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THE PERSIAN PROSODY AND KASHMIRI POETRY

At the outset I would like to steer clear of the relevance of the traditional prosody in contemporary genuine poetry and would rather emphasize the fact that rhythm and metre have all along been organic components of poetry and that versification alone cannot make a poem. It is, perhaps, poet's extraordinary creative personality – endowed with imagination and sensibility – resounding the intensely individual music of his thought patterns that shape his art. A poem of a verse of a ghazal is considered to be an organic whole wherein words and other poetic vehicles are not ornamental and decorative but are contributory to the making of the organic unity of that linguistic structure. Like words and metaphors metre and rhythm too contribute towards creative organism of poetry. There is no denying the fact that total metrical rigidity has and will continue to hinder the organic growth of a poetic experience and shall rather encourage a kind of poetic compositions that are mechanical and uninspired – lacking imagination, intensity of thought and insight and above all, the powerful expression that is essence of poetry.

The earliest Kashmiri poems – Chume padas, Vakhs and Shruks – belonged essentially to an oral tradition and were primarily didactic and spiritual in character. Vakhs and Shruks composed by the pioneers of Kashmiri poetry Lal Dad and Sheikhu Alam, are undoubtedly heights of a long ranging poetic legacy. The prosody of the padas, Vakhs and Shruks is in many ways different from that of Sanskrit wherein every hemistich has equal number of feet; whereas every hemistich of a Vakh or a

Shruk generally consists of four stressed syllables. It seems that in this prosody, variations of metrical patterns were admitted by deviation from the norms if there had been any. As a result of it the most creative and imaginative expressions came into being through the variegated should effects which we confront with in these Bakhs and Shruks. The European Scholar Sir George Grieson, who made remarkable contribution to India linguistic studies wrote with reference to the prosody of a Bakh of Lal dad, that this type of prosody existed nowhere right from Iran down to the North India¹. He further wrote that despite the number o the feet in some of the lines being equal, the prosodic scheme does not emerge as a pattern as it is not strictly followed after 2nd or third halves of the poem².

The Vakhs and Shruks were composed in a literary scenario that had imbibed and assimilated influences from Sanskrit poetics – a poetics that illuminates the inquisitive minds and connoisseurs of the contemporary literary world belonging to the East as well as the West – retaining the phonological niceties of the Kashmiri language and could not strictly follow the quantitative prosody of Sanskrit. It is a well established fact that the prosodies of Sanskrit, Arabic and Old Persian bear a close resemblance to each other and are based on quantitative systems. True, it is that the system of prosody in Sanskrit is at many a places loose and flexible and that this looseness and flexibility is all too evident in Hindi Poetry.

“The different poetical works of the Hindus contain a great number of metres. The names of the metres differ according to the number of syllables and also according to the verses which follow. For they do not, like all the verses of a long poem belong to one and the same metre. They use many metres in the same poem, in order that it should appear like an embroidered piece of silk”⁴.

Since the prosody of Arabic, Old Persian and Sanskrit had this kind of characteristic prosodic affinity the languages like

modern Persian and urdu also felt comfortable with most of the metres of Arabic prosody maintaining their own phonological niceties which in turn brought about some changes and variations in the metres. These changes and variations are known as Zihafat.

With the spread of Islam in Kashmir, the Persian language like other regions and cultural zones became the lingua franca of the valley. As such the Persian poetry got introduced in Kashmir though the genres of mathnavi and ghazal developed as distinctive poetic forms at a later stage. With the emergence of poets like Mir Syed Abdullah Bailhaqi, Fakhir, Mohammad Gami, Rasool Mir, Maqbool Shah Persian prosody gained popularity as these poets employed the Persian metres in their ghazal and mathnavis though adhering to the old Kashmiri folk qualitative metres while composing their vatsans-vatsun being an indigenous Kashmiri poetic genre and form and is still being employed by some traditional poets as their main form of poetic expression.

Sir Aurel Stein keenly observed some variations in the folk metres of Kashmiri when Kashmiri folk songs were recited to him by a traditional cyat-gue. He wrote.

“After examining number of these compositions as recited by the professional cyat gur I arrived at this conclusion that the metre of these poems. Is based solely on the number of stress – accent syllables counted in each line or pada, no regard is paid to the quantity”⁵.

It is true that Mahmood Gami, Rasool Mir and other masters of the language did acquire the craft of Persian prosody and handled well some of its metres but the fact remains that they had to encounter the inevitable interference of the phonological features of the Kashmiri language during their creative process. Notwithstanding these undeniable facts it should be borne in mind that Kashmiri poets by and large adopted Persian prosody as it helped their poetic expression more rhythmic, comprehensive, diverse and dynamic. Syed Mohammad Hadi Fakhir was perhaps the first Kashmiri poet who composed ghazals in Kashmiri with

thorough mastery on some of the metres of Persian prosody. Here is an example of his two Kashmiri verses taken from one of his ghazals written in Bahri Ramal Musman Mahzoof which manifests his command over the metre:

Faailaatun,	Faailaatun	Faailaatun,	Faailun
Noori duethom	Noori mah zan	Poori saaman	Ostay
Roo darakhshan	Moo pareshan	Khush kharaman	Ostay
Fakhir andar	Ishtiyakay	Sarvi naazay	Seem tan
Parahan chak	Az gireban	Taa badaman	Ostay

The most popular metres along with their variations employed by the Kashmiri poets are as under:

01. Bahre Hazaj (mafa'eelun) standard foot is Mafaeelun, four times repetition in Musman Saalim and three times repetition in Musadas Saalim along with variations:

- i. Hazaj Musman Maqbooz ---- four times repetition of Mafaeelun.
- ii. Hazaj Musman Ashtar --- two times repetition of Faailun Mafaeelun in one hemistich.
- iii. Hazaj Musman Akhrab --- Mafool Mafaeelun twice in one line.
- iv. Hazaj Musman Akhrab Makfoof Maqsoor --- the four feet being Mafool Mafaeel Mafaeel Mafaeel.
- v. Hazaj Musman Akhrab Makfoof Mahzooful Aakhir --- the forefeet being Mafool Mafaeel Mafaeel Fa'oolun.

