

## Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib: Letter to Tufta (1862)

Mirza Asadullah Khan (1797–1869), whose bold choice of the pen-name (*taxallus*) Ghalib ‘Triumphant’ has turned out to be amply justified by his later fame, is chiefly remembered for his Urdu poetry (*UL*, pp. 87–93). The short collection of the *Divān-e Ghālib* is still compared by many Urdu aficionados to the Vedas in terms of its divine inspiration.

Ghalib himself was, however, quite as proud of his much larger output of Persian poetry and of his authoritative status as a lexicographer of Persian: and these interests are naturally prominent in his memorable Persian and Urdu letters, which provide matchless insights into the workings of a complex and far from modest literary genius. The Urdu letters were published in two volumes, ‘*Ūd-e Hindī* (1868) and *Urdū-e Mu’allā* (1869), from whose appended selection of letters dealing with literary themes this passage is taken.

The letter is one of a long series addressed by Ghalib to one of his Hindu pupils and intimate friends, Munshi Har Gopal Tufta, whose death was soon to end their long and close association. It has as its underlying theme Ghalib’s enormous pride in his knowledge of Persian, which he claimed to have learnt from a Persian-speaking convert from Zoroastrianism, and which had led him recently to compile his *Qāti’-e Burhān* or ‘*Decider of the Proof*’ in attempted rebuttal of the standard Indo-Persian dictionary, the seventeenth century *Burhān-e Qāti’* or ‘*Decisive Proof*’.

Ghalib’s first paragraph disclaims any special expertise in Arabic only to underline his often-proclaimed total command of Persian, to whose classical masters he compares himself in the second. A point raised in a now lost letter from Tufta is taken up in the third paragraph, where the suggestion that Ghalib might have copied one of his odes from the seventeenth century poet Naziri is angrily rebutted. Another point of Tufta’s, this time concerning the correct use of Arabic *zamān* ‘time’ and its derivatives in Persian, is taken up in the fourth paragraph, which leads to a devastating final attack on one of Ghalib’s favourite targets, the so-called Indian authorities on Persian.

The apparent dryness of this subject-matter is immediately belied by the legendary magic of Ghalib’s style, which intersperses the most colloquial and outspoken Hindustani mode of Urdu with Arabic and Persian tags and technicalities in a uniquely natural fashion.

The text is taken from the exceptionally careful edition of Ghulam Rasul Mihr, *Xutū-e Ghālib*, Vol. 1 (Lahore: Majlis-e Yadgar-e Ghalib, 1969), pp. 114–5.

A somewhat abbreviated translation is given in R. Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Ghalib 1797–1869: Volume 1, Life and Letters* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), pp. 279–280: this is an immensely sympathetic account of Ghalib’s life, largely based on translations of his letters. A laboriously full version of the letter is also available in Daud Rahbar, trans., *Urdu Letters of Mirzā Asadu’llāh Khān Ghālib* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 73–5.

صاحب ،

دوہوں زبانوں سے مرکب ہے یہ فارسی متعارف : ایک فارسی ، ایک عربی - ہرچند اس منطق میں لغاتِ ترکی بھی آجاتے ہیں مگر کمتر۔ میں عربی کا عالم نہیں ، مگر نرا جاہل بھی نہیں ۔ بس اتنی بات ہے کہ اس زبان کے لغات کا محقق نہیں ہوں ۔ علماء سے پوچھنے کا محتاج اور سند کا طلب گار رہتا ہوں ۔ فارسی میں مبداءِ فیاض سے مجھے وہ دستگاہ ملی ہے اور اس زبان کے قواعد و ضوابط میرے ضمیر میں اس طرح جاگزیں ہیں ، جیسے فولاد میں جوہر ۔

اہلِ پارس میں اور مجھ میں دو طرح کے تفاوت ہیں : ایک تو یہ کہ ان کا مولد ایران اور میرا مولد ہندوستان ، دوسرے یہ کہ وہ لوگ آگے پیچھے ، سو دو سو ، چار سو ، آٹھ سو برس پہلے پیدا ہوئے ہیں .....

