

Persian Prosody and Kashmiri Poetry

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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 a poet's extraordinary creative personality — endowed with imagination and sensibility — representing the intensely individual music of his thought patterns that shapes his art. A poem or 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 power 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 composition that is mechanical and frigid, lacking in imagination, intensity of thought and insight and, above all, the powerful expression, the essence of poetry.

The earliest Kashmiri poems, *chume padas*, *vakhs* and *shruks* belong essentially to an oral tradition and are primarily didactic and spiritual in character. The *vakhs* and *shruks* composed by the pioneers of Kashmiri poetry Lal Ded and Shaikh al-'Ālam, are undoubtedly heights of a long ranging poetic legacy. The prosody of the *padas*, *vakhs* and *shrukhs* 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 these prosodic variations 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 sound effects that we find in these *vakhs* and *shruks*. A European scholar Sir George Grierson, who has made a remarkable contribution to Indian linguistic studies, wrote

with reference to the prosody of the *vakhs* of Lal Ded, that this type of prosody existed nowhere right from Iran down to the North India.¹ He further wrote that despite the number of the feet in some of the lines being equal, this prosodic scheme did not emerge as a pattern as it is strictly followed after the second or third halves of the poem.²

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. The system of prosody in Sanskrit is at many a place loose and flexible and that this looseness and flexibility is all too evident in Hindi poetry.³ Abur Raihan Al- Biruni has written in his book *Kitabul Hind*:

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, modern Persian and Urdu also felt comfortable with most of the metres of Arabic prosody while 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 became the lingua franca of the valley like other regions and cultural zones. As such, Persian poetry got introduced in Kashmir, though the genres of *mathnavi* and *ghazal* developed as distinctive poetic forms in Kashmiri at a later stage. With the emergence of poets like Mir Syed Abdullah

Baihaqi, Fakhir, Mahmood Gami, Rasool Mir, Maqbool Shah, Persian prosody gained popularity as these poets employed the Persian metres in their *ghazals* and *mathnavies* while adhering to the old Kashmiri folk qualitative metres in their *vatsans* for being an indigenous Kashmiri poetic genre and form, and 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-gur*. 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 some of its metres well, 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 in being more rhythmic, comprehensive, diverse and dynamic. Syed Muhammad Hadi Fakhir was perhaps the first Kashmiri poet who composed *ghazals* in Kashmiri with thorough mastery in 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 Musamman Mahzoof* which manifests his command over the metre:

Faailaaton __ Faailaaton _____ Faailaaton __ Faailun

Doori due thom 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:

(1) *Bahre Hazaj*. The standard foot is *Mafaeelun*, four times repetition in *Musamman Saalim* and three times repetition in *Musaddas Saalim* along with the variations:

- a. *Hazaj Musamman Maqbooz*—four times repetition of *Mafaailun*.
- b. *Hazaj Musamman Ashlar*—two times repetition of *Faailun Mafaeelun* in one hemistich.
- c. *Hazaj Musamman Akhrab* —*Mafool Mafaeelun* twice in one line.
- d. *Hazaj Musamman Akhrab Makfoof Maqsoor*—the four feet being *Mafool Mafaeel Mafaeel Mafaeel*.
- e. *Hazaj Musamman Akhrab Makfoof Mahzooful Aakhir*—the forefeet being *Mafool Mafaeel Mafaeel Faoolun*.

(2) *Bahre Ramal*—standard foot: *Faailaatun*—four times and three times repetition in *Ramal Musamman Saalim* and *Ramal Musaddas Saalim* respectively.

The varied popular forms of this meter are:

- a. *Ramal Musamman Mahzoof*—the feet being *Faailaatun Faailaatun Faailaatun Faailun*.
- b. *Ramal Musamman Majnoon*—four times repetition of *Faailaatun*.
- c. *Ramal Musamman Mashkool*—two times repetition of *Faailaatun Faailaatun*.
- d. *Ramal Musamman Majnoon Maqtoo*—its feet are *Faailaatun Faailaatun Faailaatun Falun*.

(3) *Bahre Rajaz*—standard foot *Mustafilun*— four times and three times repetition in *Musamman Saalim* and *Musaddas Saalim* respectively. The other variations in this meter are *Rajaz Musamman Matvi*, *Rajaz Musaman Matvi Majnoon*, *Rajaz Musamman Majnoon Matvi*.

(4) *Bahre Kaamil*—standard foot *Mutafaailun*—four times and three times repetition in *Musamman Saalim* and *Musaddas Saalim* respectively.

