

## ❁ Chapter 6 ❁

### The Revolt of 1857

What Ghalib did during the 'Mutiny' we know, for the most part, from his own accounts. In a letter to Sarur written eighteen months later (November 18, 1858) he writes:

'On May 11, 1857 the disorders began here. On that same day I shut the doors and gave up going out. One cannot pass the days without something to do, and I began to write my experiences, appending also such news as I heard from time to time. But I made it a binding rule to write it in ancient Persian, the language of *Dasatir*, and except for the proper names, which, of course, cannot be altered, to use no Arabic words.'

It was the established tradition in Ghalib's day to choose the title of a work not to indicate its content but rather to assert in poetic metaphor its literary worth; he accordingly entitled this work *Dastambu* ('A Posy of Flowers'). It continued to occupy him on and off for fifteen months.

What else he did besides beginning *Dastambu* in the four months during which the rebels held Delhi we do not know in any detail. *Dastambu* itself treats this period very briefly, and his private letters too are noticeably reticent. But in a letter written much later—on January 14, 1858—to the Nawwab of Rampur he says,

'In those turbulent days I held myself aloof [from the Court]. But I feared that if I completely severed all connection with it my house might be destroyed and my very life perhaps endangered. Thus I continued inwardly estranged, but outwardly friendly.'

Several weeks earlier—on December 5, 1857, he had told Tufta, 'In this upheaval I have had no part in any matter of policy. I simply carried on with my verse-correcting. . . .'

No such statements are to be found in *Dastambu*, at any rate in the form in which it has come down to us. This qualification is necessary because, as we shall see later, Ghalib conceived the idea in 1858 of presenting the work to the British authorities as a means of winning their favour and patronage. With this in mind Ikram comments, 'To assume that Ghalib has recorded the whole course of events plainly and without inhibition would not be correct'. But if we may safely assume that he may on the one hand have omitted or toned down

passages which could give serious offence to the British, and on the other may have added emphasis to his horror at the acts of the rebel sepoys, there is nevertheless no reason to believe that the book in any way misrepresents his essential attitudes, and it remains the clearest connected account we possess of his personal experiences during these months and his reactions to the momentous events taking place around him; for, as he writes: 'This book from start to finish records what has befallen me and what I have heard'. (He adds that where he records what he has heard, he does so in the conviction that it is true.) The book is also a work of remarkable literary power. For both these reasons we translate the greater part of it in this and the next chapter.

Because he conceived *Dastambu* primarily as a work of literature, he does not come immediately to its essential subject matter, but begins, as a true Muslim should:

'In the name of God, from Whom comes all success, and Who created sun and moon, and night and day.

'A Mighty Ruler is He, who raised the nine heavens aloft and endowed the seven planets with light, and great is His knowledge Who caused the soul to enter the body and taught reason and justice to mankind, and caused these seven and those nine, sustained by no foundation and no prop, to endure eternally. . . .'

He goes on to argue that if the heavens influence human fortunes, they do so as the servants of His will: 'The stars are the servants of a Just Ruler, and the servants of His justice may not pass beyond the orbit of equity.' If then the stars bring misfortune upon man, all this is part of the working of God's purpose:

The Minstrel's plectrum strikes against the strings  
But who does not know what his purpose is?  
Joy lies concealed in grief. 'Tis not in anger  
The washerman beats the clothes against the stone.

'In truth the annihilation of one thing serves only to bring another into being. Ease and toil, success and degradation, are all of God's gift, and whatever He sends tends to man's gain and betterment and happiness and delight. . . . Is this not gift enough to us, that He exists? . . . The heavens turn like a millstone, and neither heavens nor millstone move without a mover. . . .'

God sets the skies in motion. Understand then  
Nothing that comes from them can be unjust.

'All praise to Him Who confers existence and sets a term to nothingness, Who nurtures equity and stamps out oppression, Whose justice saps the might of the mighty, and Whose kindness gives strength to the weak. What was it

when the swallows dropped their pebbles and by their blows the proud, head-strong riders on elephants were levelled in dust and blood?<sup>1</sup> And when the sting of a gnat took Namrud's life away? Beyond doubt, these were the evident signs of the might and majesty of God, Who can make the mighty weak and the weak mighty. Tell me, were these two disasters, of two different ages, wrought by the conquering power of the fatal glance of some cruel, capricious star?

Zuhak seized throne and kingdom from Jamshed  
And Alexander clave Darius' breast.  
A jinn can steal the ring from off the hand  
That holds both jinn and peri in its palm.<sup>2</sup>  
Reward and punishment are hidden from you:  
You harp upon the influence of the stars.

Yes, that God Who can transform nothingness into being, can in the same way annihilate all that is. If He who said "Be", and in a moment brought the whole universe into being, should in another moment say "Cease!" and annihilate all what man would dare to murmur against Him?

In short, God is great, and God is good, and the wise man who knows this, accepts with equanimity and joy all that God sends.'

Ghalib then prepares to move towards his subject proper, and a passing reference to 'armies that throw off their allegiance to their commanders' foreshadows what is ultimately to come. Ultimately, but not yet. There follows a long comparison and contrast between the fall of Persia before the invading Arab Muslims and the revolt of the Indian sepoy against their British masters, each presaged, according to astrologers, by the same conjunction of Mars and Saturn in the same mansion.

'The wise man does not fall prey to such fancies. There, a foreign army fell upon a foreign land; here an army rises against its own leaders. . . . There, the issue was religion; the blessings of a new, exalted faith brought happiness to a ruined Iran, and freed it from the bonds of fire-worship. Here the issue is the order of the state. To what new order can the Indian look with joy? The people of Persia turned their face from the worship of fire and saw before them the road to the worship of God. The Indians have let go the skirt of their just masters' garment and fallen into a snare, so that they are become the comrades of raging beasts. . . . Judge truly: to hope for peace and ease from any order but the British is no better than blindness. To the wounds which the Arab

<sup>1</sup> A reference to chapter cv of the Quran, which alludes to a story of how a powerful force including a number of elephants moved against Mecca, but was miraculously destroyed by flocks of birds like swallows, who dropped pebbles which killed all whom they struck.

<sup>2</sup> A reference to Sulaiman (Solomon). His power over jinns and peris depended upon a ring on which the Great Name—the hundredth name—of God was engraved. On one occasion, in punishment for an omission, God permitted this ring to be stolen by a jinn for forty days.

scourges inflicted on the Iranians, the excellence of the blessed religion of Islam brought balm. . . . But now, if those who know the world can conceive of the rule of reason and of equity returning hereafter, then let them tell me, and by their kindness bring comfort to my grieving, terror-stricken heart. . . .

