

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

GHALIB: AN INDIVIDUALIST

Mumtaz Hasan

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

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

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

His desire for individual identification and distinction expressed itself in more ways than one. He wore an uncommon type of cap¹ because he did not want to look like other people. When in his old age, he decided to grow a beard, he shaved his head at the same time, contrary to the normal pattern of Delhi where, in those days, people grew hair on their heads and faces with equal solicitude.² His poetic nom-de-plume originally was *Asad*, but as soon as he heard of another poet of the same name, he changed it from *Asad* to *Ghalib*. It is true that the other *Asad* was a poor poet at best and it was one of his particularly un-inspired verses which occasioned Ghalib's decision,³ but this was probably incidental. Even if this contemporary had been a better artist, it is doubtful if Ghalib would have continued to share his poetic name with him. "You know how long I have lived in Delhi," says he in one of his letters to a favourite pupil, "All this while I have not allowed any one in this city to bear my name, my poetic name or my nick name."⁴

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

² Mehr, *Khutut*. p.235. Lahore. 1962.

³ Azad, *Ab-i-Hayat*. p.488. Lahore.

⁴ Mehr, *Khutut*. p.276.

Incidentally, his nick name was 'Mirza Naushah' or 'the bridegroom', which was given to him by his in-laws at the time of his marriage, and which became an affectionate appellation among his friends and admirers. Ghalib obviously fancied it as it reminded every one, including his own narcissist self, of his handsome and distinguished appearance.¹

Ghalib had a poetic style of his own. Even when he is willing to concede merit to the other poets of his day, he regards himself unmistakably in a separate category:

ہیں اور بھی دنیا میں سخنور بہت اچھے
کہتے ہیں کہ غالب کا ہے انداز بیان اور

*Poets of excellence, they say, are many
But, Ghalib, has a style of his own.*

His earliest poetry borders on the metaphysical and the abstruse, with involved similies and far-fetched metaphors, which may bear some affinity with the poetry of Donne and Browning in England and could claim kinship with that of Zahuri and Bedil in India, but was quite alien to the easy-going atmosphere of the literary Delhi of the early nineteenth century. At a later stage, he came under the influence of men like Hafiz, 'Urfi, Naziri and Hazin in Persian and Mir in Urdu,² and his style became easier and smoother, but neither his earlier nor later work could ever be confused with any one else's. In the beginning, he was close to the mind and spirit of Bedil, but could not be regarded as a mere imitator. At that stage, there was undoubtedly a certain similarity between the styles of the two poets, although it was more a similarity of expression than of thought and feeling. The somewhat intricate similies and metaphors, which Ghalib employed like Bedil, were no more than an attempt to render accurately what he wanted to say, and it was no surprise to see that, as in Bedil, the expression was as elusive as the thought. Nonetheless,

¹ Hali, *Elegy on Ghalib*, p.24j. He was like a bridegroom and the whole city was his bridal party.

² Ghalib, *Kulliyat-i-Nathr* p.68; *Diwan* (Urdu).

every word was intended to fill a gap in meaning, there was nothing that could be called superfluous:

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

*Every word that occurs in my verse
Is like an enchanted treasure-house of meaning.*

There is no doubt, in any case, that in spite of the resemblance in the styles of Ghalib and Bedil, Ghalib retained an individual character of his own. He was, and always remained, demonstrably distinct and separate from the rest of mankind.

When he wrote his *Dastanbu*, he signalled the work by choosing to express himself in the ancient Persian of the Zoroastrian scriptures.¹ In his letters, he made a complete departure from the highly formal and ornate epistolary style of the time. His letters to his numerous friends, relatives and pupils read more like a tape-recorded *tete-a-tete* than written matter.

He did not even wish to die with the crowd. Ailing badly in 1860, and in anticipation of death, he had even composed an epitaph for himself in the form of a chronogram. But he did not die that year and explained it by saying that as an epidemic had broken out in the city, he did not wish to go with the multitude.² When he passed away nine years later, the chronogram was altered suitably by his friends.

It is true that all men are different from one another, in some way or other. Every man is unique; there is something in him which no one else possesses. Most men are, however, prevented by ignorance, modesty or lack of enterprise or opportunity from identifying and promoting their own individuality. It is one of the fundamental purposes of education to encourage the dormant feeling of separateness in human beings to develop into a full blown

¹ Mehr Khutut. p.161.

