

## Death Poetry of Mirza Ghalib: A Critical Evaluation

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### Abstract

Mirza Ghalib does not need any kind of introduction as he is a world famous poet for having made a significant contribution to the Urdu and Persian literature. He says about himself as a poet:

ہیں اور بھی دنیا میں سخن ور بہت اچھے  
کہتے ہیں کہ غالب کا ہے اندازِ بیاں اور

haiñ aur bhī duniyā meñ suḵhan-var bahut achchhe

kahte haiñ ki 'ghālib' kā hai andāz-e-bayāñ aur

At the same time Ghalib is very popular in South Asia even among unlettered people both because of the striking universal appeal of his verses and his style. One of the predominant concerns of his poetry is the way Ghalib talks about death. The theme of death is the quintessential feature of his poetry. It is such an important theme of his poetry that it almost gains the status of a character in his poetry as it occurs again and again in his poetry. Therefore the present research paper makes an attempt to highlight this particular obsessional tendency of Ghalib and relates it with these life events which kept haunting him from time to time. An attempt has also been made to look at the different connotations of death as used by Ghalib across his poetry. There are many aspects in his which have been critically examined by critics all over the world but this aspect-the most predominant feature of his poetry has not been examined at all, hence the present research paper makes an attempt to examine it critically. The paper also highlights how Ghalib foregrounds this unconventional technique of the treatment of death which creates defamiliarisation.

**Keywords:** Sukhan var, Aandaz e bayan, Niggardly, Foreground, Defamiliarization.

## **Main Body**

Mirza Ghalib is one such poet whose philosophy of poetry cannot be fully compartmentalized in one particular theory as he flouts all the conventions or sets new standards for all times to come. The proverb "it is folly to

be wise where ignorance is bliss” becomes all the more meaningful when applied to Ghalib. He probably did not have the consciousness of the two poetic philosophical schools like ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ or ‘Art for Life’s Sake’, as then he would not have become as great a poet as he is. It is this blissful ignorance that made him delve deep in the oceans of imagination and create matchless poetry which has a perennial universal appeal. It is precisely because of these qualities in him that Iqbal puts Ghalib and Shakespeare on the same pedestal and showers praises on both of them. Ghalib’s art, like that of Shakespeare, Dante and Sophocles can never become outdated and lose its relevance. They cut across the barriers of time and touch the soft strings of heart in every age. What Shakespeare said in one of his sonnets, “So long as men can breathe and eyes can see, so long lives this and gives life to thee”, S R Murthy (1988), stands true to the poetry of Ghalib equally. However the argument of this paper is to highlight and critically examine the dominant theme of death in his poetry. The theme of death is the single most characteristic feature in the poetry of Ghalib. Just as it is said about Shakespeare’s sonnets that Time is one of the characters in his sonnets as many of the sonnets revolve around the theme of Time, in the same way, Ghalib is so fond and preoccupied with the theme of Death that he toys with it every now and then. It would be therefore right to say that Death (personified) is one of the major characters in his poetry. The paper therefore makes an attempt to highlight Ghalib’s obsessional tendency with

the theme of death. Based on the analysis of the verses on death it is noteworthy to mention that Ghalib's attitude towards death is marked by ambivalence. Sometimes he takes death as a release from the sufferings of life and at other times he presumes himself already dead. In this connection Ali R Fatihi in his article titled "Death Metaphors in the Poetry of Ghalib" highlights all the possible connotations of death as used by Ghalib across his poetry. The several ways in which Ghalib interprets death based on the analysis of his verses is as under:

*Death is a better location*

*Death is life*

*Death is a summoner*

*Death is paying a debt*

*Death is the final destination*

*Death is a journey of departure*

*Death is loss*

*Death is regrouping and joining*

*Death is surrender and submission*

*Death is sleep.*

Not only in poetry, Ghalib is so much obsessed with the theme of death that he even mentions it in his letters too. In one of his letters in 1860 which he wrote to his friend he uses the metaphor of death amusingly by referring to a well-known courtesan of his times who had become fond of his poetry. Ghalib writes:

مغل بچے بھی آجب ہوتے ہے جس پر مرتے ہے اُس ہی  
کو مار رکھتیں ہیں  
ایک بڑی ستم دُومنی کو میں نے بھی مار رکھا ہے۔

*These Mughal children are strange. The one whom they die  
for, they end up killing. I too have killed a cruel courtesan.*

The idea expressed in the letter is rendered by him in some of his couplets too like the following:

محبت میں نہیں ہے فرق جینے اور مرنے کا  
اُسی کو دیکھ کر جیتے ہے جس کا فر پہ دام نکلے

*When in love, there is little difference between life and  
death,*

*The same infidel is my life, for whom I could give my last  
breath.*

In the lines above, Ghalib says that love transcends the boundary between life and death. The idea is complete submission of one's existence in love i.e. we live by losing our existence in love.

