URDU STUDIES vol 2 issue 1 2022 Pages 46-66

Ma'ni Aafrini and the Translatability of the Ghazal

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Part 1: ***Muddaʿā kyā hai*** **(The argument)**

One cannot begin without conceding that there are limits to a translator's ability to 'reproduce' the 'original' work. Hence, Popovič points out that "the translator has the right to differ organically; to be independent" (49) and Bassnet qualifies this independence by arguing it be "pursued for the sake of the original in order to reproduce it as a living work" (Bassnet 88).

Lawrence Venuti argues further that translations cannot be judged on "concepts of semantic equivalence or one-on-one correspondence" because both the translation and the text are "derivative", consisting of "diverse linguistic and cultural materials" making the text a site of " different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods." Therefore, meaning is "a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence" (18).

To gloss over the determinants that shape literary cultures to be translated is to essentialize and trivialize their uniqueness, and ultimately reproduce the contemporary hegemonic view of literary acceptability.

If the process of translation is "one in which we tentatively and precariously arrive at meanings of one cultural context and re-inscribe them, however inadequately, in another" (Kothari 1), it suffices to say that being mindful of the context, temporal and cultural, in both Target Language and Source Language, is quite significant for any translational activity.

If the translated material is poetry, then, so to say, the translator's task is to 'precariously' arrive at the conjunction between the alterity of the source text and the localizing tendencies within the target literary culture, with its own aesthetic tastes interacting with the translated 'other' (which nonetheless need contending with to make transmission possible,

being that an assumption of translatability nonetheless takes for granted a certain equivalence).

So to begin, one must be mindful of assumptions a target language reader can make of what constitutes poetry, and thus understand that this seemingly universal view is privileged by power dynamics and is also contextual, and what is being translated may come from a different epistemological system whose understanding of poetry is not altogether reducible to how poetry is understood in the said target literary culture.

For example, while few would outright concede the idea that 'true' poetry is natural and that it must follow the common idiom of the time, the legacy of Romantic Literary Aesthetics and Victorian tastes still influence the hegemonic understanding of poetry today. On the contrary, Ghazal by its very structure "flaunts its artifice" (Pritchett 168); and even this assertion only makes sense in so far as we can see 'artificial' and 'natural' as stable categories, which they are not.[1]

In terms of ghazal translation and its historical context, without an engagement with this knowledge system to understand its poetry through its terms, any translational activity (and its study) can only reproduce an incomplete view of the Ghazal, perpetuating Eurocentric and colonial discourses about the Ghazal, Urdu literature and poetry at large, ignorantly if unwillingly. Thus, it is pertinent that translations of ghazals into English be looked at through the lens of ideas put forward in the writings of its poets and theorists. The present study aims to do this by comparatively assessing three translations of ghazals by Mirza Ghalib.

Translations of Urdu ghazals, either in anthology or on single authors now form a substantial corpus. While there have been surveys and analyses of translation of Urdu poetry and ghazals specifically,[2] there is a need for comparative readings of translations and their approach through an engagement with the poetics of the Classical Ghazal.

This paper focuses primarily on *Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from the Urdu*, edited by Aijaz Ahmad. The volume has been selected for its methodology as well as the context of production. In the late 1960s, the Marxist literary critic Aijaz Ahmad collaborated with contemporary English poets who were asked to create their own free translations with the help of Ahmad's literal translation and mediation, which were

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[1] See Attridge, Derek. *Peculiar Language,* Routledge, 1988.

[2] See Anisur Rahman in "On Translating Modern Urdu Poetry", Indian Literature, vol. 42, no. 3, May-June 1998, pp. 163-176; Abbas, Nuzhat. "Conversing to/with shame: Translation and gender in the Urdu Ghazal." (1999); Assaduddin, M. "Poetry in Translation: The Case of Urdu," Indian *Poetry: Modernism and After*. Sahitya Akademi, 2001.

compiled with the original text. The collection often contains different translations for a single ghazal signifying different aspects of translation.

These translations lend themselves to a comparative reading with the original ghazals to assess whether the employment of multiple creative translations reveals the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations as something integral to the Ghazal genre.

Supplementing this, two other translations have been chosen to represent not only other methods of translation but to serve as foils with singular interpretive choices read against the versions given in Aijaz Ahmad's collection. It is assessed that these translations, produced with a different aim of 'representing' Ghalib to a particular readership in English, make certain choices that are different from those of the translators in Aijaz Ahmad's collection, and importantly, from Aijaz Ahmad the editor. Sarvat Rahman's *Diwan-e Ghalib* contains loosely metered but rigidly end-rhymed translations which replicate the *qāfiya* (rhyming element) of the Ghazal. Pritchett and Cornwall's translations are metrically free but rendered as literally as possible, sometimes maintaining even the constructions of Urdu compound words that Ghalib used extensively.

Formal features of the ghazal are also studied to explore how they interact with, mediate or influence the meaning of the text, and how their effect has been translated, if at all. The research hopes to problematize not only the latent idea of separation of (substantive) meaning from the form but also of a singular interpretive mode of translation in a text designed for multiple interpretive possibilities.

