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ENGLISH GHAZAL: AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract - Ghazal has achieved an immense popularity in today's world literature. As a poetic genre it has won a wide acclaim. Ghazal is not merely a special proud and privilege of Arabian / Persian poetry (languages in which ghazal was born) but today ghazal is composed in all the major languages of the world. The themes and structure of ghazal influenced the European languages also. Ghazal has developed, widened its scope and has found a special position in the poetic world of Italian, French, German, Spanish and English language. Due to its intrinsic beauty, modesty, philosophical and romantic touch to all the facets of life, it appealed to many English poets. Many poets living in many countries have written poems in ghazal form. A few poets gained perfection and some poets adopted only the structural aspect of ghazal but their ghazals hardly have the peculiar characteristics that may suit for ghazal. The present paper is an attempt to introduce some renowned English ghazal writers who have prospered and glorified this extraordinary poetic genre.

Keywords: Ghazal, Arabian, Persian, theme, structure, poetic genre

Introduction -

Ghazal which has its origin in Arabic / Persian poetry is no longer a proud and privilege of Arabic, Persian and Urdu poetry but it has attained a special position in many principal languages of the world like English, German, Spanish, French, Italian etc. Ghazal is a special attribute of the poetically gifted and extraordinary geniuses. The poet's poetic talent, his / her knowledge of rhetorics, aesthetic sense, mastery over diction, metre and structure, sense of perception all combine together to make ghazal artistically, thematically and structurally perfect. The history of the origin and development of ghazal is quite interesting. It was originated from Arabic poetical type 'Qasida' which was 'a poetry of praise'. Due to its intrinsic beauty, modesty, delicacy, youthful vigour and immediate response from the audience ghazal has become one of the most favourite poetic forms. The structure of ghazal, its thematic variety, its epigrammatic terseness, telling simple things in innovative and excellent manner, use of proverbial language greatly appealed English poets and consequently they turned to ghazal tradition.

Origin of ghazal -

Long before the adoption of Islam, the Arabs sowed the seeds of ghazal in Arabian deserts. In search of water and to earn their livelihood the Arabs wandered from one place to another in the deserts like nomads. Their lives were full of difficulties, hardships and poverty. They could hardly find any opportunity for entertainment. But at the end of the day, they used to meet and shared their feelings with each other. Some poetically gifted writers arranged 'poet's meets'. These poets performed public singing. These poets used to entertain the audience after long hours of labour. 'Qasida' was one of the most preferred form of singing which became extremely popular. 'Qasida' was a long poem written to praise the heroic deeds of their leaders, heroes or ancestors. It was a general custom to introduce a 'Tashbeeb' of two lines before presenting Qasida. Tashbeeb which was always abounding in love, romance was sung first and then the Qasida was presented before the audience.

The Arabs accepted the Islam and started the mission of spreading their religion. They announced a battle of religion called 'Jihad' against Persia / Iran also. As a consequence of war and acceptance of Islam, the cultural dissemination took place in Persia / Iran. Qasida which was popular among the Arabs, also gained special place in Iran.

It is mentioned in the history that a noted Persian poet Ki Rudaki (880-941) took an initiative to separate Tashbeeb from Qasida. Due to the romantic nature of Tashbeeb, it appealed Ki Rudaki. He composed a poem of these two lines (couplets) and this was the first ghazal. The Persian poets were attracted towards this newly formed poetic genre. The first ghazal was thus composed in Persian language. As a result of Muslim invasions and the mission to spread Islam, the Muslims introduced ghazal to various countries.

The word ghazal is of thus Arabic origin which literally means 'conversation with women' or 'a talk about women'. In Persian 'ghazal' has a different meaning 'the last melancholic cry of deer cornered by hunters'. Ghazal is a series of couplets (sher) in which every couplet is an independent poem itself, like a pearl in necklace. These couplets are of the same length and metre.

Structure of Ghazal -

Ghazal consists of five main components - matla (first couplet), makta (concluding couplet), bahar (metre), qafiya (monorhyme) and radif (refrain) and a collection of couplets (sher) which follow the rules of these above mentioned components is called as a true ghazal. These components unite together to form a precise structure of ghazal. Matla, makta, bahar, qafiya and radif so eloquently unite in ghazal that nobody can even imagine to separate one component from another.

