

Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions
By Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

Conventions of Love, Love of Conventions: Urdu Love Poetry in the Eighteenth Century By Shamsur Rahman Faruqi

Next to our own, the eighteenth century is the most exciting, vibrant, and productive century in more than five hundred years of literary production in Urdu. Perhaps the most remarkable thing that happened in Urdu literature during that time—traditionally represented by British historiography-influenced writers as a period of decay and disintegration—was the consolidation and discovery of a poetics, of a whole new way of charting out a course for literary creativity in a language that, in Delhi at least, was still a little tottery on its legs in the field of literary production. Delhi, even in the middle of the eighteenth century, boasted of Persian as the *zaban-e urdu-e mua'alla-e shahjahanabad* (the language of the exalted city of Shahjahanabad). It described Sanskrit as *hindi-e kitabi*¹ (learned Hindi=Indian), and the city's common, spoken language, was known as plain *Hindi* or *Hindvi*. Very little literature in *Hindi/Hindvi* was produced in Delhi during the period 1600-1700—and hardly any during the four preceding centuries—and the literary form of *Hindi* in which this literature was produced was called *Rekhta* (mixed, poured, cement-and-mortar, etc). The term *Urdu* as *language name* came into use much later. *Rekhta/Hindi* remained the universal name for the language until very nearly the end of the eighteenth century.

Rekhta may have begun independently, as a pidgin. It is more likely that it began as a kind of macaronic verse in Hindi, and gradually assumed a life of its own, so much that the pidgin element was eliminated, giving room to a literary Hindi, such as was already being written in the Deccan, particularly Aurangabad, under the name of Dakani and/or Hindi. However, Delhi, with its cosmopolitan cultural environment, long continued to look upon *Rekhta* with a faint air of disapproval, as something different from, and inferior to Persian. There is a famous verse by Qa'im Chandpuri (1724-94):

*Qa'im, it was I who gave
To Rekhta the manner
Of the ghazal. For otherwise
It was just a feeble thing,*

¹ Sirajuddin Ali Khan-e Arzu, *Navadirul Alfaz*, Ed., Dr Syed Abdullah, Karachi, Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, 1992 [1951], [1746-52] p. 6 and passim.

*In the language of the Deccan.*²

This tendency for the word *ghazal* to be taken to mean only *Persian ghazal*, continued until quite late in Delhi. Thus we have Ghulam Hamadani Mus'hafi (1750-1824), writing around 1820:

*Mus'hafi, I compose Rekhta
Better than the ghazal. So why
Should now one be
A devotee
Of Khusrav and Sa'di?*³

Delhi's Rekhta/Hindi acquired a literary status and a sophistication that was soon to equal, or even surpass, the best achievements of the past three centuries in Gujarat and the Deccan. This happened mainly due to Vali (1665/7-1708), an Aurangabadi or Ahmedabadi by birth, who came to Delhi in 1700. At that time, he was a substantial poet in his own right, regarding only the Persian poets—Iranian or Indo-Persian—as worthy of his mettle. There is a story about Vali being advised at that time by Shah Gulshan, a venerated sufi and Persian poet in Delhi to appropriate the rich store of themes and images in Persian and thus introduce a new depth and space in his Hindi/Dakani. There are reasons to disbelieve this story⁴. There is however little doubt that Vali's full Divan arrived in Delhi in 1720. According to Mus'hafi, Shah Hatim (1699-1783), who was an eye witness to this event, told him that Vali's poetry took Delhi by storm, and became instantly popular with young and old, rich and poor⁵.

It is this Divan which provided a jumpstart to Rekhta/Hindi poetry in Delhi, not only by providing an active model, but also by introducing new theoretical lines of thinking about the nature of poetry, and about how to make poems. In short, Vali seems to have provided both the model, and the theory that went with it.

There is an interesting she'r, again by Mus'hafi, in his third Divan, compiled about 1794. He says:

*Oh Mus'hafi, I have,
In this urdu of the Rekhta
Introduced a thousand new things
Of my own making.*⁶

² Qiyamuddin Qa'im Chandpuri, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Iqtida Hasan, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1965, p 215.

³ Ghulam Hamadani Mushafi, *Divan-e Mushafi*, (the eighth divan), Ed., Abid Riza Bedar, Patna, Khuda Bakhsh Library, 1995, p 52.

⁴ The first person to purvey this tale seems to be Mir in his tazkira, *Nikatush Shu'ara* [1752]. See Mahmud Ilahi, Ed., *Nikatush Shu'ara*, Delhi, Idara-e Tasnif, 1972, p. 91. I have discussed this whole question in some detail in my *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History*, forthcoming from New Delhi, OUP.

⁵ Mushafi, *Tazkira-e Hindi*, Ed., Maulvi Abdul Haq, Aurangabad, Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, 1933, p. 80.

⁶ Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. III, Ed. Hafiz Abbasi, Delhi, Majlis-e Isha'at-e Adab, 1975, p. 79

There is a certain piquancy in the phrase “urdu of the Rekhta”. (What does it mean: Urdu language as derived from the Rekhta? or does “urdu” here mean “royal court, camp, camp-market”? “Royal court” seems the more likely meaning). Yet what is most notable here is the bold assertion of invention, the poet’s confidence and assurance in his own role as a ‘maker’, and not just ‘imitator’ of things in poetry. Judging from the fact that this proudly soaring self-belief is of a poet who wasn’t even born in Delhi, and was not a witness to the momentous arrival, more than sixty years ago, of a new wave of poetry in Delhi, it is easy to see that Rekhta/Hindi poetry in the North came of age within a very short time, and the tree of invention in Rekhta continued to give off new shoots for a long time to come.

The major discovery in theory—we first hear about it in the Deccan, in *Ali Nama* (1672), a long poem by Nusrati Bijapuri—was in the concept of *ma’ni*. Nusrati speaks of *mazmun*, and *ma’ni*, as two separate entities⁷. Classical Arab-Persian literary theory spoke only of *ma’ni*—a word now universally translated as *meaning*—in the sense of the “content” of a poem, the assumption being that a poem meant what it “contained”. Nusrati, however, uses *mazmun* in the sense of theme, content, the thing/object/idea, which the poem is about. The term *ma’ni* he uses to connote “meaning”, that is, the inner, deeper, or wider signification of the poem. Vali too uses the two terms in the senses described above⁸. After him, all Rekhta/Hindi poets in Delhi constantly make use of the distinction for making points about the nature of poetry.

Since the “theme/meaning” distinction doesn’t occur in Arabic or Persian, it is strongly probable that Nusrati, a man of great learning, picked it up directly from the Sanskrit, or from Telugu and Kannada, languages which he would have known, and whose poetics is almost entirely derived from Sanskrit. Or he may have come across this idea in the Persian poets of the “Indian style”, who themselves may have developed it through their direct and indirect contacts with Sanskrit language and literature from mid-sixteenth century on. These contacts, by the way, remained very strong in the eighteenth century all over the sub-continent, and their effects permeated Rekhta/Hindi poetry as well.