Now the discussion will move to certain important aspects of literary theory as developed by the practitioners of what we call Urdu poetry of the classical phase. After certain critical concepts are established, the translations will be read with these critical concepts, to assess how far these translations are compatible with these aspects of the Urdu Ghazal tradition.

Part 2: *Adā-e ḳhāṣ se ġhālib huʾā hai nuktah-sarā* (With a special style, has Ghalib sung the point)

Precolonial Urdu Poetry had developed its own system of poetics informed by Perso-Arabic literary theory as well as Sanskrit's theoretical traditions, constituting a strong tradition of poetry that privileged ambiguity and the creation of new meanings and themes (Faruqi "Long History" 842-3), with a proclivity towards a multiplicity of interpretive possibilities without a willful foregrounding of any one unequivocal interpretation.

That there was an abrupt epistemological break in this knowledge system due to socio-political and cultural conditions in the colonial period, is known. But, to traverse the distance between current knowledge systems and what was before, one needs a "comprehension … deeply grounded in epistemological and social facts" about the "knowledge and imagination" of the practitioners of the form in question (Pollock 2). Yet, even after various postcolonial interventions, the attempt to deal with precolonial, or in other cases premodern epistemologies, on their own terms as far as possible, has been a recent intervention in research.

Making all-encompassing statements about the precolonial literary tradition of Urdu poetry, and even specifically the Ghazal is not in the aim or scope of this paper. Instead, the argument here is only regarding the proclivity of the Ghazal to multiple interpretive possibilities and ambiguity, both in its formal characteristics and practice in Urdu. This argument, regarding meaning-making and interpretive modes extant for the Ghazal, is essential for the discussion of ghazal translation, especially when considering the circulations of the Ghazal form across multiple languages. Representations of the Classical Urdu Ghazal in translation must contend with this knowledge system that produced a certain aesthetic theory which determined and was determined by the Ghazal.

S R Faruqi has elucidated in his various works the distinct development of this system of poetics[3]. Genealogically tracing the concept of *īhām* can give us some idea about this course of development.

Īhām.as a poetic concept first appears in Persian with Rashīd al-Dīn Waṭwāṭ in the 12th century (Chalisova). In Amir Khusrau, there is in fact a claim of introducing a new kind of *īhām* to poetry (Faruqi "Long History" 830) and his demonstrated redefinition becomes more prevalent as Urdu poetic culture develops. In the introduction to *Ghurrat-ul-Kamal* (The Pinnacle of Perfection), he takes great pride in having devised seven different meanings within a poem using a single mark of punctuation (Faruqi *Early Urdu* 95). This linguistic game, of the production of multiple meanings, becomes one of the central criteria of poetic excellence in the tradition.

The idea of *īhām* as a marker of poetic excellence seemed to have been widespread in the Indian subcontinent's rekhta/hindavi/dakkani traditions by the 15th century. Fakhruddin Nizami for example, in his early 15th century masnavi *Kadam Rao Padam Rao* writes as follows:

[3] Relevant works cited at the end. See specifically "Five (or More) Ways for a Poet to Imitate Other Poets, or Imitation in Sabk-i Hindi", 2008. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/srf/srf_imitation_2008.pdf

A poem that doesn't have
Dual meaning words
Such a poem does not
Attract anyone at all
A poem without
Words of two senses
(quoted and translated by Faruqi *Early Urdu)*

We see a pedestalization of something like a double entendre here, but the coding of all these arguments can boil down to the fact that ambiguity of meaning and multiple interpretive possibilities were considered a virtue in Perso-Urdu poetry.

What we do know is that it is discussed in most works of philology, rhetoric and poetics of this time. In the work of Khān-e-Ārzū, *īhām* is defined as: "Sometimes a word contains two meanings, one literal and the second extended. Thus, the poets on the amplitude of common meaning construct the extended one and equally allow both", but in Mir's Nikāt *al-shuʿarā* (Fine Points for Poets) his definition of *īhām* involves "a near [*qarīb*] and a far [*baʿīd*] meaning in which the poet actually means the far one and the reader must know to dispense with the near one" (Dudney 136). It may also be seen as having one meaning being more apparent while another is implied, concealed underneath the text, where there is a temporal difference in the implied meaning being made apparent in the process of reception. As Faruqi has argued, in its most elementary form *īhām* can at least be seen as a *san'at-e-ma'navi* or as Faruqi translates it "figure pertaining to meaning", but "in the hands of the Urdu poet, an *īhām*-based utterance could convey many more than just two meanings" and involve "many kinds of wordplay that showed greater creativity than the conventional definition of *īhām* allowed for", like using multiple meanings that seemed equally likely, thus creating an indeterminacy (Faruqi "Long History" 855-6).