The couplets are constructed as pearls on a necklace, when united they form a necklace and when dispersed they show their separate identity. There is a break in thought, feeling in all the couplets of a ghazal but there is an epigrammatic terseness and each couplet is proposed to be thematically separate lyric.

While reading a ghazal, the first thing captures the reader's attention and that is its Matla. The first couplet of a ghazal is known as Matla. This is the only couplet where both the lines rhyme together. In rest of the couplets the fourth, sixth, eighth etc. lines (second line of each couplet) rhyme with the matla. While the first couplet of ghazal is called as matla, the final couplet is called to be makta. The last couplet of ghazal often employs the poet's Takhallus (signature) or pen name of ghazal writer in very creative ways.

Bahar (metre) is a soul of ghazal because it is metre which declares ghazal's unity and conformity. In the first couplet called matla, both lines must rhyme and have exactly the same matraa (syllables) structure (same total as well as the same order). Metre proves the ghazal writer's particular mood and his / her emotional integrity. He / she has to put every syllable in each line in a single metre. If he is unable, he is supposed to be failed in composing ghazal. The poet / ghazal writer is not allowed to add or delete a single letter (word is even more bigger thing) in a line in any couplet.

Structurally there are two types of ghazal. (1) Muraddaf, and (2) Gair-muraddaf ghazal. There are some ghazals that do not have refrain (radif). Such ghazals are called as 'gair-muraddaf ghazal'. But in most of the cases, the ghazals have both monorhyme (qafiya) and refrain (radif). Ghazals having both, monorhyme and refrain are called as muraddaf ghazals. Thematically also, ghazal is of two types. (1) Musalsal, and (2) Gair musalsal ghazal. Every couplet is an independent poem in itself. It means, there is no continuity of thought among all the couplets. But there are many ghazals where all the couplets have the similar theme. The ghazals having all the couplets on the same theme are called as musalsal ghazals. The ghazals having all the couplets on a different - different themes are called as gair-musalsal ghazals.

The journey of ghazal from Arabic / Persia to other countries and other languages is quite interesting. Ghazal was originated in Arabic / Persian language before thousand years. Dr. Reza Zadeh Shafegh calls Abdullah Jafar Rudaki (859-941) as 'the first of the great poets of Iran'. He is called as the forefather of ghazal. From Persia it came to Turkey, Indonesia, India and other countries in 12th century and the poets residing in these countries tried

composing ghazal into Urdu and Hindi. The poets who followed Persian poet Rudaki and are regarded as greatest Persian ghazal writers of all time are Hafiz, Sinai, Jalaluddin Ali Afshani, Al Khaqani, Al Anwari, Muslihuddin Saadi, Farid Al Din Attar, Rashid Al Din, Jalal Al Din Rumi etc.

Amir Khusro (1253-1325) wrote ghazals in Persian as well as in Hindavi language (earliest form of Hindi). Ghalib is a world famous practitioner of Urdu ghazal and Mir Taqi Mir, Mir Dard, Hali, Daag Dehalavi, Mirza Soz, Sauda, Momin, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Mohd. Allama Iqbal, Mohd Wali, Janisar Akhtar, Jigar Muradabadi, Sahir, Qateel Shifai, Hafiz Jalandhari, Zauq, Dushyantkumar are some prominent Urdu ghazal writers of all time.

Ghazal was introduced into Europe in 19th century through translations of Persian literary works. A renowned German poet Goethe's 'West Eastern Divan' was a famous collection of ghazals and Goethe's ghazals inspired other poets like Hammer Purgstel, Friedrich Ruckert, August Von Platen. Dingelstedt's contribution to German ghazal is praiseworthy. Ghazal spread out from Persian speaking areas, first into the Indian subcontinent and the Turkish region of Asia and then Europe. Ghazals were also written in Spain, in Arabic and Hebrew. Moses Ibn Ezra (1058-1155) was a notable ghazal writer of Hebrew ghazal. Turkish ghazal writer Fuzuli (1483-1556) and Afgani poet Ali Shir Navai played an important role in spreading ghazal in their Turkish language.