'I am not so blindly ignorant as to expect from the proximity of two inauspicious planets the same outcome as befell a thousand years ago. Grief-stricken, and sunk in irremediable sorrow, I conceive it better that we poor creatures who inhabit this earth, who have neither seen Cancer and Saturn and Mars nor heard aught of them but their names, should not talk of things unseen and unheard, but should think that Time, which preserves all the secrets of past and future in its breast, and whose age-old custom it is to bring destruction upon the works of good men, could not allow the wise men of Europe to be humbled by a foreign army, and so sent their own armies from every quarter to assail them.'

He then turns abruptly to his own position:

'Let the reader of this book understand that I, the motion of whose pen spills pearls upon the page, have from my childhood eaten the salt of the English government. So to say, since I cut my first teeth my bread has come from the table of these conquerors of the world. Some seven or eight years have passed since the King of Delhi summoned me and desired that in return for six hundred rupees a year I should write the history of the Timurid Kings. I accepted, and set myself to my task. After some time, when the old *ustad* of the King passed away, the correction of his verses too fell to me. I was old and infirm, accustomed to ease and solitude. And more than all this, my deafness made me a burden to the hearts of others, as in every assembly I gazed intently at the lips of every speaker. Willy nilly, I would go once or twice a week to the Fort. If the King came out of his apartments I would stand for some time ready to serve him; if not, I would sit there for a little while writing, and then return home. Whatever I had written I would either take to the King myself or send it to him by another's hand. Such was my occupation when the far-ranging thought of the swift-moving sky planned a fresh revolution, to destroy my insignificant and harmless ease.

I swear by His name, Whose unheeding sword  
Strikes down impartially both friend and foe.'

He then describes how

'... this year, at midday on Monday 16th Ramzan, 1273 AH, which corresponds to May 11th, 1857 . . . the gates and walls of the Fort and the battlements of Delhi were suddenly shaken. It was not an earthquake: on that inauspicious day a handful of ill-starred soldiers from Meerut, frenzied with malice, invaded the city—every man of them shameless and turbulent, and with murderous hate for his masters, thirsting for British blood.'

He relates how they were admitted by the city guards and quickly overran the city, killing every Englishman they found and not resting until they had burnt their houses to ashes.

'There were humble, quiet men, who passed their days drawing some modest sum from British bounty and eating their crust of bread, living scattered in different areas of the city. No man among them knew an arrow from an axe. . . . In truth, such men are made to people the lanes and by-lanes, not to gird up their loins and go out to battle. These men, when they saw that a dam of dust and straw cannot stem the fast-flowing flood, took to their only remedy, and every man of them went to his home and resigned himself to grief. I too am one of these grief-stricken men. I was in my home. When I heard the noise and uproar, I would have made enquiry, but in the twinkling of an eye . . . every street and every lane was full of galloping horsemen, and the sound of marching men, coming wave upon wave, rose in the air. Then there was not so much as a handful of dust which was not red with the blood of men whose bodies were like the rose; and it seemed that every corner of every garden was stripped of its leaves and fruits, the graveyard of a hundred springtimes. Alas for those wise and just rulers, of good nature and good name! And woe for those fair ladies of delicate form, with faces radiant as the moon and bodies gleaming like new-mined silver! And alas for those children who had barely yet seen the world, whose smiling faces put the flowers to shame and whose dainty steps reproached the partridge's gait! For all of these were dragged down to drown in the vortex of blood. If Death itself, that rains burning coals and issues flames of fire, Death at whose hands men are compelled to lacerate their faces and blacken their clothes, should stand sobbing and lamenting at these victims' graves, and don black raiment in mourning for them, it would be no more than just. And if the heavens should turn to dust and settle on the earth, and the earth in panic move like a whirlwind from its station, it would be no more than fitting.

Spring, wallow in your own blood, like a stricken bird;  
Age, plunge in blackness, like a night without a moon;  
Sun, beat your head until your face is bruised and black;  
Moon, make yourself the scar upon the age's heart.

'At last, when evening fell on that black day, and blacker darkness overspread the earth, then these black-hearted men in their headstrong pride pitched their camps throughout the city and in the Fort, where they made the royal orchards a stable for their horses and the royal abode their sleeping quarters. Little by little, from distant towns the news came in, that in every cantonment sepoy had shed their officers' blood, and as the minstrel draws the melody from his strings, so had these faithless ones, with beating of drums raised the tumult of rebellion. Band upon band of soldiers and peasants had become as one, and far and near, one and all, without even speaking or conferring together, girded their loins to their single aim, and girded them so strongly

that the buffetings of a torrent of blood could alone ungird them. It seemed that legions without number and warriors without count were bound in unity as a single thread binds the twigs that make the broom. . . . And now you will see a thousand armies, marshalled without marshals, and unnumbered bands, led by no commander and yet ready for war. Their guns and shells, their shot and powder are all taken from English arsenals, and are bent to war against the masters of those arsenals. All the ways of war they learned from the English, and now their faces are inflamed with hate and malice against their teachers. My heart is not stone or iron: how should it not burn in sorrow? My eyes are not sightless windows: how should they not shed tears? Yes, a man must both feel anguish at the death of its English rulers, and shed tears for the destruction of Hindustan. City after city lies open, without protectors, filled with men who have none to watch over them, like gardens bereft of their gardeners, studded with trees stripped bare of leaves and fruit. Robbers go freed from the fetters of the law, and merchants released from the burden of levy. House after house lies desolate, and the abodes of grieving men invite despoliation. Nameless men, who lay lost in the oblivion of their obscure homes, have decked themselves out and sallied forth to display their shamelessness. Row upon row, they go with daggers drawn like a line of eyelashes, while peace-loving men of good will venture out to the markets bowed down at every step under oppression's weight. The thieves and the light-fingered, in broad daylight, boldly loot and plunder men's silver and gold, and go home at nights to wrap themselves for sleep in silks and brocades; while illustrious families lack even the lamp-oil to illumine their homes. In the dark nights when raging thirst assails them they await the flash of the lightning, that they may see where the pitchers and the goblets lie. See and admire His serene indifference! Men of no rank, who once toiled all day digging earth to sell, have found bricks of gold in that earth; and men of high rank who once in the assemblies of music and wine lit the bright lamps of pleasure and delight with the rose's fire, lie now in dark cells and burn in the flames of misery and degradation. The jewels of the city's fair-faced women . . . fill the sacks of vile, dishonoured thieves and pilferers. All their remaining wealth was their airs and graces, and these the new-rich, beggar's sons, have stolen from them to swell the stock of their cheap ostentations. Lovers who were to bear the perverse fancies of fair-faced mistresses, must suffer now the whims of these scoundrels. Every worthless fellow, puffed up with pride, perpetrates what he will, like the eddying whirlwind, and every vain, trifling man, who, drunk with vanity, performs the cheap antics of self-display, is like the straw borne swiftly hither and thither on running water. One, once of high resolve and high renown, has seen his honour dragged in the dust of his own lane; and another, who once had nor name nor pedigree nor gold nor jewels, is suddenly become master of rank and status beyond reckoning and wealth and property beyond compute. He whose father tramped the streets and by-lanes as though blown by the idle wind, has made the wind his slave; and he whose mother begged fire from her neighbour, has the fire at his com-

mand. Shallow men aspire to make fire and wind their servants, and we are of those ruined ones who long for one sigh of contentment and one cry proclaiming justice:

My grievous tale to you is but a story:  
The stars weep tears of blood to hear it told.'