² Mehr. Khutut. p.306.

sense of personality. It is also true that the feeling of individuality differs in extent and degree with different men. Ghalib was one of those in whom this feeling is strong from the very beginning. It grew stronger and more intense through the years, largely as a result of domestic unhappiness, financial worries, and lack of appreciation by contemporaries. Life brought him a great deal of suffering. While suffering gives the sensitive spirit an understanding of the common lot of humanity, and to that extent brings him nearer to his fellow men, the intensity of the experience isolates at the same time from other men and makes him feel like a being apart. It is an experience which no one can really share with other people. As Ela Wheeler Wilcox said:

*Laugh and the whole world laughs with you
Weep and you weep alone.*

Ghalib's early life partook of tragedy. He lost his father at five. Barely four years later, he lost the uncle who had taken care of him.¹ Thereafter he was brought up by his maternal grandfather² who was probably a member of the minor aristocracy and seems to have been in affluent circumstances. Ghalib's creature comforts were thus cared for, but an orphan is after all an orphan and there are daily occurrences which cannot fail to remind a sensitive child of his position. It is more than likely that, like all orphaned children, Ghalib came to suffer from a feeling of discriminatory isolation and was inclined to be introspective and aloof. One can almost see him growing up as a lonely and pensive boy. Nor was an early marriage calculated to add to his happiness. He was given a wife when he was no more than thirteen³ and although he always showed a certain amount of consideration for her, it would be difficult to describe them as a loving couple. It was obviously a case of incompatibility of temperament and probably also of the blood group, as none of the seven children born to them lived longer than fifteen months. Another tragedy

¹ Malik Ram, *Dhikr*, pp.24, 30

² Mehr, *Khutut*, p.22.

³ Malik Ram, *Dhikr*, p.45.

that Ghalib had to live with was the insanity of his brother Mirza Yusuf, who had gone out of his mind in his youth and died a violent death thirty years later, while still insane, at the hands of British troops during the disturbances of 1857.⁴

Ghalib's only known, though not fully known, love affair occurred in his youth.⁵ It ended in the death or suicide of his anonymous sweetheart. His lament for her is one of the most poignant pieces of elegiac poetry in the Urdu language:

شرح رسوائی سے جا چھپنا نقاب خاک میں
ختم ہے الفت کی تجھ پر پردہ داری ہائے ہائے
عمر بھر کا تو نے پیمان وفا باندھا تو کیا
عمر کو بھی تو نہیں ہے پائیداری ہائے ہائے
کس طرح کانے کوئی شبہائے تار بر شگال
ہے نظر خو کردہ اختر شماری ہائے ہائے

*Thou hast hidden beneath the veil of dust, that there
be no evil talk about our love,
No one could do more to keep love's secret, Ay me,
Ay me!*

*Thou didst pledge thy troth for life, but what of that?
Life doth not endure either, Ay me, Ay me!
How can he pass these dark rainy nights of separation
Whose eyes are used to counting the stars in expectation
of his beloved, Ay me, Ay me!*

Financial difficulties dogged Ghalib all his life. Occasionally they developed into a crisis. These crises were largely of his own making. With his aristocratic background—he prided himself on being a Saljuqi Turk and a descendant of the royal line of Afrasiyab⁶—and comfortable upbringing, he had acquired extravagant habits and a generosity towards others which far outran his resources. He was fond of wine and it had to be good wine too! He had an army of servants. He was so open-hearted and open-

⁴ Hasan Nizami, *Ghadr-i-Dehli ki Subh-u-Sham*, p.88.

⁵ Muslim Ziaee, *Iqbal Review*, Karachi, January, 1969.