To understand the possible reasons behind Ghalib's obsessional tendencies with the theme of death, it is worthwhile to take a look at the life history of Ghalib which ultimately shaped his poetic temperament and led him to reflect on the theme of death. Ghalib was born in his maternal grandfather's home and was the second of three children. The eldest one was his sister and the youngest

his brother, namely Yusuf Ali Khan. It is said and recorded also that his brother developed mental illness at the age of 29 which continued till his death in 1857 when the Mutiny was in progress. This was followed by the death of his father and his uncle which probably made Ghalib a bit indisciplined as a result of which he did not take his life seriously. He drifted into an easy and carefree life of leisure. He spent time in kite flying, cock fighting, gambling, sat in the company of dancing girls and developed the habit of drinking quite early. At the age of thirteen he got married to a girl who was just eleven. From his letters and other accounts, the marriage did not turn out to be a happy marriage due to their incompatibility. Umrao Begum, Ghalib's wife was a typical housewife, a devoted Muslim and religious at heart and she did not go well with Ghalib's unorthodox beliefs, extravagant habits, drinking, debts and his defiant outlook. N. N. Wig in his article on Ghalib titled "A New Evaluation of Ghalib and his Poetry" writes that Ghalib wrote a letter to Munshi Har Gopal Tafta (who had lost his second wife and was planning to marry a third one) in which he advises him not to repeat the mistake and says:

*On the plight of Umrao Sing, I felt pity and envy for myself.  
Good God, there are those whose chains have been cut  
twice and here am I, hanging by this noose around my neck  
for over fifty years. Neither do I die nor does the rope break.  
(Pg 36-48)*

The other important traumatic event of his life was the case of his pension which dragged on for almost fifty years. It was a major reason of his unhappiness and

financial distress. Another event which seems to consumed and traumatized Ghalib was his arrest and subsequent imprisonment for three months in 1846 on the charges of gambling. His trial and punishment came as a shocking blow to his pride and reputation. At this sensitive and critical stage of his life many of his close and loyal friends left him to his own and this made him feel more miserable. As if it was not enough, the political upheaval of 1857 and its failure razed his hope to ground as with the deportation of the King, Bahadur Shah Zafar, all financial help from the King and the British government ceased. From 1860 onwards, his health also started deteriorating and he was confined to bed and in 1869 he suffered a paralytic stroke and died.

All these factors contributed to his mood of hopelessness, despair, depression, loss of interest in everything, lack of sleep, feeling of undue guilt, suicidal tendencies and preoccupation with the ideas of death. It is precisely owing to the biographical factors mentioned above that Ghalib writes about death frequently in his poems. This is corroborated by another letter which he wrote to his friend Nabi Baksh Haqeer on January 9, 1850 as quoted by N. N. Wig:

*My dear friend, I owe you the reply to a letter. But what can I do? I am so grief-stricken and depressed. Further stay in this city is no longer to my liking. On the other hand, there are so many impediments in my way that I cannot go away from here. My grief and sorrow has reached a point where my only hope lies in death. (Pg 45-46 )*

Keeping in view the above important life events of Ghalib's life, the paper highlights the various verses on death with their meanings and contexts. For example, he exemplifies his philosophy of life and death in his other couplets too:

رو میں بے رخس عمر، کہاں دیکھے تھے  
نے ہاتھ باگ پر بے نہ یا بے رکاب میں

*The stallion of my life is in a race, let's see where it stops  
Neither are my hands on the reins, nor my feet in the stirrup*

Ghalib in these lines says that the horse of age, or life's span, is galloping and that nobody knows where it would stop because neither the hands are on the reins, nor the feet in the stirrup. Here, he is highlighting the uncertainty of life's course and man's inability to control the movement.

