

Myriad Shades of Life in Mirza Ghalib

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By

Tasleem A. War

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published **in** 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-6469-X

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-6469-5

**For my father
Ghulam Mustaffa War
& children
Reyhan and Noorain**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a book on Mirza Ghalib has not been a cakewalk. I went through many trials and tribulations in accomplishing this uphill task. I must put it on record that there are many people who have played a significant role in writing this book. I developed interest in Mirza Ghalib at an early stage of my life and the same culminated into a passion at the postgraduate level in the classes of my teacher Mr. Mohammad Amin Malik who would often quote Ghalib in his lectures in 2002. Ever since I have been studying Ghalib's poetry, quoting him, exploring different dimensions in his poetry and comparing him with many English poets in my classes to MA students. However it is after listening to Professor G. R. Malik's inspirational, insightful and innovative lectures on Ghalib in 2014-15 that I decided to do a detailed critical study of various aspects in Ghalib's poetry. Indebted to my friend and colleague Dr. Mufti Mudasir, who gave me valuable suggestions over the years and helped me in translating some verses of Ghalib. I am equally thankful to my colleagues Professor Lily Want, Dr. Nusrat Jan and Dr. Iffat Maqbool for their faith, encouragement and ideas. This venture would not have been possible without the support of my family. I thank all my family members, particularly my wife, who bore with me for a long time to enable me to complete this book. Gratitude and love for all my nieces and nephews Tayiba, Mantasha, Saira, Imran, Abdullah and Shifa for their concern for this book.

It is pertinent to mention that two articles from the book "Mirza Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal: A Study in Comparison" and "Death Poetry of Mirza Ghalib" were published in journals *Contemporary Literary Review India* and *The Literary Herald* in 2020.

Last of all, I am thankful to Mr. James Brittain for proofreading this book and the whole team of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for publishing this book. Any mistakes and inadequacies in the book are purely mine.

INTRODUCTION

There are few poets in the world who are not only widely read and researched but are quoted in day to day life by one and all. Mirza Ghalib is one such poet. Like the world famous writers Shakespeare, Sophocles and Iqbal, his poetry continues to endure and touches the soft strings of all hearts. One of the distinguishing features of Ghalib's poetry is that it presents us with myriad shades of life. These myriad shades of life are reflected by him across his poetry and in his letters. Ralph Russell in his review of a book on Ghalib rightly makes the following comment about him, "To understand Mirza Ghalib, one has to swallow not just the world but the whole universe". It is an apt observation about Ghalib due to the multidimensional and pluralistic nature of his poetry. He remains so rich a poet that there are still many shades in his poetry which have not been fathomed. He is an enigma, a puzzle which has not been completely cracked, something which only adds to his greatness. Russell is right when he says that many of Ghalib's verses have attained a proverbial status and people quote and remember them, even singing his *ghazals* every now and then. Their multidimensional nature, their dialectical twists by means of paradoxes, are of perennial appeal and make him dear to one and all. His work cuts across the barriers of caste, colour, creed, sex and religion. As a result, a poet like Mirza Ghalib never becomes outdated or unfashionable but continues to have more and more appeal with every passing day. Pankaj K. Deo in the article "Ghalib: A poet for all times" remarks:

Ghalib has written for every mood, every occasion and for every person and hence remains one of the most quoted Urdu poets. The best part is that every time you read his *shayari* (poetry), a new shade of meaning comes out of it. No wonder, every generation has interpreted Ghalib in its own way, and it's the malleability of his character that makes him so relevant in each era. The readers in every age see in Ghalib's verse a reflection of their own emotions and desires, and the poet does not disappoint them, for he has penned thousands of such breath-taking verses.

When alive, he called himself the nightingale of the garden yet to come into existence but the same garden has partly come into existence as we can say without exaggeration that there is hardly any other poet who can match the status of Ghalib. He was so confident about his poetry that he compares it

with the voice of the angel. One major reason for his popularity after his death was the publication of *Yadgar-e-Ghalib* by Altaf Hussain Hali, his disciple. Much of what we know about Ghalib today is due to the efforts of Hali and his systematic study of Ghalib and his poetry. Ghalib defines poetry as the creation of meaning and in doing so he has set a benchmark for all his predecessors and successors. The majority of Ghalib critics hold the view that a new shade of meaning comes to the forefront when one reads his poetry. Sayyid Fayyaz Mahmud in his book *Ghalib: A Critical Introduction*, further argues:

Stephen Spender in his "Making of a Poem", says that the 'faith' of a poet is two-fold, a faith in his vocation, and a faith in his own truth. The poet must feel that his is a sacred task and that he is capable of expressing his 'inmost experience', 'finest perceptions', 'deepest feelings' and 'utmost sense of truth'. This conviction Mirza Ghalib never lost, though the almost primitive force of his vision was mellowed with time....The orchestration of deeply felt ideas, passionate yearning for the unattainable and a sort of pagan joy in the continuous acts of creative Beauty, reached peaks which he so often touched in his unreformed youth, but he appeared gradually to respond more and more to the call of the world and of reason, and began to see things in the light of common day. Normal human demands, social restrictions, the eternal struggle between wants and gratifications between the forces of life and the longing for surcease, became his themes.

Similarly Hasan Abdullah in his book *The Evolution of Ghalib* also seems to be in agreement with the above two quotes, when he makes the following observations about Ghalib:

Ghalib's Urdu *ghazals* attract a highly diverse set of people—rich and poor, literary and scientific, uneducated and erudite, layperson and polymath, lover and beloved, men and women, young and old, even the oppressor and the oppressed, those sunk into the past and reactionary, as well as those who are forward-looking and progressive. The plausible reasons appear to be that his couplets, which are expressed in the most exquisite language using devices such as wordplay, hyperbole, irony and paradox, reflect diverse situations, depict a range of human emotions and provide deep insights into man's life and his relationship with Nature.

