

CROSSING BOUNDARIES



**Musings on Language, Literature
and Culture**



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Edited by Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Crossing Boundaries

Musings on Language, Literature and Culture

Edited By

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CHAPTER 6

Mirza Ghalib as a Mystical Poet: Introducing Two Urdu Ghazals*Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof**International Islamic University Malaysia*

Abstract: Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797 – 1869), the most outstanding South Asian poet in both the Urdu and Persian languages, uses all major genres of classical poetry in his works. Possibly due to his rather unorthodox lifestyle as well as liberal ideas, he has remained a controversial figure. However, while Ghalib's poetry and his ghazals in particular lie at the very heart of the Indo-Persian tradition, they manifest stunning originality both in terms of language and subject matter. Given its nature and its particular qualities, the ghazal, essentially romantic in content, has traditionally been open to diverse interpretations between the literal and the spiritual or mystical. It is surprising that Ghalib's poetry, highly acknowledged for its excellence, has principally been seen in terms of its romantic rather than religious or mystical qualities. This paper attempts to establish Ghalib as a mystical poet through a detailed analysis of two of his most important ghazals.

Keywords: Mirza Ghalib, ghazal, Urdu poetry, Indian-Muslim literature

Introduction

Following the arrival of Islam in South Asia, there came about a magnificent flowering of culture in almost every sense of the word. The architectural monuments are almost everywhere in the region, as are other forms of artistic expression. As far as literature goes, there came about the introduction of a whole range of genres including *qasidah*, *mathnawi*, *rubai* and *qissa* and *the ghazal*. Many of the poets wrote in several of these genres, using both the Persian and Urdu languages. The illustrious list of classical authors begins with Amir Khurso who was succeeded by the likes of Mir Taqi Mir, Khwaja Mir Dard, Sauda, Mirza Ghalib himself, and even the last emperor of the Mughal dynasty, Bahadur Shah Zafar. Names in the pre-modern period include Momin and they were in turn succeeded in the early decades of the twentieth century by Muhammad Iqbal and others.

The *ghazal* is a particularly important and popular form of literary expression in South Asia, reaching the Indian sub-continent from Iran where it was blossomed from an initial branch planted in Arabic literature (see Fatima,1995). Over the centuries it came to attain, in the Indian sub-continent, a unique status as the most important of all genres of traditional literature from the lands of Islam.

Technicalities of the ghazal

The ghazal is a poem made up of several couplets (*sher*) generally unrelated to each other in terms of meaning, and the relationship between them exists in terms of the technical structure of each *sher*. By extension the term ghazal is often applied to a *sher* in itself, to the extent that the distinction disappears. In effect a ghazal is a series of several independent, self-inclusive *shers*. It is thus not a complete poem in the