GHALIB AND THE BRITISH

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Ghālib's relationship with and attitude towards the British epitomized that of the Muslim gentlemen of upper India – those members of a 'fallen race' as George Campbell in his *Modern India* (1852) described the Muslims.[1] For such gentlemen, the British were as Jats who had taken over from the Marathas, men of coarser breed who were successful because of their mastery, as 'rude mechanicals' of superior techniques of war and political organization, but who needed guidance in deportment and polish so that they could be made fit for the company of the alumni of those schools of manners, the Muslim courts of Delhi and of Lucknow. The British needed instruction from those who, as Sleeman observed,[2] believed themselves to be the natural aristocracy of Hindustan, instruction in the arts of suave innuendo and subtle nuance by which power – or the absence of power – had been disguised in the later Mughal period, a period which the Muslim gentlemen hoped might be indefinitely prolonged under the British.

The descendants of the Mughal service aristocracy wished to construe the relationship of the East India Company to the Mughal ruler in Delhi, after Lord Lake's liberation of the city from the Marathas in 1803, as an acknowledgment, not only of the superiority of Muslim culture, but also of an intention to preserve an eighteenth-century Mughal facade to the edifice of British power. Although, as Dr Spear has shown in his *Twilight of the Mughuls*, the British told themselves that they had reduced Shāh 'Ālam and his successors to crowned pensionaries or stipendaries and thought that they had made this clear to the Mughals themselves, their policy of 'honour within and disregard without'

[1] George Campbell, *Modern India: a sketch of the system of civil government*, London, 1852, p. 58.

[2] W. H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, vol. II, London, 1844, p. 284.

the Mughal palace and precincts could be interpreted by minds determined to be governed by sentiment and nostalgia, as an acknowledgment by the British to themselves that they were intruders in India who should leave the tone-setters and idiom-makers of India's polite civilization alone to complete their self-appointed task. Indeed, in reading the travels of Bishop Heber, Victor Jacquemment and Colonel William Sleeman, as well as the writings of the Delhi *'ālim*, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, one is impressed by how little in feeling and in style of life, the educated classes of upper India were touched by the British presence before 1857. Muslims might be forgiven for hoping that if they shifted their gaze to cultural horizons for a while, when they shifted it back to their immediate surroundings, the British might be found to have merged completely into a familiar Indian environment. Much emphasis has been placed, and rightly so, upon the dissolving effects of British revenue and judicial policies upon the rural society of the upper provinces in the generation before 1857. What is often forgotten is that the British continued Mughal traditions of granting *jāgīrs* and *in'ām* lands for political and military services and that, certainly for thirty years after the Maratha war of 1802–3, the holders of such grants were left relatively undisturbed. For a generation after 1803, a gentlemanly existence in something like the old stlye was certainly possible in upper India, in the British presence, though perhaps for a level of Muslim society rather below the highest, that is, one composed of Muslims ready to serve the British as auxiliary cavalry and as subordinate revenue and judicial officers. An entry in Bishop Heber's *Narrative* for September 15, 1824, contains a British collector's impression of 'a new order rising from the middling classes' to replace that of 'very many ancient families...gone to decay'.[1]

It was from these 'middling classes' that Ghālib himself was drawn. His father, Mirza 'Abdullah Beg, had seen service under Nawwāb Āṣaf ud-daula in Lucknow, under the Nizam of Hyderabad and under Raja Bakhtāwar Singh of Alwar. The last had conferred upon Mirza 'Abdullah the revenue from two villages so that from it he could bring up his two sons, Mirza Asadullah (Ghālib) and Mirza Yūsuf. When Ghālib's father died in 1802,

[1] Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, vol. I, 1828, pp. 416–17.

Ghālib's uncle, Naṣrullah Beg Khan took over the care of his young nephews (Ghālib was then barely five years old). Naṣrullah Beg Khan served the East India Company in the Anglo-Maratha war of 1802–3 as commander of a contingent of 400 auxiliary cavalry and was granted a life *jāgīr* by the British commander-in-chief, Lord Lake, for his services. In 1806, Naṣrullah Beg Khan died and the British resumed his life *jāgīr* with its annual income of a *lakh* of rupees, but they made arrangements for the support of his dependants through Naṣrullah Khan's brother-in-law, Nawwāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khan. The latter had also served with Lord Lake during the Maratha war and had been awarded a permanent *jāgīr* in the district of Firozpur Jhirka. Furthermore, as a *wakil* or agent of the Maharaja of Alwar, Nawwāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khan had also been given the *pargana* of Loharu in *jāgīr*. The East India Company required that Ahmad Bakhsh Khan should pay over to them Rs 25,000 per annum from the *jāgīr* of Firozpur Jhirka.

