

THE PROBLEM OF STYLE AND TECHNIQUE IN GHALIB

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I have already discussed Ghalib's thought and poetry in some detail in the Introduction to my Selections from Ghalib which have just been published for the poet's centenary by ISMEO from Rome. /As thoughts are expressed in words, and words are arranged in a particular order and acquire different weight and colour depending on their selection and bias, the style assumes a particular form in conformity with the thought and personality of the artist. For no two writers have the same personality; and the more complex a man's thought, the more developed is his personality, the more difficult is his style. It is not merely a question of the age; it is the awareness of the age that matters. For with awareness comes comprehension and consciousness of much that lies hidden in the age. The poet has a deeper vision and greater receptivity to ideas and the Time Spirit, and often presents a picture of the age which the age itself hardly understands, as Ghalib did or Baudelaire had done in France.

Those of you who wish to know more about the thought and complexities of Ghalib should turn to my 'Ghalib' already mentioned. Here I shall only discuss certain characteristics of Ghalib's style which distinguish him from any other poet of the age or the great poets of the 18th century—the language, form, shape and pattern of his verse, the outward trappings which come to be associated with the personality of the artist, and which distinguish him at sight from any other. The question of why Ghalib used a particular diction is beside the point. He was a product not of vocabulary but of passion. His mind and personality, which were shaped by his experiences, were different from any other poet's.

Moreover, the formative influences were not the same. It is not merely a matter of heredity, although heredity plays a part in the shaping of personality.

There is no other poet quite like Ghalib, and Ghalib stands apart from all poets. Comparisons are both dangerous and misleading. But Ghalib and Mir* come very close in spite of the diversity of approach and divergence of style. In fact, no two poets could be more alike, although Mir's diction is simple and clear and Ghalib's is complex and obscure. Yet, in their attitude to the problems and complexities of life, to change and the shifting background of thought and society, they share a comprehension that is both surprising and remarkable, even though Mir's approach is through the heart, or emotions, and Ghalib's through the mind, or intellect. Yet, in their effect they often become one, Mir turning emotion into thought and Ghalib pursuing thought to the extent of emotion. And both become obscure when they extend thought to the extreme, and in their variation from normalcy, the mental make-up of the reader. The philosophical problem in both often centres round predestination and free-will, and in spite of the great difference of attitude, the axis round which they revolve is the same. When Mir says:

اب ایسے ہیں کہ صانع کے مزاج اوپر ہم ہونچے
جو خاطر خواہ اپنے ہم ہوئے ہوتے تو کیا ہوتے

*Though such we are now that we have
Precedence over the maker's pride,
If we had been entirely
Our own, what then would we have been?*

he is reaching conclusions which Ghalib arrived at in quite a different way:

ذوق بے پروا خراب وحشت تسخیر ہے
آئینہ خانہ مری شمال کو زنجیر ہے

* Mir Taqi Mir: 1723—1810

*Intelligence unconcerned
Is caught in the great despair
Of encirclement, while man's
Image remains imprisoned
In the mirror of the world.*

Mir sees through the situation of the Creator in relation to Creation, his deep sense of regret notwithstanding. Ghalib sees through it too, but expresses the thought without a shadow of emotion. Whereas Ghalib has been accused of godlessness, Mir exposes the role of godliness which is sharper in its criticism than anything Ghalib said:

الہی کیسے ہوتے ہیں جنہیں ہے بندگی خواہش
ہمیں تو شرم دانستگیر ہوتی ہے خدا ہوتے

*What be they like, O Lord, who wish
To be admitted to bondsmanship?
I am filled with shame to think of it
That ever God I should have been.*

Yet Ghalib goes further and shows the Creator helpless and unable to interfere in the affairs of the world or laws by himself made:

فرصت آئینہ صد رنگ خود آرائی ہے
روز و شب یک کف افسوس تماشاہی ہے

*Life's leisure is a mirror of the hundred hues
Of self-adoration;
And night and day, the great dismay
Of the onlooker of this scene.*

He remains purely on a metaphysical plane:

نہ تھا کچھ تو خدا تھا، کچھ نہ ہوتا تو خدا ہوتا
ڈبویا مجھ کو ہونے نے نہ ہوتا میں تو کیا ہوتا

*When there was nothing, there was God,
Had nothing been, God would have been.
My being has brought about my fall,
Had I not been, what would have been?*

Mir is a transcendentalist:

سراہا آرزو ہونے نے بندہ کردیا ہم کو
وگرنہ ہم خدا تھے گر دل بے مدعا ہوتے

*Being all desire from head to foot
Has made a slave and servant of me ;
Or else, had I been heart all free
Of desire, God I would have been.*

Ghalib says it boldly without saying it, in terms of thought, like a philosophical truth, with mathematical balance. Mir gets involved in regret, the ultimate handicap of that philosophical impossibility, the flesh.

The point I am making is that in the long run a poet with a sharp feeling is no less intellectual than a deeply thinking one. And Ghalib was a poet who thought his emotions and felt his thoughts. In other words, this was his mental set-up; his mind itself:

شب کہ برق سوز دل سے زہرہ ابر آب تھا
شعلہ جوالہ پر یک حلقہ گرداب تھا
جلوہ گل نے کیا تھا واں چراغان آب جو
یاں رواں مژگان چشم تر سے خون ناب تھا
یاں سر پر شور بے خوابی سے تھا دیوار جو
واں وہ فرق ناز محو بالش کمخواب تھا
یاں نفس کرتا تھا روشن شمع بزم بیخودی
جلوہ گل واں بساط صحبت احباب تھا
فرش سے تا عرش واں طوفاں تھا موج رنگ کا
یاں زمین سے آسمان تک سوختن کا باب تھا
ناگہاں اس رنگ سے خون نابہ ٹپکائے لگا
دل کہ ذوق کاوش ناخن سے لذت یاب تھا
مقدم سیلاب سے دل کیا نشاط آہنگ ہے
خسانہ عاشق مگر ساز صدائے آب تھا

*The lightning heat of heart's anguish, filled the cloud
With terror last night; each whirl of the vortex was
molten flame.*

*With the lustre of the rose by the water bloomed
a garden of lamps,
But here a channel of blood flowed from eye bedewed.
My clamouring head looked for a wall with lack of sleep,
But, head on silken pillow, that beauty was rapt in peace
Whereas my breath had lit the lamp of forgetfulness,
The splendour of the rose was an extent for the meeting
of friends.*

*From the earth to the sky was a tumult of colour, wave
on wave.*

*For me this space was only the door of a burning waste
Then suddenly the heart, ravished with the joys
Of pain, began to drip red tears of blood. Enraptured
Was it with the coming of the storm, but only
A reed was to the water's sound the lover's soul.*

Which brings us to the question of his style. Now, style is the way of expression, as expression is the embodiment of thought. In other words, we cannot divorce style either from thought or from expression. One is as much part of it as the other, being inseparable. For thought is expressed in words, and words stand for something abstract. By themselves words mean nothing. They are sounds or pictures which we have evolved to represent particular objects and certain emotions and thoughts, that is, states of mind, and reactions to objective and subjective reality, awareness of things outside of the mind as well as consciousness of physical feelings. When these mental and emotive states become complex, words become insufficient to express them; and we begin to use other devices to represent these conditions as closely as possible by arousing in the reader feelings as akin to those of the poet as possible, through images and symbols which the reader is more likely to understand through greater proximity to his experiences, that is, common denominators or those nearest to them. We, thus, begin to use representational devices to evoke more intimate feelings, called metaphors and similes; and to contain an excess of thought within the bounds of speech, other tricks of grammar which tie words into manageable knots, such as alliteration, inversion, ellipsis, and other me-

thods which then come to be known by more specialised words like 'ta'qid' or word displacement, conceit and hyperbole.