After a little more in this vein, in which Ghalib laments particularly the complete breakdown of the postal services, so that he no longer has news of his friends, he passes on to speak of the further development of the revolt.

'Fate mustered a sepoy from every street corner, a force from every lane and alley, and an army from every point of the compass, and set them marching on Delhi. The King was powerless to repulse them; their forces gathered around him, and he fell under their duress, engulfed by them as the moon is engulfed by eclipse, though eclipse befalls only the full moon [i.e. the moon at the height of its power] and the King was not like that [i.e. his powers were, already before the revolt, extremely limited].'

The prisons had been opened, and freed criminals contributed their part to the general anarchy and to the pressures on the King. He goes on to speak of the military situation, and the daily clashes between the rebels, now 'near enough fifty thousand strong' and the force of 'the . . . British rulers, who in all this wide area held only a hill to the west of the city'.

Meanwhile in the Fort a conflict developed between the King's advisers. On one side was Ghalib's old friend and benefactor, Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, and against him

' . . . a man who, engulfed in inordinate pride . . . made himself the secret rival of his patron and benefactor. Fearing that unless . . . [Hakim Ahsanullah Khan] were wiped out, his own malpractices, by which he had amassed his wealth and property, could not be for ever concealed, he fomented constant opposition to him and cherished malice against him, making it known that Hakim Ahsanullah Khan was a supporter and well-wisher of the English and fanning the flames of dissension between him and the rebel leaders. One day this man of evil intent, intent on the murder of this wise man, launched an attack upon his mansion. [He] . . . was at that time in the Fort, in attendance upon the King; some madmen from this band therefore entered the Fort and hemmed him in. The Lord and Protector of his servant [i.e. the King], whose grace and bounty have no flaw, covered him with his own body, and only thus in this fatal moment was his life preserved. But though his life was saved, these turbulent, unruly men could not rest until the ruin of his household was accomplished. They looted his palace, adorned in beauty like a Chinese painting, and set fire to the roof. Every beam and every joist, joined in that roof as firmly as the

stone set in the ring, fell and was burnt to ashes. The walls were blackened with smoke, as though the palace itself had put on black to mourn its own destruction.

Trust not to heaven's kindness: know that this cruel witch  
Can plunge him in disaster whom she held in her embrace.

'I say that the most damned and dishonoured of slaves could never, never practice such malevolence against his master but that his seed had entered his mother's womb in the time of menstruation. This unclean traitor, false to his salt, to whose pock-marked countenance were added great bulging eyes and an ugly broad mouth, but who counted himself a third in beauty with Venus and Diana, goes everywhere about, swinging his hips and gesturing, and thinks that his gait outdoes the pheasant and the quail in beauty. I will not write his name, for this son of a beggar has neither name nor honour. I call down curses upon him, for this is an act of merit, and bring back the steed of my pen on to its former course.'

He goes on to write how the knowledge that the King had given his name to the rebel cause spread far and wide, and brought a great accession of strength to the revolt. Rulers of Indian states, from Delhi to Lucknow, hastened to offer proof of their allegiance. They included the ruler of Farrukhabad and the Nawwab of Rampur.

'The famous Lord of Farrukhabad, Tafazzul Husain Khan, who had never owned himself the King's humble vassal, now . . . wrote of himself that he had long been the King's slave. . . . That radiant sun that warms the world, the noble ruler of Rampur (may no evil come near him) who rules his domain with regal pomp and majesty . . . and whose loyal solidarity with the English rulers is so strongly founded that though the hand of time assail it for a thousand years with a thousand tests of strength, it cannot break it, had no recourse but to send a simple message and so silence the tongues of his enemies.'

But the tide of fortune was beginning to turn. In Lucknow the rebels had enthroned a ten-year-old son of the deposed King, Wajid Ali Shah, and an embassy had been despatched to Delhi, bearing gifts for Bahadur Shah. Ghalib describes these gifts and then continues:

'It seemed that all these splendid presents would bring further lustre to the King's house. But Time was waiting to make them an eyesore to him. . . .

'His fate had been roused suddenly from its deep slumber<sup>1</sup> by the sepoys' tumult; but now its drooping eyelids again closed in sleep. But no! Rather did the star of the King's fate rise to such heights that the sight of us men of mortal

<sup>1</sup> In Persian and Urdu idiom 'the awakening of fate' means the sudden turn of one's fortunes for the better.

clay could no more discern it. . . . On the heels of the day when that inauspicious embassy fulfilled its duty and the King extended his generous kindness to them, came the next day—Monday, 24th of the lunar month and 14th of September—when they who lay in the shade of the hill made an assault on Kashmiri gate with such majestic force that the black forces had no choice but to flee before them. . . . And if May drove justice out of Delhi, September drove out oppression and brought justice back.

When four months had passed, and another four days  
The bright sun again warmed the world with its rays.

Although from May 11th to September 14th is four months and four days, yet one may say that since the city was lost on a Monday and recovered on a Monday, it was lost and recovered on the same day.'

In point of fact, the recovery of the city took more than one day. The attack of September 14th penetrated to the Jama Masjid, the beautiful mosque built in the reign of the emperor Shahjahan (1627–1658) but it was then thrown back. However, it was renewed, and although fighting in the streets continued until the 20th, the city was by then firmly in British hands. It is characteristic of Ghalib's moral courage that in a work intended for presentation to the British authorities he makes no attempt to conceal what the city suffered in the British assault.

'Smiting the enemy and driving him before them, the victors overran the city in all directions. All whom they found in the streets they cut down. Those distinguished in the city by rank and wisdom one and all took to their houses and shut the doors, that their honour might be safe. Of the army of scoundrels still in the city many determined upon flight, while a few raged to resist the attackers. These few now grappled with the brave conquerors of the city to spill, as they thought, the blood of the alien enemy, but as I deem, the honour of the capital. For two to three days every road in the city, from the Kashmiri Gate to Chandni Chauk, was a battlefield. Three gates—the Ajmeri, the Turcoman and the Delhi—were still held by the rebels. My house . . . is situated, between the Kashmiri and the Delhi Gate, in the centre of the city, so that both are equidistant from my lane. When the raging lion-hearts set foot in the city, they held it lawful to slaughter the helpless and burn the houses, and indeed, in every territory taken by force of arms these are the sufferings that people must endure. At the naked spectacle of this vengeful wrath and malevolent hatred the colour fled from men's faces, and a vast concourse of men and women, past all computing, owning much or owning nothing, took to precipitate flight through these three gates. Seeking the little villages and shrines outside the city, they there drew breath to wait until such time as might favour their return. Or if even there they could not feel at ease, they journeyed on day and

night to some other place. As for the writer of these words, his heart did not quake, nor did his step falter. I stayed where I was, saying "I have committed no crime and need pay no penalty. The English do not slay the innocent, nor is the air of this city uncongenial to me. Why should I fall a prey to groundless fancies and wander stumbling from place to place? Let me sit in some deserted corner blending my voice with my lamenting pen, while the tears fall from my eyelashes to mingle with the words of blood I write."

