

بخش انگلیسی

GHALIB

The Poet who Looked into the Heart of the Mystery

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In a significant passage of one of his ever-scintillating letters, Ghalib wrote about poetry:

Poetry is generation of meaning (*mani afarini*) and not mere versification.

This points at once to the essence of Ghalib's aesthetic and his achievement as a poet. One of the finest products of Indo-Moghul-Islamic culture, Ghalib yet transcended history through and in the history to join the ranks of the immortals. Hence like all the other greatest literary giants – Sophocles, Dante, Kalidas, Sadi, Hafiz, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Goethe, Tolstoy, Yeats, Tagore, Iqbal – he is as much relevant to us as he was to his day. Nor was he unconscious of his timelessness and immortality; he referred to himself as a *bulbul* singing for flower-gardens yet to be:

Main andaleeb-i gulshane na-afaridah hun

Ghalib surveys man, his destiny, his place in an extremely complicated and mind boggling scheme of creation from a vantage point which is not easily accessible even to the most extraordinary human minds. This yields to him a perspective from which life ceases to be either a mere tragedy or a mere comedy or a thing with which one should be morbidly obsessed. As he asserts:

*Razdan-e khu-i dharam karde-and
Khandeh ber dana-u nadan mizenem*

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I have been led into the mystery of Time
And hence I laugh at the wise and the foolish alike.

*Bazichae atfal hai dunya meray agay
Hota hai shabo-roze tamasha meray agay*

This world is a children's plaything to me:
Day in and day out the passing show flits across me.

*Laf-i danish ghalat-o naf-i ibadat ma'loom
Durd-i yek saghar-e ghaflat hai chi dunya-u chi din*

Futile is the boast of wisdom and worship's fruit –
the less said the better:
Dregs of the cup of negligence, both Here and
the Hereafter.

One wonders how the poet could gain to this position of vantage without the precise knowledge of the mysterious universe that modern science has made available to us. One can only marvel at his intuitive and powerfully imaginative response to an immeasurably vast universe in which the earth is like a speck of dust and man reduced to a nullity. Even with the not-so-sophisticated scientific knowledge available to him, he could visualise the existence of other worlds with life and consciousness beyond the human world. In a verse which occasioned a lot of controversy in his day, he said:

*Har-kuja hangamae alam buwad
Rahmatan-lil-alamine ham buwad*

In whichever world is the tumult of existence –
There also is a Prophet as a Mercy to the world.

Renowned theologians of the day like Fazl-i Haq Khairabadi (otherwise an admirer of the poet) took objection to the verse on the ground that it seemed to them as running counter to the belief in the Finality of the Prophethood (*Khatm al-Nubuwah*) but the

poet held his ground on the plea that he was referring to a universal principle and not in any way contravening the belief in *Khatm al-Nubuwwah*. In fact the verse is one of the profoundest poetic statements – the intuitive realization of a truth which modern science with all its prodigious progress is just beginning to discover. The existence of worlds other than ours with life and intelligence is quite possible and wherever such a world exists it requires prophetic guidance for a purposeful and morally upright living. Thus the poet asserts in a more subtle and rationally impregnable manner the indispensability of prophethood.

Ghalib has an equally acute though predominantly intuitive consciousness of the neutrality of the temperament of the universal order as viewed from the human angle. There may be other ways of approaching the world of phenomenal existence but from the human point of view the universal order seems to exhibit a strange and at times callous impartiality bordering on unconcern. Karbalas come and go and yet the world of existence runs as smoothly as ever. This comprehensive and dispassionate view of things, this insight into the complicacies of existence lends to the poet an ironical vision which informs his poetry and constitutes its essential strength. This is how he addresses the Almighty:

Bazm-i tura sham-u-gul khastigiay Bu-turab
Saz-i tura zir-ū-bam waqaiāe Karbala

The rose and the candle of your hall of audience is
the decrepitude of *Bu-turab* (Ali)
And the treble and bass of your orchestra, the incident
of Karbala.

And when he exclaims:

Mujh tak kab unki bazm main ata tha dawr-i-jam
Saqi ne khutch mila na diya ho sharab mai

When did the cup ever get to me in his company!
May be the cup-bearer has mixed something with the wine now!

*Ki meray qatl ke ba'd usnay jafa se taubah
Hai us zood-pashiman ka pashiman hona*

Soon after killing me he forsook killing and murder –
What repentance of my so-quick-to-repent!

It is not mere wit but the expression of the essential irony of existence. This enables the poet to laugh at everything including his own self:

*Agar Khudai bedaned ki zindie tu hanooz
Hazar musht zaned ber dahan-i Izrail*

If God knew that you still keep on living
He will rain a thousand fist-blows on the face of Izrail
(the angel of death).

