

GHALIB'S DELHI

PERCIVAL SPEAR

The title 'Ghālib's Delhi' might seem to call for a straight description of Delhi and district between 1800 and 1870. But with whose eyes are we to view the Delhi scene? The same objects may convey different impressions to the minds of different individuals, according to the quality of their consciousness. The Delhi scene, for example, presented very different pictures to the landholder and retired adventurer like James Skinner, to the administrator like Fortescue, to the traveller like Jacquemmet or Bishop Heber, to the orientalist like Garcin de Tassy, and to the worried soldier like Archdale Wilson. Within the Mughal court of Akbar II, what to some was a scene of dignified resignation and graceful simplicity, appeared to others as tawdry finery against a background of squalor. The sturdy independence of the villagers in the eyes of some observers was anarchic turbulence in the view of the administrative martinet. Before, therefore, we describe Ghālib's Delhi, we have to consider the sort of things which Ghālib would have noticed out of the sum total of Delhi phenomena. Our observation glass of the Delhi stage must also be a separating glass to remove from our vision what Ghālib would not have seen. Ghālib's Delhi is the Delhi that Ghālib saw; the Delhi that impinged on his consciousness.

Mirza Muḥammad Asad-ullah Beg Khān, Ghālib, was born at Agra in 1797.¹ His parentage on both sides was aristocratic by birth, Turkish in race and military in tradition. Ghālib's paternal grandfather was the first member of the family to come to India; he spoke Turkish, and took service under Shāh Alam's chief minister, Mirza Najaf Khan. Thus Turkish family pride and Persian skill and polish came within Ghālib's experience. His maternal grandfather, Khwaja Ghulam Husain Khan, was a well-known soldier,

¹ For the family details which follow I am indebted mainly to A. C. S. Gilani, *Ghalib*, Karachi, n.d.

receiving lands near Agra for his services and adding the sobriquet Kamin Dan (کمین دان—commander) to his name. His uncle Naṣrullah, to whose care Ghālib fell on his father's death in 1802, was also a soldier and at the time the governor or *subadar* of Agra. The next thing one notices is that these men, in the long tradition of Indian military adventurers, were ready to serve anyone without nice distinction of race or religion. Both Ghālib's grandfathers served the Mughal or his officers. His father, after serving in Shia Lucknow and Sunni Hyderabad, ended up as an officer of the Rajput Rao Rājā Bakhtawar Singh of Alwar. His uncle, whose household he entered in 1802, was then holding Agra for the Maratha chief Daulat Rao Sindia, not far from Sindia's French general Perron's headquarters of Aligarh. On the capture of Agra by the British in 1803, Naṣrullah Khān was given a command of 400 men and lands worth one and a half *lakhs* of rupees by the British general, Lord Lake. The family thus, at this early stage of Ghālib's life, had added Persian, Rajput, Maratha and British contacts to their Turkish lineage and military traditions. Like so many immigrants before them, these transmontane arrivals had within two generations become accredited members of the cosmopolitan north Indian aristocracy. It is wrong to suppose, as the late Sir Jadunath Sarkar did, that the stream of northern immigrants dried up in the eighteenth century, depriving the empire of its military sap. They continued to come; what was needed was a firm hand to hold the imperial umbrella over them, or, one might say, an administrative irrigation engineer to direct these energies and potential loyalties into fruitful channels. Not immigrant soldiers were lacking, but immigrant emperors.

With these circumstances it is clear that Ghālib was brought up in an atmosphere of Persian culture and north Indian high politics. Ghālib's stay with his uncle Naṣrullah brought a further involvement with local politics which was to run through the rest of his life. Naṣrullah had married the sister of Ahmad Baksh Khan, another adventurer of Turkish origin, the son of an emigré from Bokhara. Ahmad Baksh was a diplomatic agent of the Alwar chief, who represented his interests with the British during the Maratha war of 1803-6. In the words of Sleeman, he was in attendance on Lord Lake during the whole war. 'He was a great favourite; and his Lordship's personal regard for him was thought by those chiefs to have been so favourable to their cause, that they con-

ferred upon him the Pergunnah of Loharu in hereditary rent-free tenure.¹ Ahmad Baksh came to the rescue of Naṣrullah when the British took Agra, securing for him much the same esteem from Lord Lake as he enjoyed himself. In the Cornwallis-Barlow settlement in 1805-6, Ahmad Baksh was given the estate or principality of Firozpur Jhirka in the Punjab. He thus held Firozpur from the British and Loharu from the Alwar rājā. All seemed well until Naṣrullah fell off his elephant and died in 1806. Lord Lake rose to the occasion; he transferred Naṣrullah's *jāgīr* to Ahmad Baksh in return for an annual pension of 10,000 rupees to Naṣrullah's dependants. But Ahmad Baksh thought that this was too much and managed to whittle it down to Rs 3,000. Here was an abiding source of friction between the two families, to be complicated by the vicissitudes of Ahmad Baksh's descendants. It would be best to follow this complication to its tragic end.²