⁶ Ghalib, *Kulliyat*, p.11. Lucknow, 1893.

handed that he could not bear to see any one in distress. He spent liberally when the occasion demanded and even when it did not. "I want at least this," says he in a letter to a friend,¹ "that in the city where I live there shall be none who is hungry or naked." The result was a foregone conclusion. Before he had entered his forties, he had, as he tells the poet Nasikh of Lucknow in a letter,² accumulated a debt of the order of rupees forty to fifty thousand. His monthly income for the greater part of his life consisted only of a pension of Rs. 62.50.³ In 1850 another Rs. 50.00 per mensem were added by the Moghul Court⁴ by way of salary for compiling a history of the Timurid Dynasty in Persian.⁵ This is what we know by the name of *Mehr-i-Nimroz*. After the death of Zauq, the poet laureate, Mirza Fakhru, the Moghul Heir-apparent and the Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar himself became his pupils and Ghalib received a salary of Rs. 400 per annum for it.⁶ Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh gave him Rs. 500.00 per annum for about two years,⁷ and from 1859, Yusuf Ali Khan Nazim, the Nawab of Rampur, who also became his pupil, sent him Rs. 100 per mensem.⁸ But all this money, plus gifts and donations from friends and pupils like Hargopal Tafta and others⁹, could hardly bridge the gulf between income and expenditure. The deficit in the household budget continued and Ghalib died in debt, although the debt was not as large as one might be tempted to suppose.¹⁰

For a long time, his dependents consisted of his wife and the numerous servants of the household. When his adopted son Arif, who was a nephew of his wife, passed away, he took his two children Husain Ali Khan and Baqir Ali Khan into the house and looked after them.¹¹ When in

¹ Mehr, *Khutut*, p. 105.

² M.H. Rizvi, *Mutafarriqat-i-Ghalib*, p.100. Rampur, 1947.

³ Malik Ram, *Dhikr*, p.33.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.182.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁸ Mehr, *Khutut*, p.296.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.124.

¹⁰ Arshi, *Makatib-i-Ghalib*, p.107.

¹¹ Malik Ram, *Dhikr*, p.171.

1857 and thereafter, he was passing through particularly difficult times he did not part with a single servant—and the servants meant not only themselves but also their wives and children!¹

Ghalib had a claim to a family pension as an heir of his uncle Nasrullah Beg who had rendered meritorious services to the East India Company. The total pension came to Rs. 10,000 per annum and Ghalib was one of the major claimants. The quantum of the pension had, however, been shown at a reduced amount through the manipulations of a third party and Ghalib went to Calcutta in 1828 to represent his side of the matter to the British authorities. The mission was a failure; it only added to Ghalib's debt.²

To crown it all, in 1847, he was jailed for gambling, or more precisely, allowing gambling to be carried on in his house.³ "All pains the immortal spirit must endure", said Mathews Arnold of Shakespeare. Ghalib certainly had more than his share of bitterness and anguish.

Ghalib's inability to live within his means is typical of the Muslim nobility of his day. In the feudal-military set-up of the Moghul Empire, when the Muslims represented the apex of the socio-political pyramid, there was no need for them to save or care for money. They could command service in kind. With the rise of the British power in the Sub-continent, the Muslims lost their properties along with their political position, and found it difficult to adapt themselves to the changed circumstances. It is easy in this context to understand the financial maladjustment in Ghalib's case, the highlight of which is perhaps provided by the famous incident of the Delhi College, which was being re-organised at the time and where Mr. Thompson, a senior British Officer, wanted a competent Professor of Persian. Ghalib went to see Mr. Thompson in his office, and waited for him to come out and receive him. When Thompson found that Ghalib was not coming in, he came out himself

¹ Mehr, *Khutut*, p.411.

² M.H. Rizvi, *Mutafarriqat*, p.100

³ Malik Ram, *Dhikr*, p.107.

and asked him why he was waiting outside. "I was waiting for you to come and receive me," said Ghalib. Thompson reminded Ghalib that he had come as an applicant for a job and not as a friend on a personal visit. "Had you come to meet me as a friend", said he, "I should certainly have come out to receive you."

"If I was seeking service with you," replied Ghalib, "I thought I was going to add to my honour and prestige. If the contrary is going to be the case, I do not want it".¹ And he went away, leaving behind a surprised, and probably somewhat amused, Mr. Thompson. That, of course, was the end of the application and all that went with it.

Here we have a man who needed money, but wanted it on his own terms, a man who was caught up so irretrievably in his upbringing and his ideas of social dignity that, however pressing the need, he could not yield to the expediency of the situation. Was not Novalis right when he said that character was fate?