On the death of Naṣrullah Beg Khan, the East India Company arranged that Ahmad Bakhsh Khan should be excused the payment of Rs 25,000 per annum on condition that he keep on foot a contingent of fifty horse at a cost of Rs 15,000 per annum, leaving Rs 10,000 per annum for the maintenance of Naṣrullah Beg Khan's dependants. This arrangement was spelled out in a letter dated May 4, 1806 from Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm, Lord Lake's secretary. A month or so later, however, Ahmad Bakhsh Khan is said to have received a letter, dated June 7, 1806 from Lord Lake specifying in detail how money is to be allotted to the respective dependants. Rs 5,000 annually was to be distributed as follows: Rs 2,000 to one Khwaja Haji, the commander of the contingent of fifty; Rs 1,500 to a daughter of Naṣrullah Beg Khan and to his three sisters; Rs 1,500 to Ghālib and his brother Mirza Yūsuf. That was Rs 62,8 annas per month for Ghālib.

Thus matters rested until the 1820s when Ghālib was forced to take part in one of those tableaux of polygamous domestic life which better-class Muslim families would quite often put on to reinforce the British conviction of their, the British, moral right to rule India. Ghālib's own life as a young man and his actions in this tableau suggest that he accepted without difficulty that the British owed him a living as a young relative of Muslim collaborators with the British, collaborators who had acted as sincere

partners and allies, albeit junior, in a common enterprise, men who were neither sycophants nor time-servers. As a member of a declining aristocracy, what he came to resent was British inability to give gracefully, for that inability inhibited his ability to receive gracefully, as a gentleman should.

In October 1822, Nawwāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khan decided, with the consent of the East India Company and of the Maharaja of Alwar, to retire from the management of his *jāgīrs* and to hand over his Firozpur *jāgīr* to Shams ud-din Ahmad Khan, his eldest son by his Mewati wife, Bahu Khanum. He wished however to secure the income from his Loharu *jāgīr* to two younger sons by another wife, Biwi Begum Jan, namely Amin ud-din Ahmad Khan and Ziya ud-din. Ahmad Bakhsh Khan so feared the consequences of the enmity between the two branches of his family, that he wished to have these arrangements in operation before he died and indeed, in 1825, Shams ud-din assigned the revenues from Loharu in accordance with his father's wishes. But after Ahmad Bakhsh Khan's death in October 1827, the anticipated family quarrel did break out with appeals to the East India Company to adjudicate.

The retirement of Ahmad Bakhsh Khan had most unfortunate implications for Ghālib. In future he would be beholden for his pension to Shams ud-din whom he had offended by too close an association with Amin ud-din and Ziya ud-din. Ghālib's gay habits of life had put him into pawn with creditors and when they came to know of his future financial dependence upon the unfriendly Shams ud-din, they began to dun him. But it was not the 'accession' of Shams ud-din to his father's *jāgīrs* that set off Ghālib's lengthy suit to the East India Company but the death in 1824 of one of the co-beneficiaries of Lord Lake's letter of June 7, 1806, namely Khwaja Haji, commander of the contingent of fifty cavalry to be provided by Nawwāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khan. After Khwaja Haji's death, the Rs 2,000 allotted him continued to be paid to his two sons Khwaja Jan and Khwaja Iman, although the contingent of fifty cavalry was disbanded. Ghālib was greatly put out; although there probably was a distant connection by marriage between Ghālib's family and Khwaja Haji's,[1] Ghālib strenuously denied that Khwaja Haji was a relative of Naṣrullah Beg Khan and as such entitled to monies intended for Naṣrullah Khan's

[1] Mālik Ram, *Zikr-i Ghalib*, Delhi, 1964, p. 57.

relatives[1] – and *a fortiori*, Khwaja Haji's sons were even less entitled. Ghālib claimed that Nawwāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khan had given him a certificate that the payment of Rs 2,000 to Khwaja Haji was for the latter's lifetime only and would be transferred to Ghālib thereafter.