It is in the 20th century that the ghazal creation witnessed prosperity and glory to an excellent extent. In 20th century James Clarence, Mangan, Andrienne Rich, Phyllis Webb, James Elroy Flecker tried to experiment this poetic form in English. In the later half of the 20th century the ghazal started to be recognised as a poetic form in English language. A number of American poets were attracted by this poetic form but a few including Agha Ali, W. S. Merwin, John Hollander, Elise Paschen could employ successfully this form in their poetry. They tried to achieve perfection in ghazal structure. The ghazals they composed are better called as 'free ghazals'. Their ghazals resemble to be ghazals as their couplets show separate identity as independent poems and their efforts to follow metrical pattern. A majority of contemporary ghazals are written in free verse. Following the structural pattern of ghazal, the contemporary ghazal writers tried to display internal consistency relating line and length. In today's literary scenario some English poets have succeeded to establish themselves as English ghazal writers. The poets like Patricia Smith, Len Anderson, William, Matthews, Diana Ackerman, Paul Muldoon, Ellent Briant Voigt, Elizabeth Spires, John Canaday, Martha Collins, Richard Kenney, Barbara Little, Glyn Maxwell, Peggy O'Brien, Peg Peoples, John Richard Reed, Sagaree Sengupta, Francis Brabron, Robert Fly, Andrew Chumbley, Lorna Croizer, Judith Fitzgerald, Jim Harrison, Galway Kinnell, Marilyn Krysl, Maxim Kumin, Edward Lowbury, Robert Pinsky, Spencer Reece, John Thomson, Natasha Thretwey, John Edgar Wideman, Elenor Wilner, Rob Winger composed poems in ghazal's poetic form.

Agha Shahid Ali's contribution to English ghazal and its spread is well known. He is widely considered to be a proponent of this Persian poetic form in English. There are some magazines and journals which regularly publish English ghazals. R. W. Watkins is an editor of 'Contemporary Ghazals'. This is the only regular English Journal which is devoted to this poetic genre.

As already mentioned above Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali is called as a proponent writer of English ghazal. He is virtually a one man champion of what he calls 'true ghazal'. His 'Call Me Ishmael Tonight' is a collection of his original ghazals in English. In 2000, he edited a book of ghazals 'Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English' which consists English ghazals of 107 poets. This book has won a worldwide fame and after the publication of this ghazal collection a number of English poets in Canada, England, America and even in India turned to English ghazal writing. "It is Ali who has led the development of English ghazals in a form faithful in both spirit and letter to the Urdu model. He adheres to the rules of lines length as well as metre, rhyme and refrain. Most important he captures ghazal's essential emotion".¹ Agha Shahid Ali's ghazals employ his invulnerability, sadness

for the decaying civilizations which were once marked with religious diversity, cultural and social harmony. His exile from his homeland, lost tradition and language, personal loss, his nostalgia, memory of his past country are the representative themes of his ghazal.

Andrienne Rich's contribution to English ghazal deserves special praise. Her collaborative work with Aijaz Ahmed is well known. She started writing English ghazal in 1970's. Andrienne Rich published 'Ghazals: Homage to Ghalib', 'The Blue Ghazal' (1968), 'Leaflets' (1969), 'The Will to Change' (1971), 'Late Ghazal' (1994), 'Dark Fields of the Republic: Poem' (1995). Most of the ghazals of Andrienne Rich are based on love, politics of the day and her yearning for the emancipation of women, homosexuals etc. Andrienne tried to insert into her poetry new words, new images, concepts and myths from foreign literature. Beside her own ghazals she also translated Urdu ghazals of Mirza Ghalib into English which brought her fame and established her as a good translator and a critic. Rich has succeeded in connecting her personal life to public life and her efforts to shatter the dominance of patriarchy, fight against racism are criticized by many. Rich was inspired by Mirza Ghalib. 'Similar to the Urdu and Persian ghazal, Rich creates disunited and autonomous couplets in her ghazals and brings unity to them by creating an association between its images. The feature of disunity of couplets allowed Rich to bring together diverse subject matter into a single poem'.² Like Ghalib, Andrienne Rich abundantly use nature elements to express her ideas, like Ghalib she creates an ambiguity in her couplets and like him she practices a number of allusions to other literary, social, economic, political and historical personalities and incidents.

W. S. Merwin was a Pulitzer Prize Winner and a great literary personality of America of 20th century. When Aijaz Ahmed, a great Pakistani critic and literateur living in New York took the project of publishing translations of 'Ghalib's Ghazals' into English on Ghalib's centennial death anniversary in 1969. W. S. Merwin contributed Aijaz's project. 'The book's contributor's included four future Pulitzer Prize Winners who already enjoyed a certain stature in the literary community: W. S. Merwin, Andrienne Rich, William Stafford and Mark Strand'.³ In stead of this contribution Merwin published his own English ghazals in his poetry collections, some reputed magazines, periodicals and edited ghazal books. He also contributed to Agha Shahid Ali's 'Ravishing Disunities – Real Ghazals in English'.

