the performance, Bano's repetition of the poem's verses emphasized their meaning and, ultimately, contributed to evoking the audience's response. She repeats the verses "Jo mai bhi hun aur tum bhi ho/ Hum dekhen ge" ("that which is both you and I, we shall see!") (Faiz 23, 1) across her rendition, unlike the poem, which repeats them twice. As she sings, she stresses *main* (I) and *tum* (you), visualizing the "true humanism" the poem espouses — one that came to be adopted by the audience. Its recurrence while singing adds to its impact and generates feelings of solidarity. Witnessing the impact of the verses, especially given Zia's restrictions, the repetitions become significant in emphasizing the poem's message. Other repeated verses such as "Hum ahl-e-safa mardud-e-haram/ Masnad pe bi'thai ja'enge" ("When we – those who believe and those who have been barred from the sacred sanctuary [Mecca])/ Will be seated on the highest seats") (13-14), reiterate collective power. Her voice looms powerfully against the dictatorship as she sings, "Jab zulm -o-sitam keh koh-e-garan/ Rui ki taran urr jayein ge" ("The mountains of oppression and cruelty/ Will blow away like cotton wool") (5-6) thrice, insisting to a thundering audience the inevitable overthrowal of dictatorship and their revolutionary victory.

b) The Audience

The performance's cultural significance resulted in its memorialization to this date, placing the poem and Bano's performance seminally within the repertoire. Her re-arrangement of the verses to enhance their political charge reflects an essential categorization of the repertoire—that as a space "allow(ing) for individual agency" (Taylor 20). This significance of agency ensures that the same poem,

in different forms, has become a significant feature of cultural memory, demonstrating its political and performative strength. While Bano's reinterpretation of "Hum Dekhen Ge" reflects the new life she gave to it, it was the audience's contributions that preserved the performance as a recording and ensured it was passed on. Thus, agency extends beyond the performer and poet to the audience itself, underscoring the repertoire's universal potential. Throughout the performance, the notion of presence is central, i.e., that "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ''being there,'' being a part of the transmission" (Taylor 30). Bano's performance and its repetition were shaped by the interactive and agential approach of the audience, transforming them from passive listeners to active participants who not only preserved the performance's memory but determined its value. The recording, with its dislocation, ambiguities, and dialogic traces, captures the experience of "being there," tracing individual and collective aspects of the song's legacy. In the 1986 performance, the audience or the collective enacts "being there" in three capacities: directors, participants, and archivists. Through enacting, they make visible the links between the embodied acts performed and the historical, individual, and cultural contexts — a seminal feature of performance.

By incorporating the audience into the recording, one witnesses how they came to direct and shape "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s performance, contributing to its seminal position in the repertoire and cultural memory. Though the concert had a set list and had concluded, the audience's demand for an encore resulted in Bano re-performing and re-invigorating the political atmosphere of the evening, with "Hum Dekhen Ge," which was reportedly not on the original setlist. Her encore reflects both "restored behavior" and twice-behaved behavior" as behavior repeated in successive performances wherein "performers get in touch with, recover, remember, or even invent these strips of behavior and

then rebehave" (Schechner 36). It categorized this repetition of performativity and showed her mutability in altering her performance based on the audience's response. To elaborate, at 6:52, when she sings "ye taj uchale jayein ge" ("When all the thrones will be brought down"), the audience starts chanting *Inquillab Zindabaad*, or Long Live the Revolution. She pauses her singing at this point. At Bano's barely audible command of *ruk jaye* (Stop), the musicians behind Bano adapted their sound to accommodate the chants and modified the *tabla* (drum) beat to synchronize with the audience's claps. Their adjustment recurs throughout the performance as the audience breaks into chants during and between Bano's singing, as she opens the performance to become a collective and shared experience. The performance reflects the communal element inherent to subcontinental music, especially protest music, and its repetitive performances highlight a "collective ritual .. intended to produce at least an attentive state of mind, and often even greater commitment of some kind" (Moore and Myerhoff 7).

Similarly, the same group was also able to change the staging of the performance. Bano was originally supposed to perform in a hall at Alhamra. However, the turnout was so overwhelming that the organizers had to open all doors to accommodate the crowd. According to a testimony from an audience member, Faiz's grandson, Ali Madeeh Hashmi, the hall was "filled to the brim" even before she took the stage. Then, his mother, Muneeza Hashmi, announced that a large number of political activists and workers had gathered outside, demanding entry. The organizers thus opened the doors, and as Hashmi recalls, "Once the doors were opened, people streamed in, and soon there was not an inch of space left in the hall. People were sitting on the stairs, the floors, wherever they could find some space" (Hashmi and Media).

In these ways, the audience's involvement in the performance dissolved the affective distance

between the actor and the spectator, between performer and listener, allowing them to become one with the performance. The audio recording of "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s encore immortalized the cries of the audience and their chants of *Inquillab Zindabad*, making their memory an active presence within the song's history. Given the song's performance at the height of Zia's dictatorship, the audience acted as a temporary substitute for a broader social and political community. The combined auditory mediations of the song between Bano's voice, the music, and the audience stresses its position as a magnetic song of persuasion and the audience's active involvement in shaping the performance. The revolutionary cries throughout the song, both at instrumental sections and during Bano's singing, reflect the role of the song to "create social cohesion or a feeling of solidarity among the membership of a social movement or specific world view" (Denisoff 585). In this context, resisting the dictatorship and its censorship. The performance's effect on the audience is further highlighted when Bano sings the verse "Hum ahle-e-safa mardud-e-haram" ("When we – those who believe, and those who have been barred from the sacred sanctuary [Mecca]"), (Faiz 13) the audience members audibly cry out *Wah!* — an exclamation of admiration — in unison. When she finishes the verse with "musnad par bi'thai ja'enge" ("Will be placed on the highest seats") (14), the audience begins cheering in the middle of her singing, and the applause continues until 6:02, prompting her to pause the song. The audience's affective cries and cheers, interspersed throughout her performance, helped contribute to its revolutionary effect and position in the repertoire. They showcase how "the song persuades individuals, both emotionally and intellectually, into supporting and possibly joining the movement" (Denisoff 585). As a participant, their voices are forever held within the recording and their role in being a "part of the transmission" (Taylor 30); their cries shape the songs' instrumental sections and

Bano's pauses. Between 6:38 and 7:03, however, one hears a clear break in the music and singing, where the drum beat begins to match the cries of the people within the audience. Significantly, these interjections signify how "performance offers a crucial political technique in the affective constitution of publics" (Menon 47).

The audience's bodily effect contributes to and builds on Bano's lyricism and music, showcasing movement's role in constructing the performance. As Joseph Roach writes in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996): "Performance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it" (Roach 10). Throughout the recording, we hear different ways in which the audience's fleeting physical movements are captured. For example, at minute 0:56, the audience begins to clap in tune with the *tabla* (drum) without interrupting Bano's singing. The percussive sound of the clapping forever captures the audience's emotions and appreciation, now present as an ephemeral yet residual memory. The song's impact aligns with Roach's extension of performance as coterminous with memory and history, emphasizing its role in the transfer and continuity of knowledge. Thus, it becomes clear that the written text's ingrained resistance was brought to life by both Bano and the audience, who actively contributed to shaping the atmosphere and the performance's aftermath and were simultaneously affected by its impact.

Building on this, during Bano's performance, the performers came to bear witness, as did the listeners, to their role as "participant(s) and a co-owner(s) of the traumatic event [of the dictatorship's

backlash]" (Felman and Laub 57) and played a significant role in its memorialization and ensuring a copy of the performance remained. Given the ban on public activities and Faiz's works, the event proved contentious, and Zia's authoritative forces attempted to remove any trace of its existence. Ali Hashmi, Faiz's nephew and witness to Bano's performance, states: "The same night, authorities raided the homes of the organizers and many of the participants looking for any audio copies of the concert, especially 'Hum Dekhenge.' Many copies were confiscated and destroyed." Several audience members who attended the concert were questioned and detained by the Pakistani army as well. Even Bano was banned from singing at official events, making her television appearance illegal. The state also destroyed all video recordings to maintain its hegemony and suppress resistance. The intent was to make the performance ephemeral and transient, reducing it to the vestiges of the past and the memory of those present in the audience.

Though performances are generally considered ephemeral, disappearing as they happen, per Peggy Phelan's definition, this impermanence becomes profoundly political in the context of the dictatorship. Whose memories, traditions, and claims to history disappear if performance practices lack the staying power to transmit vital knowledge? Under this framework, preserving and archiving a performance becomes essential, and even the survival of a recording becomes an alternate mode of situating its afterlife. Despite the categorial erasure of Bano's rendition from archival memory, one recording made by a technician at Alhamra Arts Council of the encore survived. According to Ali Madeeh Hashmi's account, his uncle, Shoaib Hashmi, acquired this copy and smuggled it to Dubai via friends, where multiple copies were further made and distributed widely (Hashmi and Media). Though, as Taylor identifies, a live performance can not ever be fully captured through the archive, and

even a video of the performance is not a performance, the recorded audio then "often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself (the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire)" (33). The recording captured the intense political atmosphere within the Hall, and in effect, through preserving a singular aspect of the moment, cemented the performance in the embodied cultural memory of the nation, continuing even now. The gesture of recording and its subsequent acquisition by Shoaib Hashmi, Faiz's son-in-law, reflect their endeavor to preserve their memory of the event mediated through technology and demonstrates how "embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it" (Taylor 20).

While Bano's choices reflect the new life accorded "Hum Dekhen Ge," it was through the audience's contributions that the performance was preserved as a recording and passed on. Their actions demonstrated an act of transfer physically, allowing the tapes to reach a global audience, be preserved from destruction, and be replayed. Despite the ban on Bano's public performance, even in Pakistan, the legacy continued as her tapes flourished in the black market. Pakistanis tuned in to the All India Radio station across the border to listen to her singing (Hashmi and Media). In this manner, the tapes countered the restrictions on television and public appearances as they were available across the city, on sidewalks in front of train and bus stations and bookstores, and held the potential to counter state control in the private sphere. The recording's dissemination, the subversion of Zia's epochal restrictions, and now, its availability on Youtube, standing at 5.4 million views (22nd March 2024), have resulted in its clear position in everyday time and allowed for a continual engagement with it. While Bano performed "Hum Dekhen Ge" numerous times until her death in 2009, this performance has defined her career and the poem's legacy.

II.“Is Faiz Anti-Hindu”[31]— Performance and Controversy at Anti-CAA Protests

The first comment under Iqbal Banos’ recording on YouTube as of 22nd March 2024 marks its usage during the Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (Anti-CAA) protests, signifying its enduring legacy. The comment, “Who is against CAA and NRC? Here after listening to this song during protest of Jamia students,” has 4K likes, more than any other comment on the video, and demonstrates “Hum Dekhen Ge”’s role during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests. India's Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) under the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on December 19, 2019. The act proposed a religious basis for citizenship for refugees entering India from the neighboring countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Under the amendments’ tenets, any refugees from these countries who were Hindu, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi could receive Indian citizenship within six years, even if they were without identification papers. However, significantly, missing from the list were Muslims, Tamil Hindus and Muslims from Sri Lanka, Rohingya Muslims, Bhutanese, Hazaras, Shias, and Ahmadiyyas (Amnesty International). The bill raised controversy because it fundamentally reworked the conception of nationality, making religious faith a condition of citizenship. According to Delhi-based lawyer Gautam Bhatia, by dividing alleged migrants into Muslims and non-Muslims, the law "explicitly and blatantly seeks to enshrine religious discrimination into law, contrary to our long-standing, secular constitutional ethos" (BBC). More broadly, the law was considered overtly exclusionary, violating the secular principles of the Indian constitution. As a result, mass protests began across India, demanding that the amendment be revoked.

[31] See article, Arun Anand’s “Faiz: A rabid anti-India fanatic masqueraded as progressive by illiberal Left” and The Wire, IIT Kanpur Panel Says Reciting Faiz's 'Hum Dekhenge' Was ‘Unsuitable to Time, Place’. For link: https://thewire.in/rights/faiz-ahmad-faiz-iit-kanpur-hum-dekhenge .