Ghālib's account[2] of these transactions provides an interesting *aperçu* of the conflict of values between aristocratic and commercial society which the British presence in upper India was beginning to highlight by 1830. Ahmad Bakhsh told Ghālib that having once said in the presence of Lord Lake that Khwaja Haji was a kinsman of his, it would have been a dishonourable act to have gone back on the statement. Ghālib said in his later petition to the British government that he did not wish to upset Ahmad Bakhsh Khan as the senior member of the family, namely his uncle, Ghālib's sister's husband and Ghālib's father-in-law's brother.

Following the death of Khwaja Haji, Ghālib was astounded to find the pension of Rs 2,000 being paid to Khwaja Haji's two sons. He went to Firozpur to protest to Ahmad Bakhsh Khan, but the latter was very ill and begged Ghālib to possess himself in patience. He promised to give Ghālib a *sanad* guaranteeing payment of the pension of Rs 2,000 to Ghālib after his, Ahmad Bakhsh Khan's, own death, and to introduce him to Sir Charles Metcalfe, Resident at Delhi, when Metcalfe visited Firozpur. But Ahmad Bakhsh Khan did neither and Ghālib, abandoning hope of his uncle, thought of going to see Metcalfe in Delhi himself, but for fear of outcry from his creditors, and because his brother Mirza Yūsuf was mentally ill, desisted. Instead Ghālib decided to go to Lucknow to meet Metcalfe on his return from greeting the new Governor General, Bentinck. But at Cawnpore Ghālib fell ill and as there was no suitable physician available in Cawnpore, Ghālib had to travel in a hired *palkī* to Lucknow where he was confined to bed for five months. However, assisted by funds probably raised on the strength of Ghālib's connection with the Nawwāb of Banda, Ghālib turned his face towards Calcutta which he reached in February 1828.

Ghālib reached the capital of British India in high hopes, as one

[1] Proceeding no. 94 for August 28, 1837 in *India Political Consultations* for period August 24 to September 4, 1837, Range 194, vol. 47.

[2] Given in a lengthy petition received in the Political Department on April 28, 1828 and found in *Board's Collections* for 1832–3, vol. 1344, no. 53429.

of his couplets shows: 'Triumphant we reached Calcutta and washed away the scar of distance from loved ones with wine.'[1]

Once in Calcutta, Ghālib appears to have tried to win friends and influence people belonging to an old India-hand network favourable to ruling India by the nod, the wink and the knowing smile in the direction of her old aristocracy. He cultivated Lang the chief secretary, and Simon Fraser the assistant secretary, composing a *qaṣīda* in praise of the former; he gained access to the governor general's *durbar*. Although Nawwāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khan died in October 1827, and the latent dispute between Nawwāb Shams ud-din and his half-brothers now came out into the open, the government seemed to be leaning away from Shams ud-din by deciding, in 1828, to give the possession of Loharu to Amin ud-din and Ziya ud-din.

Dr Shaikh Muhammad Ikram has stated[2] that Ghālib's letters give the impression that Sir Edward Colebrooke, Resident at Delhi, sent a report on Ghālib's petition to Calcutta and that Calcutta (that is the Political Department) sent an encouraging reply, but that Colebrooke was dismissed before that reply reached Delhi. (Actually, Colebrooke was suspended on charges of corruption in July 1829 and was dismissed in December 1829.) In the *Bengal Political Consultations*[3] there is a letter from Colebrooke to Calcutta, dated February 24, 1829, which quotes from the letter of May 4, 1806 from Lord Lake to Ahmad Bakhsh Khan. The quotation is to the effect that Ahmad Bakhsh Khan will be responsible for the support and maintenance of Khwaja Haji and the dependants of Naṣrullah Beg Khan, and for holding in readiness for service fifty horsemen. The letter itself expresses no opinion on the merits of Ghālib's petition. The Political Department in Calcutta replied by asking for a copy of the letter or *sanad* of June 7, 1806, signed by Lord Lake. On October 8, 1830, Francis Hawkins, Colebrooke's successor as Resident at Delhi, sent what he described as the original of Lord Lake's *sanad* of June 7, 1806, which he said he had obtained from Nawwāb Shams ud-din. This original was said to be complete with Lord Lake's signature and seal.[4] This *sanad* allocated Rs 2,000 to Khwaja Haji and

[1] Shaikh Muḥammad Ikrām, *Ghalib-Nama*, Bombay, n.d., 1945 ?, p. 76.

[2] Ibid., p. 80.

[3] Extracted in *Board's Collections* for 1832–3, no. 53429 in vol. 1344.

[4] Op. cit.

Rs 3,000 to the relatives of Naṣrullah Beg Khan, including Ghālib.

