

Pakistani story

(from real to comic)

By Rizwan Akhtar

I

When they call me Paki
they do not know that back home
the word means 'pure'.

I cover eight thousands miles
leave behind droning afternoons of Lahore;
a patched & dust-friendly sky;
a book of history shoved into a wrong shelf;
and a map burned at edges.

Oil slick and grease of the English waters
sits on my postcode and cheekbones,
the tongue is heavier than ever
the eyes are blurring than ever
but the nose is sharper than ever.

Oui ! paki-hairs, paki-drag,
Paki wife, paki kiddos,
*smelling basmati*and lamb's fats*
lovely! your flab and flaps!

My mother stitches a white cap,
embroidered kurta and *shalwar*
I wear it on Fridays
but the English winters

shape me for jackets and corduroys.

With a Paki flourish
I slip into a white butcher's coat
chop the grammar, skin the verbs
mince the personal pronouns
separate bones
from the fleshy sounds
hook broths with a gruff
thump the gurgling till
with the English huff.

II

My wife fries Paki *puris*
a touch fluffy than the Indian
for the sake of name
sava, suji or semolina
the desserts are same
borders merge in cuisines
but Paki shops are decked
in green Paki hopes
the land of pure
and pennies
are in their orbs —
invested in fat boys
ganging around
desi clubs
girls gyrating in jeans
tiptoeing to their jobs
inside Hijabs
a wink of uncertainty
stuck in their eyes
heaving mascara
contact lenses
and jilted ties.

III

Paki women lag behind
curled in yards of clothes
they simper in mimes
make babies
scrub grimes
herd dole-nourished children
whine for extra wages and time.

On Eids their dreams
return with vermicilli
sprinkled with nuts and tears
women release from etched duppatas
their wages of domesticity
but men stay in *namaz**caps,
yell and curse at the western sins
flatter their dyed beards with a grin.

IV

After years of travelling
in the underground
the seat next to me has a ghost
I hug it and it follows me
to the gas stations and roads
speaks nothing but asks for more—
the passport is punched
Home office is in my abode
I speak for the Queen but
bathe in the local streams.

Scrubbing, scarping, counting quids
end up buying a cheap day travel pass
never take a day off
and cab around
the Trafalgar Square
watch pigeons
picking grains and seeds,
feel for my licence and deeds
what if I am baled and dumped
in Thames and left to bleed.

I turn on a nazam*
Hum Ka thehere ajnabi
*itni Mulaqaton ka bad**
the cab halts abruptly
the Tower bridge folds
the Paki cab becomes
a dream toad
hops over the bridge
the eyes go wide
the English search me
in their data base and tides.

*prayer cap

*The literary meaning of Nazm is Poetry. Nazm is a poem fully dealing with a single subject or thought.

* 'after so many meetings, we are still strangers '; *Matla* (The opening She'r/couplet of a Ghazal or a poem) of Faiz Ahmad Faiz' ghazal.