Incidentally, it would be wrong to suggest that in his meeting with Mr. Thompson, Ghalib, as a member of the old ruling class, was in any way actuated by any feeling of hostility towards the British rulers. On the contrary, he admired them. He counted many of them among his personal friends and some of them among his pupils.² He mourned his friend Major John Jacob in a moving letter,³ and his grief was great over the death of his pupil, the famous Alexander Heatherly 'Azad' of Begum Soomro's Court.⁴ He sorrowed over the death of his British friends in the holocaust of 1857 in the same way as he did for the Indians.⁵

His visit to Calcutta, in spite of the frustration it otherwise had for him, had given him an insight into the British system of administration, and the new achievements of science and technology which the British had brought with them

¹ Azad, *Aab-i-Hayat*, p.495.
² Mehr, *Khutut*, pp.218, 416.
³ *Ibid.*, p.218.
⁴ Mehr, *Khutut*, p.306.
⁵ *Ibid.*, p.264. Lahore.

to India. This made such an impression on him that when Syed Ahmad Khan, the great educationist and founder of Aligarh, asked him to write an appreciation of his new edition of the *A'in-i-Akbari*, Abdul Fadl's famous Imperial Gazetteer of the Moghuls, Ghalib was less than enthusiastic. He thought the British system represented an improvement over the Moghul one, and went to the length of disparaging the Syed's work by saying that exalting the dead was not a task that is worth any one's while.¹

مرده پروردن مبارک کار نیست

There is nothing commendable in promoting the dead.

Ghalib's catholic sympathies enveloped all men in a bond of affection. In a letter to Hargopal Tafta,² one of his Hindu pupils, he said "Believe it or not, I love all human beings, be they Muslims, Hindus or Christians, and regard them as my brothers." He could transcend all distinctions of race, religion and geography, and rise to the level of pure humanity. The difference between East and West did not exist for him, and Rudyard Kipling could not have convinced him that "the twain shall never meet." He could, indeed, have said, like his older contemporary, Goethe:

*Wer sich selbst und andra kennt
 Wird hier auch erkennen
 Orient und Occident
 Sind nicht mehr zu trennen.
 [Whoever knows himself and others
 Will also know
 That East and West
 Are no more apart].*

To the unhappiness of personal life and the constant need for money was added the cold shouldering that Ghalib received from his contemporaries. Even though towards the end of his life, he was an honoured citizen with the title of 'Najm-ud-Daulah Dabir-ul-Mulk Nizam Jang Bahadur',

¹ Ghalib, *Kulliyat*, p.116
² Mehr, *Khutut*, p. 187.

from the Moghul Court, which commanded respect among the British community; and had a large circle of friends and admirers among all sections of the population, there is no doubt that recognition came to him so grudgingly and so late that it hardly mattered. Years earlier, he had resigned himself to the idea of posthumous fame. Of that he was sure:

کوکبم را در عدم اوج قبولی بوده است
شہرت شعرم بگیتی بعد من خواهد شدن

*My star was in the ascendant in the realm of non-
existence
The fame of my verse will spread throughout the
world when I am no more.*

As with Swift, so with Ghalib, 'fortune had turned rotten at the same time that it became ripe'!

Ghalib was always less understood than misunderstood. And whatever the causes and circumstances of conflict between Ghalib and his critics, there is no doubt that it was in reality a clash of the old with the new, of convention with invention, of mediocrity with genius. Ghalib had something to say and he wanted to say it with truth. He yearned to express the inexpressible and did so in words of unsurpassable beauty. The great artist has to pay the price of being himself. One of his problems always is that since his thoughts and feelings have an individual quality of their own, he has to find new words and phrases to express them if he wants to be true to himself and his art. This unavoidably leads him to new modes of expression, which often disturb the existing patterns and upset those who shelter snugly behind them. This artistic necessity, coupled with the inner tensions and disharmonies of his nature, which were peeping from behind the curtain all the time, made Ghalib's poetry almost incomprehensible to most of the poets and literary connoisseurs of the day, who were used to beautiful words and expressions which hardly conveyed

anything by way of human experience. Browning was in a similar case when he spoke of:

*Thoughts hardly to be pack't
Into a narrow act
Fancies that broke through language and escaped.*