Ghālib alleged this *sanad* to be a forgery, claiming that there was no copy and no translation in the records of the government, as was the custom. (The proceedings of the Political Department appear to bear out this latter claim.) On October 22, 1830, the Governor-General in Council ordered the original of the *sanad* to be sent to Sir John Malcolm, secretary to Lord Lake in 1806 and now Governor of Bombay.[1] On November 30, 1830, Sir John Malcolm minuted a record of his belief that the *sanad* sent to him bears Lord Lake's genuine signature and that it was unlikely that Ahmad Bakhsh Khan would have forged the document and that if he had, that there would have been complaints earlier.[2] In January 1831 Lord William Bentinck and his Council denied Ghālib's petition, a decision confirmed by the Court of Directors on July 24, 1833.[3]

In the official papers, Ghālib's suit turned upon the terms of the letter of May 4, 1806 and upon the authenticity of the *sanad* of June 7, 1806. It is impossible to know whether a different decision would have been reached by different British officials, but the period of decision on his suit was one in which a 'new India-hand network' was developing in Calcutta, composed of officials less indulgent than their predecessors to the necessities of Delhi gentlemen and less disposed to the old open-handed and indeed open-hearted relationship with the Muslim 'better classes' of upper India. Bentinck had been, as Dr Spear and other historians of British–Indian history tell us, sent out by the Court of Directors with a mandate for economy; he also carried within himself ideas of efficiency, regularity, system and westernizing innovation. Trevelyan, the young David who had felled the 'old India-hand' Colebrooke with charges of corruption in 1829, became Secretary to the Political Department from 1831 to 1836. Hawkins, Colebrooke's successor at Delhi was in the habit, Dr Spear tells us, of reading Persian documents for himself and, as it would appear from the proceedings in Ghālib's affair, of standing upon their letter. All three servants of the East India Company were an earnest of more cavalier attitudes towards Indian sensibilities and

[1] Proceeding no. 41 for October 22, 1830, *Bengal Political Consultations*, October 13 to November 5, 1830, Range 126, vol. 20.

[2] *Board's Collections*, no. 53429.

[3] Extract from *Political Letters to Bengal* in *Board's Collections* for 1842–3, no. 69684 in vol. 2009.

towards those whose social pretensions were not matched by their economic and moral productivity in British eyes. Writing on July 20, 1833, Trevelyan held that interference with *jāgīrs* in the Delhi Territory (he is specifically referring to Colebrooke's action in transferring Loharu to Amin ud-din and Ziya ud-din) by the East India Company would only be justified if the aim of such interference was to strengthen them. 'Instead of being able to yield us efficient aid, weak states can only be a burthen to us and from the want of continued action and the greatly increased liability to collision arising from intermixed and multiplied boundaries they greatly interfere with the progress of order and the improvement of the country.'[1] Perhaps the fate of Ghālib's petition was the first rustle of a dead leaf in a wind of change.

Ghālib had, however, left Calcutta before the decision of the Governor General in Council and had arrived back in Delhi in November 1829. Before leaving Calcutta, he wrote some bitter couplets in Persian, in the form of a dialogue:

> I enquired about what it was like in Calcutta: he said, it must be called 'the eighth clime' [that is somewhere out of this world];
> I said, what occupation is most profitable there? He said, to be afraid of every living being;
> I said, what shall I do here? He said, anything other than writing poetry;
> I said, I came here to obtain justice. He said, be off with you and do not strike your head against a stone.[2]

Following the execution of Nawwāb Shams ud-din on October 3, 1835 for conspiracy to murder the Agent in Delhi, William Fraser, Ghālib took up his suit again. The omens, he probably thought, were favourable. The Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces had directed, after Shams ud-din's execution, that the Rs 3,000 should continue to be paid to Ghālib, his brother, his sister and aunts. Ghālib asked for the papers to be sent to the Court of Directors in London. On February 7, 1838, the Court of Directors decided not to disturb the decision already taken in India – i.e. not to award Ghālib the Rs 2,000 allocated to Khwaja

[1] Proceeding no. 92 of September 5, 1833, *Bengal Political Consultations* for August 22 to September 5, 1833, Range 126, vol. 73.

[2] Text quoted in Ikrām, op. cit., p. 80.