'The command which went forth on the first day of eternity is immutable. On that day the fate of all created things was written and the leaven of the bread of all that would befall was set to work; our ease and pain conform to that eternal command, and it is to our gain that we eschew sorrow and despair and, as children rejoice at every spectacle they see, so we too should in our old age sit and watch the wonders which ever-varying Time displays, and be content.'

He passes on to

' . . . Friday, the twenty-eighth day of the month of Muharram and the eighteenth day of September. . . . In these five days the black rebels who had strayed from the right path fled like pigs from within and without the city, and the conquerors gained full control of the city and the Fort. The tumult of arrests and killings reached this lane, and the heart of every man was rent with fear. You must know that there is only one means of egress from this lane, and the lane holds no more than ten to twelve houses. . . . Most of those who lived there, the women with children in their arms and the men with bundles of their possessions on their shoulders, left it and fled away. The few that remained . . . closed the gate to the lane from the inside, and piled stones all about it. . . .

'From September 15th every house and every room had been shut up, and neither shopkeepers nor shoppers were anywhere to be seen—no grain-dealer to supply our grain, no washerman to wash our clothes, no barber to cut our hair, no sweeper to clear away the refuse. For five days people had gone out, returning always with water, and sometimes, when they could find them, with salt and flour too. But in the end the doors were barricaded with stones and the mirrors of our hearts were rusted over. . . . With light or heavy hearts, we ate what we could get, and drank water so sparingly that a man might think it came from a well we had dug with our fingernails. And then the water in the jugs and pitchers, and the fortitude in the hearts of men and women, ran out, and there was no more. The stage passed where we could delude ourselves that we could sustain the burden of the day with patience or that food and drink would come, and for two nights and days we went hungry and thirsty. . . . But on the third day . . . release from our troubles came. It came about in this way. The ruler of Patiala, Maharaja Narendar Singh Bahadur . . . was with the victors in this war, and his army had from the outset been ranged at the British army's

side. Some of his favoured servants were distinguished noblemen of Delhi, holding high rank at his court, and among them were Hakim Mahmud Khan, Hakim Murtaza Khan, and Hakim Ghulamullah Khan, all sons of that Hakim Sharif Khan who dwells in Paradise: and they lived in our lane. Their houses stretch in a long line, threshold to threshold, roof to roof, on both sides of the lane, and the writer of these words had been for ten years the neighbour of one of these beneficent men. The first of the three, with his wife and children, lived in the capital, in accordance with the tradition of the family, while the other two lived in Patiala, privileged to be companions to the Maharaja. Forseeing the re-taking of the city, the Maharaja in his gracious kindness to his servants, had secured from the mighty warrior-lords [the British] a promise that when the flowing tide of time should bring them victory, protectors should take their stand at the gate of this lane so that the British soldiers . . . should do it no harm. . . .

'On the third day, then, the Maharaja's soldiers came, a guard was posted, and the dwellers in the lane were freed from the fear of looting and attack. They came out of their houses, saying to themselves "Now come what may," and asked the soldiers' permission to leave the lane. Since the guard was one of friends and not of enemies, their request was granted to this extent: they were told "You may go as far as Chandni Chauk: to go beyond is to go to the slaughter". In hardship, misery and fear and trembling they opened the gate. Water-skins and water carriers there were none, and a man from each house, and two of my servants, ventured out. Sweet water was far away, and far they must not go. Of necessity they filled their pots and pitchers with brackish water and brought them back home; and at last that fire whose other name is thirst was quenched. They who had gone out and fetched the water said that in the lane beyond which they were not permitted to go, soldiers had broken down the doors of several houses, but the sacks in them were empty of flour and the vessels empty of oil. I said, "God's true servant is he who speaks not of vessel or sack, of oil or flour. Our livelihood is in the hands of Him Who forgets us not. To fail in thanksgiving to God for His bounties is Satan's work".

'In these days we thought of ourselves as prisoners, and in truth the life we led was a prisoner's life: none could come to us that we might listen, nor could we go out to see what could be seen; thus our ears were deaf and our eyes were blind. And in this trouble and perplexity, a dearth of bread and water! One day out of the blue, clouds gathered and rain fell. We hung out a sheet and put a pitcher beneath it, and got water. They say the clouds draw water from the oceans and rain it down on earth: this cloud of great price and auspicious shadow brought water from the fountain of life, and that which Sikandar, for all his kingship, vainly sought, I, for all my wretchedness, found. . . .'

At this point he breaks off to tell of his present difficulties. The use of the present tense and 'this year' in the sense of 1857, shows the original character of *Dastambu* as a narrative of events written as they happened from day to day:

'This year [1857] I enter my sixty-second year, stirring the dust of this ancient world of dust. And for fifty years I have used up my strength in the pursuit of poetry. . . . [He then gives the history of his pension.] Until the end of April of this year—I write these words in 1857—I drew my pension from the treasury of the Collector of Delhi. But the doors of that treasury have been closed since May, and I am face to face with misfortune, and wild and fearful fancies throng my heart. Formerly I had none to support but my one wife, with neither son nor daughter. But some five years ago, I took to my bosom two orphaned boys from the family of my wife, prime source of all my troubles. They had just learned to talk, and love for these sweetly-speaking children has melted me and made me one with them. Even now in my ruined state they are with me, adorning my life as pearls and flowers adorn my coat. My brother, who is two years younger than I, at thirty years of age gave sense and reason to the winds and trod the ways of madness and unreason. For thirty years he has passed his life unaware, troubling no man and making no commotion. His house is apart from mine, at a distance of about two thousand paces. His wife and daughter, with the younger children and the maidservants, saw that their best course lay in flight, and went away, leaving the mad master of the house with the house and all it contained, with an aged doorkeeper and an old maidservant, to fend for himself. Had I had an enchanter's power I could not in those days have sent anyone to bring the three of them and their goods to me. This is another heavy sorrow, another calamity that has descended on me like an avalanche. Two tender children, tenderly reared and cherished, ask for milk and sweets and fruit, and I cannot give them. Alas! at such a stage the tongue falls silent. We live in anxious thought for bread and water, and die in anxious thought for shroud and grave. Constant care for my brother consumes me. How did he sleep at night? What did he eat by day? And no news comes, so that I cannot even tell if he be still alive or if the weight of constant hardship has broken and killed him.

