

## GHALIB: MAN AND POET

*Hamid Ahmad Khan*

The principal medium through which Ghalib expressed himself was the *ghazal*—a literary form essentially non-Western and, indeed, a form which deviates considerably from the Western notions of a poem's continuity and logical cohesion.

The *ghazal* is a poem comprising a series of couplets whose second lines rhyme together. This arrangement makes the couplet of the *ghazal* the primary unit of expression. The language has to be compact and concentrated, for the couplet must achieve its pinnacle of effect by deploying to maximum advantage the two arcs of its parallel movement. Furthermore, the couplet of the *ghazal* prefers to be a record of universal experience. A particular event, when incorporated into a *ghazal*, must be so generalized as to transform the personal into a broadly human theme. On this account, the *ghazal* need not be, and quite often is not, a subjective poem. The poet of the *ghazal* can, and does, make of his poem a vehicle of dramatic portrayal—though, of course, he does not make it drama in the technical sense. The only exception to the rule of universal appeal may be the end-couplet of the *ghazal* where the writer, using his poetical surname, may introduce a subjective note by pointedly referring to a particular personal experience.

In spite of its own conceptual or emotional identity, each couplet of a *ghazal* is an integral part of the total harmony of the poem. More often than not, the logical coherence of the *ghazal* is based on the spirit rather than on the matter. The *ghazal* is, thus, a unique composition which fuses variety of meaning into a unity of effect by means peculiar to its own structure. Without the external link

of a perceptible argument, the couplets of a *ghazal* are held together by an inner accord of attitude and feeling. The rhyme scheme is only the outer symbol of the *ghazals'* semantic harmony. Goethe perceived this basic fact about the unity of the *ghazal* when he remarked to Eckermann: "*Ghazals* have this peculiarity that they demand great fulness of meaning. The constantly-recurring similar rhymes must find ready for them a store of similar thoughts.\*

Having briefly introduced the peculiar technique of Ghalib's verse, I must remind you that Ghalib is, like Iqbal, a poet who wrote in both Urdu and Persian. Indeed, his work in Persian is at least five times the size of his Urdu *Diwan*. It will, therefore, be necessary to bring in references to his work in Persian and to quote from it.

## II

Now let us turn to Ghalib the man. The poet's grandfather had migrated some time about the middle of the eighteenth century from Samarkand in Central Asia to Lahore, and had then moved on to Delhi. The poet himself was born in Agra, in December 1797. He spent his boyhood, and had his early education, in his native town. He lost his father at the age of five, when his uncle took charge of him, but the uncle, too, died some three years later. This uncle had been a gallant cavalry officer in the army of the British East India Company. The Company, therefore, sanctioned a pension of Rs. 10,000/- per annum for his dependants. The poet's share in this pension came to something less than a seventh of the whole. And even this whole was halved by the machinations of avaricious relatives who, by means still unknown, contrived to have the original decision modified to the disadvantage of the poet. When he grew up, this pittance was to be his only permanent income. In his earlier days, however, when he lived with his mother, the British pension was a thing unthought of, for he had at that time enough and to spare.

\* Italics mine.

His mother's father was a grandee of the town; the palatial house in which the poet spent his boyhood years may still be seen in Pipal Mandi, Agra.

Ghalib started on his poetic career when he was about ten or eleven. His early verse is distinguished by grotesque imagery and fantastic conceits. He appears utterly to ignore the smooth, sweet tone of his great predecessor, Mir, and seems bent upon going back to the Persian "Metaphysicals" of the seventeenth century. His great master is Bedil, a difficult, philosophical poet, who is now more popular in Afghanistan and Soviet Central Asia than in Pakistan and India. The young Ghalib does not appear to take particular note of Bedil's philosophical meaning but, fascinated by Bedil's "Metaphysical" conceits, tries to employ the same technique in his own highly Persianized Urdu verse. These early exercises in extravagant imagery talk of "the point of a scorpion's sting" being used by his false sympathisers as a needle to sew his wounds or of "the nightingale's egg under the fairy's wing" as a symbol of "lamentation bred by wayward flight."