Haji and continued to his heirs. They recorded their view that 'this claim had been negatived on good grounds previously to the sequestration of the Jageer' (that is the *jāgīr* of Nawwāb Shams ud-din resumed after his execution).[1] Even then Ghālib did not give up; in July 1842 he appealed to Queen Victoria but in 1845 the Court of Directors sent a despatch to India to the effect that 'Her Majesty has not been pleased to make any communication to us on the subject of the memorial in question.'[2] Ghālib had already, in a petition of August 9, 1837 given up the claim that the *sanad* of June 7, 1806 was a forgery;[3] now he ceased to prosecute his suit entirely.

The *Proceedings* in the *India Political Consultations* record decisions relating to Ghālib rather than the reasons for them, but I would suggest that the unyielding treatment of Ghālib's suit is of a piece with that 'flattening out of local usage', that 'conformance of all with the regulations' which Dr Spear has suggested became typical of British treatment of the Mughals at Delhi from the governor generalship of Ellenborough (1842–4) onwards. The *Political Consultations for the North-Western Provinces* for the decade before the Mutiny and Rising of 1857 show that, although *jāgīrs* and pensions were not brusquely resumed on the slightest pretext, the death of a *jāgīrdar* or *mu'afidar* was made the opportunity for a strict construction of the original grant, for the conversion of a *jāgīr* into a pension or for the restriction of a pension to the nearest relatives of the original grantee. A letter from William Muir (later Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces and author of *The Life of Muḥammad* and *The Early Caliphate*), then Secretary to the Government of the North-Western Provinces, to F. P. Buller, British Agent at Farrukhabad, dated February 13, 1854,[4] expresses the current attitudes. Apropos of a plea for the continuance of a pension by Nawwāb Aliyya Begum of Farrukhabad, Muir wrote: 'It is not desirable to keep together the members of a particular family trained up to look to the receipt

[1] Extract from *Political Letter to India* of February 7, 1838, *Board's Collections* for 1842–3, no. 69684 in vol. 2009.

[2] *India and Bengal Despatches*, vol. 45 for June 4 to August 27, 1845. (Despatch no. 80, p. 121.)

[3] Proceeding no. 94 for August 28, 1837, *India Political Consultations* for August 24 to September 4, 1837, Range 194, vol. 47.

[4] Proceeding no. 43 for February 1854, *North-Western Provinces' Political Proceedings*, Range 230, vol. 69.

of a gross fixed amount of gratuitous support from the government.' The gentlemanly classes of the upper provinces were ceasing to be regarded as valuable collaborators, as those who in fact constituted the Indian political and social world which the British must accept, as those who set the tone of good society, and were coming to be shrugged off as feckless Don Quixotes or (to paraphrase Bishop Heber a generation earlier)[1] as indigent ancient Highlanders, people whose vain pride was only matched by the insolence of their demands for eleemosynary support, through the public purse, by the Samuel Smiles of this world.

Ghālib, for all his petitions to the East India Company and for all his obsessive preoccupation in his correspondence with the suspension of his pension between 1857 and 1860, maintained an inner posture of independence of the British. He was neither supercilious nor sycophantic. He was exactly what, in his letter of January 13, 1858 to the Nawwāb of Rāmpūr, he says he was[2] – a *namak-khwur-i sarkār-i angrīz* – an eater of the salt of the English government. Moreover, this salt that he ate neither choked him nor made palatable anything and everything English. Ghālib was only six when Lord Lake established British supremacy at Delhi; he knew no other political order. He not only knew on which side his bread was buttered, he also accepted that there was no other butter to be had in any future that he could really foresee. It is, of course, possible to see the sycophant in Ghālib if his poem in praise of British arms on the occasion of their victory over the Sikhs in 1846 is taken literally; Shaikh Muḥammad Ikrām, in his *Ghālib-Nama* says that when Ghālib got wind of the East India Company's intention to reduce the Timurid family to princelings living in a 'grace and favour' residence near the Qutb Minar, he promptly wrote a *qaṣīda* in praise of Queen Victoria and suggested to Lord Canning that he be awarded a title, a robe of honour and a pension. A faint hint that James Thomason, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, might be prepared to confer a *jāgīr* upon him was sufficient to produce a panegyric.

Yet Ghālib was not really selling his soul for a mess of pottage. He was acting according to the standards of his own culture, that of Amir Khusrau and Faizi and Abu'l Fazl, in bowing towards the risen sun. He was really convinced that British rule was 'the best

[1] Heber, *Narrative*, vol. II, p. 139.

