

The Marriage of Dynamic Thought and Aesthetic Sensibility: A Study of Urdu's Shakespeare, Mirza Ghalib

Furrukh Faizan Mir

Ph.D. Scholar, Dept. of English

University of Kashmir

India

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to give credit to Ghalib as the one who not only popularised the genre of *Ghazal* but also increased its canvas tremendously. This paper also delineates Ghalib as the last representative of Mughal's cultural and aesthetic accomplishments. Further it has been shown how Ghalib though being a genius, always showed thirst for knowledge in all forms. As a result his poetry warrants a full and elaborate appreciation by our modern generation. This paper aspires to show how his poetry appeals to the modern man via his peculiar symbols and imagery. Attempt is made to show how his poetry uniquely integrates ideas and expression in a subtle manner, fusing sensation and emotion resulting in a poetry where ideas become feeling. The paper strives to show how uniquely Ghalib penetrates the depths of the objects of beauty as well as the depths of his own conscious, thus triggering the spiritual sense which is the greatest of poetic credits.

Almost all the prominent literary critics of Urdu right upto Altaf Hussain Hali to Shams Ur Rehman Farooqi have estimated Ghalib as the greatest Urdu Poet. Ghalib's poems are widely read and admired all over the world. What Shakespeare is to English, Ghalib is to Urdu.

Although Ghalib himself was proud of his poetic achievements in Persian he is today more famous for his Urdu poetry especially for his *Ghazals*. Before Ghalib the *Ghazal* in Persian and Urdu was primarily an expression of anguished love; but Ghalib expressed philosophical thought, the travails and mysteries of life and many other subjects. He thus expanded the scope of *Ghazal*. Ghalib's Urdu *Ghazals* are considered to be his paramount contribution to Urdu poetry.

Ghalib was the last representative of the intellectual and aesthetic achievements of Mughal culture in India. His poetry, sophisticated and sometimes obscure and oblique, expresses the cumulative experience of a very sensitive soul who was avid for knowledge in all its forms.

Ghalib in his youth was much attracted by the sophisticated style of famous Persian poet Bedil, and his often quaint images, which reverberated in the memory through their identifiable emotional effect. Ghalib's early poetry shows that he followed in Bedil's footsteps and adopted his style of writing instead of the limped diction employed by such masters of Urdu Ghazal as Mir Taqi Mir and Mir Dard. He freely used a vocabulary loaded with obscure, wild and extravagant symbols and imagery. During this earlier period use of symbolism and imagery tends to be more intellectual than emotional. He had to wait for maturity to give full expression to the wisdom gathered from his personal experience. Being an artist capable of gaining knowledge and experience from all the sources that life offers, Ghalib finds himself in a different world in every decade of his life, or rather, he sees the same world with different eyes. It is therefore that the material of his poetry and the manner of its presentation is continually renewed.

A great poet must have other interests in life besides poetry, in order to nourish his creative imagination. A poet is a poet because he has the capacity to train his dominant interests, including his thought processes, into poetry. The creative output of Ghalib's warrants full and elaborate appreciation by our modern generation. His use of symbol and imagery gives to his poetry a modern air. Even his ambiguities and obliquity are modern in the sense that they give us insight into something we know as contemporary reality. It seems as if he were addressing the modern man when he ruefully exclaimed:

My songs are prompted by delight
In the heat of my ideas;
I am the Nightingale
Of the flower garden of future.

The above lines clearly imply that Ghalib's words are the means through which feelings are made conscious, even if they were not properly understood and appreciated by most of his contemporaries. The value of his words is in their contribution to the understanding and ordering of his own emotional conflicts.

Contemplation of Ghalib's style becomes a contemplation of what is expressed by him as the integration of ideas and expression in a subtle manner. The reader becomes vividly aware of the inner experience by his words, his poetry is not discursive, it does not describe, but reveals; it is obscure in the same way that once's feelings are obscure. His creative imagination clothes the emotions with life. Sensation and emotion fuse, and idea becomes feelings. Ghalib's poetry is primarily perceptive, not logical thought. His seemingly intellectual and analytical argument is in reality a subtle form of imaginative reasoning, transmuting thought with feeling.

In Ghalib, feelings precede understanding. For him, life is an emotional experience, which is only subsequently explained by reason. His heightened awareness leads him to use the condensed suggestiveness of metaphor. With emotional fervour and imaginative vividness he stretches the meaning of his words. His metaphors are always in touch with the actual world. They do not indicate an arbitrary flight of imagination:

O Asad, my shadow
Runs from me like smoke;
Who can stay near
To such a fiery soul as I?

Sometimes Ghalib's meaning is implicit; It is condensed to such an extent that words need to complete the construction or sense are purposely omitted. The reader has to fill in the gap, as it were, from his own imagination. Ellipsis is one of the characteristics of his poetry. Such ellipsis or lacuna is not a deficiency on the part of the poet, but a merit, and it is filled when the objectified feeling is received into the soul of the reader or listener. In Ghalib, the implicit is bound by definite links with his inner experience. Even trite imagination becomes instruments of inner awareness:

Ask not about the waves of mirage
In the desert of loyalty:
There each particle of sand
Had the sharp quality of sword.