(5) *Bahre Mutaqaarib*—standard foot *Faoolun*—four times repetition in *Musamman Saalim* and three times repetition in *Musadas Saalim* with variations such as *Mutaqaarib Musamman Mahzoof*, *Mutaqaarib Musamman Maqsoor*, *Mutaqaarib Musamman Maqbooz Aslam*, *Mutaqaarib Musamman asram Saalimul Akhir*.

(6) *Bahre Mutadaarik*—standard foot *Faailun*—four times repetition in *Musamman* along with the variations such as *Mutadaarik Musamman Mahzoof*, *Mutadaarik Musamman Majnoon*.

(7) *Bahre Munsara*—this meter has neither been used as *Saalim* nor as *Musaddas*. Some of its varied forms used by Kashmiri poets are *Munsara Matvi Maqsoof*, *Munsara Musaman Matvi Manhoor*, *Munsara Musaman Matvi Majdoo*.

(8) *Bahre Muzaare*—it has not been used in standard form nor has anybody used it as *Musaddas*. In this meter *Faailaatun* is *Mafrooqi* i.e. *F-aa-ilaatun*. The two popular most varied forms of this metre used by the Kashmiri poets are *Muzaare Musamman Akhrab*, *Muzaaria Musamman Akhrab Maqfoof*.

(9) *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 Musaman Majnoon Mahzoof Maqtoo*—feet being *Mafaailun Failaatun Mafaailun Falun* and *Mujtas Musamman Majnoon*—feet being *Mafaailun Failaatun Mafaailun Failaatun*. It will not be out of place to mention here that *Mujtas Musamman Majnoon Mahzoof 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 Musamman Majnoon* was for the first time used by the modern Kashmiri romantic poet Rafiq Raaz in his famous *ghazal*

tse chhuy kunyar ti labi kus vanjaayijaayi nisf reets
bi chhus kunuy ti vasakh na mya nish khudayi nisf reets

-- provoking Prof. Rahman Rahi to compose his famous *ghazal* in this metre.

zaban te drai bewafhi kathan tiphor matsar aekher

It is also worth mentioning that a poet like Mirza Ghalib wrote a solitary Urdu *ghazal* in this *bahr*.

*ajab nishaat sejallad ke chale hain ham aagey
kyi apne saaya se sar panu se hai do qadam aagey*

(10) Last but not the least is *Bahre Khafeef*—this metre has only one popular form in Kashmiri i.e. *Faailaatun Mafaailun Falun*. As has been the tradition in Urdu it is neither used in standard nor in *musamman* form; it is rather popularly used in *Musaddas*.

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 term. No doubt the Kashmiri poets have composed four-lined poems with considerable 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 Prof. Marghoob Baanhaali cannot lend themselves to the prosody of the *Rubai*. G. N. Khayal's translation of *Rubai-Umar Khayyam* are remarkable contribution to Kashmiri poetry. According to Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Khayal seems to have excelled Khyam at many places. Having said this, the fact remains that even Khayal too has not adhered to the prosody of *rubai* as the phonological features of Kashmiri language and its natural rhythm are not in tune with it.

During the second half of the twentieth century, some exhaustive and comprehensive discussions were made on the prosody of the Kashmiri language and during the last ten years some good books on the subject have been published by eminent scholars of the Kashmiri language. Amin Kamil—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 inevitable.⁶ In Prof. Rahman 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 vernacular.⁷ Prof. Shafi Shauq⁸ and Rafiq Raaz⁹ have also considerably contributed to these discussions.

Notes and References

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- ¹ Munawar Naji and Shauq Shafi, 1992. *Nov Kashri Adbuk Tawareekh*. Srinagar: Kashmiri Department Kashmir University.
- ² Ibid.
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- ⁴ Ahmad Qeyammudin. 1999. (ed.), *India by Al Biruni*. New Delhi: National Book Trust of India.
- ⁵ Stein Aurel. 1989. *Hatim's Tales* (Kashmiri stories and songs)
- ⁶ Kaamil Amin. 2001. *Javaban Chu Arz*. Srinagar.
- ⁷ Rahi Rahman. 2000. *Kashir Shayiri Te Waznuq Sooratihal*. Srinagar.
- ⁸ Masoodi M. M. 1997 (ed.). *Contribution of Kashmir to Persian*. Srinagar, DRS Wing, P.G. Department of Persian, University Of Kashmir.
- ⁹ Asmi, Majid. 2004. (ed.), *Shiraza* (Kashmiri). Srinagar: Cultural Academy.