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**GHALIB IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

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**Abstract:** Translation is a crucial act, serious and capricious, which sometimes gives us glimpses of problems since the days of its beginning. Translation has gradually assumed defined shape and serious significance. It is difficult to distinguish the various classes of translation which social evolution has produced. Gayatri Spivak says, “How does the translator attend to the specificity of the language she translates? There is a way in which the rhetorical nature of every language disrupts its logical systematicity. If we emphasize the logical at the expense of these rhetorical interferences, we remain safe.” (Chakravorty 398) Although, there is a continuous need for the translation, there are also some questions pending answers, like, how can the various classes of translation be distinguished? How can the works of creative imagination and scientific works in translation be separated from one another? What are limitations of translation viz a viz the act of translation?

It has been 147 years since Mirza Ghalib departed from this world. On his 147<sup>th</sup> death anniversary today on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2016, he is still read and appreciated with the same interest and appreciation all over the world. In most of the places, including India, he is read in translation. In this paper, it would be attempted how Ghalib is read in translation and what are the limitation and benefits of such readings.

**Keywords:** English, Translation, Creative, Imagination, Language.

Poetry is what gets lost in translation.” — Robert Frost<sup>1</sup>

Translating poetry with all the magnificence and connotations of the original is considered an impossible task. The other types of texts, or to say ‘knowledge texts’, may be translated with some justification. But when it comes to translating poetry, the task becomes all the more difficult and impossible. However great skill a translator may possess and use, the outcome remains incomplete. W. H. Auden, in his introduction to Rae Dalven’s translation of *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, states, that “he has always believed the essential difference

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that the specific statement is just attributed to Frost. We do not have any written evidence of it. Particularly, Frost wanted to give his definition of poetry.

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between prose and poetry to be that prose can be translated into another tongue but poetry cannot” (Rae Dalven 1961: vii). As the readers of the target language, we may not be able to identify the lacunae in a translation. But if we know the original, we surely identify the problems and sigh with the remark- ah! This just isn’t good enough- something is amiss.

David Connolly, in his article “Rewriting the Poem: Stages in the Translation Process: Factors and Constraints”, mentions that “Translation in general may be a science and a craft, but the translation of poetry is also an act of creative writing (or creative re-writing) and requires art, talent and inspiration. It is a combination of these factors which perhaps explains why the translation of a poem is never finished and why the translator has eventually to stop somewhere” (Connolly 2002: 25).

Mirza Ghalib is perhaps one of the most translated poets into English after Rumi and Darwish. The influence of Ghalib has been great on the readers and the writers of the world. But it remains far from being the reality that the readers of Ghalib in translation do ever come close to the real Ghalib at all. What is lost to them and what do they find? The question is significant and surely the answer would be that though something is surely found, but the loss seems greater. Ghalib did not write for the craftsmanship but created layers of meanings in his Ghazals. As he says in one of his letters, “Poetry is not measuring of rhyme or syllables, but creation of new meaning/ themes”. بھائی شاعری معنی آفرینی ہے، قافیہ پیمائی نہیں۔ Every word that he uses in his poetry is a treasure of aesthetic values and poetic truths. His verse has the capacity to bewilder the readers each time they read them. But does this apply to Ghalib in translation also?

The value Ghalib has in Urdu is not translatable to English. Urdu being a syllable timed language becomes impossible to translate into English, which is a stress timed language and the beauty of it gets lost somewhere in this process. Among the various forms of poetry in Urdu, Ghazal is the worst hit. When a Ghazal is translated into English, it ceases to be a Ghazal. All we have in front of us are couplets- looking us in the eye, stark and naked with meanings assigned to them. The Ghazal as a poem is found no more. It dies; it gets killed in the process of translation. But this death is not devastating, with its death new microcosms, the couplets are born. Each couplet acts as a separate and independent poem in itself. But in this process, the Ghazal is reduced to two liners and the beauty of the Ghazal as a genre is lost forever. Though the *shers* in a Ghazal are not linked together, still they contain a beauty in itself within the confines of a Ghazal.

Having broken the Ghazal into these small units, further violence is done to them while they are translated into English by removing the ambiguity. (*Ambiguity here is used in the sense that Empson uses it in his Seven Types of Ambiguity*). Since a translator must translate the meaning which should be clear, and not ambiguous. But Ambiguity is the soul of Ghalib’s

SP Publications  
**International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)**

**An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal**

[www.ijoes.in](http://www.ijoes.in)

Vol-1, Issue-4, 2019

ISSN: 2581-8333

Indexed in  Directory of Research Journals Indexing

Poetry and if it is removed, the verses do not remain the same. The multiple meanings of the verses of Ghalib is not possible in English.