Many advantages accrued to Rekhta/Hindi from this discovery about the dual nature of meaning. For our purposes, the most important seems to have been the change in the ontological status of the lover and the beloved. Now, the lover in the poem need not have been the poet himself, nor did the beloved necessarily have to be a “real” or “real-like” person. In the Deccan, Dakani/Hindi poets often spoke in the female voice—poets like Hashimi Bijapuri (1635-1697/8) consistently adopted the female persona in the ghazal. Others moved freely from one persona to the other.

The recognition of the poem being splittable in “What is it about?” and “What does it mean?” meant that the poet could assume any persona—now it was not, for instance, Vali the person, who was speaking in

⁷ Mulla Nusrati Bijapuri, *Ali Nama*, Ed., Abdul Majid Siddiqi, Hyderabad, Salar Jang Dakani Publications Committee, 1969, pp. 9, 27, 425, 426. [circa 1672]

⁸ Vali Dakani, *Kulliyat*, Ed. Nurul Hasan Hashmi, Lahore, Al Vaqar Publications, 1996, p. 177.

the poem, but there was a voice, and Vali the poet was only the articulator of that voice. Again, if the poem could mean something else, or more, or different, from what it was about, the person or object or thing about whom, or as a result of transactions with whom, the poem came into existence, did not need to be fixed in any particular gender, for then that would tend to limit the “meaning” aspect of the poem.

The great nineteenth century Urdu poet Ghalib (1797-1869) made this point nicely, more than two centuries later. Qadr Bilgrami, a pupil of his, sent him a ghazal for correction. The *matla*’ (opening verse) can be translated as follows:

*You brought me into the world
And gave me the poison
Of mortality. What a pity!
You cheated, leaving me alone
In this maze.*

Ghalib wrote back, “ Tell me, who is it you are addressing here? Except for Fate and Destiny, none else, no boy, no woman, can be imagined to be the addressee.... So I changed the person of the verb to plural...now the utterance is directed equally to the worldly beloveds, and Fate and Destiny.”⁹

The contribution of Vali in the development of the new ontology is that in his ghazals, the beloved is occasionally female, often it/he is male, and in many cases, indeterminate. The significance of this is that the notion—articulate or inarticulate— of the protagonist or the speaker in the poem assumes a critical importance. The protagonist-lover could now be just a notion, an ideal lover, whose gender was not so important as the ideas that could be expressed through his medium. Similarly, the beloved became a notion, an ideal, expressed and realised in the poem by whatever metaphorical construct lent itself conveniently at the moment. Just as the woman/man lover was not actually a woman or man, so the woman/man/boy beloved was not actually a woman, man, or boy.

Since the convention of having the “ idea ” of a lover or beloved instead of an actual lover/beloved freed the poet-protagonist-lover from the demands of “reality”, or “realism”, love poetry in Urdu from the last quarter of the seventeenth century onwards consists mostly—if not entirely—of “poems about love”, and not “love poems” in the Western sense of the term. This is true of almost all of Indian style Persian poetry too—for obvious reasons—and even of a lot of other Persian poetry of earlier times. But the distinction between poet—the person who actually wrote the poem-- and protagonist—the person, or the voice, which articulated the poem— was nowhere so seriously adduced and practiced as in the Indian style Persian poetry, and in Urdu love poetry of the eighteenth century.

⁹ Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Khutut-e Ghalib*, Ed., Maulvi Mahesh Parshad/ Malik Ram, Aligarh, Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, (Hind), 1962, p. 262

The ghazal is often described by West-oriented Urdu critics as a “lyric”, and the main quality of the ghazal, as “lyricism”. Modern Urdu critics invented even a new term *taghazzul* (ghazal-ness) to describe this quality. It comes as a surprise, if not an incredible and unpleasant shock, to modern students to be told that the term *taghazzul* does not occur in any work or document extant to us from before 1857, the time when a great discontinuity began in our literary culture through colonialist interventions.

There are serious flaws in the proposition that a ghazal is a lyric, and that a rose by any other name, etc. While there doesn’t exist a single, hegemonic, seamless image of the lyric in Western poetics, the lyric is generally understood there to be a poem in which the poet expresses “personal” emotions and “experiences”, and does not, in the nature of things, assume an external audience for his poem. Both these assumptions are false for the ghazal. We just saw how new developments in Urdu poetics split the poet-poem-as-one notion, in which a main line “lyric” poem would seem to be anchored. As for the audience, since the ghazal was intended to be recited at mushairas and public gatherings, and was in any case largely disseminated by word of mouth, the whole proposition of the ghazal as a “personal-private-no-audience-assumed” text becomes ridiculous.

The idea that the ghazal is a poem in which oral performance plays a great part, has other important consequences. One consequence is that a ghazal may perhaps be expressive of “emotions”, in the ordinary sense of the terms. But these are not necessarily the poet’s “personal” emotions “recollected in tranquility” (Wordsworth), or “the spontaneous expression of the powerful feelings of the heart” (Wordsworth)¹⁰, or the “lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake” (Byron)¹¹. It was the “verbal contraption” in the poem, to use Auden’s phrase, which became the chief object of the poetic exercise. Poems needed to make sense of the experience, or the idea, of love, and in terms that made sense to the audience as a whole, and not a specific individual, beloved, or friend.

Byron was nearer the mark when at another place he said that the poet was “the most artificial” of the artists¹². But the ideas about the nature of poetry—all poetry—that won the day in Urdu through the efforts of the great modernisers of the late nineteenth century were those of the “lava of the imagination” type, and echoed writers like Wordsworth and Hazlitt, who insisted that a certain lack of “art”, and an overflow of “passion” were the hall marks of poetry. Hazlitt, one might recall, said that there was a natural and inalienable connection between passion and music, and music and poetry. Then he went on to say, “Mad people sang”¹³. Small wonder that phrases like *shirin divanagi* (delectable madness) became the stock in trade of our modern critics when they spoke of the kind of ghazal that they admired.

The distinction between *mazmun* (theme, motif), and *ma’ni* led to the recognition of the fact that there was a universe of discourse particular to the

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” in Edmund D. Jones, Ed., *English Critical Essays of the Nineteenth Century*, London, Oxford University Press, 1919, p. 26.

¹¹ Quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, London, OUP, 1977, p. 49

¹² Quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, London, OUP, 1977, p. 49

¹³ Quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 51.

ghazal. Certain kinds of *mazmuns* were admissible in this universe of discourse; others were not. Thus while *mazmuns* were infinite in theory, each *mazmun* had to have affinity with other *mazmuns* before it could be considered a proper subject for poetry. Thus one major convention—common, by the way, to Sanskrit, Indian style Persian poetry, and Indian style Turkish poetry—was that *mazmuns*, even words and images, already used, should be reused, though in a new way, or with a new slant. “Personal” or “personalised” narration was by no means barred, but was not to be encouraged, and preferred only when it made sense in more general terms.

One of the recurrent themes in the eighteenth century Urdu ghazal is the poet’s self-denigration as a “writer of elegies”, and not of poems proper. Here are some examples:

*Nothing falls from the lips of Qudrat
But lamentation. He’s no poet
But an elegist for his own heart.*

(Qudratullah Qudrat, 1713-91)¹⁴

*It’s a whole age
Since Mazhar has been pouring
His lamentations into metre,
And yet in the beloved’s mind,
He doesn’t speak like a poet.*

(Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Janan, 1699-1781)¹⁵

The above verse is in Persian; Mazhar was a major sufi and an important Persian and Urdu poet in Delhi, and is described as having influenced a great many Urdu poets, especially in the first half of the century.