Allied to this, is what Farqui calls the first major discovery in the field of literary theory in this tradition: that a distinction could be made between *maẓmūn* [theme or topos] and *maʿnī* [meaning] (Faruqi *Urdu Ghazal ke* 10). Classical Arab and Iranian theorists had used the term *maʿnī* to denote both theme and content. In the subcontinent, however, *maẓmūn* comes to define not necessarily theme in the western sense of the term, but something more analogous to 'topoi' in western rhetoric as Dudney argues (260). *Maʿnī* was simultaneously connected to the base structure of this *maẓmūn* in a particular context, while also being understood independently. Now a particular poem could be understood as being about something (*maẓmūn* or theme) which nevertheless did not

restrict the possibilities of what it could mean (*maʿnī*, meaning). This idea becomes a central tenet for abstract poetry in the Urdu tradition.

With the distinction of theme and meaning well established, now the themes that were 'permissible' in poetry were theoretically infinite, yet they were accepted in the context of the larger intertextual tradition, with nods to the established themes. Thus, the search for new acceptable themes, or for new ways to express old themes became one of the chief concerns of the poet and was called *maẓmūn-āfirīnī* [theme creation] (Faruqi *Urdu ghazal ke* 11-12).

Maʿnī-āfirīnī, was then the creation of meaning within these themes. If a particular poem is particularly strong in *maʿnī-āfirīnī*, it means that it produces new interpretive possibilities. Here *īhām*'s binary of suggested and apparent meanings has given way to a rhizomatic system of various possibilities.

Ghalib was particularly given to this kind of poetry. In a letter to a friend providing *iṣlāḥ* (correction), he says as much: "ghazal is meaning creation, not the measuring of rhymes" (Mehr 114-15). This glorification of meaning creation, over the metrical aspects of poetry, does not mean that the formal is irrelevant, but that the formal and the content if they can be separated (if the classical theorists were to use binaries of our time), serve to create multiple meanings within a poem.

Again, this is not to say that all ghazals have to have multiple meanings or multiple interpretive possibilities. There is no evidence that this literary theory, unlike any other, was monolithic and promoted a single strand of interpretative criteria. The attempt here is to merely focus on the fact that most poets of the Classical ghazal were not looking for a single authoritative meaning in many of their works. Some of their central concerns were abstraction and ambiguity.

This is important when studying translation which necessarily entails interpretation, and thus predisposed to privilege certain interpretations when the genre itself entails ambiguity and possibilities. As we shall see, these central concerns are sometimes ignored to the point of misinterpretation, even by those who profess that there can never be one translation.

Part 3: *Pā-e suḳhan darmiyāñ nahīñ* (The foot of utterance, not in between)

Before delving into an analysis of translations from Aijaz Ahmad's editorial project *Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from the Urdu,* it is important to look into the context of its production. The volume was created, alongside Daud Rahbar's translations of Ghalib's letters, for Ghalib's death centenary, at the behest of the Asia Society of New York

(Rahbar xvi). Ahmad, had "witnessed the socio-cultural turbulence and the struggles of the literary groups and poets against the Vietnam War, racism, and the American governmental policies" and understood that contemporary American poets wanted to "subvert mainstream ideology and poetics" through "translation as a subversive force" (Kashani 95). This method itself has been theorised in translation studies as a practice of bringing a 'foreign cultural weapon' to dismantle the status quo in the receiving culture and has historical antecedents going back to Holderlin, Goethe and Herder.[4]

Thus, Ahmad's translational project is self-consciously political at the outset, focused on the receiving culture's needs. The choice of Ghalib's poetry, in particular, may stem from Ahmad's belief in Ghalib's times being analogous to North America of the 1960s, in that "the whole civilization seemed to be breaking up and nothing of equal strength was taking its place" (xxi). Ghalib is framed in Ahmad's introduction as a poet who singularly records the decline of an old order he had outlived, and has an almost prelapsarian sensibility, looking back to a time when "the poet lived in essential harmony with, not opposition to, his society." Ahmad frames his historicism of social change in broad strokes, with Ghalib being a poet with "moral grandeur" alongside "moral loneliness" and a "sense for utter waste" (xxii).

While it is not in the scope of this paper to prove how this view is incomplete and even distorting, it suffices to say that Ahmad conflates a broader, historicist[5] narrative of terminal indigenous decline before the

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[4] See Even-Zohar where the principal of selection of works for translation is according to the 'home poly-system' ("The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem." *Poetics Today* vol. 11, no. 1, 1990, pp. 45-51.); in Gentzler the cultural weapon breaks down norms of the established system (Gentzler, Edwin, "Translation, Counter-Culture, and the Fifties in the USA." *Translation, Power, Subversion*, edited by Roman Alvarez, and M. Carmen Africa Vidal, Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1996, pp. 116-137); Lefevere introduces a political conern here by reminding the ideological basis of selection and commissioning of translations are ever present (Lefevere, Andre, *Translation, History, Culture*, Routledge, 1992) and that translation is a strategy to deal with the foreign 'other' (Lefevere, Andre, "Chinese and Western Thinking on Translation." *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Tradition*, edited by Susan Bassnett, and Andre Lefevere. Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1998, pp. 12-24), while Venuti points out that the foreignness of the foreign in translation is often the function of deviation from 'domestic literary canons' (Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge,Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.).