میرے ابہام پہ ہوتی ہے تصدق تو ضیح

میرے اجمال سے کرتی ہے تراوش تفصیل

As Montaigne says about translation, "...; but it is risky to undertake (*translate*) those who have given their language much grace and elegance, particularly with a language of less power". (Montaigne) However great the genius of a translator may be, when it comes to translate Ghalib, all genius seems fall short. As one of the translators of Ghalib, Ralph Russell says. "...; that I do not think that these English versions are, in general, such as would fully satisfy an English-speaking public in countries where English is the mother tongue ...". (Russell 71-87). Russell admits that native speakers of English would not be satisfied with the Ghalib in translation, but the fact remains whether it is the translation that is problematic or the poetry. The translators themselves know that whatever they do is insufficient to send the meaning across but that is what they could do.

Ghalib is a difficult poet. Sometimes, his poetry needs to be read over and over again to get the meaning or the meanings. That's why we have a substantial number of commentaries on Ghalib in Urdu. This has been done by a great Ghalib Scholar from Columbia University Frances W. Pritchett. She has written extensively on Urdu poetry and maintains a website by the name A Desertful of Roses (<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ghalib/>), which is her work exclusively on Ghalib. It is an open access repository of Ghalib in English. She has translated 234 Ghazals/ 1459 Couplets of Ghalib's Ghazals with considerable number of commentaries translated into English by her and for this work she deserves 'sweat equity'. Having worked on Ghalib for more than ten years, she has learned Hindi and Urdu languages. She has been the student of Prof. C M. Naim, the first commentator of Ghalib in English. Her work is the only substantial achievement of the English world for Ghalib.

Undeniably, the translatability or untranslatability of poetry remains an enigma that the translator attempts to resolve. But the success of these translators may not satisfy us as the admirers of Ghalib.

جان دی دی ہوئی اُسی کی تھی / حق تو یوں ہے حق ادا نہ ہوا۔

He gave me life and I offered it back to him/ What is so special in giving what was His alone? (Uniyal)

- 1a) [I] gave [my] life-- the given [life] was only/emphatically hers/his  
1b) [He] gave [us] life-- the given [life] was only/emphatically His  
2) The right/truth is like this: that the right/claim did not become fulfilled (Pritchett)  
The yielding back of life is but the repayment of a loan, / For it was he who gave to us our  
lives, all his own (Raina)

ہے پرے سرحدِ ادراک سے میرا مسجود / قبلہ کو اہل نظر قبلہ نما کہتے ہیں

- 1) beyond the limit of the senses is [their/our] own {worship/prostration}-object  
2) people of vision call the *Qiblah* the '*Qiblah*-pointer' (Pritchett)

Russell, Raina And Uniyal have not translated this verse at all.

بوئے گل، نالہ دل، دود چرائِ محفل / جو تیری بزم سے نکلا سو پریشان نکلا

- 1) scent of the rose, lament of the heart, smoke of the lamp of the gathering  
2) whoever/whatever emerged from your gathering, emerged disordered/dispersed (Pritchett)  
The scent of flowers, silent moan, the smoke from pensive flame, -/ Whatever emerged  
from your abode took Despair for its name (Raina)

شوق ہر رنگ میں رقیبِ سر و سامان نکلا / قیس تصویر کے پردے میں بھی عریاں نکلا۔

- 1) ardor in every mode/colour turned out to be an enemy/Rival of proper-possession  
2) Qais, even/also in the veil of a picture, turned out to be naked (Pritchett)  
Never could this world of safe device defiant love surpass; / No trappings could ever  
conceal the fact of Majnu's nakedness. (Raina)

Again Russell and Uniyal has not translated these.

محبت تھی چمن سے لیکن اب یہ بے دماغی ہے / کہ موجِ بوئے گل سے ناک میں آتا ہے دم میرا۔

- 1) I loved the garden-- but now, there is *this* [much] irritation--  
2a) that the breath comes into my nose with a wave of rose-scent  
2b) that by a wave of rose-scent, I am disgusted/harassed (Pritchett)

کوئی ویرانی سی ویرانی ہے / دشت کو دیکھ کے گھریا د آیا۔

What is this wilderness before my wilderness? / I imagine my home in the forest again  
(Uniyal)

Mr Sunil Uniyal translates the *matla* of this Ghazal thus:

Those moist eyes have come to my mind once again/ My heart and liver thirst for a lament again.