The present study thus makes an attempt to highlight the different shades of meaning or life in his poetry and letters, which include common human emotions, concerns common to the whole of mankind like love, hatred, jealousy, suffering, pain, trauma and disappointments in life. He weaves heterogeneous ideas by means of his art of dialectical poetics by employing literary devices like paradox, irony, humour, conceits and unconventional

metaphors. He is a master in creating meaning out of nothing. His philosophy of life, that is, his ironic vision of life, is reflected throughout his poetry and the myriad shades of life or meaning which are present in his poetry are embedded in his vision of life. Like Shakespeare and Sophocles, Ghalib creates the colourfulness of life in all its horror and glory. Just as life itself is colourful in its myriad shades, Ghalib's poetry offers us a vision of life which is at once pluralistic, multifarious and universal. Taking its cue from this aspect of Ghalib, the book contains seven critical essays on a range of issues like comparing Ghalib with Shakespeare, Donne and Iqbal, and highlighting the most predominant concerns of his poetry and letters, such as his art of dialectical tension, his death poetry, his study of trauma, and his representation of Karbala and *Ahl al-Bayt*. There is hardly any serious critical reading of the aspects which have been taken up in the present study which makes it all the more relevant and useful.

The first essay, entitled "Mirza Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal: A Study in Comparison", attempts to argue how these poets made experiments in both form and content in their poetry. They represent the best that has been written in these languages and have set a bench mark for prospective poets for all time to come. Iqbal was such an admirer of Ghalib that he wrote a poem about him and made him a character in his magnum opus *Javid Nama* too. For Ghalib creating poetry is like drawing the heart blood from the veins of speech and Iqbal shared this understanding with him. Ghalib believed in creating meaning out of nowhere which makes his poetry enriching. If Ghalib is a master in creating meaning, Iqbal not only adds meaning to things but is a poet with a message too. His poetry has meaning as well as message. Both of them are rebels in terms of style and theme. Emerson's famous adage, 'Who so would be a man must be a non-conformist' fits well to both the poets due to their originality and freshness. The chapter therefore attempts to compare the two poets by critically analysing their biographies, beliefs about poetry, the contribution that they made to both Urdu and Persian, and above all their thematic concerns. The study shall also attempt to evaluate critically their poetry so as to foreground the commonalities between them.

The second essay is entitled "Mirza Ghalib and John Donne: A Comparative Study" and attempts to highlight how Ghalib and Donne, representing two different civilizations, came to use language and themes differently for which they were held in contempt. Notwithstanding the difference between them, their poetry, representing the best that has been written in terms of form and content, came to have a universal appeal. Taking its cue from this proposition, the essay therefore makes an attempt to compare these two

poets on the premise that there are many things in common between them, not least the unconventional themes in their poetry and their experimentation in the use of language. Both of them were disliked and often ridiculed by their detractors primarily for their style. Donne was criticised for his metaphysical style and Ghalib for his *Andaz-e-bayaan* (style) and their real worth was recognised posthumously.

The third essay continues in a similar vein, and is entitled “Mirza Ghalib and William Shakespeare: A Comparative Study”. Shakespeare and Ghalib are the most popular poets not only in their respective cultures but all over the world. One of the main reasons for this is the universal and perennial appeal and relevance of their poetry. Shakespeare’s name is famous not only for poetry but also for dramas while Ghalib’s oeuvre was restricted to poetry only. Notwithstanding the differences between them, there are many things they have in common. For instance, both of them went through immense financial difficulties, as a result of which Shakespeare had to bank upon his benefactors and Ghalib had to rely upon his creditors. They were also treated very adversely by their critics. Shakespeare’s contenders were the University Wits and other sonneteers who often poked fun at him and Ghalib too was not held in good estimation by his contemporary poets. As a sonneteer Shakespeare made experiments both in his style and themes and Ghalib too floated new themes and new rules of versification as a *ghazal* writer. Furthermore the issues/themes which form the warp and thrust of their poetry are representative of every man. Their poetry is not intellectually demanding for the readers but straightforward, clear, brief and lucid. Hence the essay in question makes an attempt to compare these literary luminaries keeping in view the parameters mentioned above.

The fourth essay, “Death poetry of Mirza Ghalib: A Revaluation”, aims to highlight Ghalib’s preoccupation with death both in his poetry and letters. The predominant concern of Ghalib’s poetry is the way he talks about death: the theme is the quintessential feature of his poetry. It is such an important feature that it almost gains the status of a character, occurring again and again. Therefore the essay aims to highlight this particular obsessional tendency of Ghalib and relates it with the life events which haunted him from time to time. An attempt has also been made to look at the different connotations of death as used by Ghalib across his poetry. There are many aspects in his poetry and letters which have been critically examined by critics all over the world but this aspect—arguably the most predominant feature of his poetry—has hardly been examined at all, hence the fourth chapter of this text seeks to address this imbalance. It also attempts to highlight how Ghalib foregrounds his unconventional technique of the

treatment of death and the defamiliarisation this creates.

The fifth essay concerns Ghalib's "Art of Dialectical Poetics". It shows how critics like Altaf Hussain Hali and Gopi Chand Narang have tried to foreground the dialectical tension in Ghalib. When we do a close textual analysis of Ghalib's poetry we find that it is essentially dialectical in nature and is so because his mental structure is itself dialectical. There is a thesis followed by an anti-thesis which eventually leads to synthesis. The dialectical structure is so embedded and ingrained in his poetry that it permeates it throughout. Since Ghalib found life full of contradictions in which there is always a tussle between appearance and reality, these same opposing forces are reflected in his poetry by means of enigmas, paradoxes and irony. For Ghalib, life is neither a tragedy nor a comedy but a tragic comedy, rather a tragic farce. This tragic and farcical nature of life is represented by Ghalib in his poetry and letters too. Hence the essay attempts to analyse the poetic/artistic philosophy of Ghalib which is essentially dialectical and show how it is the single most characteristic feature of his poetry.