While the comments under Iqbal Bano's video reflect its significance in the anti-CAA protests, they point more broadly at the role of poetry in the subcontinent. Though Pakistan and India are separated by their constructed borders and heavily militarised nationalism, producing ongoing enmity, the cultural repertoire of the nations holds a shared revolutionary zeal, one that relies on poetry to criticize the fractures in the socio-cultural fabric. In this vein, during the anti-CAA protests (2019/2020), Urdu poetry played a central role in protests against the BJP's restrictive laws in Delhi and other urban centers. Amongst these was "Hum Dekhen Ge," which became a slogan and mobilizing call for people, taking form as a chant, a song, visual art, and even an internet meme. While the poem has appeared in the Indian repertoire before, its iconic position during the protests began through mimetic performances on campuses across India, from Jamia Millia Islamia, Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur (IIT-Kanpur), to Aligarh Muslim University. It was not only recited but converted into a visual display at the Shaheen Bagh protests. Its reperformance critiqued the state's injustice and drew the audience into the experience, emphasizing "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s transnational significance and unique position in Indian cultural memory.

a) Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-Kanpur) Performance

While each rendition is significant, I begin my analysis with the performance at IIT-Kanpur in light of the "Hum Dekhen Ge" controversy within and outside the university. Unlike Iqbal Bano's performance, its recitation was disrupted during the performance by angry crowds, ultimately resulting in an upsurge of mimetic performances of the poem across universities. On December 17, 2019, students at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur (IIT-Kanpur) held a protest in solidarity with students at Jamia Millia Islamia. The Delhi Police had brutally attacked the university on

December 15th, after which "dozens of students were beaten with batons amid the firing of tear gas shells" (Ahmed and Raju) for their agitation against the Citizenship Amendment Act. In IIT-Kanpur, the recitation of "Hum Dekhen Ge" occurred after 300 students began a solidarity march, raising their hands in the air to protest the police brutality faced by students at Jamia. In a video posted on Twitter, a student recites the poem from his cellphone, surrounded by a crowd at IIT-Kanpur. He stands at the center of what appears to be a seated stadium, his voice cutting through a conversing crowd. It is apparent immediately that the crowd is disparate in their attentiveness, with some listening mindfully and others conversing with each other. After he recites the following lines, the crowd begins cheering and hooting:

"Hum mehkoomon keh paon tale	"Under the feet of we, the oppressed,
Jab dharti dhad-dhad dharke ki	The earth will thump and shake
Aur ahl-e-hakam ke sar upar	And above the heads of the rulers
Jab bijli kad-kad kadkegi"	

The lightning will thunder and strike." (Faiz 7-10)

The sense of appreciation from the audience increases as they continue expressing support and cheering even when he recites the lines with a clearer illusion of Islamic sentiments

"Jab arz-e-khuda keh ka'abe se	"When from the Ka'aba of God's earth
Sab but uthva'e jayein ge"	All the idols will be removed." (11-12)

It is when he continues, "Jab naam rahe ga Allah ka /Jo ghayab bhi hai aur hazar bhi /Jo manzar bhi hai nazir bhi" ("Only Allah's (God's) name will remain/ who is both absent and present/Who is both the vision and the beholder") that a commotion can be heard in the audience as someone begins shouting *"nahi chale ga"* (This will not stand). As this incursion occurs, the remaining audience members begin cheering to counter the violent sentiments that his statement implies. The videographer, Vashi Sharma, shifts the camera to the figure yelling, a man in a red hat, aggressively trying to move toward the performer. He continues screaming "*nahi chale ga"* (This will not stand) and makes other indiscernible comments that clearly express discontent with the poem. At 1:15, the audience starts yelling back at him, many standing up, but he remains undeterred, shouting at the performer. This continues for a while, and what I believe to be campus security intervenes, trying to take him out of the area. Bystanders in the area attempt the same while he attempts to hit them. While he is taken aside by a bystander who tries to talk him down, the audience and performance disintegrate into turmoil. The organizers attempt to seat audience members down and prevent the event from escalating into a violent mob. While it is hard to discern what the man continues yelling, you can make out him saying, "jo allowed nahi hai vo kyun karva rahe ho" ("Why are you letting what is restricted to continue"), referring to both the poem and the protest itself, clearly angered at those resisting. The video ends soon after the turmoil, and the performer no longer continues; however, as it ends, the audience members sparsely clap, and some raise their placards in a show of resistance.

The ruptured recital through the antagonist's actions became a "condensational event" (Roach 28), resulting in acts of transfer that continued "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s performance across different educational institutions. Joseph Roach defines condensational events as a zone that "offer[s] a place for

transgression, for things that couldn't happen otherwise, ... [and offers], a place in which everyday practices and attitudes may be legitimated, ... [and] ... reinforced" (Roach 28). He further explains that these events remain embedded in cultural memory because they are powerful. In this performance, the transgression takes on two forms: the transgression of the performer on state control and repression and the antagonist's transgression on the performance. Both events, in their own way, sparked reinforcement. In regards to the performer, despite the interruption, it offered a model for non-violent protests that were taken up across India during the anti-CAA protests. By reciting poems in opposition to military violence, the student protesters in India showcase an attempt to build an ethical struggle where "everyday practices" of tolerance can be reinforced. Even in their peaceful nature, they are transgressive as the state brutally attacks them. When comparing the recitation to Iqbal Bano's, the antagonist poses a visceral danger to the performer and the audience as he continues advancing in the video. However, even during the performance, it builds on the attack on the Jamia Millia students, and as the performer recites, the audience cheers, reinforcing the political sentiment of "Hum Dekhen Ge" and the performer.

His aggressive response reinforces the complaints that arose against the recitation and creates a replication of Hindutva nationalism. Though the antagonist himself was stopped, the paranoia over the recitation reached higher authoritative forces, who placed restrictions on the students at IIT-Kanpur. More concretely, within the campus, a complaint was lodged by a member of the faculty, Dr. Vashi Mant Sharma, and 16 others, including faculty members and students, at IIT-Kanpur against the poem's performance because its lines allegedly invoked "communal sentiments" (Dubrow "Singing"). According to the newspaper *The Tribune,* the controversial line was the verse, "When all idols are removed, only Allah's name will remain" (The Tribune). The problem is not necessarily the Islamic nature, but rather,

as IIT-Kanpur's deputy director, Manindra Agrawal, stated in his support of the complaint, "The video suggests that the poem provokes anti-Hindu sentiments" (The Wire).[32] Ironically, the poem, though recited by Indian students, came to be portrayed as anti-nationalistic and "as alien to the culture that reproduces it and that it reproduces" (Roach 6).

The institution's overall stance opposed IIT-Kanpur's students' solidarity with the students at Jamia Millia Islamia and the anti-CAA protestors. It established a high-level inquiry committee to investigate the complaints against the march and to determine whether "Hum Dekhen Ge" was, in fact, anti-Hindu. An email sent by Agarwal emphasizes the complaints claim of the use of "inflammatory, abusive and intimidating language at the gathering" (The Quint, YouTube), hinting to the assumed superiority held by those of Muslim faith and their communalism. The inquiry resulted in a public debate in the media, as prominent Indian poets, former Indian Supreme Court judges, journalists, and intellectuals discussed the poem and its meaning. The university asked the student media body, "Vox Populi," to remove their editorial against the institute's decision. Vox Populi wrote in a post on their Facebook page on December 21st, "The committee has asked our publication to pull down our recent editorial — "Don't communalize the peaceful gathering at IIT Kanpur"— to reinstate harmony on campus.....This is the first time, since the launch of the online edition of Vox Populi, that we are pulling down any article following instructions from the administration," (Vox Populi, IIT Kanpur).

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[32] The irony of these debates is not lost when in 2022, *The Kashmir Files,* a blatantly anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan film following the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus during the Kashmir Insurgency, showed the song being performed by the Pakistani/Muslim enemy. On its release in theatres, Indian journalist Fatima Khan of *The Quint* tweeted, "The movie is doing exactly what it was meant to. Absolutely terrifying scenes playing out in theatres: murderous chants, hateful sloganeering, calls to stay away from Muslims." The sentiments fostered under the BJP regime through legitimising the CAA and their lasting implications become increasingly evident.

This discussion and censorship of both the performance and Vox Populi depicts the nationalist pedagogy of the state and its control of discursive freedom. Vashi Mant objected to the lines referring to the destruction of idols, claiming, "The revolutionary Faiz Sahib opted (for) Islamist Pakistan of Jinnah over secular India. Pakistan that promised to degrade Hindu-Sikh-Non-Muslims to second class citizens" (Chopra). The discussion shows a reductive understanding of the original poem and Faiz's own atheism. In "Hum Dekhen Ge," the word "idols" does not call for the destruction of Hindu idols; rather, it refers to false rulers, clearly indicting Zia-Ul-Haq's regime in his historical moment. Even more broadly, given the poem's universal humanism, its usage serves as a criticism of the anti-CAA law and the BJP's Hindu majoritarianism rather than anything else. Similarly, establishing "Allah's name" in the original text does not aim to create an 'Islamic Republic of India,' but rather uses Allah to critique Zia's cooption of Islam for his reign of "terror" (Malik 59) and liken god to the inevitable socialist revolution.[33] The poem's particular usage of Islamic metaphors was an intentional choice to mobilize a specific group, not as suggested here, attest to violence against different communities. Despite its original intent, the lines held a different meaning for IIT-Kanpur's committee, creating a debate on its meaning in right-wing circles. The 'Hum Dekhen Ge" controversy and divisions in interpretation within different groups in India reflects how "performance and aesthetics of everyday life vary from community to community, reflecting cultural and historical specificity as much in the enactment as in the viewing/reception" (Taylor 3) even in a text and poet shared in cultural memory and in this case, nation. Under the anti-CAA protests, the right wing's interpretation of "Hum Dekhen Ge" is positioned against the protesters, with the poem

[33] Brigadier S.K. Malik, in his book *The Quranic Concept of War,* which was commissioned by Zia, who also wrote its foreword, states, "Terror is not a means of imposing decisions upon the enemy, it is the decision we wish to impose upon him" (Malik 59).

evolving based on which group engages with it. In this context, the verses no longer belong solely to Faiz and one era; instead, they acquire different meanings depending on the group's political leanings. Regardless of its interpretation, the engagement with the poem underlines people's role in constructing its double narrative in the repertoire.

Though the performance was interrupted, recording and posting it on social media becomes dually significant in resisting archival control. First, it shows the mediation between the politics of the archive and repertoire as essential sources of information. The recording's availability, akin to Iqbal Bano's preserved performance, demonstrates how "they work alongside other systems of transmission—the digital and the visual" (Taylor 21), allowing them to transcend the limitations of either mode. Since the performer revoked his actions after the panel decision, the recording also preserves the memory of the event, its effect, and the individual's actions.[34] Second, and perhaps most importantly, it undoubtedly confirms technology and social organization's seminal role in creating "vortices of behaviour" ... [which channel] specified needs, desires, and habits in order to reproduce them" (Roach 28). Vashi Sharma's recording not only documented the verses that caused controversy and the performance method but also captured the antagonist's aggressive attack, which ruptured the performance and "brought .. into the open" (Roach 28) the conservative mindset. Finally, it embedded the IIT-Kanpur performance in the cultural memory of the poem and ensured its continued

[34] "Deputy director Manindra Agarwal said that given the time and place, "it [recitation of Faiz's poem] was not the most suitable thing to say" and "The person who recited that (poem) agreed with this perspective and wrote a note saying that he regrets (it) in case anybody's feelings were hurt. So that matter was closed," Agarwal said." (qtd in The Wire, "IT Kanpur Panel Says Reciting Faiz's 'Hum Dekhenge' Was 'Unsuitable to Time, Place'").

reproductions, to demonstrate solidarity with the students at IIT-Kanpur.

b) Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Performance

In solidarity with the students at IIT-Kanupr, a rendition was posted on YouTube on December 29, 2019, where the poem was sung on the steps of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus. Similarly, other universities and individuals began to release their renditions of the poem, including Samin Raza's montage of different artists, either as a direct response to IIT-Kanpur or the broader political turmoil affecting the nation. Its impact signifies how "the gravitational pull of social necessity brings audiences together and produces performers" (Roach 28) and fundamentally, how "performances travel, challenging and influencing other performances...., in a sense, always in situ" (Taylor 3). The continual transmission of "Hum Dekhen Ge" as a "condensational event" (28) thus finds itself contained within its performative zeal and results in an afterlife in "everyday time" that extends far beyond its immediate temporal moment.

