"WHO IS" GHALIB

Fact and Fiction in some of Ghālib's Autobiographical Statements

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[Author's Note: This — from an unpublished book on Ghālib — is mainly an attempt at explaining in terms of a poet's self-image some mythical-seeming statements made by Ghalib about his ancestry, early youth and poetic apprenticeship.]

One of Ghāib's favourite topics was his genealogy, which he traced to ancient kings. To begin with, here is a seemingly playful poetic argument, the major premise of which is a matter-of-fact claim that he is descended from Pushang and Afrā siyāb and, through them, from Jamshed, said to have been the inventor of wine in Iran:-

"I am a scion, O sāqī, of Pushang and Afrāsiyāb.

So you know Jamshed's kingdom is my family estate.

Come give me wine, which is part of my royal heritage:

And as for Heaven, O let that legacy of Adam wait."

In the following quatrain he names Afrāsiyāb's grandfather,

Zādsham, as his progenitor:-

"O Ghālib, I belong to Zādsham's line,

And so my mind is as keen as a sword.

No more a warrior, I am now a bard;

My forebear's broken arrow is my pen."

"1 am of Turkish origin," he asserts more baldly in a letter to an acquaintance, Maulawi Sirāj al-Din, "and my ancestry goes back to Afrāsiyāb and Pushang." Now, these illustrious men arc not authentic historical figures,

but epic heroes belonging to the borderland between Iranian mythology and prehistory. But Ghālib did not know this, as we do today. The irreverent hand of research had not yet divested these venerable figures of the cloak of historical make-believe in which so-called historical writings like Mirzā Jalāl al-Din's "Nāma-i-Khusrawān", deriving their materials from poetry and folklore, had clothed them; and Ghālib had no reason to be ahead of his time in historical knowledge or curiosity.

The obvious explanation is that he had taken his ancestry on ' from his elders as a family tradition. Nor was there anything naive about his having done so. Who, especially if he was a poet, would not be happy to learn that his remote ancestor was Joshed, the. inventor and owner of the world-reflecting wine-cup which is one f the archetypal symbols of Persian and Urdu poetry, signifying as all-comprehending intellect ? And, happy in this knowledge, who would not be proud to share it with the world ? Modesty in speaking of one's origins was not a virtue practised in Ghālib's society; and is Ghālib's case, as we shall see by and by, there were great strains upon it.

No matter who were Ghālib's ancestors in hoary antiquity, their successors in historical times gain in credibility what they lose in romantic glamour. "My forefathers," continues Ghālib in the letter from which we have quoted above, "because of blood relationship with the Saljuqīs carried aloft the standard of rulership and military leadership during their time. When the fortunes of their patrons declined, some of them took to the highway and others to agriculture. My branch of the family settled at Samarqand in Tūrān."

From here on the story has been better told in a biographical note Ghālib furnished about himself to an Englishman named Rattigan, who was compiling a tazkira (an anthology with biographical notes) of, contemporary poets writing in Persian.

"Asad-Allah Khān, alias Mirzā Naushah", so runs the note, to' begin at the beginning, "nom de plume Ghālib, Seljuqī Turk, descendant of Sultān Barkiaruk. His grandfather, (Qūqān Beg Khān, came to Delhi from Samarqand during the reign of Shāh ʻĀlam and entered the Emperor's service as a commander of fifty horse with a personal kettle-drum and standard. The pargana of Phasu, which has now been granted by the government to the Begum of Sumro, was granted to his as his personal estate. The said Asad-Allah Khān's father, ʻAbd-Allah Beg Khān, left his estate in Delhi and migrated to Akbarabad, whets Asad-Allah Khān was born. ʻAbd-Allah Beg

Khān then took service with Rāo Raja Bakhtāwar Singh of Alwar and was killed there bravely fighting in a battle, when Asad-Allah Khan was only five or six years old. Asad-Allah Khān's paternal uncle, Nasr-Allah Beg Khān, was at that time the subadar of Akbarabad under the Marhattas. When, in 1803, General Lake attacked Akbarabad, Nasr-Allah Khān voluntarily surrendred the city to him. As a reward for this, the General appointd him a brigadier over 400 horse on a salary of Rs. 1700. Later, when Nasr-Allah Khan wrested the parganas of Sonk and Sonra from Holkar's cavalry, the General granted the parganas to him in perpetuity. But Nasr-Allah Khān was killed by a fall from the back of an elephant ten months later. His estate was resumed by the government and, in lieu thereof, an annual pension was awarded to his heirs, out of which Asad-Allah Khān gets Rs. 750 a year."