Nawwāb Ahmad Baksh had three sons. In 1822 he declared his eldest son, Shamshuddin, his heir in both his principalities, but in 1825 he prevailed on Shamshuddin to assign by deed Loharu as provision for his two younger brothers, who were thus cousins of Ghālib. Soon after Shamshuddin succeeded in 1825, disputes arose stemming from Shamshuddin's desire to recover Loharu. Ghālib was involved because the dispute over the family pension with Shamshuddin made him espouse the cause of the two younger brothers in their efforts to get their own allowance from the eldest. Appeals went to and fro until William Fraser, now Agent to the government of India, severely rebuffed Shamshuddin. There followed Fraser's murder on March 22, 1835, the tracing of the crime to the Nawwāb and his execution by hanging outside the Kashmir gate on October 3rd. Along with the bringing of the canal water to Delhi in 1820 and the Colebrooke case in 1829, it was one of the three great sensations of the pre-Mutiny British occupation of Delhi. Firozpur Jhirka was resumed by the British government, but Loharu remained with the brothers and the family continues there to the present. It was the quest for an increase in his pension from this source that led Ghālib on his journey to Lucknow, Benaras and Calcutta in 1827-9 and proved so fruitful to his muse. A further effect of Ghālib's share in these controversies was

¹ W. H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, London, 1844, vol. II, p. 211.

² The Shamshuddin case is described by W. H. Sleeman (op. cit., pp. 209-31) who had it from the magistrate Gubbins, and in my *Twilight of the Mughals*, ch. IX.

suspicion of his part in the Nawwāb's exposure because of his known animosity and his contacts with British officials.¹

Ghālib moved to Delhi at the impressionable age of fifteen or sixteen and remained there for the rest of his life, with breaks for his visit to Calcutta in 1827-9 and for two brief visits to Rāmpūr. He lived in a number of houses in the neighbourhood of Bazar Ballimaran and Gali Qasim Jan, just off the Chandni Chowk and not far from the Fatehpuri Masjid. There are houses here whose gateway inscriptions were composed by him.² He thus became intimately bound up with the life of the city in most of its aspects. His irregular or even wild life during his early years must have brought him into contact with that underworld which was as active, though on a reduced scale, as in the heyday of the empire. His literary and intellectual tastes naturally brought him into close touch with the learned and literary world. His aristocratic connections gave him the entrée to that world of Muslim notables striving to keep up appearances on pensions, making titles do duty for estates. Both these circles led him towards the Mughal court, still maintained in the Qila-i-mu'alla or the Red Fort by the pensionary Mughal emperors. Akbar II and after him Bahadur Shāh were the natural heads of both circles, the latter being a poet in his own right with the pen-name of Zafar. It naturally became Ghālib's ambition to become the latter's court poet or laureate. Here he had to contend with the reigning laureate, Shaikh Muḥammad Ibrahim, whose pen-name was Zauq. He had been Bahadur Shāh's tutor before he became his laureate. Ghālib unfortunately first paid his addresses to Mirza Salīm, Akbar II's candidate for the succession and thus Bahadur Shāh's rival. It took thirteen years³ and fifteen *qaṣīdas* to live this down, so that it was not until 1850 that he received the titles of Najm-ud-daula, Dabir-ul-mulk and Nizam Jang, a commission to write a history of the House of Taimur, and a salary of Rs 50 per month. There followed patronage by the Heir Apparent, Mirza Fakhr-uddin, on Rs 400 per annum and succession to the laureateship on Zauq's death. These successes were short-lived, for the Mirza died in 1856 and the Mutiny followed a year later. But his efforts taken

¹ A. C. S. Gilani, *Ghālib*, Karachi, n.d. (Gilani).

² E.g. that of Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. *List of Hindu and Muhammedan Monuments in Delhi Province*, Delhi, 1912, vol. I.

³ Gilani, op. cit., p. 61.

with his achievement lasted over twenty years and this makes the Delhi court one of the interests of his life.