جلا بے جسم جہاں دل بھی جل گیا ہوگا  
کُریدے ہو جو اب راکھ جستجو کیا ہے

*Where the body has burned, even the heart would have  
In search of what are you now raking the ashes?*

Ghalib in this verse indicates that the fire of love has consumed both his body and the heart. The other

interpretation of this verse is that the beloved is looking for his heart in the ashes either to check that it is fully burnt with the body or to see if it can be retrieved.

رہیے اب ایسی جگہ چلکر جہاں کوئی نہ ہو  
ہم سُنن کوئی نہ ہو اور ہم زبان کوئی نہ ہو

بے درو دیوار سا اک گھر بنایا چاہئے  
کوئی ہمسایہ نہ ہو اور پاس بان کوئی نہ ہو

پڑئے گھر بیمار تو کوئی نہ ہو تیمار دار  
اور اگر مر جائے تو نوحہ خواں کوئی نہ ہو

*It is time to now go somewhere no one lives and there  
rest*

*Where conversation will remain quiet, where tongues  
will be at rest*

*There a house without doors, floors and walls will I  
erect*

*So no need to keep vigil, so no neighbours to expect*

*Should I fall ill and ail, there'll be no-one to tend to me*

*And perchance death takes me away, no bemoaners  
there'll be.*

Ghalib in the above verses wishes to live or be at a place where he is alone and nobody around him and where there is no one to speak to. He wishes to construct a house there without doors and walls so that there is

nobody to look after him or to keep a watch over him. And if he falls ill there should be nobody to nurse him back to health and if he dies there will be nobody to mourn over his death.

نہ ہوئی گر مرے مرنے سے تسلی نہ سہی  
امتحان اور بھی باقی ہو تو یہ بھی نہ سہی

*If my death did not satisfy thee, let it be  
If there are more tests in love, let it be*

The idea expressed by Ghalib is that he has given the proof of his devotion by his death, however, if the beloved is still not content with it, the poet is ready for more and that she should go ahead with it.

ہو چکی غالبِ بلائے سب تمام  
ایک مرگے ناگہانی اور ہے۔

*I have seen almost all the possible Troubles in my life,  
The last one that I have to face is the Death.*

In this couplet Ghalib sees death as the final trouble among all that he has endured so far in his life.

عشرتِ قطرہ ہے دریا میں فنا ہو جانا  
درد کا حد سے گزرنا ہے دوا ہو جانا

*The drop dies in the river of its joy  
pain goes so far it cures itself*

In the lines above, Ghalib says that the ecstasy of a drop is to dissolve itself in the ocean. The pain that goes beyond the bounds turns into its own panacea.

کوئی اُمید بھر نہیں آتی  
کوئی صورت نظر نہیں آتی

موت کا ایک دن معین ہے  
نیند کیوں رات بھر نہیں آتی

ہم وہاں ہے جہاں سے ہم کو بھی  
کچھ ہماری خبر نہیں آتی

مرتے ہیں آرزو میں مرنے کی  
موت آتی ہے پر نہیں آتی

*No hope ever comes to fruition  
No way out can I see anymore  
A day has been fixed for death  
So why can I not sleep at night?  
I have reached a place from where  
No news of mine ever gets back to me  
Offering life in constant hope for death*

*The death comes, but life still does not come*

In the lines above, Ghalib's pessimism is at its highest point. He complains that since none of his hopes have ever come to fruition, how can he see his way to resolve any of his predicaments? He also says that when we know that we will die on a fixed day, as is destined, then why do we lose sleep over it? Apparently sleep is also like death that will come to us at its fixed time, but unpredictably. In the next four lines, Ghalib says that he is in a state of devotion where he has lost himself and is unable to tell where he has reached or where he has gone. Desperate with life, his only desire is to die. He is dying for it but like so many other lost desires, death also does not come to him when he needs it

تہا زندگی میں مرگ کا کھٹکا لگا ہوا  
اُڑنے سے پیشتر بھی مرارنگ زرد تھا

*While speaking, there remained the fear of death;*

*Even before the flight of my soul, my complexion had turned pale.*

Ghalib, in this verse, states that the paranoia of death kept him pale throughout, when as mostly people become pale in death, Ghalib was pale even before his death. The idea here is that the complexion of Ghalib was pale before the flight of his soul because he has already endured multitude of death in the form of pain, trials and

tribulations, humiliations and sufferings throughout his life.