Before ʻAbd-Allah Beg joined the service of the Rāja of Alwar, he tried his luck elsewhere. "In the chaos that followed the death of my grandfather," writes Ghālib in a letter to Munshi Habib-Allah Zakā, "my father lost his Phasu estate and went to Lucknow, where he entered the service of Nawāb Āsaf al-Daula. After some time he proceeded to Hyderabad, where he served Nawāb Nizām ʻAli Khān as a commander of 300 horse for several years. He lost his job as the result of a domestic quarrel and betook himself to Alwar in a distracted state of mind."

Dogged as ʻAbd-Allah Beg's career was by misadventures, he was fortunate enough to marry into a leading family of Agra (the other name of Akbarabad). His father-in-law, Commandant Ghulām Husain Khan, was a military officer under the British and a fairly big land-owner; and his house was a haven of carefree rest for ʻAbd-Allah Beg during the intervals between his wanderings. It was there that Ghālib was born, on 27 December, 1797, and spent his childhood and early youth. He had happy memories of the time he spent under his maternal grandfather's roof.

"We used to play chess and chat, often till after midnight," he writes to Munshi Shiv Narā'in, Proprietor of the Mufidi-Khalā'iq Press, speaking of his intimacy with Shiv Narā'in's grandfather, Munshi Bansidhar. "We were more or less the same age. He used to visit me quite frequently, because his house was not very far from ours, there being between our two houses only the house of the singing-woman Machhia and two *katras* (lanes) belonging to us. Our main *haweli* (mansion) was the one which has now been bought by Seth Lakhmi Chand. My sitting-room was on top of the twelve-gate stone balcony that formed its entrance (At three removes from it) there was a katra known

as the Kashmiranwalla *katra*. From the roof of one of the houses in that *katra* I used to fly kites and have kite matches with Raja Balwān Singh."

These innocent pleasures, we may be sure, were not the only ones that Ghālib enjoyed as a youthful member of the decadent aristocracy of Agra at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In an autobiographical passage in his Mihri-Nīmrūz he figuratively hints at less venial forms of self-indulgence. He does not name them; but we can well guess that they included gambling and drinking, which were his besetting sins in later life. There are indications even of an affair of the heart with a Domni (a low-caste singing woman). Ghālib refers to his gay youth in different moods: with a light-hearted self-satire or self-caricature, with a nostalgia for good old days gone never to come back, with a gnawing remorse for precious time wasted, with penitence for grave sins committed and, here and there, with something akin to objective self-criticism. The ambivalence is particularly noticeable in regard to his love affair.

"Listen, my friend," he writes in a letter of condolence to Mirzā Ḥātim ʻAlī Mihr on the death of his mistress Chunnā Jān, "there are three outstanding men in three allied fields — Firdausī among poets, Ḥasan of Basra among mystics and Majnun among lovers. It is the height of achievement for a poet to become a second Firdausī, for a mystic to become a second Ḥasan of Basra and for a lover to become a second Majnūn. Lailā died before Majnūn's eyes. So did your beloved before yours. In fact, you excel Majnun in that, while Lail' died at her father's house, your beloved died at yours. I say, Mughuls are terrible people: they kill anyone whom they love. Being a Mughul, I too have killed one woman. May God grant salvation to both of our sweethearts and may He also have mercy on us, recipients of the wound of separation from them. My affair happened forty or forty-two years ago. I am no longer in that field now and have been reduced to almost a tyro in the art."

