Conceptual Blending in Ghalib's Poetry

A. R. Fatihi[*]

Abstract

The present paper intends here to bring together an understanding of Ghalib's poetic and dramatic strengths to show what principles of thought are operative alike in the poet's word choices and in the "larger wholes" of his creative work. It is generally believed that resources for achieving this more unified and more encompassing perspective can be found in the theory of conceptual integration. The paper attempts to consider Ghalib's art of figuration from several angles all tending to converge on the notion of compression. The second half of the paper focuses on his craft of versification, particularly as a mechanism for creating compressed and hybrid meanings. A certain "strange meaning" is seen all the way through Ghalib's poetry, differently infected at different stages. New words and compounds are manufactured to express the peculiar mental states. These coinages are marked by an intense compression. Flood of thoughts within a reasonable space of compressed language, employing old words in new combinations to elaborate new concepts giving them original tones and symbolical meaning based in his own peculiar experiences.

Discussion

The word, as the poet uses it, has to be conceived of as a potential of meaning, a nexus or cluster of meanings, treasure of meaning and not as a discrete particle of meaning.

> gaNjeena-e-maa'anee ka talism usko samajhiye
> jo lafz ki 'GHalib' mere ash'aar meiN aave
> (treasure of meaning)

What is true of the poet's language in detail is true of the larger wholes of poetry. The present paper intends here to bring together an understanding of Ghalib's poetic and dramatic strengths to show what principles of thought are operative alike in the poet's word choices and in the "larger wholes" of his creative work. It is generally believed that resources for achieving this more unified and more encompassing perspective can be found in the theory of conceptual integration.

Conceptual integration is characteristically a part of poetry, but in poetry, the conceptual incongruity seems usually to be an offshoot of a more significant conceptual integration or conceptual convergence. Incongruity calls attention to the fact that different frames of reference are being brought to bear, and so invites attention; the genuine relevance of both frames, though, is closer to the heart of the matter in poetry than is their apparent incompatibility.

> In aabloN se paaon ke ghabra gaya tha main
> ji khush hua hai raah ko purkhraar dekh kar

Poetry is most properly understood not as a genre or a kind of text but as a quality of experience, a "felt change of consciousness" that arises from one's encounters with strange meaning. This change of consciousness seems to match to the combination of "frame clashes" that mark conceptual blending.

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*Mangalayatan University, Beswan, Aligarh

Ishrat-e- qatra hai dariya mein fana ho jana.
Dard ka had se guzar jana dava ho jana.

To be annihilated in the sea is the delight of every drop
When pain exceeds the limit It becomes its own remedy

Maulana Altaf Husain Haali has explained it thus in his well-known book "Yaadgaar-e-Ghalib" :
"Jab dard had se guzar jaayega to mar jaayeNge, ya'nifana ho jaayeNge (ya'ni waasil~billah hojaayeNge).Goya qatra dar'ya men khap jaayega aur yehi is ka (qatre ka) maqsood hai. Y'ani dard ka had se guzar jaana, yehi is ka dawa hojaana hai."

The metaphysical layer of meaning of this couplet emerges out of conceptual incongruity of the poetic expression *Ishrat-e- qatra* and *dariya mein fana ho jana (*To be annihilated in the sea). The delight of *qatra (*drop of life) is to be conquered by *fana* (Supreme power). The highest of ecstasy for the drop of water is to lose itself into the mighty river.

These divergent mental states 'have their root in the same though remote associative feeling, and the 'suggestion' leads to the catalyst, the agent which had brought the two together and fused them. The solution lies in Ghalib's careful and vigilant use of words loaded with meaning in the context. This is another way of finding "verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling" which we come across in the Metaphysical Poets of England who were as mature and difficult as Ghalib was without the requisite of philosophy. Thus we find in Ghalib a method similar to that of the Metaphysical Poets, the same multiplied associations and telescoping of images, the same forcing and dislocation of language into the meaning. We have the same use of conceit which presents the flux of the poet's thought but arrests that of the reader.