Having made this preliminary observation, let us proceed to examine the details. The first component of style is words: and Ghalib employs a diction which is highly Persianised, not that he did not write the simple language used by Mir, Dard and Sauda or Momin, termed by Ghalib himself "rekhta", and of which he was quite boyishly proud. But that is not his characteristic diction. I shall take the opening poem of his collection known as the Nuskha-e-Hamidia, for purposes of analysis:

نقش فریادی ہے کس کی شوخی تحریر کا
کاغذی ہے پیرن پر پیکر تصویر کا
آتشیں پا ہوں گداز وحشت زنداں نہ ہوچہ
موتے آتش دیدہ ہے ہر حلقہ یاں زنجیر کا
شوخی نیرنگ صید وحشت طاؤس ہے
دام سبزہ میں ہے پرواز چمن تسخیر کا
لذت ایجاد ناز افسون عرض ذوق قتل
نعل آتش میں ہے تیغ یار سے نخچیر کا
کاوے کاوے سخت جانی ہائے تنہائی نہ ہوچہ
صبح کرنا شام لانا ہے جوئے شیر کا
خشت پشت دست عجز و قالب آغوش وداع
پر ہوا ہے سیل سے پیمانہ کس تعمیر کا
وحشت خواب عدم شور مماشہ ہے اسد
جو مڑہ جوہر نہیں آئینہ تعبیر کا

*Of whose gay tracery is the picture
A complainant?
Papery is the dress
Of each figure face in the painting.
Fiery-footed I am, the molten despair
Of the prison do not ask:
Each link of the chain is here
A fire-curved fire-filleted hair.*

*The dazzle-of-deceit is the prey of the
Peacock's despair
In the greenness is, of the garden's
Glory of encirclement, the snare.
The-joy-of-creation-of-magic-producing-
Coguetry-of-expressing-
The intense-desire-of-being-killed!
In the furnace-of-fire is the hoof
Of the prey from the beloved's scimitar.
Oh-digging-oh torment of life, ah! do
Not of loneliness ask!
To pass until morning the eve
Is to dig a milk-canal through rocks.
The brick, the prop-of-the-helpless-hand,
And the structure, the arms
Of departure; when has ever
Flood filled the wine-cup of a building?
The despair-of-the-dream-of-non-existence
Is the din-of-the-spectacle,
Asad, the eye which is not
The brightness of interpretation's mirror.**

The first and fifth verses do not call for attention from the point of diction or construction, what I have called arrangement of words, although they have a technical significance which I shall discuss later in this lecture. Here I would like you to consider the words and their arrangement in the other five verses. Before I discuss them further, I would like you to listen to the lines again:

*Fiery-footed I am, the molten-despair
Of the prison do not ask:
Each link of the chain is here
A fire-curved fire-filleted hair.*

and so on—quite unfamiliar and unlike anything any other Urdu poet ever wrote. It is a poem full of light and brilliance, flashes of fire, colour, water and mirror's light, as

* This translation follows closely the style and construction of sentences of the original. No attempt has been made to bring out the meaning more than could be gathered from the original itself.

befits the opening poem of a collection which is full of subtleties of thought, apocalyptic images, and prophetic vision, as the imagery here indicates. More indicative of the style is the choice and arrangement of words, baffling, difficult, and even, let us say, obscure, defying the reader, yet amounting to a challenge as well.

The least thing about the style here is that the vocabulary is entirely Persian except for the verbs. The notable thing is that it is highly elliptical. The outstanding impression it leaves is that it is incomprehensible. We need not dwell on the choice of the Persian vocabulary. Ghalib was, after all, a Persian scholar and poet, and the language of his father, as that of his forefathers, was Persian. And then, beginning right with Sauda in the 18th century, poets had used Persian words, expressions and construction in their verse. As for ellipsis, Persian is an elliptical language. But the use of ellipsis in Ghalib is not the common or ordinary, or even the usual Persian use of ellipsis. It is a quality of style, a trick of his method by which he strings words and images together pell-mell, exactly as it is occasionally with the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins whose poetry is akin to Ghalib's in style and technique, and who, may I inform you, was a contemporary of Ghalib in time (he died in 1889) though in distance far removed, across the seven seas as we say; and in culture and atmosphere as foreign and alien as two civilisations can be. Ghalib's elliptical style is as startling in Urdu as Hopkins' is in English. I quote from The wreck of the Deutsch-land:

*No but it was not these
The jading and jar of the cart,
Time's tasking, it is fathers that asking for ease
Of the sodden-with-its-sorrowing heart,
Not danger, electrical horror; then further it finds
The appealing of the Passion is tendered in prayer
apart:
Other, I gather, in measure of mind's
Burden, in wind's burly and beat of endragoned seas.*

Did you catch the conjuncted, elliptical phrase "sodden-

with-its-sorrowing heart"? The ellipsis in Ghalib is more complicated and breath-taking:

*The-joy-of-invention-of-magic-producing-
Coquetry-of-expressing-
The-intense-desire-of-being-killed!*

Where all the three lines are one series of ellipsis, the words being conjuncted throughout, making one intricate mental-emotive state. This is, thus, wit, conceit, hyperbole, all in one. Ghalib is mixing metaphors and conditions of mind and feeling. It is a complex, composite picture of overlapping and inter-linked states in which words and grammar, image and idea, fact and fiction, experience and emotion, all play their part, singly and collectively. We do not find this in Hopkins or any other poet, not even in Donne and his School who are closest to Ghalib in many respects in technique.*

This brings us to the third quality of Ghalib's style, namely obscurity. The use of ellipsis is necessitated by the insufficiency of words to express the emotion, suggest the magnitude of thought or the process of passion, for passion is a complex state which, like fire, consumes the basic substance and produces other material and volatile forms, yielding, at the same time, new amalgams and bye-products, that is, substances which, emanating from a basic element, undergo a complete change during the process of combustion. The more intense this process, the more compounded the ingredients, the more intricate are the patterns and observed facts, impressions and results. Hence, to work back to the original substance from the residue (words in this case) is most difficult and requires a thorough analysis and reconstruction, even though it is physically impossible to have an exact resuscitation of the original matter. For thoughts and feelings, and passions, are relative things, their origins and effects depending on circumstances, formative influences and felt effects which are never the same in two

* See my early essay: *Ghalib, a Metaphysical Poet*. Anjuman-e-Urdu, Karachi University, 1960.

individuals. We have, therefore, to satisfy ourselves with equivalents, the nearest approach to and recreation of the fundamental original state, right from its germination in the mind to fruition by way of expression.

That is a handicap we can never get over in using words. For more personal and intimate feelings apart, every day phenomena cannot be expressed with any exactness in language. How can one, for instance, reproduce sound or colour in words? We have, perforce, to take a recourse to suggestion and evocation of reactions and responses nearest to the objects in the mind of the reader. When we speak of such a common sound as the whistle of a railway engine, we cannot imitate it with any success in words and have to be content with involving the reader's personal reactions to the whistle which, of course, are not bound to be the same as those of the writer, and which, in a person who has never heard an engine whistle, shall leave no impression nor evoke responses and associations. Similarly with colour. How can we bring to the reader's mind the precise shade of grass or the sky, or show the effect of light in spite of nearest-to-the-phenomenon description, as in Tennyson's onomatopoeic line?

"The casement grows a glimmering square."

We have to use common denominators to produce states in the reader's mind as near those of the writer as possible. But when the subjects are mental and emotional conditions, it becomes much more difficult, as the artist is a more sensitive and passionate being than the average person. And when the poet happens to be a child of passion like Hopkins or Ghalib, the intricacies of thought and feeling require an equally oblique and elaborate use of language. Hence, like Hopkins, Ghalib coins new words and expressions all the time: gay tracery, fiery-footed, molten despair, fire-filleted, dazzle-of-deceit, prop-of-the-helpless-hand, arms of departure, din-of-the-spectacle, interpretation's mirror, to confine ourselves to the poem under discussion;

and more complicated still, the three lines which form one single interlinked emotive picture:

*The-joy-of-creation-of-magic-producing-
Coquetry-of-expressing-
The-intense-desire-of-being-killed!*

Hence, Ghalib begins to use words to stand for ideational states peculiar to his own intellectual situation and psychogenic conditions, such as "*vahshat*" for a peculiar condition of despair qualifying both material and abstract states and thoughts; "*taskhir*", capture, subjugation, for intellectual encirclement; "*mizha*", eye-brow, for eye; "*aena*", mirror for enlightenment, knowledge, and more. The lexical world of Ghalib is vast and intense, and calls for special attention and treatment.

