

BOOK REVIEW

1.

Review of Anisur Rahman's *Hazaaroon Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals*

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Hazaaroon Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals.
Anisur Rahman. Harper Collins Publishers, 2019, 456 pp.

Anisur Rahman's *Hazaaroon Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals* opens with a couplet from Ghalib's ghazal:
Hazaaroon khwashishein aisi ke har khawahish pe dam nikle
Bahut nikle mere armaan lekin phir bhi kam nikle
which Rahman translates differently from other translators:
Desires in thousands I had, for each I would die
With many I had luck, for many I would sigh

It is from this very couplet the title of the anthology is drawn. It has seven sections of translations of ghazals composed by sixty-five Urdu poets, from South Asian countries. *Hazaaroon Khwashishein Aisi* is not like seven connected parts of the whole, but rather as seven snapshots of sample, Urdu ghazals during more than five centuries. Rahman, in the "Translator's Note", points out:

I have identified seven literary periods and selected sixty-five poets to create a historical perspective and show the development of its poetic form in each translation. (452)

Rahman tries to retain the remarkable position of each *sher* by finding space for all units of ideas. Perhaps that is why Tabish Khair's

'Foreword' to the collection points out: 'it enables the readers to dip into the sample this rich world of letters, imagination, emotion, and thought'. He also discusses the earlier translators' attempts and the liberties they have exercised with punctuations in the English versions that have reduced the flexibility of the Urdu originals. But Rahman tries to minimize the 'tyranny of punctuation'. In the "Preface" to the compendium, Rahman discusses at length, the brief historiography of ghazal from Abdullah Jafar Rudaki, the first canonical ghazal writer of Persia from the ninth century to Aftab Hussain born in 1962 in Pakistan and based in Austria, one of the contemporary voices. In India, the ghazal found its 'hospital destination' during the 13th century in the works of Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah with its metaphysical beginnings. It later flourished under the Qutub Shahi dynasty of Golkonda when it received patronage from Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah, (1565- 1611), who was an avid poet of Deccani Urdu (a variant of Urdu) in his own right and also the ruler. He established the city of Hyderabad. Rahman points out:

Poetry in the Deccan had a rich variety of sources to draw upon. It reflected the communal harmony of land represented its flora and fauna, absorbed the linguistic habits of its folk and recorded literature, and finally negotiated with the Persian influences without being unduly swayed by it. (20)

Another significant poet of the metaphysical period was Vali Deccani also known as Vali Gujarati. He was deeply interested in the mystic traditions of India. He is regarded as, 'a master image maker and innovator of refreshing similes and metaphors...'. Vali says:

*'Ab judaayi na kar, Khuda soon dar
Bewafai na kar, khuda soon dar(30)*

Rahman translates as:

Don't part with me now, fear, God
Don't break my love you, vow, fear God(31)

During the 18th century, Urdu poetry flourished into the *age of enlightenment* in the hands of Mir Taqi Mir, Khwaja Mir Dard, Siraj Aurangabadi, and others. New idioms and metaphors came into the form that expressed a sense of acute emotional and physical dislocations. Like others Mir's poetry ferrets out his despair and philosophical reflections, broader manifestations of life and the world, he says:

*Rafatagaan mein jahaan ke hum bhi hain
Saath us karwaan ke hum bhi hain (64)*

Rahman translates:

Of those who left the world behind I too am one
Of that very passing caravan, I too am one (65)

The late 18th and 19th centuries witnessed the flourishing of two schools of Urdu ghazal in Lucknow and Delhi. The period is often billed as the 'golden period' and as the 'age of romance and realism'. The traditions which were established during the last four centuries reached their poetic excellence in the hands of Syed Inshallah Khan Insha, Qalandar Baksh Jurat and others in Lucknow; while in Delhi, major poetic voices were Bahadur Shah Zafar, Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Momin Khan Momin, Nawab Mirza Khan Dehlavi, Shaikh Ibrahim Zauq and others. The age also witnessed the rising popularity of mushairas. It gave rise to the new idiom, syntax and lexicon in poetry. Lucknow poets were more inclined to delicate human passions while in Delhi, poets heavily depended on Persian phrases. Bahadur Shah Zafar writes:

*Baat karni mujhe mushkil kabhi aisi to na thi
Ab hai jaisi teri mehfil kabhi aisi to na thi (86)*

Rahman translates it as:

It was never so very hard to speak, but now
Your assembly was never so bleak, but now (87)

After the First War of Independence, in 1857, modern sensibility gave rise to new liberties in ghazal poetics and poets such as Khawaja Altaf, Hussain, Ali Shahid Abadi, Hazrat Mohani, Mohammed Iqbal, Fani Badayuni, Jigar Moradabadi, and others. Firaq Gorakhpuri too belonged to the 'school of modernism'. They delved into traditional references to find space for the mundane and the metaphysical. Firaq writes:

*sukoot-e shaam mitao bahut andheraa hai
sukhan ki shama jalao bahut andheraa hai (178)*

Rahman translates:

Let not the quiet of dusk grow, it is too dark.
Let the flames of words glow, it is too dark. (179)

The next section of the book is about “progressive poets”. According to Rahman, ghazal during this period was charged with Marxist ideology. It disengaged itself from cliches, and nurtured the spirit of decolonisation, the poets who wrote in this grouping were Asrarul Haq Majaz, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Majrooh Sultanpuri and others. Faiz Ahmad Faiz writes:

*mit jaaegi makhloq to insaaf karoge
munsif ho to ab hashr utha kyun nahi dete (196)*

Rahman translates it:

When will you give verdict? After the living will perish?
If a real judge, why don't you pronounce a doomsday? (197)

During the mid-20th century, the majority, of progressive poets experimented with the form and content of ghazal that gave rise to the ‘New Poetics’. They lived in ‘an increasingly shrinking world of migrations and diaspora belonging and estrangement’. They evolved a unique diction with fresh usage of metaphor and moods. they focused on major contemporary historical events in their poetry, such as India’s Partition, 1947, the Indo-China war, 1965, India’s nuclear experiments and Indo-Pak wars and several other similar incidents. Leading poets were Shah Munir Niazi, Jaun Elia, Ahmed Faraz, Basheer Badr, Shahryar, Nida Fazli and others. Shahryar says:

*zakhmon ko rafu kar lein dil shaad kaarein phir se
khwaabon ki koi duniya aabaad kaarein phir se (346)*

Rahman’s translation is:

Let us stitch our wounds, let us make merry once again.
Let us find a world of dreams, let us roam it once again (347)

Shahryar’s experimentation has a unique sense of absorbing traditions in it. The last section of the book ‘Beyond New Poetics’ focuses on the last two decades of the 20th century and early 21st century. The ghazal has come of age and now flourishes in contemporariness not only in South Asia but across the globe wherever South Asians have dispersed. Poets have an infinite passion for life and art, they engage with modern and post-modern paradigms in their poetry, and philosophical and mystic aspects are also covered. Rahman points out:

These poets, citizens of a larger world have chosen to defy social, and political, polarities, and speak in the language of common aspirations to compose a literary culture of greater inclusivity and strength. (388)

Interestingly, quite a few women ghazal composers have made significant contributions such as Praveen Shakir and Ishrat Afreen and others.

Praveen Shakir writes:

*tera ghar aur mera jungle bheegata hai saath- saath
aisi barasatien ke baadal bheegata hai saath- saath*

Rahman's translation is:

Both your home and my jungle get wet together
Such heavy rain. All clouds get wet together.

Both Shakir and Afreen are apprehensive about social biases against women.

Rahman's *Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals* is a detailed account of the pretext, text and context of the ghazal. The poets and their ghazals shortlisted in the volume have contributed to the canon through the ages. The translations, never violate the structure of rhythm and end rhyme of any composition, Rahman reiterates in the 'Endnote' that:

The neutrality of gender and interchangeability of male, female and the divine makes the ghazal a complex site for the negotiation of meaning. (453)

According to Tabish Khair, 'the volume is a work of love, skill and scholarship'; on the blurb, Keki N Daruwalla feels that Rahman is, '...any translators envy'. Debjani Chatterjee believes that 'it is an exciting literary rollercoaster journey for its readers'.

It is a must-buy book for ghazal lovers because the ideas behind the translated ghazals are compelling and somewhat large in scope. The translator attempts to make connections across generations, decades and continents. Indeed, Rahman's style is a great gift, the multiple parts of each text wedded together beautifully. What seems clearest is his felicity with the language and canon, identity and effect. *Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi*, harnesses and displays canny powers of precision and grace. The book is a precious gift for one and all.