*Mai ne kaha ki bazm-i naz chahiay ghair se tih
Sunke sitem-zarif ne mujh ko uthadiya ki yun*

I said, "the proud session of love should be
perturbed by no stranger"
"Yes, said he with cruel irony and stood up to
show me the door.

Obsession with the irony of existence at the deepest level reveals to a sensitive eye the ultimate vision of horror which reduces human life to a tragic farce. Modern Existentialists and Absurdists have experienced this horror as intensely as did the ancient Greeks with the difference that they (the ancient Greeks) sought refuge in fatalism whereas modern man can do little in the face of this horror but harbour suicidal tendencies unless he learns to laugh at every thing. Ghalib perceives the tragedy and the horror of existence but has the courage and knack of reducing it to a farce and laughing at it though one can not but see tears shimmering in this laughter:

*Ny mujdae wisal na nazzarae jamal
Muddat huiee ki ashtie chashm-u-gosh hai*

Neither any tidings of union, nor any sight of beauty:
It is a long time since the eye is reconciled with the ear.

*Ny tir kaman main hai na sayyad kamin main
Gushe main qafas ke mujhe aram bohot hai*

Neither the arrow in the bow nor the hunter in ambush –
How cosy and comfortable is this corner of the cage!

*Tujh se qismat main meri surate qusle abjad
Tha likha bat ke bante hi juda hojana*

Like the alphabetical lock's formula it was destined for you and me
To fall apart as soon as the letters fell into place to form the word*

*Milna tera agar nahin asan to sahl hai
Dushwar to yahi hai ki dushwar bhi nahin*

It were easy if it were not easy to meet you:
The difficulty is that it is not difficult either.

It is not that Ghalib is blind to the charm and colourfulness of the universe or the intrinsic beauty and grandeur of man. On the other hand he has a keen sense of it but at the same time he has the capability of seeing the other side also:

*Tamasha-i gulshan tamanna-i chidan
Bahar-afarina gunehgar hain ham*

The surveying of the flower-garden, the desire to pluck –
you creator of vernal bloom, we are sinners.

Ghalib seeks to capture and communicate the ironical vision rooted in the variety and multi-dimensionality of creation through

*The original uses the Urdu idiom, *bat ka banna*, which defies translation. The *abjad* (alphabetical) lock was like the modern number lock, using alphabets in place of digits.

language – a medium which can hardly bear that burden. Hence he stretches words to their maximum capacity in order to bend them to his purpose, thus setting in motion the process which he terms as *mani-afarini* (generation of meaning). As he himself says:

*Ganjinae mani ka tilsm usko samjhiay
Jo lafz ki Ghalib meray ashar mai away*

Ghalib, each word that occurs in my poetry
Is a charm to unlock the treasure-house of meaning.

I have pleasantly discovered, while toying with one of the famous Persian couplets of the poet, how a single word can act as a key – a spell as it were – to unlock treasures of inexhaustible meaning. The verse is:

*Wida-u wasl judaganeh lazzat-i dared
Hazar bar birow sad-hazar bar biya*

Wida (farewell) and *wasl* (union) has each its own sweetness:
Depart a thousand times, come back a million ones.

I tried to replace the key words of the verse – *wida* and *wasl* – with their synonyms without in the least harming the metrics and the scansion of the verse. I said:

*Firaq-u wasl judaganeh lazzat-i dared
Hazar bar birow sad-hazar bar biya*

And again:

*Wisal-u hijr judaganeh lazzat-i dared
Hazar bar birow sad-hazar bar biya*

The verse remains safe on the surface after these alterations and would be the same in translation into any other language such as English but – and this is the discovery – any replacement destroys the semantic profundity and signification arising from associations of different words of the verse. *Wida* has pleasant associations and implies bidding farewell to a beloved one. As against this *firaq* and *hijr* have patently unpleasant associations. This is true of the whole poetry of Ghalib – indeed, of all the great poetry of the world. Every word used in it is irreplaceable even by its so-called synonyms (exact synonyms never exist). Coleridge rightly remarks that removing a word from a genuine poem amounts to removing a stone from a pyramid – the whole pyramid will crumble down.

In consequence of this deft and masterly use of language, Ghalib's poetry is highly rich and multi-layered and one of the most remarkable illustrations of the quality of plurisignation. Not only do his verses have multiple levels of meaning but it sometimes happens that even contradictory meanings are contained in the same verse and so skilfully are the words used that the text easily bears these meanings. Sometimes a word acts as an open sesame to lead on to new and unforeseen connotations. Cleanth Brooks says that a distinctive feature of poetry is that in it, it is not the dog which wags the tail but the tail which wags the dog. This is how in great poetry words are made to carry layers on layers of meaning so that one has to read it again and again, discovering a new meaning on each new reading. This is what gives to great poetry, such as that of Ghalib, a universal appeal.