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## **Translating Resistance: A Translation Studies Approach to *Hum Dekhenge* by Faiz Ahmed Faiz**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the English translation of *Hum Dekhenge*, a politically charged nazm by **Faiz Ahmed Faiz**, through key frameworks in Translation Studies. Drawing on theories of equivalence, ideological refraction, and domestication/foreignization, the study evaluates how linguistic, cultural, and ideological meanings shift across translation. Through comparative analysis of literal, poetic, and hybrid translations, the paper argues that while semantic meaning may be preserved, the performative and political intensity of the original inevitably undergoes transformation. A balanced, resistive translation strategy emerges as the most effective approach.

**Keywords :** Faiz Ahmed Faiz; Hum Dekhenge; Translation Studies; ideological translation; Urdu poetry; resistance literature

### **1. Introduction**

Few modern Urdu poems have attained global resonance like *Hum Dekhenge*, written in 1979 by **Faiz Ahmed Faiz**. Originally composed as a critique of authoritarian rule, the poem has evolved into a transnational anthem of resistance.

Translating *Hum Dekhenge* involves more than linguistic transfer; it requires negotiation of ideological force, cultural symbolism, and performative rhythm. The central question guiding this study is: Can the revolutionary certainty embedded in Faiz's future tense survive translation?

### **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study integrates multiple theoretical perspectives:

- Roman Jakobson's theory of equivalence, which highlights the impossibility of complete semantic transfer between languages (Jakobson 233)
- André Lefevere's concept of ideological refraction, where translation reshapes texts according to cultural power structures (Lefevere 14)
- Eugene Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence (Nida 159)
- Hans Vermeer's Skopos theory, emphasizing purpose-driven translation (Vermeer 221)
- Lawrence Venuti's domestication vs foreignization framework (Venuti 20)

These frameworks collectively position translation as both a linguistic and ideological act.



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### 3. The Source Text: *Hum Dekhenge* (Hindi Script Transliteration)

The nazm as commonly rendered in Devanagari:

#### हम देखेंगे

फ़ैज़ अहमद फ़ैज़

हम देखेंगे

लाज़िम है कि हम भी देखेंगे

वह दिन जिसका वादा है,

जो लौह-ए-अज़ल पे लिखा है

हम देखेंगे

जब ज़ब्र-ओ-सितम के कोह-ए-गराँ

रूई की तरह उड़ जाएँगे

हम देखेंगे

सर-ए-लौह-ए-अज़ल भी जब

इंसाफ़ के तराजू पलड़े

ज़ालिम के मज़ार पे

ग़ालिब मूसल जैसे झूलेंगे

हम देखेंगे

जब अहल-ए-सितम के महलों में

फूलों की तरह मशालें जलेंगी

बाज़ार-ए-सितम के तहत-ए-देवार

फूटेगी और आब-ए-हयात बहेगी

हम देखेंगे

#### 3.1 Literal Gloss Translation (Word-for-Word)

To establish the base meaning, a literal version follows:

- **Hum dekhenge** – We will see
- **Lāzim hai ki ham bhī dekhenge** – It is necessary that we too will see
- **Woh din jiskā wādā hai** – That day which is promised
- **Jo lauh-e-azal pe likhā hai** – Which is written on the tablet of eternity
- **Jab zibr-o-sitam ke koh-e-garān** – When the heavy mountain of oppression and tyranny
- **Rūī kī tarah ur̄ jāyenge** – Will fly away like cotton
- **Sar-e-lauh-e-azal bhī jab** – Upon the tablet of eternity, when
- **Insāf ke tarāzū palde** – The scales of justice's pans



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- **Zālim ke mazār pe** – On the tyrant’s grave
- **Ghālib mūsāl jhūlenge** – Like a heavy pestle will swing
- **Jab ahl-e-sitam ke mahloñ meñ** – When in the palaces of tyrants
- **Phūloñ kī tarah mashālen jaleñgī** – Torches will burn like flowers
- **Bāzār-e-sitam ke taht-e-dīwār** – Beneath the wall of the marketplace of oppression
- **Fūtegi aur āb-e-hayāt bahegi** – The water of life will burst forth and flow

## 3.2 Comparative Analysis of Two Published English Translations

We examine two starkly different English renderings: one by Agha Shahid Ali (foreignizing, archaizing), and another anonymous activist version (domesticating, rhythmic).