"My dear Mīrzā," he says in another letter to Ḥātim ʻAli on the same subject, "I don't like this kind of thing. I am 65 years old. For 55 years I was an epicure at large in the world of pleasure. In my early youth a great spiritual mentor counselled me to eschew piety and renunciation and have my fill of sin and self-indulgence. ʻEat, drink and be merry,' he said to me, ʻbut be like a fly that sits on sugar candy for a moment and then flies away, and not like a bee sedulously collecting honey.' I have acted upon this wise counsel. Only he should cry over another person's death who is never going to die himself.

What's all this mourning and wailing for? You should be thankful for your deliverance rather than cry over it. But if you are so fond of being in chains, then choose a Munnā Jān in place of your Chunnā Jān, I for one shudder to think of paradise and the prospect (in the event of my salvation) of a palace with a single houri in it, with whom I should have to spend the whole of eternity. Life everlasting with a single woman, houri or no houri, would be hell."

The levity of these letters--probably assumed in order to set to Ḥatim 'Ali an example of how to make light of one's sorrows--contrasts strongly with the solemn elegiac note struck in the following *ghazal*, which, if it was addressed to any real creature of flesh and blood, must have been addressed to the Domni, Ghālib's only known love .-

"If you had not the strength to bear the shock of It,

Why did you choose to share my misery, alas?

For you to be my friend was being your own foe.

Why did you think of thus befriending me, alas ?

What matter if you pledged to me a life-long troth?

For life does not endure eternally, alas!

A poison to me is the climate of this life;

For it did not treat you congenially, alas!

What has become of beauty's riotous showers of flowers?

Now tulips grow on your grave silently, alas !

To guard our secret you took shelter underground;

That was the height of lovers' secrecy, alas !

The honour of love's troth has been reduced to dust;

Gone from the world is all fidelity, alas !

O how is one to spend the long, dark rainy nights

Without the beads of the stars' rosary, alas!

No message for my ears, no beauty for my eyes

To see: for one heart all this agony, alas!

My love had not grown into a mad passion yet:

I had not had my fill of calumny, alas !"

What Ghālib regrets in these verses is that his love remained a timid, clandestine affair instead of growing into a grand passion and a famous story like the love of Mājnūn, the Arab madman who is the ideal lover in Persian and Urdu poetry. It has been suggested by some of Ghālib's biographers, probably from an anxiety to save his fair name as a man of noble birth from being smirched, that the word "Domni" used by Ghālib in this context was only a mask to hide the identity of his beloved, who was actually a lady belonging to a higher order of society. This well-meaning suggestion is falsified by Ghālib's speaking of her along with Ḥātim 'Ali's mistress Chunna Jan, who, it is clear from her name, was a member of the demi-monde. Ghālib's mistress, we are forced to conclude, was at best a singing-woman of a class slightly higher than a Domni. There is also some doubt as to whether the affairs belonged to Ghālib's early years at Agra or to his maturer years in Delhi, where, as we shall presently see, he went to live a few years after his marriage. No matter who his mistress was, and at what period she came into his life, let us bless her memory for making Ghālib experience that heartache without which no genuine love poetry or, for that matter, no genuine poetry, was ever written. Every now and again she lifts a corner of the veil of conventional diction that Ghālib was compelled to use in speaking of matters of love, quietly reassuring us that she actually existed in the world of flesh and blood before she was transported to the realm of his imagination to inspire him constantly as a bitter-sweet memory. The role of the beloved of the *ghazal*--that enigmatic being, to be spoken of and spoken to in the masculine gender, but essentially a woman in character and habits, a personified abstraction, but with all the quirks and foibles of an individual human being seems to suit her mysterious, undefined identity in a peculiar

manner.