The video showcases an unnamed girl seated at the center of stairs, surrounded by fellow students and protestors. She holds the mike and sings. Rather than performed with music, the poem is sung to the beat of the audience's claps. Though she leads the song, audience members occasionally join in, singing quietly in their respective seats or right beside her, singing throughout her performance, or even sitting around her, joining in for the deemed controversial lyrics. It's singing at JNU spotlights "a pattern of transgression indulged but also one of transgression carefully channeled into regulated conduits of time and space" (252) through the performative reinvigoration of the controversial poem's verses. When she sings "jab arz-e-ḳhudā ke ka'abe se sab but uthvā.e jā.eñge" ("When from the Ka'aba of

God's earth/ All the false idols will be displaced") (Faiz 11-12) and "Jab naam rahe ga Allah ka/Jo ghayab bhi hai aur hazar bhi/Jo manzar bhī hai nāzir bhī" ("when only Allah's name will remain /Who is both absent and present/ Who is both the vision and the beholder") (Faiz 17-19) — the lines which caused the recitation at IIT-Kanpur to abruptly end — she is joined by an upsurge of voices coming together in *unisonance.* These same verses gain additional significance compared to Bano's performance, where they served to critique the fundamentalist dictator. In this performance, the audience members singing in unison highlight their support for minorities excluded from citizenship through the CAA legislature. Their singing contains "an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance" (Anderson 145).

The audience's participation "in the production and reproduction of knowledge" (Taylor 20) takes on different forms: appreciative, *unisonance,* and as a protester in the performance, whereby they enact "being there" (20). Their claps, which provide the beat mainly throughout the singing, contribute to the collective power of music, being created spontaneously at the site of protest[35]. One audience member, visible at 3:56, plays the *kanjira* (a South Indian frame drum). Another individual seated to the singer's left, though, without an instrument, uses his legs as a drum. These bodily reactions to the song reflect what Tina Rosenberg identifies as seminal to creating an 'atmosphere' for protest music. She explains that the songs act as a "mediator and cohesive element....evoking strong corporeal responses'" (Rosenberg 179-80), which, according to her, are embodied effects (180). Even as the audience claps and

[35] It resonates similar to the *dholak* tradition at Punjabi weddings in both India and Pakistan where the guests clap in tune to the wedding songs. Concurrently, *Aurat* March (The Women's March) organizers hosted a fundraising *dholak* in 2022 where they re-wrote traditional Punjabi *tappay* (folk songs) into feminist anthems.

actively creates the music, they remain cognisant of the verses they are listening to and respond accordingly. At minute 2:40, when she first sings the verses "When from the Ka'aba of God's earth/ All the false idols will be displaced" (Faiz 11-12), the crowd raises a cry of *"wah"* (a cry of appreciation). While popular misconceptions of the verses could read *but* (idols) as the idols for Hindu worship, the crowd understands that Faiz is referring to false idols in power lauded by the public rather than literal Hindu idols for worship. In this case, the students' critique indicts the ruling party in India through their performance rather than indict the Hindu faith. The collective act of singing the verses "Sabh tajh ujale jayein gee /Sabh takht giraye jayein ge" ("When every crown will be flung /Each throne will be brought down") (Faiz 15-16) and "uthe ga An-al-Haq ka naara" ("When the cry of 'I am Truth' will rise") (17) further propels this reading. The difference between the JNU and IIT-Kanpur performances showcases explicitly that "actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same" (Taylor 20), and even when performing the same poem, they are reshaped by its actors. Both the protests and the ones that followed "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s performance reflect its continuing position in Indian cultural memory and that of "a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests — above all — in the form of poetry and songs" (Anderson 145).

The performance, spurred by affective information in the form of the consequences at IIT-Kanpur and the CAA bill, allows outsiders and audience members to be drawn in through empathy, transforming "the passive listener into an active participant" (Neuman 3). According to Neuman, protest songs make it easier for outsiders to join the movement and raise awareness about the grievances fuelling the protest and its ultimate goal (Neuman 2-3). "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s recurrence as a protest song signifies its position in the repertoire and as a magnetic song of persuasion as it spells out its aim to

mobilize against the CAA legislature. In its performance in JNU and IIT-Kanpur, the poem mediated between protestors and onlookers and attempted to create an affective bond of solidarity with other movement members. They situate its performance firmly as a "condensational event" (Roach 28) where, despite its reenactment at different locales and times, it "gain[ed] a powerful enough hold on collective memory that they will survive the transformation or the relocation of the spaces in which they first flourished" (ibid 28). In this vein, "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s continual resurgence, transmission, and rupture of state control in the anti-CAA protest centers its radical afterlife beyond its immediate temporal moment.

Similar to Iqbal Bano's performance, the performers and "the listener .... ha[d] to be at the same time a witness to the trauma and a witness to [them]self" (Felman and Laub 58) at both JNU and IIT-Kanpur's protests against the CAA. The two protest sites faced different attacks in the historical moment: IIT-Kanpur was subject to panel investigations and censorship, whereas JNU was the site of a violent attack on students and faculty by an armed mob. During the protests, "trauma like performance, is characterized by the nature of its "repeats" (Taylor 153), as groups joining the nationwide movement against CAA were faced with imminent danger. The embodied performative dimension of the protests — that of the utilization of poetry as protest — was as important as the "scientific evidence because it brought attention to the national tragedy" (ibid 156) of the Citizenship Amendment Act. Both mediums engaged in conversation with the broader political conflict between the Right and Left in India and contributed to increased individual coordination at the sites themselves. The relationships built created a nationwide movement as the attack on JNU resulted in the poem's transfer and adaptation by students at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM)

Ahmedabad on January 8th, 2020, to protest and agitate against the state's measures. Their performance spurred others, ultimately paving the way for the massive Shaheen Bagh protest.

c) Art Installation at Shaheen Bagh

Within the context of the same protests, "Hum Dekhen Ge" became a microcosm of public art pieces at Shaheen Bagh, the site of a 24-hour sit-in now considered one of India's most seminal women-led protests. It began on 15 December 2019 and lasted until 24 March 2020 in the Shaheen Bagh neighborhood in Delhi, when it was halted for lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[36] The protest began in response to the passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) on 11 December 2019 and the ensuing police intervention against students at Jamia Millia Islamia opposing the Amendment. By the end, over 150,000 protesters were present at the site, including women, children, families, and countless others. Each individual and community establishes their forms of platforming, dialogue, and protest to impart knowledge on the CAA, build affective attachments, and move people into participating.

Art and education through artistic practices came to occupy significant positions in sustaining the force of the protest. A frequently observed secular protest activity was the public reading of the Preamble of the Indian Constitution to challenge the religious bias of the BJP. The Preamble documented the importance of sovereignty, secularism, and equality as the core values driving the Indian Constitution and politics. "Reading the Preamble at Shaheen Bagh " symbolizes that...[it] is a secular protest—look at the national flags. We have everyone here—people from different religions. They are

[36]After the COVID-19 outbreak in India and subsequent government-enforced restrictions the protest continued for several days in a more controlled manner. Once the complete lockdown was imposed in Delhi on 23 March 2020, the remaining protesters were arrested or forcefully removed from the site by the Delhi Police.

here because they know that the BJP's anti-Muslim and anti-minority policies will hurt everyone and hurt the "nation." We are not a religious country. We are secular." (Bhatia and Gajjala 6294). The domain of popular contestations therein became an affective domain, mobilizing cultural memory through familiar idioms such as "Hum Dekhen Ge."

Notably, artists performed poetry and songs, a reading area was created with crowdsourced texts, and graffiti and murals denouncing the exclusionary politics of the CAA-NPR-NRC were present all around the protest site where reports claimed, "Delhi's Shaheen Bagh has turned into an open-air art gallery" (Scroll Staff). The reading area — "Read for Revolution" — was an allusion to the police invasion of library and research spaces at Jamia Millia Islamia University during the December 15th violence. By recreating a reading area, it sought to manifest reparative organizing and rebuilding through education. In creating such toolkits for resistance, the protesters not only documented the violence that the anti-CAA communities were subjected to and continue to loom over them, but they also used these spaces and tools to reorient the affective relationship with these violent, threatening events.

It is within this open-air art gallery that renditions of "Hum Dekhen Ge" were rooted within. On January 13, 2020, a group of art students wrote lines from the poem onto sheets of paper, folded into boats, and laid out in the shape of a heart (Fig 2), with the poem's text placed at the base. The heart also had two sheets of the entire poem in front of them (Fig 3). Together, they represented a "culture of hope" (Turner 6), building political activism through the effect of 'flowing ephemera of the daily and the workaday' (Seigworth and Gregg 7). The poem contained the semiotics of love and camaraderie that defined the community at Shaheen Bagh, visually reflected through the boats' heart construction. The choice of "Hum Dekhen Ge" visualized camaraderie and "humanism" (Cesaire 78) as it built on the

poem's metaphors of "true humanism" (Cesaire 78). Just as the poem envisioned the overthrow of "false idols" and rulers to establish an egalitarian world, the display melds these ideas together by constructing the beating of a universal heart through the boats placement. Moreover, the heart-shaped display on the ground evokes the alliterative onomatopoeia of "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s verse "jab dharti dhad dhad dhadke ki" (Faiz 8), symbolizing the beating of the earth's heart under the weight of the feet of the oppressed. Through their idiomatic references, the display reiterates the quest for universal emancipation.

The artists simultaneously displayed the poem's focus on "true humanism" (Cesaire 78) and the autocratic power of unjust rulers to further its critique of the CAA legislature. The display visualized the unjust rulers through a toy tank accompanying the paper boat "Hum Dekhen Ge" display (Fig 4). According to Jennifer Dubrow, the artist explained that the tank acted as a synecdoche to critique the military's limited power compared to poetry's affective potential (Dubrow "Singing") and position in resistance. Though Dubrow mentions the artist, they remain unnamed. Even in other articles, there is no ownership online of who created this exhibit or any name that can be ascribed. Sarover Zaidi and Samprati Pani explain the phenomenon of the unnamed artist and activist at Shaheen Bagh in their ground report from Shaheen Bagh. They wrote of an instance when a friend asked for the names of the artists involved in Shaheen Bagh's artworks and how, when it came to it, they said, "There are so many of them, and yet no one person in particular. Everyone is doing something — painting, drawing, welding, writing, making. Whose idea, whose imagination, whose materials, whose labor, whose dissent has gone into what?" (Pani and Zaidi, FirstNote). Though there is no trace of the original artist and curator of the exhibit online, within the display (see Fig.2), a group on the left can be seen folding the boats into existence as spectators watch the display come into being. No one is named, and given that most creators

look down at the boat, their identity is obfuscated. Perhaps, in the anonymity accorded through collective action, it becomes a tactical choice to prevent the Delhi police from discovering the 'organizers' and differentiating between supporters and spectators.

Fig 2. Still from a video posted on The Quint, showing artists at work, taken from Jennifer Dubrow's "Singing the Revolution: India's Anti-CAA Protests and Faiz's "Hum Dekhenge."

In addition to their effective power in visualizing the poem, the paper boats act as props, becoming vessels bringing Faiz's words to people attempting to wear down the proposed law. I use props as defined by Sofer to discuss the paper boats and the toy tank to emphasize their role in Shaheen Bagh "as material participants in action that script both time and space in performance, ... play(ing)s active roles as material and semiotic agents in performance (Sofer 2). By depicting Faiz's poem as boats and calligraphed pages of the poem, its resistance, thus far auditory in the protests, takes on a literary and visual element for the spectator. The visual representation of Faiz's poem harkens to the *ghazal's* illustrations commissioned under the Mughal rule and provides a strong commentary on the CAA's anti-Muslim rhetoric. In the Islamicate context, *ghazals* were depicted in illuminated manuscripts,

calligraphed and decorated with ornate borders. At Shaheen Bagh, “Hum Dekhen Ge” is written in calligraphy and becomes constructed into the ornate visual of a boat, an art piece itself, rather than surrounded by illustrations, as is usual. These boats become part of the “repertoire” (Taylor 21) at the protest site wherein they showcase a “‘live,’ ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” (ibid 155) in an unprecedented display of female discourse around the ‘common’ public through the intermediation of language and visual idiom. Their co-existence demonstrates the continuing relationship between poetry, performance, and protest.

Fig 3. The finished product. Photo by @delhi6wala, posted on Instagram, January 30, 2020. Taken from Jennifer Dubrow’s “Singing the Revolution: India’s Anti-CAA Protests and Faiz’s “Hum Dekhenge.”