*Don’t describe me as a poet, Oh Mir,
I collected numerous griefs and sorrows
And made up a Divan.*

(Mir, 1722-1810, in the third Divan, compiled circa 1785¹⁶).

*I just don’t know
If my Divan is a book,
Or an elegy, or
Anything at all.*

(Mus’hafi, in Divan I, circa 1785¹⁷).

¹⁴ Qudratullah Qudrat, in Yusuf Taqi, Ed., *Murshidabad ke Char Klasiki Shu’ara*, Calcutta, Osmania Book Depot, 1989, p. 20.

¹⁵ Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Janan, *Divan-e Farsi*, Kanpur, Matba’-e Mustafa’i, 1855, P. 60. [circa 1740]

¹⁶ Mir Muhammad Taqi Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 511.

¹⁷ Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed. Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1968, p 544.

*I am not really a poet, Oh Mus'hafi,
I am an elegy-reciter,
I recite the soz, and make
The lovers weep.*

(Mus'hafi, Divan III, circa 1794¹⁸).

In fact, we can see this convention in action even in the nineteenth century. Here is Syed Muhammad Khan Rind (1797-1857):

*Those of a lovely temperament
Often weep while reading them;
Indeed, the poems of Rind
Are not poems, but elegies?¹⁹*

Poetry thus was basically a quest for themes, and love was just another theme, not an event in the poet's real life; only that in the ghazal, love was the most important theme. And the core function of love was to soften the heart, to make it receptive to more pain, which ultimately made the human heart a site for the Divine Light to be reflected upon and into it. Pain, and things that caused pain, had a positive value. The lover's place was to suffer; the beloved's function was to inflict suffering. This was a sufistic formulation, but was regularly taken by the ghazal poet to be true for the ghazal universe. Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, a leading and extremely influential Indian sufi of early seventeenth century, wrote that the lover should desire that which is desired by the beloved. Since the lover suffered pain and grief, it is obvious that that was what the beloved desired for the lover. To ask for, or long for, comfort was therefore unlovely²⁰.

All this was *mazmun* for Urdu love poetry in the eighteenth century. The poet suffered pain also in search of *mazmuns*. Or he wept for a *mazmun* that was lost, or couldn't be realised, or which was experienced for a moment, and then lost. One is reminded here of Shelley's characterising the creative process as being "conscious of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with a place or person, sometimes regarding our mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden..."²¹ So the poet toiled to get the lost visitations back, or mourned at their departure. Mir said:

*You have neither grief in your soul
For the mazmun,
Nor is your heart soft with pain.
So even if your face was pale like parchment,*

¹⁸ Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. II, Ed., Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1971, p. 228.

¹⁹ Navab Syed Muhammad Khan Rind, *Divan*, Lucknow, Naval Kishor Press, 1931, p. 277.[after 1832]

²⁰ Quoted in *Aqval-e Salaf*, Translated and edited from numerous Arabic and Persian Sources by Maulana Qamaruzzaman, in four volumes, Vol.III, Allahabad, 1991 p. 134.

²¹ P.B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" in Edmund D. Jones, Ed., *English Critical Essays of the Nineteenth Century*, London, OUP, 1919, p. 157.

What of it?

(Divan IV, circa 1794²²)

The lover-protagonist and the beloved-object both live in a world of extremes: supreme beauty, supreme cruelty, supreme devotion—all things are at their best, or worst, in this world. The beloved-object is not a passive recipient of the lover-protagonist's tribute of love, or a helpless non-entity, unable to alleviate the lover's pain, or ameliorate his condition. The beloved's "cruelty" may be real, or a metaphor for his/her indifference, or physical distance from the lover. But the indifference of the beloved is an active stance, it makes a point. The lover-protagonist would prefer death at the hands of the beloved to his/her indifference. Or if one does find oneself to be lucky enough to be killed by the beloved, there are degrees of merit and distinction in death, too. The lover-protagonist is the only true lover: all the rest are false, and given to *havas* (lust), rather than *shauq* (desire), or *ishq* (love). There is a famous Arabic saying: *al ishqu narun yubriqu ma siva al- matlub*. (*Ishq* is a fire that burns down everything but the object of desire). The rival, the Other (*ghair*) doesn't burn with that fire; even if the beloved kills him, he earns no distinction:

*There's the difference of earth and sky
Between the death of the ghair
And my giving up the ghost:
Doubtless, she killed us both, but me
She killed with torture.*

(Mir, Divan V, circa 1798-1803²³).

Also, even if there are other true lovers—though not really possible, such a state can at least be imagined—the lover-protagonist of the ghazal deserves special treatment:

*She ought to have maintained
My distinction at the moment
Of killing. What a pity, she
Trampled me into dust, roiling me
With others.*

(Mir, Divan II, circa 1775-8²⁴)

*She was heard telling someone
The other day: I'll kill someone.
Well, there's no one who so deserves
To die, but me.*

(Muhammad Rafi Sauda, 1706? -1781²⁵)

²² Mir, *Kulliyati*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 649.

²³ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 699.

²⁴ Mir, *kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 472.

²⁵ Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Abdul Bari Asi, Lucknow, Naval Kishor Press, 1933, p. 98.

It should be obvious that in such a scheme of things, “success in love” is not a valid, or powerful, category of thought. No doubt, eighteenth century Urdu ghazal contains some extremely delightful erotic poetry, and these poets are much more conscious of the body, and its pleasures, and the transactions that give rise to, or lead to such pleasures, than their nineteenth century successors. Yet success in terms of this universe is unsuccessful—the greatest success is therefore death. This poetry is thus quite naturally more occupied with dying than most love poetry that one is likely to encounter in other cultures. It reverberates throughout with the terror, and the ecstasy, of dying. Death, in spite of all its uncertainty and unfamiliarity, is an achievement, a respite, a transition:

*I hacked through life in every way,
Dying, and having to live again
Is doomsday.*

(Shah Mubarak Abru, 1683/5-1733²⁶)

*From being to non-being
The road is just a few breaths
It's not much of a journey—
Passing from this world.*

(Sauda²⁷)

It thus follows that so long as Death doesn't come to him, the lover-protagonist seeks, or gets, suffering and ill luck, disapproval of the “worldly”, loss of honour and station. Madness and banishment, or imprisonment or general “ill fame” are the functions of true love: the stronger the madness, the farther the wandering, the blacker the ill fame, the truer and deeper the love. All this is often expressed with the subtlest of word plays, in the most vigorously metaphorical language, and occasionally, with extremely vivid but generally non-carnal realisations of the beloved's body. Since the beloved-object is the ideal in physical beauty too, his/her body can be evoked freely, but because the idea of the beloved is not anchored into any particular person or gender, the narration, though bold, is rarely physical in the modern sense of the word.