In August 1810, when he was barely thirteen, the poet was married in Delhi to the niece of the first Nawab of Loharu. About two years later, he left his home in Agra and came over permanently to Delhi. Here he completed his education, and by slow degrees got over the turgidity and startling conceits of the ten years of his apprenticeship which began in 1806 or 1807. About 1817, began that fruitful second period of poetic activity which extended over more than a quarter of a century. A great part of his Urdu *Diwan* and a considerable part of his Persian odes and *ghazals* date back to these years.

Right in the middle of this productive period, he was beset for the first time by a lack of money verging almost on penury. He resolved to fight it out with those who had robbed him of his inheritance. In 1826 he travelled to Calcutta—at that time the seat of the East India Company's growing Indian Empire. He returned to Delhi in 1829,

defeated but not broken in spirit. He filed applications made representations and lodged appeals. The struggle went on till 1844 when, in view of the final refusal received from England, nothing more was left for him to do. Then the latent sources of strength within him burst into action, and he developed an attitude of stoical calm which became increasingly prominent in the third period which begins about 1840-44:

چون عکس ہل بسیل، بدوق بلا برقص ا

*As the bridge's shadow on the flood  
Dance thou to the surging waves of fate!*

This note of full reconciliation with life becomes more conspicuous a few years later in the famous poem on his own imprisonment. In 1847 he was arrested on a charge of gambling and had to go to jail for three months. This was a terrible disgrace for a gentleman of Mughal times. Ghalib was, of course, deeply hurt, but there is no trace of anger or bitterness in his prison-poem. One of the stanzas always puts me in mind of Spenser's "Epithalamium," the beautiful hymn of love in which Spenser conducts his bride to the nuptial chamber. I will quote a few lines from this stanza which are strikingly similar in tone to Spenser's bridal poem:

پاسبانان بہم آئید کہ من می آیم  
در زندان بکشائید کہ من می آیم  
جادہ نشناسم و ز انبوه شما می ترسم  
راہم از دور بمائید کہ من می آیم  
چون سخن سنجی و فرزانگی آئین من است  
پہرہ از من برمائید کہ من می آیم

*Ye Warders, come around! for I am coming;  
Open the prison-door, for I am coming.  
I do not know the way, and am fearful of your throng,  
Show me the way from afar, for I am coming.  
Since poesy and learning is my profession,  
Seek ye your share of me, for I am coming.*

About the middle of the century things took a turn for the better. Ghalib was introduced at the Mughal court, and even the royal court at Lucknow sought to patronize him. This happy interlude, however, did not last him long, for the courts of Lucknow and Delhi were both wiped out in 1856 and 1857—almost within a year of each other. The great change which followed 1857 brought his poetic career to an end, and he spent the last ten years of his life writing his inimitable letters to friends. As a model of direct and lucid statement, the letters of Ghalib clear the way for Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's prose. Their choice humour continues to be a delight for the reader. The zest for life and the love of graphic detail which these letters exhibit has made them a classic of Urdu prose.

### III

There is a certain quality of uniqueness about Ghalib in that he belongs at once to the ancients and the moderns. If he is the last of the great race of artists whom the advent of Muslim culture produced in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent, he is also the first exponent of our recently acquired modern disposition. The questioning attitude, the indifference to authority, the insistence on psychological truth, the variety and comprehensiveness of the themes handled, the singularly broad outlook, all tend to project him beyond his age. Ghalib is not only the greatest writer of the last phase of our culture; even the contact with the West has not so far helped produce a personality so rich, various and versatile.

Living up to the age of seventy-one, Ghalib spent the best part of his life in writing for a society which finally passed away with the Great Fight of 1857. His increasing popularity in our own day has been the source of some literary superstitions. One of these describes him as a man born before his time, pining to reach out to unrealized worlds. This view is fundamentally false. To a reader of normally clear vision, it is at once evident that there is really no sharp cleavage between Ghalib and the times in which he lived.

