



## ISSUES OF FORM IN POETIC TRANSLATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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### ABSTRACT:

*Lyric poetry is of various kinds in English such as Sonnet (a poem that comprises of 14 lines.), odes, elegy, epic poetry, villanelles, dramatic monologue etc. Each of them contains specific form and structure. Stanzas in English are also of various forms and structures. The issues and problems concerning metrical form create problems for the translator when he desires to render assonance of any poetry into versified form. For, the figurative system of any poetic genre creates assonance of a specific kind that is very difficult to be rendered into the target language. Hence, this paper argues that it becomes impossible to render assonance while translating Persian or Urdu poetry into English.*

**KEYWORDS:** Poetic Translation, Assonance, Urdu, Persian, English.

### ISSUES OF FORM IN POETIC TRANSLATION

Poetical/Metrical translation of poetry of any language into any other language is the most difficult work from amongst the translations of serious (classical) literary genres. This reason may be cited that the elements, which the poetry is formed with, are completely different from the incorporeal dogmatism found in the prose literature i.e. allegory, metonymy, simile, metaphor, obscurity, ambiguity, intimation/ insinuation etc. This is the world where metaphorical and tropical connotation is denoted and understood more than what the literal and real meanings the words stand for. The poet expresses his emotions, feelings, observations, experiences, conditions, thoughts and imaginations in such a style which is formed with appropriate words, fitting similes and metaphors and put into the order of the best form. Obviously, behind engagements of these literary and poetic arts that culture and all sorts of its literary, intellectual, linguistic and cultural values and norms are incorporated which distinguish its prominent and distinct place from the features of poetry and literature of other language and these are the characteristics which are very difficult to be converted into the target language. Rendering form of a poem, assonance, melody rhyme, meaning and imagination into other language are such difficulties which a translator faces while he translates poetry into poetic form and verse, thus, they are required to be pondered over seriously. Dissimilarities between the source language and the target language; and differences of poetic forms create problems for the translators of the poetry. Forms of every language vary from one another in nature. They can be explained clearly through comparative study of the poetic forms of Urdu, Persian or Arabic and English languages. Arabic poetry is not divided and categorized according to its form. Its classification is done on the basis of topic instead. Form is not a scale for categorization. Classification of old Arabic poetry stands on the feature of assonance and rhyme which

people of Europe call lyric poetry. Arabic poetry generally comprises of the form of ode and encomium which has no stanza and the number of couplets is not fixed too. Well, this number does not exceed the hundred couplets. Ismail El-Naggar says:

*"The poem (Qaseedah) according to the meter of the verse comprises of thirty syllables which are divided into two hemistiches. The first part of it is chanted in low sound (falling tone) and the second one is in high sound (rising tone). The gap between the two hemistiches is equal to the gap between the two words and rhyme is repeated in the end of every hemistich. Besides, initial hemistiches are often scaled on the same meter."* 1

So, for poetic genres of Urdu are concerned, they are identified by topic and form both ways. For instance, the form of erotic poetry is fixed but the topics are not restricted. Any problem and issue of the universe and life can become the topic and title of the erotic poetry. Well, the norms related to the erotic poetry must be taken into consideration. It means that whatsoever the topic is, but the couplets of the love poetry should express symbolism, pantomime, innermost feelings, excitement and stimulation. Let us have a glance at encomium or ode (Qaseedah) whose form and topic, both are already fixed. The form of Qaseedah more or less is similar to that of erotic poetry. The form and meter of quatrain are fixed but topic is not specified. So for the matter of the genre of the new poetry is concerned, it is more complicated. There unlimited diversity in the topics and forms of the poetry is found. It includes blank verse, free verse and prosaic verse etc. There is no restriction of topics in it too. In the poetic genres of Urdu elegiac poetry can be divided into two categories: elegiac poetry that was composed to express lamentation on the demise of an individual and elegies which were composed to express the incidence of Karbala. Elegies whose technical norms are commonly discussed are the same two elegies which were composed relating to the incident of Karbala. This is truth that elegiac poet Mir Zameer had composed encomium in hexagonal form describing the incident of Karbala and incorporating elements such as face, entire incarnate (organ-wise description of human figure) permission, arrival, martial song, war, martyrdom, and wailing in it, had claimed it to be in the style of 'tarze-navi' whereas before and after it, elegies related to the incident of Karbala were being composed in various forms. But, after an elegy composed by Mir Zameer in the style of 'tarze-navi' all sorts of elegies on the incidence of Karbala were generally composed in hexagonal form. Apart from this traditional form, in this present age various elegiac poets in Pakistan such as Raees Amrohvi and Aale Raza etc. have experimented pentagonal form to compose elegiac poetries.