In fairness it must also be said that Ghalib did nothing to mollify his opponents. He did not mince matters when he expressed his opinion about such reputed poets as Qa-teel of Faridabad or Waqif of Lahore, nor did he easily acknowledge the superiority of any one. One of his pupils happened to visit the tomb of Amir Khusro and ate of the sweet fruit of *Khirnie* tree by the graveside in order, as he said, to acquire eloquence. He told Ghalib how already he was feeling more eloquent than before. "You need 'nt have gone to all that trouble," said Ghalib, "If you had turned to the *Peepal* tree at the back of my house, the heavens themselves would have opened for you."¹ This may be a light-hearted observation, but there were certainly not many in Ghalib's Delhi who could have dared to be light-hearted about Khusro in this fashion.

It is also true that Ghalib never admitted defeat, although he was fair-minded enough to acknowledge an individual error when it was pointed out to him. He refused to yield to criticism or opposition and went through life with a head that was "bloody but un-bowed." What annoyed his critics was that he was more often right than wrong, a situation unbearable to the generality of human beings.

The criticism of Ghalib's poetry on the part of his contemporaries assumed the tone of derision now and then. Agha Jan Aish said, for instance:

مزا کہنے کا جب ہے اک کہے اور دوسرا سمجھے
مگر اپنا کہا یہ خود ہی سمجھیں یا خدا سمجھے

*'Tis worth while writing poetry when one man writes
it and the other understands,
But what he (Ghalib) writes can be understood only
by him or by God.*

¹ Azad, Aab-i-Hayat, p.516.

Abdur Rahman, a stooge of Agha Jan Aish who bore the unusual poetic name of *Hudhud* (hoopoe) composed some pompous nonsense, which he declared had been written in the style of Ghalib.¹

The fact is that Ghalib's contemporaries were not on the same wave-length with him. It is one of the ironies of literary history that what they found incomprehensible has now come to be acclaimed as some of the greatest poetry of the world.

Ghalib listened to these taunts with good humour. Now and then, he appealed to his critics not to be led away by prejudice and refuse to see the merit in him:

توای کہ محو سخن گستران پیشینی
مباش منکر غالب کہ در زمانہ تست

*O thou that art taken up with the poets of by-gone days,
Deny not the merit of Ghalib who lives and writes in
thine own time.*

When the campaign against him grew, he decided to turn his back on it:

ند ستائش کی تمنا نہ صلے کی پروا
ند سہی گر مرے اشعار میں معنی نہ سہی

*I want neither recognition nor reward,
If my verses have no meaning, let it be.*

The most virulent attack on Ghalib came when he published his criticism of the well-known Persian lexicon the *Burhan-e-Qati*. There were those who regarded it as a sacrilege for any one, least of all Ghalib, who was no favourite any way, to point the least little finger of doubt or criticism against a well established work which had become almost a classic. There was an outburst of anger against Ghalib, which among other things took the form of

¹ Ibid., p.474.

These verses were believed to have been composed by Agha Jan 'Aish' himself and put in the mouth of Hudhud.

filthy personal abuse. Ghalib thought fit to bring a defamation case against one of his detractors. During the course of the hearing, the defence made so many mis-statements and put up such a stink that Ghalib decided to withdraw the proceedings.¹

Ghalib's reaction to some of the abuse heaped upon him was typical. In one of the angry letters he received about the *Qati Burhan*, as Ghalib's book was called, the author had made a scurrilous reference to Ghalib's mother. "These idiots," said Ghalib, "do not even know how to abuse people correctly. You see, when you want to insult a boy you remember his mother, when a young man, his wife, and when an old man, his daughter. Abusing an old man's mother is simply stupid!"

A side-light on Ghalib's character is provided by the way he tried to help the son of his well-known critic and detractor, Agha Jan Aish. After 1857, when the Aish family had fallen on evil days, Ghalib recommended the young man, whom he described as his nephew, most warmly to Jawahar Singh, a Hindu pupil of his who was a Tehsildar. It is not given to every man to treat his enemies with such forgiving nobility.