This does not, of course, mean that he was completely adjusted to his own age. No great artist is; the harmony of his inner world always transcends that of his environment. It is this divine discontent of Ghalib which makes him sometime cry out:

ہوں گرمیٰ نشاط تصور سے نغمہ سنج  
میں عندلیب گلشن نا آفریدہ ہوں

*I sing from lively fancy's glow;  
I am the nightingale of a garden uncreated.*

In spite of such utterances, there is obviously an essential accord between Ghalib's personality and that Indo-Muslim culture which took shape under the inspiration of a thousand years of Muslim rule and ultimately passed away with the Great Change of 1857.

Most apologists of Ghalib are led to this kind of fallacious theorizing because of their difficulty in connecting Ghalib's vigour and vitality with a social order which was already tottering to its final ruin. This is not a real difficulty. In fact, Ghalib's personality was moulded by a society which had attained to a stage of great cultural advance and refinement. This society was, no doubt, unenterprising in terms of historical movement, but it still retained a sense of its old intellectual and political life and was fully conscious of its unbroken link with a glorious past. Education was acquired on a very ambitious scale. I believe the modern Indo-Pakistan Muslim is not really quite as cultured as his great-great-grandfather. For proof we have only to refer to the many-sidedness of the rich intellectual life of the nineteenth century. Of the younger generation of that period, we may mention the great Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Hali, Shibli, Nazir Ahmad and Zaka Ullah, as typical examples. These men were leaders of thought who successfully bridged the gulf between our old and new modes of life. Here is a bit of foreign evidence on this subject. Colonel Sleeman of the Bengal Army wrote the following about a hundred and thirty years ago:

Perhaps there are few communities in the world, among whom education is more generally diffused than among Mahomedans in India. He who holds an office worth twenty rupees, gives his son an education equal to that of a prime minister. They learn, through the medium of the Arabic and Persian languages, what young men in our colleges learn through those of the Greek and Latin.\*

It is in such a period of social customs established and cultural conventions matured for centuries that a vigorous mind working on and reacting to a mellowed body of tradition makes a great artist. Thus, not to speak of his life's work being inopportune, Ghalib came just at the right moment of time. His greatness was born of the society in which, and for which, he lived. A reference to the celebration in the court of King Bahadur Shah of the festival known as "Last Wednesday" will bring out Ghalib's sensitive awareness of the life around him. This festival falls in the lunar month of Safar and commemorates the recovery of the Holy Prophet from a serious illness. The King celebrated the occasion by distributing rings of gold and silver among his courtiers. Please remember that Ghalib was no longer young when these verses were written, and note also how completely he identifies himself with the general merriment. This is a literal translation in spite of the meter.

ہے چار شنبہ آخر ماہ صفر، چلو  
رکھدیں چمن میں بھر کے مئے مشک بو کی ناند  
جو آئے جام بھر کے بٹے اور ہو کے مست  
سبزے کوروند تا بھرے، پھولوں کو جائے پھاند  
بٹے ہیں سونے روپے کے چہلے حضور میں  
ہے جن کے آگے سیم و زر سہر و ماہ ماند  
یوں سمجھئے کہ بیچ سے خالی کئے ہوئے  
لاکھوں ہی آفتاب ہیں اور بے شمار چاند

*'Tis the Last Wednesday of the month of Safar;*

\* Rambles and Recollections, Vol. 2, p.283

Come, let us go to the garden and put down in it  
 An earthen though full of musk-scented wine.  
 Whoever comes may fill his cup and drink.  
 And, let him then, in utter wantonness,  
 Trample about the lawn and overleap the flowers  
 In the King's presence gold and silver rings  
 Are being given today, though he outshines  
 The gold and silver of the sun and moon:  
 You think that scooped out from within there are  
 Millions of suns and moons innumerable.

IV

Ghalib's scholarly attainments call for at least a brief reference. He had a fair understanding of astronomy as taught by Ptolemy, and his knowledge of Greek and mediaeval philosophy and of the great *sufis* inspired respect even among the finest intellects of the age. He continued to be a great reader to the end of his life. But no other interest could possibly match his passion for verse. He felt he was the sole inheritor of the riches of old Persian poetry. An intimate spiritual kinship, aided by a memory remarkably receptive of verse, gave him complete hold of the great Persians, so that he could quote lines from them by the hundred. He believed that nobody in the sub-continent had ever captured like him the spirit of the Persian masters.