A second essential point is that consciousness oscillates between a rational or analytic principle that differentiates things, and a "poetic" principle that assimilates them. Blend theory likewise highlights an oscillation between the mental imperative of discriminating among frames of reference and that of productively integrating them.

In view of the above the paper attempts to consider Ghalib's art of figuration from several angles all tending to converge on the notion of compression. The second half of the paper focuses on his craft of versification, particularly as a mechanism for creating compressed and hybrid meanings. A certain "strange meaning" is seen all the way through Ghalib's poetry, differently infected at different stages. New words and compounds are manufactured to express the peculiar mental states. These coinages are marked by an intense compression. Flood of thoughts within a reasonable space of compressed language, employing old words in new combinations to elaborate new concepts giving them original tones and symbolical meaning based in his own peculiar experiences. In this manipulation, Ghalib uses the Persian conjunctive form (*izafat*) to produce a string of compounds which are themselves often conjunct together with bewildering effect. Ghalib coins new phrases all the time, compounded of noun and adjective, or noun and noun, and noun and verb, such as, "inebriety of custom", "silent fire", "the river of wine", "the snare of desire", "sea familiar", and so on, using the same word at different places to denote a different meaning. As he does not pause to explain, and the reader hurries along with the words, he is left behind with thought which he cannot revivify from the inhibitive process of his mind.

The suddenness and breadth of realization make poetry most effective. It can be seen as resulting from highly effective compression; something of the same dynamic applies to the strong, sudden realization of possible meanings that characterizes poetry. Some figurative expression, in Ghalib is coextensive with conceptual blend, and cannot be entirely differentiated

from it. In other cases, though, a distinction, or at least a difference of emphasis, can be observed between wit and glum in Ghalib. Both can be described with the network model of conceptual integration which, we have discussed earlier. It includes: the juxtaposition of elements from different scenarios. The imaginative completion that builds a new, coherent scenario around these elements; and the elaboration that sets the scenario in motion to yield a kind of imaginative micro-narrative involving change and causality. Here we are using the word "narrative" somewhat unusually for a literary critic, in reference to something that consists not of words but of logico-spatial intuitions that are based in sensory experience. In the case of a pun, such scenarios and their implicit stories are made to collide, and the wider their incongruity, on a particular axis of relevance, the greater is their poetic effect. Ghalib's multi-sensory poetic temperament and his innovative dialectic meaning have come in for a focused reading.

The key logical relation of Ghalib's wordplay was dissimilarity. The term dissimilarity refers not to the absolute difference that takes away relevance, but the contextual difference that can create it. Ghalib's characteristic mode of wit centres on the pleasure to be had from incongruity, or from recognition of a dissonance at the heart of a conceptual network, the more extensive and intricate the better. And just as an especially effective witticism or well-contrived comic irony is likely to involve a certain largeness of implication, so also it is bound to be. It gains force and point from its success in being highly compact or concise in its form, and very sudden in its activation.

The literary terminologies like *acyron, paronomasia, antanaclasis* offer a useful way of identifying some elements of Ghalib's wit, which could, in turn, be seen as illustrating particular patterns of conceptual integration. What makes the language of poetry, apart from prosody, is its richness of figuration, its density with verbal elegancies for which the field of rhetoric provides names: *personification, hyperbaton, or syntactic inversion*; *metaphor*; *paradox,metonymy, catachresis, or switching parts of speech transferred epithet.* Blend theory offers a comprehensive account of the mental processes behind figuration, a model by which the various tropes (mental turnings) may be accounted for.

