

I had them all  
before I set eyes  
on the cold rich eyes  
of this woman. (*Narrinai* 160)<sup>44</sup>

Another:

O crab with crooked legs  
I ask you please  
do not efface the wheel-tracks  
of my lord's chariot,  
he is the lord of the seashore;  
please  
let me look at the trace  
of his wheel's designs. (*Aintiṇai*)

The seashore is separation. But there is an individual irony in the notion that crooked-legged little crabs can efface the wheel-track of the seashore's lord. Here is another poem on this theme:

My mother asked me  
why I wept.  
I told her  
the waves have washed away my doll  
and my house of sand.

The lover has taken away not only her hopes, but her girlhood.

The dilemma of the lyric poet is that he wants to be both Daddy Longlegs and Floppy Fly, as T. S. Eliot has put it. But

One never more can go to court  
Because his legs have grown too short;  
The other cannot sing a song,  
Because his legs have grown too long.<sup>45</sup>

The lyric poet knows or feels it is impossible to write a "long poem" yet is dissatisfied with the small compass of the short lyric. He wants to say many things while saying one thing. He wants to set up not a single resonance but a whole system of resonances while striking a couple of notes. He wants to find an astronomy in specks and flashes. Sanskrit poets set the conventional theme for the Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal and the poet-saints of Kannada, against which these could register their observations on the life of the soul by speaking of the body. The Tamil poets found a different formal world of symbolism in five landscapes and

their various contents, which allowed them to speak one thing and say far more than one. (AKR)

*Ghazal and taghazzul: the lyric, personal and social*

#### Background

It is from one point of view surprising that there was much interaction between the Muslim literary traditions of Persian and Urdu and those of the Hindus. From another point of view, it is surprising that there was not more. When Islam came to India in strength, it came as a fully developed culture, with loyalties and legalities well defined. The great Muslim empires, centered in Delhi, employed Hindus in the government, but the establishment was such that areas of authority were carefully delineated, and there was little overlap. And on the lower strata of society, though Hindus and Muslims lived side by side in the villages, the orbits of their daily activity were largely separate. On the other hand, there was an aspect of Islam that was receptive to religious syncretism. The Great Mughal, the Emperor Akbar, attempted to found a new syncretistic religion, the Din-i-ilahi, which took tenets from Hinduism and Christianity as well as Islam; Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's great minister, and such as Prince Dara Shikoh were scholars of both Hindu and Muslim philosophical and religious texts. And the teachings of certain orders of Islamic Sufis, notably Chishtiya, were most congenial to the emotional, devotional love-centered worship and doctrine of many Hindu *bhakti* cults. One small result of this has been noted: Muslims writing lyrics in Bengali on the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme.

From about the fourteenth century through the seventeenth century, a wave of *bhakti* or ecstatic devotionalism swept across northern India, down the Gangetic plain into Bengal. The movement which had begun many centuries earlier in the south, with the writings of the Tamil Alvars (ninth and tenth centuries), caught on in Maharashtra in the late thirteenth century; the text *Jñānesvarī*, an interpretation of *The Bhagavadgītā*, was written by Jnanadeva or Jnanesvara in 1290. Other famous poet-saints of Maharashtra followed: Nama-deva, Ekanatha, and Tukaram; but by the fifteenth century the *bhakti* movement had spread also to northern India, and Ramananda, the great *bhakta* and guru of the even more famous Kabir, was preaching against idolatry and that devotion alone is the source of release. And, preceded by the two great *bhakti* poets Candidasa and Vidyapati (both early fifteenth century), the great reformer Caitanya was born in Bengal (1486).

The primary characteristics of the *bhakti* movement were four: devotion to the deity as an exclusive means of the attainment of the

ultimate goal (the deity was usually Kṛṣṇa, though especially in North India Rama is popular), a somewhat more liberal attitude toward caste and frequently a receptive attitude toward Islam, the use of regional languages instead of Sanskrit for religious expression, and anti-Brahmanism.

Devotional religion was not at this time new to India; it had been stated in *The Bhagavadgītā* and given fuller and more poetic expression in the ninth- and tenth-century *Bhagavata-purāna*. The iconoclastic attitude of the *bhakti* movement toward caste was also nothing new. The Buddhist and Tantric traditions had from time immemorial offered religious systems in which caste played no part at all. But in the *bhakti* movement the attitude took a new and vigorous form. The *bhakti* poet Kabir, for example, has a Muslim name (an appellation of God in the Qur'ān). Legend has it that he was the illegitimate son of a Brahman widow, who was cast off by her and picked up and raised by a Muslim of a weaver caste, who was childless. Kabir was educated as a Muslim by his foster parents, but read Hindu texts also. Kabir's reaction to matters of distinction in caste and religion was strong, but not atypical. One song attributed to him says:

