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The English Translation of *Ab-e Hayat*: A Review Article*

AB-E HAYAT deserves attention not only because it is an interesting history of Urdu poetry and discusses some important linguistic issues, it is also immortalized as a model of style and substance. A major portion of it does not lend itself easily to translation into English, or, for that matter, into any other language, as its style is deeply embedded in startlingly creative similes and metaphors. This problem is magnified when the translation is made in a cultural and linguistic milieu significantly different from the cultural and philological ambit of the book's author.

Āb-e Ḥayāt is fortunate in at least one respect: for the last one hundred and thirty years it has enchanted each new generation of literary scholars, climaxing in its English translation by Frances Pritchett. But it is less fortunate in another respect: some of its parts have been completely disfigured on account of the flawed, and, in some cases, fairly nonsensical renderings of the Urdu original. These parts desperately call for a drastic review. Though the translation was made and edited "In association with Shamsur Rahman Faruqi," a distinguished Urdu critic, I tend to think that he played only a minor role in the enterprise, as will be substantiated by the examples in the pages that follow.

Admittedly, however, some parts of the translation are not only highly agreeable, they are also invariably creative and in complete harmony with the original Urdu content. These sections may indeed have benefitted enormously from Faruqi's extensive linguistic knowledge, his extraordinary translation skills, and his profound cultural insights. It is highly unlikely

* For the Urdu citations from *Āb-e Ḥayāt* I have used its Lahore: Naval Kishore, 1907 edition (identified in the textual citations as "AHU," and for the English citations, Muḥammad Ḥusain Āzād, *Āb-e Ḥayāt: Shaping the Canon of Urdu Poetry*, translated and edited by Frances Pritchett in association with Shamsur Rahman Faruqi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). The latter is cited as "AHE."

that Faruqi could in any way be responsible for some of the glaring errors found in other parts, where the translation lapses into sheer travesty and seriously damages its literary value. Pritchett cannot be expected to fully comprehend the cultural context of Urdu in a wider semantic perspective and to properly evaluate the linguistic complexities and stylistic innovations native to it. As a result, some specific Urdu cultural devices, linguistic niceties and idiomatic turns of phrase seem to evade her. Her reach is necessarily limited, while the arcane civilization of the Subcontinent and the essence of its poetic language are too lofty to be fully grasped by a non-native.

A substantive part of the present English translation does approximate the original content and may easily be described as its creative substitute. A comparative study of two Urdu-English excerpts will certainly illustrate this point. Here is an excerpt from the preface to *Āb-e Ḥayāt* in the First Era, followed by its fine creative translation:

Pas insān vabī hai ke jis pairāyah mēn khūbšūrī jōban dikhā'ē, yē us sē kaifiyat uḥā'ē na ke faqaṭ ḥasīnōn ke zulf-o-rukhsār mēn parēshān rahē. Khush-nazar usē nabīn kabtē ke faqaṭ gul-o-gulzār hī par dīvānah p̄hīrē. Nabīn, ghās kī pattī balke saḍōl hāñṭā khushnumā hō tō uskī nōk-jhōk par bhī p̄hūl hī kī ṭarah lōṭ jā'ē.

(AHU 1907, 82)

Thus he alone is fully human who can relish the mood of any guise in which beauty shows its youthful vigor, and who is not driven to distraction only by the curls and cheeks of beautiful ones. He cannot be called a good observer who wanders around like a madman only for the sake of the rose and the garden. No! If a blade of grass, or even a well-shaped thorn, should seem attractive, he can be as much ravished by its prickly tip as by a flower.

(AHE 2001, 110)

This is a fine English translation of Āzād's comparison between the depth and love of study of the people of a former time and the superficial knowledge of our generation. The following excerpt also clearly indicates that Āzād is not niggardly in acknowledging the laudable aspects of the past:

Pable jō lōg kitāb dek̄htē thē tō us kē mazmūn kō is ṭarah dil-o-dimāgh mēn lētē thē jis sē uskē aṣar dilōn mēn naqsh hōtē thē. Ājkal lōg parhtē bhī haiñ tō is ṭarah ṣaf̄hōn sē 'ubūr kar jatē haiñ gōyā bakriyāñ haiñ ke bāgh mēn ghūs ga'ī haiñ. Jahāñ muñh par gayā ēk buktā bhī bhār liyā. Bāqī kuč̄h kabar nabīñ. Havas kā čarvāhā un kī gardan par savār hai, vō dabā'ē liyē jātā hai.

(AHU, 296)

In former times, people who read a book took its contents into their hearts and minds in such a way that its imprint was graven on their hearts. The people of today, even if they read, run through the pages as if they're goats who have invaded a garden. Wherever their mouth happens to land, they bite off a chunk; the rest they know nothing about. The goatherd of Greed is sitting on their necks; he keeps them bent to their tasks.