[5] Sudipta Kaviraj has noted how 'historicism' can be used in two early diametrically opposite meanings, one being "staying away from law-like generalizations" and the other, popularized by Karl Popper, being a "belief in

advent of Colonial modernity, with the life (and poetry) of a poet who lived during it. Both the historiographical narrative and the poet's biographical essence can be questioned.

This rather stereotypical framing of Ghalib, to serve the immediate context of production of the volume, framing the historical for the needs of the immediate political, would be excusable was it not seemingly the only viewpoint into Ghalib that the editor asks his translators to consult. We know that it is through Ahmad that most of his collaborators understood the Ghazal (and Ghalib), and then wrote their own English ghazals, most notably Adrienne Rich. This is why when Ahmad sings off his introduction to Ghalib's life and times with:

"*He* expects that you will read these couplets as impressions of a man who sought wholeness *at a time* when wholeness was difficult … a man who needed love … sought for it always … in his loveless times … *a man who wrote poetry because poetry was necessary*" (Ahmad xxv) [emphasis added].

It becomes apt that Barua argues that this framing is "a glamorised, politically corrected 1960s' version of Ghalib, apparently resuscitating him from the amoral epicurean image of the nineteenth century Urdu poet" (104-5). At the very least, it is an imposition of "his own ideology and interpretation on Ghalib's ghazals" (Kashani 99).

Despite the fraught attempts at revolutionary historicism, there is much creative and critical potential in this work. The volume is relevant for its method, which was consciously presented "to demonstrate a process, to let the reader see for himself precisely what went on in the process of collaboration" (Ahmad xxviii). In fact, its status as a singular event with its own socio-historical context is the primary reason for critical rigor.

The original purpose entailed getting a "multiplicity of responses" having started with the premise that "there is no one right way of translating a poem" Thus, the way out is to "strive for more than one inspired approximation, not by accident, but by design." (Ahmad xviii-xix).

The central concerns that Ahmad discusses in the introduction to the volume, which serves as a gateway to the world of ghazals for an average reader, do take up many important issues. Aijaz Ahmad outlines that the "main tradition" of Urdu poetry is of "highly condensed, reflective verse,

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inexorable historical teleology" ("An Outline of a Revisionist Theory of Modernity", *European Journal of Sociology*, vol 46, no. 3, 2005, pp. 497-526). Here it is used in the second sense.

with abundance and variety of lyrical effects, verbal complexity, and metaphorical abstraction." (xv).

While the assertions of there being a "main tradition" can lead to certain problems, it is not egregious to frame Ghalib and his influences in these terms. Ahmad also focuses on the Orientalist implications of the reception of Ghalib.

If he wasn't already a Victorian Romanticist, he had to be made into one; if the tradition of Urdu poetry wasn't already minor or trivial, the design of the Empire demanded that triviality be imposed upon it. For decades major Urdu poets were being read according to standards set by minor English ones. (xx)

Acknowledging what Ahmad has eloquently put here makes it all the more significant to attempt to see the Urdu ghazal in its own critical terms and not those that are imposed upon it from outside. Yet, as demonstrated above, Ahmad himself falls for the rhetoric of cultural decline and its false equivalence with the poetic concerns of the time, which is a legacy of Colonial historiography.

Ahmad, had framed himself as a cultural mediator of the Urdu tradition in this volume, to introduce the Urdu ghazal and its poetic practice to English, but later came to regret the methodology and critical apparatus used in this volume.[6]

Turning to the text itself, the collection is structured with the ghazals in Urdu text appearing first, followed by Aijaz Ahmad's literal translations and comments, which are in turn followed by one or more translations by the selected authors. Ahmad believes that a translation worth reading must have poetic qualities in its own right. Hence Ahmad is open to interpretive possibilities and liberties were taken by the poets, all the while keeping them grounded in the literary context of the production of the ghazals themselves. Thus, while he eschews rhyme,

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[6] In the 1994 reprint, Ahmad writes:

"The exercise was difficult; so, poets that we were, we chose to be playful. But a reprint, almost a quarter century later, of a work that so smacks of the impetuosities of youth involves for me a different, more dreary set of embarrassments. In the intervening years, my views have changed about everything that has a bearing on my own role in this book: the Urdu language and its poetics; the place of Ghalib in our literary and intellectual histories; my understanding of those histories as such; not to speak of poetry itself. Most things in the Introduction, and some in the apparatus I then provided for my collaborators, now strike me as wrong." (xxxi). A critical analysis of the work is all the more significant precisely because of this change of opinion and what it entails.

refrain and metre for the English translation, saying they are more restrictive in English than they would be in Urdu, he tries to retain important cultural phrases, motifs and references to convey the cultural universe inhabited by the ghazals in their original context.