یہ لاش بے کفن اسد خستر جاں کی بے  
حق مغفرت کر کے عجب آزاد مرد تھا

*This shroudless corpse is that of tired soul, Asad.*

*May God forgive him, a strangely carefree man that he was.*

Again here, Ghalib is preoccupied with death, describes himself as a shroudless body-a broken and tired man. Presuming himself dead, he prays for his departed soul. The image of dead body lacking a shroud perhaps indicates dearth of friends. In the next line in which Ghalib uses an expression of "strangely carefree" for himself, he probably argues that he cared little about the world, which was indifferent towards him. He faced all the inequities of life boldly, though hurt in the end, yet he stood tall when alive.

کس سے محرومی قسمت کی شکایت کیجئے  
ہم نے چاہا تھا کہ مر جائیں سو وہ بھی نہ ہوا

*To whom shall I complain of my ill fate?*

*I had wanted to die but even that did not happen.*

Ghalib, lamenting on his fate by saying that he is so deprived of good fate that he did not even get the wish which nobody wants-which is to die. This, he regards as

the ultimate misfortune. It is possible that he regarded death as a union with the beloved and thus a relief from all the vicissitudes of life but even this wish has not been fulfilled.

مرگیا صدمہء یک جنبش لب سے غالب  
ناتوانی سے حریف دم عیسیٰ نہ ہوا

*The shock of a single movement of lips killed Ghalib*

*The weakness prevented facing the breath of Jesus*

Here the idea of Ghalib is that his beloved with Jesus's resurrecting instinct came to me but he was so frail that the movement of her lips was sufficient to kill me. This also connotes that the condition of Ghalib was so helpless that nothing could change it, even a panacea offered little hope.

گلیوں میں میری نعش کو کھینچے پھرو ، کہ میں  
جان دادہ ء ہوائے سر رہ تھا

*Take my corpse and drag it through the alleys, for I*

*Was desirous of dying along the path frequented by her.*

Ghalib here suggests that after his death let his corpse be dragged along her route to remind her of who he was and how much he loved her and also that he has achieved his soul. The idea of dragging his corpse does disgrace him but it will also make her feel ashamed for being

irresponsive to me. It also connotes that the desire to be dragged through many alleys refers to the places where she used to visit the rivals, where she might come across his corpse also.

لے گئے خاک میں ہم داغ تمنائے نشاط  
تو ہو اور آپ بہ صد رنگ گلستان ہونا

*We took to the grave the scars of the longing for happiness  
Wishing you to rejoice in hundreds of ways*

Ghalib here addresses his beloved and tells her that he has taken to his grave the unfulfilled desire of a joy, however, he wishes her well in her merriment and joy and that she may bloom in hundreds of ways.

کی مرے قتل کے بعد اس نے جفا سے توبہ  
ہائے اس زور پشیمان کا پشیمان ہونا

*After killing me, she vowed never again to be cruel  
Alas! The repentance of an early repentant!*

The idea of Ghalib here is that after killing him, his beloved vowed never to kill again with her cruelty. Alas! She did not repent early enough to save him. Her repentance is useless now and is not going to serve any purpose as he is already dead.

یہ نہ تھی ہماری قسمت کہ وصالے یار ہوتا  
اگر اور جیتے رہتے یہی انتظار ہوتا

*It wasn't in my fate to have union with the beloved*

*Had I lived, the waiting would still have been the same*

Continuing with his treatment of the theme of death, Ghalib in the above verse argues that his union with beloved was not his fate. Thus he goes on to say that it is better that he died for if he had kept on living it would have been a life of continuous waiting. The pain of waiting would have been worse than the one time agony of death. It has been therefore for his advantage that he died.

تیرے وعدے پر جئے ہم ، تو یہ جان جھوٹ جانا  
کہ خوشی سے مر نہ جاتے اگر اعتبار ہوتا

*Had I lived on your pledge, I would surely have lost life*

*Out of sheer joy and ecstasy, if I had believed in it.*

In the same poem, he goes on to say that if he had believed in her promise, the joy of it would have killed him. The fact that he is living is a proof that he did not believe her.