02. bahre Ramal (fa'ilatun) standard foot Faailaatun --- four times and three times repetition in Ramal Musman Saalim and Ramal Musadas Saalim respectively. The varied popular forms of this metre are:

- i. Ramal Musman Mahzool --- the feet being Faailaatun Faailaatun Faailaatun Faailun.
- ii. Ramal Musman Majnoon --- four times repetition of Faailaatun.
- iii. Ramal Musman Mashkool --- two times repetition of Faailaatun Faailaatun.

- iv. Ramal Musman Majnoon Maqtoo --- its feet are Faailaatun Failaatun Fa'lun.
03. Bahre Rajaz (mustaf'ilun) standard foot Mustafilun --- four times and three times repetition in Musman Saalim and Musadas Saalim respectively. The other variations in this metro are Rajaz Musman Matvi, Rajaz Musman Majnoon, Rajaz Musman Majnoon Matvi.
04. Bahre Kaamil --- standard foot Mutafaailun --- four times and three times repetition in Musman Saalim and Musadas Saalim. Respectively.
05. Bahare Mutaqarib (fa'oolun) standard foot Fa'oolun --- four times repetition in Musman Saalim and three times repetition in Musadas Saalim with variations such as Mutaqaarib Musman Mahzooz, Mutaqaarib Musman Maqsoor, Mutaqaarib Musman Maqbooz Aslam, Mutaqaarib Musman Asram Saalimul Aakhir.
06. Bahre Mutadaarik (fa'lun) standard foot Faailun --- four times repetition in Musman along with the variations such as Mutadaarik Musman Mahzooz, Mutadaarik Musman Majnoon.
07. Bahre Munsare --- this metro has neither been used as Saalim nor as Musadas. Its some varied forms used by Kashmiri poets are Munsara Matvi Maqsoof, Munsara Musman matvi Manhoor, Munsara Musman Matvi Majdoo.
08. Bahre Muzaaria --- it has never been used in standard form nor has anybody used it as Musadas. In this metre Faailaatun is Mafrooqi Le Faailaatun. The two popular most varied forms of this metre used by the Kashmiri poets are Muzaaria Musman Akhrab, Muzaaria Musman Akhrab Maqfoof.
09. Bahre Mujtas.... Like Urdu poets it has not been used by any Kashmiri poet in its standard form. The popular variations in this form are Mujtas Musman Majnoon Mahzooz Maqtoo - feet being Mafaailun Failaatun Mafaailun Falun and Mujtas Mosman Majnoon - feet being Mafaailun Failaatun Failaatun Mafaailun Failaatun. It will not be out of place to mention here

that Mujtas Mosman Majnoon Mahzooz Maqtoo became very popular in the second half of the twentieth century and is now one of the beloved metres of Kashmiri ghazal writers. Mujtas Mosman Majnoon was for the 1st. time used by the Modern Kashmiri romantic poet Rafiq Raaz in his famous ghazal----- provoking Prof. Rahman Rahi to compose his famous ghazal ----- in this metre. It is also worth mentioning that poets like Mirza Ghalib wrote a solitary Urdu ghazal ----- in this metre.

10. Last but not least is Bahru Khafeef This metre has only one popular form in Kashmiri i.e. Faailaaton Mafaailuni Fallin. As has been the big addition in Urdu it is neither used in standard nor in Musman form, it is rather popularly used in Musadas.

I do not feel shy of the fact that no Kashmiri poet till date has employed the 24 measures associated with the Rubai form with total mastery nor has any poet been able to compose a rubai in the real sense of the word. No doubt the Kashmiri poets have composed four-lined poems with tremendous poetic beauty but these cannot be taken as Rubaiyyat as their prosody is different from that of the Rubai. The four lined poems written by Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Prof. Rahman Rahi, Prof. Rashid Nazki, Prof. Ghulam Nabi Firaq and Marghoob Baanhaalii cannot lend themselves to the prosody of the Rubai.

During the seonc half of the twentieth century some exhaustive and comprehensive discussions were made on the prosody of the Kashmiri language and during the fast ten years some good books on the subject have been published by eminent scholars of the Kashmiri language – Amir Kaamil – poet-critic and researcher – was perhaps the first Kashmiri scholar who initiated this process of discussion. He scanned the ghazals of Rasool Mir and Mehjoor and asserted that they could not strictly stick to the Persian prosody in their ghazals as the interference of the phonological character of native language was inevitable⁶. In Prof.

Rehman Rahi's well documented book "Kashmiri Poetry and its Prosody" one can read between the lines that Kashmiri poets have employed and will continue to employ the Persian prosody not with rigidity but with some looseness and flexibility desired and demanded by the phonological features of the vernacular⁷. Prof. Shafi Shauq⁸ and Rafiq Raaz have also considerably contributed to these discussions.

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