Evocation, rather than description is the rule in the ghazal. This is also true of all other characteristics, circumstances, transactions, of the lover and the beloved. The only items somewhat firmly anchored in quotidian, recognizable reality are the “other” “Others”—friends, advisers, preachers, censors, the devout, and the priestly—that is, all those who are in principle not in favour of the lover throwing his life away, or destroying his faith by following the course of love, rather than that of the world, and of God

²⁶ Shah Mubarak Abru, *Divan*, Ed., Muhammad Hasan, New Delhi, Government of India, Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, 1990, p. 270.

²⁷ Sauda, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Abdul Bari Asi, Lucknow, Naval Kishore Press, 1933, p. 2.

as seen by the worldly and the priestly. The lover rarely listens to them, and generally holds them in contempt, regarding them as benighted, materialistic, and mundane, having no understanding of the inner life. The phrase *abl-e zahir* (the people of the obvious and apparent) sums it up all. The world of the ghazal is one world where the Outsider is the Hero, where non-conformism is the creed, and where prosperity is poverty.

In spite of its idealistic and unworldly air, the poetry of the ghazal wears an air of delight, of enjoyment, in making up poems through words, in making the language strain at its limits, and yet remain *ravan* (flowing, felicitous, smooth in reading aloud, easy to remember: all these things are denoted by the term *ravani*). All poets, in even conventionally “sad” narration, employ word play to the best of their power. A certain restraint in physicality, and a certain exuberance in execution, mark much of the best Urdu love poetry from the eighteenth century:

*In the Time's garden, Oh how well
My fortune sleeps. I am verdant
And prosperous like the green grass;
But it's a sword that's crushed
To sleep by the feet that walk
Upon it.*

(Khvaja Mir Dard, 1720-85²⁸)

The verse turns on a play on *sar sabz* (*verdant, thriving*), *sabza* (greenery), and *khufsta/khvabida* (sleeping) whose subtlety can't really be conveyed in any translation or *explication*. Most modern Urdu readers, brought up on false notions of “naturalness” of expression, are taught to feel disappointed and let down to see a “serious” poet like Dard indulging in the “frivolity” of word play on such an occasion. Yet the poets knew better. They knew that word play infuses new life into old themes, expands the horizon of meaning, and often makes for an ambiguity of tone which enriches the total feel if the poem. Here is an almost exact contemporary, using the same image, to a different effect:

*Like the grass
That grows on the roadside,
I was trampled off
By the multitude
In a single sortie.*

(Qa'im Chandpuri, 1724-94²⁹)

It is a powerful verse, but lacks the additional energy of meaning that Mir gives to the same theme by word play:

I was grass newly sprung

²⁸ Syed Khvaja Mir Dard, *Divan*, Lahore, Khayyam Publishers, 1991, p. 72.

²⁹ Qa'im, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Iqtida Hasan, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1965, p. 263.

*On the roadside. I raised
My head to be crushed down
By feet.*

(Divan I, circa
1754³⁰)

The word play revolves around *nau rusta* (newly liberated, newly sprouted, newly sprung), *sar uthana* (to raise one's head, to rise in rebellion), and *pamal bona* (to be trampled underfoot). It is obvious that Qa'im's verse lacks these dimensions which are afforded to the poem by word play.

As we can see, "sadness" of theme or "authenticity" of emotion is not the point here. The poet and the audience both know that it is in the nature of certain themes to be sad, and they are not interested in how "sad" is "sad". Their primary concern is to renew, and refashion, and thus demonstrate and realize the potential of the language. Intertextuality, imagination, audience expectation, all play their part. Obviously, eighteenth century poets did not have twentieth century Indian readers in mind.

Let's now examine how "erotic" is erotic in this kind of poetry. Word play is important here too. But other devices like all kinds of sensuous imagery, metaphor, and a sense for dialogue and drama also come into play. An epistemological convention almost always respected here more than most is that things are expressible by their essence, or epitome. There is an essential "itself-ness" in each thing, and it is this, rather than specific points, which needs to be indicated by the poet. Ghalib (1797-1869), though not of the period we are discussing, put it best:

*The rose, the poppy, the eglantine
Are all of a different colour.
In every style, every colour
One needs to affirm the spring³¹.*

Thus the rose is the essence of all roses, and since the beloved is the essence of all beloveds, so *gul* (rose) is often employed to mean "beloved". The central image of the rose generates an almost infinite complexity of metaphors, but the human body beats it all:

*How can the rose
Have the clearness, the finish
Of your body? And then,
There is the bride-like fragrance
Of good fortune,
Poured into it to the full.*

³⁰ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 196.

³¹ Ghalib, *Divan-e Urdu*, Ed., Imtiaz Ali Khan Arshi, New Delhi, Anjuman Taraqqi-e Urdu, 1982, p. 284.

(Shaikh Jur'at, 1748-1809³²)

This is based on Shah Hatim (1699-1781), and reading Hatim's verse, one can see how great a difference the suggestive imagery has made in the case of Jur'at:

*You whose body is like a rose,
How exciting are the waves
Of fragrance from your perspiration,
Roses are now perfumers, and
The breeze is ever so pleased* ³³.

(Shah Hatim)

Doubtless, Hatim is more earthy in talking of the perspiration as a heady perfume, and his globalization of the perspiration-as-fragrance is piquant, but the verse feels bookish when put beside that of Jur'at.

*Morning, she rolled her sleeves
Up to the elbows—
The nakedness of her body, entire,
Was drawn into the hands.*

(Mus'hafi, Divan III, circa 1794³⁴).

*How closely it clings
To her gold-like body,
There's someone whose
Sulphur-coloured dress burns
My heart much with envy.*

(Mir, Divan VI³⁵, Circa 1809/10) .

Mir and Mus'hafi both use the image of the clinging dress over and over again, and always to great effect:

*If you would always wear
Dresses of this design
I for one would never say,
"Please put off your dress."*

(Mushafi, Divan III, circa 1794³⁶).

³² Qalandar Bakhsh (Yahaya Man) Jur'at, *Kulliyat*, Ed., Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Aligarh, Litho Colour Printers, 1971, p. 450.

³³ Shah Zahuruddin Hatim, *Intikhab-e Hatim*, Ed., Abdul Haq, New Delhi, Delhi Urdu Academy, 1991, p. 79.

³⁴ Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. III, Ed., Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1971, p. 231.

³⁵ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 797.

³⁶ Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. III, Ed., Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1971, p. 155.

*My heart is torn to pieces
Envy her clinging dress
How tightly the dress
Hugs the body*

(Mir, Divan VI, circa 1809/10³⁷).

Consider the date: Mir was nearly eighty-eight when he put together this last, sixth Divan. Also consider the word play: the heart that tears, and the dress that clings. It should be clear that the verse wouldn't have had much to do with Mir's "real life" at that time. It is the play of imagination on a favourite theme, the life of the mind, and the poet boldly writing and rewriting on the palimpsest that enables such vivid and "naughty" poems to be made.