کہوں کس سے میں کہ کیا ہے شبے غم بُری بلا ہے  
مجھے کیا بُرا تھا مرنا ، اگر ایک بار ہوتا

*To whom shall I tell what it is, that the night of separation is  
a bad calamity?*

*What was wrong if I were to die, but only once?*

Here, Ghalib says that to whom and what shall he say about the distresses of the night of separation as it is too unbearable? In comparison, it would have been better to die only once than to die repeatedly, all night, with each breath, waiting for her to arrive. The night of separation kills endlessly.

ہوئے مر کے ہم جو رُسا ، ہوئے کیوں نہ غرق دریا  
نہ کبھی جنازا اُٹھتا ، نہ کہیں مزار ہوتا

*Having died, I invited disgrace, why didn't I just drown in the  
river?*

*For then, no coffin had to be raised, nor any shrine built.*

Imagining himself already dead, Ghalib says that when he died, nobody came to console or offers a eulogy which was matter of great disgrace to his dead body. It would have been better if he had been drowned as in that case it would have spared his corpse the embarrassment as there would be no funeral or a grave for him. It is also possible that Ghalib presumes that once he is dead there would be few people to carry his coffin, hence, embarrassing, so he, therefore, prefers death by drowning.

حوس کو بے نشاط کار کیا کیا

## نہ ہو مرنا تو جینے کا مزا کیا

*Avarice is busy with what a multitude of lively affairs?*

*If there were not death, then life would not be worth the joy.*

The idea of the verse above according to Ghalib is that avarice prompts a desire to work so as to achieve worldly things. The driving force for avarice to exist is the inevitability of death. We know there would always be a tomorrow that is why we are doing things today. Similarly, if there were no death, there would be no joy left in life. Life becomes all the more interesting and meaningful because we shall all die one day.

## جان دی، دی ہوئی اسی کی تھی حق تو یہ ہے کہ حق ادا نہیں ہوا

*I returned my life for He gave it anyway.*

*The fact is that the debt was still not repaid to Him.*

Ghalib, believing himself already dead, says that returning life did not absolve him of his obligation that He had bestowed upon him. The obligation remained unfulfilled throughout life and the life was gone.

## نہ تھا کچھ تو خُدا تھا، کچھ نہ ہوتا تو خُدا ہوتا دُبا یا مجھ کو ہونے نے، نہ ہوتا میں تو کیا ہوتا

*When there was nothing, there was God; had there been  
nothing, God would still have been.*

*Drowned because I existed, how would it have mattered if I  
did not exist?*

In the above verse, Ghalib argues that when there was nothing, there was God. Had nothing ever existed, God still would have been. Similarly if he had not been created it would have had no impact whatsoever. This also means that bringing him into existence is akin to drowning him or putting him through a life time of suffering. This verse highlights the overall philosophy of Ghalib about life and it's Creator.

ہوی مدت کہ غالب مر گیا پر یاد آتا ہے  
وہ ہر اک بات پر کہنا کہ یو ہوتا تو کیا ہوتا

*It has been a long time since Ghalib died, but he does keep  
coming to our thoughts*

*His arguing at everything, "What would it have been, if it  
were like this or like that?"*

In this verse, Ghalib has been dead for a long time but is still remembered for his arguments like "what if?" in everything. Since he was curious about things around him and so it had become his characteristic style to ask questions like that. Here Ghalib anticipates how, long after he is dead, he will be remembered by the ones who know him.

جاتا ہوں داغے ہسرتے ہستی لئے ہوئے

## ہو شمع کشتہ در خور محفل نہیں رہے۔

*I am leaving taking with me the scars of life's unfulfilled desires*

*Like an extinguished candle, I am gone, removed from the assembly.*

Here, the idea of Ghalib is that he is leaving this world with the sorrow of unfulfilled longings. He is like a burnt-out candle pulled from the candlestick. Comparing life to a burnt out candle expresses extreme dejection, loneliness, love-stricken and rejection. It is important to note that at one time the burnt-out candle was in the candlestick and is now thrown out of the candlestick and so all hope is gone.