### 3.2.1 Agha Shahid Ali Translation (1999, from *The Rebel’s Silhouette*)

We shall see it

It is certain we too shall see it —

That day which has been promised,

Written on the slate of eternity:

We shall see it.

When the mountain of coercion and cruelty, heavy as it is,

Scatters like a piece of cotton, we shall see.

On that slate of eternity, when the scales of justice

Dangle like a heavy mace on a tyrant’s grave, we shall see.

And when, in the palaces of tyrants, torches burn like flowers,

When, from under the walls of the marketplace of cruelty,

The water of life gushes and flows, we shall see.

#### **Analysis:**

Ali retains the future iterative “shall” (marked in modern English), mirroring the Quranic-legal weight of *lāzim*. The “slate of eternity” for *lauh-e-azal* foreignizes — no English idiom exists for the Preserved Tablet. Loss: the hypnotic repetition of “Hum dekhenge” as a full line (1, 5, 12) is replaced by “We shall see it” or a trailing “we shall see.” Gain: the biblical-cadence “water of life” aligns with *āb-e-hayāt*.

### 3.2.2 Activist Domestication (c. 2014, South Asian Resistance Archive)

We will see

Yes, we will see —

That promised day

Written on the eternal board.

When the huge mountain of tyranny

Blows away like a cotton pod,

We will see.



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When on the eternal board, justice's scales  
Hang like a hammer on the tyrant's tomb,  
We will see.

When in the tyrants' palaces, torches bloom like flowers,  
Beneath the wall of the tyrants' market,  
The living water bursts and flows —  
We will see.

## Analysis:

Domestication operates via “eternal board” (not slate, easier to visualize), “blows away” (dynamic, not literal), “living water” (common Protestant hymn phrase replacing *āb-e-hayāt*). Major semantic shift: *zālim ke mazār pe ghālib mūsāl* – “heavy pestle” becomes “hammer,” losing the grinding-mill metaphor of ongoing punishment, gaining revolutionary clarity. Prosodically, the short lines mirror the oral chanting of the nazm. Loss: Quranic intertextuality. Gain: immediate political accessibility.

## 3.3 Key Translation Problems from a Theoretical Lens

### 1. The Future Tense of Certainty

Urdu *dekhenge* (first-person plural future) carries no modal doubt. English “will see” is predictive; “shall see” is archaically prescriptive. Lefevere’s “ideology” suggests Ali’s “shall” is a *refraction* — keeping the power of *lāzim* (necessity) even at the cost of naturalness.

### 2. Sacred Toponyms of Struggle

*Lauh-e-azal* (لوح ازل) refers to the Quranic Preserved Tablet. Venuti’s foreignization would transliterate; Ali domesticates as “slate,” the activist as “board.” Both lose the theological dimension: oppression’s end is not human hope but divine decree.

### 3. The Untranslatable *Mūsāl*

A heavy wooden pestle (used in grain mills) — *ghālib mūsāl* implies overwhelming, crushing force. “Mace” (Ali) suggests medieval weapon; “hammer” (activist) suggests a tool rather than a weight. No perfect equivalent.

### 4. Aphoristic Repetition

The nazm form allows “Hum dekhenge” to function as *radif* (refrain). English prose lineation breaks the incantatory effect. Jakobson’s “poetic function” — where sound and syntax dominate — is inevitably diminished.