Lastly we come to the British. His family and that of Nawwāb Ahmad Baksh Khan had their first and very satisfactory contacts with the British in the persons of Lord Lake and his officers. Ahmad Baksh was held in high regard by Charles Metcalfe, the Resident, nicknamed the King of Delhi, from 1811 to 1819. Ghālib was in touch with successive Residents and Agents, including Sir Edward Colebrooke and William Fraser. James Thomason, later Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, thought highly enough of him to consider him for a post in the Delhi College. After his fruitless Calcutta journey, he developed the habit of composing *qasidas* for each visiting dignitary. His European contacts survived the curious episode of his imprisonment in 1847 on a charge of gambling, as they did the far greater strain of the Mutiny upheaval.¹

We can therefore say that Ghālib's range of conscious interest included not merely the literary and intellectual circle of Delhi; it extended to the whole aristocratic circle in the city and on to the imperial court itself. It went beyond the court to the new British rulers, and it burrowed below the dignified upper classes to the raffish and spendthrift Delhi underworld. What it did not do, as far as can be seen, was to extend to the commercial concerns of the city or the rural concerns of the countryside. Ghālib was concerned with pensions rather than commerce, with pay offices rather than estates. It is on this basis that we must look at Ghālib's Delhi.

The Delhi of Ghālib's youth was the centre of a district torn by anarchy and strife. After the death of Mirza Najaf Khan, Zulfiqar-ud-daula, the last Mughal minister of any authority, in 1782, the region had been ridden, marched and fought over by Mughal and Rohilla chiefs, by Marathas, Rajputs and Jats, by French-led disciplined troops and by the British and their allies. To the north, Sikh bands made plundering raids from self-acquired strongholds. Even the *sannyasis* organized themselves for war, so that Himmat Bahadur and his Gosains were a recognized mercenary force.² Allegiances changed with startling rapidity, mercenary officers generally being willing to defect to the winning side and the

¹ Ibid.

² See, e.g., H. G. Keene, *Fall of the Moghul Empire*, London, 1887, pp. 142 and 168.

soldiers glad to follow wherever their pay was secure. There were some islands of stability, such as the Begam Samru's *jāgīr* at Sardhana, where her well-organized force gave steady support to the Emperor and repelled all attempts at interference. So also did General de Boigne at Aligarh, Sindia's officer with two brigades of disciplined troops – until he left for France with his fortune. These cases and that of the sailor George Thomas, who for two years maintained a principality at Hansi, show the bizarre nature of the times. George was a sailor who collected some followers, seized Hansi, built a fort which he called Georgegarh, and was overthrown only after a siege by a regular Maratha force. The Begam was the widow of the German adventurer Walter Reinhardt, nicknamed Sombre or dark, wanted by the British for his share in the Patna murders of 1763. She became a Christian, succeeded to the *jāgīr*, built a cathedral and a palace, had a special bishop named Julius Caesar, and lived till 1836.¹

Behind these picturesque figures and their plottings we must note two sinister facts. The first is the great Delhi famine of 1781–2 when, it is thought, a third to a half of the population died. When the British arrived in 1803, 600 villages were still abandoned, and Fortescue reported in 1820 that 200 had still not been re-occupied.² The second is that the victims of the campaigns, whoever won, were the villagers. It was they who paid the revenue which supplied the pay to the troops who would mutiny if it was withheld too long – say more than a year. It was they who were the objects of as many campaigns as avowed enemies in order to raise money for the next campaign. It was they whose lands were marched over, crops destroyed and houses looted if the fighting moved that way.

The area concerned was large and the particular forces involved usually small, but such conditions produced a general sense of insecurity along with detailed cases of oppression and disaster. This is how Charles Metcalfe described the state of affairs when the British took control in 1803, while defending his rule in 1811–18:³

¹ For G. Thomas see H. G. Keene, op. cit. pp. 215–43. For the Begam Samru, see Brajendranath Bannerjee, *Begam Samru*, Calcutta, 1925. For the situation generally, see J. Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Calcutta, 1950, vol. iv, especially chs. 41, 46, 47.

² *Punjab Govt. Records, Delhi Residency and Agency Lahore*, 1911, p. 111. Report on the Revenue System of the Delhi Territory, 1820, par. 162, by I. Fortescue.

³ J. W. Kaye, *Papers of Lt Metcalfe*, London, 1855, p. 55.

'When the force at Dihlee was not sufficient to keep in awe the neighbouring villages; when the Resident's authority was openly defied within a few miles of that city; when it was necessary to draw a force from another district, and employ a battalion of infantry with guns, and a squadron of cavalry, to establish the authority of government in the immediate vicinity; when the detachment was kept on the alert by bodies of armed villagers menacing the pickets, and when sepoy who strayed were cut to pieces, when it was necessary to disarm villages; and when swords were literally turned into ploughshares; when every village was a den of thieves, and the city of Dihlee was parcelled out into shares to the neighbouring villages, of which each co-partnership monopolized the plunder of its allotted portion; when a company of infantry was necessary to attend the officer making the revenue settlement, and even that force was threatened with destruction, and taunted with the menace of having its muskets taken as playthings for the villagers' children; when to realize a single rupee of the settlement then concluded, purposely concluded on the lightest terms, it was necessary to employ a battalion of infantry with guns; when to subdue a single unfortified village a force of five battalions with cavalry and artillery, was decreed necessary, and when the villagers, instead of awaiting the assault, sallied forth against this force, and for an instant staggered the advancing columns by the briskness of their attitude – if that gentleman had been at Dihlee in those days he would probably have been more indulgent towards a system which had brought the Dihlee territory into the state in which it was at the end of 1818.