Talking of Keats's wonderful mastery of sensuous effects, Shelley once said that "he *was* a Greek." In the same way, we might say of Ghalib that he *was* an Iranian. Living in Delhi, he yet breathed the air of Iran and Turkistan. And old Delhi was in fact a sister city of Shiraz and Samarkand. She was only one of those great centres which lay along the line of advance of Perso-Arabic culture.

It was in Delhi that Ghalib made his debut in the periodical meetings of poets and "wits", known as *musha'iras*. He did not cut a happy figure in these *musha'iras*, for his verses were found to be remarkable mostly for their obscurity and a kind of fantastic originality. What could the

wise, old critics make of a self-confident young man who prated to them, with prosaic precision, of glances from the eye of the needle, of his own ashes passing to the hour-glass, of stings of wasps and scorpions, and of a pen made of a human hair? They persecuted him with derisive criticism, laughter and scorn. In England, Keats almost equally young, was being similarly treated at exactly the same time. Only an innate strain of stoic courage, and a consciousness of his own ultimate worth bordering on egotism, could have sustained Ghalib through these trying years. Then, gradually, about the time he was twenty, he attained to clarity and power. But one might as well record that even the period of his apprenticeship had not been devoid of occasional flashes. Consider the following illustrations:

بہار در گرو غنچہ شہر جولان ہے  
 طلسم ناز بجز تنگی قبا معلوم

The spring, locked up in buds, streams through the town:  
 Beauty cannot work its magic except in a tight-fitting vest.

گر تجھ کو ہے یقین اجابت، دعا نہ مانگ ا  
 یعنی بغیر یک دل بے مدعا نہ مانگ

Art sure thy prayer is heard? Then do not pray at all!  
 That is: Ask nothing but a heart without desire.

خاک بازی امید کارخانہ طفلی  
 پاس کو دو عالم سے لب بخندہ وا پایا

The dusty hide-and-peek you play with Hope is but a children's game;  
 I see Despair laughing in scorn, his lips apart with the two worlds.\*

ہے کہاں تمنا کا دوسرا قدم یا رب؟  
 ہم نے دشت امکان کو اک نقش پا پایا

\* The "two worlds" are, of course, this world and the next, here represented as the two eternal lips of Despair gone wide apart in derisive laughter.

*Where is the second footstep of the heart's desire,  
O Lord?*

*This wilderness of Being appears to be a footprint.*

I have translated my last illustration in verse. It is not a literal translation like the others, but it is, nevertheless, faithful to the meaning and spirit of the original:

اے نوا ساز تماشا، سربکف جلتا ہوں میں  
اک طرف جلتا ہے دل اور اک طرف جلتا ہوں میں  
شمع ہوں لیکن یہ پا در رفتہ خار جستجو  
مدعا کم کردہ، ہر سو ہر طرف، جلتا ہوں میں

*O Thou Who filled this goodly mart  
With things that bless the eye,  
I feel within a bitter smart,  
On one side burns my heart  
And on the other I.  
I know I am a taper bright:  
Flame of eternal quest  
I have nor end nor aim in sight,  
Throwing this way and that my light—  
No purpose and no rest.*

V

The sombre note in some of the verses just quoted has misled a number of critics into forming a totally erroneous idea of Ghalib's mind and art. They have almost attributed to him a message...the message of Schopenhauer. They forget that the theory which aspires to describe a mind of rich varieties should never confine itself to a single phase of that mind. We know that Shakespeare was likewise subjected to such lop-sided theories. The pedant and the doctrinaire toyed with them for some time, and then they dropped into the waste-paper basket of literary criticism.