Thus, in the matter of actual experience of love — love for a woman — Ghālib was luckier than most Persian and Urdu poets, who, because of the restrictive conventions of their society, had to be content with imaginary experiences and other poor substitutes for the genuine thing. His married life did not afford him anything like it. He was married on 9 August, 1810, at the absurdly early age of 13 years to a girl two years his junior —Umrāo Begum, daughter of Ilāhī Bakhsh Khān Ma'rūf, younger brother of Nawāb Ahmad Bakhsh Khān, ruling chief of Loharu. This marriage, which brought Ghālib a degree of social elevation, was, as marriages go, quite successful in that husband and wife lived their separate lives together under the same roof to the bitter end. It, however, was not a happy marriage. All Ghālib's references to it show that clearly and unmistakably.

"Listen," he says allegorically in a letter to Nawāb Amin al-Din Khān, "there are two worlds, that of spirit and that of matter. The ruler of both is He who asks 'Who is the Lord of Time?' and then Himself answers 'The One and Almighty God.' Although the general practice is that those who have committed sins in the material world are punished in the spiritual, yet it sometimes happens that sinners of the spiritual world are sent to the material world for punishment. Thus, I was arrested and sent to this world for trial on 8 Rajab, 1212 A. H. I remained in the lock-up for 13 years, after which on 17 Rajab 1225 A. H. a sentence of life imprisonment was pessed on me. A shackle on my foot, I was imprisoned in Delhi, with writing prose and verse assigned as my labour. I escaped from prison years later and wandered in the eastern regions. At last I was rearrested in Calcutta and brought back to Delhi. To prevent my escaping again two more shackles were put on my feet." The first shackle in this passage stands for Ghālib's wife and the additional two stand for two nephews of his wife's whom he had adopted, having no surviving children of his own.

"I am sorry for Umrāo Singh, but at the same time I envy him," he writes to Munshi Hargopāl Tafta, referring to news given by him of the death of his second wife some years after the death of his first. "There are some lucky people whose fetters are removed twice; but here am I with a halter round my neck for the last 51 years. The halter neither snaps nor strangles me."

Here is a quatrain in a satirical vein on this subject:-

"O pilgrim, going Ka'baward,

I know A virtuous impulse is impelling you.
But you are running as if for dear life.
Are you fleeing a wife who is a shrew?"
Here is another:-

"How unwise is the man who takes a wife!

For he can never get relief from grief.

No woman rules God's house, the world.

That is the secret of His might, in brief."

"On one occasion," writes Ghālib's greatest biographer, Ḥāli, "the Mirzā (Ghālib) wanted to change his house. He went and inspected a house. He liked the male portion, but could not have a look at the female one. So he sent his wife to look at it. When she returned, he asked her opinion. She said that the house was reported to be haunted by evil spirits. 'What evil spirit in the world,' exclaimed Ghālib, 'dare compete with you, my dear?"

Some of Ghālib's biographers, chief among them Ḥālī, have tried to explain away these utterances of his as involuntary outflowings of an exuberant humour. But so interpreted, they represent Ghālib as a cracker of poor jokes, a sort of enfant terrible who allowed his impish high jinks to run away with his good taste and good manners. It is not doing any service to Ghālib, whether as a man or as a poet, to suggest that, though quite happily married, he indulged in wisecracks at the expense of marriage as an institution and of his own marriage in particular. That is attributing to him either flippancy or insincerity to his own experience. It is only fair to him to accept the obvious fact that he was not happily married. At the same time, it is only fair to Umrāo Begum to admit that he could never be happily married, no matter who was his wife; for he was not cut out for the life of a married man. Living poetry all the time, so to speak — thinking it, composing it, reciting it, listening to it recited, reading it, writing about it, discussing it, correcting it for others—with intervals of drinking to prime himself, and bouts of gambling to refresh himself, for it: such, in brief, was the pattern of his daily life. Little room as there was in this routine for the duties of a husband and house-holder, it must be said to Ghālib's credit that he performed them to the best of his ability; but they were never a pleasure to