[2] *Makatib-i Ghalib*, ed. Imtiyaz 'Ali 'Arshi, Bombay, 1937, text of letters, p. 11.

rule we have' – to adapt Lord Butler's famous phrase – as the episode of the proposed review of (Sir) Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's edition of the *A' in-i Akbari* suggests. According to Ḥālī in his *Yadgar-i Ghālib*,[1] a review by Ghālib of Abu'l Fazl's work was to have been published as an appendage to the new edition. Ghālib not only considered that tastes in history had changed too much to make such an edition worthwhile, and that Abu'l Fazl's style of writing was not to be disinterred, but also that the institutes of Akbar's day were silly and futile (*bich o puch* in Ḥālī's words) in comparison with those of Ghālib's and Sir Sayyid's own day under British rule. The following is typical of the savage sarcasm of his review: in a play upon Abu'l Fazl's father's name (Shaikh Mubarak), Ghālib wrote: '*Khud mubārak bande-i āzād kard*'[2] (literally, 'he freed Mubarak, a slave'). The metaphorical meaning is however 'he has done a vain and foolish thing'.[3] Needless to add, when Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's edition of the *A' in-i Akbari* appeared in 1855 it was not accompanied by Ghālib's review.

The popular suspicion in Delhi after Fraser's murder in 1835 that Ghālib was guilty of delation against Nawwāb Shams ud-din finds no support in the official report in the *Foreign Consultations* on the investigation into the murder and on the trial.[4] Ghālib made no secret of his friendship for Fraser and wrote '*wa marā gham-i marg-i pidar tāze kard*' ('and made fresh for me grief for the death of my father').[5]

I would like to cite two other pieces of evidence in support of the contention that Ghālib preserved the honour and dignity of an independent gentleman in his dealings with the British, at least before 1857, one probably not widely known, the other well known. The first is his petition, dated November 14, 1836, for the payment of Khwaja Haji's two thousand rupees to himself and to his relatives, in *India Political Consultations*.[6] He nicely impales the

[1] Altaf Husain Hali, *Yadgar-i Ghalib*, Lahore (1963) edn, pp. 123–5.

[2] Ibid., p. 124.

[3] F. Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, 3rd impression, London, 1947, p. 1149: 'a proverbial saying, originating in a man having a slave named Mubarak whom he tortured until the poor wretch died, when his master pompously said: "I have set him free."'

[4] Proceeding no. 32 for September 31, 1835. *Indian Political Consultations*, Range 193, vol. 83.

[5] Ikrām, op. cit., p. 85.

[6] Proceeding no. 160 for December 5, 1836. *India Political Consultations*, Range 194, vol. 24.

Governor-General upon a Morton's fork: 'If your Lordship has obtained replies from the Lieutenant-Governor at Agra to the seven points and has admitted them, your petitioner begs permission humbly to state that he should have been favoured with a copy of these and made acquainted with the ground on which your Lordship was pleased to admit them. But if your Lordship did not demand replies from the Lieutenant-Governor of Agra to the seven queries, your petitioner begs leave with every deference to state that your Lordship ought to have satisfied your petitioner in respect to these.' The second is the well-known episode in 1842 when Ghālib was, so to speak, 'on the short list' for a professorship of Persian at the re-organized Delhi College and waited upon James Thomason, then Secretary to the Government of India, in hope of appointment. He refused to enter Thomason's tented pavilion because Thomason did not come out to greet him. When Thomason did appear, after being informed by a servant of Ghālib's reason for his remaining outside, Thomason told Ghālib that although it was customary for officials to go to greet someone attending a *durbar* because such a person was attending in his quality as a *ra'is*, on this occasion Ghālib was coming to apply to enter government service. Ghālib thereupon replied that the intention of entering government service was to enhance family honour, not to sacrifice it. When Thomason further pleaded custom and usage, Ghālib asked leave to depart and desisted from asking for the post in prospect.[1]

Ghālib's behaviour and attitude during the Mutiny and Rebellion of 1857 was of a piece with his earlier life style: outward non-resistance to the ebb and flow of events, combined with a disillusioned inner disdain for the brutal passions let loose on both sides, coupled with a sense that savagery was what one must expect when the lower orders escape from the control of their betters, and that gentlemen on both sides can find common ground in despising the excesses of their own compatriots. This is at any rate my reading of Ghālib's Persian *Dastanbu*, admittedly written for British eyes, and such of Ghālib's letters as I have read relating to this period. On the other hand, there is a certain tasteless and obsessive quality about Ghālib's preoccupation with his pension in this period (he was almost destitute), but one wonders if this was partly a cynical reaction to the discovery that the British were

[1] Ikrām, op. cit., pp. 96–7.

worse than Ghālib had previously thought them. As they were incapable of appreciating that a 'native' could have finer feelings so he, Ghālib, might as well not display any.