(AHE, 254)

Such flowing, meaningful, perspicuous passages which are also closely consistent with the original content are liberally sprinkled throughout the English translation, but, along with them, one also finds parts that practically subvert the original content. Such unfortunate blemishes in the translation are briefly as follows:

In many places the translation, although correct, is extremely literal and may cause communicative snags for Western readers. The age-old proverb, "If the loved one is loyal, she cannot be pretty, and if pretty, she cannot be loyal," best describes such a translation. A second significant shortcoming of the book is that, without any fixed principle, page upon page of the original text is uncritically skipped over, leading to incoherence and incompatibility, causing problems in communication, and seriously affecting the scope of the translation's usefulness. The selected content of each poet as given by Āzād has been maimed and mangled. Poetic examples adduced in the prose text have been handled arbitrarily. While some examples have been retained, others are left out. Similarly, some prose excerpts are translated and others ignored. This mode of acceptance and rejection is autarchic and quite arbitrary. Let us, however, see what the translators have to offer in this regard. In a section titled "How To Use This Translation" they advise:

Because the Urdu text is 528 pages long, some parts of it have been merely summarized or described, rather than translated in full. Summaries of omitted material are contained within square brackets. We have omitted some of the most technical material (certain linguistic examples) and some of the most untranslatable material (certain literary examples). Small omissions of these kinds occur at many points within the text, and are always clearly indicated.

But the bulk of our omissions are of a different sort. They are made in the anthology sections. After Āzād writes about each poet, he generally offers a sample of that poet's work; these samples range in length from a few verses to a number of pages. We have not translated these anthology sections.

Our reasons for omitting the anthology sections are both pragmatic and literary. Pragmatically, we recognize that these verses have merely been selected, not composed, by Āzād, and are in most cases available (often in better versions) from other sources as well. Thus since we have to cut

somewhere, this is a good place to do it.

(AHE, x)

The truth is that the detailed excerpt given above does not satisfy the sensible reader.

The distortions generated by the extremely literal translation and a close study of a few pages of the book can readily identify the whimsical mode of selection.

In the following I offer a few samples of such literal translation and the various levels of miscommunication it has triggered. (Translation is given following the original text; nonsensical translation is underscored):

1. In the section titled “The History of Urdu Poetry,” Āzād has mentioned one Bī Čimmō (an old female tobacconist) who served the Amīr with a huqqah (it is interesting to note, however, that the times of Amīr Khusrau were unacquainted with tobacco; it reached the Deccan centuries later through the Portuguese and then was transmitted onward to North India). Āzād writes: “*Ēk dīn ūs nē kahā ke balā lūñ, hazāroñ ghazlēñ, gīt, rāg rāgnī banātē hō [...] kōʿī čīz lonḍī kē nām par bhī banā dō*” (AHU, 71).

Now “*balā lēnā*” as a ritual ceremony was practiced in a very peculiar way among Indian womenfolk. First of all, a woman would pat a minor’s head, then place the fingers of her hands on her temples and snap them. This act of snapping fingers was called “*blāʿēñ lēnā*.” The women believed that through this act they had taken the misfortunes of the minor upon themselves. True, but as an idiomatic expression, “*blāʿēñ lēnā*” just means “to sacrifice oneself,” “to love someone immensely.” Pritchett translates “*balā lūñ*” as: “May I take your misfortunes upon myself” (AHE, 100). Though true in the backdrop of the ceremony mentioned above, the translation has become too literal and formal. It could easily have been rendered as: “May I be sacrificed to you.”

2. [...] *mē parad rañgam ḥubābē gar be-daryā bishkanad* (AHU, 112).
My color flies away if a bubble bursts in the ocean (AHE, 128).

3. In AHU, Āzād quotes a *sheʿr* of Mīr Zāhik:

*Kyā dījīyē iślāḥ khudāʿī kō vagarnā
kāfi thā tirā ḥusn agar māh nā bōtā*

(175)

The meaning of the *sheʿr* is simply that the beloved’s beauty is so enchanting and exceptional that it would make no difference if there were no moon in the universe. In lexicons, *khudāʿī* has come to stand for “people,” “world,” “universe.” Zauq, in this regard, has a famous *sheʿr* to his credit:

*Kyā gharaz lākḥ khudā'ī mēñ bōñ daulat vālē
un kā bandā hūñ jō bandē haiñ maḥabbat vālē*¹

What do I care if there be innumerable people of wealth on earth
I am the slave of those who are men of Love!

(My translation)

Mīr Zāhik's above-noted *she'r* has been translated as:

How could one give correction to God—otherwise,
Your beauty would have been enough, if there had been no moon
(AHE, 174)

“God” as the substitute for *khudā'ī* is quite fallacious and inappropriate.

4. Commenting on and appreciating the easy, smooth style of Mīr Sōz, Āzād regrets that this style could not persist for long since the Persian style of colorful metaphors and ideas full of exaggeration had overpowered the literary scene and had become expletives for people: “[...] *rañgīn iste'ārāt aur mubālgha kē khayālāt goyā miśl takya-e kalām kē zabānōñ per čarḥ ga'e haiñ*” (AHU, 187). This has been translated so literally that it appears to border on caricature: “[...] colorful metaphors and ideas full of exaggeration have been placed like pillows for our speech to recline against” (AHE, 181). The underscored phrase could be translated as: “...have become expletives for us.”