This description may be somewhat overdrawn, though all the incidents described undoubtedly occurred. What happened was that the villagers, being a vigorous and militant people when roused, fortified themselves and defied all comers, showing an independence which earned them from Metcalfe the epithet 'little republics'. They seized old *serais*, garden enclosures, or enclosed themselves with mud walls and thorn hedges. They were so enterprising that they sometimes mulcted the government *amils* or Agents instead of being fleeced by them. Nevertheless trade and cultivation went on, the condition being that merchants and travellers needed armed escorts, and had to bargain with the

larger villages for safe conduct as formerly they had to bargain with officials at octroi posts. The traveller Twining journeyed to Delhi in 1794 without mishap. Everyone, he said, between Delhi and Agra was armed with a scimitar and a round, black shield.¹ Sir J. Malcolm's evidence from Malwa, an equally disturbed region, about insurance rates witnessed both to the insecurity by the inflation of the rates, and to the existence of trade by the fact of there being rates at all.² Much trade continued to move with the tribal carriers, the Banjaras, who were their own guards and equal to anything less than a large-scale pre-meditated attack. A material mark of these years was decay rather than destruction. There was in fact little to destroy in the countryside, such as railways, bridges or mansions. There were mosques and temples, but these were respected; there were the typical Muslim domed tombs, but these were already in ruins. There was a lack of new construction and a failure to maintain, through lack of means, so that the country must have had a very run-down appearance. A minor inconvenience, which Ghālib may have felt as a boy, was that you could not visit nor picnic at any of the monuments around either city without an escort for fear of being picked off by some lurking sharpshooter. In 1827, young Charles Trevelyan reported that lions still roamed to the north of Delhi in Hariana: 'Hurriana is famous for being the only part of India where lions are to be found.' (He evidently did not know about the Gujarat ones.) 'They are not perhaps quite so large or fierce as the African lion and their colour approaches nearer to a black than a red. Still they are formidable animals. Having intelligence of several, I hope with the assistance of my cavalry guard to do some execution among them.'³

The first thing which the British did was to restore order. The revenue was at first collected from resistant villagers by detachments of troops with the collector riding on an elephant. But they soon realized that the government pressure was steady as well as occasionally overpowering. Charles Metcalfe's discovery of the local village communities and his willingness to do business with their leaders, the *muqaddams* or village proprietors, greatly helped the process of pacification. One evidence of its success was the

¹ T. Twining, *Travels in India a Hundred Years Ago*, London, 1893, p. 219.

² Sir J. Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, 3rd edn., London, 1832, vol. II, pp. 366-9.

³ Charles Trevelyan Papers. Letter of May 1827.

restoration of Ali Mardan's canal from the upper Jumna to Delhi. It was said that when the water flowed down the Chandni Chowk 'the people went out to meet it, and threw flowers into the stream'.¹ This canal transformed the country to the north of Delhi, so that John Lawrence in 1842 could write of riding 'for miles as through a highly cultivated garden'.² A second evidence was the gradual extension of houses beyond the city walls. At first the British built bungalows along the city wall from the Kashmir gate southwards. The British deputy Commissioner had his, with its classical portico and coat of arms, in Daryaganj.³ Later they spread on the plain to the north of the city as far as the Ridge. Mahrauli became a country retreat for the Delhi gentry, with a palace for the Mughal, *dargahs* for the pious, a feast of *punkahs* in the rains for the people and abandoned Mughal tombs for conversion into European summer-houses.⁴ Suburbs extended to Sabzimandi and Kishenganj and a new quarter was planned by Trevelyan, long known as Deputy *ganj*.

Metcalf largely used Indian agency in his administration. He had rarely more than three European revenue officers, and on one occasion when reduced to one, wrote cheerfully that he could spare him too if government had need of him elsewhere.⁵ He abolished capital punishment and *suttee* within the Territory by executive decree; though he had the odd notion that you could discourage escapes from prison by doubling the sentences for each attempt, his administration was in general humane as well as firm. Some of his officers were original as well as independent. The French botanist Jacquemont wrote of William Fraser: '... he is half Asiatic in his habits, but in other respects a Scotch Highlander and an excellent man, with great originality of thought, a metaphysician to boot, and enjoying the best possible reputation of being a country bear.'⁶ Land settlements it is true, were at first haphazard, and Fraser, who preferred Persian *ghazals* to measurements, was noted for over-assessments and a trail of deserted

¹ Lord Ellenborough's Political Diary, 2 vols., London, 1881, vol. II, p. 157.