Similarly, lyric poetry is of various kinds in English such as Sonnet (a poem that comprises of 14 lines.), odes, elegy, epic poetry, villanelles, dramatic monologue etc. Each of them contains specific form and structure. For instance, Shakespeare's Sonnet generally contains fourteen lines comprising of three quatrains and two couplets. Its scansion is always fixed and specified. Stanzas in English are of various forms and structures. *Terza rima* is a poetic genre in Italian language. It is a poem comprising of three rhyming and assonant couplets. Well-known lyric song by Dante is also composed in this very form of poetry. *Ottava rima* is also another Italian poetic genre which is composed in form of stanza comprising of eight couplets. A single stanza of lyric and narrative poems in English and other many western languages comprise of six or seven couplets. The famous poem 'The Faerie Queen' is a great work by English poet Spenser of sixteenth century. One stanza in this poem consists of eight five-lined couplets and a six lined couplet too. It is called *Spenserian Stanza*. In addition to it, narrative or love poetry in English language has three or four syllables and there is pause in between. There in the meters of English language two words rhyme in the same way when the final vowel ends with a stress and assonance sounds occur continuously such as (Game) and (Fame).

These are the very technical and artistic norms and features that require this important point that a translator must be not only a poet; rather he also must have complete understanding of source and target languages and forms of poetry as well, when he embarks on the translation work of poetry into poetic form. Since, cultures of languages and their linguistic nature vary from one another, so, the translator often feels incapable to find out the same rhymes. He had better to decide that the metrical translation of any poetic work should be rendered whether into the form of free verse or rhymed verse.

The issues and problems concerning metrical form mentioned above also create problems for the translator when he desires to render assonance of any poetry into versified form. For, the figurative system of any poetic genre creates assonance of a specific kind that is very difficult to be rendered into the target language. This is the reason that it becomes impossible to render assonance while translating Persian or Urdu poetry into English. Repetition of sound of the same single letter in the beginning of the words or sound of consonant letter occurring in the adjacent words creates such an assonance that cannot be converted into translation. The following Urdu verses can be taken as example:

kavkavesakhtjaanihaitanhaainapoochh  
subhkarnashaam ka laanahaijoo e sheer ka

**- Ghalib**

Dil ka ujadnasahelsahibnasahelnahizaalim  
Basti basnakhelnahihai baste bastebastihai

**- Faani Badauni**

This is a difficult issue to render the assonance of these couplets into the target language. That is why the great poet Johnson had said: 'Beauty of the poetry in any language can remain protected in the same language.' Here I would like to cite a famous couplet by Mirza Ghalib as an example:

Aah ko chaahiye ek umrasar hone tak  
Kaun jeetahaiterizulfkesar hone tak

**- Ghalib**

Now let us have a glance at English translation of this couplet rendered by J.A. Coal.

"I know-  
The lover may sigh the livelong day  
To touch the loved one's heart;  
It takes too long to win thy love, and  
Can death outlive and hope quell  
Thy curs?

Have a glance at another translation of the same couplet rendered by Ralph Russell:

My sigh will a lifetime to  
Touch your unfeeling heart  
Who lives so long a life  
That he can hope to conquer you?

Both sorts of translation of the couplet mentioned above show this truth that the translation has lost prosody of original verse. Both of the translators have failed to convert the impact of real connotation of the original verse though they both have faithfully done this work. There is another difference between the two works of translation. The translation work by Coal demonstrates the style of Indian English. The language is though English but the style of expression is not like that of English. On contrary to it, sense of English taste is reflected in the translation done by Russell. Well, these two translations are good but lose power of expressing the sense that contains the poetry of Mirza Ghalib. Assonance and power of imagination in the poetry of Mirza Ghalib are so rich that converting them into translation is a difficult task.

Similarly, Music is an important element to convey the meaning and sense in lyric poetry. It has such hidden meanings that are not less important than the connotations of the words. Sometimes, music and assonance of a word occupies importance more than its literal meaning. Take the songs as an example wherein modulation or tune is more important than the words. Enani writes in his book 'Al-

**Tarjam-al-adabi-al-bayaan':**

*"Howsoever correct is the translation of the songs in form, if there is no assonance or lyricism in it, the sense or spirit of the verse stands meaningless."* 2

Melody is more important than the words in lyric poetry. Melody depends on the good arrangement and order of the words. Melodious words put into appropriate and apt array and order creates a special kind of music. If a poem or song of such kind is chanted with rising and falling tone, it becomes more melodious. Benjamin insists that the translator, while doing translation, should not miss the assonance or melody at any cost that is generated in fundamental language by putting the words in good array and order. He also says that the translators must focus on the assonance more than connotation when they render the lyric poems into other languages. Let us have a glance at the following Persian couplet and its Urdu translation.

