

GHAZAL: JOURNEY FROM PERSIAN TO ENGLISH

Dr R.P. Singh

Professor of English

University of Lucknow-226007

Abstract: It is an informative paper on the construct, form and expansion of Ghazal as a poetic form. The origin of the word 'Ghazal' goes back to the Arabic word 'Ghazal' meaning 'deer' in English. The reference finds roots to the act of hunting a deer. When a hunter shoots a deer in a moonlit night in the Arabian desert, the deer getting pierced with the arrow, runs around helplessly in search of water. In this state, the throat makes the sound like "gaz - gaz". A lover, in the same way, pines for his beloved, and feels emotional bleeding; this leads to the making of Ghazal. The paper discusses various aspects of Ghazal.

Keywords: Ghazal, Sher, Matla, Takhallus.

The Ghazal is a Persian word referring to a form of Persian poetry. It became popular in Urdu literature later. It is, generally speaking, a form of poetic expression describing platonic love. The locale, tone and content –almost everything around Ghazal find a lover and his unattained love as the central concern. The narrator almost knows it too well that the meeting of the lovers is unattainable, yet they keep striving till the last. This pang and desire emanate into the verses of Ghazal. The complete Ghazal comprise of Shers (couplets); most of the Ghazal has less than fifteen shers, A good Ghazal has approximately five Shers. The first couplet (sher) of a Ghazal is called Matla, and the last couplet (sher) is called the Maqta. There is a convention of adding the poet's (shayar) pen name /name (takhallus) in the Maqta.

The origin of the word 'Ghazal' goes back to the Arabic word 'Ghazal' meaning 'deer' in English. The reference finds roots in the act of hunting a deer. When a hunter shoots a deer in a moonlit night in the Arabian desert, getting pierced with the arrow, the deer runs around helplessly in search of water. In this state, the throat makes the sound like "gaz - gaz". A lover, in the same way, getting stabbed by the thorns of life, reaches a state of emotional bleeding, he grumbles; this leads to the rhymes that make Ghazal. Ghazal always sounds separation and anxiety. It has a beautiful capacity of comprising the values of time and clime in well weighted and balanced words. On the nature of Ghazals, Academy of American Poets writes:

Traditionally invoking melancholy, love, longing, and metaphysical questions, ghazals are often sung by Iranian, Indian, and Pakistani musicians. The form has roots in seventh-century Arabia, and gained prominence in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century, thanks to such Persian poets as Rumi and Hafiz. In the eighteenth century, the ghazal was used by poets

writing in Urdu, a mix of the medieval languages of Northern India, including Persian. Among these poets, Ghalib is the recognized master. (Ghazal: Poetic Form)

The beginning of Ghazal relates to Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207 – 1273), a thirteenth-century Persian poet, jurist, theologian, Sufi mystic and religious scholar. Khwāja Shams-ud-Dīn Muhammad Hāfez-e Shīrāzī, popularly known as Hāfez (1325/26–1389/90), a Persian scholar and poet, and Muhammad bin Suleyman, a sixteenth-century Azerbaijani poet, popularly known as Fuzūlī. Chandrabhan Brahman (1574 - 1662) is known to begin the practice of writing Ghazals in India. Later on, in India, the Ghazals became popular with the sustained efforts of Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan (1797-1869), popularly known as Mirza Ghalib, and Muhammad Iqbal (1877 -1938), popularly known as Allama Iqbal. Bangla poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) also wrote Ghazals in Urdu and Bangla.

German scholar-critic Goethe (1749–1832) has played a significant role in introducing Ghazal as a form of world literature in Germany. Later on, Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866) and August von Platen (1796–1835) used the form of Ghazal in their writings. Asian American poet Agha Shahaid Ali (1949-2001) introduced the form of Ghazals in English poetry. Eminent poets using Ghazal as a form in English are; Robert Bly, Lorna Crozier, Jim Harrison, John Hollander, Maxine Kumin, Edward Lowbury, William Matthews, Spencer Reece, John Thompson, Andrew D. Chumbley, and others.

Mirza Ghalib, Mir Taqi Mir, Momin, Daagh Dehlvi, Aatish, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Muhammad Iqbal, Sahir Ludhianvi, Jigar Moradabadi, Qateel Shifai, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and others are the famous Urdu poets who have written Ghazals.

Traditionally the Ghazal was written on the theme of love only; it may be the *Ishq-e-haqiqi* (the love for eternal being), or *Ishq-e-majazi* (the worldly love), but nowadays the ghazals address several subjects like love, separation, aesthetics, desire, deprivation, longing, life and death and the likes. In general, they expose two tones-the worldly longings and the Islamic mysticism/Sufism. The longing for men and women both are frequently noted in Ghazals. Love is rated as a lofty value which can always elevate the soul. The connotation of love in the Ghazals written under the impression of Sufism and Islamic mysticism is always spiritual. The soul wants to meet the eternal soul, i.e. God.

The addressee is always unattainable. Farfetched imagery, a figurative use of language, uncommon expressions fused in common expressions, conceits, metaphors and similes are freely quoted in the *ashaar* (verses) of Ghazals. The lover knows it too well that the other partner is unattainable but neither he can forget his/her presence around nor can detach himself from the longing. The conventional form of Ghazal is found in five or more *ashaar* (couplets) but in the contemporary times the ghazals of three and four couplets are also found. The serial

unity in the ashaar(couplets) is not a necessity, the rhythmic chain is a pre-requisite. The singing of traditional classical ghazals also require the knowledge of classical rāga , khayāl and tāla but the present day singers have simplified it up to a certain extent. Indian Ghazal singer Jagjit Singh has the credit of using the guitar for the first time in Ghazal singing.