² *Selected Reports on the Revenue Settlements under Reg. IX, 1833, in Delhi Territory*, 2 vols., 1846. Report of J. Lawrence on the Sonapat district.

³ Still to be seen in 1930.

⁴ E.g. Muhd Quli Khan's and Adham Khan's.

⁵ C. T. Metcalfe's *Report on Delhi Territory*, par. 88. See P. Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls*, Cambridge, 1951, p. 88.

⁶ V. Jacquemont, *Letters from India*, 2 vols., London, 1834. To V. de Tracey, January 11, 1832, vol. II, p. 254.

villages in his wake. Nevertheless there was order, if not to every-one's satisfaction, and growing prosperity.

In achieving this result Metcalfe, and indeed the inhabitants generally, knew that there was a strong reserve of military force. There was the cantonment at Meerut, forty miles from Delhi, with a British brigade, and there was the frontier station of Karnal, seventy miles to the north, later moved to Ambala. This faced Ranjit Singh's Sikhs but was also an effective reserve for dealing with civil disturbance. Reserve of military power made villagers amenable and police action effective. In Delhi itself there were no British troops, partly in deference to the feelings of the Mughal, still the implied though unacknowledged head of the Territory. But the Indian regiments in the cantonments beyond the Ridge (the present university site) had British officers, and these, with a gradually growing group of civil officers and subordinate Europeans and Eurasians, made up the European element. They had developed a miniature metropolitan life of their own, with the Resident (later Commissioner and Agent) as its centre, Ludlow Castle as its Buckingham Palace, Metcalfe House as its Windsor, the Dilkusha at Mahrauli as its Sandringham, and St James' Church in Kashmir Gate for its cathedral. There were enough people in later years to support a local newspaper, the *Delhi Gazette*.¹ It was chiefly filled with local gossip and reprints from down country. Christmas was a time for coming in from the districts for special celebration. 'Delhi', said Jacquemont, 'is the most hospitable place in India.'² By 1857 the British society consisted of the civil officers such as the collectors, magistrates and their assistants, the military officers, technical officers such as those dealing with roads, canals and medicine, and a group outside the charmed circle who mostly lived in Daryaganj, between the Red Fort and the Delhi gate. It contained a few business people such as bank managers and merchants, and many subordinates, both European and Eurasians, who served the public offices and the new branches of the administration such as posts and telegraphs. On the fringe were people such as the descendants of adventurers like the Skinners and some Portuguese. For the most part this group lived a life apart from the city. They were connected by two rather frail bridges; one was the ex-adventuring

¹ Files of this paper are to be seen in the Delhi Fort Museum.

² V. Jacquemont, op. cit., vol. I, p. 189.

families just mentioned, who had Persian tastes and some branches of whom became Muslim, and a few officials at the top who had Persian tastes whether of duty or inclination, and an interest in recent Indian history. The magistrate Prescott, with whom Ghālib consorted, was one of these, and so was Fraser, and so was the historian Henry Elliot. The group had its hard-working ornaments like Charles Trevelyan and John Lawrence, and its oddities like William Fraser and the German head of the Delhi College whose trousers were removed by his wife every night to prevent his wandering in the city.¹ The head of this society for eighteen years (1835-53) was Thomas Metcalfe, the lesser brother of Charles. He built Metcalfe House and presided with static dignity, periodically lamenting that he had been overlooked and passed over, particularly in the sending of John Lawrence (his junior) to the Punjab. He had a passion for Napoleon and collected his relics including a bust by Canova. All these disappeared into the hands of the Gujars, and it was said that a bust of the radical Lord Brougham was later found doing duty as a god at a local shrine. He adopted Napoleon's habit of pinching the ears, in his case of offenders, with mock indignation, first donning a pair of kid gloves presented to him on a silver salver.² He thought oranges and mangoes messy, so that his daughter used to eat them at the top of the Qutab Minar with Richard Lawrence, in order that the traces could be removed in time when his buggy appeared on the dusty road from the city. His daughter Emily thus described him:³

'He was not a tall man, I should think about five feet eight inches, but well-made. . . His hair was gray and he was bald on the top of his head; his eyes were blue, a straight nose, well formed mouth, with often a whimsical expression on it. . . He was very sprightly in all his movements and had a very pleasant voice. . . His clothes. . . were made by a first class London tailor, Pulford in St James' Street, and were sent out regularly every year. . .