Two errors reveal the difficulty of non-critical engagement with the knowledge systems of ghazal poetics even on a cursory look at the volume. The first is that the editor has made a choice to include only five *she'rs* for most ghazals unless they were seen to have a thematic unity, in which case the ghazals are reproduced in full. Ahmad justifies the selections by the authority of general practice in the subcontinent: that people remember *she'rs* as individual units and not whole ghazals (certainly not in any order), and that singers recite a selection of *she'rs* too. While this is true, in translation, the selection cannot be considered innocent due to the dangers of distorted representations. Ahmad is not seeking to translate Ghalib just to introduce him to a readership that already knows the genre, aesthetic systems and poetics he inhabited. The volume is trying to introduce a genre itself to a new readership, and hence every choice made here runs the risk of becoming normative for the new practitioners who learn from it, which is precisely what happens with ghazal's form, as made clear by Rich's comments in her first collection of self-composed ghazals titled "Ghazals: Homage to Ghalib."

> This poem began to be written after I read Aijaz Ahmad's literal English versions of the work of the Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib, 1797-1869. While the structure and metrics used by Ghalib are *much stricter than mine*, I have adhered to his use of a minimum five couplets to a ghazal, each couplet being autonomous and independent of the others. (Rich 59) [italics added].

The ghazals written by Adrienne Rich are not only *less* formally strict than Ghalib (if strictness is quantifiable), they hardly follow the Ghazal form, apart from having 'couplets' as Agha Shahid Ali would lament thirty years later in his own editorial attempt to reintroduce 'strict ghazals' to English with *Ravishing DisUnities* (Ali 1-14). Rich retains only the five-verse structure, which is often only a loosely followed prescriptive (made normative in Ahmad's representation).

The form itself, with defined metrical patterns, refrain and a particular rhyming scheme are of no concern to Rich. Indeed, as studied by Kashani, her very understanding of the Ghazal largely stems from the "distorted" (Barua 102) view of the Ghazal espoused by Ahmad in the volume's introduction.

Out of the three translators, Rahman along with Pritchett and Cornwall retain (at least) all the *she'rs* that are available in Ghalib's authoritative *diwān*. This may be the most neutral approach for consistent

and author-intended representation. So, while the selection of *she'rs* in a ghazal is warranted by the tradition, it can nonetheless still be open to critical analysis for what certain omissions may reveal.

If this error reveals a complication, the other error of cursory look may be symptomatic of a deeper cause, as it is present in Sarvat Rahman's volume too. It is symptomatic precisely because it is a modern editorial error and entails the process of meaning-making. The use of punctuation in poetic lines is virtually unknown in the Classical Ghazal. Ghalib's manuscripts do not have punctuation. Thus, the editorial practice of introducing punctuation, not only to the translated text which is excusable but to the original text itself, is an editorial meaning imposition. It is all the more glaring because considering that few in the target readership would presumably see the Urdu text itself, yet the punctuations remain in the text provided precisely for referential authenticity. This shows a non-critical engagement with the operatives of classical ghazal aesthetics and is symptomatic of refusals to think through pre-colonial epistemological systems.

Many of these lines are designed in a way that there are multiple possibilities of pauses and word constructions, that make the thematic stress fall differently at a certain place in the line, subtly adding to the possibilities of meaning. To refer back to Khusrau who claims that placing single punctuation the right way can create seven different meanings, punctuation placed where it isn't required just as easily can forgo seven meanings too.

To look more deeply into how the said non-critical engagement with classical ghazal aesthetics brings out interpretive difficulties in poems, especially in Ahmad's mediation, we can look at a few examples from the text.

For demonstration, a few *she'rs* can be seen.

baskih dushvār hai har kām kā āsāñ honā
ādmī ko bhī muyassar nahīñ insāñ honā (Ghalib's text)

(It is found that) it is difficult for every task to get easy;
Even man cannot attain to the condition of being Man.
(Aijaz Ahmad's literal translation)
Nothing comes very easy to you, human creature—
least of all the skill to live humanely.
(Adrienne Rich's translation following Ahmad's mediation)

The semantic point here is of '*bas kih*', a remarkably open phrase which signifies the multiple connotations that can be emphasized in this utterance. Ahmad's literal translation makes it 'it is found that', thereby losing focus of the exasperation, disdain, or dejection that can be

expressed with this phrase. Aijaz Ahmad replaces the more emotive tone of the original with a matter-of-fact, idiomatic expression, which is then reflected in the well-composed lines of Adrienne Rich. What we lose out on is perhaps what the poet could have done with the beautiful possibilities of that word.

This can be compared with the translation done by Sarvat Rahman and Pritchett and Cornwall.

It's difficult for everything to be easy, surely,
For mankind, too, it's difficult to attain humanity.
(Sarvat Rahman)

Although it's hard enough for every task to be easy,
Not even humans can manage to be humane.
(Pritchett and Cornwall)

In Rahman's translation, the use of the word 'surely' reached closer to the '*bas ki*' of Ghalib, with its tonal possibilities, while using it for the rhyming element throughout the poem. Pritchett and Cornwall's translations are more literal in general, however here they also lag behind in the rendition of the tone. Here, the editorial mediation has not altered the verse too far and it presents a rather promising picture.