It is unjust to state something about Ghazals without referring to Sufism and having the background knowledge of this cult. Many of the traditional exponents of Ghazals have been Sufi themselves. Mirza Ghalib, Mir Taqi Mir, Momin, Daagh Dehlvi, Aatish, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Muhammad Iqbal, Sahir Ludhianvi, Jigar Moradabadi, Qateel Shifai, Majrooh Sultanpuri and all the rest, are the famous Urdu poets who have composed Ghazals.

In simple terms, a Ghazal is a group of Asaar (couplets) which is just a form. It means a Ghazal can be written in any language. Asaar, the plural of sher is itself an independent poem of two-lines. In a sher, there is at least one 'Matla' and one 'Maqta'. All the Shers in a Ghazal are of same 'Beher', having the same patterns of 'Kaafiyaa' and 'Radif'. Ghazals not maintaining any 'Radif' are known as "gair- muraddaf" Ghazal, although rarely found. In the same way, there are many ashaars and Ghazals in modern Urdu that do not follow the restrictions of rhyme.

For a better understanding of the form and tone of Ghazals, a classic Ghazal is given below. It is from the classical Persian tradition and taken from the Dîwân-é Kabîr also known as Kulliyat-é Shams and Dîwân-é Shams-é Tabrîz of Jalaluddin Rumi. It is taken from dar-al-masnavi.org. I am grateful to Mr. Ibrahim Gamard for granting me permission to use Jalaluddin Rumi's ghazal no. 683, translated from Persian by him. It is given below:

*ze-khâk-é man agar gandom bar ây-ad
az-ân gar nân paz-î mastî fezây-ad*

*khamîr-o nân-bâ dêwâna gard-ad
tanûr-ash bayt mast-âna serây-ad*

*agar bar gûr-é man ây-î ziyârat
to-râ khar-poshta-am raqSân nomây-ad*

*7105 ma-y-â bê-daf ba-gûr-é man, barâdar!
ke dar bazm-é khodâ gham-gîn na-shây-ad*

*zanokh bar basta-wo dar gûr khofta
dahân afyûn-o nuql-é yâr khây-ad*

be-darr-î z-ân kafan bar sîna band-î

kharâbâtê ze-jân-at dar-goshây-ad

ze-har sô bâng-é jang-o chang-é mast-ân

ze-har kêrê ba-lâ-bud kêr zây-ad

ma-râ Haq az may-é `ishq âfrîd-ast

ham-ân `ishq-am agar marg-am be-sây-ad

7110 man-am mastî-wo aSl-é man may-é `ishq

be-gô, az may ba-joz mastî che ây-ad

ba-burj-é rûH-é shamsu 'd-dîn-é tabrîz

be-par-ad rûH-é man yak-dam na-pây-ad

The following is a translation of the above Ghazal from Persian by Ibrahim Gamard:

'If Wheat Comes Up From My Grave'¹

Ghazal 683

If wheat comes up from my grave (and) you bake bread from it, drunkenness will increase.

The dough and the baker will become crazy (and) his oven will sing verses like a drunkard.

If you come to visit my tomb, its shape will appear (to you as) dancing.

7105 (O) brother, don't come without a tambourine to my tomb, since (being) full of sorrow is not suitable at the banquet of God.

The chattering chin is bound up and sleeping at the tomb, (and) the mouth (of the spirit) is chewing the opium and sweet deserts of the Beloved.

Tear (something) from the shroud (and) tie it to (your) chest; (then) from (within) your soul, open the door of a (wine) tavern.

From every direction (is) the sound of the quarreling and the harp

¹ The title, "If Wheat Comes Up From My Grave" is Ibrahim Gamard's addition: Rumi's ghazals have no titles

of the drunkards. Inevitably, from every activity, (more) activity is born.

God has created me from the wine of Love; even if death grinds me (down to nothing), I am that very same Love.

7110 I am drunkenness, and my origin (is) the wine of Love. Tell (me), what comes from wine except love?

My spirit won't stand waiting for a moment: it will fly to the tower of the spirit of Shams-i Tabrîz.”(trans. Gamard)

Thus Ghazal with its soothing velvety rhyme creates almost magic for the listener, and the ambience turns melodious and heavenly. Its sensory appeal has made it so popular that almost every major ethnic group and linguistic culture is appreciating and adopting it. More and more translations are coming up and new experiments are listed.

References:

- Ali, Agha Shahid. *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English*. Wesleyan University Press, 2000.
- Fatemeh Keshavarz, *Reading Mystical Lyric: The Case of Jalal al-Din Rumi*, University of South Carolina Press, 1998.
- “Ghazal: Poetic Form.” Academy of American Poets. <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/ghazal-poetic-form>. February 21, 2014.
- Kanda, K.C., editor. *Masterpieces of the Urdu Ghazal: From the 17th to the 20th Century*. Delhi: Sterling, 1991.
- S. Abd-Allāh, *Adabīyāt-e fārsī m e Hindūō ka ḥeṣṣa* (The share of the Hindus in Persian literature), Delhi, 1942.
- S. A. H. Abidi, “Chandra Bhān Brahman—His Life and Works,” *Islamic Culture*. Hyderabad. 11, 1966, pp. 79-95.
- Watkins, R. W. (ed.). *Contemporary Ghazals*; Nos. 1 and 2, 2003—2004 Nocturnal Iris Publications, 2005.
- <http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/gh-0683.html>. Rumi, Jalaluddin. *Dîwân-é Kabîr* Translated from the Persian by Ibrahim Gamard. © Ibrahim Gamard. First published on "Sunlight" (yahoogroups.com), 10/10/98; revised 11/00 and re-published on "Sunlight," 12/12/00).