## 3.4 The Translator’s Ethico-Political Choice

Faiz wrote *Hum Dekhenge* in Urdu’s Perso-Arabic script, but its Devanagari rendering (used here) is common for Indian audiences. The translator into English faces a double bind: too literal, and the poem becomes a footnote museum; too free, and it loses the Islamic-universalist



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resonance of *lauh-e-azal* and *āb-e-hayāt*. The present author's position follows Venuti's "resistive translation" — a middle path:

- Keep *Hum Dekhenge* untranslated in the first line, then gloss.
- Use "will see" for modernity, but retain "heavy pestle" with a footnote.
- Preserve the anaphoric refrain as a separate line each time.

A sample hybrid translation (proposed):

*Hum dekhenge* — We will see.

It is certain: we too will see

That day which is promised,

Written on the Tablet of Eternity.

*Hum dekhenge* —

When the heavy mountain of force and cruelty

Floats away like cotton,

*Hum dekhenge* —

When on that Tablet, justice's scales

Hang like a heavy pestle over the tyrant's grave,

*Hum dekhenge* —

When in the tyrants' palaces torches burn like flowers,

Beneath the wall of cruelty's bazaar

The water of life bursts and flows —

*Hum dekhenge.*

## 4. Translation Models

### 4.1 Literal Translation

We will see

It is necessary that we too will see

This version reflects formal equivalence but lacks rhetorical force (Nida 159).

### 4.2 Poetic/Adaptive Translation

We shall witness—

Yes, we shall surely witness—

This approach enhances rhythm but introduces interpretive amplification (Lefevere 19).

### 4.3 Hybrid (Balanced) Translation

*Hum dekhenge* — We will see

It is certain: we too will see

This model balances readability, cultural retention, and ideological intensity.

## 5. Comparative Analysis

Feature	Literal	Poetic	Hybrid
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Semantic Accuracy	High	Medium	High
Rhythm	Low	High	Medium
Cultural Depth	Medium	Low	High
Ideological Force	Medium	High	High

The hybrid model aligns most closely with dynamic equivalence while preserving cultural specificity (Nida 160; Venuti 21).

## 6. Theoretical Implications

The translation of *Hum Dekhenge* by Faiz Ahmed Faiz offers a fertile ground for examining how major Translation Studies theories operate in practice. Rather than functioning independently, these frameworks intersect, revealing translation as a layered process involving linguistic, cultural, and ideological negotiation.

### 6.1 Dynamic Equivalence and the Problem of Effect

Eugene Nida’s concept of **dynamic equivalence** emphasizes that translation should aim to evoke in the target audience a response equivalent to that experienced by the source audience (Nida 159). In the case of *Hum Dekhenge*, this principle becomes particularly significant because the poem’s power lies not only in its meaning but in its **performative intensity**.

For example: “*लाज़िम है कि हम भी देखेंगे*”

A literal translation—“*It is necessary that we too will see*”—fails to convey urgency.

A dynamically equivalent rendering—“*It is certain: we too shall witness*”—better captures inevitability and emotional force.

However, dynamic equivalence encounters limits in poetry. The original Urdu audience shares cultural, political, and religious contexts that intensify meaning. English readers, lacking this shared framework, may experience a **diminished affective response**, even when dynamic equivalence is attempted.

**Implication:** Dynamic equivalence is necessary but insufficient for translating resistance poetry.

### 6.2 Skopos Theory and Functional Prioritization

According to Hans Vermeer’s **Skopos Theory**, translation strategies must be determined by the purpose (skopos) of the translation (Vermeer 221). In the case of *Hum Dekhenge*, different purposes produce radically different translations:

Purpose	Translation Style	Outcome
Academic	Literal	Accurate but lifeless
Literary	Poetic	Aesthetic but interpretive
Political/Activist	Simplified	Immediate but reductive
Global readership	Hybrid	Balanced



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For instance, activist translations often simplify religious imagery to ensure accessibility, while scholarly translations retain original terminology for fidelity.