The term acyron refers to the use of words incompatible with or contrary to the speaker's meaning. In plain English, acyron is called 'malapropism'. Malapropism is a powerful source of wit in poetry as well as in real life. Malapropism finds its origins in the French phrase mal a propos, which means "inappropriate." It is the use of an incorrect word in place of a similar-sounding word, which results in a nonsensical and humorous expression. A miss-speech is considered malapropism when it sounds similar to the word it replaces, but has an entirely different meaning. Philosopher Donald Davidson has noted that malapropisms show the complex process through which the brain translates thoughts into language. In his essay "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs", philosopher Donald Davidson suggests that malapropisms reveal something about how people process the meanings of words. He argues that language competence must not simply involve learning a set meaning for each word, and then rigidly applying those semantic rules to decode other people's utterances. Rather, he says, people must also be continually making use of other contextual information to interpret the meaning of utterances, and then modifying their understanding of each word's meaning based on those interpretations.

Words not only express what we want to express but also what we haven't said. And words have a magic of their own. Ghalib had a fabulous sense of humour and in using acyron words, he revealed something of his taste in teasing people. In his style, which was remarkably trenchant and unpretentious, he never resorted to using words because of their rich high sounds.

Naqsh faryadi hai kis ki shokhi-e tahrir ka
Kaghazi hai pairahan her paikar-e tasvir ka
Against whose playful writing are the words complainants?
Made of paper is the attire of the countenance of every image.

This is the first couplet *(sher)* of *Diwan-e-Ghalib*. It is considered to be the most controversial, in the sense of its interpretation by various scholars. While some scholars believe that it is a *sher* worth its weight in gold, others call it an example of acyron. Our understanding is that this is an example of deliberate attempt to use malapropism. The use of malapropism is a stylistic device which is subject to varied interpretations.

In this couplet Ghalib complains about the existence of mankind to the Creator. 'Naqsh' represents mankind, which complains to the creator represented here by the 'Tahrir' of which it is a part. O God! why did you create me in your playfulness? The second line elaborates this complaint by saying, "*Kagazi hai pairahan har paikar-e-tasveer ka*". The stylistic device helps in portraying Ghalib's lamentations that all existence is nothing but a complaint. "*Kagazi hai pairahan har paikar-e-tasveer ka*" is critical of God in a rather unusual manner. The poetic device brings an element of surprise in it. Ghalib alludes to God's neglect and obliviousness towards us. "Whose mischief was it to create this Universe?" the first line asks in a rather perplexed manner. This would have been a straightforward ode to the Lord if in the first verse the poet had not raised the question, "who has done it?" but instead stated, "He did it." This would have been in line with the tradition of making the first verse an ode to the Lord. This is followed by a description of the sheer helplessness of humankind. All that is visible in the Universe is clad in "paper dress", as if pleading or bowing before the Lord in awe. In this sense, Ghalib implies that we stand before God in a similarly humbled way. Another literary support to the construction of paper attire comes from the word "candidate", derived from Latin and means someone who is presenting his or her credentials wearing "white" attire.

A language is compositional if the meaning of a complex expression is systematically related to the meanings of its constituents (Frege, 1970; 1892). The interests of philosophers and linguists are complementary because semantics provides algorithms that show how the truth of a complex expression depends on the truth of its components. A good example is propositional logic, in which the truth or falsity of any well-formed formula can be systematically determined from the truth values of its component propositions and the truth tables for the connectives.

In keeping with the dual tasks of understanding compositionality and intentionality, part of what a semantic theory is supposed to account for is the relationship between the meaning of a sentence and facts about the world that support the truth of the proposition or propositions expressed by that sentence. Semanticists assume that to understand the meaning of a sentence in the indicative mode is to understand the kind of a world in which it could be used to make a true claim. Thus the main goal of semantics is to provide truth conditions for sentences.