'Everything was ordered with the greatest punctuality. . . After he had had his breakfast, his Hookah was brought in and placed behind his chair. It stood on an embroidered carpet

¹ P. Spear, op. cit., p. 165. Hardcastle Papers.

² Hardcastle Papers, in *Great Grandmother's Days*, Autobiography of Lady Clive Bayley, p. 20 and p. 33.

³ Ibid., p. 20.

worked for him by some lady friends and was a beautiful erection in itself. The stand was of solid silver about eighteen inches in diameter at the bottom, and the cup for the sweet smelling tobacco mixture which he smoked, of beautifully embossed silver, with silver chains hanging from it. The snake-like pipe was from about six to eight feet long and the mouth piece at the end of it was exquisitely wrought in silver. . . The gurgle of the Hookah still rings in my ears.

'His carriage always appeared punctually at ten o'clock, under the Portico. He passed through a row of servants on his way to the carriage, one holding his hat, another his gloves, another his handkerchief, another his gold-headed cane, and another his despatch-box. These were put in the carriage, his *Jemada* mounted beside the coachman and he drove away with two *syces* (or grooms) standing up behind.'

More important than the loan of the *hookah* was the cult of the Mughal dignitary or *omrah*. The up-country Europeans seem to have fallen into this insensibly and certainly without acknowledgment. Indeed, a few exceptions apart, they became more aggressively British as time went on. The *omrah* had his town house and his country retreat in the form of a walled garden within which a family tomb might be built. He lived in state with many retainers. Some of the British may have fancied themselves as country gentlemen; but what they actually produced was the air of the *omrah*. Sir David Ochterloney, twice Resident of Delhi, built classical mansions wherever he went of which that of Karnal, later in the possession of the Liaqat Ali Khan branch of the Karnal family, survives. He had one in Delhi near Azadpur which has disappeared.¹ The Resident used Dara Shikoh's palace in Kashmir Gate. Charles Metcalfe built a garden house in the overgrown Shalimar gardens with a smaller villa for his private work which was still standing a few years ago.² Colebrooke built the house later known as Hindu Rao's. Skinner of Hansi had his classical town house in Kashmir Gate complete with marble bathroom in the Mughal style and Bengali-style apartments for the ladies.³

¹ A picture of this house exists in a book compiled by Sir T. T. Metcalfe in 1844 for his daughters, entitled *Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi*. This is in the J. M. Ricketts collection in the India Office Library.

² For a sketch of the remains of this villa see P. Spear, op. cit., p. 164.

³ For many years used by the Hindu College in Delhi.

Indeed, he went one better than the rest by building St James' Church opposite his house, as nawwābs would build mosques.

In 1829 Delhi was convulsed by the suspension and ultimate dismissal of the Resident, Sir Edward Colebrooke. It was a David and Goliath contest for his accuser was a young civilian only two years in service, by name Charles Trevelyan.¹ Within the service the event was a confrontation of the old outlook and the new. But it shook the city as well for Sir Edward had many connections with the gentry and, with his son, others less defensible with the city financiers, including the leading banker, Joti Prasad. However necessary it may have been to put a stop to Sir Edward's methods of administration, the result of the crisis was to draw the British further apart from Indian society. The utilitarian query, on surveying the old world of Mughal Delhi, of to what purpose is this waste, became louder and more widespread. The distinction between 'them' and 'us' became sharper.

The city itself was prosperous, being the distributing centre for the northern trade to the east and south. By 1852 it had about 160,000 inhabitants.² Within it there lived the merchants, the financiers, the learned and the dependants of the court. Of the 2,104 *salatin* or descendants of the emperors listed in 1852, a considerable proportion lived outside the Fort walls.³ The neighbouring nawwābs and rājās had town houses for their occasional visits. Since political power was denied them the well-born turned their attention to where the last Mughal emperors held full sway within the Red Fort. Looked at with hindsight the pre-Mutiny pageantry has a dreamlike quality as though it never actually existed. It was the product of a group pretending that a dead past still existed because they had nothing to look forward to. And if the dream ended in a nightmare of violence, at least, while it lasted, it provided amusement, diversion and some mental refreshment to the people. The court held its regular *darbars* in the Diwan-i Khas, but what struck the imagination of the people at large were the frequent public ceremonies and processions. On the great festivals the Emperor would parade the streets on his elephant, the ministers, the Heir Apparent and the Mirzas in their

¹ For an account of this incident see my *Twilight of the Mughuls*, Cambridge, 1951, ch. VIII.

² *Punjab Government Records, Delhi Residency and Agency*, Lahore, 1911, p. 431. Statement by Sir T. T. Metcalfe based on a Mughal Statement, 1848.