him. His quips about married life, in both good and ill humour, were thus a form of mental escape from a vexatious predicament. To the credit of Umrāo Begum, it must be acknowledged that she was as good a wife as Ghālib could wish for or deserve. Brought up, as girls of the Muslim nobility in those days were, to a strict regimen of religious and domestic duties, she was all that a normal man of her class — a good Muslim and a good householder could expect his wife to be. But Ghālib was not that kind of man. Nevertheless, she dutifully kept house for him and attended to his personal needs and comforts. In the latter task, however, she had to stop short of compromising her religious principles and sentiments. Not only were Ghālib's alcoholic drinks looked after and served by his personal servant in the *dīwānkhāna* (i. e. the part of the house used exclusively by the menfolk as a sitting-room *cum* study), where he used to take most of his meals; but, because of her disapproval of his drinking, his eating and drinking untensils were kept separate from those of the rest of the family. This was orthodoxy carried to the point of treating Ghālib as a pariah in his own house, and must have been one of the major irritants that evoked ill-humoured comments from him on married life. As for Ghālib's innuendoes about her being a shrew, there was presumably some justification for them from his point of view; for she could not have helped nagging him. Ghālib never did a day's work to earn a living, unless we can give that name to his spasmodic attempts at winning rewards from the Mughul king or ruling chiefs by writing panegyrics on them — mostly half-hearted because of his being too proud to stoop to the kind of fulsome flattery that conventionally went into that genre of verse or to his lifelong struggle to obtain what he considered his rightful pension in lieu of his uncle's resumed estates. A typical member of a decadent aristocracy, living on unearned incomes in the shape of hereditary grants and pensions, the residue of ancestral fortunes, not always well-acquired, Ghālib never seems to have thought of exploring some means of earning a living. There was one excellent opportunity he got of becoming a respectable salaried servant of the government. That was when, in 1842, he was invited by the Secretary to the Government of India to an interview for the post of Professor of Persian at the Delhi College. But his diabolic aristocratic pride made him decline the post simply because the Secretary had not come out to the porch of his house to receive him, as he had expected he would do to show due honour to a *r'ais*, — (grandee). "I was seeking government service," he told the Secretary when the latter came out

against his original intention in answer to a complaining message sent to him by Ghālib through a peon, "to enhance, and not to diminish, the respect enjoyed by me as a member of the aristocracy." With this antiquated concept of socio-economic values, with an uncertain and at best inadequate income from his pension and with expensive personal habits, Ghālib could not expect his wife never to reproach him. But the imperious egocentricity of genius is a law unto itself and knows no other laws, least of all those that impose domestic obligations.

Another figure in Ghālib's life, no less important than those we have so far dealt with, and no less mysterious either, is a person known as Mullā ʻAbd al-Samad. His importance lies in this that Ghālib claimed to have sat at his feet for two years, during which, as he used to declare proudly and with ample justification, he learned more Persian than any other Indian, whether among his contemporaries or belonging to a generation or two earlier than his, knew. ʻAbd al-Ṣamad's mysteriousness lies in this that there still rages a controversy as to whether he ever actually existed. There are innumerable statements about Mullā ʻAbd al-Ṣamad in Ghālib's writings. The statements contain far fewer facts about him than compliments, often in rhetorical language, to his ancestry, scholarship and piety.

Here is Ghālib's fullest single description of Mullā ʻAbd al-Ṣamad contained in a letter he wrote to Maulawi Ḍiā' al-Din Ḍiā' of Delhi, which was published in the January 1934 issue of The Hindustani, the quarterly organ of the United Provinces Hindustani Academy."During my early schooling," he writes, "I read up to the Sharḥ .Mr at-u-Amil, after which I became absorbed, first in play and then in self-indulgence and pleasure-seeking. I had a natural bent for the Persian language and for poetry. As luck would have it, a man, who was descended from Sāsān the Fifth and who, along with his other accomplishments, was the equal of the late Maulawī Faḍl al-Haq in the knowledge of logic and philosophy, besides being a devout and pious Muslim, arrived in my city. From him I learned the finer points of pure Persian and the subtleties of Persian mixed with Arabic. This was the acid test of the gold in me. With my inborn aptitude for the Persian language, the tutelage of a teacher who was, without exaggeration, the Jāmāsp and Buzurjmihr of the age, instilled into me the inwardness of that language."