On an objectivist account, understanding the meaning of an utterance such as *Kagazi hai pairahan har paikar-e-tasveer ka* involves the ability to specify the conditions that make the propositions stated by the utterance true. Moreover, the truth conditions for a complex expression are determined systematically from those of simpler expressions. The lexical semanticists account for the meanings of individual words, and the compositional semanticists provide an account of how the meanings of words are composed into the meanings of their constituents, and how constituents are composed into the meanings of their constituents, and how constituents are composed to yield the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

An important component of this account is that sentences have an independent level of representation, syntactic structure, which is used to compute an unambiguous semantic representation. Intuitively, the meaning of *Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka kaghazi hai*

pairahan her paikar-e tasvir ka would be derived by combining syntactic and semantic information about the components of the sentence. A "graffiti " (naqsh) ponders the purpose for its creation *(faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka)*.The probing tone and tenor of this line indicates the mood of questioning emerging in the mind of the poet, Accordingly, understanding the meaning of a sentence such as *Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka* involves the ability to specify the conditions that make the propositions stated by the utterance true. In the first line, Ghalib talks about the Universe as if it were a thoughtless creation, a careless stroke of a pen, an undesirable graffiti, wherein each "word" of that "graffiti" ponders the purpose for its creation. If the end were sorrow and grievance, then what was the need to create the universe?

A semantic account should be able to differentiate the meanings of (*Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka*) and (*kaghazi hai pairahan her paikar-e tasvir ka*). Clearly, the state of the world (or worlds) in which (*Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka*) is true differs from that in which (*kaghazi hai pairahan her paikar-e tasvir ka*) is true.

Kaghazi hai pairahan her paikar-e tasvir ka differs in predictable ways concerning the spatial relationships between particular *kaghazi hai pairahan* and *paikar-e tasvir.* Formal semantics captures the intuition that anyone who claims to understand the meanings of *Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka*and *kaghazi hai pairahan her paikar-e tasvir ka* ought to be able to discriminate between a world in which (1) is true and a world in which (2) is true. Of course, a real semanticist would not offer such a crude description as this as a semantic account. To relate words to the world, the objectivist semanticist (actually an extensional semanticist) employs set theory to model properties with sets of objects that possess those properties, and relations as ordered pairs (or triples, or quadruples, etc.) of related objects. Semantics provides a set of functions that convert constituents into sets that can be tested for truth in some model. A semantic account can convert the English representation into an unambiguous semantic representation such as might be provided by predicate calculus.

In common parlance, the term "meaning" applies to both linguistic expressions and particular utterances of those expressions. In contrast, semanticists reserve "meaning" for the expressions themselves. An expression such as (*Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka*) has a meaning that is independent of any particular context in which it might be uttered, while as an utterance of this expression has a content that depends on things such as the particular graffiti to which the speaker is referring. One might hope for a semantic theory to relate expression meaning to utterance content. However, the paper argues that we should tackle the opposite problem: how meaning construction processes that generate utterance meanings might also explain why we think of words, phrases, and sentences as having meaning that is independent of any particular context. Perhaps the main reason for shifting our focus from expressions to utterances is that meaning is never fully context-independent. Searle (1979), for instance, provides a number of examples that argue against the idea that the literal meaning of a sentence is context-independent. Rather, the literal meaning can be applied only relative to particular contextual assumptions. As we have seen, on the traditional account, answering the question of whether the *Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka* requires establishing which *naqsh* and which *shokhi-e tahrir* are being referred to, and determining whether the correct spatial relationship obtains. However, Searle (1979: 122) points to the case in which the *naqsh* is in outer space.

Searle suggests that the establishment of the truth conditions for even the most transparent sentence is not context-independent, but relies on the assumption that conditions are normal. In this way, judgments of truth resemble judgments of category membership. While there is a great deal of disparity in people's truth and category-membership judgments concerning atypical cases, people tend to agree in their judgments of more typical cases (see Lakoff, 1987; Taylor, 1995). A similar process underlies both sorts of judgments. Context-independent meaning is an illusion based on the fact that a competent language user will create a context when none is

provided. Any given expression permits an indefinite number of interpretations that depend upon a speaker's understanding of the relevant context. Considering the immense variability in the utterance meaning of (*Naqsh faryadi hai kiski shokhi-e tahrir ka*), Langacker (1987: 155) argues that a compositional account based on context-invariant meanings is unlikely to have much explanatory content.