While a powerful depiction, the paper boats enact an ephemeral quality wherein some accounts describe their disintegration after the rain. Their usage enacts political activism as both “the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera’s ... repetitious practices of power (that) can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for

realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm" (Seigworth and Gregg 7). The transient status of paper displays due to environmental variances is inherent within its construction, even as it signifies the movement of hope. The boats' rootedness in active events unfolding and in "Hum Dekhen Ge" evoke shared intimacy between communities, making the reader witness collective solidarity scenes of intimacy denied by the CAA law and the media narratives around it. It fluctuates thus between the 'live' of the repertoire and the archive, wherein though "'live' can never be contained in the "archive"; the archive endures beyond the limits of the live" (Taylor 156). The "Hum Dekhen Ge" boats ephemeral trace at the protest compared to the 'permanent' photographs of the exhibit and protests signifies this fluctuation and suggests their coexistence in the archive and repertoire of the Shaheen Bagh protest.

The objects "go on a journey" whereby they guide and script the spatial narratives (Sofer 2; 11) and political sentiments at Shaheen Bagh. Through the collective act of making the boats, they attain the status of scriptive things in their position as "an item of material culture that prompts meaningful bodily behaviours" (Bernstein 71). Making the boats together thus serves as collective labor, stringing together its political response as a group. Accounts of Shaheen Bagh art displays signified the openness of their construction, wherein anyone who wished could join(Pani and Zaidi, FirstNote). Through this open art space, the barriers between spectator, artist, and protest thus become blurred, and the public art piece becomes very much of, by, and for all the protestors, evoking a togetherness across the different religious communities present.

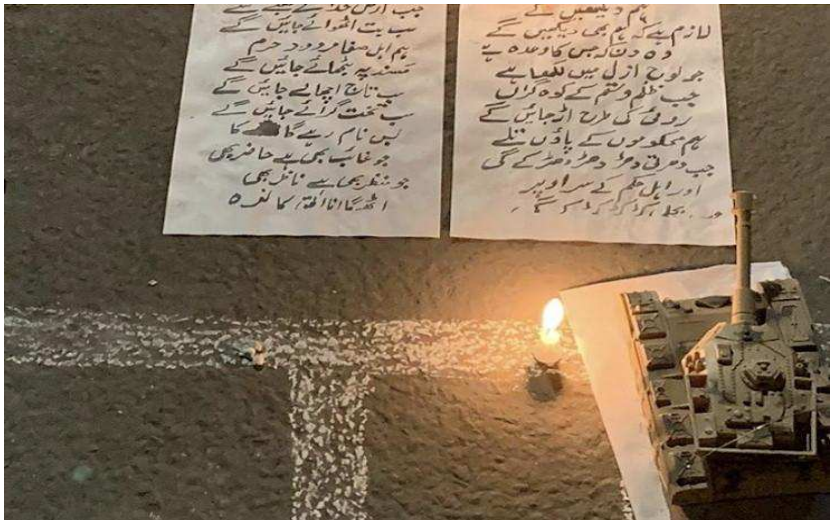

Fig 4: The toy tank accompanied by pages of the poem. Photo by @delhi6wala, posted on Instagram on January 30, 2020. Taken from Jennifer Dubrow's "Singing the Revolution: India's Anti-CAA Protests and Faiz's "Hum Dekhenge."

Similarly, the toy tanks serve as props through the artist's presence and placement within the exhibit, allowing it to possess different onstage and offstage functions (Sofer 9; 12). Offstage, the tank functions as a toy for children to use in their play. Onstage, its miniature size becomes an allusion to the military's power compared to the resistance poetics of "Hum Dekhen Ge." It further serves to comment on the unrestrained police repression that was adopted against protestors and students alike to suggest that the poem's word and their resistance will always stand larger than their brute force. Interestingly, the tank subverts the association of toy tanks with patriotic propaganda, for example, in World War I and the ideological control instrumented through "entertainment outlets that market toys, movies, and video games, through which images of war and destruction are manipulated and conveyed (Luckham 16-19 qtd. in Regan). Instead, at Shaheen Bagh, a sit-in where many children also joined, it critiques the violence and the state, which supports itself through jingoistic propaganda. The "scriptive thing" thus

furthers the distinction between things and objects, where "a thing focuses a person into an awareness of the self in material relation to the thing" (Sofer, "Review" 683); in this case, the tank. The model of resistance and its effect on children, in addition to the placement beside "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s continued life, symbolize a continuity in collective action. The continuity of this effect is seen even in 2024, with protests beginning again in response to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's implementation of the CAA legislation days before a general election.

While using a toy may appear odd, it deliberately seeks to mock the state by adopting a variation of "laughtivism." Defined by Srdja Popovic, founder of the student movement "Otpor!" ("Resistance!"), against the former Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic as the strategic use of humor and mocking by social nonviolent movements to undermine the authority of an opponent, build credibility, break fear and apathy, and reach target audiences (Popovic). While its name undercuts the seriousness of the retaliation faced by activists in India, perhaps it can explain their mediation of the toy tank with the paper boats containing the controversial poem. Under the framework of laughtivism, the opponent is faced with a dilemma. They can either "react to those who ridicule it, thereby making themselves look even more ridiculous in the process. .....or ignore the acts of laughtivism aimed against them, thereby opening the floodgates of dissent" (Popovic and McClennen 39). Using a toy tank in contrast to the highly contentious poem at that point in history offers a tongue-in-cheek and disguised criticism that could prevent severe retaliation.

Chapter 3: "Hum Dekhen Ge" under Commercial Capital

Introduction

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the contemporary era has seen a continual reproduction of Hum Dekhen Ge, casting a revolutionary afterglow on its legacy, as it remains relevant as a mode of protest against fascist regimes globally. The iterations have ranged from individual to collective, from preserved archivally to performed and present within a transnational repertoire. In all variations, it is significant that its popularity has not wavered, eliciting global and local responses, including events like the Faiz Aman Mela, held annually to commemorate Faiz. With its continuing popularity, some renditions have emerged that subvert the revolutionary message of the poem and co-opt Faiz for their means. While some versions, such as its performance in Vivek Agnihotri's 2022 film, *The Kashmir Files*, used it to perpetuate Islamaphobic sentiments within India and raise Hindu nationalist consciousness, others have sought to temper its message under the guise of commercial capitalism to boost product sales.

The irony of performing Faiz's communist resistance poetry to perpetuate consumer capitalism is not lost when watching Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge," a promotional song preceding the release of its eleventh season. The song was released on 22nd July 2018, three days before the general election (25th July 2018) in Pakistan with several violent incidents in July leading up to it. Instead of directly engaging with the political turbulence, the song presented an aestheticized, depoliticized poem censoring some of the poem's most revolutionary verses. The video begins with the words One Nation, One Spirit, and One Sound coming onto the screen as Coke Studio's logo pans on. Each phrase comes one at a time

as if intended to linger in the audience's mind, collectively forming Season 11's slogan. It fades out as the music begins, mixing a *tabla,* an accordion, and other stringed instruments. The melody is happy even as the image changes, bringing into focus a neon sign of a Coke bottle and the title, Coke Studio. At least 50 performers — a range of urban, folk, rock, and Sufi artists collectively — depict *joie de vivre*, smiling as they sing their respective verses. Dressed in their traditional garb, they represent different provincial, ethnic, and religious minorities, emphasizing the image of a unified Pakistan. Most smile, some cross their arms, others point to the audience, and a few tap their instruments, but all stare directly into the camera — inviting the viewer into their utopic vision of the nation. The glow of Coke Studio remains ever-present in neon light as the stage is bathed in red hues. Throughout the video, as viewers, we are bombarded with the neon outline of a Coke bottle, sometimes behind the artist (see Fig 5), sometimes double exposed onto the artist's body, sometimes layered on the outline of a drum cymbal (See Fig 6). For most of the performances, Coke Studio's label, with a Coke bottle replacing the letter 'I,' hangs in the background, an ever-present reminder of the brand's 'fundamental' role in the production. Even as they sing the lines *Hum Dekhen Ge* (We Shall Overcome), the Coke bottle remains luminous in one form or the other.

Fig 5: Ali Azmat, formerly of the band *Junoon*, in Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge," Screenshot, Coke Studio Pakistan, "Season 11| Hum Dekhenge", *YouTube,* 22 July 2018. Screenshot taken on 14 Apr. 2024

While I cannot discount Coke Studio's significant role in revitalizing the dying music industry in Pakistan, I situate their version of "Hum Dekhen Ge" under Coke Studio's commercial framework in this chapter. I will read Coke Studio's role in reviving Pakistani music and "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s representation of provincial, religious, and gendered minorities under capitalism as "a single process in which an infinity of good and bad effects appear ... interlocking of the destructive and the progressive" (Aijaz 8). I argue that the version reduces "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s resistive potential to a profit-making and 'nationalist' commodity. My intent is not to critique the producers, Ali Hamza or Zohaib Kazi, or any of the artists — all great musicians in their own right — but rather to emphasize Coca-Cola's overarching control on the production process and generation of musical commodities. As such, I explore the limitation of performing Faiz under the commercial capital's eerie glow, its reduction of the revolutionary poem, and the subsumption of folk/Indigenous music under a 'national mass culture.'

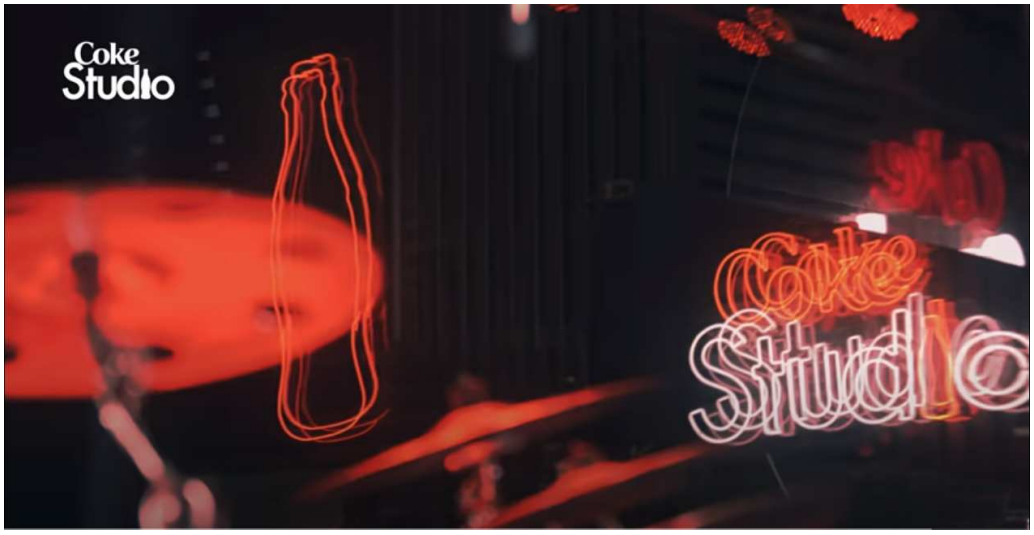

Fig 6: Neon Coke Bottle over Drum Cymbal, Screenshot, Coke Studio Pakistan, "Season 11| Hum Dekhenge", *YouTube,* 22 July 2018. Screenshot taken on 14 Apr. 2024.

I. "Always Coke": Coca-Colonisation and the Rise of Coke Studio

"The story has flipped from a decade ago; the problem is that you're no longer judged by the work you do but by what program you're on. And if you're not on the three main shows—Coke, Pepsi, and Nescafé—people don't think you're doing anything that matters, even if you are." - Zain Ahsan, guitarist for the Lahore-based indie rock band Poor Rich Boy (LeVine 210).

The Coca-Cola Company began a strategic investment in Pakistan by sponsoring Coke Studio as a bastion for 'corporate peace' in 2008. The idea originated from a program in Brazil**,** *Estúdio Coca-Cola,* in 2007, which featured live performances (Dhanwani 10). Owing to its success, Nadeem Zaman, Marketing Head of The Coca-Cola Company, partnered with Rohail Hyatt, a former Pakistani band Vital Signs member, to create a Pakistani version of the show. The episodes are recorded live by artists in

Karachi, Pakistan, and broadcast with the company's $6 billion advertising budget on multiple TV and radio channel broadcasts (Dhanwani 5). They are also available as Video and MP3 files for immediate download from its official YouTube channel (Tanweer) and other streaming platforms such as Spotify and the local application Patari.[37] The show features different artists with the house band in each episode and predominantly roots itself in poetry's oral performance of poetry as they generate their own covers. Under Hyatt, the investment-turned-cultural institution attempted to bridge cultural fragmentation in Pakistan after the security crisis of the 2000s destroyed the live music scene.[38] The show focused on bringing tradition and modernity together, synthesizing traditional folk music with Western music to make it more accessible to the younger generation. It ultimately aimed to promote a 'softer' image of both Pakistan and, by extension, Islam, which, coupled with the fusion narrative, fit Coke's motto: "Hope, the power of unity and refreshing the world."[39]

Since its inception, the show became a cultural behemoth dominating the Pakistani music scene, materializing its 1993 slogan, "Always Coca-Cola" (1993). Coca-Cola's business model of corporate social responsibility and profit generation worked, increasing Coke's market share in the subcontinent by

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[37] Spotify launched in Pakistan in 2021 and has since partnered with Coke Studio Pakistan to "bring generations of Pakistani music to an even larger audience around the world." Khan FM, Head of Artist and Label Partnerships in Pakistan stated "While *Coke Studio* has been producing music for years, it presented a new vision for 2022, which matched Spotify's mission to unlock the massive potential of creators and music across Pakistan," The dominant partnership with Coke Studio further reduces visibility of local, indie artists, not represented by the corporation.