5. In the Fourth Era, Āzād gives credit to Rañgīn for inventing a new genre, *rēkhtī*, but at the same time he also applauds the services of Inshā'allāh Khān Inshā' in this regard saying: “*Syed Inshā' kī tab'e rañgīn nē bhī mūjid sē kam sughrāpā nabīñ dekhāyā*” (AHU, 259). Now the word *sugghar* literally means “the one skillfully fashioned.” Hence *sughrāpā* means “skillfulness,” “accomplishment” and “elegance.” *Sughrāpā* is not specific to the female sex. Anyone who is skillful and accomplished can be called *sugghar*, regardless of whether the person is a female or not.

Keeping this exposition in mind, note the translation of the above passage: “[...] but the colorful [*rañgīn*] temperament of Sayyid Inshā showed no less feminine skill than that of the inventor” (AHE, 232). The word “feminine” here is altogether superfluous and demands to be omitted.

6. Again in regard to Inshā', Āzād says that in spite of his close association with the court of Nawwāb Sa'adat 'Alī Khān, he was never well-off because the Nawwāb was not very generous and the following verse proved true in his [Nawwāb's] case:

¹*Kulliyāt-e Zauq* (Delhi: Taraqqī-e-Urdū Bureau, 1980), p. 201.

*Gar jān ṭalabī mūzā'iqā nīst
zar mī-ṭalabī sūkhan darīn ast*

(AHU, 281)

In Persian “*sūkhan darīn ast*” means “it is debatable” or “one cannot agree with this [matter].” A *she‘r* of Ārzū would illustrate my point:

*‘Aqīq rā ke ba ū nāmdārī-e-yaman ast
shabīb-e la‘al-e tō gūftum valī der ān sūkhan ast²*

The clime of Yamen is famous for its agate
I likened yours lips with agate but I myself do not agree with it

(My translation)

The line: “*zar mī-ṭalabī sūkhan darīn ast*,” however, has been translated as: “But if you want money—I won’t even discuss it!” (AHE, 248). A better translation for the underscored phrase might be: “... it is debatable.”

7. In the Fourth Era, Āzād has devoted a few pages to the literary encounters between Inshā’ and Muṣḥafī where satires were composed which sometimes bordered on obscenity. Then, by way of advice, he says: “*Khair hamēn čābi’ē ke ṭhōrī dēr kē liyē shebd kī makkhī ban jā’ēn. Jabān rasilā phūl dēkhēn, jā bēḥēn, jālē aur mailē mailē pattōn sē bacēn*” (AHU, 302). This passage has been translated as: “Well, for a little while we ought to become honeybees—where we see a juicy flower, we ought to go and alight. We ought to avoid the spiderwebs and the many dirty leaves” (AHE, 260). It did not cross the mind of the translator that the word “*jālē*” here actually denotes the wild-grown weeds, grass or bushes, and have a semantic affinity with dirty leaves. “Spiderwebs” are quite out of place here. John Platts, in his famous *Urdu, Classical Hindi and English Dictionary* has given one of the meanings of *jālē* as “weeds.”

8. In the Fifth Era of *Āb-e Ḥayāt* (hereafter, AH), Āzād makes mention of Imām Bakhsh Nāsikh. Taking note of the fast decaying values of his time, he feels grief-stricken and remembers with sadness his mentor (*ustād*) Ibrāhīm Zauq. Feeling affinity between himself and Muḥammad ‘Azīmu’-l-Lāh Raghmī, the one who long enjoyed the company of Nāsikh, Āzād records a famous Persian couplet:

*Bināl būlbul agar bā manat sar-e-yārīst
ke mā dō ‘āshiq-e zārīm-o-kār-e mā zārīst*

(AHU, 329)

Pritchett has translated this as:

²Tēk Čand Bahār, *Babār-e ‘Ajām* (Lucknow: Naval Kishore, 1916), p. 416.

Oh nightingale, lament, if you claim to be friends with me
For we are two sad lovers, and our desire is to weep

(AHE, 276)

The English translation of the *sheʿr* falls short of the original. “*Kār-e mā zārīst*” has a clear meaning: “We are wont to cry/weep.” “Our desire is to weep” is an inappropriate translation since the word “desire” here is quite unjustifiable and uncalled for.

9. Āzād has mentioned Shāh Naṣīr in the same Fifth Era. The name of his father was Shāh Gharīb. Making a pun on Shāh Gharīb, Āzād writes: “*apnī ghūrbat-e ṭabʿa aur khāksārī-e mīzāj kī badōlat ism bā musammā gharīb thē*” (AHU, 387). He writes further that many a royal village had been allotted to his forefathers and he had inherited them. This speaks volumes that Shāh Gharīb was “*gharīb*” (poor) in name only. That is why he raised his child, Shāh Naṣīr, along lines conforming to élitist notions of propriety and respectability and appointed competent and well-reputed tutors for his education. What Āzād meant by “*ghūrbat-e ṭabʿa*” was simply that Shāh Gharīb was not “*gharīb*” in the literal sense of the word but out of his nature and temperament; he had inwardly made his heart his true habitat. However, in the English translation he has been parenthesized “poor” (AHE, 318), which is ridiculous. It could have been easily translated as “outsider” or “stranger.”