More than the cry which echoes the heart's strife would leave my lips  
God and my soul! the very breath of life would leave my lips!

The things that I have written sap my life; and things I have not written afflict my soul. I look to men who know of these things to give ear to my complaint and judge me justly. The end of life draws near, and I am like the flickering lamp of early dawn or the sun that sinks to rest behind the roof-tops. . . .'

He again breaks off to relate how he had two years earlier composed an ode in Queen Victoria's honour, and what had been the response to this, and how the revolt had prevented matters coming to a conclusion. Then he resumes:

'On Wednesday, September 30th, seventeen days after the taking of the city and the sealing of our lane, news was brought to me that robbers had attacked

my brother's house and looted it, and the whole lane had been plundered. But they spared . . . [his] life and those of the old doorkeeper and old maidservant. These two old people, helped and accompanied by two Hindus who in the panic and uproar had fled there and found refuge with them, had spared no effort to find water and food. Be it known that in the uproar of tumult and reprisal that shook the city, just as the modes of violence and oppression varied from lane to lane, in the same way the ways of the soldiers in killing and plundering varied, and ruthlessness or mercy was shown according to each soldier's mood and temperament. I surmise that in this assault the orders were to spare the life of him who bows the head of submission and take only his goods, while he who resists must yield his life and wealth and property all three. . . . And this is the general belief. . . . And to cut down old people and women and children is not held lawful. . . . Ye men who worship God, exalting equity and justice and condemning violence and oppression . . . remember first the Indians and see their character who in enmity without cause and malice without foundation, in full knowledge that the murder of one's masters is a sin, drew the sword against their rulers and murdered helpless women and sent to their long sleep in the dust and blood children whom their mothers would have lulled to sleep in their cradles; and then behold the English, who when they rose to battle against this enemy, and marshalled their forces to take revenge upon the guilty, might in their just suspicion of Delhi's citizens have left not a dog or cat in the city alive. On fire with an anger whose flames could burn the heart to ashes, they yet restrained it, and harmed not a hair on the head of any woman or child. . . .'

Yet a few lines later he continues:

'Many of the wretched people of the city have been driven out, and the rest lie here, prisoners of hopes and fears . . . and there is perhaps no balm to soothe the pain of either those within or those without the city. If only those within and those without could have news of each other's lives and deaths! . . . All one can tell with certainty is that every man, wherever he is, is in want. Those . . . within the city who sigh deeply for their fate and those without, who rejected by fate, are condemned to rove aimlessly, their hearts alike carry a full burden of sorrow and their faces alike are pale with the fear of death.'

He then relates an incident which took place

' . . . suddenly at midday, on Monday, October 5th, when a small band of British soldiers came along the wall which runs from the gate to the lane, climbed onto a roof, and thence jumped down into the lane. The Maharaja's soldiers attempted without success to stop them, and disregarding the smaller houses, they came straight to the house of him who writes these words. In the

goodness of their hearts they did not touch any of the household effects, but took me, and the two fair-faced boys, and two or three servants and a few good-hearted neighbours with them, using, however, no violence or harshness, and brought us to a point rather more than two furlongs from our lane, to the house of the merchant Qutub ud Din, on the other side of Chandni Chauk, where the wise and capable Colonel Brown<sup>1</sup> had his headquarters. He spoke to me courteously and humanely, asked me my name and the others their occupation, and there and then dismissed me with every kindness. I offered thanks to God, sang in my heart the praises of that gracious man, and returned to my house.'

Here he turns again to the wider scene. He is puzzled on October 7th to hear a salute of twenty-one guns, 'for the Lieutenant-Governor's approach is saluted by seventeen, and the Governor-General's by nineteen'; but he ultimately concludes that this must salute some further victory over the rebels, 'for be it known that in many places—Bareilly, Farrukhabad, Lucknow—band upon rebel band is still bent upon stirring up evil . . . their hearts—may God crush them to blood—are set upon war, and their hands—may God strike them useless—are set to their task.' Other disturbances have arisen too,

' . . . as though Hindustan has become the arena of the mighty whirlwind and the blazing fire. And if in these grievous days whose beginning none can remember and whose end none can tell, mine eyes have seen aught but weeping, may their windows be blocked with dust. Save the darkness of my fortunes, there is nothing I can claim my eyes have seen. . . . To leave the house, to set foot on the threshold, to walk the lanes and streets, and see Chandni Chauk in the distance—these, except for that one day when the English soldiers took me—have not fallen to my lot. It is as though the sage of Ganja [the Persian poet Nizami] spoke for me when he said

I do not know what passes in the world  
Or what of good or bad befalls men there.

Afflicted by these ills without remedy, these wounds without balm, I must think that I have died, have been called to life to give an account of my deeds, and in punishment of my sins have been suspended head-down in the pit of Hell, thus to live for ever in misery and degradation. Woe upon me if all my todays and tomorrows are to be like this! . . .

'On October 19th, a Monday once again—that day whose name should be struck from the list of the week's days— . . . in the first watch of the day, my brother's doorkeeper with downcast face and dishevelled hair, brought me the joyous news of my brother's death. I learned that he had taken the road to oblivion and walked with hurrying steps: for five days he had burned in high

<sup>1</sup> It appears that, in fact, the Colonel's name was Burn.

fever, and then half an hour after midnight, had urged the steed of life to leap from this narrow pass. Think not of water and cloths, seek not for corpse-washers and grave-diggers, ask not for stone or brick, talk not of lime and mortar; but say how can I go to him? Where can I take him? In what graveyard can I consign him to the earth? Cloth, from the dearest and finest to the cheapest and coarsest, is not to be had. Hindus may take their dead to the river and there at the water's edge consign them to the fire. But what of the Muslims? How could a Muslim join with two or three of his fellows and, joining shoulder to shoulder, pass through the streets carrying their dead to burial? My neighbours took pity on my loneliness and at length girded their loins to the task. One of the Patiala soldiers went in front, and two of my servants followed. They washed the corpse, wrapped it in two or three white sheets they had brought with them, and in a mosque at the side of his house dug a hole in the ground. In this they laid him, filled up the pit with earth once more, and came away. Alas for him who in his life of sixty years passed thirty happily and thirty in sadness . . . God grant him His mercy—for in his life he knew no comfort—and send some angel for his delight and grant his soul to dwell in Paradise for ever. Alas for this good man of ill fortune . . . who in the years of sanity never showed anger and in the years of madness troubled no man . . . but lived his life a stranger to himself . . . and on the 29th night of the month of Safar, died.

Bow down your head and ask for God's forgiveness;  
Where'er you do so, there His threshold is.'