³ *Ibid.*

places. A straggle of foot soldiers went in front and behind; musicians sounded trumpets and rhapsodists recited the imperial praises – a slightly tarnished and tawdry assembly perhaps, and raucous to the ear, but cheerful and colourful and much appreciated.¹ The royal elephants moved constantly about, one frightening the horse of a buggy which threw out two British officers on the road to the Qutab. No injuries were received, but, said the report: 'The gentlemen were very angry.'² The Emperor would march to the Jama Masjid on important occasions and usually sacrificed a camel at the Id. Hindu festivals, including Holi, were also observed, as Mughal miniatures testify, and there was the Persian custom of ceremonial weighing against seven kinds of grain, gold and coral (in the heyday of the empire it had been gold, silver and precious stones) on the Persian Nauroz or New Year's Day. Communal relations, though they hardly reached the height of fraternity suggested by C. F. Andrews in his book on *Zaka-ullah*,³ seem to have been generally good. The city was about equally divided between Hindus and Muslims. Each had an extremist wing and each its action groups. The Muslims had the butchers at hand and the Hindus the Jats with their *lathis* who would readily come in from the countryside at call. But the court in general favoured peace; Bahadur Shāh employed the Christian doctor Chiman Lal as one of his physicians. Then there was the influential Kayastha community, the hereditary servants of the empire, who acted as a bridge between the two faiths. Over fifty years I have found no record of a communal riot, and only one of a dispute which reached the lieutenant-governor. The running dialogue concerned the desired extension of the right to sacrifice cows on the part of some Muslims and Hindu resistance.

The court was not merely a show, if only a tawdry one. Firstly, it exercised a positive influence in three directions. It was a school of manners and etiquette, Bahadur Shāh himself being noted for his punctiliousness in this respect. The 'old-world dignity and courtesy' often praised by travellers and visitors as one of India's virtues, stemmed from this centre and affected Muslims and Hindus alike. Long after Delhi had ceased to be the Paris of power

¹ The details can be seen in contemporary Mughal paintings and drawings.

² National Archives of India, Foreign Dept. Misc. Political, vol. 361. *Palace Intelligence, Delhi 1851-54*, August 22, 1851.

³ C. F. Andrews, *Zaka ullah of Delhi*, Cambridge, 1929, pp. 15-17.

it continued as the Versailles of good manners. Secondly, it continued the royal tradition of patronizing the arts. Not much could be done for architecture from lack of money, though both Akbar and Bahadur Shāh erected some modest buildings. Bahadur Shāh was fond of gardens, the Roshanara and Qudsia in particular, and laid out one of his own at Shahdara. But with fine arts the case was different. Calligraphy, that most distinctive of Islamic arts, flourished, and so did painting, whose patronage extended from royalty through the nobles to the British. Jivan Ram was a leading painter,¹ and the school has left a legacy of miniature portrait paintings on paper and ivory, of court scenes and royal processions. It was a dying art perhaps, but attractive in a subdued and rather plaintive way. The most favoured, however, was poetry. It was the major intellectual occupation of the Delhi classes, both in the Persian and Urdu idioms. The poetical contests at the literary assemblies or *mushairas*, at which the Emperor himself would sometimes preside, were major social events, and the spectators would experience something of the euphoria of a cup-tie. Literary controversies were a substitute for political ones and their factions for political parties. It was unfortunate that Bahadur Shāh was too involved himself under the pen-name Zafar, to be an impartial judge. The irreverent whispered that his own poems owed much to the polishing of Zauq; hence that poet's firm hold on the laureateship.

The world of Islamic learning had the Delhi College for a centre, and here, after an English department had been added to the existing Oriental, something of a Muslim renaissance began in the late forties and fifties. There was a sudden enthusiasm for western knowledge, especially scientific, and the first sign of recognition of, and interest in, a new world beyond that of Islam among the Indian Muslims. Munshi Zaka-ullah² is the best-known product of this period but it was perhaps no accident that Sayyid Ahmad Khān, then a young man, was in Delhi compiling his *Asar-us-Sanadiid*.³ Other members of the school, like Nazir Ahmad, joined the Sayyid later in his Aligarh movement.

Behind this show and mild intellectualism there was a background of decay and corruption. Beyond the solemn decorum of

¹ W. H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, London, 1844, ch. 11, p. 285.