10. “*Bāteñ kabāniyāñ hō gaʿīñ*” (AHU, 409), is translated as “All these things became stories” (AHE, 333), which is too literal. “All these are now bygone tales” would have been a better substitute.

As mentioned above, the translator’s misrepresentation of the content and her arbitrary treatment of the text is unacceptable. It violates the established principles of good translation, which assign priority to the original text. Any violation of this fundamental principle is likely to lead to a flawed translation.

At certain places, the communicative value of some lines and verses has been seriously damaged, negating the very aim of translation. A couple of examples will clarify my point:

It is a known fact that AH not only deals with the lives of poets and their poetry but also discusses at length the evolution of Urdu language in different periods. Āzād was not only a literary historian, he was also a competent linguist in general. Hence it is a great injustice to omit a considerable chunk of his linguistic deliberations. As a consequence of such omissions, the reader is offered only a fragmentary picture of his linguistic discourses.

The anthology sections of the poets who are under discussion, anthologies compiled by Āzād himself, are also of great importance since they

have been done by a man who was himself a great connoisseur of poetry. Such anthologies invariably reflect whether the anthologist's critical acumen is deep or shallow. Their omission (AHE, x–xi) with the argument that these are also available elsewhere is a faulty logic, carrying no weight at all. Such omissions are tantamount to depriving the reader of the joy of poetry which otherwise might have been his pride and privilege. Such omissions aside, even other omitted examples (both poetical and prose) have greatly reduced the scope and influence of AHE. The following examples elaborate my point:

In the context of the evolution of the Urdu language in North India, Āzād had quoted certain examples from Faḏlī, Maḏhar Jān-e Jānān and Inshā', which, of course, were an eye-opener for the reader. An excerpt from Faḏlī *Dah Majlis* ran thus:

Phir dil mēn guzrā ke aisē kām kō 'aql čāhiyē kāmīl aur madad kisū ṭaraf kī hō'ē sbāmīl kyūnkē bē tā'id-e šamadī aur bē madad-e Janāb-e Aḥmadī. Yē šakl šurat pazīr nā hōvē. Aur gōhar-e murād rishta'-e ummīd mēn nā āvē. Libāzā kō'i is šan'at kā nabīn hūā mukhtari' aur ab tak tarjama Fārsī ba 'ibārat-e Hindī naṣr nabīn hūā. [...] Nāgāb nasīm-e 'ināyat-e ilāhī dil-afgār par ebtizāz mēn ā. Yē bāt ā'ina khaṭīr mēn munh dikhā'i.

(AHU, 22)

Then it occurred to me that such a difficult task demands deep thought and assistance from someone since, without the benevolence of God and His Prophet, it was difficult to accomplish. No one, till now, had been the innovator of this genre and no one had attempted the translation of [this] Persian [work] into Hindi. [...] All of a sudden, the Zephyr of God's benevolence started blowing in my wounded self and a strange fact appeared in the mirror of my heart.

(My translation)

This excerpt was worth mentioning not only because of its clear, matter-of-fact prose, but also because it has been taken from the first prose work that appeared in North India. Hence there was no logic in omitting it. Again, it was far easier to translate versus the dialogue between Maḏhar Jān-e Jānān and Inshā'.

On page 30 of AHU, Āzād admits that infinitives did exist in Hindi but hundreds of compound verbs were invented with the passage of time. In addition to these, a good number of infinitives and derivations were taken from Arabic and Persian and were converted into Hindi derivations. To adduce his stance, he quoted verbs and phrases such as *gozashtan*, *farmūdan*, *qubūl*, *badal*, *bakhsīdan*, *larzīdan*, *navākhtan* and *kāhīlī*. These were converted into Hindi (Urdu) as *guzarnā*, *farmānā*, *qūbūlnā*, *laraznā*, *navāznā* and *kablānā*. Āzād used these verbs in sentences as examples.

All these verbs and examples were omitted in AHE with the single exception of *kablānā*.

At the beginning of AH, Āzād refers to the adoption of Persian and Arabic words in Hindi and of Hindi words in the Persian language. He cites an interesting example from *Tuzuk-e Jahāngīrī* on the assimilation of Hindi words into Persian in which Akbar had advised Jahangir to treat well his younger sister Ārām Bānō Begam (AHU, 48–49). In the English translation this example has been elided, crippling the communicational effectiveness of Āzād's intention (AHE, 81).