He turns to speak of what happened to his kinsmen of Loharu.

'In the same week in which the British army conquered the city, Amīn ud Din Ahmad Khan Bahadur and Muhammad Ziya ud Din Khan Bahadur, men renowned for their wisdom and justice, bethought them that their honour might best be safeguarded and their hopes for the future made stronger if they left the city. They set out with their wives and children, with three elephants and about forty fine horses, and took the road to the domain of Loharu, which had always been their estate. They first halted at Mihrauli, where in the radiance of that blessed burying ground<sup>1</sup> they partook of the provisions for their journey and rested for two or three days. While they were there, robber soldiers surrounded them, and robbed them of everything except the clothes they wore. Only the three elephants, whom their loyal and faithful companions had led away the moment the tumult began, survived to remind them of their former state, like three burnt granaries [on a plundered estate]. You may well imagine the plight of these victims of robbery and ruin, as they set out, without provisions and without equipment, for Dujana. They were welcomed by Hasan Ali Khan Bahadur, of noble name and fairest fame, who gave proof of his humanity and courage, telling them "My home is yours"

<sup>1</sup> Mihrauli is burial place of the great saint Qutub ud Din Bakhtyar.

and escorting them to Dujana. I will not speak at length: this laudable leader of men acted towards his peers with all the gracious generosity that Iran's emperor . . . showed to Humayun.<sup>1</sup> When the Commissioner<sup>2</sup> Sahib Bahadur heard the news, he sent for them to come to Delhi. Accordingly they returned to the city and presented themselves before him. For some time he spoke to them with unkind taunts, but they returned soft answers to him, and he fell silent. He directed them to a palace in the Fort, next to the hall of the King's Steward in Chief, and commanded them to take up residence there. Regard for the even flow of his writing did not permit the writer of these words to tell the full tale of loss and ruin that befell this family. Know then that while their owners fell a prey to pillage in Mihrauli, their empty houses in Delhi were plundered and laid waste. Of all they had taken with them, they brought only their fainting lives to Dujana, while the rest in its entirety fell to the robbers. While here, of their mansions and palaces nothing remained but bricks and stones and pebbles. They were stripped bare; not a trace of their silver and gold remained, and not a thread of their carpets and their clothing. God grant His mercy to these guiltless men, and an auspicious end to this inauspicious beginning, bringing them comfort out of distress. It was Saturday, the 17th October when these two men, unrivalled in wisdom, returned to the city, and, as I have said, took up their residence in the Fort.

'Two or three days later a force was ordered out, and returned bringing in the lord of Jhajjar, Abdur Rahman Khan, as criminals are brought in. He was lodged in a corner of that hall in the Fort which is called the Hall of Public Audience. The whole of his former estate passed into the power of the English government. On Friday 30th October the ruler of Farrukhnagar, Ahmad Ali Khan, was arrested and brought in in the same way, and given room in another corner of the Fort. The town of Farrukhnagar became the target of attack for skilled and practised robbers, and its citizens lost all they had. On Monday, November 2nd, the ruler of Bahadurgarh and Dadri, Bahadur Jang Khan was arrested and confined in the Fort. On Saturday 7th November, to these nobles, held in the fort in isolation from one another, the coming of the Lord of Ballabgarh, Raja Nahar Singh Bahadur, added another. Let him who seeks the truth understand that the number of those estates which are subject to the Delhi Agency is no more and no less than the number of the days of the week. Jhajjar, Bahadurgarh, Ballabgarh, Loharu, Farrukhnagar, Dujana and Pataudi—there are these seven. The rulers of five of these were now in Delhi Fort, as I have said, and the remaining two, Pataudi and Dujana, are the target of the shafts of fear. What has Fate yet to show? And what will be the outcome for these men?'

He goes on to speak of two other nobles, Muzaffar ud Daula Saif ud Din Haidar

<sup>1</sup> Humayun, second of the Mughal dynasty, reigned from 1530 to 1556. Early in his reign he was forced to flee for some years to Iran.

<sup>2</sup> Of Delhi.



Khan and Zulfaqar ud Din Haidar Khan, generally known as Husain Mirza. (Although Ghalib does not say so here, both were known to him personally.<sup>1</sup>) They too

'... had left the city ... leaving behind them houses full of furnishings and treasures beyond price. These two men of noble lineage had several houses and halls and palaces, all adjoining one another, and it is certain that if one measured the land on which they stood it would equal the area of a village, if not a town. These great palaces, left without a soul to attend them, were utterly looted and laid waste, though some of the less valuable, heavier things, such as the drapings of the large halls, and pavilions and canopies and ... carpets, had been left as they were. Suddenly one night—the night of the morning when Raja Nahar Singh had been arrested—these things caught fire. The flames rose high, and stone and timber, doors and walls, were all consumed by fire. These buildings lie to the west of my house, and are so near that from my roof at midnight I could see everything in the light of the leaping flames, and feel the heat on my face and the smoke in my eyes, and the ash falling on my body, for a westerly wind was blowing at the time. Songs sung in a neighbour's house are, as it were, gifts which it sends; how then should not fire in a neighbour's house send gifts of ashes? ...

'About the princes no more than this can be said, that some fell victims to the rifle bullet and were sent into the jaws of the dragon of death, and the souls of some froze in the noose of the hangman's rope, and some lie in prisons, and some are wanderers on the face of the earth. The old and infirm King, confined in the Fort, is under trial. The lords of Jhajjar and Ballabgarh and he who adorned the throne of Farrukhnagar, have been taken separately, on separate days, and hung on the gallows tree, that none might say that their blood has been shed.'<sup>2</sup>

On this blunt note Ghalib ends his account of 1857, and though there is more in *Dastambu*, it is convenient to break off at this point and see what further light on his experiences is shed by other sources.

We have seen that in *Dastambu* he discreetly ends his account of his connection with the Mughal court at the point when the entry of the sepoys into Delhi 'destroyed his insignificant and harmless ease'; whereas in his letters to Tufta and to the Nawwab of Rampur already quoted he says that he continued during the rebel occupation to perform his duties as the King's *ustad*, and in general to maintain outwardly friendly relations with the court. There are similar differences in the period from September 14th, when the British launched the assaults that re-captured the city. The British soldiers did not behave with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 206–8 below.

<sup>2</sup> Much later, on June 13, 1858, he records that Bahadur Jang Khan had now been released, granted an allowance of Rs. 1000 a month, and ordered to take up permanent residence in Lahore.

quite the restraint which, while not concealing their ruthlessness, he praises in *Dastambu*; and Ghalib knew it. During the fighting many excesses were committed; and, much worse, they continued long after Indian resistance had ceased. All able-bodied men were assumed to be rebels and all who could be found were sought out and killed indiscriminately. Ghalib's feelings are expressed in a poem evidently written at the time, and appended without comment to a short letter on quite another topic written in 1858.