The question that most bothers western readers (and, unfortunately, now a number of native readers too) is that of the beloved's gender. The fact that in many ghazal she'rs, the lover and beloved can be construed as male, or the beloved can be construed to be a boy, was seen by the modernising Urdu critics of the late nineteenth century as an embarrassment, if not an indictment of the whole ghazal culture. It never seems to have bothered anyone else before. Many reasons are offered by the modern critics for this "lapse of taste" committed by the eighteenth century Urdu poets: an almost universal vogue of various kinds of same-sex love—from homoeroticism to open pederasty; segregation of women in the society; influence of Iran; "corrupt" practices prevalent in religious and sufi institutions; general decline of "moral" values, encouraging every kind of dissolute life; and so on³⁸.

No one, of course, seems to have asked the "accused" if they had any explanation or defence. All of us were in the greatest hurry to apply the moral standards of Victorian-Colonial India to a culture that was nowhere near being colonised at that time. In fact, during a great part of the eighteenth century, the boot was on the other leg: it was the English who were trying to adopt what they thought was the Indian life style. Throughout the eighteenth, and through much of the nineteenth century, Indians looked down upon the English as essentially uncivilized. A white complexion was not yet a thing of universal praise and desire.

*One who, in preference
To those of a dark-complexion,
Hankers after the white ones—
Connoisseurs of beauty
Regard him as heart-dead.*³⁹

³⁷ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 820.

³⁸ See for instance, Altaf Husain Hali, *Muqaddama-e She'r o Sha'iri*, Allahabad, Ram Narain Lal, 1953, pp. 133-140. [1893]. Also see Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness, Urdu Poetry and its Critics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, pp. 169-183.

³⁹ Shah Mubarak Abru, *Divan*, Ed., Muhammad Hasan, New Delhi, Government of India, Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, 1990, p. 230.

(Shah Mubarak Abru, 1683/5-1733).

*Let me go hunt the Dark-
Coloured Beauty. Why die
At the hands of the light-weight
White ones?*⁴⁰

(Muhammad Shakir Naji, 1690? -1744).

The point that I want to make here is that by late nineteenth-century standards, fairness of complexion may have been the greatest of merits in a person, but poets of the eighteenth century should not be blamed for holding a different opinion. Similarly, questions about the beloved's gender didn't bother the poets of that time because they weren't practicing "realism", or writing autobiographical poems. The beloved was, first and foremost, an idea, and that idea could be represented in one of many ways. The beloved's anthropomorphic character was often left vague, especially by poets inclined toward sufism. The general literary feeling was, anyway, in favour of ambiguity and richness of interpretive potential.

Once the beloved was no longer anchored in any given entity, it became possible to play all kinds of possibilities. Man, woman, boy, God himself, all, or none of them, but a general sense of "belovedness", became possible. The "you" of the ghazal assumed a life of its own. There is no question but some of the poems are clearly homoerotic or even pederastic. Also, there is no question but in many of such poems it is very hard to determine the tone— ironic, or self-mocking, or just conventional, or maybe all of this rolled into one. Similarly, the she'rs in which the gender, or the identity of the beloved is so vague as to encompass both "profane" and "sacred" love, would perhaps outnumber all other kinds of she'rs in the eighteenth century ghazal put together.

What is really important here is not the question of who? Or why? And how bad or how good a light it reflects on the poets. Literature is a system in its own right, it needs to be understood and judged, first and foremost, in its own terms. Is the system coherent? Do all its parts make sense separately, or collectively? These questions are more valuable than those of "moral soundness" or "political correctness" in regard to the literary output of a culture.

The matter of real importance thus is to understand the poetics which enabled poems to be written where the poet could be heterosexual, sufistic, homoerotic, or pederastic at the same time, and where the beloved could have characteristics of both man and woman in the same poem, often in the same she'r. This is how this came about.

The liberation of the beloved from the constraints of gender identity enabled the poet to use all possibilities as it suited him. For example, let the beloved be a boy. Now the convention is that the beloved is always assumed to be youthful in age and appearance. Since intensification is a common

⁴⁰ Mujammad Shakir Naji, *Divan*, Ed. Fazlul Haq, Delhi, Idara-e Subh-e Adab, 1968, p.147.

device in this poetry, the age of the beloved became gradually so reduced that he could be imagined, without any sense of incongruity, as little more than a baby. Little children everywhere love to ride a short staff, or the cane-reed, pretending to be expert horsemen. In Urdu, the word for such children is *nai savar* (cane-reed rider). Now this is Mir:

*Well, love is a terrible thing indeed
Even Mir, much given to lamenting
Ran on and on, like a petty servant
Yesterday, alongside the cane-reed riders*⁴¹
(Divan III circa 1785).

There is a bit of word play here, but it's not a great she'r. Still, the great thing about it is that Mir carries off the image of a grown up person running hot like a footman behind a reed-riding child. Even in English translation the poem doesn't sound risible. In Urdu, it sounds entirely appropriate. Here is a she'r by Mus'hafi:

*Wearing my heart on my sleeve,
I was always there, around him
Even in the days when he played
Marbles with the urchins of the street.*⁴²

(Divan I, circa 1785).

The Mus'hafi she'r does not have the *ravani* that Mir's has, but the point, I think, is clearly made by the two examples: the poet-protagonist-lover is not a paedophile. It is the convention—the *écriture*—to use a fashionable word, that's doing the writing here. And by the same token, if the beloved is assumed to be a grown up man, he is conventionally seen as a boy, or adolescent, on whose face the down has not appeared, or is just appearing. All these are again full of possibilities for *mazmun*-making. It is quite common, for instance, to say that the appearance of the down on the face has made the beloved more beautiful, hence more cruel, less truthful, and more prone to break promises. The word most used for “down” in such cases is *khat*, which also means *writing*, and therefore, a *written agreement or letter*. Mir Tahir Vahid, a noted Iranian poet of the Indian style, makes the point beautifully:

*How can Vahid claim his heart
Back from you now?
The day he gave it to you,
There was no khat between us.*⁴³

⁴¹ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1967, p. 598.

⁴² Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1968, p.276.

⁴³ Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Janan, *Kharita-e Javahir, Anthology of Persian Verse*, Kanpur, Matba'e Mustafa'i, 1855, p. 155 [Circa 1740].

(Mir Tahir Wahid, d. 1708).

In the following verse, Naji (1690? -1744) implies that the bearded face of the beloved is more devastating than that of a clean one. Unfortunately, my translation loses the delightful word play. Anyway, here it is, for whatever it is worth:

*For how long the practice
Of tyranny, dearest?
Cut your hair short,
Shave off your beard.*⁴⁴

Taking advantage of the fact that the beloved's hair is occasionally described as the rays of the sun, and the sun's rays are supposed to kiss the dewdrops on the rose, Naji says:

*If you desire union with
The sun, keep your eyes wet
With tears, like the dew.*⁴⁵

The two eighteenth century poets who are most given to *mazmuns* of boy love, homosexuality, homoeroticism, so forth, are Shaikh Mubarak Abru (1683/5-1733) and Muhammad Shakir Naji (1690? -1744). It is not clear that their interest in these themes was based on actual propensity, and if so, how far did this propensity enter their real life. Abru never married, and if the following verse of from him is taken as a true statement of personal preference, he looked down upon heterosexuality as improper and unlovely:

*One who passes by a boy
And loves women
Is no lover. He is
A man of lust.*⁴⁶

We know that there were many women in Mus'hafi's life, yet he claims—again, if the poem is accepted as true personal evidence—a certain proclivity for bisexuality:

*Though the catamite gives pleasure
Of a sort, I didn't find
The true pleasure of love
But in women.*

(Divan IV, circa 1796⁴⁷).