Āzād put forth some interesting examples of certain poets who had come across a *she'r* or two of a certain Persian poet and converted it into Urdu verbatim. In this connection he quoted a famous couplet of Maẓmūn:

*Ham nē kyā kyā na tirē 'ishq mēn maḥbūb kiyā
ṣabr-e Ayyūb kiyā girya'-e Ya'qūb kiyā*

(AHU, 96)

This couplet was actually plagiarized from a Persian couplet of Muklīṣ Kāshī which ran:

*Dar firāq-e tū čihā aē būt-e maḥbūb kūnam
ṣabr-e Ayyūb kūnam girya-e Ya'qūb kūnam*

The translator did enter Maẓmūn's couplet but omitted the one from which it had been plagiarized (AHE, 116–17). What an irony!

In the Third Era of AH, Āzād complained that since the *divāns* of our poets are arranged according to the *abjad* system, one cannot discern which poetry belongs to each period of a poet's life. In the absence of this, one cannot assess the transitional variations of the style of a certain poet occurring in the different phases of his creativity. This was, of course, a very important point raised by Āzād. As two exceptions, Āzād made mention of Amīr Khusrau and Jāmi's works, i.e., *Tuḥfat aṣ-Ṣiḡhar*, *Ghur-rātu'l-Kamāl*, *Vasaṭu'l-Ḥayāt* (Khusrau) and *Fātiḥatu'sh-Shabāb* (Jāmi), which indicated clearly the period-by-period differences of their poetic diction. These works were omitted from the English translation with no plausible reason.

Another interesting example relates to the meeting between Sayyid Inshā' and Mirzā Maẓhar (AHU, 135–36) in which Inshā', with remarkable devotion, has furnished details about the personality of Mirzā Maẓhar and the distinctive features of his dress. One fails to understand the omission of this example or what harm it might have inflicted on the compactness of the translation. These examples are so plentiful that the comparison does not provide even the slightest justification for the unpardonable omissions.

The translator's norm with regard to the translation of poetry has been: "In general, we have chosen to sacrifice elegance for the sake of accuracy" (AHE, xi). However much accuracy may be commendable over elegance, the sheer literalism at certain points in the translation at hand has not only marred the beauty of the original text but has also become a bit ludicrous, insipid and fails to carry over the meaning properly.

Now let me look at the places where the translation is clearly incorrect and makes no sense at all.

In AH, in the context of *Niṣab'u-ṣ-Ṣibyān*, where *Khāliq Bārī* is ascribed to Amīr Khusrau, Āzād writes:

*Khāliq bārī bhī inḥīn kē makhlūqāt-e fikr sē hai. Bārik-bīn ashkbāṣ us sē
bhī bubat sē alfāz aur fiqrē dēkh kar ye nuktē samajh saktē haiñ: beyā
birādar ā'ō rē bhā'ī // benashīn mādar bēṭh ri mā'ī.*

(AHU, 16)

In English "*beyā birādar ā'ō rē bhā'ī*" has been translated as "Like father, like son; like mother, like daughter" (AHE, 65). The reader simply wonders what connection the translation possibly has to the original verse!

In the Third Era of AH, Āzād writes about certain words whose gender had not been fixed up to the time of Mīr and Saudā. In this context he has quoted the following verses of Mirzā Saudā:

*Kahā ṭabīb nē aḥvāl dēkh kar mērā
ke sakht-jān hai Saudā kā, āh kyā kijē
Butāñ kā dīd mēñ kartā hūñ sheikh jis din sē
ḥalāl tab sē hai mai, mū ba-mū mirē dil par
Karēñ shumār baham, dil kē, yār, dāghōñ kā
tū ā kē sair karēñ āj dil kē bāghōñ kā*

(AHU, 165)

Now it was Āzād's sheer bad luck that in order to highlight their gender, he not only underlined the words "*jān*," "*dīd*" and "*sair*" but also noted them in the margins." Pritchett, in her misplaced enthusiasm, draped them in the garb of poets and wrote "Illustrative verses by Jān, Dīd, and Sair" (AHE, 169).

In regard to Dard's early education, Āzād writes that for many months Dard received instruction on the *maṣnavī* from Muftī Daulat Ṣāḥib (AHU, 176), which obviously means that he had received instruction in Rūmī's *Maṣnavī*. However, Pritchett translates this as: "Muftī Daulat Sahib instructed him in the art of the *Maṣnavī*" (AHE, 174).³

³Pritchett's translation of the sentence actually reads, "[F]or a number of months, Muftī Daulat Sahib instructed him in the art of the *Maṣnavī* [of Maulanā Rūm]." —Ed.

In my view, the addition of “in the art of ...” is superfluous. The reference is clearly to a particular *mašnavī*, that of Rūmī. Not only was it extremely popular in the Sufi circles of the South Asian subcontinent, it was also the staple of every young man’s early education. Therefore, the sprig of a Sufi family like Dard’s was eminently and inevitably cut out for such instruction.

Āzād writes in reference to Mīr’s “seventy two lancets” or surgical knives: “*Urdū zabān kē jauharī qadīm sē kabtē ā’ē haiñ: sattar aur dō bahattar nashtar haiñ. Bāqī Mīr Šāhib kā tabarruk hai.* (AHU, 198). Here, “*tabarruk*” means either quantitatively insignificant or qualitatively inferior, but Pritchett, instead of interpreting the word figuratively translates it literally, “The rest is [only] Mīr Sahib’s blessing” (AHE, 189). The word “blessing” is, in the present context, semantically irrelevant and grossly misleading.