A Brahman wears a sacred thread that he himself has made.  
If you are a Brahman, born of a Brahman mother, why haven't  
you come into the world in some special way? If you are a Turk,  
born of a Turk, why weren't you circumcised in the womb of  
your mother? If you milk a black cow and a white cow, can you  
distinguish between the milk that they give?<sup>46</sup>

There is in modern Bengal a group of mendicant singers and devotees who, dressing themselves in cast-off garments of both Hindus and Muslims, wander the countryside singing their songs of devotion. Some of these songs are modern, and use the imagery of the lights and trams of Calcutta in expressing their contempt for the glitter of external life. Others are very old, handed down from guru to disciple over many generations. These Bauls, as they are called (the word means "madmen"), sing in no uncertain terms of their hatred of caste and all other divisive institutions:

Go to visit Jagannatha—see there how caste is kept. A Candala  
brings a Brahman's food, and the Brahman eats. Kabir was a  
Jola—but Jagannatha, the lord of *dharma*, does not want caste, for  
he is lord of *bhaktas*. In such measure as one lives by caste, in such  
measure is he evil. . . . If he does not root this out, he will never  
gain the feet of Hari. Do not sing the praises of caste, saying "Do

not touch him." . . . Lalan says, if I could take this caste in my  
hands, I would hurl it into the fire.<sup>47</sup>

It is certainly true that some of the leaders of the *bhakti* movement did not understand or care about the social consequences of their position on caste. Some of them acted "on ritual, not individual" grounds: when the scene was religious, they acted in one way; when the scene was not religious, they acted in accordance with their training in the Brahmanical tradition. In *Maharashtra* the great poet and devotee Tukaram (ca. 1700) approved of the traditional ordering of society, and wrote:

I tell you, O saints, that the different castes have been born of  
some Being according to their merits and demerits.<sup>48</sup>

And Chaitanya (ca. 1486–1538), the great *bhakta* of Bengal, approves positively the attitude of one of his disciples who refuses to eat with high-caste people because of his low status. Yet Chaitanya can say that the *bhakti* of Kṛṣṇa is for all people, that a Shudra is not one who is born in a lowly Shudra family, but is one of any caste who has closed his ears to the preaching of the *bhakti* of Kṛṣṇa.

The third characteristic of the movement was its attitude toward orthodox religion. To the *bhaktas*, the traditional paths of ritual and knowledge, and even that of Yogic discipline, if followed without devotion, are not only meaningless, but downright evil and dangerous. Kabir says:

O brother, when I was forgetful, my true *gurū* showed me the way.  
Then I left off rites and ceremonies, I bathed no more in holy  
waters; then I learned that it was I alone who was mad, and the  
whole world beside me sane, that I had disturbed these wise  
people. From that time forth I knew no more how to roll in the  
dust in obeisance. I do not ring the temple bell, I do not set the  
idol on its throne, I do not worship the image with flowers. It is  
not austerities which mortify the flesh which are pleasing to the  
Lord. . . .<sup>49</sup>

Again, the Bauls are even more outspoken about the matter:

The Vedic cloud casts fearful darkness, and the day's jewel cannot  
rise. . . .<sup>50</sup>

As much as you read the Vedas and the Vedanta, so much will  
your delusion grow. . . .<sup>51</sup>

Some say that praying to Hari instead of to Kali is an error.

Others say that praying to Kali instead of to Hari is an error. I have thought much on these things, and have gone mad. . . . I used to make a great show, bathing three times a day in the Ganges, reciting many *mantras*, performing Yogic exercises, and all I got was out of breath. I fasted day after day, and all I got was a pain in the belly. . . .<sup>52</sup>

It is significant that this revolt was directed not only against Hindu orthodoxy, but against Muslim orthodoxy as well. A Baul sings:

The path to God is blocked by the temple and the mosque, and though I hear your call, O Lord, I cannot find the way. Against me stand both *gurū* and *murshid* [*murşid*] . . . on the gate are many locks: Puranas, Qur'an, *tasbi*, *mālā*—such outward show makes Madana weep in sorrow.<sup>53</sup>

And Kabir again:

I have seen those who observe the practices of ceremony, and those who are very pious, who bathe every morning. . . . I have seen many elders, *pirs*, and Muslim holy men who recite the Qur'an and . . . worship metal and stones. They have become mad with pride of having made the pilgrimage . . . they have lost their reason, singing words, and know nothing of the soul. . . .<sup>54</sup>

These poets, then, looked for the good in all religions. Their enthusiasm stemmed from the conviction, not unfamiliar to the West, that there was no need of a ritual intermediary between God and man. As time went on, of course, the movement took on some of the very qualities against which it was reacting. In the generation or two following men like Chaitanya and Kabir, the enthusiasm died away, and sectarian organization took the place of the strong bond of emotion that had held the *bhaktas* together. The story is that after the death of Kabir, there was controversy among his followers as to whether the body should be burned, according to Hindu custom, or buried, according to the custom of the Muslims. In the midst of this argument, the body disappeared, and in its place was left a pile of flowers. These were equally divided between the two groups, to be disposed of according to belief.