Ghālib was in Delhi for the entire period between the arrival of the mutineers from Meerut on May 11, 1857 and the successful British assault upon the city from the Ridge on September 14th. If we accept his own account – and I have failed to find any papers in the India Office Library dealing with Ghālib between 1857 and 1866 – throughout this time Ghālib behaved as most men of sixty off the centre of the political stage would react, that is tried to merge unobtrusively into his background. In a Persian letter to the Nawwāb of Rāmpūr dated January 13, 1858, Ghālib writes that 'at this time I withdrew myself to one side, but in the anxiety that if I suddenly abandoned all social connection with them [the mutineers and rebels], my house would be plundered and my life would be exposed to danger, in my heart I remained a stranger to them, but outwardly I remained a familiar acquaintance [*bi-bātin bīgāne o bi-ẓāhir āshnā māndam*].'[1] In *Dastanbu*, Ghālib describes his distress during the struggle for the city; his pension was last paid in April 1857; his wife, demented brother, sister and their aged retainers were dependent upon him; his brother's house was 2,000 paces distant from Ghālib's own; such was the disorder in the neighbourhood, Ghālib says he could not have reached his brother's house if he had been a magician.[2]

It was worse for him and his family after the British had retaken the city; on September 30th, Ghālib heard that his brother's house had been plundered. On October 19th, Ghālib received news that after five days of fever, his brother had died in the night. Earlier, on October 5th, a number of white soldiers entered Ghālib's house and though, he says, they kept their hands off his household goods, they arrested him and took him and others before a Colonel Brown (Burn). With typical Ghālib touch, in *Dastanbu* Ghālib writes that Colonel Burn asked him his name and the others their occupation[3] (he could see at once that Ghālib was a gentleman!), and soon dismissed him. Dr Ikram, quoting a selection of Ghālib's poetry and prose prepared for Sir John

[1] *Makatib-i Ghalib*, ed. 'Arshi, text, p. 13.
[2] *Dastanbu*, text printed in *Urdu-i Mu'alla* (Delhi), vol. II, *Ghalib Number Part II*, February 1961, nos 2 and 3, p. 149.
[3] *Dastanbu*, p. 153.

McLeod, retails several of Ghālib's quips during his arrest and interrogation – for example, that he was a demi-Mussulman because he drank wine but did not eat pork – and that when questioned by Colonel Burn (to whom Ghālib had shown his letter from a Mr Russell Clerk intimating the award of a title and robe of honour after his *qaṣīda* in praise of Queen Victoria) as to why, as a loyalist, he had not left Delhi and joined the British forces on the Ridge with other loyalists, Ghālib replied that even if he could have deceived the rebel sentry and left Delhi, even if he had escaped being killed by the English fire once outside the walls of Delhi, what use would he have been. 'I am an old man, slow of foot and hard of hearing, fit neither for war nor for counsel. Yes, certainly I pray; so here [in Delhi] I continued to pray.'[1] But in *Dastanbu* Ghālib sounds nothing like so nonchalant; he is conscious that he has had a narrow escape: '*Āh, gar bāshad hamīn emrūz-i man, fardā-yi man*?' ('If *this* is my today, what will be my tomorrow?')[2]

Furthermore, although Colonel Burn may have laughed at Ghālib's witticisms, his British paymasters' suspicions were not to be as easily mollified by a display of 'Ghālibiana'. In March 1858, Ghālib was dismayed to have a new *qaṣīda* in praise of Queen Victoria and the high British authorities returned by the Commissioner in Delhi, Saunders, with the comment that there was nothing in it except encomium and to find his pension withheld. In January 1860, when Lord Canning's camp moved from Meerut to Delhi, Ghālib was refused admission to the Governor-General's *durbar* and a *qaṣīda* in praise of Lord Canning was returned with the comment that he should send no more of such things. However, in May 1860, Ghālib's pension was restored to him and in March 1863, Sir Donald McLeod, Financial Commissioner of the Punjab, presented Ghālib with a robe of honour and informed him that the Governor-General, Lord Elgin, had ordered his right to attend *durbar* and wear a robe of honour to be restored to him.[3] Apparently, however, some British reservations remained, for Malik Ram[4] refers to a *Foreign General Proceeding* for February 1866 in which the Governor-General in Council decided that it was not fitting for Ghālib to be a *durbar* poet (*durbari sha'ir*) but he had no objection if the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab gave him a

