

In theory there is no way to define a metrical line. You can only sense that it is metrical. It is in this sense in Urdu poetry we have terms as *mauzun* (metrical) and *na mauzun* (not in metre). A person who can sense if a line is mauzun or na mauzun is described in the literary culture as *na mauzun tab'*. There is no logical, demonstrable way to prove that a certain sound-pattern in a line of verse is metrical, or that such and such sound-pattern is not metrical. You simply cannot say this. All you can say that since this line follows a certain given, familiar pattern which is recognized as metrical, so this line is metrical. That this line sounds sweet or agreeable to the ear or this sound-pattern is freely flowing and so forth, are not statements in prosody. There is no way that you can say that there is no other sequence of sounds or no other elements of sounds that cannot be metrical.

In Urdu, the problem is manifold. First of all, Urdu has a very strong structure of metric statements in the *abstract* whose details are known as *bahr* (metre) and *vazn* (weight). Armed with an adequate knowledge of these terms, we can describe the meter of a given line and also the weight of each foot and its constituent syllables. So we can always say that here is a recognized meter-weight pattern and these lines conform to that pattern. Hence these lines are 'metrical'. But that would only be a mechanical statement. It won't prove 'metricality'. But there is no way to ascertain that the metre-weight pattern is itself metrical. For example, take the popular metre-weight pattern called *Hazaj Musamman Salim*. It goes like this:

Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun

That is to say, there are four feet, each foot has four syllables; each syllable conforms to the pattern of one short syllable (let's say -) followed by three long syllables (let's say +)

Now, an Urdu line according to this pattern will be:

Kisi ko de ke dil ko'i nawa sanj-e fughan kyun ho

Correct scansion of the line will give use the following weight-pattern:

Kisi ko de (mafailun/-+++)/key dil koy'i (mafailun/-+++))/ nawa sanj -e (mafailun/-++ +)/ fughan kyun ho (mafailun/-+++).

So one can prove that the misra—i.e. one of the lines of a two line couplet in Urdu—by Ghalib follows strictly the pattern:

Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun

Therefore, it is in the metre; but whether the metrical statement itself *Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun* is metrical, there is no way to prove this, despite the fact that it sounds metrical, or to put it in colloquial terms, it sounds 'musical'.

The other problem of metrics in Urdu, which is in fact a universal problem in metrics and the theory of metre everywhere is that you can only depend on your power of hearing and your judgment of sounds to say that certain line is metrical or not.

As far as Urdu prosody is concerned, the problem is quite peculiar simply because no statement can be considered metrical unless it follows a given metrical pattern. This is a

very difficult thing to understand. For example: *aj main subh uttha, tabi'at bahut bhari thi, leta he raha*. It is good prose but there is no way to say that it is not in metre. All that we can say is that it does not conform to any prevalent or even recognized metre-weight pattern in Urdu, therefore it is numerical. Yet there is no way to prove that the metrical line itself: *Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun, Mafailun* in itself is metrical. It sounds metrical but it follows a given pattern of syllables in which the poet is composing. English, as I said, does not necessarily follow a given number of syllables. In English the fundamental thing is the *stress* that a syllable carries, and *not* the length of the syllable.

Since Greek and Latin have a length-based prosody, and English by the 1th century was furiously imitating Greek and Latin, English metrical theory long continued to discuss matters relating to English prosody as if the English metres also were based on the length of the syllables. But this position was given up by late 17th century when it became recognized that the bedrock of an English metrical line is *stress*, and not *length*. This helped much greater flexibility. Also, by a natural development, it was recognized that it was not always necessary in a poem for all lines to be of equal length. Stanza form or verse forms could be devised or adopted where all lines were not equal, and a fixed could or could not be imposed on where the 'smaller' line should occur.

A more important result of stress-based prosody was that the *rhythm*, or the *total musical effect* of a poem was more important than its rigid metric structure. Milton, Shakespeare, Jon Donne, Tennyson, Keats, and all others write poems in the iambic pentameter, but the iambic pentameter of each sound different from the rest. Still, there is also a recognizable effect of iambic pentameter *which is common to all poems in iambic pentameter*.

If you read or hear carefully, you will find that much English poetry does not conform to any recognizable metre at all. Therefore, it is not metrical. There is no way to produce a line in Urdu poetry (apart from the prose nazm or prose poetry which is in plain prose) which may sound metrical but may not be in a given metre.

In English, for example, it is quite possible to write a line of verse which does not follow any given metrical pattern and yet it sounds metrical. Thus, English has a wealth of what is known as free verse, the verse which does not follow any given metrical pattern and yet it sounds metrical. The best example is Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* whose general scheme is that each line is longer than a normal English verse line and there will be 3 or 4 stresses to a line, but on the syllables on which stress will fall which will not be regular so that would always fall on the 3rd syllable or the 4th syllable or the 6th syllable or the 7th syllable and so forth. It can be fall anywhere and the rest will be unstressed, and the lines sound metrical though there is recognizable metrical pattern. So it is a phenomenon of the English language that a line sounds metrical though there is no strict meter pattern which you can discern in that line. In Urdu, it is not possible. You must needs follow a given metric pattern.