I should like to state, in the first place, that for good or ill, Ghalib has no specific message to deliver; as Iqbal has, for instance. This does not mean that Ghalib has nothing

to say on human life and conduct. A considerable part of his poetry deals with the ethics of human affairs, but he is no more preoccupied with a particular ethic than with a particular metaphysic. In the second place, it should be definitely recognised by critics who rely exclusively on Western standards of literary judgment that the *ghazal* is a form as much of dramatic as of lyric expression. It should, therefore, be clearly understood that in his *ghazals*, Ghalib does not invariably speak for his own self. We know that the *ghazal*-writers had no specific drama, and their objective view of the mental states of their fellow-beings has been embodied in a large number of artistically finished couplets in Persian and Urdu poetry.

The early pessimistic verse of Ghalib should no doubt be classed with the essentially impersonal part of his work. Such certainly is the reference to Depsair laughing at the vanity of human life for, in spite of the sublimity of the image, this verse utterly lacks the warmth of personal feeling. It may be recalled that Ghalib, at this point of his poetic career, was in the prime of youth, a man in the fulness of his powers, physical and intellectual. He had money enough to squander at will. And how thoroughly he enjoyed himself in these days—wine, women, the company of cultured friends, the finest treasures of philosophy and Persian poetry before him, and dance and music and gardens and evening parties galore. Looking back on these days, he said in later years: "The feverish haste of my career raised a cloud of dust from mosque and temple and struck convent and tavern one against the other".

In the middle years, when the shadows darkened around him, a real note of sadness came into his poetry. It is a sadness which sometimes deepens into pain. Very often, however, he welcomes the sorrows that come to him for, as he tells us in some of his Persian verses, it is the fight against fate which makes a man a hero.

بے غم نہاد برد گراسی نمی شود  
زنہار قدر خاطر اندونگیں شناس ا

آرائش زمانہ ز بیداد کردہ اند  
بر خون کہ ریخت غاڑے زمین شناس

*Greatness in man is not produced except through grief;  
Be, therefore, mindful of the worth of a sorrowing heart!  
This world is beautified with cruel pain;  
Whatever blood is spilt is cream for the face of the  
earth.*

It is this note of power which made Iqbal recognise in Ghalib the daring and self-confidence of a kindred spirit—a spirit sustained by its own strength in the face of bitter pain. In *Payam-i-Mashriq*, three poets—Browning, Byron and Rumi—express themselves through the words of Iqbal. Ghalib is allowed to speak through one of his own verses which, I guess was written in the Second Period (1817-44). This is what Ghalib says:

تا بادہ تلخ تر شود و سوده ریش تر  
بگدازم آبگینہ و در ساغر افکنم

*O for a bitter draught—quick, passionate, divine!  
'Tis not fierce wine alone will bruise this heart of mine;  
So in a burning fire I fuse the beaker bright,  
And pour the liquid glass into the cup of wine.*

This high-spirited attitude was no mere poetical mask. Ghalib lived up to it. In 1842, when money was a sore need, he was offered the post of Head Persian Teacher at Delhi College. In this connection, he was required to call on James Thompson, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. Deeply imbued with a sense of the Mughal forms of courtesy, Ghalib lingered outside the house and, on being asked to step in, insisted on his privilege of being met at the door. This was refused, and Ghalib turned back without setting his foot inside the Secretary's house. It was most probably after this incident that he wrote the well-known Urdu *ghazal* in which occurs the couplet:

بندگی میں بھی وہ آزادہ و خود ہیں کہ ہم  
آئے پھر آئے در کعبہ اگر وا نہ ہوا

*We are created beings, yet we are free and proud;  
We turn round and retrace our steps if the gate of God's  
House is not open.*

Referring to the darker element in his own literary work, Goethe once said that through it he purged himself of his sorrows. No poet of extreme sensitiveness can live without such purgation. I should like to emphasize the fact that the treatment of sorrow in Ghalib should not be taken to imply, any more than it does in Goethe, a settled pessimistic outlook on life. The sombre note in Ghalib's poetry is as much of a Katharsis with him as it was with Goethe, for it left the man unscathed, his faith in human nature unshaken. In full enjoyment of life, always thinking kindly of his fellow-creatures, he was to the end without either the fierceness or the feebleness of a pessimist. I will quote here from an Urdu *ghazal* of the Third Period (1844-57):