The sixth essay is entitled "Surviving Trauma: Crafting Poetry from Pain" and aims to highlight the suffering, human predicament and the resultant trauma which are part and parcel of his poetry. The list of the million incidents and events which strike a shattering blow to one's consciousness is endless when it comes to the life of Ghalib. We often wonder why Ghalib has become so popular everywhere and why does he appeal to one and all regardless of affinities: the thing that he shares in common with the whole of humanity is suffering—be it poverty and debt, the disappointment which emerged out of his loss of loved ones, or his humiliation and unfulfilled desires. What makes Ghalib a very popular and great poet is that these things were the warp and woof of his life and that consequently they're reflected by him in his poetry and letters. It is not therefore an exaggeration to say that Ghalib lived his poetry. The essay therefore makes an attempt to examine critically his life, poetry and letters to understand how Ghalib grapples with the trauma he experienced and which came to define him. There seemed to be no end to the problems of life for Ghalib, hence, he craves for death as an escape, both in his poetry and letters. The essay attempts to apply theoretical insights from trauma studies, from such scholars as Cathy Caruth, Kai Erikson, Bessel van der Kolk and Neel Burton. An attempt has also been made to highlight the invincible courage and fortitude which Ghalib displayed while facing all the fearful ordeals in his life. Ernest Hemingway's famous quote "Man can be destroyed but not defeated" suits Ghalib well, as he did not bow before the number of

problems in life. Unlike many ordinary people who eventually yield before the challenges of life Ghalib faces them head on. He was well equipped with the weaponry of humour, which is a distinguishing feature of his life, poetry and letters. By means of his humour and his poetry he vents all the frustration, anguish, pain and trauma which are very conspicuous in his creative output and letters.

The last essay, “Representations of *Ahl al-Bayt* and the Karbala Martyrs: A Study of Mirza Ghalib and Muhammad Iqbal” aims to highlight the contribution of the two poets to the genres of the *marsiya*, *salam* and *qasida* in terms of the martyrs of Karbala. An attempt has been made to trace the genesis of *marsiya* and other sub genres of it like *soaz*, *noha* and *rawda khwani* in Urdu poetry in particular and the contribution made to the *marsiya* by Mir Anees and Mir Dabir. The essay also aims to foreground how both Ghalib and Iqbal regarded themselves as the servants of Imam Ali (a.s), and how they expressed their ardent love, devotion and empathy for the martyrs of Karbala—like Imam Hussain (a.s) and his companions—and paid rich and glowing tributes to them.

MIRZA GHALIB AND MUHAMMAD IQBAL: A STUDY IN COMPARISON

Ghalib and Iqbal were the two greatest poets of the sub-continent in the 19th and 20th centuries. Ghalib was born either on December 17 or 27, 1797 and died on 15 February 1869. Iqbal was born on November 7 1877, almost 9 years after Ghalib's death, and died on 21 April 1938. Both of them wrote poetry in Persian and Urdu, and by their own admission their best work was that written in Persian. Critics have gone to the extent of saying that Iqbal was born to take to the logical conclusion the unfinished mission of Ghalib. Before we come to analyse and compare their poetry let us take a look at what Iqbal says about Ghalib. It is well known to all that Iqbal treated Ghalib as his master and he not only praises him in his poetry but in his prose too—that is, in *Stray Reflections*. He records the following impressions about Ghalib:

As far as I can see Mirza Ghalib—the Persian poet—is probably the only permanent contribution that we—Indian Muslims—have made to the general Muslim literature. Indeed he is one of those poets whose imagination and intellect place them above the narrow limitations of creed and nationality. His recognition is yet to come. (Shafique 2006, 50)

Iqbal goes on to express his gratitude to Ghalib in the following way, “I confess I owe a great deal to Mirza Ghalib and Abdul Qadir Bedil as they taught me how to remain oriental in spirit and expression after having assimilated foreign ideals of poetry” (Shafique 2006, 53). In addition to this, Iqbal also wrote a poem on Ghalib in which he highlights his worth and contribution, arguing:

فکر انسان پر تری بستی سے یہ روشن ہوا
بے پر مرغ تخیل کی رسائی تا کجا

Through you the secret was revealed to the human intellect
That innumerable enigmas are solved by human intellect
(Khalil 1997, 71)

لطف گویایی میں تیری بمسری ممکن نہیں
 ہو تخیل کا نہ جب تک فکر کامل ہم نشین

Matching you in literary elegance is not possible
 Till maturity of thought and imagination are combined
 (Khalil 1997, 71)

In this poem Iqbal glorifies Ghalib's creative imagination. He also compares Ghalib with Goethe and finds life in his songs. Khundmiri in his book *Some Aspects of Iqbal's Poetic Philosophy* argues, "this is not a mere poetic simile; there is a deeper kinship of spirit between Ghalib and Goethe. If 'ceaseless striving' has a meaning in itself for Goethe, 'Striving even if it is fruitless' is a source of joy for Ghalib" (12). Such was the influence of Ghalib on Iqbal that he brings him together with several other poets—Byron, Browning and Rumi—in his *Payam-i-Mashriq*. He does not stop here but takes Ghalib on a spiritual journey in *Javid Nama* in the company of Mansoor Al-Hallaj and Qurrat-ul-Ayn Tahira. Besides Iqbal, his close friend Sir Abd Al Qadir in the Preface to *Bang-e-Dara* also highlights the connection between the two poets:

No one knew that after the late Ghalib, someone would rise in India who would again inspire Urdu poetry with a new spirit and through whom the matchless imagination and the rare imagery of Ghalib would be created anew and would lead to the glorification of the Urdu literature. However, Urdu was fortunate in getting a poet of Iqbal's calibre, the superiority of whose literary elegance has impressed the Urdu knowing people of the whole of India and whose reputation has spread to Iran, Asia Minor and even to Europe. Ghalib and Iqbal share many common characteristics. If I were a believer in the transmigration of soul I would have certainly said that the love which Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib had for Urdu and Persian poetry did not allow his soul to rest in peace even in the Elysium and compelled him to reappear in another material form to render service to poetry, and was reborn in a corner of Punjab, called Sialkot and was called Muhammad Iqbal. (Iqbal *Bang-e-Dara* Preface)

Before examining and analysing their poetry it is important to compare them from a biographical point of view. Both of them were proud of their ancestors. Ghalib was originally from Samarkand, Central Asia. His grandfather was a Seljuq Turk who had migrated to India in the 18th century. His father Mirza Abdullah Beig was an employee of the Nawab of Lucknow, the Nizam of Hyderabad and then he took service with Rao Raja Bakhtawar Singh, the ruler of Alwar. It is here that he was killed in a battle in 1803. Since his ancestors were from Turkey, Ghalib also referred to

himself as a Turk and was proud of his ancestry. In a letter of February 15, 1867, he briefly describes the history of his family: "I am of Seljuk, Turkish stock. My grandfather came to India from beyond the river (Transoxiana) in Shah Alam's time" (quoted in Russell 1994, 23). The reference to his ancestral family is made by Ghalib frequently in his writings and he held a very high opinion about the fact that his ancestors were soldiers for a hundred generations. Another claim of superiority that Ghalib made was his mastery of the Persian language; Persian represented the culture of the whole Islamic world for several centuries and was thus the language of literature par excellence. Urdu, by contrast, was an inferior language for poetry. According to Ralph Russell, the third claim that Ghalib makes about himself is about his poetry. Ghalib writes, "the love of poetry which I had brought with me from eternity assailed me and won my soul" (in Russell 1994, 28). Iqbal was born in Sialkot and his ancestors were originally Kashmiri Brahmins who had migrated to Sialkot in the 19th century. Like Ghalib, Iqbal was also proud of his ancestors as he himself writes, "Look at me, in India you will not see another man of Brahmin descent who is versed in the mysteries of Rum and Tabriz" (Iqbal 1927, 11).

Ghalib became a single orphan at the age of 5 and subsequently his uncle Nasrullah Beg looked after him for some time before he himself passed away in 1806 after falling off an elephant. In spite of his father's early death his mother made sure that it did not affect his education and as a result he showed outstanding performance in both the Persian and Urdu languages. He knew the basics of Arabic too. He was fortunate enough to be a student of a renowned teacher, Agra Muazzam Ali, who recognized his abilities and encouraged him accordingly. He also had the privilege of being a student of Mulla Abdul Samad, a distinguished scholar of Persian from Iran. Samad taught him for two years when he was only 14 years of age. It is said that Ghalib was so thankful and so attached to him that he brought him to Delhi when he moved there and even kept writing to him after he left India. Iqbal was five years old when he was sent to the local mosque to learn the Quran and the Persian language. He, like Ghalib was also fortunate to be a student of a reputed teacher, Sayyid Mir Hassan, who was also a distinguished scholar of Arabic and the Quran. Iqbal continued to be under the tutelage of Mir Hassan at Scotch Mission School and College where Mir Hassan was the professor. Both of them were influenced by Mirza Abdul Qadir Bedil (1642-1720) a famous poet of India. Like Iqbal's confession above, Ghalib also acknowledges the influence of Bedil on him, as is evident in the following verse:

طرز بیدل میں ریختہ کہنا
اسد اللہ خاں قیامت ہے

Writing Urdu after Bedil's style
Is a difficult task O Assad!
(*Divan-e-Ghalib*, 138)

At the age of fourteen, Ghalib got married to Umrao Jan who was then only thirteen years old. She was a daughter of Nawab Ilahi Baksh and niece of the Nawab of Ferozpur Jhirka. Although it was a common practice those days to get married at this age, one can still discern clearly that Ghalib and Umrao were married before being mature enough. All that is known about them is that she gave birth to seven children, with none of them surviving beyond a few months. Thus it has often been said that he was unhappy in his married life and had disagreements with her for many reasons. This is further validated by the letters he wrote to his friends from time to time. When he was in sixties he heard of the demise of his disciple Umrao Singh and the death of his second wife. He had young children and therefore saw no option but to marry for a third time. Ghalib responded in his unique style:

I feel sorry for Umrao Singh but I'm envious of his situation. Allah! Allah!
His chains have been broken twice. And look at me. For the past 50 years I
have had this noose around my neck. Neither the noose breaks nor my neck
gives in. You should tell him, my brother, I can help you raise your kids.
Why is he eager to have this calamity visit him again? (Qtd. in Narang 2017,
257)

Like Ghalib, Iqbal was also a victim of early and incompatible marriage. Iqbal married thrice and his first marriage took place at the age of 15 in 1892. First, he was married to Karim Bibi. The marriage lasted for 16 years but he stayed away from her for a long time first in Lahore and then in Europe. He makes an admission of his failed marriage in a letter to Miss Atiya Faizee written on April 9, 1909 when he had come back from Europe. The letter reads:

Life is extremely miserable; they forced my wife upon me, I have written to my father that he had no right to arrange my marriage, especially when I had refused to enter into any alliance of that sort. I am quite willing to support her, but I am not prepared to make my life miserable by keeping her with me. As a human being, I have a right to happiness—if society or nature deny that to me, I defy both" (Ish Kumar 1988, 17).