Elsewhere Ghālib states the following further facts about 'Abd al-Ṣamad. Originally a Zoroastrian named Hurmuzd, he was a high-ranking

nobleman of Yazd in Iran. After acquiring Arabic scholarship from eminent teachers in Arabia and Baghdad for fifty years, he had embraced Islam and, changing his name to ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, had come to India. He stayed for two years at Ghālib's maternal grandfather's house at Agra (including, probably, a stay with Ghālib in Delhi) and then left India for good. He corresponded with Ghālib from abroad and in one of his letters wrote to him: "So dear are you to me that, in spite of my detachment from the world, I remember you every now and again."

As Ḥālī had an opportunity of learning the facts at first hand from Ghālib himself, let us hear him on the subject. "Although the Mirzā has now and then been heard saying", writes Ḥālī, "that he was nobody's pupil but God's and that ‘Abd al-Samad was merely a fictitious figure, invented by him because people used to taunt him with being self-educated ; yet there is no doubt that there actually was a man named ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, who was of Pārsī origin, and that the Mīrzā learned some Persian from him. Thus, the Mīrza has frequently in his writings spoken proudly of having been ‘Abd al-Ṣamad's pupil and has used of him the word *Temsār*, which is a title of great honour among the Pārsīs. Nevertheless, as the Mīrzā has clarified in some of his writings, he was only 14 years old when ‘Abd al-Ṣamad arrived at his house, and the latter stayed with him for only two years. Thus, when we consider at what a tender age and for what a short period the Mirzā enjoyed his company, it seems to make little difference whether or not ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ever existed and whether or not he taught the Mīrzā. Therefore the Mīrzā was not wrong in saying that he was not indebted to the tutelage of anybody except God. He has beautifully expressed the idea of his direct indebtedness to God in the following lines:

‘Whatever is there in the Primal Source

is all my property.

The flower not yet culled from its branch is in

My lap as owned by me.'

"He has made the same point more beautifully in another place:

I have excelled the ancients in deriving from the Source,

Because I came to it when it was fuller than before.

I saw the light of day in twelve hundred and twelve A.H.,

Khusrau and Sa'adī in six-fifty, that is, days of yore.'

"Mullā ʻAbd al-Samad, besides knowing Persian as his mother-tongue and the language of his community's religion, was, as Ghālib writes, a great scholar of Arabic. Although the Mīrzā enjoyed his company for a very brief period, yet for a genius like him to find in his childhood an affectionate teacher of this kind, who was a master of two languages, was one of those fortunate circumstances which are of rare occurrence."

It is obvious that Ḥālī has not squarely faced the contradiction between Ghālib's written statements and his oral admission. As a matter of fact, in trying to gloss over it he has involved himself in an equally serious contradiction: he both emphasises and minimises the importance of 'Abd al-Ṣamad from the point of view of Ghālib's Persian scholarship. Ṣālī's acceptance of the literal truth of Ghālib's written statements about ʻAbd al-Samad, it would seem, proceeded more from his veneration for Ghālib than from any independent inquiry, of which, it is significant, he has discreetly omitted any mention. What is still more significant is that no corroboration of them is available from any source. Even such references to ʻAbd al-Ṣamad as are found in con-temporary writings seem to assume his existence on Ghālib's authority. I At any event, nobody ever seems to have. met him.

Perhaps the best thing we for our part can do about ʻAbd al-Samad is to accept him as the imaginative analogue of the legendary heroes whom Ghālib hailed as his remote ancestors. The latter were necessary for his pride of birth, the former for his pride in his linguistic attainments. The only difference was that he had to invent the former, whereas he found the latter ready to hand in his family traditions. Bali casually mentions that towards the end of his life Ghalib started writing a fable or allegory, which, however, he never completed. Who . knows if 'Abd al-Ṣamad was going to be its hero? In a way 'Abd al-Ṣamad is Ghālib himself, his alter ego, his persona, with some easily recognizable points of resemblance, such as descent from a king of hoary antiquity, birth in a noble family, and interest in mysticism. If 'Abd al-Ṣamad with his profound knowledge of logic and philosophy makes up for a, deficiency which Ghālib was, without much justification, conscious of in