⁴⁴ Mujammad Shakir Naji, *Divan*, Ed. Fazlul Haq, Delhi, Idara-e Subh-e Adab, 1968, p. 192.

⁴⁵ Mujammad Shakir Naji, *Divan*, Ed. Fazlul Haq, Delhi, Idara-e Subh-e Adab, 1968, p. 209.

⁴⁶ Shah Mubarak Abru, *Divan*, Ed., Muhammad Hasan, New Delhi, Government of India, Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, 1990, p. 283.

⁴⁷ Mushafi, *Kulliyat*, Vol. IV, Ed., Nurul Hasan Naqvi, Lahore, Majlis Taraqqi-e Adab, 1974, p. 56.

In any case, such verses, whether true testaments or false, would not have shocked their audiences in the eighteenth century. Indian society has never looked upon homosexuality with the horror and anxiety that have characterised western responses to it since the early modern period. K.J.Dover tells us that among the Greeks, homosexual transactions were intercrural, and anal penetration was not permitted, at least in theory. If some of the Indian eighteenth century accounts are to be believed, while there were any number of professional boy beloveds in Delhi at that time, even touching and kissing were considered improper, and were to be discouraged strongly.

The story is told, for instance, of a poet called Aftab Rai Rusva's love for a boy. Rusva came from a well to do family, and was gainfully employed when he fell in love with the boy. He gave up his job, began to wander naked in the streets of Delhi, mad and uncaring. Once he found his beloved holding court, surrounded by friends and admirers. Apparently there had been no physical contact between Rusva and the boy until then. Finding him in open company, Rusva was overwhelmed by passion, and boldly kissed his beloved. This lapse from decorum so enraged the boy that he fatally stabbed Rusva who refused medical aid and all other succour. He recited the following verse (apparently his own) as he died:

*Though my master may not
Sew up the wound in my heart,
What of it if I die,
Let my master live.⁴⁸*

Abu has left us a long poem in the *masnavi* form, addressed to a young male who wants to set up as a beloved. Detailed instructions about toilette, make up, hairstyle, deportment, and speech, are given. He is also advised to retire as soon as his beauty starts declining, though not immediately after the down appears, or even after the whiskers grow stiff, necessitating their removal: for the down also is "the secret of beauty, and goodness". It is God's "artistry on the face." Coquettish behaviour is okay, but things should never be allowed to become physical:

*Be sure that among your lovers
There's none that is vulgar,
Lustful, unchaste, filthy hearted*

You already have beauty, now

⁴⁸ At least two versions of the incident have come down. For the story of Rusva's death at the hands of the boy beloved, see Abul Hasan Amrullah Ilahabadi, *Tazkīra-e Masarrat Afzā*, Ed., Syed Shah Muhammad Isma'īl, Patna, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library, 1998, p. 56.[1780-81]. Qudratullah Qasim, in his *Majmu'a-e Naghaz*, Ed. Mahmud She'rani, New Delhi, Government of India, Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, 1973, [1805-6]pp. 268-9, quotes the she'r, but not the circumstances of Rusva's death. He however adds a new dimension by saying that according to Rusva's desire, his body was bathed in wine in preparation for his last rites. Yet the body didn't at all smell of wine after being so bathed. A very similar incident of the lover's killing, by the boy-beloved of a disciple of Baba Shah Musafir, the well known Aurangabadi sufi of the eighteenth century, is narrated in an account of the Shaikh, translated by Simon Digby. See Simon Digby, *Sufis and Soldiers in Aurangzeb's Deccan*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 80-81..

*Look for sophistication,
A bad-living person is
No beloved at all.*⁴⁹

Choudhri Muhammad Naim has an excellent analysis of the poem, and the issues involved in it. The interested reader is referred to it.⁵⁰ My limited concern here is to show that however much rooted in the social mores of the eighteenth century, boy-love, and man-love, as depicted in this poetry, are, for us, not “social” but literary issues. These themes, and their treatment in the extant form, became possible due to literary reasons. And in any case, since poetry then was not expected to reflect social reality (as if there could be one seamless, omniscient social reality which poetry could catch hold of), but deal with *mazmuns*, the issues of the beloved’s gender, age, profession, social status, never arose, and we would be doing serious injustice to this poetry if we raised such issues now.

Mir described one of the qualities of his poetry of which he was particularly proud as *ada bandi*.⁵¹ This term, vague in itself, is hard to translate. It means something like “depiction and narration of the beloved’s coquetry, dress and manners, speech and body language”. Mir, no doubt, excels here, as he does in many things. But he does much more. The depths and intensities of experience, coupled with the fullest possible vocalisation of the mysterious power of love that Mir is able to achieve is not seen elsewhere in this century, or in any century, for that matter. In Mir’s poetry, the dimensions of both loss and gain are infinite, and yet the poems are strictly earthy, not abstract or cerebral. A great deal of Urdu love poetry can be interpreted as sufistic, but Mir retains the everyday, human dimension even while suggesting things best seen on a cosmic scale.

The thing that immediately strikes the reader’s mind from the eighteenth century—as compared to the nineteenth—is the human relationship aspect, the *ada bandi*, the rare meetings and closenesses, the all too frequent partings and the distressing distances between lover and beloved that the eighteenth century poetry highlights for us. Mir was thus quite correct in giving *ada bandi* such importance in his scheme of things.

It is largely because of *ada bandi* that the beloved in the eighteenth century ghazal is not the passive, hiding-behind-the purdah, slightly tubercular, recoiling from the slightest physical contact, shrinking-violet type of little girl much touted by modern critics as the optimal beloved in the ghazal. This image gained currency through modern “classicist” poets like Hasrat Mohani (1875-1951), and attempts continue to be made to fit all ghazal to this image, but even a brief look at the ghazal of this period will demonstrate the falseness of this image. Here is Hatim:

⁴⁹ Shah Mubarak Abru, *Divan*, Ed., Muhammad Hasan, New Delhi, Government of India, Bureau for the Promotion of Urdu, 1990, pp.304, 305.

⁵⁰ Choudhri Muhammad Naim, “The Theme of Homosexual (Pederastic) Love in Pre-Modern Urdu Poetry” in Muhammad Umar Memon, Ed., *Studies in Urdu Ghazal and Prose Fiction*, Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1979 pp. 120-142.

⁵¹ Mir, *Nikatush Shu'ara*, Ed., Mahmud Ilahi, Delhi, Idara-e Tasnif, 1972, p. 163. [1752]

*Our bodies and souls were one
There were no cracks
But both our hearts longed
Just for a word or two.*

*I still remember that heart enticing
Hint of yours, making up
A little pan from a filbert
Leaf, and flinging it toward me.*

*At that time, right then
My heart was in your firm grasp
When you let your hand
Touch with mine.*

(Shah Hatim, composed 1736-37 ⁵²).

*Scooting over a little bit, bit by bit
You came to sit right next to me
What skittishness, effrontery,
Self-assurance!*

(Shah Hatim, composed 1743 ⁵³).