On the next page Āzād quotes the following verse by Mīr and comments on the poet’s self-reliance and self-conceit:

*Mujh kō dimāgh vaṣf-e gul-o-yāsman nabīñ
maiñ jūñ nasim bād-farōsh-e čaman nabīñ*

(AHU, 199)

In her translation—“I’m not minded to praise the rose and the jasmine, // I’m not, like the breeze, a fragrance-merchant for the garden” (AHE, 189), Pritchett does not realize that the word “*bād-farōsh*” means a garrulous and sycophantic person and only this interpretation is relevant to an understanding of the meaning of the she’r.

In the Fourth Era of AH, we witness a spirited and vivacious battle of masters of Urdu poetry vying with one another to steal the show: one such battle contained a chain of satire within satire: “*ḥūr’s neck, the skink’s neck, the baboon’s neck.*” One of Inshā’s poetic lines contained the word “*Maryam*”: “*Mahfil mēñ tirī, sham‘ banī mōm kī Maryam*” (AHU, 306). *Maryam* [made of wax] denotes a frail and delicate woman. Since “*Maryam*” was misprinted in the 1907 edition as “*marḥam*,” the translator was naturally misled to translate it wrongly, thinking little that such a translation made no sense at all⁴ (“In your gathering, the wax of the candle became

⁴A similar bon-mot popped up in connection with the English translation on p. 242 where “Maulvī Sajan” has been printed as “Maulvī Sukhan,” ignoring Inshā’s quatrain which had been composed keeping in view the word “sajan”:

*Tarkhīm kē qā‘idē sē sajnā likhīyē
aur lafẓ kharōjnā kō kbajnā likhīyē
Gar ham kō “ajī na likhīyē” hūvē likhnā
tō kar kē murakhkham is kō ajnā likhīyē*

(AHU 275)

salve—” (AHE, 263).

In the same Fourth Era, a sentence regarding encounters between Inshā’ and Muṣḥafī runs: “*Ye rivāyatēñ bhī mukbtalif haiñ aur mukbtalif zabānōñ par parīshān haiñ*” (AHU, 302). Here, the word *parīshān* means “popular,” not “disordered” as Pritchett’s translation has it (“These stories too are various, and are disordered on various tongues” (AHE, 260)).

A little further down the last she’r of Muṣḥafī’s poem “Zuhra kī Jō Ā’ī Kaf-e-Hārūt meñ Uñglī” runs

*Thā Muṣḥafī ye mā’īl-e giryab ke pas az marg
thī uskī dharī časbm pe tābūt meñ uñglī*

(AHU, 303)

The second line of this she’r has been translated as: “in the coffin, there was stuck in his eye—a finger” (AHE, 260). It would have been contextually more appropriate to translate “placed on his eyes,” rather than “stuck in his eye.” In any case, satire within satire was the order of the day, and Sayyid Inshā’ was not one to sit back. He rose to the challenge and retorted:

*Tōrūñgā khum-e bāda’-e añgūr kī garden
rakḥ duñgā vabāñ kāt kē ek ḥūr kī garden*

(AHU, 305)

This poem also contained the she’r about “*mōm kī Marīyam*,” discussed above. Muṣḥafī gave his scathing response in a long satirical poem composed in the same meter. In one of its she’rs, he denigrated Inshā’ as a despicable and helpless ant (AHU, 308). The phonic compatibility between “*bōjḥ*” and “*mōr*” is quite obvious, but Pritchett has chosen to translate “*mōr*” as “peacock” instead of “ant”: “This burden can’t be lifted by a peacock’s neck!” (AHE, 265).

In the Fifth Era, a sentence is found regarding Nāsikh’s insipid innovations, viz., “*Shaikh Ṣāhib kī akṣar nāzuk-khayāliyāñ aisī haiñ ke kōb kandan va kāb bar-āvurdan*” (AHU, 342). Its English translation, inspired by the proverbial Urdu cliché “*khōdā pahār nīklā čūhā*,” instead of the Persian proverb noted above, is: “Shaikh Nāsikh is so fond of ‘delicate thoughts,’ it’s as though ‘the mountain had labored and brought forth a mouse’” (AHE, 288).

The truth is that if “*kāb*” can be translated as “mouse,” the mountain can also be made to feel the pangs of giving birth. Like Inshā’ and Muṣḥafī, the wrangles of Ātash and Nāsikh are equally famous. The allegation leveled against Nāsikh was that he plagiarized the themes of men of distinction. Ātash satirized his penchant for plagiarism in this she’r:

Mazmūn kā čōr bōtā hai rusvā jabān meñ

čakkhī kharāb kartī hai māl-e ḥarām kī

(AHU, 346)

Pritchett's translation reads: "The thief of a theme is disgraced in the world, // Forbidden property destroys the taste" (AHE, 292). Now "*čakkhī*," also called *čakhōtī*, means "a relished meal" or "delicious food." "Taste" here is a poor substitute for the word. The following translation would have done greater justice to the meaning: "The delicious food of iniquitous wealth destroys man."