نہیں بہار کو فرصت، نہ ہو، بہار تو ہے ا  
طراوت چمن و خوبی ہوا کہیے

نہیں نگار کو الفت، نہ ہو، نگار تو ہے ا  
روانی روش و مستی ادا کہیے

*Spring is short-lived. So what? The spring is here!  
Speak of fresh gardens and of breezes sweet.  
The loved one bears no love. So what? She is the  
loved one!  
Speak of her grace of motion and of her winsome  
bearing.*

## VI

Having said something on Ghalib's moral outlook, I should like to add a word on his metaphysical vision. First, he is like the *sufis*, a pantheist, believing that nothing exists but God and that nothing can touch our being but God.

ہے مشتمل نمود صور پر وجود بحر  
یاں کیا دھرا ہے قطرہ و موج و حباب میں

*The ocean's being consists of emerging forms;  
What else is there in drop and wave and bubble?*

But this philosophy does not make him forget the striking impact of sensory experience on our mind:

جب کہ تجھ بن نہیں کوئی موجود  
پھر یہ ہنگامہ اے خدا، کیا ہے  
یہ ہری چہرہ لوگ کیسے ہیں  
غمزہ و عشوہ و ادا کیا ہے  
سبزہ و گل کہاں سے آتے ہیں  
ابر کیا چیز ہے، ہوا کیا ہے

*When naught exists but thee, O God,  
Then what is this commotion?  
What are these fairy faces,  
What charm, and grace, and beauty?  
Where do the spreading green and roses come from?  
What is the flying cloud and what the breeze?*

I have likened Ghalib to the *sufi* but, in his extreme idealism, he is, of all Urdu poets, nearest to the Indian Vedantist:

ہے غیب غیب جس کو سمجھتے ہیں ہم شہود  
ہیں خواب میں ہنوز جو جاگے ہیں خواب میں  
*What we consider Being is the essence of non-Being;  
We continue asleep, having woken up in our sleep.*

And again:

ہستی کے مت فریب میں آ جائیو اسد  
عالم تمام حلقہ دام خیال ہے  
*O Asad, do not be deluded by Existence;  
The whole world is a ring in the web of thought.*

Some of his verses on this theme are couched in the passionless syllogistic style of the Vedanta. The *sufi*, you will observe, is moved by a divine passion: the Vedantist by an equally divine cognition. Here is an illustration of Ghalib's Vedantist leanings:

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

*When nothing was, God was. Had nothing been, God  
would have been.  
Yes, Being is my bane. O if I had not been, what, then,  
I should have been.*

After this acrobatic feat in logic, I should like to close on a simpler note, for Ghalib can be both abstruse and playful on this serious theme. Here is the end-couplet of a well-known Urdu poem:

ہستی ہے نہ کچھ عدم ہے غالب  
آخر تو کیا ہے؟ اے "نہیں ہے"  
*So, Ghalib, Being is not, and non-Being is not;  
What, then, art thou thyself, O "Is-not"?*

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you agree that Ghalib can be a fascinating study if we may read him at some length. I have not, except casually, referred to his immaculate sense of humour or to the incomparable magnitude of his imagination, nor even to some verses here and there which would have put you in mind of Goethe, Shakespeare or Michael Angelo or some other known figure in European art. I could not have done this without abusing your patience. But I believe I have said enough to make you feel interested and inclined to read more of him. Thank you.