## مرنے کی اے دل اور ہی تدبیر کر کہ میں شایان دست بازوئے قاتل نہیں رہا

*Contrive some other means of dying, O! My heart!*

*I am no longer worthy of the arms and hand of the slayer.*

Ghalib here says that giving life to his beloved was his goal and getting killed at the hands of his beloved would have been ideal. But he is now too insignificant to be worth of her attention and that she will not waste her efforts to kill him. Since there are new rivals coming in to offer their lives, he is no longer a desirable option for her. But he must prove his love and thus find some alternate way to lose his life.

عمر بھر دیکھا کیا مرنے کی راہ  
مر گئے پر دیکھئے دکھلائے کیا

*Having waited all my life for death to arrive*

*Now dead, let us see what would come out of it.*

In the above verse, Ghalib says that death was considered a reprieve from the pain and sorrow of life. He also states pessimistically that he is actually dead now, it remains to be seen what good will this bring with it.

غم سے مرتا ہوں کہ اتنا نہیں دُنیا میں کوئی  
کہ کرے تعزیت مہرو۔ وفا میرے بعد

*I am dying of sorrow that there is not anyone left in this  
world*

*Who would condole at the death of love and faithfulness  
after my death*

Here Ghalib states that he is concerned that after his death no one will care for the values of love and faithfulness. This very thought is killing him. He is dying of sorrow that there is not anyone in the world who would offer condolences to love and faithfulness after his death. He is also dying of worry about who will show concern about the extinct qualities of faithfulness? He looks confident that he is the only living legend who places any value on these virtues and that after his death infidelity

and lack of faithfulness will become a norm for society and lovers will no longer be sincere.

آئے بے بے کسے عشق پہ رونا غالب  
کس کے گھر جائے گا سیلاب بلا میرے بعد

*Tears exuding at the helplessness of love, O! Ghalib*

*To whose abode would this destructive flood go, after my death?*

Continuing with the same tone as in the previous verse, Ghalib argues that as long as he was alive, he was holding the catastrophic flood, namely love. After his death, the floodgates will open and inundate many homes as he wanders. The idea is that the flood will visit many homes in search of someone to uphold its value. This helplessness of love is indeed hurtful and makes him cry also. After his death the beloved will not find another lover like him.

مرتا ہوں اس آواز پہ ، ہر چند سراڑ جائے  
جلاد کو لیکن وہ کہے جائے کہ ہاں اور

*Dying for that voice, even though my head might roll*

*If she would keep telling the executioner, "Yes more!"*

The poet here says that at the time of his execution, the lover is delighted to hear the beloved's voice, albeit this may just be the instruction to the executioner to strike

again and again. Although death resolves all the relationships, yet for a lover death is a reward. To hear her voice at the time of death is the ultimate reward.

نادان ہو جو کہتے ہو کہ کیوں جیتے ہیں غالب  
قسمت میں ہے مرنے کی تمنا کوئی ایک دن اور

*Ignorant you are questioning why does Ghalib continue to live?*

*It is in my fate to continue to pray for death for a few days more.*

The idea of Ghalib in the above verse is that after suffering through horrendous experiences, people may wonder why Ghalib did not die of this sorrow. Little do they know that Ghalib suffers a greater pain waiting for his death now.

اسد اللہ خاں تمام ہوا  
اے دریغا وہ رند شاہد باز

*AsadUllah Khan has passed away*

*Alas! That wine addict and womanizer!*

Imagining himself already dead, Ghalib, in the above verse, says that now that AsadUllah Khan (referring to himself) has passed away, who will fill his shoes? He was a drunkard and womanizer too.

میں بھی رُک رُک کے نہ مرتا جو زبان کے بدلے

## دشنہ اک تیز سا ہوتا میرے غم خوار کے پاس

*I would not have died so slowly, if, instead of that sharp  
tongue*

*There had been a sharp digger held by my consoler*

In the verse above, Ghalib says that at the time of his death, his friends, who are supposed to share his grief, are telling him how foolish it was of him (the poet) to reach this pathetic stage. This is very painful to him like death itself. Ghalib wishes here that they had a sharp dagger instead of a sharp tongue with which to kill him with one sharp blow so as to relieve him of the pain, thus proving that they had actually come to alleviate his pain.

## مر گیا پھول کیسر غالبے وحشی ، ہے ہے بیٹھنا اُس کا وہاں آکر تیری دیوار کے پاس

*He killed himself by smashing his head, that lunatic Ghalib*

*How he used to come and sit by your wall*

Ghalib, already dead in the verse, remembers how Ghalib used to come and sit by the wall of the beloved's house. The idea is that Ghalib used to come and sit there, hoping to hear a word or two from the beloved or to catch a glimpse of her. Totally frustrated he finally banged his head against the wall and killed himself.