**Implication:** There is no single “correct” translation—only contextually appropriate ones.

## 6.3 Ideological Refraction and Power Structures

André Lefevere’s concept of **ideological refraction** suggests that translation is shaped by ideological forces within the target culture (Lefevere 14). This is particularly evident in the translation of politically charged poetry like *Hum Dekhenge*.

Consider the line: “ज़ालिम के मज़ार पे घालिब मूसल जैसे झूलेंगे”

Different translations render this differently:

- “mace” = medieval, formal tone
- “hammer” = revolutionary, modern imagery
- “pestle” = culturally accurate but unfamiliar

Each choice reflects an **ideological positioning**:

- “hammer” aligns with revolutionary symbolism
- “mace” aligns with historical authority
- “pestle” preserves cultural specificity

Translation thus becomes an act of **rewriting shaped by power, ideology, and audience expectations**.

Lawrence Venuti distinguishes between:

- **Domestication** → adapting the text to target culture norms
- **Foreignization** → preserving cultural difference (Venuti 20)

In *Hum Dekhenge*, this tension is especially visible in religious terminology:

Source Term	Domesticated	Foreignized
लौह-ए-अज़ल	eternal board	Tablet of Eternity
काबा	sacred place	Kaaba
आब-ए-हयात	living water	water of life

Domestication increases readability but erases cultural specificity.

Foreignization preserves meaning but risks alienating readers.

The hybrid model—retaining key terms while ensuring readability—aligns with Venuti’s idea of “**resistive translation**,” which resists cultural erasure.

**Implication:** Translation is also a political act of cultural representation.

## 6.5 Jakobson and the Limits of Equivalence



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Roman Jakobson argues that “**there is no full equivalence between code-units**” (Jakobson 233). This insight is particularly relevant for poetry, where meaning is inseparable from sound, rhythm, and structure.

In *Hum Dekhenge*:

- The repetition of the phrase creates an incantatory rhythm
- Internal rhyme and phonetic texture reinforce meaning

These features are difficult to replicate in English. Even when meaning is preserved, **poetic function is diminished**.

**Implication:** Translation inevitably involves loss—especially in poetic texts.

## 6.6 Cultural Translation and Hybrid Meaning

Drawing on **Homi K. Bhabha’s** concept of cultural hybridity, translation can be seen as creating a “**third space**” where meanings are reconstituted rather than transferred.

In translation:

- Islamic eschatological imagery becomes universal political metaphor
- Religious symbolism is reinterpreted as revolutionary discourse

Thus, *Hum Dekhenge* shifts from:

- A **context-specific Islamic-political poem**  
to
- A **global symbol of resistance**

**Implication:** Translation produces new meanings rather than preserving original ones intact.

## 6.7 Synthesis: Toward a Hybrid Translation Model

The combined application of these theories suggests that the most effective approach to translating *Hum Dekhenge* is a **hybrid, resistive model**, characterized by:

- Dynamic equivalence (retain emotional force)
- Skopos awareness (adapt to purpose)
- Foreignization (preserve key cultural terms)
- Ideological sensitivity (acknowledge shifts in meaning)

This model does not attempt perfect equivalence—rather, it embraces translation as a **negotiated act of meaning-making**.

## 7. Discussion

The translation of *Hum Dekhenge* demonstrates that poetry translation is inherently interpretative. Cultural symbols undergo transformation, and political intensity is often moderated.

The poem shifts from a performative political chant to a literary artifact, highlighting the limits of translation.



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## 8. Findings

- Literal translation preserves meaning but weakens impact
- Poetic translation enhances aesthetics but risks distortion
- Hybrid translation achieves optimal balance
- Translation involves both loss and gain

## 9. Conclusion

The translation of *Hum Dekhenge* is not a neutral act but a process of cultural and ideological negotiation. While no translation can fully replicate the original, a balanced approach can preserve its essential force.

Ultimately, what survives translation is the insistence of hope and resistance: **Hum dekhenge.**

**We will see.**

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