² See C. F. Andrews, *op. cit.*

³ First published 1847.

the Diwan-i Khas, hundreds of *salatin* or imperial descendants lived in squalor. They had pensions of Rs 5 or less per month and they spent their time in gambling on cock fights or bemoaning their lot. In the city there was an underworld of vice stimulated by idleness and frustration. This same consuming frustration, with its urge to make the most of what little there was, produced an atmosphere of intrigue, of faction and of bitterness. Munshi Zaka-ullah in his old age declared: 'People speak of "the good old times"; but those times, as a whole, were not good, when they are compared with the days in which we are now living. They were full of corruption and decay.'¹

This world of mediatized sovereignty, of Weimar-like elegance against a backcloth of squalor and despair, a Mughal sunset glow, might have faded imperceptibly into the night of oblivion. It had already been arranged to move the court to Mahrauli while modern influences were increasingly playing upon the city. But the after-glow was extinguished by a thunderstorm of violence; the Mughal dream ended in nightmare. With it the world of Ghālib and his contemporaries crashed around them, never to be the same again. The crisis came on the morning of May 11, 1857, when the mutineers from Meerut took over the city and were joined by the regiments in the Delhi cantonment. Bahadur Shāh was unwillingly made the titular head of the movement and Delhi was held for a little more than four months, until the storm of September 14-20th. It was a time of acute discomfort and great suffering for most of the citizens. No one except some discontented Mirzas, for whom anything was a relief from the tedium of life, and the more fanatical of the *maulvis*, really wanted a rebellion. The King's adviser, Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, was scandalized; the gentry lost their rents and peaceful *durbars*, the literati their audiences and personal contests. A wave of terror swept the city; anyone being suspected of sympathy with the British or tainted with Christianity was in danger of his life. Ghālib was one of these and he lived in great danger both during the siege and after the city's capture. The mercantile community fared no better for it was subject to looting by the soldiery and exactions by the royal government. As the situation worsened, suspicion, panic and disorder increased. It should be remembered that the *gardī* or calamity which followed the recapture of the city was preceded by

¹ C. F. Andrews, *op. cit.*

the *gardi* of the actual mutineer occupation. In both cases it was the citizen who received the blame and who suffered the blows. If the British could have controlled their troops after the storm they would have found a grateful populace ready to welcome them. If they had been content to blockade the city a little longer it must have surrendered for want of food.¹ In either case the disaster of Delhi's desolation and the feelings that went with it would have been avoided.

As it was, the horror of the rebel occupation was eclipsed by the greater horror of the British restoration. During the siege the city was short of food and at the end threatened with famine; many went in fear of their lives from denunciation as friends of the British; and all suffered from looting as each new batch of distraught soldiery arrived in the city. But afterwards the storm of seven days passed into a sack, accentuated by the troops' discovery of large stocks of liquor in the 'Europe' shops. It was at this time that Ghālib's mentally sick brother, Yūsuf, was shot by a British soldier.² The whole population was driven out and was still in the open on the brink of the cold weather in December. Then the Hindus were allowed to return. Nothing like normality returned until well into 1858. Next, there were the penal measures. For months there were five or six hangings a day. A special commission with summary power sentenced 372 to death and fifty-seven to life imprisonment. The victims of irregular action were far greater – stray figures shot by officers on the prowl, like the twenty-one villagers because their village had handed a servant of Sir J. Metcalfe to the mutineers, and those who were mistaken for someone else, or not mistaken at all and just shot. After this violence came the demolitions and the violations of the palace and mosques. The whole built-up area between the Fort and the Jama Masjid was destroyed to give the Fort a field of fire. A complex system of tickets for compensation did not prevent much hardship, or touch the extensive confiscations of property throughout the city.³ In the palace the Diwan-i Am was turned into a hospital and the Diwan-i Khas into an officers' mess. The Zinat-ul Masajid

¹ P. Spear, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-10. Most of the evidence comes from the *Mutiny Papers* in the India Office Library and Indian accounts of the siege.

² *Two Native Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi*, London, p. 72. Ghālib's own account, however, differs from this. See Russell and Islam, *Ghālib, Life and Letters*, London, 1969, pp. 145-6.

³ P. Spear, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-2 and ch. XI for the whole paragraph.

became a bakery until Lord Curzon's time. Both the Jama and the Fatehpuri mosques were seized, and there were loud cries for the former's destruction.

During the last years of Ghālib's life the city slowly recovered from this hammer-blow. It was not till 1872 that the population approached the pre-Mutiny figure. Culturally the Mutiny was a mortal thrust. The Mughal family, with Mirza Illahi Baksh at its head, survived, but there was no pageantry, no *darbars*, no patronage of the arts. Delhi was a depressed provincial city still numb with communal shock. Only the merchants and those linked with the British prospered. Can it be wondered that Ghālib retreated more and more within himself, that his gaze was fixed on eternity rather than on earth and that his themes were disillusioned and tragic? The citizens could neither enjoy the present nor look back with pleasure on the past. A generation was to pass before they really began to look forward with confidence into a new world.