Leaving this new vista of research and scholarship to specialists, let us consider how Ghalib's oblique expression necessitates an un-common arrangement of words. The structure of the sentences becomes twisted, the syntax distorted. Words are displaced and dislocated from their normal place to fit into the meaning, and verbs begin to qualify more than one clause, leading to a further complication of the syntax, and to obscurity:

*The dazzle-of-deceit is the prey of the
Peacock's despair;
In the greenness is, of the garden's
Glory of encirclement, the snare.*

Hopkins employs the same technique:

*Ah, touched in your bower of bone
Are you! turn for an exquisite smart,
Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
Do you! mother of my being in me, heart.*

"Do you" appears at the wrong end of the clause here, exactly as "is" does in Ghalib's

*In the greenness is, of the garden's
Glory of encirclement, the snare.*

Similarly, "heart" in the last line of Hopkins,
...mother of my being in me, heart.

along with the whole clause appears at one oblique place, as "the snare" and the clause "of the garden's glory of encirclement" do in Ghalib. This is verbal displacement, *ta'qid* which taxes the reader's intelligence by making the meaning oblique, a trick Ghalib is constantly employing although he avoids a deliberate use of displacement so common in Hopkins:

*When will you every, peace, wild wood dove, shying
wings shut,
Your round me roaming end, and under be my
boughs?
(—Peace).*

It is quite a different matter when we do experience a similar feeling in Ghalib which is due, in fact, to an excess of thought bordering on the obsessive, and to syntactical distortions, such as when he employs one verb to qualify more than one clause and abstract states, as in:

*The despair-of-the-dream-of-non-existence
Is the din-of-the-spectacle,
Asad, the eye which is not
The brightness of interpretation's mirror.*

where the first "is" qualifies and acts as a bridge for two quite different conditions, meaning thereby that the qualified "despair" is the qualified "din", and the two together are the quality of the qualified "eye", and that appearances (spectacle) being deceptive, the eye which cannot see through these, as through the dream of non-existence which is itself illusory, is full of despair—the pain of life.

This amounts to a telescoping of words and phrases, which is an outcome of a rush of ideas which find expression in compounded words and lead both to a juxtaposition of grammatical entities and a simultaneous refraction of thought as of light through a disturbed surface of water. To follow the refraction of light back through the water to its source is comparatively simple. To trace the refracted thought

through a maze of words and phrases which are further distorted in the labyrinths of the mind, becomes well-nigh impossible. The more so, as the rush of thoughts calls for the greatest agility on the part of the reader in following them at extra-terrestrial and supra-intellectual speed. Yet Ghalib's poetry was not written for astral beings, and can be appreciated by those who are prepared for enjoying the experience of a poetry of sheer passion.

Besides words and ideas, metaphors and images are also telescoped by Ghalib in series of contrasting elemental and physical states, abstract and concrete subjects, as in 'fiery-footed, molten despair, dazzle-of-deceit, arms of departure, din-of-spectacle, mirror of interpretation', etc., that is, objects of the world without, with those of the world within, the mind. There is a similar use of conceit and hyperbole, a similar juxtaposition of image in the Metaphysical poets, and a similar elaboration of metaphor as we find in Ghalib:

*What ere shee meant by it, bury it with me,
For since I am
Love's martyr, it might breede idolatrie,
If into others hands these Reliques came;
As't was humility
To afford to it all that a Soule can doe,
So, 'tis some bravery,
That since you would save none of me, I bury some
of thee.
(—John Donne: The Funeral).*

Here the obscurity is not so much of grammar as of passion, though of lesser intensity than that of Ghalib:

*Fiery-footed I am, the molten despair
Of the prison do not ask:
Each link of the chain is here
A fire-curl'd fire-filleted hair.*

Donne is comparatively easier. Yet Ghalib leaves suggestions by which the various components of his passionate thought could be pieced together and the sense grasped.