### Chronology of Ghalib

- |  |                    |  |         |
|--|--------------------|--|---------|
| 1) Mirza Kokan Beg Khan, Ghalib's grandfather, migrates from Samarkand to Lahore ... | 1748-54            | 13) Completion of the first manuscript Urdu <i>Diwan</i> ...                                 | 1821    |
| 2) Birth of Mirza Asadullah Beg Khan ("Ghalib") in Agra ...                          | 27 December 1797   | 14) Beginning of financial troubles  | 1822-23 |
| 3) Death of his father, Mirza Abdullah Beg Khan ...                                  | 1802-03            | 15) Begins litigation for his British pension ...  | 1826    |
| 4) Years of schooling in Agra and in Delhi ...                                       | 1803-12<br>1812-14 | 16) Starts for Calcutta ...  | 1826    |
| 5) Death of his uncle, Mirza Nasrullah Beg Khan ...                                  | 1806               | 17) Returns to Delhi ...   | 1829    |
| 6) First exercises in versification  | 1807-08            | 18) Troubles and disappointments multiply. The golden years of his poetry ...                | 1830-50 |
| 7) Years of frolic and dissipation in Agra and Delhi ...                             | 1806-1818          | 19) First edition of the Urdu <i>Diwan</i>   | 1841    |
| 8) Marriage ...  | 9 August 1810      | 20) Declines to accept appointment as Head Persian Teacher at Delhi College ...              | 1842    |
| 9) Changes his poetical surname from "Asad" to "Ghalib" ...                          | circ, 1810         | 21) His final appeal to Queen Victoria turned down ...                                       | 1844    |
| 10) Moves permanently to Delhi   | 1812               | 22) First edition of the Persian <i>Diwan</i> ...  | 1845    |
| 11) Years of creative activity ...   | 1815-25            | 23) Arrested and imprisoned for gambling ...   | 1847    |
| 12) The great love affair of his life  | 1817-1820          | 24) Appointed Court Historian (at Rs. 300/- a half-year) by the last Mughal King ...         | 1850    |
|  |                    | 25) Adopts baby son of his wife's nephew, Zainul Abidin Khan Arif, on the latter's death ... | 1852    |

- 26) Mirza Fakhru (heir-apparent to the Mughal throne) and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh become his "pupils in poetry". Remuneration: Rs. 400/-and Rs.500/-per annum respectively) ... 1854-55
- 27) Nawab Wajid Ali Shah deposed and interned in Calcutta ... February 1856
- 28) Mirza Fakhru's sudden death July 1856
- 29) The Great Rebellion and the end of the Mughal Empire ... May-September 1857
- 30) Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan of Rampur becomes his "pupil in poetry" ... February 1857
- 31) The decade of letter-writing 1858-68
- 32) First collection of letters published ... 1868
- 33) Death ... 15 February 1869
- 34) Second collection of letters published ... March 1869
- 35) Death of his widow ... 4 February 1870

## GHALIB: AN INDIVIDUALIST

### Mumtaz Hasan

Ghalib was different from other men and wanted to be different. He was a non-conformist in life and did not wish to be classed with what he regarded as the common herd. His attitude is summed up in one of his famous verses:

ازان کہ پیروی خلق گمراہی آرد  
نمی رویم برای کہ کاروان رفت است

*Following the multitude, leads you astray  
I, therefore, do not tread the path that the caravan  
has taken.*

His desire for individual identification and distinction expressed itself in more ways than one. He wore an uncommon type of cap<sup>1</sup> because he did not want to look like other people. When in his old age, he decided to grow a beard, he shaved his head at the same time, contrary to the normal pattern of Delhi where, in those days, people grew hair on their heads and faces with equal solicitude.<sup>2</sup> His poetic nom-de-plume originally was *Asad*, but as soon as he heard of another poet of the same name, he changed it from *Asad* to *Ghalib*. It is true that the other *Asad* was a poor poet at best and it was one of his particularly un-inspired verses which occasioned Ghalib's decision,<sup>3</sup> but this was probably incidental. Even if this contemporary had been a better artist, it is doubtful if Ghalib would have continued to share his poetic name with him. "You know how long I have lived in Delhi," says he in one of his letters to a favourite pupil, "All this while I have not allowed any one in this city to bear my name, my poetic name or my nick name."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Kulah-i-Pupakh*. Malik Ram, *Dhikr-i-Ghalib*. p.239. Delhi. 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Mehr, *Khutut*. p.235. Lahore. 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Azad, *Ab-i-Hayat*. p.488. Lahore.

<sup>4</sup> Mehr, *Khutut*. p.276.