But when you come back to the question: whether it is metrical? That is, is there any mechanism, or theory, or formula, which can be used to prove metricality? The answer is No. You only go by a custom or tradition or the way that you are used to hear sound patterns which the culture recognizes as 'metrical'. For example, somebody has sung these lines somewhere and the 'singable' or 'recitable' pattern echoes in your mind as you have heard or recited these somewhere in the past. There may perhaps be a natural intuitive power that will come into effect to tell you that here is a metrical line. Later, more familiarity with more sound-patterns can also tell you, intuitively, that there can be several recognizable patterns and the one that you are now exposed to is different. In other words, you may recognize a sound-pattern *intuitively*, but intuition is no proof. It is not objectively demonstrable or enforceable.

English in this regard has a great advantage which is the basic metrical pattern in a given English poem does not necessarily follow a system of a fixed number of syllables. The general effect (rhythm) may or may not sound like a given metre, but the poem's metrical entity remains viable.

English works according to the stressed or unstressed syllable pattern. Good English poets follow the pattern, but with astonishing freedom, and yet the total effect of the poem seems to be regular and uniform. And to create the effect of a given pattern (for instance the iambic metre) is also a certain quality which good poets always can do; how does it come about, is something that's not definable. It all comes down to the *rhythm*, or the *total musical effect* of a poem.

Tennyson is a great exponent of this quality of 'rhythm' and he can get away with creating a uniform rhythm, but also breaking the syllable (stresses/unstressed) with ease at the same time. For instance, here is the opening stanza of a poem by Tennyson, called *Break, Break, Break*:

Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones O sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

The whole stanza sounds mellifluous, and generally in iambic tetrameter. But the ground reality is different. The first line consists of three spondees, that is, one foot consisting of two stressed syllables side by side, and a single stressed syllable immediately following. But in the second line, the first foot is an anapaest, that is, two unstressed syllables followed one stressed syllable (- - +). The next two feet are regular iambs (-+/-+). The third line opens with two anapaests (And I would- -+ /that my tongue - - +), while the third foot is a regular iamb (-+), followed by one unstressed syllable (you can call it half an iamb, though not without injustice to iambic metre). The fourth line opens with a regular iambic foot (-+); it is the second foot that is an anapaest (that arise- - +), followed by a proper iambic foot.

Very few native speakers realized the prosodic-linguist marvel that this stanza is. This is because all the lines sound 'okay', generally iambic.

Judging from Urdu prosody's standpoint, none of the lines quoted above is metrical, but even an Urdu speaker, if he has a sensitive 'ear' can see that the stanza is not only in metre, but also pleasant and mellifluous. Unless she has some knowledge of English metrics, the native speaker won't even realize that there is 'something wrong' with Tennyson's lines.

THE END

Urdu Chronograms

The Hebrews, perhaps following the Aramaic language, assigned values to each letter of their alphabet. The values were in ones, 10's, and 100's, as the alphabet was read from right to left. The Arabs followed the same value-pattern and the same alphabet sequence, thus:

ا	ب	ج	د	ه	و	ز	ح	ط	ی
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ک	ل	م	ن	س	ع	ف	ص	ق	ر
20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	200
ش	ت	ث	خ	ذ	ض	ظ	ع	ق	ر
300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000		

These letters combine into groups as separate words, as follows:

ضظغ نخذ قرشت سعفص کلمن حطی ہوز ابجد

In different languages they are pronounced differently. In Urdu the standard pronunciation is:

Abjad Havvaz Hutti Kaliman Sa'fas Qarshat Sakhkhaz
Zazzagh

The numerical value of a word is determined by simple addition of the values of all the letters in it. Letters which have a tashdid are not counted twice. The *written letter is counted, not the pronounced letter. So tashdid, or izafat are not counted.*

The value of Urdu letters not found in Arabic is determined according to the corresponding letter in Arabic. Thus:

پ	ٹ	چ	ژ	ڈ	ڑ	گ	ھ
2	400	3	7	4	200	20	5

The nun-e ghunna is counted as simple nun.

Thus, the value of محمد = mim 40, bari he=8, mim=40, dal=4, Total 92

Because of the letter abjad, the system of deriving value of a letter or a word is known as قاعدہء اجد. It's also known as قاعدہء جمل.

A text (letter, word, phrase, line) whose letters' sum total gives the date of an event is known as the *tarikh* (تاریخ), which means, 'date'. (Aso 'history', but that's not relevant here.)

A *tarikh* or chronogram may be in the Hijri calendar, or the Common (Gregorian) calendar, often called Isavi in Urdu.

A line may contain many words the value of which some (one or more) letters gives the actual date. It is called the *مادہء تاریخ*. This may be contained in a she'r, or a nazm, or often in a qit'a. That is to say, two or more she'rs are composed, leading to the line in which the *مادہء تاریخ* occurs. Almost always, the *tarikh* bearing word(s) are underlined and the date written there.

Some examples:

خجستہ انجمن طوے میرزا جعفر

کہ جس کے دیکھے سے سب کا ہوا ہے جی محظوظ

ہوئ ہے ایسے ہی فرخندہ سال میں غالب

نہ کیوں ہو مادہء سال عیسوی محظوظ

1854

THE END