[38] The worsening security situation in the late 2000s and early 2010s in Pakistan drastically affected the live music scene in the country. Ahmer Naqvi writes: "In the vacuum [created by the security situation] came [corporate] programs, where it was safe to enjoy music from the comfort of one's home" (Levine 223).

[39] See Ryan A. D'Souza's "Composing an Oppositional Discourse in Coke Studio Pakistan" for details regarding its position in placing Sufi Islam and women at the forefront in opposition to the image of terrorism associated with Pakistan.

38.8% (‘Beverage Sector’ The News International).[40] What my study emphasizes is that in their musical productions, "there is one and only one social responsibility of business — to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition” (Friedman 133). According to Arnab Roy, Coca-Cola vice-president of marketing for India and South West Asia (Coca-Cola), Coke Studio Pakistan is the music platform's largest market worldwide. He further explained, "In Pakistan, Coke is now the number one brand by far. Ten years ago, Pepsi was the market leader there. The single biggest growth driver to the Coke brand in Pakistan has been Coke Studio" (Bhushan). Its critical acclaim inspired a growing international franchise scaling 30 markets, including Coke Studio India, Coke Studio Bangladesh, and Coke Studio South Africa, wherein it has become an “always-on” program. Forbes even remarked that the show has broken geo-political boundaries. For example, songs such as Pasoori by Ali Sethi and Shae Gill on Coke Studio Pakistan reached 300 million views on YouTube and entered YouTube's Global Top Music Videos chart (week of 16–22 December) (Web Desk). Wherein the video is full of comments from people from India and Bangladesh claiming it “connected the subcontinent” (YouTube).[41]

While Coke Studio has achieved critical success worldwide and has been associated with Pakistani music’s resurgence, it has received its fair share of criticism. Its hegemony and production control have ultimately generated a modern-day resurrection of Coca-colonisation due to the "asymmetry in the

[40] Since its launch in 2008, it has amassed 4538941464 views and 15.1 million subscribers on YouTube alone as of 8 May 2024 (YouTube statistics, 2024).

[41] Coca-Cola’s stategy in the sub-continent has long drawn on this notion of unifying the enmity between nations. See for example YouTube video, “Coca-Cola Small World Machines -Bringing India and Pakistan Together”. It offers a live communication portal through a Coca-Cola vending machine for Indians and Pakistanis to interact with and engage across country borders. With Coke Studio, it appears YouTube’s comments section has provided another site for interaction.

transfer of culture ... lead[s] to the conclusion that we are dealing with cultural . imperialism" (Wagnleitner 87).[42] Another significant critique is how it simultaneously worsened the generational and economic divide such that only certain groups can "participate in and take advantage of the ... changed production, distribution, and consumption environment ... [leaving many] on the outside looking in" (LeVine 212). Mekaal of the Mekaal Hassan Band highlights, "Now bands don't release their own stuff but rather wait to get on Pepsi Battle of the Bands. It's a cycle: the corporations swoop onto the exploding scene, and whatever they can't monetize, they crush" (LeVine 210). Artist recognition under its absolute monopoly is mediated through corporations. Consequently, for musicians, the capital and position gained by performing at Coke Studio are considered markers of artistic success. As Imran Akhund, lead guitarist (1998 to present) for Pakistani pop/rock singer Shehzad Roy and bands like Strings and Vital Signs, who joined Coke Studio in Season 7, states, "I have been playing for 20 years and mostly with Shehzad Roy, but it is only now that people recognize me wherever I go. It's because I am constantly on their screen, playing my guitar" (Rehman). Under Coke Studio's patronage, what emerges thus is a culturally elite, corporately sponsored (and gatekept) initiative that makes the artist a tool for selling wares, reducing the music and the artist to an aesthetically packaged commodity.

Despite this, Coke Studio has adapted numerous poems and folktales into music and produced

[42] Cocacolonization as a historical concept gained visibility through the 1994 publication of Reinhold Wagnleitner's book *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War*. Within it, he used "Coca-Colonization" to premise the US's attempted cultural imperialism through spreading consumer goods as Coca-Cola and Levi jeans, and further, through cultural symbols like rock and roll and Marlon Brando's black leather jacket. Though overall the premise is fascinating, the book does not discuss the presence of Coke in Austria. Wagnleitner even admits later in his book that Coca-Cola was not available for sale in Austria during most of the occupation (277). The case is very different in Pakistan, where Coke is present in many ways, as a bottle, a can, a music production house and even, festivals i.e. Coke Fest. I use the term to elaborate on these many nuances and the way Coke specifically shapes and fragments culture in Pakistan.

great adaptations and collaborations, including one of my favorite adaptations, "Paar Chaana De" by Noori and Shilpa Rao. However, seeing "Hum Dekhen Ge's" performance under the neon glow of a Coke bottle is particularly disconcerting, considering the poem's influential role in histories of leftist resistance and Faiz's staunch critique of capitalism. This irony raises several pressing questions: can the song still retain its revolutionary essence when produced by a conglomerate? Does it still belong to the original artist or the producers? Is it still Faiz's poem, or has it transformed into something entirely different under Coca-Cola's expansive reach?

II. The Performance

"Hum Dekhen Ge" is a montage of over 50 Pakistani artists, both local and diaspora, who come together to perform in various genres. These include rock, Pakistani pop, electronic, *qawwali, bhajan, na'at,* rap (Lyari Underground; Young Desi), instrumental funk (Mughal-e-Funk), and many others, each bringing their differing backgrounds into the performance. The performance features renowned Pakistani artists such as Abida Parveen, Ali Azmat, Momina Mustehsan, Jimmy Khan, and others. It balances their position with 'unknown' local artists that were 'discovered' by Coke Studio, some as part of the Coke Studio spin-off, Coke Studio Explorer, which served as a prequel to its eleventh season.[43] These artists are Ariana and Amrina, Shamu Bai and Vishnu, Mangal Khan, Darehan Khan Maula Baksh

[43] Coke Studio explorer was different from the studio recording settings of the original format. Instead, it followed live music collaborations between Kazi and Hamza with regional but largely unknown artists discovered by the duo in five regions of Pakistan.

and Shayan Maula Baksh (Baloch Throat Musicians) and Mishal Khawaja.[44][45][46][47]

In the performance, the stage is barely visible. Instead, the camera focuses on the musicians facing the screen, directly looking at the audience as they sing. There are occasional shots of the singers with their instruments or microphones. Still, overall, the video maintains a consistent format: fixed camera angles, a uniform stage setup, and the performers' unwavering gaze straight at the viewer. Kazi stated it was an intentional choice, "It needed to be head-on. We will look into your soul through the camera. We told the artists to look in the camera as if they are looking into the soul of people, and they felt a certain belief that we too can do something" (Sabeeh). Their direct gaze and smiles enhance their affective power, drawing the audience in and contributing to its vision of a happy, peaceful Pakistan glowing with an aura of optimism. The lilting and hopeful music reflects this intent, blending Eastern and Western styles. It is never rough or abrasive but soft and melodic, driving the verses forward. Though similar in tone throughout, it shifts at minute 1:21 to emphasize the verse "Jab bijli khar khar karkhe gi" ("The lightning will thunder and strike") sung by Riaz Qadri and Ghulam Ali Qadri at 1:20. Here, the music changes seemingly to mimic thunder and lightning, becoming an auditory representation of the poem.

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[44] Ariana and Amrina are members of the Kalasha community from the Bumburet Valley of Chitral, Kyber Pakhtunkhwa which follows an ancient form of Hinduism, animism. Both have been singing together locally since the age of five. Their "all-female Indigenous act" is significant in highlighting their religious and cultural uniqueness in contrast to the hegemonic Muslim culture of Pakistan.

[45] Shamu Bai and Vishnu are a brother and sister duo who were classically trained by their father Arjun and hail from Deewan Lal Chand a village in rural Sindh. They are famous for their bhajans at local jagrans and have also performed at local gatherings, weddings and festivals.

[46] Mangal Khan together with Darehan and Shyan hails from Dera Bugti District in Balochistan. One of few singers who have been performing using throat singing technique called "overtone singing" (in Balochi known as "Narsur") for over thirty-years. Kazi compared their music to Tuvan singing of Mongolian monks.

[47] Mishal Khawaja hails from Toronto and makes a significant voice in the Pakistani diaspora. Her music introduces a unique musical fusion, weaving together R&B and pop with Middle Eastern and Pakistani influences.

The song progresses through verses assigned to each musician and artist, flipping through numerous performers, even during the instrumental sections. Even the refrain "Hum Dekhen Ge" is repeated 19 times, with other verses repeating at infrequent measures. The frequent switch of performers is disorienting, where often, you have to pause to identify who is on the screen, which, for me, detracted from the listening experience. Singers appear at different junctures, some with verses reflecting their musical interests and some without. Notably, the producers, possibly recognizing the artists' strengths, assigned the poem's overtly Islamic verses — "bus naam rahe ga Allah ka" ("when only Allah's name will remain") (Faiz 17)and "uthe ga An-al-Haq ka naara" ("When the cry of 'I am Truth' will rise") (20) — to Abida Parveen and the *qawwals*, Fareed Ayaz and Abu Mohammad. Both artists elevate those lines with their own interpretations, emphasizing their affective charge. As Mughal-e-Funk's instrumental funk music plays and the music slows down from its earlier tempo, it transitions into Parveen's classical tonalities, fading almost to silence, as she sings the line "bus naam rahe ga Allah ka" ("Only Allah's name will remain") (17). Her voice stresses Allah ka at 1:35, elongating the words and drawing the listener further in. Similarly, 10 seconds later, the verse "uthe ga un-hal ka nara" ("The cry of I am the Truth rings") (20) is repeated twice by the qawwals. The main qawwals *(mohri*) — Fareed Ayaz and Abu Muhammad — sing the verses, repeating them for emphasis. When Abu Muhammad sings "Nara" ("cry"), the background qawwals respond with a unified cry and raise one arm. The power of *unisonance* and the collective come together briefly, perhaps the strongest instant in the song, as it begins to lean into the poem's resistance poetics. The remaining artists carry the gusto set by the *qawwals* until the music and tenor of voices quiet before the final "Hum Dekhen Ge."

In the hustle of changing faces that make up the song, one could almost miss one of the most

radical changes made to “Hum Dekhen Ge” — the erasure of 6 verses from the performance. While I delve into its reason in the coming sections, it is unquestionable that the excision alters the poem’s meaning as it removes arguably the most revolutionary verses that visualize rebellion. The removed verses were:

“Jab arz-e-khuda keh ka’abe se	“When from the Ka’aba of God’s earth
Sab but uthva’e jayein ge	All idols will be removed.
Hum ahl-e-safa mardud-e-haram	We – those who believe and who have been barred from the sacred sanctuary [Mecca]
Masnad pe bi’thai ja’enge	Will be seated on the highest seats
Sab taaj ucchale ja’enge	All the crowns will be tossed
Sab takht gi’rae ja’aenge”	All thrones will be brought down.” (Faiz 11-16)

As much as the collaboration of these diverse groups, with their varied genres and backgrounds, is moving to a listener, comparing this rendition to others of “Hum Dekhen Ge” I have witnessed, both in person and as a bystander, I am left unnerved. Something that does not sit right, whether it’s the omission of certain verses, the lack of collected *unisonance* that I associate with the song or the disconnect from Pakistan’s less-than-idyllic reality. Though the song fails to capture the poems’ revolutionary sentiments in many ways, in contrast, it demonstrates radical inclusion far beyond what is typically seen in Pakistan.