However, the following verse demonstrates the enormous possibilities of meaning that are lost when the mediating interpretation is restrictive rather than permissive.

vāʾe dīvānagī-e shauq kih har dam mujh ko
āp jānā udhar aur āp hī ḥairāñ honā (Ghalib's text)

What madness of attachment is it that I should every instant in that direction
Go by my own will/volition and all by myself become perturbed/astonished/ amazed (at not finding her there).
(Aijaz Ahmad's literal translation)

Time after time ahead of time, you fool,
standing in panic at the meeting-place.
(Adrienne Rich)

How insane is the passion that pushes me, alas,
To go there every instant, to return distractedly.
(Sarvat Rahman)

Cheers for the madness of ardor—at every moment
I have to go that way, and I alone have to be surprised.
(Pritchett and Cornwall)

Ahmad's insistence on imposing a single meaning, that too a decidedly amorous one stereotypical of common perceptions of the Ghazal form, is baffling. The text has no sanction for any meeting place

that is sought, much less that it is a 'she' that the poetic voice is supposed to meet.

In Ghalib's verse, the impassioned person goes somewhere again and again and finds himself perplexed. Nothing else is told. Yet Aijaz Ahmad imposes a complete situation onto this wonderfully ambiguous and powerful utterance about the nature of desire, longing and ardor, and turns it into just another *she'r* about the lover's predicament. Granted, it is a possibility within the text. But it is a possibility along with all other equally valid possibilities, which could just as easily have been retained, as demonstrated by the other two translators. Translating '*dīvānagī-e-shauq'* and '*ḥairāñ'* proves difficult enough, but the other translators are able to produce something close to the original. Aijaz Ahmad's mediating influence has made Rich's translation completely misdirected in terms of the original.

Adrienne Rich broadly translates *she'r* by *she'r*, so the comparison between the literal translation and the poetic one is consistent. Hence, it is also important to look at some more free translations in Ahmad's volume to see how they stand with the Urdu text. W S Merwin's translation of *ʿishrat-e qaṭrah hai* stands entirely upon the structure arbitrarily created by Ahmad with his five selections, and cannot sustain a rearrangement of *she'rs* within it as can be warranted according to tradition. That Ahmad includes the translation despite the contradiction in terms is somewhat puzzling.

Reproduced in full, the translation reads:

> The drop dies in the river
> of its joy
> pain goes so far it cures itself
> in the spring after the heavy rain the cloud
> disappears
> that was nothing but tears
> in the spring the mirror turns green
> holding a miracle
> Change the shining wind
> the rose led us to our eyes
> let whatever is be open

In Merwin's verse, there is an obvious stripping down of elaborate imagery into the elementary ones. Merwin's free verse works on the arrangement of stripped-down lines where the space between them opens the possibility of meaning making and ambiguity. This can certainly be a method to use for explicating *she'rs*, however its possibilities have not been employed here to the fullest extent. Indeed, in the second and third stanzas it is the formal compulsions of the 'flow' of the free verse itself

that dictates that the two *she'rs* being interpreted be arbitrarily connected, a connection that is over-determined by the use of 'in the spring' with the prominence it is afforded in both the stanzas.

Completely missing in both echo and content, is the second *she'r* in Ahmad's selection which is interesting. The missing *she'r* employs Ghalib's exposition of the evaporative process through a connecting metaphor of tears turning into cold sighs through weakness[7]. Somewhat puzzling too is Ahmad's omission of a *she'r* about word-pattern-based locks[8] (*qufl-e-abjad).* These two are quite novel topoi and present a brilliant example of *maẓmūn-āfirīnī* in Ghalib's work, but they are not reflected in their context, which can be reflected in a translation singularly dedicated to challenge the status quo of literary production.

In contrast, Pritchett and Cornwall's translation of the lock verse demonstrates the method of reflecting the freshness of the metaphor used

My fate with you, like a combination lock,
Was written: at the moment we clicked, to part.

There is an obvious work of *īhām* in the second line with 'clicked,' and the phrase 'combination lock' sounds just anachronistic enough within the context to reflect the neologism used by Ghalib (*qufl-e-abjad*). The verse with evaporation is translated by them quite simply as

From weakness, weeping changed into cold sighs.
Now I believe it—water can turn to air.
In Ahmad's literal this is written as
Our weakness is such that tears have turned into mere sighing.
Now we really believe that water can turn into air.

This misses the marginally crucial point of 'cold sighs', following which Thomas Fitzsimmons' rather clumsily written verse misses an important descriptive, retaining only the skeletal meaning of the verse.

So weak now we weep sighs only;
Learn surely how water turns to air.

In Ghalib's construction, the verse reflects a straightforward structuring of posing a situation in the first line and then deriving some clever observation out of it that would be unrelated but is connected by

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[7]*ẓuʿf se giryah mubaddal bah dam-e sard huʾā/ bāvar āyā hameñ pānī kā havā ho jānā*

[8]*tujh se qismat meñ mirī ṣūrat-e qufl-e abjad/ thā likhā bāt ke bante hī judā ho jānā*

two different metaphors used in the lines. The first line becomes pregnant with subtler possibilities with the construction of *ba-dam-e-sard*, which may be contrasted with the comfort produced by the evaporation of water from a warm surface is against the feebleness of not being able to cry and only having cold sighs, a marker of ailment. This contrast produces a rich tapestry of emotive possibilities within the *she'r's* largely neutrally coded tone. The poet observed what happens in the first line, and only now believes in evaporation. Well, what does the complication of the cold sighs mean for the emotive nature of the discovery?