(Uniyal)

Despair urged me on to seek some desolate sanctuary, / But desolation, as I recalled my house, less desolate seemed to be (Raina)

1a) now *that/this* is a desolation-like desolation!

1b) is *this* a desolation-like desolation?!

1c) is there any desolation-like desolation anywhere?

2) having seen the desert, the home came to mind/recollection (Pritchett)

ہوس کو ہے نشاطِ کار کیا کیا / نہ ہو مرنا تو جینے کا مزہ کیا۔

From Desire many joys of action spring/ If there's no death, will we relish life? (Uniyal)

The Things that zest inspires the men to do!/ were there no death, what dullness would ensue!  
(Raina)

What urges to achieve, desire has brought us!/ And but for death where would be life's joys?  
(Russell)

1a) what various joys of action Desire has!

1b) what various joys of action does Desire have?

1c) as if Desire has various joys of action!

2a) if we did not have to die, then is there relish in life?

2b) if we did not have to die, then what relish is there in life?

2c) if we did not have to die, then what relish there is in life!

2d) if we did not have to die, then-- as if there's any relish in life!

ایمان مجھے روکے ہے جو کھینچنے ہے مجھے کفر / کعبہ میرے پیچھے ہے کلیسا میرے آگے۔

My faith restrains me while the lure of unbelief attracts me/ That way the Kaba: and this way, the church before my eyes (Russell)

Conscience holds me back from sin, Temptation drags me on; / The Idols lie in front of me, behind me the holy Dawn! (Raina)

ہے خبر گرم ان کے آنے کی / آج ہی گھر میں بوریا نہ ہوا

Is translated as

The news comes hot that she is on her way/ Just on the day my house is empty, bare.  
(Russell)

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She means to honour my abode, the rumour is about/ What irony, my only mat I should  
be without (Raina)

I hear a guest is visiting today, / But there is no bedding in my house. (Uniyal)  
there is fresh/recent news of her/his/their coming--/

only/emphatically today, in the house a straw-mat did not appear/occur! (Pritchett)

In the present study, some examples of translations which do not seem to present Ghalib in his true colour are discussed. The examples from Ralph Russell, Sunil Uniyal, Raina's Ghalib and Frances Pritchett have been taken. While some of the translations are unable to decipher the flavour and uniqueness of the original, there's is a considerable number of translations that do justice to it. Mr. Sunil Uniyal has translated some of the verses quite literally, and has maintained fidelity to the text. To quote Paul Valery, "Fidelity to meaning alone is a kind of betrayal". Ralph Russell has done considerable justice in his translation of Ghalib. Russell is a communist and presents Ghalib as a forced revolutionary at places or a predecessor of Progressive writers, which I believe he was not. Likewise, other translators use their ideology to interpret and assign meaning to the poetry of Ghalib and thus follow the regime. "Raina's Ghalib", a translation of Ghalib by Prof Badri Raina is more of a *transcreation* than translation. It is a beautiful rendering of the poetry of Ghalib, but you may not find Ghalib "Ghalib" in the translation. As is the case with Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyam, Penguin published a literal translation of Omar Khayyam, which is barely relateable to Fitzgerald. Raina's Ghalib may be read in the same vein.

Having spilled all pessimism, the translations of Ghalib remain relevant. If he were not translated, a lot of literature lovers would have been bereft of the pleasure of knowing the most magical poet of our country. The command that Ghalib has on our hearts is such that even after the lapse of 147 years he is read, felt, quoted, sung, translated, *transcreated* and appreciated. There may be a section of readers who may find Ghalib obscure. But to every serious scholar, Ghalib is a deity and shall remain so for a long time to come.

The charm of Ghalib is so magical and captivating that even the prose writers of his time could not remain uninfluenced by his writing. Ghalib is a maestro who can keep the readers of every age surprising. He does not belong to just one age, but is relevant even today.

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[www.ijoes.in](http://www.ijoes.in)

Vol-1, Issue-4, 2019

ISSN: 2581-8333

Indexed in  Directory of  
Research  
Journals Indexing

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