III.“Share a Coke”: Radical, National Inclusion?

Regarding “Hum Dekhen Ge”’s choice, producers and directors Ali Hamza and Zohaib Kazi highlight, "We couldn't be more confident about the power of human stories coming together to form a

bigger picture.. [so]... there couldn't be a better choice for a track than: "Hum Dekhenge" – A song sung by the people of Pakistan, for the people of Pakistan!." In its quest for representation, the song definitively emphasizes the inclusion of Pakistan's diverse population, presenting an image of a unified nation by including artists from every corner of the country. While the producers' decision to include these groups is significant, it should not be read in a vacuum. The choice aligns with Season 11's overarching theme, "One Nation, One Spirit, One Sound," and Coca-Cola's global brand requirements. In this case, their motto is the same as the corporation: "promoting happiness and sharing, inclusivity and demonstrating cultural and social awareness."

The revolutionary song under Coke Studio presents a series of contradictions, depicting inclusion while negating its political meaning. Though seemingly paradoxical, the contradictions come together to showcase the "good and bad" of capitalism in a "relation of mutuality and reciprocity....the interlocking of the destructive and the progressive" (Ahmad 8). The song survives through this mediation, even harkening back to its revolutionary past by citing Iqbal Bano's performance in 1986. In a radical show of inclusivity, even for Coke Studio, the song includes religious, ethnic, provincial, and sexual minorities, each given one line of the poem to sing. This inclusion increased the song's popularity across Pakistan and showcased how the production contains the seeds for the "progressive."

The 50 artists reflect Season 11's theme of "one nation," depicting each aspect of *Pakistaniyat* —

local and diaspora — as an expanding and inclusive concept.[48] Regardless of their position in the global and cultural repertoire, each artist was assigned a single line of lyrics and equal screen time. The inclusive approach quite successfully promotes a progressive image that encapsulates all communities in Pakistan. On the surface, it simultaneously upends the traditional musical hierarchy in Pakistani music by giving space to musicians otherwise denied opportunities. The collaboration features artists from different religions — Sunni, Shia, Christian, Parsi, and Hindu — in opposition to the dominance of Sunni Islam in the region, reminiscent of Faiz's critique of Zia's Islamisation. Additionally, the representation of artists from Kalaash, Gilgit, Balochistan, and rural Sindh counters the provincial dominance of Punjab and urban Sindh in political and cultural spheres. Through both endeavors, this theme continues as producers demarcate a significant inclusion of local identities within the urban imagery as these artists participate in different songs across Season 11. The decision marks a significant shift from earlier seasons of Coke Studio. In contrast to the first two seasons, which predominately featured male artists, the latter seasons progressively increased the number of female guests in the later seasons (see Fig.7, Dhanwani 9).

[48] Following "Hum Dekhen Ge", the season's first song was a performance of Allama Iqbal, the national poet of Pakistan's poem, "Shikwa" (Complaint) and "Jawab-e-Shikwa" (The Answer to the Complaint). It was followed by numerous performances than stressed equality, as visualised in "Hum Dekhen Ge" for example, "Mein Irada" (My Intention), a feminist anthem, sung by Haniya Aslam, "Baalkada" (Your Wing), sung by Naghma, Lucky and Jimmy Khan, and "Piya Ghar Aya" (My love is home with me), sung by Fareed Ayaz, Abu Muhammad Qawwal and Brothers. They were significant especially in their linguistic variance, where Season 11 had songs in Farsi, Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki, Balochi, Kalasha, Pashto, Purbo, Arabic and Sindhi. In this vein, it brings together the different cultural and linguistic heritages in the country.

Table 1

Seasons	Coke Studio Artists																
1	Ali Azmat	Ali Zafar	Hussain Bakhsh Gullo	Rahat Fateh Ali Khan	Saba & Selina	Sain Tuffail	Sajid & Zeeshan	Strings									
2	Arieb Azhar		Atif Aslam	Javed Bashir	Josh	Noori	Riaz Ali Khan		Saieen Zahoor	Shafqat Amanat Ali	Zeb & Haniya						
3		Abida Parveen	Amanat Ali	Arif Lohar	Aunty Disco Project		Entity Paradigm	Fakir Juman Shah	Karavan	Meesha Shafi		Rizwan & Muazzam	Sanam Marvi	Tina Sani			
4	Akhtar Chanal Zahri	Asif Hussain Samrat	Attaullah Khan Esakhelvi	Bilal Khan	Fareed Ayaz& Abu Mohammad	Jal	Kaavish	Komal Rizvi	Mizraab	Mole	Qurat-ul-Ain Balouch	Sajjad Ali		Sketches	Ustaad Naseer-ud-Din Saami		
5	Atif Aslam	Bohemia	Chakwal Group			Farhan Rais Khan	Hadiqa Kiani	Hamayoon Khan	Meesha Shafi	Tahir Mithu	Overload	Qayaas		Rachel Viccaji	SYMT	Uzair Jaswal	
6		Abrar-ul-Haq	Alamgir	Ali Azmat	Asad Abbas	Ayesha Omar	Fariha Pervez	Muazzam Ali Khan	Rostam Mirlashari	Rustam Fateh Ali Khan	Saieen Zahoor	Sumru Ağıryürüyen		Umair Jaswal	Zara Madani	Zeb & Haniya	Zoe Viccaji

Source: Wikipedia
*marked in blue are the women guest artists

Fig.7: Representation of Female to Male Artists, Coke Studio Season 1-6, taken from Rashmi Dhanwani "Coke Studio: Remapping Translocality Investigating the Transnational in its Labour, Technological and Economic Relations." Accessed 14 April 2024.

Just as "an iced cold Coke tastes better when shared together with friends, family, and even strangers" ("Special Moments Happen"), so too does Coke Studio. Its representation of the communities allows Coke to foster a more significant share of the market. As the company's global policy shifts towards inclusivity, as reflected by the commercial "Share a Coke with Love," showcasing diverse couples, Coke Studio necessarily shifts to match the same. Under this lens, one of the most significant changes was including Naghma and Lucky as the first transgender singers in Coke Studio, which earned the show appreciation across the border. At minute 2:07, they sing the lines "Khalq-e-Khuda ... Jo main bhi hun aur tum bhi ho" ("God's creatures ... which both of us are") (Faiz 22-23), gesturing towards the audience. Their words gain additional meaning as they directly address the listeners, stressing that they

are all one, erasing societal discrimination for a brief moment.[49] Their inclusion is a powerful statement by Zohaib Kazi and Ali Hamza, especially in light of the widespread discrimination against the *Khwaja-sira* (transgender) community in Pakistan on mainstream platforms.[5051] Likewise, rap group Lyaari Underground's presence is significant in changing perceptions about Lyaari —a densely populated 'no-go' slum in Karachi dominated by gang violence, which Rangers and the government covertly support. They are portrayed as resisting the violence and beyond that — as artists in their rights.[52] As they sing, "Hum **bhi** dekhenge" (we *too* shall see) (my emphasis) (Faiz 2), it offers a look into the power of music and its role in resisting violence as they stress "hum **bhi**" (We *too*) (my emphasis), stressing the inevitably of resistance in Lyaari.

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[49] The violence predates Pakistan's formulation and can be associated with the Pakistan penal act, originally originally developed under the British Raj, that criminalised sodomy with penalties of prison sentences from two years to a life sentence and fines. In recent years, between 2015 and September 2020 alone, 68 transgender people were killed in Pakistan, and 1,500 were sexually assaulted in multiple incidents. In 2018, transgender people reportedly experienced 479 violence incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including numerous counts of unreported violence.

[50] See Shahnaz Khan's, "Khwaja Sara, Hijra, and the Struggle for Rights in Pakistan," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 5, Aug. 2017.Further, see Amara Faheem, Aminah Shah Jehan, Saqib Raza, & Lashkar Hussain, "Transender Voices: Analyzing Discourse and Representation in Media in Pakistani Society", *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences*. Retrieved from https://ijciss.org/index.php/ijciss/article/view/326 and their discussion on media's perpetuation of stereotypes.

[51] In Pakistan, it was as late as 2011 that Transgender citizens were allowed to vote, and in 2018, under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, they could have that identity recognized on official documents, including national IDs, passports and driver's licenses The right was recently revoked in a Shariah court reading in 2022 which mandated that they could not change their gender and halted the issuance of ID cards.

[52] Lyari is said to be one of the oldest inhabited parts of Karachi, and is referred to by its residents as the 'Mother of Karachi'. It has been an important site for social and labor activism since the colonial era, i.e it was a base for anti-colonial movements, such as the Khilafat Movement, and the Reshmi Rumal Tehreek, as well as, the main base for student organization and Baloch nationalist organisation in the 1960s. During both Zia-Ul-Haq and Musharraf's dictatorship, it became a predominant site for resistance. See Laurent Gayer's *Karachi: Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* and Nichola Khan's *Cityscapes of Violence in Karachi: Publics and Counterpublics* for details on the changing landscape of Karachi and Lyari.

While these aspects are important in their own merit, in Coke Studio, particularly through "Hum Dekhen Ge," it is evident that art's commercial and entertainment function has overshadowed its historical significance and political message. Throughout, the ever-present Coke bottles in the video serve as advertising campaigns and act as a synecdoche for this new form of imperial expansion in the market. Through their version of Coca-colonisation, Coke Studio frames "Hum Dekhen Ge" to expand their global market share, incorporating Coke bottles and slogans emphasizing unity, i.e., One Nation, One Spirit, One Sound, and in earlier seasons, Sound of the Nation. Their constructed utopian national culture and market mimic Coca-Cola's original brand image as traditional, patriotic, friendly, and American. While earlier, it used advertisements like "Have a Coke, foreigners hear the G.I. say when he wants to be friendly, and they begin to understand what America means ... [R]efreshe[d] with ice-cold Coca-Cola helps show the world the friendliness of American ways" (Print advertisement qtd in Greenfield 13); now it only needs to rely on Coke Studio. The studio implicitly manufactures a harmonious image of the nation, subsuming the different groups into its vision of *Pakistaniyat* by detaching them from traditional performance sites. Although the musicians wear traditional outfits, representing the "ethnographic fragment" (Kirshenblatt-Gimlett), they are displaced from their regions and presented solely as a facet of *Pakistaniyat* in "Hum Dekhen Ge" rather than any other aspect of their identity. The studio stage counteracts their usual sites of cultural production — within dargahs (places of worship), shrines (Sufi sites of prayer), weddings, villages, and open-air performances (for wandering musicians such as the fakirs). Their original context reflects what Ahmad identifies: that "cultural productions everywhere greatly exceed the boundaries set by the [cultural imperialist] state, so that highly diverse historical trajectories may ... not be available for generalizing ... unified narratives" (*In*

Theory 244). As such, the reduction is necessary for Coke Studio to craft a convincing national culture and music.

While Pakistan's national culture often involves exclusion and violence targeted at minorities ("Pakistan: Authorities Must Ensure Protection"), Coke Studio attempts to counter this with radical inclusion. The stage in Karachi acts as a metonymy for in-situ ethnographic displays and contributes to its creation, projecting a "harmonious national whole that harmoniously integrates regional diversity" (Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 20). The mistaken utopic vision erases the provincial struggles in Sindh, Kashmir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, where these regions have fought to protect their regional identities and traditions against national culture's supremacy since Pakistan's creation (1947). It further appears to gloss over secession movements, such as the Baloch Liberation Movement, and their efforts to break away from the Pakistani state despite facing severe repression. Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge," in tandem with their slogan, develops "spectacular thought [that] must justify a society without justifications, and must constitute themselves into a general science of false consciousness" (Debord 105), one that erases the regional and ethnic differences (and conflicts) dominant in Pakistan. Adopting these practices for "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s performance contradicts the poem's central message of universal liberation for all and undermines the artists' agency in re-performing it within the repertoire, as highlighted in earlier chapters. Instead, it stipulates a particular model of its performance, one mandated by the soft-drink conglomerate. Through the song's commodification and Coke Studio's popularity, it generates a " world appears [that] as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the totality of the society can be and do" (Debord 28) — the spectacle of nationalism. Here, 'national' music is stimulated through

"Hum Dekhen Ge," a poem and song embedded in the nation's cultural memory and fundamentally its repertoire by Coca-Cola, an international conglomerate.