This suggestiveness resides in words themselves which lead to the meaning. The associative quality of fire determines the atmosphere of passion, love, despair, in the above quotation. The condition of despair in love which imprisons the heart, leads to frenzy and fire of passion so that each hair of the body, burnt and curled by its heat, begins to act as a chain. The verse is parabolic of life, its pain and restlessness and decay, suggested through the image of burnt hair. It is not without interest to contrast this image with Donne's:

A bracelet of white hair about the bone which shows the decay but not the passion we find in Ghalib.

Extended further, the suggestiveness of this method leads to another associative quality which is more subtle and, for that reason, more difficult of comprehension:

The dazzle-of-deceit is the prey of the peacock's despair;

*In the greenness is, of the garden's
Glory of encirclement, the snare.*

where deceit is the suggestive link, implying a state of illusion, the illusion of the peacock, like the evanescence of greenness is which the glory of the garden is imprisoned and which acts as a snare for it as well as the peacock which is prey to the dazzling deceit of beauty, as the garden's glory is deceived by the greenness. But glory and beauty are transient and pass; we deceive ourselves in vain; and yet, there is no other verity but illusion:

*Be not deceived by life, Asad,
However they may say it is,
It does not exist.*

Another kind of associative quality we find in Ghalib is akin to that of T.S. Eliot's poetry which is based on observation and memory of a hundred things read, observed and felt, whose basis is purely personal and accidental as in the two verses of the poem which I had set aside for a later discussion, namely:

Of whose gay tracery is the picture

A complainant?

Papery is the dress

Of each figure face in the painting.

which refers to the ancient Persian custom when a complainant appeared before the judge wearing dress made of paper. Ghalib uses this parabolically to suggest the illusory picturesqueness (deceit) of life and the pain it brings with it, as Ghalib has himself pointed out a thought which runs through the whole poem. Similarly, the other left-out verse:

Ho-digging-oh, torment of life, ah do

Not of loneliness ask!

To pass until morning the eve

Is to dig a milk-canal through rocks.

becomes a parable and carries a reference to Farhad, the Persian lover who, in order to win Shireen, the damsel he loved, dug a canal through granite rocks so that milk could flow for his love, to find in the end that in spite of loneliness and despair, the fever and the fret, all effort was vain. For the prize was not won, and all was illusion, a painful dream. Thus, the only reality that remains is death and helplessness which no flood can ever drown, so strong are the foundations of despair:

The brick the prop-of-the-helpless-hand,

And the structure the arms

Of departure; when has ever

Flood filled the wine-cup of a building?

Whatever is born is subject to decay. No flood can fill the wine-cup of any building (man's life), which asks for more and more and is never satisfied, and remains ever helpless, ready to depart. Which brings us back to our original comparison of Ghalib and Mir:

Put each step here

With the greatest care,

For this manufactory

Is a workshop, alas,

Of the maker of glass.

Says Mir; and Ghalib warns:

*The despair-of-the-dream-of-non-existence
Is the din-of-the-spectacle,
Asad, the eye which is not
The brightness of interpretation's mirror.*

as Mir had done:

*An inn of senselessness
Is the universe;
Take heed and come
Soon into your senses.*

The thought is presented by Mir time and again with precision and poignancy. Ghalib is suffused with it too, but puts it through the kaliedoscope of his mind, making it as deceitfully charming as it is charming in deceit. In the poem we have been discussing, it is presented in prismatic colours, the expression assuming all known grammatical tricks of word and syntax, image and hyperbole, metaphor and conceit, multiplied association and a dislocation of language into the meaning, as we find in the Metaphysical poets. Marvell, Cowley and Donne who elaborate conceits to extremities and the central idea breaks up into a cascade of thought. Ghalib does it too, and more hyperbolically:

*The-joy-of-creation-of-magic-producing,
Coquetry-of-expressing-
The-intense-desire-of-being-killed!
In the furnace-of-fire-is the hoof
Of the prey from the beloved's scimitar.*

Ghalib is explosively economical in contrast to the Metaphysicals. He, in fact, ties up the shrapnel of thought into knots of words, which no other poet, not even Hopkins or Donne, ever did, and leaves the reader numb or groping through the maze of meaning which lies hidden in the illusory thought of death which, like love, hypnotises its prey and makes him restless for the joy of martyrdom—release from the sorrows and pain of life.