کیا ہنسی آتی ہے کہ تم مانند اور شاعروں کے مجھ کو بھی سمجھے ہو کہ اُستاد کی غزل یا قصیدہ سانسے رکھ لیا ، اوس کے قوافی لکھ لئے اور ان قافیوں پر لفظ جوڑنے لگے ۔ لاجول و لاقوۃ الا باللہ ۔ بچپن میں جب میں رسیختہ لکھنے لگا ہوں ، لعنت ہے مجھ پر اگر میں نے کوئی رسیختہ یا اوس کے قوافی پیشِ نظر رکھ لئے ہوں ۔ صرف بحر اور ردیف ، قافیہ دیکھ لیا اور اوس زمین میں غزل ، قصیدہ لکھنے لگا ۔ تم کہتے ہو نظیری کا دیوان وقتِ تحریرِ قصیدہ پیشِ نظر ہوگا اور جو اس کے قافیہ کا شعر دیکھا ، اس پر لکھا ہوگا ۔ واللہ اگر تمہارے اس خط کے دیکھنے سے پہلے میں یہ بھی جانتا ہوں کہ اس زمین میں نظیری کا قصیدہ بھی ہے ۔ چہ جائے آنکہ وہ شعر ۔ سبائی شاعری معنی آفرینی ہے قافیہ پیمائی نہیں ہے ۔

” زمان “ لفظِ عربی ” ازمنہ “ جمع ، دوہوں طرح فارسی میں مستعمل ۔ ” زمانے “ ” یک زمان “ ” ہر زمان “ ” زمان زمان “ ” دریں زمان “ ” در آں زمان “ سب صحیح اور فصیح ۔ جو اس کو غلط کہے ، وہ گدھا ۔ بلکہ اہلِ فارس نے ، مثل ” موج “ و ” موجہ “ یہاں بھی ” ہ “ بڑھا کر ” زمانہ “ استعمال کیا ہے ۔ ” یک زمان “ کو میں نے کبھی غلط نہ کہا ہوگا ۔ سعدی کے شعر لکھنے کی کیا حاجت ؟

سنو میاں : میرے ہم وطن ، یعنی ہندی لوگ جو وادیِ فارسی دانی میں دم مارتے ہیں ، وہ اپنے قیاس کو دخل دے کہ ضوابطِ ایجاد کرتے ہیں ، جیسا وہ گھاگس : عبدالواسع ہانسوی ، لفظ ” نامراد “ کو غلط کہتا ہے اور یہ اُو کا پٹھا قیتل ” صفت کدہ “ ” شفقت کدہ “ ” نشتر کدہ “ کو اور ” ہمہ عالم “ و ” ہمہ جا “ کو غلط کہتا ہے ۔ کیا میں بھی ویسا ہی ہوں جو ” یک زمان “ کو غلط کہوں گا ؟ فارسی کی میزان یعنی ترازو میرے ہات میں ہے ۔ بِلّٰہِ الْحَمْدِ وَ لِلّٰہِ الشُّکْر۔

غالب

مرقومہ چہار شنبہ ۲۷ ماہ اگست ۱۸۶۲ء

Mihr's careful edition preserves the spelling-conventions favoured in nineteenth century U books: besides the spelling 27 *hāt* for *hāth*, the chief point to note is the very convenient distinction through the use of written *vāo* of *us*, *un*, etc., from *is*, *in*.

1 *sāhib*: an opening address entirely appropriate to a very old friend, cf. 10 *tum*, 17 *bhai*, 23 *suno miyāh*.

2 *donoñ zabānoñ se murakkab hai ye fārsī muta'āraf*: perhaps 'it's as a compound of the two languages that this Persian is familiar' — but Ghalib's effortless incorporation of PA loans into colloquial HU syntactic patterns repeatedly defies attempts at producing definitive E translations.

3 *mantiq*: here 'everyday speech, colloquial', vs. the modern U specialization of this loan in the sense of 'logic'.

3 *luḡāt*: in its original A sense of p. 'words', vs. modern s. 'dictionary'.

3 *nirā jāhil bhī nahīn*: 'not a complete ignoramus either', whose self-deprecation is splendidly picked up by *bas itnī bāt hai kī* . . .

4 *muhaqqiq*: cf. *tahqīq* f. 'research' (721).

5 *sanad*: here 'authority, precedent', vs. the modern sense of 'certificate'. Since both A and P were learnt languages for most Indians, doubts as to the correct usage of particular words could only be resolved by the sort of authoritative guidance Ghalib himself provides in his final paragraphs.

5 *mabdā-e fayyāz*: 'Bounteous Source', implying the God-given origins of Ghalib's expertise in P.

6 *jaise faulād meñ jauhar*: 'as the temper is in steel'.

7 *ahl-e pārs*: = 20 *ahl-e fārs*, 'the people of Fars', i.e. the classical Persian poets like Sa'di and Hafiz, both born in Shiraz, in the province of Fars or Pars. Neo-E 'Farsi' derives from A — which has no phoneme /p/ (71) — vs. 'Persia', 'Persian', and 'Parsi': cf. A > U *iflātūn* vs. 'Plato'.