Cherakaar e kunadaaqil ki baazaayadpashemaani (Persian)

Karo tum kaamkiunaaisa ki jis se ho pashemaani (Urdu)

The translator did not render the word 'Aaqil' into Urdu translation. You have seen that the translator has translated the Persian sentence 'baazayadpashemani' into Urdu sentence 'jis se ho pashemani'. This Urdu translation does not completely match with the literal translation of the Persian words. But this literal translation makes no difference in the sense and meaning. For, the word 'pashemani' is diction of Persian language not of Urdu language. So, this may not be a literal translation. On the contrary to it, this word should be translated into 'sharindagi or pashemani ho'. This is usually spoken in Urdu. Assonance and lyricism found in the Persian couplet is completely felt in this poetic Urdu translation. These are the reasons that Portugal ideologist Kansilozakal lays emphasis on conversion of melody in translation of lyric poetry. He says:

*"It is melody which accords audition and sense of hearing to the imagination and echoes in the memory. The words fall short if it desired to be felt. This is a great achievement for the translator of the poetry to develop his sense of hearing according to the melody and modulation. He must promote this art of translation as the first preference."* 3

Kansilozakal has indicated to an important characteristic of lyric poetry in the paragraph mentioned above. It is often felt that imagination or thought that remains unexpressed through verbal expressions; it is conveyed to the listener with the help of melody that is found in the lyric poetry. He thinks so that melody is the feature which conveys the thoughts and ideas which are obviously not reflected in the verbal expressions of lyric poetry. But this is the real issue that how can this melody of poetry converted into target language because in the poetic verses, this lyricism occurs out of those measures and meters which are specified for poetry of every language and rendering them into any other language is very difficult task. This is the reason that dissimilarity of meters and measure between the source language and target language creates problems to translate the couplets and verses into poetic form. For instance, meters of Urdu language like Arabic and Persian are countable, i.e., vowel points are fixed in number. It depends on the vowels and consonants used in the couplet. Generally, every syllable begins with consonant. Basic elements of meter vary as the syllable changes and they both cause assonance and rhyme to exist by getting together. On contrary to it, meter of English poetry is adjectival and it depends on pronouncement of the syllable not the number of the syllable. Similarly, the meter of English poetry is based on the syllable and the stress of the word. This is also truth that the meter and rhyme are used in English poetry like poetry in Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages. But this meter is a combination of a specific sequence of the syllable containing stress and short vowel syllable. According to the sound, the meter used in English lyric poetry is of two kinds. In the first kind, tone of the word goes up from falling meter to the rising meter, whereas in the second kind of meter, tone comes down from rising meter to the falling meter. This meter is called fundamental assonance. Example of such meter is given in the following couplet:

The/ cur/few/ tolls/ the knell/ of par/ting day

There is stress on five places in the couplet mentioned above. So, it is called limbic pentameter. This is a well-known meter of English poetry that is applied in various metric forms particularly in the

blank verse. Shakespeare has also applied this meter in the poetic parts of his drama and the sonnets.

Having gone through this short discussion concerning form, meter, pentameter and rhyme, it would not be wrong to reach this conclusion that the translator cannot render assonance of any language into any other language though he has got mastery over the art of translation. In fact there is no need of doing so, because assonance of the source language is meaningless for the reader of the target language. Instead, the translator should try to convert assonance of the source language into assonance similar to it in the target language, so that the reader of the target language could enjoy properly. The one who tries to translate Sonnets of Shakespeare should be well-versed in meter, rhyme and prosody applied in the poetry of Urdu language so that assonance found in the Shakespeare's couplet could be produced in such a way that is appropriate for the reader of Urdu language. Right and appropriate selection of meters requires that the translator must have proper understanding of the context of the poems when he embarks on translation of poetic verses. If he has complete familiarity with poetic system of the target language along with the source language, he will select the meters wisely, he will fail completely otherwise. Perceptions and senses of the poetry should be rendered basically because poetry in any language contains the ideal example of aestheticism and perceptual values. A translator has to face linguistic, literary, aesthetic, social and cultural problems. Linguistic problems include arrangement of the words and structure of syntax. Aesthetic problems relate to the form of verse, metaphorical sentences and sounds. So for social and cultural issues are concerned, the translator faces them when he translates four major social concepts and ideologies i.e. imaginations, environments, course of action and structures pertaining to practical subsequences. Since this article highlights study of the structure or form only, so, other literary matters cannot be discussed here.

## CONCLUSION

Rendering form of a poem, assonance, melody rhyme, meaning and imagination into other language are such difficulties which a translator faces while he translates poetry into poetic form and verse. Although the translator has mastered the skill of translation, it would not be incorrect to draw the conclusion that he cannot reproduce assonance of any language into any other language. In reality, there is no need to do this because the reader of the target language cannot understand the assonance of the source language. Instead, the translator should attempt to recreate assonance from the source language in a way that the reader of the target language can understand and appreciate.

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