The beloved here is a conscious participant, and since the gender is not specific in any of the four she'rs I quoted above, the lover-protagonist here need not necessarily be male, just because the poet is male. In fact, even in the general scheme of things, though the lover/beloved became essentially genderless, the lover-protagonist inherited some of the qualities from the original, female protagonist in the ghazal. That is, many qualities which are generally identified in Indian society with women—steadfastness against the (male) beloved's fickleness, being given to copious weeping, growing thin, and wasting away, being patient, and self-surrendering—came more and more to be the mark of the lover-protagonist in the eighteenth century ghazal. I discussed the "female" aspects of the lover-protagonist's personality in a paper.⁵⁴ One might recall here that Muhammad Hasan Askari, Urdu's greatest modern critic, identified Mir's greatest strength and poetic quality as his ability to fully and unconditionally surrender his lover's self to the beloved, and even to the world and its people⁵⁵.

⁵² Hatim, in Hasrat Mohani, Ed., *Intikhab-e Sukhan*, Vol. I, U.P. Urdu Academy, Lucknow facsimile edn., p. 51.

⁵³ Hatim, in Hasrat Mohani, Ed., *Intikhab-e Sukhan*, Vol. I, U.P. Urdu Academy, Lucknow facsimile edn., p. 50.

⁵⁴ "The Expression of the Indo-Muslim Mind in the Urdu Ghazal" in *The Secret Mirror: Essays on Urdu Poetry*, Delhi, Progressive Book Service, 1981.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Hasan Askari, "Mir ji" in *Waqf ki Ragini*, Lahore, Maktaba-e Mehrab, 1979, pp. 206-209, and "Ghalib ki Infradiyat" in *Takbliqi Amal aur Uslub*, Karachi, Nafis Academy, 1989, pp. 128-130.

We'll now look briefly at one point relating to the epistemology of metaphor, and close this necessarily brief discussion of a wide and difficult subject. Non-native readers, and now most of the native ones even, are shocked and even revolted by the image of the beloved and the lover as presented in the ghazal. The beloved seems mindlessly given to bloodshed, kills countless people at one stroke, lets rivers of blood flow in the streets, cuts the lover up into pieces, is deliberately and sadistically cruel, so forth. The lover is apparently the most wretched of persons, partly or wholly mad, revelling in being denigrated, often grovelling in the dust or mud in the beloved's street, and so on. These things are true, except that they are seen in the ghazal universe as positive, not negative characteristics, and the reason for their being where they are is again literary, not the social or mental backwardness of our poets.

Metaphors are also to be understood in their "literal" sense, before they can start making sense as metaphor. Abdul Qahir Jurjani held that in some cases, rejection or deferment of the literal sense would lead to losing all the sense contained in the metaphor. He quotes the line

Shamsun tuzalliluni minashshamsi

(A sun gives me shade from the sun)

and says that although the sun is a metaphor for the beautiful slave who opened an umbrella over the head of his master to protect him from the sun, the line has no meaning unless it is read as if there were no metaphor at all.⁵⁶

Schleiermacher made a similar point about the literality of metaphor eight centuries later when he said, "Words used in the figurative sense retain their proper and specific meaning, and achieve their effect only through an association of ideas on which the writer depends."⁵⁷

One implication of the "literalness" of metaphor was on the epistemological level: metaphors do not represent facts; they are facts. Thus a metaphor could be treated as a fact, and another metaphor drawn from it. From that metaphor again, another one could be derived, and so on. Shibli No'mani (1857-1914), the great modern Indian-Persian scholar and critic, was the first to point this out.⁵⁸ Instead of the frightening "infinite regress" of meaning that one finds in Derrida, here was an exhilaratingly infinite progress of metaphor, and each metaphor was a fact in its own right. Consider the following:

The lover obviously loves the beloved more than he loves his own self. This leads to the metaphor/idiom: *kisi par marna*=to die on someone. Or, there is the metaphor/idiom: *kisi par jan dena*=to give up one's life for someone. This leads to the proposition: The beloved can cause death. This is followed

⁵⁶ Abdul Qahir Jurjani, *Asrarul Balaghat*, Ed. Hellmut Ritter, Istanbul, at the Government Press, 1954, p. 21.

Also see Kamal Abu Deeb, *Al-Jurjani's Theory of Poetic Imagery*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1979, pp. 77-80.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Zvetan Todorov, *Symbolism and Interpretation*, Trs. Catherine Porter, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 161-162. Many modern philosophers of language too hold similar views about the "literalness" of metaphors. Paul Ricoeur develops Schleiermacher's ideas in the direction of psychology. See "What Metaphors Mean" by Donald Davidson, and "The Metaphorical Process" by Paul Ricoeur in Sheldon Sacks, ed., *On Metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 29-45 and pp 141-157. It must be noted that Jurjani's position is more firmly grounded in semantics and is demonstrated easier than the positions taken by the western philosophers cited above.

⁵⁸ Shibli No'mani, *She'r ul Ajam*, Vol. V, Azamgarh, Matba'-e Ma'arif, 1957, p. 76. [1918].

by the proposition: The beloved can kill. This is followed by: The beloved is a killer. Now a new line of metaphorical reasoning takes over: The beloved kills—with a look. Her eyes therefore are daggers, or swords, or a weapon of killing. Now swords etc. need to be sharpened; so the kohl applied to the eyes is a sharpener. But why should only the eye be the sword/dagger, etc.? The beloved's coquetry also can kill. So another set of metaphors comes into existence. Then since the beloved has a number of lovers, and all lovers, by definition, get killed, so the beloved can kill a whole host of people in one glance=blow. Then, killing with a dagger or a similar weapon causes blood to flow. Hence the beloved's street is a place where one smells blood, like Cassandra, anticipatively, or actually. If a number of people get killed at the same time, rivers of blood flow in the city, and the beloved can be seen riding his/her/its charger in triumph.

Then, the beloved doesn't necessarily kill; she may inflict a wound or two, and stop at that. The lover now can react in any number of ways, given the "fact" that the wounds are real wounds. For example: The lover writhes in pain, ecstatically, hoping to "enjoy" the moment for as long as possible; the lover may complain, to the effect that the beloved was casual, and not in earnest; or worse still, she was deliberately casual and intentionally delivered only a glancing blow, so as to deprive (because she is perverse by definition) the lover of the pleasure and honour of dying. The lover may plead for the killing blow, or feel angry and disappointed at being reprieved.

A casual blow, or refusal on the beloved's part to kill the lover, may also involve a value-judgement: the lover is poor material, not fit to kill. This may again be due to one of many reasons: the lover is qualitatively inferior; he is not a good enough lover, or distinguished enough as a person, to deserve killing at the hands of the beloved. Or, it may be that the lover has grown "pale, and spectre thin", has wasted away, and is therefore not worth the trouble of killing. Or maybe the beloved, or her sword—yes, even the sword, because the shine and sharpness of a sword is described as its *ab=water*—may perspire, out of shame at having to kill such a wretch who is more than half-dead himself.