What runs beneath, however, is the feeling that a man is first a man, regardless of his nominal religious affiliation. There is the story of Haridasa, who was a follower of Chaitanya, but who had been born in a Muslim family of high station. Because of his supposed defection, Haridasa was brought before a Muslim judge. They questioned him, and ordered him to recite the Qur'an. Haridasa replied:

Now hear me, lord. There is one God, of all people. Only his name is different, between Hindus and Muslims. This one God is the highest meaning of both Puranas and Qur'an. There is but one pure, eternal, unchangeable truth, which fulfills the meaning of our lives by dwelling in our hearts. . . . The one Lord speaks, in each man's heart, of names and qualities, and that man writes. The writings may differ, but the Lord is the same. If a man is born a Hindu, perhaps even a Brahman, if God within says that he is a Muslim, so he is. . . . Should he be punished for that? If I have sinned, punish me.<sup>55</sup>

He was whipped through twenty-two marketplaces.

It is hardly that at this, or any other, period, all men looked upon each other with respect and love. But at least one attitude is summed up by Abu'l Fazl, minister to Akbar, who wrote in the *Ain-i-akbari* (*ā'in-e akbarī*):

It was for me then indispensable, to place in full evidence the Hindu system of philosophy, the degree of interior discipline, the gradations of rites and customs of this race, in order that hostility to them could be eliminated, that the temporal sword be able to abstain from drawing blood, and that the thorn of strife and hatred be caused to bloom into a garden of peace.

It is then into two contexts that Muslim poetry in India must be fitted. Islam and its literary tradition took a particular form in India. Islamic literature was colored by its Indian environment, just as some Hindu *bhakti* poetry was colored by its juxtaposition to Islam. But at the same time, the repertoire of some Islamic poetry is that of Persia, not the Sanskrit tradition of India. The Urdu ghazal (*ghazal*) is a foreign gem in an indigenous setting.

#### Ghazal and taghazzul

In 1956 when the question of reorganizing the states on linguistic grounds was being hotly debated in the Indian Parliament, C. D. Deshmukh, a member of Nehru's cabinet but also a supporter of the United Maharashtra movement, concluded a long and angry speech against his own party with some Urdu verses by a Pakistani poet. Immediately Nehru got up and after suitably defending his party's position, ended with the remark: "My distinguished friend quoted a Pakistani poet to embellish his argument; I can only answer in the words of the famous poet from my home town, Allahabad,

A mere sigh, and we get a bad name;  
He commits murder, and no one comments."

This very well known and quite typical *ghazal* couplet of Akbar Allahabadi (d. 1921) expressed the late prime minister's feelings more poignantly than any other remark could have, as was evident from the thunderous applause that followed. In quoting a couplet from an Urdu *ghazal*, Nehru expressed not merely his personal inclination but displayed a habit common among the millions of admirers of Urdu poetry who come from all parts of the subcontinent and from all strata of society. Of all the gifts that the comingling of the two great cultures, Hindu and Persian-Muslim, brought forth in India, perhaps the greatest is the Urdu language and literature; and the most precious part of that literature is the Urdu *ghazal*.

In formal terms a *ghazal* is a collection of couplets, each couplet containing a separate thought and being often semantically disconnected from the other couplets in the collection. What the various couplets of one *ghazal* have in common are two formal devices, meter and rhyme. The meters are many, and are almost all of Arabic origin, only a few having been developed by the Persians. The rhyme scheme in a *ghazal* is always as follows:

aa ba ca da ea fa ga, etc.

The rhyme may consist of only one element, a final rhyming syllable called *qāfiyah*, or two, a *qāfiyah* followed by a *radif*, i.e., a word or phrase repeated without any change whatsoever. The first couplet of the *ghazal* in which both the lines rhyme is called the *maṭlaʿ*. The following is a *maṭlaʿ* by Ghalib (d. 1869).

har qadam dūrī-e manzil hai numāyāN mujh-sē  
mērī raftār-sē bhāgē hai biyābāN mujh-sē

Each step shows how remote the destination is.  
The wilderness runs away from me at my speed.