It is said that Ghalib was attracted to an enticing female singer and this claim

is validated by a letter which he wrote to Hatim Ali Beg in which, reminiscing about his youthful days, he talks about a *domini* (a singing dancing girl) who had fallen madly in love with him:

We Mughal lads are outrageously passionate. If we fall in love with someone, we really kill her with our love. I am also a Mughal. In my life I too afflicted a *domini* with my love. May God bless the lovers and the two of us because we have experienced the wound of the loss of loved ones! This happened nearly forty or forty-two years ago. Although I am not into this game anymore and I no longer possess the skill of managing a love affair, I do remember her and her enchanting ways. I will never forget all my life how she died. (Narang 2017, 106)

The name of the *domini* was Mughal Jaan and Ghalib was deeply fascinated by her. Anisur Rahman argues that Ghalib's romantic life did not come to an end with Mughal Jaan. He claims that Ghalib was also in contact with a respectable lady from a well-off family but that this affair also did not last long. Rahman further argues:

He found another beauteous being yet again who would give all he wanted—emotional solace and physical contact. This lady was an admirer of poetry and poets and Ghalib undoubtedly was the one whose companionship any poetry lover would pine for. She used to send her ghazals to him for his opinion. This brought both of them closer to each other although she was a minor poet and Ghalib would not have otherwise drawn closer to her but for his amorous nature. Ghalib referred to her as the “Turk lady” and enjoyed her special companionship the most. Their affair went on secretly and reached a stage where every excuse would only bring greater damage to their reputation than repair it. Fearing the onslaughts of the society for doing an inexcusable wrong, the lady chose to sacrifice her life. This put Ghalib to great agony. (Rehman, 2020)

As far as Iqbal is concerned, he is also said to have developed a strong affection for a singing girl, Ameer Begum, from the city of Lahore, around 1903-04. Khurram Ali Shafique, a noted biographer of Iqbal in his book also argues that the affair with the singing girl lasted for a year. He goes on to say “She is mentioned by name in a letter to a friend and anonymously called the ‘raison d’être’ of his grand poem ‘The Pearl-laden Cloud’ (1903). Reportedly, the girl’s mother resented her daughter’s attraction to the frugal professor and eventually stopped her from seeing him at all” (Shafique 2006, 18).

In Europe Iqbal made a number of friends and some of them he became very close with. One of them was Aitya Fyzee, a liberal aristocrat from Bombay.

They met on April 1, 1907 in London and developed a lifelong friendship with each other. On his return from Europe, Iqbal wrote many letters to her in which he shared his personal problems. She eventually married the prominent artist and writer Samuel Fyzee-Rahamin in 1913. After the partition they migrated to Pakistan and settled down there. In 1947 she made some startling comments about Iqbal. She wrote, "In India, an individual is obligated to bow before the wishes and orders of his family. In view of this, many men and women, though endowed with extraordinary intellectual abilities have ruined their lives." She measured Iqbal's life in the light of these parameters and called Iqbal's life "a cruel tragedy" (Dawn.com). The other woman who Iqbal was closely associated with is Emma Wegenast, from whom Iqbal took German language lessons which helped him to complete his PhD. Shafique notes that "Emma Wegenast was indeed a very different case from Atiya Fyzee. Iqbal met her during his brief stay at Heidelberg in the summer of 1907, and it seems that he became emotionally attached to her. It has also been speculated that the two wanted to get married but were prevented because Emma's family did not allow her to leave Germany for settling down [sic] in British India" (Shafique 2006, 51). After his return from Europe, Iqbal is believed to have written to her in German, "I've forgotten all my German, except for one word: Emma!" (quoted in Shafique 2014, 52). Pertinently Emma gains importance for Iqbal biographers after the 1980s when the poet's letters came to the forefront through a Pakistani researcher. It is said that Emma had handed over the letters to the Pak- German Forum before her death in the 1960s (2014, 50).

Ghalib was a free thinker and he never claimed to be a practising Muslim. There are two things in him which make him a Muslim and which he thought were enough for his salvation. Altaf Hussain Hali writes that "from all the duties of worship and the enjoined practices of Islam he took only two—a belief that God is one and Immanent in all things, and a love for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his family. And this alone he considered sufficient for salvation" (1969, 35). He had two main consolations in his life. One was his sense of humour and the other his poetry and it would not be wrong to say that he vented his pain, frustration and anguish through them. In fact his sense of humour attained a proverbial status which continues to grow today. The more he suffered the more humorous and witty he became, and he displayed his wit both in his letters and poetry. He displayed his presence of mind and ready wit with his friends and acquaintances in conversation too which made him dear to one and all. The other mainstay of his life, his poetry, would keep him going. The remarkable magic that he attains in his poetry is the ability to turn his grief into verse. He even presumes himself dead in many of his poems.