An important element in Ghalib's personality is the predominance of the intellect in his make-up. It seems as though his sensitive spirit, which had experienced the whole range of pain and sorrow, had provided itself with a defensive mechanism. "Those that are sensitive," said Goethe, "must gird themselves in triple steel". Intellect and Reason became the protective steel around the delicate and vulnerable heart of Ghalib. After his tragic encounter with first love, he never allowed himself to lose self-possession. Although his friendships were deep and lasting, he had fortified himself against the love of woman and spoke of love as though it were a light-hearted pastime. Even though his youth was hardly free from indiscretions of the 'wild oats' variety, the flippant references to love in Ghalib's

¹ Malik Ram, *Dhikr*, p.228.

poetry are undoubtedly a psychological defence against his inner sensitivity. He is certainly doing no more than masquerading as a gallant when he says:

عاشق ہوں بہ معشوق فریبی ہے مرا کام
مجنون کو برا کہتی ہے لیلیٰ مرے آگے

*I am a lover all right, but my business is to beguile
the sweethearts of others
Even Laila speaks ill of Majnun in my presence.*

He even speaks of love as a mental disorder:

بلبل کے کارویار بہ ہیں خندہ ہائے گل
کہتے ہیں جس کو عشق خلل ہے دماغ کا

*The Rose laughs at the Bulbul's foolish infatuation,
That which they call love is nothing but a derangement
of the mind.*

Recalling his own tragic experience of love to a friend who had lost his sweetheart, he counsels him not to involve his heart in women. He tries to cheer him up by saying: "If Chunna Jan is gone, let there be a Munna Jan," said he in his characteristic banter. One is reminded of Richard Lovelace:

*Out upon it, I have loved
Three whole days together,
And am like to love three more
If it prove fair weather.*

But Lovelace, the representative of Restoration England, said what he meant and practised what he said, while Ghalib was only trying to show off.

The importance of the Intellect is emphasised more than once in Ghalib's poetry. He assigns a higher place to Reason and Intellect than Rumi or Goethe or Iqbal would be willing to allow. In a poem entitled "Mughanni Nameh" he has extolled Reason and Intellect above poetic inspiration:¹

سخن گرچہ گنجینہ گوہر است
خرد را مگر تابش دیکر است

Ghalib, Kulliyat, P. 156.

خرد کردہ درخود ظہوری دگر
دل از دیدہ پذیرفته نوری دگر
ہگنجی کہ دانش بہ ویرانہ ریخت
در آفاق طرح پریشانہ ریخت

*Though poetry is a treasure full of gems
Reason has a lustre all its own.
Reason manifests itself ever anew,
And the heart acquires new light from the eye.
The treasure with which reason has endowed the
wilderness,
Would make the world a fairy-land.*

The emphasis on the Intellect is significant, as Intellect is more individualistic than feeling and emotion. Feeling draws us towards others. It makes us fall in love and enter into other human relationships. Intellect, on the other hand, is cold and aloof, and transcends affiliations and alignments.

Individualism is first cousin to cosmopolitanism. It is only the man who is able to rise above his social and political environment, who is qualified to become a citizen of the world. In Ghalib we have such a man. He was certainly related to the society of his time, but only in a personal and limited way. He lamented the passing of the old order because he himself belonged to it:

داغ فراق صحبت شب کی جلی ہوئی
اک شمع رہ گئی ہے سو وہ بھی خاموش ہے

*There is only solitary burnt out candle
Left to mourn the revelry of yesternight.*

The terrible events of 1857 moved his heart to grief for Delhi and the Muslims¹:

شہر دہلی کا ذرہ ذرہ خاک
تشنہ خون ہے ہر مسلمان کا

*Every particle of Delhi's dust
Is thirsty for the blood of every Muslim.*

¹ Muslim Ziaee: Ghalib ka Mansookh Diwan. P. 276, Karachi 1969.

Delhi, of course, was Ghalib's city and he could not see it being destroyed, without a pang. As regards the Muslims, he was never their leader or champion, but he could not help being affected as he was one of them. He saw them being mercilessly slaughtered all round, and his own life and honour was as much in peril as theirs. His sympathies were, however, not confined to himself or his community. He felt for all those who suffered and deplored vandalism wherever it took its toll. Any victim of barbarity, be he European or Indian, Hindu or Muslim, white or black, claimed the same sympathy from him.