Translating ambiguity is complex because multiple interpretive potentialities are often contingent on the use of words and phrases in various semantic possibilities in a particular order most conducive to ambiguity. One of the brilliant examples of this in Ghalib is in the *she'r:*

> *be-ĕtidāliyoñ se subuk sab meñ ham huʾe*
> *jitne ziyādah ho gaʾe utne hī kam huʾe*
> (Ghalib's text)
>
> Because of our intemperances, we have lost our worth among/for others;
> The more we became (the more intemperate we became, the more we extended ourselves), the less (in worth, trustworthiness, respectability) we became.
> (Aijaz Ahmad's literal translation)
>
> Outrageousness has given me a bad name in the world;
> Self-aggrandized, I've lost my honor among men.
>
> (Adrienne Rich)
>
> My excesses were the cause amongst all of my shame
> The more I indulged in them, the lesser I became.
> (Sarvat Rahman)

The movement from the wide possibilities of be-*ĕtidāliyoñ*, or imbalances or intemperances to 'outrageousness' and 'excesses' here lets go of many possibilities with its interaction to *subuk,* the possibilities of which have been drastically reduced. *Subuk*, which means 'light' in terms of weight, can be used in both positive and negative connotations. Hence, the imbalance in terms of social decorum can be understood to be a fault in *adab,* but in *adab* as poetry, the same intemperance can signal poetic genius. *Subuk* is available in both connotations in this verse, especially because of the extremely unrevealing nature of the second line. While the second line literally translates to 'the more we/they became, the less we/they became', Ahmad finds it necessary to provide one particular explanation of the 'less' and 'more', which is why in Rich's version only

the meaning pertaining to outrageous self-aggrandizement. The same is reflected in Rahman's own interpretation.

But once we consider the other possibilities, the verse reveals its beauty. For example, if the intemperance is of passionate artistic composition (a positive expletive), suddenly the person is known to be expeditious (*subuk*) and thus the second line now entails the poet becoming more by becoming less (light: expeditious). Another possibility here is that the second line is tonally saying 'even as I became more and more, it was still quite less' which opens up possibilities through the semantic connotations of *subuk* discussed above.

How tonality supports the semantic possibilities for ambiguity is demonstrated by this *she'r*:

sādagīhā-e tamannā yaʿnī
phir vuh nairang-e naẓar yād āyā
(Ghalib's text)

Simplicity of our desires! Meaning that
Again, we remember her who cast a spell on our eyes.
(Aijaz Ahmad's literal translation)

Old, simple cravings!
Again, we recall one who bewitched us.
(Adrienne Rich)

The possibilities here are endless. The *nairang-e naẓar* is an enchantment of sight, which can range from divine or mystical revelation, the sight of the beloved, or even some piece of memory itself. Again, in mediation a more personalized interpretation is favored. The colloquial placement of '*ya'ni'* binds the two lines in a relationality that produces multiple meanings. The word *sādagī* itself allows possibilities of naivety and simplicity in various connotations, which is lost in the use of 'cravings'.

In Sarvat Rahman, one sees the rhyming compulsions leading to a verse that is entirely out of bounds:

There's such simplicity in my desires
Bewitching fickleness, what would you advise?

It is hard to see how the second line of the she'r warrants this interpretation. Pritchett and Cornwall have not included this *she'r* in their translation, but one may consult the literal translation and extended commentary on the *she'r* by Pritchett[9] for similar conclusions to this paper.

[9] http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ghalib/035/35_03.html

To demonstrate how many facets of a single *she'r* can be revealed by different interpretations, one can look into the following verse, rendered effectively (and differently) in all three translations:

le ga͗e ḳhāk meñ ham dāġh-e tamannā-e nashāṭ̤
tū ho aur āp bah ṣad-rang gulistāñ honā

(Ghalib's text)

We have taken with us into our grave the scar of the unfulfilled desire for happiness;
Now you are (here) and your embellishment of yourself with a hundred colors like/of a blooming orchard.

(Aijaz Ahmad's literal translation)

My body in the grave, scarred with its disappointments,
and yours, alive as the rainbow glistening through the orchard.

(Adrienne Rich)

I took down into the dust the wound of the longing for joy.
You remain—and I will be a hundred-colored garden.

(Pritchett and Cornwall)

I carry with me to the grave, the scar flower of desire
May you live, in a hundred ways, to blossom fully.

(Sarvat Rahman)

For Adrienne Rich it becomes a tale of disparity between the lover and the beloved, one is scarred with disappointment in the grave while the other is alive as the rainbow, glistening in the orchard. To Pritchett and Cornwall, the hundred-coloured garden is the defeated lover's defiant metaphysical afterlife. To Rahman it is the lover's poignant wish for the beloved's flourishing from beyond the grave, which carries a hint of irony within its sincerity. All possibilities remain valid with the text, and who is to say another reading is not possible?