## ہم نے مانا کہ تغافل نہ کرو گے لیکن

## خاک ہو جائنگے ہم تم کو خبر ہونے تک

*I admit that you will never become indifferent to me, but*

*I will long be reduced to dust before you come to know of  
me*

Ghalib in this verse argues that the lover accepts the beloved's promise that she will not ignore him and yet he is concerned at the same time that unless she first comes to know him, how will she pay any attention to him? Before you come to know who I am, I will be dead. The lover is giving the beloved a benefit of doubt. He accepts that the beloved is not cruel and it is not her fault that she cannot give him any attention. If she does not know who I am, how can she be expected to be attentive to me?

## غمے ہستی کا اسد کس سے ہو جز مرگ علاج شمع ہر رنگ میں جلتی ہے سحر ہونے تک

*O! Asad! What can relieve the grief of life except death?*

*The candle burns, as it must, till the break of dawn.*

The idea of Ghalib here is that death brings to an end all the miseries of life just as dawn ends the burning misery of the candle. The verse also means that we must suffer through agony of life as long as we are alive just as the candle burns itself fully till it consumes itself. The verse highlights the melancholy temperament of Ghalib at its worst.

## وحشت و شیفتہ اب مرثیہ کہیں شاید مر گیا غالبے آشفته نوا، کہتے ہے

*"Vehshat and Shefta" would probably chant elegies*

*It is rumored that Ghalib, the singer of sad songs has  
passed away*

Supposing himself dead, Ghalib in the verse says that now that Ghalib, the poet who used to write sad poetry, is gone, his friends "Nawab Shefta and Vahshat" could probably write a good elegy for him.

## قیدے حیاتو بندے غم اصل میں دونوں ایک ہے موت سے پہلے آدمی گم سے نجات پائے کیوں

*The bondage of life and the succession of sorrows are  
actually one and the same*

*Before death, how can man hope to be free of the clutches  
of sorrow?*

Ghalib, in this verse, takes death as a release from all the sorrows of life. According to him, the duration of our life is fixed, but living means having feelings and desires. Since all acts of living lead to sorrow and are interspersed with moments of joy, the sorrow continues until we die. It is death that offers the only freedom from sorrow. Life is therefore a bondage and sorrow a sign of life.

## اللہ رے ذوق دشت نور دی کہ بعد مرگ

ہلتے ہے خود بہ خود مرے اندر کفن کے پاؤں

*Oh! Lord, what a desire for wandering the desert that even  
after death*

*My feet keep moving on their own inside the shroud.*

Supposing himself dead, in the lines above, Ghalib states that his desire to wander the wilderness did not end with his death. His feet were so used to the rough terrain of the wilderness that they kept moving even inside the shroud.

پڑے گر بیمار تو کوئی نہ ہو تیماردار  
اور اگر مر جائے تو نوح خواں کوئی نہ ہو

*If I should fall ill then no one would come to attend me*

*And should I die, there will be no one to mourn for me either*

In the lines above, Ghalib, probably tired with everything in life, wishes for a life which is cut off from everything. Thus, in the above lines, he says that it would be ideal if nobody attends to him when he falls ill and also that there is nobody to mourn at his death. The verse shows Ghalib's dissatisfaction, disgust and frustration with everybody around.

اپنی گلی میں مجھکو نہ کر دفن بادے قتل  
میرے پتے سے خلق کو کیوں تیرا گھر ملے

*Bury me not in your alley after murdering me*

*For why should the world find your home through my  
address?*

In the verse above, Ghalib says that from the location of his grave, people will be able to find out who killed him and that will bring embarrassment to his beloved. But the visitors to his grave will also come to know of her abode and thus they may become friendly with her. This will create a situation of jealousy for him even if he is dead. Therefore, it is better that she buries him away from her alley where she killed him. The lover's ultimate desire is to be buried in the beloved's alley but the passion of jealousy is so strong that the lover is willing to let it go.