In Ghalib, there is a perceptible indifference towards the problems and needs of society. He is neither a social philosopher, nor a social reformer. He worships at the shrine of Truth and Beauty, but is not deeply concerned with the good life or the moral pattern of society. His approach is always based on a personal rather than a social view of the human problem. Nor is he alone in this respect. In his own time, there was hardly any one, with the exception of Syed Ahmad Khan, who had any appreciation of the predicament of the society around him and the direction in which the social environment needed to be changed. Speaking of other great poets of the world, and judging by the prevailing tone of their poetry, Goethe, Hafiz and Rumi, like Ghalib, are pre-occupied with the idea of the exaltation of the human individual and the development of human personality. They are inclined to overlook the importance of corporate human effort, and the need for building up a proper state of society as a basis for the training and development of the individual. This is admittedly a delicate and difficult matter, as a balance has to be struck between the claims of the individual and of the society, and one would like to see that balance tilted, be it ever so slightly, in favour of the former, rather than the latter. Howsoever that may be, these questions do not seem to have arisen in Ghalib's mind. Among the great poets, Iqbal and Sadi, to take only two examples, represent those who are socially conscious and concerned.

Ghalib and Iqbal are both poets of humanity, but Iqbal

is for a good deal of the time, an Easterner and a critic of the West, while Ghalib is more consistently a man rather than an Asian. It is only fair to add, however, that Ghalib was never exposed to the impact of Western civilization and culture, except socially and superficially to a certain extent; he never had the opportunity of studying the origins and sources of strength and weakness of the western culture.

It is true that at times Ghalib does look forward to a golden age in the future:

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

*My song spring from the warmth of my intoxicated
imagination,
I am the nightingale of a garden not yet created.*

He does not, however, show any anxiety on his own part to bring the golden age nearer. He certainly has no plan or programme for it.

With his dedication to the cause of individual freedom, Ghalib fits properly into the century to which he belonged. The nineteenth century, in spite of its territorial imperialisms and exploitation of man by man, was a century of liberalism just as the twentieth century, notwithstanding the disappearance of thrones and crowns, is a century of retrogression, a century where the human individual is no more than an instrument of Society and a chattel of the State. That is probably one of the reasons why Ghalib has attracted more attention in our time than before and why men all over the world are beginning to turn towards him and his like. It is possible that the twenty-first century will emancipate the individual from the tyranny of the State and Society, and allow him to take his proper place in the social environment. If so, it will be the century of Ghalib.

Ghalib's spiritual development is in the nature of vertical rather than horizontal progression. He grew upwards

and not side-ways. As he passed from experience to experience, his life and thought became progressively individualised, and he soon reached the point where he had already transcended the limitations of the social context. His outlook became so broad and his sympathies so catholic that nothing much remained in him of the Indian or the Asiatic. He is a man.

The stages through which his spirit passed on its way to its final goal can be guessed at with a fair amount of probability, although it would be a piece of gratuitous folly to pretend to any exact knowledge in this respect. His poetry gives us glimpses of him in the course of his spiritual quest. We find, for example, that from his Olympian heights, Ghalib could look down upon the world and watch its denizens like a god-like spectator out for fun:

باز بچہ اطفال ہے دنیا مرے آگے
ہوتا ہے شب و روز تماشا مرے آگے

*The world to me is a children's playground,
The show goes on before me night and day.*

He had reached the stage where he could regard himself and his experiences as though they were the affairs of a third person:

رہے اس شوخ سے آزدہ ہم چندے تکف سے
تکف برطرف تھا ایک انداز جنوں وہ بھی

*I stayed away from that saucy sweetheart with a show
of vexation,
But pretence aside, that too was no more than a mode
of love's madness.*

ہوئی مدت کہ غالب مر گیا ہر یاد آتا ہے
وہ ہر اک بات پر کہنا کہ یوں ہوتا تو کیا ہوتا

*It is a long since Ghalib passed away, but we still rem-
ember
The way he used to say of everything, "what if it had
happened this way and not that?"*

At the same time, his prodigious ascent to the realm

of spirit brought him nearer and nearer to the Reality that he was seeking. It would appear that he started with a feeling of primeval wonder at the various manifestations of Creation:

سبزہ و گل کہاں سے آئے ہیں
ابر کیا چیز ہے ہوا کیا ہے
یہ ہری چہرہ لوگ کیسے ہیں
عشوہ و غمزہ و ادا کیا ہے