IV. The Spectacle of Revolution

In a song with 50 singers that, at first glance, offers powerful imagery in symbolizing collective strength and solidarity, I often wondered why the performers are introduced in fragmented sections, some alone, others with one or two others, and at most, with eight artists. Why did they only get one line? Why, even if just for the refrain, did these voices not come together in unison, as it has in so many countless performances before? If the aim is proferring 'one nation,' why is the image not visualized? And most importantly, why are the verses clearly alluding to the downfall of oppressive regimes missing? Unlike Coke Studio's vision of nation and 'solidarity,' previously discussed renditions of 'Hum Dekhen Ge" positioned themselves in context to the national and global political moment as people stood together against state power, chanting and singing together. These performances reflected peoples' power, drawing attention to the song's political past and present, and ultimately showcased how their performances recodified the understanding of the sites of protest/performance, made historical due to their performance (Hernández 134). In contrast, Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge," produced by an international conglomerate, is disjointed, vocally, and visually fragmented in its depiction of 'solidarity.'[53]

The red and white studio and individualized staging of the performers in small clusters are inherently dissonant with images of revolution and resistance. Though the representation of minorities is

[53] To contrast, popular music as protest with relatively individualized performances has been part of Pakistan's history but has not diminished its political effect, the way I see in Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge". See Saba Pirzadeh and Tehminda Pirzada's article *Pakistani Popular Music: A Call To Reform in the Public Sphere*

significant in its own right in Pakistan, it is difficult to see it as more than a symbolic gesture given the poem's excision of verses, the Coke bottles, and corporate studio space. These contradictions highlight neoliberal corporations' convoluted stance in their pursuit of "woke" corporate capitalism, positioning themselves within progressive conversations to generate profit. Given the song's placement within Coca-Cola's evolving empire and hegemony over Pakistan's music scene, it is evident that it seeks to create a spectacle of resistance and national unity, which facilitates its capitalistic growth and market dominance. Through this lens, the song becomes a spectacle (Debord) by rendering it a fragmented object through a "poetics of detachment' (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 21). In this context, I define spectacle drawing from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which argues that creating a spectacle under capitalism is intended to manufacture a fragmented total commodity. He further describes that in manufacturing such a commodity, "it is necessary for this total commodity to return as a fragment to the fragmented individual, absolutely separated from the productive forces operating as an ensemble" (Debord 24). In this vein, Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge" becomes a "fragmented total commodity" (Debord 24), distanced not only from Faiz's poetics but from its political context and, essentially, its political meaning.

To begin, it was produced and repackaged under a commercial monolith's reign, which raises immediate concerns given Faiz Ahmad Faiz's Marxist and staunchly anti-imperial politics. Journalist Fahad Desmukh, a Karachi, Pakistan-based journalist, comments on this, describing Coke Studio's choice of "Hum Dekhen Ge" as a cover song as "Marxist poetry appropriated by corporate capitalism to promote manufactured state nationalism" (Desmukh qtd. in Sabeeh). The producers of Coke Studio, Ali Hamza and Zohaib Kazi, were questioned by Maheen Sabeeh, a journalist for *The News*

International, about their response to such critiques regarding taking a Marxist poet to a commercial, capitalistic platform. Hamza responded:

> "Marxism needs capitalism. Marxism is outdated, and capitalism will get outdated pretty soon. We're entering a new age, and that's the whole point. We're entering a time where the aspirations of both will mix up. A human being works within a capitalist world with a questioning mind. That's the real thing because it's not as if all of us here are Marxists. At one level, that's our take. We're human beings, what are our aspirations? Instead of pinpointing the issues, it's better to do something" (Hamza qtd. in Sabeeh).

The statement creates a binary opposition, positioning Marxists and capitalists as separate from the ordinary public. It directly contradicts Faiz's understanding of power's integration in the everyday wherein he argued, "The war between the Capitalist and the proletariat is not the exclusive war of the proletariat; it is a battle challenging all of us. Are not we part of our society?" (Faiz qtd. In Malik. 653). He believed that the liberation struggle permeates every aspect of life and politics, advocating for collective rather than individual freedom. As such, Faiz's vision, as continued in "Hum Dekhen Ge," centered on communal liberation. He evoked the imagery of a battlefield to call upon writers to "make their pen a barricade against the threatened march of imperialist forces towards human destruction and a banner for the forces ....lead[ing] mankind towards universal freedom" (Faiz, *Culture, and Identity* 204). However, by producing Faiz's poetics in Coke Studio, the platform uses its "pen" to allow its commercial and imperialist agenda to overshadow the revolutionary spirit, thus perpetuating its vision rather than advancing Faiz's ideals.

The decisions concerning the song reflect an agenda to create a spectacle of revolution. This is

particularly evident in removing the poem's most radical lines, likely because they could be seen as critical of US imperialism (or "Coca-colonization") or due to the political turbulence in the nation. These omissions fragment the poem in Coke Studio, removing its political meaning and spirit of revolution. Given the video's emphasis on radical inclusion and visualizing minorities, it is especially ironic that one of the removed verses was "We – who believe, and who have been barred out of sacred places" (Faiz 13). In a context where the inclusion of such lines could resonate powerfully, similar to Naghma and Lucky's lines "jo mei bhi hoon aur tum bhi ho" ("that which is both me and you") (Faiz 23), the omission is striking.[54] Although no clear statement has come from the Coke Studio producers about its erasure, it seems hardly a coincidence that the lines "when the crowns will be tossed" (Faiz 15) and "thrones will be brought down" (Faiz 16) were removed given the song's release in the politically charged climate preceding the 2018 General Elections. The lines emphasize the inevitable overthrow of false rulers through united resistance and, as highlighted in earlier chapters, have historically been used to critique dominant oppressive regimes. At its release in 2018, Pakistan faced the aftermath of the Panama Papers leak and the subsequent impeachment of Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister, along with his ban from public office. Had these verses remained, they could have been construed as a direct critique of Sharif and his political party, the Pakistan Muslim League - N (PMLN).

Given the overall political hostility between Nawaz Sharif and his constituents and the opposing parties, Coke Studio's palatable version of the song appears to be an attempt to protect Coca-Cola's "investment turned cultural institution" (Collier 75). The apolitical stance ensures that regardless of the electoral outcome, Coke Studio remains in favor of creating the "spectacular consumption of the

[54] Ironically, two of the verses omitted were the same as those that caused controversy at IIT-Kanpur in India.

spectacle [of Hum Dekhen Ge] whose function is to make history forgotten within [a] culture" (Debord 104). In this way, its historical erasure takes on a different layer as it aligns with Coca-Cola's strategic use of music as a diplomatic instrument. Coca-Cola's attempts to fortify diplomatic relations, establish connections, and cultivate favorable associations with other countries (Hurn 80–84) are reflected in this approach. Consequently, The poem's position as spectacle is evident, displayed under Coke bottles, given the omitted verses, which distances it from the poem's political meaning and spirit of revolution. Instead, it generates a corporatized spectacle of revolution detached from its poet, original performance, and current political context.

More significantly, before the 2018 General Elections, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued a media ban on political speeches. In another document, it warned all TV channels to:

> Ensure that no hateful, defamatory, malicious, and derogatory content/speech/press conference/paid political advertisement is aired, broadcast, or televised in any manner, live or recorded, which may likely undermine the sanctity of the judiciary, armed forces of Pakistan, other institutions, individuals, political parties and the electoral process. (Dawn, 'Pemra').

Though "Hum Dekhen Ge's" release was not mediated entirely through television channels and did not necessarily apply to Coke Studio directly, PEMRA's limitation affected the overall cultural climate in Pakistan, severely impacting other journalistic and entertainment bodies. Consequently, there is a strong likelihood that Season 11's production decisions were affected by such limitations. Under the dictatorship, the poem was censored by the state; here, the poem was self-censored and 'sanitized' by a corporation's vision of resistance during 'democratic' elections— reflecting the politics of silencing

rooted in the poem's history and position in the repertoire. By censoring the verses, they succeed in "not only the act of producing fragments but also the detached attitude which makes fragmentation possible" (Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 18). Coke Studio's active sanitization of resistance histories while simultaneously building on "Hum Dekhen Ge" popularity in the repertoire is further evident on the credits page (minute 2:30). It credits Faiz Ahmad Faiz for the poem and Iqbal Bano for its original performance. However, the reference avoids a direct political statement as it only hints at the poem's performance history. It merely notes, "originally performed by Iqbal Bano in 1986, at Alhamra Music Hall, Lahore" ("Coke Studio Season 11| Hum Dekhenge" without referencing her role in resisting Zia-Ul-Haq's dictatorship or the ramifications against those who attended the performance.

In the visual overload of the video, shifting from artist to artist, each with their own verse, it is almost impossible to realize that the verses are missing unless the listener actively seeks them out. To the average consumer, the song is a melodic, catchy tune containing their favorite artists and a vital step forward in representation. It makes for an easy listening experience uniquely distanced from the political climate and of political charge. In that sense, Coke Studio's "Hum Dekhen Ge" resembles Coke's association with spreading happiness, i.e., the 2009 campaign 'Open Happiness" and the 2010 "Happiness Machine." As Kazi himself states in choosing "Hum Dekhen Ge" as a song, "Optimism is the thing that keeps the world moving forward" (Sabeeh). To consumers, the song is intended to show Pakistan's marginalized groups coming together to sing Faiz's poem as the ultimate rupture in hegemonic narratives and an act of 'resistance' — de-emphasizing the need for collective solidarity. Coupled with the affective charge of the music, soothing, immediately uplifting since it begins, contributes to furthering this utopic vision and its commodification. It "adopts an appealing appearance which is supposed to

have a legitimizing effect on all its important targets....[to] sell capital .. capitalism.. [and the spectacle] as a positive form of society" (Haug 127)**.** Though the lived realities of the minority communities continue to remain disenfranchised, the vision presented in Coke's spectacle of "Hum Dekhen Ge" overtakes and showcases how the poem's revolutionary fervor "that was once directly lived has moved away into [mere] representation" (Debord 8). As Debord highlights, the spectacle emerges when the commodity attains the "total occupation of social [that is when] The relation to the commodity is not only visible, but one no longer sees anything but it: the world one sees is its world" (24). In this manner, Coke Studio creates a culture through spectacle that is "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual" (Williams xiv) and constructs a spectacle of egalitarianism that ends at representation.

Through endorsing revolutionary anthems such as "Hum Dekhen Ge," Coke Studio's agenda offers insight into how their capitalist model "offered itself both as a way of achieving self-fulfillment by engaging in [it] and as a path of liberation from capitalism itself" (Boltanski and Ève Chiapello qtd. in T.D Taylor 175). It emphasizes a passive victory from capitalism through representation politics rather than actual concrete social change, showcasing a liberal appropriation of Faiz's radical humanism. In addition to the excised verses, the Studio continues the depoliticization of revolution by changing the poem's arrangement. For example, "Hum Dekhen Ge" is distanced from the affective power of the powerful refrain through repetition. The refrain is repeated 19 times within the song, often interspersed with other verses, with many of the artists smiling as they sing it (see Minute 0:18, 0:40, 1:24, 1:28, and 2:14). Its repetition contrasts sharply with its original position in the poem at the beginning, where it foregrounds the inevitability of revolution (Day of Judgement) and vividly evokes the destruction of false regimes. Here, however, its repetition is counterproductive and interrupts the continuity of the

imagery of revolution. For example, three repetitions of "Hum dekhen ge" (We shall overcome) break the verses "Wo din jis ka wa'ada hai, Jo luh-e-azal mei likha hai" ("The day which has been promised to us / That has been written in the Book of Destiny") (Faiz 3-4) and "Jab zulm-o-sitam keh koh-i-giran, Ruui ki tarah ud ja'aenge" ("When the mountains of oppression / Will be blown away like wool") (5-6). After the verse ends, we again get "Hum Dekhen Ge." These constant repetitions render the verses individualized, fragmented segments with their own message rather than connected, building the image of revolution. The division further divides the performers, as they only come into focus for their verses rather than together as a powerful collective, which showcases "the fragmented individual" (ibid 25) that the total commodity (the poem) must return to. The polemic refrain is reduced through repetition and functions as a chorus rather than an affirmative cry of power in the song. In the poem's visualization, as commodity and spectacle, in Coke Studio, "appearance [of revolution] becomes just as important - and practically more so - than the commodity's being itself" (Haug 17).