AH relates a tradition that at one stage Nāsikh suffered from some blood disorder (AHU, 330). Pritchett uses "Because of a skin condition" (AHE, 277) in her translation, however, the word "septicemia" would have been far more appropriate.

On page 372, Āzād quotes two she'rs by Mīr Khaliq regretting that he could not lay hands on the complete poem. One of the two she'rs is: "*Hañs diyā yār nē jō rāt Khaliq*." Pritchett's translation:

The beloved burst out laughing last night, Khaliq
When I stumbled and fell down against her doorway

(AHE, 310)

It is quite clear from the she'r that the act of falling was the result of the beloved's sarcastic burst of laughter, otherwise the she'r would become poetically superficial and hollow. However, it would gain immensely in semantic effectiveness if "when" were replaced by "whereupon."

Āzād has painted a miserable picture of Ḥaidar 'Alī Ātash's unpretentious and practically mendicant lifestyle in a memorable passage: "*Sar par ek zulf aur kabhī Ḥaidarī čuṭṭā ke ye bhī Muḥammad Shāhī bāñkōñ kā sikkab hai. Isī mēñ ek ṭurra sabzī kā bhī lagā'ē rahtē thē aur bē-takallufāna rahtē thē*" (AHU, 373). In her English translation of this passage, viz.: [...] "and sometimes a thick curly braid in the Ḥaidarī style, for this too was the hallmark of the dandies of the Muḥammad Shāhī time. And with it he wore a green turban-ornament, and a casual manner" (AHE, 311), Pritchett has failed to realize that the phrase "*sabzī kā ṭurra*" is not "a green turban-ornament," but rather a "draught of the potion made with hemp-leaves" as in the following she'r by Ṣabā:

*Faqīr mast haiñ bar vaqt kaifiyat mēñ rahtē haiñ
kabhī ṭurra hai sabzī kā, kabhī ghōlā hai afyūn kā⁵*

The dervishes are always drunk,

⁵Nuru'l-Ḥasan Nayyar, *Nūr'u-Lughāt* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel Publications, 1989), vol. 3, p. 290.

They are always in a state,
Sometimes it is a hemp draught,
and sometimes an opium blend.

(My translation)

Such inaccuracies can also be seen on pages 314, 315 and 316 of the English translation. For instance, the first line of Ātash's popular verse

*Dukhtar-e raz miri mūnis bai, miri ham-dam bai
maiñ Jabāngīr hūñ, vō Nūrjabāñ Bēgam bai*

(AHU, 377)

has been rendered as: "The daughter of the grape is a woman, she is my companion" (AHE, 314). The translation of "*miri mūnis bai*" as "is a woman" is achromatic and stripped of all grace and aesthetic subtlety. Yet another popular verse of Ātash (AHU, 381) has been translated as:

Sahib, you have begun to make faces too while giving abuse—
If your language is damaged, it's damaged—look and see if your face
is damaged!

(AHE, 315)

A more appropriate translation of "*zabān*" here is "tongue," rather than "language," and "*daban*" should have been translated as "mouth," not as "face." In addition, "if" has been used at two places which is syntactically jarring and stylistically distasteful.

On page 320, Pritchett translates "*tazallum*" as "lament," though it means "to cry for help or redress."

Likewise, the translation of the second line of Shāh Naṣīr's she'r quoted by Āzād, namely,

*Bayābāñ marg bai Majnūn-e khāk-āludāh tan kis kā
siyē bai sauzan'e khār-e mughlāñ tū kafan kis kā*

(AHU, 391)

happens to be wide off the mark: "Oh Majnūn with the dust-smeared body, whose body is now dead in this wilderness?" (AHE, 321).

Actually the poet means to say why did Majnūñ, dust-smeared, die in the wilderness, i.e., why did he die in a state of helplessness? To which, the answer must be, "obviously out of love for Laila." Unfortunately, the translator has missed the real meaning.

Another lively and quite effective description is the reference to "Hudhud ash-Shua'rā," four of whose she'rs were given by Āzād. One of them reads:

*Jō ā kē rēz karē mērē āgē mūsīqār
tō aisē kān maṛōrōn ke bē-surā kardūn*

(AHU, 466)

This is translated by Pritchett as:

If the Musician-bird should preen himself before me
I will twist his ears and make him sing a different tune

(AHE, 380)

“Preen” actually means a bird tidying its feathers with its beak. Its use in the translation misses the point, because “*rēz karna*” means “to chirp,” which is required by the context of the sheʿr. Similarly, the translation of “*bē-surā kardūn*” is also flawed.