رنج سے خوگر ہوا انسان تو مٹ جاتا ہے رنج
مشکلیں مجھ پر پڑیں اتنی کہ آسان ہو گئیں

When man becomes used to sorrow, the pain of sorrow is alleviated
So many hardships have fallen on me that they have become easier to
endure
(Niazi 2002, 32)

Iqbal on the contrary was a staunch Muslim. For him Islam did not stand for only *Tawheed* and *Risalat* as it did for Ghalib, but much more than that. *The Quran* was the basic source of inspiration for him and much of his poetry is motivated and determined by the teachings of it. All of his major poetic works and his prose works too, including *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, are influenced by Islamic teachings. As far as the creation of poetry is concerned, Ghalib firmly believed in the inspirational nature of poetry:

آتے ہیں غیب سے یہ مضامین خیال میں
غالب صریر خامہ نوائے سروش ہے

These themes I write of come into my mind from the unseen Ghalib, the
sound my moving pen makes is an angel's voice
(Russell 1994, 186)

He defined poetry as “the creation of meaning, not the matching of rhymes” and there is hardly any poet who can match Ghalib in terms of creation of meaning. For him the creation of poetry is not an easy task. As he writes:

فرجام سخن گوی غالب بتو گویم
خون جگر است از رگ گفتار کشیدن

Let me tell you the profit of Ghalib's poetic labour
It is heart's blood that is sucked through the vein of speech
(Myself)

Altaf Hussain Hali in his book *Yadgar-e-Ghalib* highlights two important features of Ghalib's poetry: *turfaqi-e-khayal*, or ingenuity of thought, and *jiddat-o-nudrat-e-mazaamin*, or the innovative freshness of subjects (Narang 2017, ii). Although these features can be found in other poets of *Sabke Hindi*, Ghalib's treatment of them is different. His poetry is multi-layered and multidimensional, having a great appeal and making our senses come alive. The concerns in his poetry are down-to-earth as he focuses on

human beings, their wishes, and the inherent paradoxes of life. His creative ability is such that he uses simple words and commonplace expressions and shapes them in a way which gives rise to a trove of meaning. As he himself comments:

گنجینہ معنی کا طلسم اس کو سمجھئے
جو لفظ کہ غالب مرے اشعار میں آوے

Think of it as a magical treasure of meaning
Every word that appears in my verse, Ghalib.
(Niazi 2002, 662)

The idea is that his verses cannot be kept in water tight compartments as, once written, they spread around in different directions, and hence, it is not possible to draw any boundary lines. Narang suggests that “Ghalib’s life and poetics are a true reflection of our yearning for freedom” (2017, v). Ghalib does not subscribe to any particular ideology or school of thought: he rises above all. This, perhaps, is the reason that he called himself the ‘nightingale of a garden which is yet to come into existence’ in the following verse:

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

I sing with the heat (excitement) of the delights (joy) of the things I
imagine and foresee.
I am the nightingale of the garden that is yet to be born.
(Rahulnegi.blogspot.com, 2020)

Ghalib’s contemporary, the poet Agha Jan Aesh is on record to have said about him:

کلام میر سمجھئے اور زبان میرزا سمجھئے
مگر ان کا کہا یا آپ سمجھیں یا خدا سمجھئے

We did understand the verses of Mir, and what Sauda says-
But Ghalib’s verses!-Save he and God, we know not who can understand
them
(Schimmel 1979, 8)

Aesh confesses that he did not understand Ghalib’s poetry like many others. He rejected all the conventions and dogmas and was therefore ahead of his

time. When he chose the grammar and the style of his poetry, he did not follow the beaten track of age old and stilted thought structures but challenged all the traditional practices. Hali categorically admits that “we shall have to come up with a different standard to judge the quality of Mirza’s fine couplets, which I hope people with good judgement will accept” (Hali 1897, 107). Hali time and again highlights Ghalib’s ingenuity of thought and innovativeness of topics. Ghalib sheds more light on the function of poetry by highlighting the interpretative and representational role of poets in his *Panj Ahang* in the following way: “Rhythmic speech which is called poetry has a different place in every heart and has a different colour for every eye, and as far the poets, every stroke of their plectrum brings out a new sound, every instrument they use, a different melody” (in Mahmud 1993, 428). Also in this Persian work he further defines poetry as the “capital of the world of Divinity”, a phrase which he elaborates on in the preface:

There should be something virginal in the nature of a verse. In essence it should be pure and novel and in spirit it should have the capacity to melt. It should have the sweetness of kindness and the salt of plaintiveness. It should have the joy of song and the sorrow of tears. It should have elegance of fitness and the wisdom of greatness. It should reveal the secrets of life, give a message of beautification and should elicit praise. It should convey the heart-break of rejection and the keen joy of invitation; it should keep severity away and interpret a promise, recommend a message, be a means of entry into any company and may effectively represent scenes of conflict and battle. (in Mahmud 1993, 427)

Sayyid Fayaz Mahmud argues that Ghalib also talked about the function of poetry at the individual and social level but his emphasis is more on the representational and interpretative role of poetry itself. According to Mahmud, Ghalib does not think of the poet living in a vacuum. He is a social being who has a responsibility and obligation towards the society of which he is a part (1993, 427). Elsewhere in his Urdu poetry, Ghalib remarks:

اے اسد آباد ہے مجھ سے جہاں شاعری
خامہ میرا تخت سلطان سخن کا پایا ہے

O Asad! The world of poetry is populated, because of me
My pen is the leg of the throne of the Sultan of Poetry
(Mahmud 1993, 240)

Iqbal too held poetry to be an instrument of pleasure, but he firmly believed that it should serve the purpose of life. He assigns a fresh role to

poetry and for him the poet does not entertain only but has a definite role to play. He inspires the masses, caught in a state of oblivion, to action. He expects the poets to be a “trumpet of prophecy” like Shelley. For him ‘a poet is a part of a prophecy’:

شاعری جزوِست از پیغمبری

Since he was not only a poet but a philosopher too, he used poetry as a medium to communicate his philosophy. Although he started his poetic career as a conventional poet writing about nature, nationalism and lover/beloved relationships etc., the bulk of his poetry is motivated by the vision which he had for the whole of humanity in general and Muslims in particular. He, like Ghalib, also creates meaning, but at the same time his poetry has a message as he comments:

مری نوائے پریشان کو شاعری نہ سمجھ
کہ میں ہوں محروم رازِ درون میخانہ

Take not my rhymes for poet's art,
I know the secrets of the wineseller's mart.
(Wine symbolically used)
(Iqbal *Bal-e-Jibril*, 48)

Iqbal did not approve of the philosophy of art for art's sake. He draws his inspiration for writing poetry from the *Holy Quran* and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In an article entitled “The literary opinions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)” Iqbal quotes an example of Imraul Qais, the 6th century Arab poet about whom the Prophet (PBUH) said, “The best of the poets and their guide to Hell” (1964, 144-145). Taking this tradition as the yardstick Iqbal argues:

The ultimate end of all human activity is Life—glorious, powerful and exuberant. All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose and the value of everything must be determined in reference to its life-giving capacity. The highest art is that which awakens our dormant will-force and nerves us to face the trials of life manfully. All that brings drowsiness and makes us shut our eyes to reality around, on the mastery of which alone life depends, is a message of decay and death. There should be no opium-eating in Art. The dogma of “Art for the sake of Art” is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power. (In Abbasi 1997, 462)

Iqbal, like Ghalib, also believed that he was a poet for future generations:

نغمہ امہ نخم بے پرداستم من نوائے شاعر فرد استم
عصر من داندہ اسرار نیست یوسف من بہرائیں بازار نیست

I have no need of the ear of Today,
I am the voice of the poet of To-morrow
My own age does not understand my deep meaning My Joseph is not for
the market
(Nicholson 1980, 27)

Apart from the above similarities there is one more feature in common between Ghalib and Iqbal and that is their love and admiration for Hazrat Ali (A.S) and *Shohada-e-Karbala* (the Martyrs of Karbala). Both of them have written poems on this subject in which they express their strong admiration for them. In this regard, Hali says of Ghalib that his “real religion was enmity towards none, but he was inclined towards Shia beliefs and held...(Ali), after the prophet of God, to be pre-eminent...There was not a man in the court who did not know that Ghalib was a Shia, or at least a *tafzili* (one who, though not a Shia, acknowledges the pre-eminence of Ali)” (in Russell, 100). He expresses his fervent love in verses such as:

غالب مے نوش ہونے پر گر گنت نہ جا سکوں
حسرت یہ ہے کہ بعد مرگ کچھ کام آسکو
ایندهن بنا دے مجھ کو جہنم کا اے خدا
بر دشمن علی کا کلیجہ جلا سکوں

Ghalib! If I can't go to Paradise for being a wine bibber I wish that I be of
some use after my death

I implore you to convert me into a fuel of Hell
That I can burn the hearts of the enemies of Ali (A.S)
(Digital Akhbar “Imam Hussain...” 2020)

In the line above, Mirza Ghalib expresses his heartfelt love for the progeny of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and hatred for the enemies of *Ahl al-Bayt*. He also pays glorious tribute to Hussain (a.s) in many of his verses, for instance:

سلام اسے کہ اگر بادشاہ کہیں اسکو
تو پھر کہیں کہ کچھ اسکے سوا کہیں اسکو
نہ بادشاہ نہ سلطان یہ کیا ستائش ہے
کہو کہ خمس آل عبا کہیں اسکو

Blessings on him who deserves to be called a king Or if not then let us call

him something higher You do not call
 him either a king or a sultan
 Let us call him the *Panjatan*
 (Digital Akhbar “Imam Hussain...” 2020)

Similarly, Iqbal also draws inspiration from Karbala which according to him transcends all sectarian barriers. He conveys a universal message to mankind to follow Imam Hussain (a.s) who sacrificed his life and his family in the cause of Truth. Iqbal glorified Hussain (a.s) in many of his poems, as in the following lines:

حقیقت ابدی ہے مقام شبیری
 بدلتے رہتے ہے انداز کوفی و شامی

The place of Hussain (a.s), the Martyr great is fact, not bound to Space or Date,
 Though the Syrians and the Kufis may often change their wont and way.
 (*Bal e Jibril*)

Iqbal in the verse above argues that Hussain (a.s) remains a representative of truth and the love of God. His glorious martyrdom shall continue to inspire and be a model standing for justice and the fight against injustice and oppression. Hussain (a.s) through his martyrdom has become an eternal truth while on the contrary the people who ruled Kufa and Syria shall keep on changing colours like chameleons and attempt to gain power by means of deceit, manipulation, fraud and trickery. Iqbal praises Hussain (a.s) and his companions elsewhere also in the following way:

دشمنان چون ریگ صحرا لا تعداد
 دوستان او بہ یزدان ہم عدد

Like the grains of desert sands His (Hussain's) enemies were countless
 While the number of his friends equalled God (yazdaan)
 (Naqvi 1977, 60)

Iqbal's idea in the above verse is that Hussain's (a.s) enemies were countless and are likened to the sand grains of the desert, but Hussain's (a.s) companions are equivalent to God Himself as the 72 companions are equivalent to the numeral summation of alphabets in 'Yazdaan' (which means God).