John Hollander is a famous American poet, editor and anthologist. He is famous as free ghazal writer of America and known for his open ghazals. He has written ghazals usually without the strict pattern of traditional form.

Phyllis Webb is a Canadian poet and a writer who worked as a broadcaster. In the preface of her book 'Water and Light', Phyllis Webb writes that her antighazals focus on the particular, the local, the dialectical and personal. Her ghazals are better called as antighazals and her antighazals present her love feelings, intimate relationship between male and female and her poetic and personal experiences. "Webb defies every rule of the ghazal form and the ghazals-ness of her ghazals or antighazals is in question. How are they different from a western poem? In a broader sense she had departed from the structure of the ghazal. From a personal standpoint what Webb presents cannot be deemed as a ghazal not even a reflection of the notion of ghazals".⁴

Len Anderson is an American poet and physicist. He is famous for his 'Invented by the Night' and 'Affection for the Unknowable'. He wrote several English ghazals as well as published his various articles on ghazal verse form. Patricia Smith is an American author of seven books of poetry and a winner of National poetry slam for four times. She has won numerous awards for her remarkable contribution to poetry. She is a journalist, poet, mystery writer, a historian, a performer and children's book writer and specially famous for her hip-hop ghazals.

Elise Paschen is a renowned American writer and a poet of worldwide fame who wrote 'Bestiary', 'Houses', 'Coasts', 'Infidelities' and she also published her poems and

ghazals in 'The New Yorker', 'The New Republic', 'Ploughshares' etc. Jim Harrison is a significant American writer, novelist, a poet and an essayist. Though he was a versatile writer, he called his poetry 'the true bones of my life'. His 'Outlyer and Ghazals' (1971) was published by Simon and Schuster, New York. John Thompson was a Canadian poet, translator and University professor. He is well recognized for his mastery of poetic forms. He is widely credited as the first to bring the ghazal to Canada. He published his ghazals in his 'Stilt Jack' (1978) and his preface to this book of ghazals is also well known for his criticism of ghazals.

Denise Levertov is a prolific writer, poet, essayist, activist and humanist. Under Anderienne Rich's influence she started composing ghazals in English and published her ghazals as 'Broken Ghazals' but her ghazals are not so successful as genuine ghazals. James Clarence Mangan, an Irish poet and a scholar is specially praised for his 'Dark Rosaleen', 'Siberia' and 'A Nameless One'. He is a romantic poet and is compared to S. T. Coleridge. His ghazals comprise a variety of themes. Elizabeth Spires is a renowned American University teacher and a poetess famous for her 'Worldling', 'The Wave Maker', 'Swan's Island' etc. Her ghazals are marked by her personal experiences, themes of parting, nature, culture, politics, distress and depression in contemporary world, remembrance of past etc.

In this way, some noted ghazal writers have widened the scope of English ghazal. English ghazal and its prosperity flourished mostly in America and now a days many American poets have turned to ghazal writing due to its intrinsic beauty, natural rhythm, dramatic paradox, contradictory statements, imaginative thinking, immediate reader's response and a variety of themes of love, unconditional love, society, mysticism, humanity and what not?

Conclusion -

In recent literary scenario, the ghazal tradition is practiced in many countries like India, Pakistan, Iran, America, Germany, Spain, England, France, Italy etc. In some countries ghazals are set to music and have gained commercial popularity as recordings and in movies. A number of English poets tried their hand in this comparatively difficult poetic genre. Ghazal came from Arabia / Persia and soon attracted the attention of the worldwide poets and today we see that in the hands of inborn and talented literary geniuses it has glorified and won a position as literary genre of great pride and prestige. Ghazal which was once revolved round the general themes of wine and love has widened its scope and today in the hands of great craftsmen ghazal has represented a diversity of themes and there is no topic in the world which is remained untouched by ghazal writers. This paper is an attempt to pay tribute to the representative English ghazal writers like Andrienne Rich, Agha Shahid Ali, John Hollander, Patricia Smith, W. S. Merwain, Phyllis Webb, Len Anderson, William Matthew, Elizabeth Spires etc. for their remarkable contribution to English ghazal and its development.

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