*Where from have they come-these flowers and all
this greenry?
What really is the cloud? What is the breeze?
Who are these beautiful, fairy-like beings?
And what is the meaning of this coquetry, these amo-
rous glances, these blandishments?*

This led to deeper questioning:

اصل شہود و شاہد و مشہود ایک ہے
حیران ہوں پھر مشاہدہ ہے کس حساب میں
ہے مشتمل نمود صور پر وجود بحر
ہاں کیا دھرا ہے قطرہ موج و حباب میں

*When the seer, the seen and the sight itself are one
and the same,
I wonder where the seeing comes in!
The ocean is but a successive manifestation of forms,
Else, what is the meaning of these drops of water, the
waves and the bubbles upon them?*

He also found himself peeping into the heart of life and saw the elements that composed it:

لطافت بے کثافت جلوہ پیدا کر نہیں سکتی
چمن ز نگار ہے آئینہ باد بہاری کا

*Purity cannot manifest itself without impurity,
The garden is but the verdigris of the mirror of the
spring breeze.*

That reminds us of Euripides:

*"The good and evil cannot dwell apart;
The world's a mixture—"*

But this is no more than an *obiter dictum*. Ghalib's goal lay far beyond the phenomena of the material world, and in directing his footsteps to that goal, he chose any but the beaten path. For him there would be no conventions, no caste, creed or colour:

ہم سوحد ہیں ہمارا کیش ہے ترک رسوم
ملتیں جب مٹ گئیں اجزائے ایماں ہو گئیں

*I believe in the One, I believe in discarding all cere-
mony and ritual,
When individual creeds disappear, they become part
of one [Universal] Faith.*

Reality lay beyond the territory of Intellect, beyond the sun, moon and stars and the whole phantasmagoria of sense experience. Even the *Kaba* was no more than a symbol, a sign-post on the way:

ہے برے سرحد ادراک سے اپنا مسجود
قبلہ کو اہل نظر قبلہ نما کہتے ہیں

*The One I worship is beyond the bounds of compre-
hension,
The Kaba we know is no more than a symbol of the
real Kaba.*

The *Kaba* and the temples represented no more than the fatigue of the human soul. It is only the tired spirit who would stop at them and go no further:

دیر و حرم آئینہ تکرار نما
واماندگی شوق تراشے ہے بنائیں

*The mosque and the temple are reflections of the
repeated end of desire,
They are shelters which the tired spirit fashions
for itself.*

Ghalib is now in full search of that Reality. Shorn of all earthly loyalties and relationships, he stands alone before the mystery of existence. He yearns to get a glimpse of what lay behind the appearance of it:

کس کا سراغ جلوہ ہے حیرت کو اے خدا
آئینہ فرش شش جہت انتظار ہے

*What is the wondering eye waiting for, O Lord?
The world of expectation is lined with mirrors on
every side.*

He could take all the existing and possible universes in one sweep of comprehension, but what else was there:

ہے کہاں نما کا دوسرا قدم یا رب
ہم نے دشت امکان کو ایک نقش پا پایا

*Where is the second step of yearning, O Lord?
The whole realm of possibility is but one foot-print.*

To have an answer to this question, he wished he had an observation-post beyond the Throne of the Almighty:

منظر اک بلندی پر اور ہم بنا سکتے
عرش سے برے ہوتا کاشکے مکان اپنا

*I could have seen everything from a still greater height,
Oh how I wish I could have my abode beyond the
Throne of God.*

These were moments of ecstasy. They lie embedded in words and phrases that defy mortality. Ghalib's quest was nearing its end. He was soon to come face to face with the One he sought. He had reached the empyrean of bliss and saw the Truth. And lo and behold! the Truth was nothing but Beauty:

وا کردنے ہیں شوق نے بند تقاب حسن
غیر از نگاہ اب کوئی حائل نہیں رہا

*Love has untied the strings of the veil of Beauty,
There is nothing now between except the seeing eye.*

This is the great vision of Ghalib, the greatest ever vouchsafed to a poet's eye.

*"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know;"*

said John Keats. That, in a word, is Ghalib's message, but while Keats seems to have had only a distant glimpse of Reality, Ghalib, after his pilgrimage of ecstasy, came as near to it as was ever permitted to mortal man.