Similarly, both Ghalib and Iqbal undertook experiments with the form and content of poetry. Ghalib shunned old popular clichés and idioms and

revolted against the existing styles. He created his own original metaphors taken from different sources which made him an incomprehensible poet. The imagery that he used was uneven, irregular, abstruse, far-fetched and mysterious. In comparison, Iqbal was exquisite and clear cut and he mostly used conventional metaphors but put them in different and fresh contexts. He was not vague and ambiguous like Ghalib but direct and candid and his statements were like hammer strokes by means of which he made his point. They also wrote about sorrow; Ghalib is through and through sorrowful in his poetry whereas Iqbal's poetry has sorrowful associations but much of it is a complaint. Ghalib's natural inclination was more towards the Persian language, as he tells us himself:

فارسی بین تابہ بینی نقشہائے رنگ رنگ
بگزار از مجموعہ اردو کہ بے رنگ من است

Look at my Persian; there you see the full range of my artistry
And leave aside my Urdu verse, for there is nothing there of me.
(Islam & Russell 1994, 82)

He seconds this in his letters in which he claims that the Persian language and eloquence have been bestowed upon him in eternity. The variety of Persian that he used in his poetry was pure classical Persian and not the vernacular Persian like that of Iqbal. Likewise though, Iqbal also did not imitate the traditional style of his predecessors. Having said that he did briefly follow the Indo-Persian style (*Sabke Hindi*), but he was able in time to break the barriers of this period. He also wrote much of his poetry in Persian and his preference and first choice of Persian is mentioned in *Asrar-i-Khudi* in the following way:

I am of India: Persia is not my native tongue
I am like the crescent moon: my cup is not full
Although the language of Hindi is sweet as sugar
Yet sweeter is the fashion of Persian speech.
Because of the loftiness of my thoughts
Persian alone is suitable to them
(Iqbal 1994, 33)

Iqbal achieved tremendous fame as an Urdu poet in India but his Persian poetry made him famous across the world, particularly in Iran, Turkey and Russia. Just as Ghalib stood for freedom and assertion of personality, Iqbal also followed this tradition and took them to new heights in his poetry. Ghalib's features of poetry like revolt and rebellion, respect for the dignity of man, and joy in life are equally shared by Iqbal too. Unfortunate for both

of them is the fact their Persian poetry did not receive much attention in Iran and other places where this language is a mother tongue.

Another common thing between Ghalib and Iqbal is that they lay bare their inner selves through their letters which they wrote to their friends. Ghalib's letters are a huge legacy which display his wit, self-irony and acute observation. He unveils himself in these letters by talking about his sorrows, sufferings and joys in such a way as if he were talking to them face to face. In short, his letters give us an important insight into his inner self. Similarly, Iqbal is also famous for having left a heritage of letters which he wrote to his friends like Atiya Fyze and Emma Wegenast. They also give us an insight into Iqbal as he pours his heart out by talking about his failed and imposed marriage and other personal problems. Furthermore, he wrote letters to Muhammad Ali Jinnah which, it is believed, gave rise to the idea and creation of Pakistan.

Before rounding off the discussion about the two poets it is important to look at what the most renowned critic on Iqbal and Ghalib Shamsur Rehman Faruqi says about them in his famous book *How to Read Iqbal: Essays on Iqbal, Urdu Poetry and Literary Theory*. In the chapter "Iqbal, the Riddle of Lucretius, and Ghalib" he remarks:

For better or for worse, Iqbal is essentially a poet of hope; Ghalib is not. Ghalib is a poet of Romantic revelation: Iqbal is not. Iqbal is a poet with a message; Ghalib is not. For the sake of the message, Iqbal can sacrifice poetry. Ghalib has no such problem. For Ghalib, words are the ultimate reality; for Iqbal, they are the means to another end. Ghalib is the poet of compression and introspection; Iqbal the poet of dilation and explication. Both use metaphor, both use verbal skills, but in different ways. Iqbal's greatness is in his poetry, not in his ideas...We must remember, as A.A. Suroor has said, that in Iqbal the philosopher was always engaged in a battle with the poet. Suroor breaks down the components of Iqbal's personality into poet, philosopher and man of religion...Like Yeats, Iqbal too was a practicing politician...Ghalib had no such conflicts to face, for Ghalib had no desire to explain the world: he was content to reflect it through his consciousness. Iqbal's desire to explain and thus conquer the world enmeshed him in many contradictions which Suroor has pointed out, particularly with regard to Nietzsche and Bergson...Two poets can be said to work in the same tradition, or to be similar to one another, if their poetics and poetic practice are largely similar; or if their vision of life is similar; or then if either or both flow from the same compulsions of literary tradition and ethnic environment as reflected in their poetry. For Ghalib and Iqbal, none of these conditions obtain. Ghalib wrote within the essentially Romantic tradition of Sabk-i Hindi (Indian Style). Iqbal at his best has been

compared to Rumi, Hafiz, Sa'di, even Firdausi. Nothing could be farther from the *Sabk-i Hindi*. Iqbal was undoubtedly a serious poetic craftsman and artist even in his weaker poems. But his poetics was different from Ghalib's. (Faruqi 2007, 79-81)

Iqbal had set ideas behind writing poetry while Ghalib did not subscribe to any tenets or philosophy whatsoever. His poetry can be called a profound reflection on life whereas Iqbal, particularly in his later poetry, writes with a purpose and a definite agenda. Ghalib had an extraordinary sense of humour and had many friends from all walks of life while Iqbal was reticent and had few personal friends. Ghalib was an open book and Iqbal did not reveal himself to everybody. Ghalib deals with the general concerns of life which appeal to all and are sundry whereas Iqbal has particular concerns in his poetry and therefore it does not appeal to all. The last phase of both Ghalib and Iqbal was also similar as both were plagued by prolonged illness. Ghalib suffered from various health issues including the loss of his eyesight. Iqbal's health was far worse than Ghalib's and he also died due to his illnesses. The last days of Ghalib were miserable and he would often lose consciousness. Just a few days before his death, he dictated a letter to Alauddin saying, "What do you want to know about my condition? You may ask my neighbours in a day or two" (Kumar 1988, 9). He remembered God too much before his death often saying 'there is no God but God'. As for Iqbal, he quoted a Persian verse to his brother just some days before his death which reads:

نشان مرد مومن باتو گویم
چون مرگ آمد تبسم بر لب اوست

You ask me a sign of the sign of the man of faith?
When death comes, he has a smile on his face
(Kumar 1988, 21)

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