8 *āge piche*: 'one after another, in succession'.

10 *mānind aur šā'iroñ ke*: an obsolete prepn. construction (844).

10 *ustād kī ḡazal yā qasīdā*: the rest of the paragraph demands some acquaintance with the technical terms of classical P and U poetry (UL, pp. 17–25).

The *ustād*, a living or dead master, provided the example for composition in the two main genres of the *ḡazal* 'lyric', and the *qasīdā* 'formal ode', both of which were formally defined in terms of the triple criteria of *bahr* 'metre', *qāfiyā* 'rhyme', and *radīf* 'end-rhyme', collectively constituting the *zamīn* or 'ground' of the composition.

Ghalib's own famous U *ghazal* beginning *dil-e nādāñ tujhe huā kyā hai* is in the metre called *xafif* 'light', scanning  $\sim\vee\sim\vee\sim\vee\sim$  on the mnemonic pattern *Fā'iLātun maFā'iLun Fī'Lun* (cf. 721), the rhyme *-ā*, and the end-rhyme *kyā hai*.

11 *lā haul va lā quvvā illā billāh*: a common A formula, explained earlier (743).

12 *rextā*: the P loan formerly used to designate U (14).

12 *likhne lagā hūñ*: 'ever since I started writing'.

12 *la'nat hai mujh par*: 'may I be accursed', with entirely natural U word-order in this interjectory expression.

14 Naziri (d. 1613) was one of the many Persian poets who achieved a successful career and an enormous posthumous reputation in India.

14 *vaqt-e tahrīr-e qasīdā*: 'at the time of writing the *qasīdā*', an adv. P izafat phrase.

17 *ci jāe āñki vo šī'r*: lit. 'what place for that verse?', i.e. 'let alone that verse!'. The mixture of P *ci* 'what?' and *āñki* 'that' with U *vo* is entirely typical of Ghalib's omnivorous style.

18 The paragraph lays down rules for the correct use of A *zamān* 'time', its broken plural *azminā*, its PA derivatives *zamāne* 'for some time', *yak-zamān* 'contemporary', *har-zamān* 'all the time', *zamān zamān* 'from time to time', *dar-in zamān* 'at this time', *dar āñ zamān* 'at that time', besides its P extension *zamānā*, on the pattern of A *mauj* 'wave' > PA *maujā*.

- 21 Sa'di of Shiraz (d. 1292) was one of the ultimate Persian masters, whose *Gulistān* or 'Rose-Garden' was drilled into countless generations of Indian children in their Persian classes.
- 23 *suno miyān*: 'listen, my dear fellow', a very informal phrase sardonically juxtaposed in Ghalib's usual fashion with the elaborately PA *vādī-e fārsī-dānī* lit. 'valley of acquaintance with P'.
- 24 *vo ghāgas*: 'that dodo'. While HU is quite as rich as E in genitally-based four-letter words, the rules of Mughal courtesy dictated a preference for bird or animal names in curses, cf. 31 *ullū kā paṭṭhā* 'owl-sprat', or the very common 20 *vo gadhā* 'he's an ass'.
- 24 Abdul Vasi Hansavi, a late seventeenth-century writer on P grammar, is a favourite target for Ghalib's acid criticisms of Indian 'experts' in P, like the Hindu convert Mir Muhammad Hasan Qatil (d. 1823).
- 25 The huge possibilities opened by the freedom of prefixation and suffication in P (821-2) led to an uncertainty in Indian minds as to the correctness of many PA derivatives, e.g. *nā-murād* 'wretched', or *safvat-kadā* 'council-chamber', *ṣafqat-kadā* 'compassion-chamber', *ništar-kadā* 'lancet-chamber' (all elaborate synonyms for 'heart'), or *hamā-ālam* 'world-wide' and *hamā-jā* 'everywhere'.
- 27 *mizān ya'nī tarāzū*: 'balance, i.e. scales', a nicely throwaway gloss of an A word by its more familiar P synonym.
- 27 *lillāhul-hamd va lillāhuš-šukr*: 'to God be the praise and to God be the thanks', a typical use of an A formula (743) to close the communication.
- 28 *marqūmā cahār-šambā*: 'dated Wednesday'. P names for days of the week share *jum'ā* with U, but otherwise prefix numerals (824) to *šambā* 'Saturday', from *yak-šambā* 'Sunday' through to *panj-šambā* 'Thursday'.