In short, there are many other spots where the translation is either totally or partially incorrect or purely literal to the point of sheer absurdity. My fear of this review morphing into a lengthy article restrains me from further elaboration. Besides, the book is rife with other mistakes, for example, “*sabad čīn*” has been written as “*sabd-e čīn*,” or the claim in footnote 2 on page 355 that “within the literary critical tradition,” the term *taghlīb* “seems to be completely nonexistent.” Quite the contrary, *taghlīb* is a well-known linguistic term and means the comprehensive or inclusive use of a word or expression, for example, “*abvayn*,” which means both father and mother), though *abū* is used only for father, or the words *validain* (both parents), and *qamarain* (both the moon and the sun), etc.

There are many other flaws and distortions in the English translation that need to be closely looked at. Some errors relate to history or events. For example, on page 287 Manī and Behzād are eulogized as Mughal miniaturists. The question arises: what connection did the famous painter Manī have with Mughal miniature since he flourished during the reign of Ardashīr? Behzād was also a reputed Iranian painter during Taimur’s reign. On page 309, Mīr Anīs is mentioned instead of Mīr Uns. And in footnote 2 on page 364, the words “*al-Kabīr*” and “*al-Ṣaghīr*” are used to explain that these “are two books of logic in Arabic.” I am inclined to think that here the two terms of logic standing for the “major premise” and “minor premise” have been muddled with “*ṣaghīr*” and “*kabīr*,” though they retain this identity in the Arabic grammar.

In Pritchett’s translation, some words desperately call for explanatory footnotes. For instance, the word “*lā-khair*” in Ātash’s famous opening sheʿr

*Ye bazm vo hai ke lā-khair kā maqā nabīn
hamārē ganjafē mēn bāzī gbulām nabīn*

(AHU 380; AHE 315)

One could profitably rely for its explanation on the Qur'anic Surahs an-Nahl and an-Nisā', where verse 16 of the former aptly illustrates its meaning. The Qur'an draws a comparison between two persons: one dumb and dense, the other sensible, articulate and upright. The Qur'an refers to the first person as *ainamā yuwajjibu lā yāti bikhairin* (16:76), meaning, "Wherever the [master] sends him, he bungles the job." In verse 4 of Surah an-Nisā' one reads "*lā khaira fī kaširin min najvāhum* [...]," meaning "There are many whispers which contain no good [...]."

In Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's "Constructing a Literary History [...]," which appears at the beginning of Pritchett's translation, one finds a wealth of highly thought-provoking ideas. Here, though, I might mention that his assertion in footnote 20 on page 27 that the preface to *Ghurratu'l-Kamāl* by Amīr Khusrau was published only once, from Delhi, and never again, is not true. Khusrau's preface, titled "Preface to Dīvān *Ghurratu'l-Kamāl*" was published from Lahore in October 1975 by the compiler and editor Sayyid Vazīru'l-Ḥasan 'Ābidī, a distinguished Persian scholar, on the occasion of Khusrau's seven-hundredth anniversary celebrations.

In the English translation of AH, one falls prey to ambiguity at certain points. For example, during the literary encounters between Inshā' and Muṣḥafī many ghazals, "*Hūr kī garden*," "*Langūr kī garden*," etc., were composed. These also included the one which Muṣḥafī had composed in response to Inshā''s ghazal. It contained the couplet:

*Vo Shāh-e Sulaimān ke agar tēgh-e 'adālat
tuk khēñchē to dō hō vabīñ Faghfūr kī gardan*

(AHU, 308)

which has been translated as:

That King Solomon, if he should just slightly draw the sword of justice
It would be cut in two, the Emperor of China's neck.

(AHE, 265)

The word "be" in the second line is not needed, while the first line mentions "King Solomon," which drives the reader's attention to the memory of the famous king of Israel, Ḥaḏrat Sulaimān, whereas the intent of Muṣḥafī was just to indicate the son of Shāh 'Ālam, the king of Delhi, Prince Sulaimān, with whom Muṣḥafī was associated for correcting and improving the prince's ghazals.

Last but not least, it is a widely known fact that AH, despite its immense readability, contains scores of research lapses. As a matter of principle, all such lapses demand brief corrective notes. If this were not possible as a whole, the translators should have at least taken into consideration those

errors, which, though mostly known to Urdu readers, would be little known to the Western perusers for whom the translation was principally intended. Take, for example, the case of one Gunnā Bēgam, a charming poet whom Āzād has mentioned in one of his footnotes (AHU, 281) as the daughter of Qizilbāsh Khān Ummīd—while in actual fact she was the daughter of ‘Alī Qulī Khān Vāleh Dāghistānī, the six-fingered *tazkira* writer of *Riyāz ash-Shu‘arā*. In the same footnote, Āzād has described Sa‘ādat ‘Alī Khān as the son of Gunnā Bēgam, which is equally wrong. If such errors and omissions had been corrected with brief notes, the book might have proved more beneficial for Western readers.

Thus the English translation of *Āb-e Hayāt*, despite its merits, needs to be thoroughly revised. In its present form, it suffers from an arbitrary mutilation of the select articulations of some poets and either completely ignores or under-emphasizes the significance of the illustrative examples. In some places the translation is so tarnished that one almost involuntarily invokes divine help for clarification. □