Now every English soldier that bears arms  
Is sovereign, and free to work his will.

Men dare not venture out into the street  
And terror chills their hearts within them still.

Their homes enclose them as in prison walls  
And in the Chauk<sup>1</sup> the victors hang and kill.

The city is athirst for Muslim blood  
And every grain of dust must drink its fill. . . .

Another thing missing from *Dastambu* is Ghalib's characteristic humour, which he no doubt felt to be inappropriate to such a work. That it did not desert him even in the worst days is evident from two incidents that occurred when he was carried off by the British soldiers to be interrogated by Colonel Burn. The first is related by Hali, and the second by Ghalib himself. Hali writes:

'I have heard that when Ghalib came before Colonel Brown [Burn] he was wearing a tall Turkish-style head-dress. The Colonel looked at this strange fashion and asked in broken Urdu, "Well? You Muslim?" "Half," said Ghalib. "What does that mean?" asked the Colonel. "I drink wine, but I don't eat pork," said Ghalib. The Colonel laughed, and Ghalib then showed him the letter which he had received from the Minister for India [*sic*] in acknowledgement of the ode to Her Majesty the Queen which Ghalib had sent.<sup>2</sup> The Colonel said, "After the victory of the Government forces why did you not present yourself at the Ridge?"<sup>3</sup> Ghalib replied, "My rank required that I should have four palanquin-bearers, but all four of them ran away and left me, so I could not come." The Colonel then dismissed him and all his companions with every courtesy.'

Hali evidently did not know that Ghalib himself had written an account of

<sup>1</sup> Mihr notes that after the mutiny the British hanged offenders in Chandni Chauk, in front of the police headquarters.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. p. 130 above.

<sup>3</sup> High ground outside the city, where the English forces were encamped.

this incident, and that his own version of his reply to the Colonel's final question is a little more elaborate. He says he told him:

'The rebel soldiers were posted outside the gates to prevent people leaving. How could I come? If I had made up some story to deceive the rebel sentry I might have got out of the city, but as soon as I came within range of the English sentry on the Ridge he would have fired at me. And let us suppose that I did get past the rebel guard, and the English sentry did not shoot me—just look at me and consider my condition. I am old and crippled and deaf, and as unfit to confer with as I am to fight. I do pray for your success, and have done all along; but I could do that from here.'

Ghalib's remark that he was 'half a Muslim' was not entirely flippant. 'At this point in his book *Dastambu*,' says Hali, 'Ghalib writes, "A free man does not hide the truth; I am 'half a Muslim', free from the bonds of convention and every religion; and in the same way, I have freed myself from grief at the sting of men's tongues".'<sup>1</sup>

In *Dastambu*, Ghalib puts a bold face on it and says of his decision not to flee before the British assault that 'his heart did not quake, nor his step falter', nor did he 'fall a prey to groundless fancies'. It is not to deny his courage to say that his letters tell a rather less confident story. A letter to Tufta written towards the end of the year, on December 5, 1857, looks back on what has passed since the re-taking of the city, and its whole tone is very markedly—and very understandably—apprehensive. He explains how the lane in which he lived received the protection of troops from Patiala, and continues:

'But for that I should not have been in Delhi now. Do not think I am exaggerating: everyone, rich and poor alike, has left the city, and those who did not leave of their own accord have been expelled. Nobles, grant-holders, wealthy men, artisans—none are left. I am afraid to write you a detailed account. Those who were in the service of the Fort are being drastically dealt with, and are harassed with interrogations and arrests—but that is only those who entered the service of the Court during these months and took part in the revolt. I am a poor poet, attached to the Court for the past ten to twelve years for writing chronograms and correcting verses—call it Court service if you like, or call it wage-labour. In this upheaval I have had no part in any matter of policy. I simply carried on with my verse-correcting, and considering that I was innocent of any offence, I have not left the city. The authorities know that I am here, but they have found nothing against me either in the royal papers or in the statements of informers, and accordingly I have not been summoned to appear before them. Otherwise, when high-ranking nobles have been summoned or brought in under arrest, of what account am I? In

<sup>1</sup> The words which Hali quotes do not in fact appear at this point in *Dastambu*, but in another context. See p. 156 below.

short I stay in the house and cannot as much as step outside the door, much less get into the palanquin and go visiting. As for anyone coming to see me, who is there left in the city? House after house lies deserted, and the punishment of offenders goes on. Martial law was introduced from May 11th, and today, Saturday 5th December 1857, is still in force. No one knows how life goes on in the city. In fact, the authorities have not even turned their attention to such things. Let us see what will come of it all. No one can enter or leave the city without a permit. On no account should you think of coming here. We must still wait and see whether the Muslims are permitted to return to their homes in the city or not. Anyway, give my regards to Munshi Sahib<sup>1</sup> and show him this letter. Your letter has just come, and I have sat down and replied to it right away and given it to the postman.'

Well might Ghalib, even so late in the year, feel 'afraid to write', and well might he feel the need to assure Tufta that he was 'not exaggerating'. For the British reign of terror continued for weeks after the re-taking of the city, and the measures taken against the people of Delhi were so drastic as to seem almost incredible. As soon as the city was re-taken, the British expelled the whole population, and Ghalib, in the same letter to Tufta, vividly describes the uncanny sense of desolation that this produced:

'Do you understand what has happened, and what is going on? There was a former birth in which you and I were friends, and all the many things that happen between close friends happened between us. We composed our verses and compiled our diwans. In that age there was a gentleman who was our sincere friend—my friend and yours. Munshi Nabi Bakhsh was his name, and Haqir his takhallus. Suddenly that age came to an end, and all the friendly dealings and sincerity and love and joy ended with it. After a while we received another birth. But although to all appearances this birth is exactly like the first—I write a letter to Munshi Nabi Bakhsh Sahib and receive his reply, and today I get a letter from you, and your name is still Munshi Hargopal and your takhallus Tufta, and the city I live in is still called Delhi and this muhalla is still named Ballimaron muhalla—yet not one of the friends of that former birth is to be found. By God, you may search for a Muslim in this city and not find one—rich, poor, and artisans alike are gone. Such as are here are not Delhi people.'

The expulsion of the population had taken place in mid-September. By mid-October its sufferings were extreme. Mrs Saunders, wife of the Commissioner of Delhi, wrote in a letter on October 25th, 'The inhabitants of this huge place seven miles round are dying daily of starvation and want of shelter,' and accounts by contemporary English observers support Ghalib's statement that in December, when the cold at nights is severe in the Delhi region, the position was still unchanged.

<sup>1</sup> Munshi Nabi Bakhsh Haqir.