When the brilliance of the explosion is perceived, it is

both awe-inspiring and ecstatic in effect, and makes Ghalib seem always new, ever modern and pleasing.

The problem of Ghalib's technique does not end here. There are a few more tricks to his method, equally baffling, if not more. To the utter bewilderment of his contemporaries and ours, he leaves out words and sentences, so that we fumble for support and meaning, connection between sentence and sentence, and thought and thought:

*The brick the-prop-of-the-helpless-hand,
And the structure the arms
Of departure; when has ever
Flood filled the wine-cup of a building?*

where the connection between the first two clauses is difficult to find, and of the two with

When has ever

'Flood filled the wine-cup of a building'? is missing. What is the reader to do then? Only the suggestions are there to help us climb up the ladder of his vision. For he was a poet of unbounded capacity for stretching his thought through the vast space of imagination. If we cannot reach the ultimate limit of his passion, Ghalib is not to blame. The short-coming is ours, not his, for he had already declared:

*My heart is a temple of fire
With secret mysteries;
But these, alas,
Do not find expression in speech.
Take the word which appears
In the poems and verses of Ghalib
To be a treasure
Full of the magic of meaning.*

"In Ghalib's well-managed sensibility", to borrow from my own summing up of his style and technique in my Book of Selections from the poet, "the scattered images, seemingly unrelated, become an entity, though to a reader whose sensibility is untrained, this looks more of a riddle than a statement, as the central idea breaks up into the colours of the

spectrum so that the putting back of the different colours into the pencil of light again, if not impossible, becomes a formidable task, and requires a trained mind and considerable agility. Ghalib's central idea, with all its component parts (for no thought is ever single, and is always a compound of many states), becomes an active metabolical process. As there is an under-current of plasma in the body-organism, there is a continuous under-current of feeling in Ghalib's poetic system which forces us to revert to his poetry all the time. This is a sure test of great poetry as Coleridge pointed out, and even in his obscurest moments, there is something in Ghalib which compels us to go back to him. It is this which lies behind his undying appeal, so that in spite of any psychological aversion one may have for this kind of poetry, in spite of the impossibilities of his poetic technique and impenetrable obscurity, one cannot ignore him or put him out of mind. Because what he says is universal, and because it had never been said in the way Ghalib says it, he becomes a classicist in expression, and no one, not even the average reader, can forget his lines. Ghalib's poetry pleases for the same reason as it intrigues, and he remains a living poet. For the thoughtful reader, the search for the meaning becomes a stimulating mental exercise, and the casual reader derives enough aesthetic satisfaction from the surface. Even when inscrutable, his expression is so architectonic that he remains like the Sphinx, delightful in its mystery."*

*Ghalib: Selected Poems: pp. 22-23, published by ISMEO, Rome, 1969.

GHALIB AND IQBAL

B.A. Dar

عمر ہا چرخ بگردد کہ جگر سوخته ای
چوں من از دودہ آزر نفساں برخیزد

*The heavens revolve and ages pass,
That a person with a burning heart as I is born,
From the stock of those who breathe fire.¹*

So says Ghalib about himself. He has been more than fortunate in winning recognition for the sterling qualities of his art which charm and please lovers of poetry both Urdu and Persian. He seems to be himself fully convinced of the greatness of his art and was therefore greatly perturbed at the coldness shown by his contemporaries towards him. This feeling of frustration found expression in several of his verses both in Urdu and Persian.

نہ ستائش کی تمنا نہ صلے کی پروا

Neither do I desire praise nor care for reward.

And yet he was fully confident of his greatness as a creative artist. In one of his Persian verses he claims to possess the white hand of Moses while his critics are worshipping the calf of Samiri, the false prophet.

بنمای بہ گو سالہ پرستان ید بیضا
غالب بہ سخن صاحب فرتاب کجائی

¹ *Kulliyat-i-Ghalib* (Persian) p.498. All references are to the one published by Shaikh Mubarak Ali, Lahore, 1965.