himself, Ghālib reciprocates this by being an exponent of the mysteries of reality, whereas 'Abd al-Ṣamad was only a knower of them. Considered as Ghālib's double, 'Abd al-Ṣamad acquires an importance even greater than that which a literal acceptance of Ghālib's accounts of him gives him or that with which Ghālib's literal-minded biographers have been able to invest him.* Symbolically, he is Ghālib's intellect, the faculty with whose help he acquired the knowledge necessary for his art.

Ghālib's other teacher, Maulawi Muḥmmad Mu'aẓẓam, was, unlike Mullā 'Abd al-Ṣamad, an actual historical figure, one of the leading scholars of Agra; but even to him Ghālib cannot conceivably have owed much of a debt; for he attended the MauIawī's lessons hardly for a year or two when he was only 12 or 13 years old.

Ghālib's poetry, especially so far as his Persian qaṣīdas and *mathnawīs* are concerned, is richly laden with allusions, imagery, figures of speech and technical terms drawn from a wide range of learning, such as was current in his society, especially logic, philosophy, astronomy and medicine. He has a copious Arabic and Persian vocabulary and displays complete mastery over Persian, and a fair working knowledge of Arabic grammar. He has also demonstrated prosodic skill of a high order by composing in difficult and rarely used metres, beyond the competence of the common run of poets. How did he acquire all this learning and skill? It was the fashion in his day for writers, and especially poets, to attach themselves to some eminent scholar or poet as his pupils, and it used to be a matter of pride for them to attribute their attainments to their teachers: the more eminent the teacher, the greater used to be the pupils' pride. Ghālib had no such teacher, and was in the fullest sense of the term self-educated. This was something his contemporaries could not understand. His scholarship would always remain suspect in their eyes; in fact, he was often taunted with being untutored. So, to counter this, he not only invented Mulla ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, but talked of his

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* Having reached these conclusions independently, although in a rather vague manner, I have been encouraged to set them forth by the confirmation they receive from an essay on 'Abd al-Ṣamad by Qadi 'Abd al-Wadud (Ahwal-i-Ghalib by Dr, Mukhtar al-Din Ahmed, Maktaba-i-Jami'a, Delhi, 1953), the most thorough piece of research so far published on the subject. — Author.

debt to Maulawī Muhammad Mu'aẓẓam, although he can have owed the latter practically nothing beyond an elementary knowledge of Persian. Driven into a corner, however, he would hurl at his critics the proud and magnificent truth that he was indebted to nobody but God, that is to say, the divine spark in him. Remarkable as was his attainment to a high level of learning unaided by a teacher, what was still more remarkable was that he never owned any book and had seldom by his side any but a few borrowed, according to need, from a library run by a local bookseller or from friends. He was, however, an avid reader and whatever he read he not only retained in his memory, but converted into material ready to be put to use in his art. It was thus the alchemy of the poetic gift, turning everything that came its way to gold, and neither formal schooling nor constant consultation of books that was the source of the wealth of learning which much of his poetry displays with an effortless brilliance. The virtuoso of poetry took the dilettante of learning in hand and raised him to the eminence of a genuine scholar and philosopher.

As regards Ghālib's apprenticeship in poetry, it has been suggested by some of his biographers that he served it for some time under Naẓīr of Akbarabad. No greater compliment could have been paid to that writer of what for want of a better name can only be called "popular poetry"-- poetry having for its themes the life and thoughts and feelings of the common people, peasants, artisans, woodcutters, jugglers and tramps, and describing them in popular language. Ghalib's fastidious Muse could never have relished such coarse fare. Indeed, no two poets could be more unlike each other. The untmost that is conceivably possible is that Ghālib took some advice on the elementary technique of versification from Naẓīr, which he may well have done; for Naẓir, no matter what the themes and style of his poetry, was no mean craftsman and was, in any case, the most prominent poet then living at Agra.