In it *numāyāN* and *biyābāN* are the two *qāfiyah*, and *mujh-sē* is the *radif*. The last couplet, in which the poet usually mentions his real or literary name, is called the *maṭtaʿ*. There is no restriction as to the number of couplets a *ghazal* may have, but there should be at least five. Originally, there was a continuity between couplets of the *ghazal*; this came to be neglected and was soon discarded completely. Each couplet is now considered complete in itself, highly condensed and effective in thought, and resembling the other couplets only formally.

*Ghazal* is a word of Arabic origin and is variously translated as "to talk with women" or "to talk of women." As a separate form of verse the *ghazal* did not exist in the pre-Islamic poetry of Arabia. In the Arabic odes, however, there used to be an initial section, called *nasīb*, in which the poets talked of their beloveds' charms and reminisced about the days when they were young and their loves successful. After the brief amatory prelude the poet would continue with whatever happened to be the main theme of the ode—eulogizing himself, or his tribe, or some worthy person; or perhaps satirizing with equal power his enemy. For Arab poets were more often than not recorders of tribal events that they would immortalize in their verses.<sup>56</sup>

These amatory preludes, which in the beginning were only one part of the ode, slowly gained prominence and, by the first century of the Muslim era (seventh–eighth century A.D.), were popularly treated as separate poems. The so-called *Udri* poets of Hijaz were pioneers in this respect. Their love poems were usually recited in literary meetings by the poets themselves or by special readers called *rāwī*. Often they were set to music. Thus from the very beginning the element of musicality was important. These two practices are still followed in the world of the Urdu *ghazal*. In areas where Urdu is spoken and understood, whether in small towns or in large cities, symposia of poets, called *mushaira* (*muṣāʿirah*), are regularly held. These *mushairas* usually last five or six hours and are attended by literally thousands of people. And about 90 percent of the poetry read at them belongs to the genre of the *ghazal*.

With the transfer of power to the Abbasids and the migration of Arab tribes, Arabic traditions reached Persia. The Persians were not without a poetic tradition of their own, though present knowledge about it is not very extensive. It seems they were aware of the necessity of rhyme in poetry; also, for them poetry was closely related to music. Beside more lyrical themes their poetry included religious and ethical ideas. This was in contrast to the Arabic tradition, where pre-Islamic poets never wrote on religious matters and Muslim poets hesitated to rival the Qurʾān. The Persians took over the existing Arabic verse forms and invested them with further refinement and a new vigor. Apart from inventing a new form of poetry, *mathnawī* (*maṣnawī*), for narrative purposes, they paid most attention to the *ghazal* and expanded and enriched its traditionally limited scope. The Persian poets used the *ghazal* to express a wide range of human emotions—religious, mystic, ethical, as well as philosophical and totally secular. The *ghazal* especially suited the needs of the developing cult of Sufism. The Sufis, the mystics of Islam, were not all necessarily poets, but some of them were, especially one of the greatest among them,

Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273), who, beside producing a prodigious amount of marvelous poetry, also established music and singing of verses as an integral part of Sufi practices. The Sufis found the *ghazal*'s lyric tone and love imagery most appropriate, even essential, to the satisfactory depiction of their love for the divine beloved.

With the advent and settlement of Persian-speaking Muslims, the *ghazal* reached India. In Persia it had already reached the pinnacle of achievement, and it was the most popular form of poetry not only there but also in Turkey and Arabia. Urdu speakers, who looked toward Arabic and Persian for their literary traditions, adopted the *ghazal* as their own, and since that time, about the sixteenth century, it has been the most popular form of verse in Urdu as well. More recently, it has been taken up by poets of other languages, especially of Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Bengali in Pakistan, and of Punjabi, Sindhi, Gujarati, and Hindi in India.

It should be noted that the *ghazal* is not the only form of verse used in Urdu. For narrative and descriptive purposes there is the *mathnawī*; for elegies and panegyrics there are the *qasīdah* and the *musaddas*; for ethical and moral aphorisms there is the *rubā'ī*. It is that which is beyond these more prosaic and didactic purposes that is expressed in the melodies and concise couplets of the *ghazal*.

Urdu critics and poets, in their discussions of *ghazal* poetry, have developed a concept of *taghazzul* (*tağazzul*), *ghazal*-ness or *ghazal*-like quality. A couplet—not the *ghazal*, for that is only an arbitrary collection of couplets, but a couplet itself—is significant only to the degree of *taghazzul* that it may contain. *Taghazzul* is not, however, just one element; it refers to many diverse features, which combine in a couplet.

*Ghazal* poetry is essentially introspective. A *ghazal* poet seeks the source of his poetry deep within himself. His view of the world and this universe is purely subjective. Looking within himself he finds everything—his heart is the mirror in which the entire universe is reflected. The external world exists for him only to the extent to which it relates to human emotions. For a *ghazal* poet his imagination (*taxayyul*) is the greatest reality. A story is told of Mir (d. 1810), the foremost *ghazal* poet of Urdu, that once he was given by the Nawab a room to live in that opened onto a garden. One day a visitor noticed that the window on the garden had never been opened. He pointed that out to Mir, adding that the Nawab expressly wanted him, a poet, to enjoy the beauty of the garden. Mir replied: "I am always busy tending the plants and blooms of my imagination. How can I find time to look at these ordinary flowers!"