The anxious, defensive tone in which he describes the nature of his connection with the Fort is fully understandable. No reference to his name had been found in the Royal papers, but some reference might yet be found, and however harmless its nature, it could in the mood then prevailing have had the direst consequences for him. Similarly, informers were everywhere active, and men were paying off old scores against their enemies by denouncing them to the British as supporters of the rebel cause. Reports like these were being acted upon without any attempt at independent verification, and Ghalib knew from abundant evidence all around him that anyone who felt a strong enough grudge against him could put his life in immediate danger. For weeks together, therefore, fear and uncertainty continued to oppress him, so that even in his private letters he is afraid to speak of what is going on. On December 26, 1857 he writes to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'I got your letter. . . . You say that I've never written to you. Be fair! What am I to write? What can I write? What news is there that can be put into writing? What did your letter amount to? And what does this letter of mine amount to? Nothing more than this, that both of us are still alive. And more than this neither you nor I can write.'

We shall see in the next chapter that weeks later he is still writing in the same vein.

Not until long after this does he feel that he can safely express his feelings about the heavy toll which the revolt and its aftermath took of his friends. It is in an undated letter to Tufta, written perhaps as late as June or July 1858, that he reveals all that he felt. We give it here in full. Though it speaks of other things besides his grief, the quotation from his own verse with which, without any preamble, he begins his letter, sets the tone of the whole, and the intensity of his emotion rises to its highest pitch as he approaches the end.

'If Ghalib sings in bitter strain, forgive him;  
Today pain stabs more keenly at his heart.

My kind friend, first I have to ask you to convey my greetings to my old friend Mir Mukarram Husain Sahib. Tell him that I am still alive and that more than that even I do not know. Give my regards to Mirza Hatim Ali Mihr Sahib and recite this verse of mine on my behalf:

Keep strong your faith in the unseen—else you are no believer.  
You who are hidden from my sight, love for you is my faith.<sup>1</sup>

I had already sent off an answer to your first letter. Your second letter came two or three days later. Listen, my friend, when a man has the means to devote

<sup>1</sup> In the original the verse is all the more apt because the word translated 'love' is 'mihir', which is also the takhallus of the man to whom it is here addressed.

all his days free of care to the pursuit of the things he loves, *that* is what luxury means. The abundant time and energy you give to poetry is proof of your noble qualities and your sound disposition; and brother, the fame of your poetic achievement adds lustre to my name too. As for me, I have forgotten how to write poetry, and forgotten all the verses I ever wrote too—or rather, all except a couplet-and-a-half of my Urdu verse—that is, one final couplet of a ghazal, and one line. This is the couplet. Whenever my heart sinks within me it comes to my lips and I recite it—five times, ten times—over and over again:

Ghalib, when *this* is how my life has passed  
How can I call to mind I had a God?

And when I feel at the end of my tether I recite this line to myself:

O sudden death, why do you still delay?

and relapse into silence. Do not think that it is grief for my own misery or my own ruin that is choking me. I have a deeper sorrow, so deep that I cannot attempt to tell you, and can only hint at it. Among the English whom those infamous black scoundrels slaughtered, some were the focus of my hopes, some my well-wishers, some my friends, some my bosom companions, and some my pupils in poetry. Amongst the Indians some were my kinsmen, some my friends, some my pupils and some men whom I loved. And all of them are laid low in the dust. How grievous it is to mourn *one* loved one. What must his life be like who has to mourn so many? Alas! so many of my friends are dead that now if I should die there will be none to weep for me. "Verily we are for God, and verily to Him we shall return."<sup>1</sup>

These letters and the narrative in *Dastambu* afford adequate materials for an assessment of Ghalib's attitude to the revolt, even though the conditions in which he wrote them prevented him from expressing all that he felt. The picture is substantially what one would have expected. When the revolt broke out he was fifty-nine years old, and his attitudes had long been formed. A Mughal aristocrat, steeped in the traditional culture of Mughal India, he was at the same time a highly intelligent, clear-sighted and unsentimental man who had seen Calcutta, the British capital, and had lived for more than forty years in Delhi, where, outside the precincts of the Mughal court, the British were in full control. He knew the material strength and vitality of the civilization to which, in the last resort, the British owed their success in the struggle for supremacy in India, and he had been deeply impressed by it. Equally well he knew how effete were the political representatives of the old Mughal order, and how

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 121 above.

powerless to resist the new force which confronted them. We have seen how some years before the revolt, he had written that the Mughal court would not survive many days more, and there is reason to believe that in letters written early in 1857 to the Nawwab of Rampur, he had convinced him too of the hollowness of the Mughal power. This is the view of Arshi, the editor of the volume of Ghalib's correspondence with Rampur, who writes:

'Only a few months after the renewal of Ghalib's relationship [with the Nawwab] as his *ustad*, signs of the coming Mutiny . . . began to appear. Ghalib wrote a number of letters to his shagird and benefactor which, on the latter's instructions, were destroyed. The only reason for these instructions which suggests itself is that their subject-matter was political.'

He goes on to say that the policy which the Nawwab pursued during the revolt [of *de facto* support for the British without overt hostility to the rebels] could not have been worked out had he not been 'provided beforehand with a correct appraisal of the situation and of the real causes that had given rise to it'.

At the same time Ghalib resented the encroachments of the British. In a letter of February 23, 1857 written to a friend in Oudh he speaks of his feelings about the British annexation of 1856: 'Although I am a stranger to Oudh and its affairs, the destruction of the state depressed me all the more, and I maintain that no Indian who was not devoid of all sense of justice could have felt otherwise.'

It is not likely that a man of such divided sympathies could have given wholehearted allegiance to either side when the great clash came, and the position was further complicated by the fact that there was a strong plebeian element in the revolt to which Ghalib's aristocratic temperament reacted with contempt and hatred. In Delhi in particular the plebeian element constituted the real driving force of the revolt, and *Dastambu* shows clearly that Ghalib was fully aware of this.

Thus Ghalib's letter to Sarur quoted at the beginning of the chapter probably does represent accurately enough his real attitude in the early days of the revolt. An absence of deep sympathy with either side impels him to shut himself up within his own four walls, while at the same time a sense of the momentousness of the events taking place impels him to record them. His decision to do so in ancient Persian is, no doubt, mainly due to his wish to set himself a task difficult enough to engross all his attention and keep him fully occupied, though his ever-present enthusiasm for Persian also inclines him to the exaggerated purism he describes. As events move to their climax and culminate in the savage British actions of September and after, he is deeply shocked and expresses his feelings in the bitter poem already quoted and even, in a more restrained way, in *Dastambu* itself. But what moves him most deeply and makes the most lasting impression upon him is the personal tragedy of individual men personally known to him, caught up and destroyed in the play of forces far

beyond their control. He had friends in all camps—among the English, among the Hindus, among Muslims who aided the British and Muslims who supported the revolt—and he mourned all of them deeply and sincerely, and felt their death as an irreparable loss. This sense of loss forced into the background all his partial political sympathies, and overshadowed even his sense of personal danger.