There were, however, two men who, it seems, did influence Ghālib's poetic development. These were his father-in-law, Nawāb Ilāhī Bākhsh Din Ma'ruf, and his friend, Maulawi Faḍl-i-Ḥaq of Khairābād. They diverted him from a path that led to a quicksand. Ambitious from the very first, he had chosen for his model the most difficult of Persian poets, namely. Mirzā 'Abd al-Qādir Bedil, whose unfamiliar diction, involved syntax, far-fetched conceits and complexity of meaning probably intrigued him as a useful foil to the lack of formal learning he was conscious of in himself. But imitation of Bedil in Urdu was doomed to be a self-defeating exercise. Bedil's poetry was

the crowning achievement of an already existing school of Persian poetry, and his greatness consisted essentially in exhausting the possibilities of the tradition to which he was heir. Neither Urdu nor the traditions of Urdu poetry, on the other hand, provided a soil favourable to verses written in Bedil's style. What was, therefore, originality, a rich ambiguity and metaphysical subtlety in Bedil became oddity, obscurity and, indeed, something bordering on nonsense in Ghalib. Ma'ruf and Faḍl-i-Ḥaq warned Ghālib against chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of a wrongheaded ambition, that of becoming a greater Bedil in Urdu. Ma'rūf was not only a good poet himself, but also a ṣūfī—a practising one. In his company Ghālib acquired not only a working knowledge of mysticism, of which he made excellent use in his poetry, but also that receptivity to things spiritual which was necessary for moderating his purely intellectual approach to life and art. Faḍl-i-Ḥaq, besides being a finished scholar in the current intellectual disciplines, had an impeccable poetic taste. The example of Ma'raf and the friendly criticism of Faḍl-i-Ḥaq between them made Ghalib turn over a new leaf in his poetic practice. Abandoning Bedil, he turned to other masters, such as 'Urfi and Naẓiri, who were better, because easier, models for him to follow.

Two even greater men are also believed to have had something to do with this change. One of them was no less a man than Mir Taqi Mir, the greatest poet of Urdu before Ghālib. According to a story told by Hali on Ghālib's own authority, a friend of his, NawābḤisām al-Din Ḥaidar Khān, having recited some of Ghālib's verses to Mir, the great Olympian remarked: " If this boy gets a good master who can set his feet on the right path, he will become an unrivalled poet; otherwise he will soon begin to write nonsense." The truth of this story has been challenged like that of some others told or reported to have been told by Ghalib about himself. Ghālib, it is argued, was hardly 13 when Mir died at the ripe old age of 88, too far gone during his last years in senile decay for any sensible man to inflict on him the tortuous lucubrations of a mere fledgling and for him to express an opinion on them. The argument is not unanswerable if we assume the not _too fanciful possibility that, in the first place, Hisām al-Din Khān thought Ghālib's verses worth reciting to Mir and that, in the second place, he was on friendly enough terms with Mir to make him pay attention to them during one of his comparatively bright moments. But whatever the literal truth of the story, the point of it is that Ghālib let Mir pilot him into the main stream of Urdu

poetry instead of adhering to his self-charted course, which would have landed him in a shoal.

The second great man who weaned Ghālib from his early eccentricity was the famous Persian scholar-poet, Shaikh ʻAli Ḥazin, who, as GhAlib wrote in the epilogue to his collected Persian verse, "made known to me with a veiled smile my strayings from the right path." Although Ḥazin visited India during Ghālib's early years, we do not know for certain whether the admonition took place at an actual or an imaginary interview. The context suggests the latter rather than the former; for Ghālib goes on to describe similar physical demonstrations of disapproval regarding his early poetic style by Ṭa̲lib Āmuli, ʻUrfi Shirāzi, Ẓahūri and Naẓiri, all of whom had long been dead. However, whether actually or metaphorically, Ḥazin, with his unsparing criticism of all departures from the highroad of Persian poetry in its homeland, helped to guide Ghālib's wayward steps on to that highroad.

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