Similarly, the decision to assign the Islamic verses to Parveen, Ayaz, and Mohammad must be viewed through the lens of Coke Studio's longstanding perpetuation of a sanitized image of Islam and Sufism. The popularity of Sufi music and urban 'Sūfiānā fashion within a commercialized studio can be interpreted in several ways: as a "'local efflorescence of a global Sufi music fad,' as an anticommunalist investment in traditions of pluralism and tolerance, or as a 'bourgeois appropriation of a subaltern idiom' (Manuel 378). By secularising Islam through Sufism, Coke Studio has perpetuated an image that counters the assumption of Pakistan as an Islamic Fundamentalist state; however, in the same vein, its commodified depiction of Sufism strips it of its traditional significance. Interestingly, when Parveen sings the verse "bus naam rahe ga Allah ka" ("only Allah's name will remain") (Faiz 17), she stresses "Allah" not

"naam" (name). Originally, the line was meant to be a double-entendre, changing meaning when recited aloud. Unlike Iqbal Bano, who stressed "*naam*" (name) in her performance, emphasizing the poem's secular resistance, Parveen emphasizes Allah, giving it a religious overtone. Whether this was Parveen's emphasis or Coke Studio's, its arrangement affects the poem's interpretation. Through these changes, it is clear that in Coke Studio's version, "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s vocal, visual, and textual fragmentation paradoxically undermines other versions' collective solidarity and power. In its visualization, as commodity and spectacle, "appearance [of revolution] becomes just as important - and practically more so - than the commodity's being itself" (Haug 17). The political detachment and excision further the corporation's quest to retain its market share and cultural position in Pakistan by changing it to an easy, pleasurable listening experience. Consequently, "Hum Dekhen Ge" shifts from a piece of counter-resistance to an 'ethnographic object' constructed by Coke Studio, ultimately detached and reduced in meaning except to increase Coke sales.

While Kazi and Hamza's inclusion of musicians from Kalaash (Amrina and Ariana), Sufi devotional singers, Vishnu and Shamu Bai (Hindu Performers), and the Baloch Throat singers is significant for showcasing folk/Indigenous traditions, it can not be read in isolation. Positioning it in the context of Coke Studio's overarching reduction of "Hum Dekhen Ge," it is apparent that the performance shows how "the good' and the 'bad' stand in a relation of mutuality and reciprocity so integral ...that [it] cannot even begin to be undone without a revolutionary rupture (Ahmad, 'Communist Manifesto' 8). The studio site, then, simultaneously acts as a laboratory for cultural production, proclaimed collaboration and fragmentation. It no longer serves as a neutral space but reinforces the dominance of prevailing popular cultural production and its commercial format. This

approach constructs a modern, mass culture aligning with the dominant music trends in Pakistan while leveraging a commercial lens to boost Coke's market shares and consumption. Although I argue that "Hum Dekhen Ge" has lost its integral appeal and message under Coke Studio, I am conflicted about what this highlights about the overall project, its role in reviving Pakistani music, translating and transcribing regional cultures into 'national' history. What does this transformation reveal about the production process and the artist? Does the original meaning endure in this cultural production? How does this adaptation relate to the poem's revolutionary renditions? Echoing Ahmad's query, "Whose nationalism, then, whose culture, whose literature" (Ahmad 28), whose music, and whose poem? Perhaps, rather than one, it encompasses aspects of all of them, carrying them forward in cultural memory.

Conclusion

Though my association with the poem was initially its revolutionary fervor, what I found fascinating in undertaking this study is the infinity of versions of the poem — as text, as song, as resistance, as commercialism, as perpetuating terrorism, as generating money, as cultural capital — and how each is beholden differently in memory. In the works I have brought together in this thesis, I have attempted to showcase the poems' powerful position in cultural repertoire through their re-enactment and re-imagining under different political and cultural contexts. Each artist exercises their agency in formulating their rendition, giving it another meaning. While the 'original' intent may be relevant for the poem's usage under Zia-ul-Haq's regime, it gained an afterlife that developed unchecked and unfettered following Faiz's death. Though some versions of the poem, such as Iqbal Bano's performance and its recurrence at the anti-CAA protests, lean into Faiz's radical third-world internationalism and activism, on the flip side, we can witness its cooption by conservative and capitalist groups in direct opposition to the political message of the poem. As such, my thesis has hoped to showcase the differing political and commercial perspectives that are interrelated in constructing meaning through the poem's performance. Even in writing the thesis, I am doubtful whether the 'new' interpretations of "Hum Dekhen Ge" can be attributed to Faiz's voice or whether they have become objects of their own rights.

In my reading, the poem, through its continuation in these different iterations, has manifested a "palimpsest of memory" (Hernandez 138). Though the term palimpsest was initially used to describe manuscript pages, in scrolls or books, from which text was scraped to allow its reuse in the other textual documents, it has since then been used to emphasize imprinted memories on physical and mental space and the lingering traces of violent pasts. The poem is layered through its performative history, where new

performances have been superimposed onto the old, creating a living history. With "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s recurrent re-enactment against authoritarian, fascist regimes, one witnesses its significance against political repression and the hope it continues to elicit as a mode of protest. They further evoke the history of past performances either implicitly or explicitly, layering the text and performance atop its reception, effectively ensuring its position as palimpsest across generations. For example, the anti-CAA protests build on both the legacy of Faiz and "Hum Dekhen Ge" in India and the added significance of the poem at universities in 2020, where the controversy and backlash contributed to an upsurge of performances responding to CAA and the IIT-Kanpur performance. Even Coke Studio's radically divergent direction while censoring the poem showcases its role in reviving its position for new generations, albeit with an additional layer of difficulty to 'read' the original text. It builds on the cultural memory of the poem and Bano's performance by crediting it as initially performed by her, overlaying the significance of Faiz's poem and her performance. While listeners of Coke Studio have lauded its role in re-imagining and reviving older Pakistani music and poetry, there is a worry that this version of "Hum Dekhen Ge" will become the point of reference. With the censored lyrics and the spectacle of revolution, how much does it retain of the poem's original message, and how much is obscured in its palimpsestic history? How much does it retain of Bano's powerful performance even as it evokes its memory, crediting Iqbal Bano's performance in the video? Despite these questions, what is apparent through the legacy of older performances, though not necessarily evoking each other, is "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s continued centrality and life within the present moment.

Similarly, the performers' bodies carry the traces of previous performances. As Hellier-Tinoco states, "Through layering, accumulations, and iterations, palimpsest bodies perform complex

trans-temporal provocations and re-visions" (5). Drawing on her insights, the performers contribute to reinterpreting and shaping the poem. "Hum Dekhen Ge" thus plays an imperative role in cultural memory and through its ever-continuing and sporadic afterlife — taken on and beholden by the performer's intent. They are layered with touches of history and memory, which can be read simultaneously, dividing the poems' usage through categorization. It both contains and loses its political oeuvre through that lens. In Chapter 2, within the anti-CAA protests and Iqbal Bano's version, the binaries between the audience and participants collapse as they become interlinked in the legacy of the performance. However, in the next Chapter on Coke Studio, I have aimed to highlight how the performers' bodies signify the reimagining of national and transnational narratives through music and envision a sanitized liberal rebellion in the studio space. Though the audiences are not participants in some performances, they are part of its memorialization as media consumers and digital audiences expand its global reach and viewership.

My thesis has aimed to emphasize the different ways the poem has been interpreted, mainly due to its position in the cultural repertoire in South Asia. The mimetic continual repetition of the song, as an anthem for protest and as a cultural artifact, has resounded across Pakistan and India's history, sung by leftists, capitalists, women, and students alike. Though the countries are separated by their constructed border and the military's attempts to utilize nationalism to produce hostility, they are united by Faiz and "Hum Dekhen Ge"'s seminal position in the cultural repertoire of both countries. The transnational nature of the poem thus allows it to become the literature of people's movement across borders and represent a further complication to Anderson's *unisonance* — that which expands across the bounds of nationhood and national identity within these post-colonial nations.

Evidently, the public performance — in each rendition — has taken the poem beyond the page. What remains of it now is how the performances have shaped it. Each enactment holds its meaning and draws on Faiz's continuing position in the cultural repertoire through various visual, oral, and performative forms. The different interpretations of "Hum Dekhen Ge" ultimately center the poem as a palimpsest, each adding another layer of meaning to the text, allowing it to exist in different temporal frames. It renders any analysis of the poem incomplete without considering both the memories of what was there before and the 'imagined' alternative of the present (and forthcoming) interpretations. For me, as a bystander, the collective power of voices coming together in *unisonance* reflects an unifying aspect of poetry—that of its spontaneous taking up by anyone viewing it. The collective impact and influence it has in the contemporary understanding of the Pakistani and Indian socio-cultural reality and rhetoric of every day enables any individual familiar with the work to join, produce, or memorialize it, as some versions broke constructed boundaries between performer and participant. Essentially, "Hum Dekhen Ge" has been repeated, reiterated, recorded, and varied across history and has become embodied in cultural memory through both repetition and variance.

In my research, I came across a writer, Anam Raheem's piece on listening to Iqbal Bano's "Hum Dekhen Ge," contrasting the feeling the poem evoked when she first heard it after Israel's 11-day aerial bombing campaign on the Gaza Strip in 2021. She states, "As if hearing it for the first time, I realize what this poem really is: a promise. A cosmic promise that injustice doesn't go unnoticed and that pain doesn't go unheard. Within this realization sparks the slightest glimmer of hope, the kind of hope that only a restoration of faith can bring about" (Raheem). She says, "The drums of war are overpowered by the heartbeat of resistance as I take stock of the moment" (Raheem). Reading it, I returned to my first

memory of the poem, at the site of protest, feeling its evocative pull. I understand what Raheem states when categorizing its ability to promise hope. Even before knowing this poem would be the subject of my thesis research, I have returned to it often in Montréal since my move here in 2022, finding different meanings as my work progressed —in the infinite protests for Palestine, in the tenants strike in Verdun, Montreal, after both the Women's Day protests I hear the promise of upthrowing fascist governments, of being accepted not as an 'immigrant' or 'outsider' but as a person, of a world where the country of your birth does not define the value of your life. I hear the promise of an egalitarian world. I hear the words of Refaat Alareer, Nour al-Din Hajjaj, Saleem Al-Naffar, Heba Abu Nada, the 39175 lives massacred, and all the names I cannot fit in. I hope I hear an end to every fascist regime in power now. In this vision, when listening to the poem, I do not return to Coke Studio's sanitized version but to protestors' chants and Bano's performance and its representation of the synesthetic power of music and poetry. I do not know when that day will come, but I have to believe that, hopefully, inevitably, "Hum Dekhen Ge." There is no other choice. As Nagi Ali points out, "And the world also knows that when justice is denied to the people, when the smile is uprooted from the lips of the innocent children, sometimes it turns into the guns of El Salvadorean guerillas, sometimes into Palestinian martyrs' blood and sometimes into the poetry of Faiz" (Ali qtd. in Aydelott 313).

Appendix ("Hum Dekhen Ge" and Translation)

Hum dekhen ge	We shall see
Lazim hai ki hum bhi dekhen ge	Inevitably, we shall see,
Vo din keh jis ka vahda hai	The day that has been promised to us,
Jo lauh-e-azal meñ likhkhā hai	that has been written on the eternal tablet
Jab zulm-o-sitam ke koh-e-giran	When the mountains of oppression and cruelty
Ruii ki tarah ud ja'enge	Will be blown away like cotton wool
Hum mehkoomon keh paon tale	Beneath the feet of we, the oppressed
Jab dharti dhad-dhad dharke ki	When the earth will thump and shake
Aur ahl-e-hakam ke sar upar	And above the heads of the rulers
Jab bijli kad-kad kadkegi	The lightning will thunder and strike
Jab arz-e-khuda keh ka'abe se	When from the Ka'aba of God's earth
Sab but uthva'e jayein ge	All [false]idols will be removed
Hum ahl-e-safa mardud-e-haram	When we – those who believe and those who have been barred from the sacred sanctuary [Mecca])
Masnad pe bi'thai ja'enge	Will be seated on the highest seats
Sab taaj ucchale ja'enge	All the crowns will be tossed
Sab takht gi'rae ja'aenge	All thrones will be brought down
Bus naam rahe ga Allah ka	Only Allah's name will remain
Jo ghayab bhi hai aur haazir bhi	Who is both absent and present

Jo manzar bhi hai naazir bhi	Who is both the vision and the beholder.
Uthe ga An-al-Haq ka naara	When the cry of 'I am Truth' will rise
Jo main bhi hun aur tum bhi ho	Which is both you and I
Aur raaj karegi ḳhalq-e-ḳhuda	And each one of God's creatures will rule
Jo main bhi hun aur tum bhī ho	Which is both you and I

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