[1] Ikrām, op. cit., p. 133.
[2] *Dastanbu*, p. 155.
[3] *Makatib-i Ghalib*, ed. 'Arshi, pp. 35–6.
[4] *Zikr-i Ghalib*, p. 154.

robe of honour or bestowed upon him in *durbar* the highest place. Ghālib in fact attended his last *durbar* in December 1866. (I should perhaps here add that I am unable to add anything to the speculations of Ghālib's biographers and others about any part which the Nawwāb of Rāmpūr or Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān may have played in the restoration of Ghālib's pension or rights. In the course of exhaustive searches in the India Office Library, nothing came to light on these matters. The very detailed catalogue of the papers of 'Clemency Canning', now in Leeds Public Library, also failed to mention Ghālib.)

Dastanbu was written in part, perhaps in too large a part, as a personal *cri*, to justify Ghālib to the British, but nevertheless in it Ghālib revealed his sense that the Mutiny and Rising was a vast human tragedy in which humanity is the loser. He failed to see the mutiny in terms of a liberation from a false religion, and a turning towards a better religion.[1] He asked what new way of life could the people of India look forward to? They had lost the protection of the givers of justice and fallen victim to beasts of prey. They were blind when they did not see that it was vain to hope for their welfare except under the English dispensation. He described the mutineers from Meerut as men without shame, the murderers of their masters and he laments the killing of women and children by the mutineers in unmeasured terms.[2] Delhi became a city without a ruler, a slave without a master, a garden without a gardener.[3] After expressing the fear of the mutineers in which the respectable inhabitants of Delhi lived after May 11th, Ghālib lamented that in defence of religion and custom, justice was abandoned, treasure granted by God squandered, the orders of the army leaders enforced upon Bahadur Shah, brave men made afraid of their own shadows and friends prevented from hearing of each other. It was not right that there should be railing at lamentations, slander at mourning, winking at anguish and laughter at weeping. That there was indifference to these cries for help and great misery in this baseness is accounted a weakness in religion and an unsoundness in custom.[4]

When Ghālib described British behaviour after the storming of Delhi, his language was outwardly more circumspect, but the import of the nuance and innuendo in *Dastanbu* is unmistakable.

[1] *Datsanbu*, p. 130. [2] Op. cit., p. 133.
[3] Op. cit., p. 134. [4] Op. cit., p. 136.

His understanding was, he said, that orders were issued before the assault to spare the innocent – but there was the outcry to spare no one and to carry off all household property. He praised the English for sparing the old, the women and children, unlike the mutineers, but their hearts were full of hatred for the inhabitants of Delhi, so that after their victory, they expelled all the inhabitants. Ironically, he says they, the British, did not grant an audience to anyone except to those whom they summoned for interrogation.[1] In a little while, all were helpless in the grip of fear and hope. Would that, Ghālib cried,[2] those inside and outside the city had known whether each other were dead or alive! After sorrowfully recording the arrest and death of many of his friends, both Hindu and Muslim, he poignantly – but as ever with Ghālib, wittily – described the straits and shifts to which he was reduced after fifteen months without his pension: 'While others ate bread, I ate my clothes [i.e. he sold his clothes for food]. I feared that when I had eaten everything fit to wear I would die naked and hungry. Of those servants who have been with me from time past, several remain with me in this dismal situation and verily one must continue to look after them.'[3] Even in his destitution, Ghālib's sense of *noblesse oblige* did not desert him.

Ghālib's feelings about the events of 1857 and about all who were responsible for them, the mutineers who terrorized the peaceable folk of Delhi and the British who wreaked their vengeance upon them after the recapture of the city, are summed up for us in the title Ghālib himself gave to a Persian *qiṭ'a*[4] to an unnamed friend, written some time in 1857 – *Rastakhīz bī jā*, that is 'the ill-timed Day of Resurrection', that is, a prelude to a Day of Judgment presided over by men who must themselves face judgment.

[1] Op. cit. p. 152. [2] Op. cit., p. 153.
[3] Op. cit., p. 171. (I have doubts.)
[4] Quoted by Ghulam Rasul Mihr, *Ghalib ke Makatib* in *Kawā'if o Saha'if 1857*, Karachi, 1957. Cf. also *Dastanbu*, p. 132.