Like Mir, a *ghazal* poet considers nature only in that aspect in which it provides a backdrop for human existence. Nature is never assigned a separate or independent existence. The external world is always in some way relative to the interior world. The cypress is tall, but is it taller than the beloved? The rose is red, but why? Is it because it has been put to shame by the beloved's beauty?

Cypress trees beside the brook, poppies, roses, and jasmine—  
Everywhere, you see in bloom, a garden of colorful thoughts.

(Mir)

The bud has learnt to bloom, but only a little,  
From the drowsy eyes of the beloved.

(Mir)

Mistakenly hoping they can catch a glimpse of you,  
the flowers rush to bloom, one after another.

(Ghalib)

As we said earlier, it is the imagination of a *ghazal* poet that gives significance to his experience. His imagination helps him discover all the dimensions of the experience; it also helps him maintain his uniquely introspective point of view. For a *ghazal* poet the external phenomenon and his response to it are not divisible; his imagination unites them. Reality, thus, is what he creates for himself from within himself by means of his imagination. This attitude of the *ghazal* poet is called *durūn-bīnī* in Urdu, and its origin can be traced back to the introspective aspect of mystic love that asks the seeker to plunge deep into his own heart and discover there the presence of the divine beloved. The result is that the *ghazal* poet considers himself unique, considers himself and his beloved as the center of the universe or, to put it more precisely, considers his love as the center around which the universe rotates.

There is no eternal theme in the world, Majruh.  
But the theme I touch, becomes eternal.

(Majruh; b. 1919)

We never saw even the outside of the ka'bah or the temple.  
Without stirring we saw, within the heart, the two worlds.

(Mir Hasan; d. 1786)

The most important theme in the Urdu *ghazal* is the theme of love, especially that of the love of flesh and blood. This love, however, is not what Mir once called *cūmā-cāṭī*, or love play. Love (*işq*) is an ennobling

process as well as a vital process that sustains this universe. To the *ghazal* poet, as to Dante, the universe is based on love, on "relationships which exist between all its elements and between it and its creator." These relationships are not causal in essence, but sympathetic. God created mankind and everything out of His love. And the creation partaking of this love has its own unique and vital role:

The goblet of colorful sights rotates at your will.  
It is my amazed eye that sets mirrors around it.  
(Ghalib)

It must be borne in mind that this attitude, though being very similar to that of a mystic, does not imply that the poet-lover is a practicing mystic in other respects.

Here is what some of the *ghazal* poets have to say about love.

My nature found the pleasure of life through love—  
A remedy for its pain, and a pain without remedy.  
(Ghalib)

An increase in love increases light in the world.  
It is the only lamp in this dark place.  
(Zauq; d. 1854)

There are many more worlds beyond the stars.  
There are still more tests of love to come.  
(Iqbal; d. 1938)

It is love that draws the moth to the flame, the nightingale to the rose, the river to the ocean, the breeze to the garden, the poet to his beloved, and the creation to its creator. For some this love appears in a simple garb.

Perhaps this is what is called love—  
This fire that seems to burn my heart.  
(Shefta; d. 1869)

And for others, like the Persian poet Urfi (d. 1591), the pain of love ennobles and enriches the mundane experience.

In my heart mundane sorrows of life turned  
into sorrows of love. Though the wine was raw,  
the cask brought it to maturity.

The path of love is not easy. It is full of hardships, and there is no one to lead the way. The mystic may find a master (*murşid*) to guide him on the path of divine love, but in the blazing desert where the poet-lover

finds himself, there is no guide except his own heart (*qalb, dil*). Those who preceded him in this desert were true lovers, but they were not as true as he is; and this assertion of the uniqueness of his love is made again and again, in many ways. The popular romances of antiquity, the loves of Majnun and Laila, or Shirin and Farhad, of Yusuf and Zulaikha, the metaphors of the flame and the moth, the rose and the nightingale, the wave and the ocean, all these are recalled in various forms but only to prove that the poet's love is far superior in its intensity and purity to them. There is even a code of love that only the genuine lover knows.