ہو چکیں غالبِ بلائیں سب تمام  
ایک مرگ ناگہانی اور ہے

*Having been through all calamities*

*A death, unplanned, remains the last one*

In the above verses, Ghalib says that he has lived through all disasters and misfortunes. There remains just one only, that is, death, but that is something that will happen suddenly and unexpectedly. Having survived so much in life, the poet has become very pessimistic and so he welcomes the event that will relieve him of all the pain.

موت آتی ہے پر نہیں آتی  
موت آتی ہے پر نہیں آتی

*Offering life in constant hope for death*

*The death comes, but still it does not come*

In the above verse, Ghalib argues that he is desperate with life and his only desire is to die. He is dying for it but like so many other lost desires, death also does not come to him when he needs it. The idea is that he dies every day from lost desire but the desire that will end it all-death-does not come.

نہ ہوئی گر میرے مرنے سے تسلی، نہ سہی  
امتحان اور بھی باقی ہو تو یہ بھی نہ سہی

*Not contended with my death? It matters not*

*If there is more to test then go on, it matters not.*

In the above verse, Ghalib says that death being the ultimate proof of devotion, the poet is ready for testing beyond death. The poet says that if he is not merely content with the death, he can go on and desecrate his ashes too. Referring to the many historic occasions when the corpses were dragged through streets to disgrace the dead, the poet is making a remarkable hint towards the history of the era.

آہی جاتا وہ راہ پر غالب  
کوئی دن اور بھی جنے ہوتے

*She would have come to the straight path*

*If only I had lived a few more days*

Ghalib, in this verse, argues that his beloved would have come to agree if He had a few more days to live. The idea is that death came to him soon and so the poet is consoling himself that he should not feel bad as it was not his fault.

اس رنگ سے اُٹھائی کل اُس نے اسد کی نعش  
دُشمن بھی جس کو دیکھ کے غم ناک ہو گئے

*Yesterday the corpse of Asad was raised with such  
disrespect*

*That even the enemies, seeing this, became melancholic*

In the verse above, Ghalib, assuming himself already dead, says that his corpse (the corpse of the poet) was raised with such disrespect, perhaps even being dragged in the street, that even the archenemies of Asad became sad.

زندگی میں تو وہ محفل سے اُٹھا دیتے تھے  
دیکھوں اب مر گئے پر کون اُٹھاتا ہے مجھے۔

*While living, she would tell me to rise and leave her  
assembly*

*Let us see who would raise me now that I am dead.*

In the above verse, Ghalib, believing himself already dead, asks who would raise his coffin and carry his corpse to the

graveyard? When he was alive, the beloved would tell him to rise and leave. Now dead, let us see who would raise his coffin.

Ghalib is also influenced by Sufism as far as his conception of death is concerned. From the Sufi or Vedantic point of view, death is only another beginning, the start of another journey. For the one who is aware of divinity and of the True nature of Reality, death is a continuation of life by other means, as it were. This is where Ghalib takes us in his Farsi verse

نشاط هستی حقدار داز مرگ  
چراغم چون گل آشامد نسیم صبح گابان را

*I exult in the existence of God/Ultimate Reality, from death I  
am safe/secure Ghalib*

*My lamp, like a flower/rose drinks off the morning breeze*

## Conclusion

After critically analyzing all the verses quoted in this paper it is established/discovered that there is only one thing in common among all of them, i.e. the predominant theme of death. It is this act of foregrounding death that is the central characteristic feature of Ghalib's poetry. Ghalib used death not only as a mere metaphor, simile or any other figure of speech but a full-fledged living character with whom he interacts frequently. Based on the analysis of the verses quoted in this paper, Ghalib interprets death

as a better location, as life itself is continuous death, as a summoner, as a debt which we pay back, as a final destination, as a journey of final departure, as loss, as regrouping and joining back, as surrender and submission and sleep. One of the possible reasons why he talks about death so much in his poetry is that he probably knew that is the only way to mitigate and diminish the effect of death which is the Absolute eternal inescapable reality. He is so fond of death that he toys with it every now and then as it is a source of enjoyment too to talk about it. Although the whole of Ghalib's poetry has its thematic and stylistic merits but the verses above about death convey varying shades of meanings of it and thus lend an eternal charm to his poetry. The impact of these verses is such that they have become a part and parcel of everyday speech and have assumed the status of proverbs and quotations quoted by people from all walks of life.

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