Here the words derive their force and value not from what they say so much as from the weight of experience which lies behind them.

Poetic creation needs the height of awareness on the part of the poet, but this is not to be equated with analytical intelligence. By the images the poet is like a man who ascends to higher ground and who sees all around him a vaster horizon, where relations are seen to establish themselves, relations which are not determined by logic or by the law of causality.

The poet's imaginative appreciation of beauty, and sensitive reaction to it produces the version of "glorious manifestation". The beautiful object, in spite of being external to the beholder, is always soaked in subjectivity. Ghalib penetrated the depths of the object of beauty as well as the depths of his own conscious and thus awakened the spiritual sense which is the greatest of poetic attributes.

In Ghalib human and erotic love sometimes evokes the longing for transcendental beauty, as is expressed in the following verses imbued with spiritual and mystical imagery:

Keh sakey kaun ke yeh Jalwa gari kis ke hai
Pardah choda hai who usne ke uthaye na baney

Who can tell
Whose is this glorious revelation?
He has let down veil
Such as none can lift.

Ghalib is fully aware of the tragic elements in human life, but he successfully transmutes awareness of this into creative energy, making his poetry all the richer for it.

Although born in a static and decadent social milieu Ghalib's approach to art and life has been dynamic, a characteristic not shared by any of his contemporary, it is this vitality that makes his poetry great. His response to reality is robust and at the same time, delicate. Everything in his verse throbs with life.

The audacity of Ghalib's thought, and the stream of his powerful ideas seem to flow as naturally as water gushes from a spring. He is fond of such images as wild madness, whirlwind, storm, flood, waves, birds in flight, captives struggling to free themselves, dancing atoms of dust, lightning. The greatness of Ghalib lies in his marriage of dynamic

thought with aesthetic sensibility. In this regard he is unique in the history of Urdu poetry and to estimate him one of the greatest poets of the whole world would not be an exaggeration.

Ghalib's poetry establishes the gulf between the esemplastic imagination and one shackled up with tradition however laudable, the esemplastic seeing the opposite in the very same breath as the object, the germinating point and the end, presenting them as an inseparable substance by a third character of the mind which excludes out each colour of a complex picture and then reassembles them into an intricate whole:

The world is full of the effulgence
Of the oneness of the well~beloved;
Where would we be if Beauty
Did not possess self-love '!
The music of the ebb and flow
Of life and oblivion are both false;
Absurd the thought of difference
Between madness and good sense.
Despair, like Spring, is only an image
In the looking-glass of contentment;
Doubt is but a mirror of the birth
Of the image of certainty.
Vain is the boast of wisdom, and
The gain of worship is - well-known
Mere dregs of the cup of negligence,
The world or religion.
Faith and unbelief arc both
A swell of the remorse of drunkenness,
Truth and doubt are the curvature
Of a line from a ruler drawn.
There's neither longing nor spectacle,
The sense of wonder nor the eye;
The mirror of the heart is veiled
In the amalgam of mercury.

This quality, thus, reflects the whole process of separating the colours of a painting and combining them again in the finished production, and make his poetry difficult. Unless

the reader's mind becomes a filter capable of separating and combining the colours, he cannot get into the spirit of the poet and know the tones and shades of his thought and feeling. And unless it is split up, the thought cannot be comprehended. Ghalib's imagination was, thus, panchromatic, sensitive to all the spectrums of thought. It could receive the different shades all at once and separate them too.

Conclusion

Ghalib by introducing philosophical concepts and conundrum of life in *Ghazal* increased the scope of *Ghazal* which prior to him was limited only to the theme of love and praise of women. Even though his symbols and imagers are ambiguous and incongruous yet they are modern as they give an insight into something contemporary thus appealing greatly the sensibility of the modern man. The weapon for all his feelings are his words. The value of his words lies in their grasping and systematising of his own discords. Feelings precede understanding in Ghalib's poetry because for him life is an emotional journey. Ghalib's imagination too is responsive to all the gamuts of thought; it accepts all the shades all at once and separates them too. Thus, his poetry comes across as the cumulative experience of a very sensitive soul which is open to absorbing knowledge from all walks of life. Thus, what Shakespeare is to the English literature, Ghalib to the Urdu literature.

References:

1. Abdul Rehman Bijnori, Muhasin Kalam-e-Ghalib (New Delhi : Anjuman Traqqi-e-Urdu, 1983), pp 89
2. Majnoon Gorakhpuri, Ghalib : Shakhsh aur Shair (Aligarh : Educational Book House, 1976), pp 64.
3. Longinus, On the Sublime in D. K. Chopra, ed. Literary Criticism: An Anthology (Meerut : Loyal Book Depot, 1974), pp 136-137.
4. Maurice Buxton Forman, ed., The Letters of John Keats (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p 222
5. Aileen Ward, John Keats : The Making of Poet (Lodon : Secker & Warburg, 1963), Chapt 1.
6. Yusuf Husain, Trans., Urdu Ghazals of Ghalib (New Delhi : Ghalib Institute, 1977), pp.168-169.