My sense of propriety sustained me in my love.  
All my life I found gains in defeats.  
(Mir)

The dust of Mir settled away from her.  
Without love one does not learn such manners.  
(Mir)

Life was spent following the rules of love.  
We never expressed our heart's desire.  
(Hasrat; d. 1951)

In this love the poet is not unaware of his own personality, and quite often carries a sense of pride in his love, even to the extent of feeling that his love is independent of the beloved. His own feelings of love, his passion, his yearning, his faithfulness, are of the utmost significance to him. Like the troubadours, he would even prefer a constant separation to a union that might kill his passion and yearning. His high individualism and his introspection make the *ghazal* poet consider himself the source of all phenomena, of all the relationships that sustain this universe, and thus in a sense independent of all relationships. At that stage he is not far from the point at which the mystic cries out, "I am the Truth."

What is love? What is beauty? Who knows the answer?  
But without the cup wine cannot appear, and  
without the wine, the cup remains worthless.  
(Jigar; d. 1960)

Who cares for the tavern, who cares for the Saqi, let our  
selflessness increase a little and it will create of itself cups,  
goblets, and wine.  
(Jigar)

If you ask me the truth, love is in no way inferior to beauty.  
If beauty is what the lovers desire, it is love that gives them life.  
(Hasrat)

The elements of innocence and chastity in love have been of utmost importance from the very beginning. The "Udri" poets of Arabic of the first century of Hijrah also insisted on this element of chastity. Though they talked of their love for real people, they never mentioned any sexual act as the goal of their love. Again, like good troubadours, they cherished the chastity of their beloveds, who were usually married to someone else, who always refused to meet the poets and kept a distance between them. In the Urdu *ghazal* the poet-lover is very rarely successful in the usual sense of the word. But, unlike the "Udri" poets, he does not go to the extent of renouncing all desire for a union. He suffers pangs of separation and, like all lovers, desires union, yet he is also aware of the propriety and dignity demanded of him by his love. The goal of his quest is perhaps not so important to him as the joys and sorrows of the quest itself, for essentially there can never be an end to his quest—a union with the beloved does not mean the end of this desire.

If you think desire ends with union,  
look at the wave, see how restless it is  
even in the bosom of the ocean.

(Ghalib)

Another characteristic of the Urdu *ghazal* is the use of masculine forms of adjectives and verbs. Unlike the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas, for whom, metaphorically, Kṛṣṇa is the sole male of the universe, the *ghazal* poets use a masculine vocabulary even when they are using feminine imagery. Even the women poets use masculine gender for themselves and for the beloved, to maintain the tradition. This may at first strike the Westerner as quite unnatural, but there are several reasons for it. It is not that the poet is a homosexual, as some critics of Urdu *ghazal* hastily conclude, but because he has been brought up under certain traditions. The ethics of Islam demand that names and specifics should be avoided to preserve the purity of the object of love, to which we should also add the requirements of a clandestine love, which was all that was possible in Persian and Indian Muslim societies, and which is still very much the case. This is not to deny the existence of male homosexual love in those days. No doubt it existed. After all, the *sāqī* of those times was not a voluptuous maiden, as we now see in the illustrations to the Rubaiyat of Khayyam, but a young slave. There is some linguistic influence evident also. In Urdu, if one wants to avoid the particular, and wants to generate universality, one uses a masculine form of the verb. Further, Urdu makes a gender distinction; Persian, from which almost all the similes and metaphors have been borrowed, does not have grammatical gender. But the most important factor, perhaps, was that this tradition enabled

the poet to maintain that very popular dual reference (sacred-profane) aspect of the *ghazal* poetry, i.e., the love described in the *ghazal* could be interpreted to be not the love for a maiden but the love for God, or the love for the guide (*muršid*) on the path of Sufi love.

On the other hand, to be fair to the morally inclined critics of the Urdu *ghazal*, it must be mentioned that in every age there have been poets who were not so reticent in describing their loves. There were also poets whose homosexual imagery is quite impossible to interpret as mystic love. But those poets and *ghazals* never gained any permanent popularity, and among them only those who retained some semblance of metaphor in their language were considered superior.

From the very beginning, mystic love was a most popular subject in *ghazal* poetry, or rather, *ghazal* poetry came to be a favorite of the mystics. The metaphorical and symbolic language of the *ghazal* was especially suitable for describing the secrets and mysteries of mysticism. Like the love of the *ghazal* poet, the love of the Sufi is subtle, impressionistic, and emotional; it dislikes detail and the logical explicitness of rational discourse. On the other hand the mystic themes of non-conformism, simple piety, humanism, universalism, self-cognition, as well as selflessness, all found favor with the poet-lovers, most of whom were in no sense practicing mystics. The Sufi and the poet-lover of the *ghazal* found understanding and sympathetic friends in one another.

Iqbal in his lectures on "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" offers what he considers to be the four main characteristics of mystic experience:

1. First is the immediacy of the experience: "We know God just as we know other objects. God is not a mathematical entity or a system of concepts mutually related to one another and having no reference to experience."