If a *she'r* is given to such a multiplicity of interpretations, any valid representation of it must have to take it into account. This possibility is foreclosed in Rahman and Pritchett's collections for the most part. Ajiaz Ahmad seems to attempt this, but the traffic is one-sided. He has granted the translator the freedom of interpretation, but not the poet. But if the poet or the larger context within which he worked was to be consulted, both the translator and the poet have their reasons for producing different interpretations. Thus the restriction in Ahmad's work happens at the mediation, where the editor seems to gloss over the ambiguity of the original, and its possibilities for meaning creation. Hence, a worthwhile attempt at translation that nonetheless creates beautiful poetry remains in the end an unfulfilled project, because of the unwillingness to see the original in its own terms and then translating it. Despite all this however,

there is much in this volume that moves towards bridging the epistemological gap between the original and the contemporary.

This work is at its strongest when explaining cultural difference and drawing the affinity of cultural motifs to meaning in poetry, to outline the relationality of approaching these cultural markers in various literary cultures.

maiñ ne majnūñ pah laṛakpan meñ asad
sang uṭhāyā thā kih sar yād āyā

In my boyhood (boyishness), Asad, I had once lifted a stone (to throw) at Majnooñ;
But, immediately, I remembered my own head.
(Aijaz Ahmad's literal translation)

Ahmad explains in an extended note, that in English "this verse sounds rather stupid" but in the original it is "one of Ghalib's most poignant verses." This difference, he ascribes to "cultural allusions" — children throwing stones at Majnooñ who is mad in love and thus walks the streets in his disheveled appearance being a culturally contingent *mazmun* of the *she'r*. Ahmad explains, that the "verbal ambiguity" of *laṛakpan*, meaning both boyhood and boyishness provides two meanings: one that "when I was a boy, I wanted to do what all frivolous boys do"; the other being "out of my boyish ignorance I came close to desecrate what is sacred" (14). In the second meaning, the seemingly stock image of Majnooñ's crazed wandering is treated as a near sacred cultural marker, a powerful existential metaphor for a shared community, as if to say, it is childhood frivolity to judge Majnooñ for his passion, because what he represents is in those who judge him too.

It is Ahmad's unrelenting focus on creating cultural affinity, along with his collaborators, that makes the project a pioneering work, for a time when the study of translation was not institutionalized as it is now. The lack in Ahmad's project, like in Rahman's, is letting certain compulsions afford centrality to something other than the original text (poeticity in Rahman, the act of mediation in Ahmad). In Pritchett and Cornwall, the text is central, but there is a lack of poeticity (albeit forgone willingly). There can be a translation that can stand as beautiful poetry on its own (which itself is a culturally and temporally contingent criteria, subjectively determined), and can still offer a rigorous engagement with the classical ghazal's aesthetics and poetics. But to bridge the epistemological gap between the original and the target literary culture, first one needs academic rigor to understand the original in its own context, and then go through the laborious task of applying this comparativity, verse by verse.

While difficult, it is fruitful with the translation of a form of poetry like the ghazal, where the binary of medium and the message break down. In fact, such a translational activity opens new vistas in how translation itself is studied. Thus, even when a volume is committed to single translations within one volume (for market reasons), the translator can hope to work at the level of abstraction to retain possibilities and ambiguities (where they seem to be available in the original text). The translation can then contend with this difference by refusing reductive localization even as limitations of language do inevitably appear in translation. The more difficult endeavor would be to decide where this ambiguity is available and in what terms it may have been understood in its original context, which requires engagement with the larger project of understanding alternative knowledge systems.

Conclusion: *Kuredte ho jo ab rākh just-jū kyā hai* (Now you rake the ashes, what is the search for?)

Arguing alongside Venuti that the translator's invisibility reproduces the hegemonic view of poetry onto translations, one concomitantly sees that the visible translator too can obscure the author's context and render it invisible. Both are sides of the same coin.

As various literatures attempt for their space in the canon of world literature in a globalized world, the responsibility to represent a literary tradition for the translators who are exponents or scholars of it, as seen in these 3 translations, is immense. To be mindful of not reproducing the dominant view of poetry in today's world in translating a genre that comes from an alternative line of thought is of utmost importance.

Concurrently, as Kothari warns, when different linguistic and ethnic communities draw attention to their cultural uniqueness, culture itself becomes a scramble for self-representation (55). This urge for representation makes space for concessions to reach a more 'global' readership. Translators and 'cultural mediators'may have to be mindful of this.

The Ghazal tradition has survived, thrived and transformed across thirteen centuries in numerous language cultures essentially through translation and appropriation while still retaining most of its rigid formal characteristics and proclivities towards certain themes, metaphors, rhetorical strategies and modes of expression. As the Ghazal now finds its footing in English, this alternate method of literary assessment and literary theory developed by the Persian and Urdu poets of the subcontinent can only enrich the global space. But for that, it is the responsibility of the mediators, the ones who carry over the works in space and time, to not

just reproduce their own culturally and temporally determined view but one negotiated with this alternative mode of understanding poetry.

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