And if there are wounds, then there are doctors, surgeons, expert or inexpert sewers up of the open wound. The lover should, by definition, refuse any kind of aid, medical or spiritual. This gives rise to another set of metaphors. Or the lover's wound may have been sutured, but the sly lover knows his job. He has fingernails to pick at the stitches, or reopen the wound.

The wounds may be self-inflicted, in a fit of frenzy, for instance, but not with a view to suicide. Or the wounds may have been inflicted by the street arabs, who harass and torture the mad lover and pelt him with stones. The lover actually desires this, because loss of dignity, honour, and station, being insulted by the meanest, and treated with contumely even by street urchins, ensures the death, or least the suppression, of his own Self, and thus makes himself more suitable for "dying" in the beloved. Negating his own being, he affirms the being of the beloved, who alone is sufficient as life, and as life-taker-giver. So the lover actually desires and welcomes the rocks

thrown at him by naughty children. In a she'r of Mir's, the protagonist-lover heaps rocks and stones in his street so as to make it easy for the street arabs to throw them at him. A seventeenth century Persian poet of the Indian style put it most piquantly, summing up a whole culture of love, and madness, and self-effacement, in these two lines:

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-----~~
~~*The madman goes his way,
And the children go theirs;
Say, friends, does this city of yours
Have no rocks or stones?*⁵⁹~~

~~----- (Syed Husain Khalis, d. 1710). -----~~

All this, and much more, could become possible for the simple reason that in the poetics of Indian style Persian poetry, and all classical Urdu poetry, the *metaphor* of dying is treated as a *fact* from which another metaphor can be generated, and the resultant metaphor, in turn, treated as *fact*, generates other metaphors. What sounds bizarre, or distasteful, to minds untrained in this poetics, falls quite naturally into place as proper and desirable—in fact unique in all poetry since early modern times—once it is seen as a rhetorical system which permits metaphors to be made both paradigmatically and syntagmatically.

Western poetics has generally treated metaphor as a paradigmatic device, which is true as far as it goes. But the picture changes drastically once metaphor and fact are treated as interchangeable, as in the Urdu and Indian-Persian poetics. Now metaphors can be generated syntagmatically as well. Thus: if *p* is the same as *q*, then the characteristics of *q* also apply to *p*. The lover is a *captive* (of the beloved, or of love). Birds also are made captive, so the lover is a bird. A captive bird is kept in a cage, so the lover is in a cage. In order to be made captive, the bird has to be captured; the person who captures a bird is a hunter=*saiyad*. So the protagonist-lover-bird was made captive by a *hunter*. But the bird-protagonist is the lover too. And the person who captured the lover is the beloved, who thus equals *saiyad*, and so on.

Syntagmatic thinking makes for an infinity of metaphors, because the metaphors generated by it do not depend on similitude between two apparently dissimilar objects (which, Aristotle said, was the soul of metaphor), but on association. Western philosophers have long held that there are no rules for metaphor making. This is quite true, so long as metaphors are seen as hinging upon similitude. Once that barrier is broken, a simple rule emerges: metaphors can be made by the power of association, *so long as each metaphor is taken as the fact itself, and not the substitute for that fact*. A delightful example of this procedure is that the eyes of the beloved are often described in this poetry as *bimar*=*ailing, indisposed*. Apparently there could be nothing more dissimilar to the beloved's eyes than ailment, or indisposition. Syntagmatism makes this possible, thus: *ankh uthna/uthana* is for the eyes to be

⁵⁹ Mirza Mazhar Jan-e Janan, *Kharita-e Javahir, Anthology of Persian Verse*, Kanpur, Matba'-e Mutafa'i, 1855, p. 105. [Circa 1740]

raised. Those who are ailing cannot rise. The beloved keeps his/her eyes lowered, out of modesty. So the eyes cannot rise, so they are indisposed. Thus, the more indisposed or ailing the beloved's eye, the better it is, for it affirms both her status, and chastity, as beloved.

Going back to the status of the beloved as the rightful taker of lives, it is natural that there are no suicides in the eighteenth century ghazal, or any classical ghazal, for that matter. There are countless deaths and woundings, burials and half burials, but no one ever kills himself. For that would deprive the lover of the merit of being killed by the beloved, and worse still, by killing himself, the lover would presume to occupy the space that can be occupied only by the beloved. There is scarcely any talk of suicide in this world, and Mir, who has a few delightful verses on this theme, makes it do more work than its nature, and the nature of the ghazal universe, would seem to imply: The following is from Divan II, put together around 1775-78:

*Don't leave sword or axe
Anywhere near Mir,
Lest he waste himself.*⁶⁰

The idea here is not so much to emphasise the act of Mir's killing himself, as his character: Mir is no wilting lily, or an adolescent in the throes of calf love. The other point is that by killing himself, he would be wasting himself; he is too valuable to be wasted. The ambiguity of the verb used to indicate the act of suicide permits two meanings. The other she'r:

*I said to her: I am
Out of my patience, entirely;
What should I do,
Kill myself? She said,
"Oh yes, man, must
Do something."*⁶¹

(Shikar Nama II, circa 1790).

The ironical dimensions of this verse can only find a match in the miraculous economy of the diction. The two-line she'r in the original though in a metre of normal length, that is, a metre that requires four feet to a line and not three, contains eighteen words, of which fully eight have only one syllable. Of the rest, nine are disyllabic; there is only one trisyllabic word. Those who read Urdu would know that Urdu favours di- and trisyllabic words. Words of four syllables too are quite common. A verse having a heavy preponderance of uni- and disyllabic words, and packing so much meaning in it, is a rarity, even in Mir.

⁶⁰ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Vol. I, Ed., Zill-e Abbas Abbasi, Delhi, Ilmi Majlis, 1968, p. 434.

⁶¹ Mir, *Kulliyat*, Lucknow, Naval Kishor Press, 1868, p. 1031.

The final impression that a major eighteenth century poet's ghazal leaves on us is not that its protagonist (and some of us erroneously tend to identify protagonist with poet) is a person much given to wine and love, but who is essentially a helpless slave to social power or sexual desire, battered and defeated. Instead, we are left with the feeling that we have been in close touch with a vigorous, complex intellect, a mind capable of self-mockery and introspection, a body and spirit that have suffered and enjoyed, and are still prepared to suffer and enjoy, a soul that is no stranger to the mystic dimensions of existence, an outsider and nonconformist who cannot be patronised. An invitation to pity is nowhere to be found in his vocabulary.

Allahabad,

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Author's Note

All translations from Urdu and Persian are by me. Following the convention of English literature, I have translated the poems depicting the beloved as female, though that may not be necessarily the case in the actual text. In the actual text, the beloved's gender would often be indeterminate; in many cases, the beloved's grammatical gender would be male, but the beloved himself/herself could well be read as female. In some cases the gender is specifically male. Where the gender, and not only the grammar, is clearly male, I have allowed for it in the translation, trying to make the gender

aspect as unobtrusive as the demands of translation authenticity would permit. Always provided that in very many cases, the poem could sustain a sophisticated interpretation, the beloved's gender notwithstanding.

This paper deals only with the Ghazal, but many of the ideas suggested here can be applied to non-Ghazal love poetry of the period in question.

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