2. The second feature is the unanalyzable wholeness of the experience: "The ordinary rational consciousness, in view of our practical need of adaptation to our environment, takes Reality piecemeal, selecting successively isolated sets of stimuli for response. The mystic state brings us into contact with the total passage of Reality in which all the diverse stimuli merge into one another and form a single unanalyzable unity in which the ordinary distinction of subject and object does not exist."

3. The third feature is that "to the mystic, the mystic state is a moment of intimate association with a unique Other Self, transcending, encompassing, and momentarily suppressing the private personality of the subject of experience."

4. It is an incommunicable experience in the sense that "it is essentially a matter of inarticulate feelings, untouched by discursive intellect."

While its contents cannot be transmitted, it can be interpreted to others in the form of propositions.<sup>57</sup>

As one looks at the *ghazals* of the mystic poets of both Persian and Urdu one is struck by the urgency and immediacy of their experience, projected through the use of a very concrete imagery and not through shallow abstractions. The high subjectivity, the personal and emotional tone, the mad joy of self-abandonment, the intensity of the felt anguish, all these find expression. The gnostic nature of their love, its intimacy and secrecy, its passionate ecstasy, found expression in a picturesque and often quite erotic symbolism, just as in the religious lyrics of Bengali and Kannada. Just as the coquetry of the beloved and its fatal effects can be expressed only by utilizing the symbols of dagger and whip, so with the experience of the mystic lover:

Though try we may to talk of divine and mystic visions—  
Yet, if not cloaked in "Cup" and "Wine," they make no sense.  
(Ghalib)

And it takes a sensitive heart to receive the message:

O you, who are not aware of the significance of our constant  
intoxication, know that we have seen the beloved's face reflected  
in this cup.

(Hafiz of Shiraz; d. 1390)

This erotic-mystic symbolism was utilized and expanded by the Persian Sufi poets, often to a fault, so that many later treatises were prepared by their followers to explain and interpret practically everything mentioned in their *ghazals*. Some of these "keys" to Sufi poetry are highly curious in their elaborateness:

The *Ghazals* or odes [of the Sufi poets] are, to those who possess the key to their symbolic imagery, the fervent outpourings of hearts ecstasied, or, as they express it, intoxicated with spiritual love. For every word has its mystical signification . . . The "Fair One," for whom in these *ghazals* Man the "Lover" sighs, is the Deity; as is also the "Loved One" whom he entreats to throw off the veil that conceals His perfect beauty from view. The "Ruby Lip" signifies the unspoken but heard and understood, words of God; "nestling in the Fair One's tresses" denotes comprehension of the hidden attributes of the Divinity; the "Embrace" is the revelation to man of the divine mysteries; "Separation" or "Absence" from the "Loved One" is the non-attainment of oneness with the Deity. "Wine" is the Divine Love; the "Cup-bearer" the

spiritual instructor, the "giver of the goblet of celestial aspiration"; the "Libertine" the Saint who has become careless of human conventionalities; the "Tavern" a place where one mortifies sensuality, and relinquishes his name and worldly fame. The "Zephyr" is the breathing of the Divine Spirit; the "Taper," the heavenly light kindling the "Torch" which is the heart of the lover, Man: and so through every detail.<sup>58</sup>

Even if we disregard, and quite justifiably so, such farfetched interpretations, the fact remains that the subtlety and ambiguity of the language of the *ghazal* and the refined concept of love of the *ghazal* poets made it possible for both kings and visionaries to patronize this form of poetry. Besides, it would be altogether wrong to suggest that the mystic interpretation of these symbols decreased their essential universality. The images and metaphors are still highly in vogue, and the contemporary *ghazal* poet depends upon them for achieving maximum communication. Just as Ghalib (d. 1869) deemed it necessary to cloak "divine and mystic visions" in "cup" and "wine," so does Faiz Ahmad Faiz (b. 1911), a contemporary poet with liberal, socialist affiliations, feel a need for those old symbols to express his modern idea.

Come, Faiz, and speak of Farhad and Parwez,  
For those who are knowledgeable shall see the truth.

The contemporary poet tries to evoke a reality of experience in his reader's heart—for the appeal is still to the heart and not to the intellect—when he invokes the names of these two characters from an old Persian romance. The story as it is generally known in India is as follows. There was a certain king of Persia named Khusrau Parwez whose favorite wife, Shirin, was unsurpassed in beauty. Farhad, a common sculptor, fell in love with her, and the intensity of his passion made its mark on Shirin's heart, too. Learning of these affairs, Khusrau promised Farhad to award Shirin to him if he would, single-handed, dig a canal from a distant mountain to his palace. It would have discouraged any ordinary person, but Farhad, intoxicated with love, took up the task and began to carve through the heart of the mountain. When he was nearly finished, Khusrau, in order to avoid making good his promise, sent him false news of Shirin's death. On hearing the news, Farhad killed himself with his pick. Later, Shirin also committed suicide. The earlier *ghazal* poets used this story extensively to express the intensity and fidelity of their love. They identified themselves with Farhad, and their rivals with Khusrau. They often also compared their own love with the love of Farhad, and found the latter inferior.