However, Fillmore (1982) suggests that the meaning of many words relies on speakers' experience with the scenarios and social institutions they presuppose. For example, expressions such as "*kaghazi hai pairahan*" cannot even be defined without providing a certain amount of background information about the more general concept of the organization of the Persian tradition. Similarly the significance of the distinction between "*kaghazi hai pairahan*" and "*her paikar-e tasvir ka*" arises because its meaning is motivated by the practice of the Persian tradition. Thus Fillmore defines a frame as a system of categories whose structure is rooted in some motivating context. Words are defined with respect to a frame and perform a categorization that takes the frame for granted. Fillmore (1982) emphasizes how meanings grow out of these motivating experiences. He argues that lexical semantics requires an account of how and why people use words as well as a characterization of the scenarios they presuppose. Fillmore construes frame semantics as a far-reaching research program with implications for lexical semantics, changes of word meaning, the creation of novel words, and even the assembly of the overall meaning of a text. In lexical semantics, for example, the aim is to characterize the motivating context for a particular word and explain how the word's meaning relates to that context. Thus words are defined with respect to frames and are used to evoke them. Fillmore (1977) shows how a number of verbs, including "buy", "sell", and "pay" are related to one another by virtue of how they highlight certain aspects of the same Commercial Event frame. Indeed, a number of verbs can be understood as evoking the same frame, but accentuating (or profiling) the perspective, motives, or intentions of particular participants. Examples include "buy" versus "sell" (Fillmore, 1977), "give" versus "take" (Fisher, Hall, Rakowitz, &Gleitman, 1991), and "substitute" versus "replace" (Landau &Gleitman, 1985). Examples such as these accentuate how meaning cues the particular construal of events rather than merely providing speakers with an objective characterization. Moreover, they demonstrate how frames are motivated by human experiences, social institutions, and cultural practices. Similarly, the meaning of "*kaghazi hai pairahan*", classically defined as a paper attire, can be shown to depend on the existence of background information grounded in Persian social practice. In the second line, Ghalib talks about everything in the Universe being "wrapped in paper". This draws a beautiful correlation between God's writing and God's creation of humanity the humility of paper dress and the humility of the written word (i.e., our being) on the paper. (i.e., this world) are in a sense synonymous. (Note: paper is also impermanent; writing on paper as opposed to carving on stone is displayed here as a source of its impermanence). In the first line, there is a plea to know the cause for this injustice while the second line expresses the extreme insignificance of human existence. It is clear that this verse is more ironic than claiming man's position in the Universe; even while Ghalib questions, "who has done it" he leaves room for us to ponder that perhaps it was God?

It suggests that meaning always emerges from understanding in a particular context. In the absence of an explicit context, speakers will create one for themselves based on their knowledge of typical situations and their default values. For example, in the absence of a particular context, we might say that "*kaghazi hai pairahan*" refers to a particular type of paper dress. However, in the present context, "*kaghazi hai pairahan*" refers to something entirely different. This construction of "pleading in paper attire" is drawn from an old Persian tradition in which the men would enter the courts of their kings wearing clothing made of paper in order to display their humility. It has a reference to the ancient Persian custom whereby the plaintiff appeared

before the king wearing dress made of paper. It is not the associative quality of simile or metaphor either. It is rather a quality of thought which leads to a conceptual incongruity. In this sense, Ghalib implies that we stand before God in a similarly humbled way. Another literary support to the construction of paper attire comes from the word "candidate", derived from Latin and means someone who is presenting his or her credentials wearing "white" attire. These divergent mental states 'have their root in the same though remote associative feeling, and the 'suggestion' leads to the catalyst, the agent which had brought the two together and fused them.

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