He couldn't kill himself without using a pick-axe.  
Farhad was a slave to customs and traditions.

(Ghalib)

Later, for example in Iqbal's poetry, Farhad represents a sincere and courageous man whose blood warms the heart of the universe.

Of the truth of Life seek the clue from the man who broke the rocks.  
An endless toil, a flashing pick, a rocky trail is Life.

(Iqbal)

There is another very interesting example from Iqbal (d. 1938), though this time the references are very topical.

So what if the toiling hands of Labor hold the power, for yet the  
guiles of Khusrau thrive in the guise of Farhad.

(Iqbal)

Here "the toiling hands of Labor" and "Farhad" stand for the National Coalition government of England, whose formation in 1931 had aroused the expectations of the Nationalist leaders in India. "Khusrau," of course, represents the Conservative party, archenemy of the Nationalist movement.

In the contemporary Urdu *ghazal*, especially in Progressive circles, the struggle between Farhad and Khusrau represents the class conflict between labor and capital. And now the poet compares himself with Farhad, not because he too is willing to make a deal with Khusrau, but because he feels inspired, as was Farhad, by an untiring devotion to his cause. He feels that though, like Farhad, he may fail to gain a final victory, his individual effort will not be completely lost.

A left-wing poet, Majruh, writing in 1951 about the Korean war, curiously symbolized President Truman by Khusrau and Communist China by Farhad.

Lo, trembles and falls in dust the crown of Khusrau's glory. Lo,  
onward strides Farhad, crushing the rocks to dust.

(Majruh)

Thus, even though they have no programmatic poetry and shun logical discourse, *ghazal* poets do respond to their age.<sup>59</sup> Using the same symbolic and metaphorical language, they make reference to the changes in their milieu and respond to those changes and events. The fact of the matter is that in such verses the more common lyrical meaning is not ruled out—for it sustains the universality of their observations; but it is possible to understand at the same time a more particular derivation. Perhaps an example will help at this point, and will also add to an under-

standing of the concept of *taghazzul*. The story from the literary chronical of Mir Hasan of Delhi is that when Raja Ramnarayana Manzur, a close friend of Sirajuddaulah, Nawab of Bengal, heard of the murder of his friend after the battle of Plassey, in 1757, the raja expressed his grief in a spontaneous couplet:

O fair gazelles, you know the truth, tell us of Majnun's death.  
Tell us how fares with the desert now that the madman is dead.

The identification of the young prince who died a tragic death with the hero of an old Arabic romance, the identification of the ardor of the one with the passion of the other, the mention of the desert and the gazelles, the fair-eyed ones, all these elements make this couplet a most beautiful and poignant one. Explicitness would have ruined its effect. If one compares that couplet of Manzur with this couplet of Mir, he can easily see which is better:

Those kings whose feet's dust was like collyrium of jewels,  
I have seen those very kings being made blind.

This couplet has a strong moral tone of a universal type. Its historical reference is also easy to recognize. In 1788, the Mughal king, Shah Alam, was imprisoned and blinded by a rebel noble, Ghulam Qadir. The decline of the Mughals and the plunder of Delhi were witnessed by Mir. Yet this couplet lacks greatly in that manylayeredness that was the chief quality of that of Manzur. The second couplet is more explicit, and though it arouses sympathy, it does not express the extent of the poet's involvement with his experience and, consequently, it fails to reach the deeper emotions and to make the listener live that experience with him. Except for its moral tone it is not much different from the couplets of some of the modern Progressive writers. It lacks *taghazzul*. For, after all, the *ghazal* poet is not so much concerned with the presentation of a fact as with depicting his own involvement with that fact. In other words, it is not the depiction of an external phenomenon but that of his own deep personal attitude or response to a phenomenon that is significant for him. His goal is not to delineate in sharp contrasting colors, but to present a totality of facts and emotions in a muted style, in metaphorical language, in the most condensed expression, with the utmost of musical effect, with the aim of reaching the heart rather than satisfying the intellectual curiosity. And the more successful he is in achieving these goals in his verses, the more *taghazzul* he achieves. It is this multifaceted quality of *taghazzul* that is the secret of the *ghazal's* popularity and makes it possible for a raja to express his sorrow at a friend's death, a Communist poet to attract and keep the attention of his workingmen audience, and a prime minister to refute the arguments of the Opposition. (CMN)