



ĠĀLEB, MĪRZĀ ASAD-ALLĀH KHAN

ĠĀLEB, Mīrzā ASAD-ALLĀH Khan, one of the greatest poets of Muslim India who wrote poems in both Persian and Urdu (b. Agra, 8 Rajab 1212/27 December 1797; d. Delhi, 2 Du'l-qa'da 1285/15 February 1869). According to a reference in one of his poems, he was of Turanian origin (*Kollīyāt* I, p. 157). His paternal grandfather came to India from Transoxiana during the reign of Shah 'Ālam (1759-1806). His father, 'Abd-Allāh Beg Khan, served under native Indian princes. Ġāleb lost his father when he was five years old and was brought up by his uncle until the latter also died three years later. Thereafter he was brought up by his mother's family. Not much is known about Ġāleb's education, but it is evident from his writings that he had acquired sufficient knowledge of traditional subjects such as logic, astronomy, medicine, and prosody. Above all, he was well-versed in Persian language and literature. During his early years he had been greatly helped in his learning of Persian by a certain 'Abd-al-Şamad, a Persian who had emigrated to India. Around 1812 Ġāleb left Agra and settled permanently in Delhi. In 1828 he visited Calcutta, the official capital of the British Indian empire, and remained there for some two years trying unsuccessfully with the British authorities to have his pension increased. There he also became embroiled in a literary controversy by criticizing Moáhammad-Ĥasan Qatīl, a local poet of Calcutta. Subsequently, he sought to make amends for his indiscretion by composing the poem *Bād-e mokālef*, which essentially amounted to an apology. His regular association with the Mughal court at Delhi may be said to have begun in 1850 when he



was officially commissioned to write a history of the Mughal dynasty (see below). The king conferred upon him several titles of honor and, in 1854, chose him for correcting his poems. In the period following the abortive revolt of 1857 by Indian soldiers, he came under suspicion for his perceived role in the movement, and his pension was temporarily suspended by the British government. However, his financial distress was somewhat eased by the grant which he began to receive in 1859 from the princely state of Rāmpūr, and which continued until his death. He died after a protracted illness and was buried in Delhi.

Ġāleb used Urdu and Persian for his literary expression displaying a mastery of both languages. His major writings in Urdu include a *divān* of poems first published in 1841, and two volumes of collected letters, namely *'Awd-e hendī* and *Ordū-ye mo'allā*, published in 1868 and 1869 respectively. First among his Persian works is his poetical collection which appeared initially in 1845 under the title *May-kāna-ye ārzū* and was republished with additions in 1863. His prose works in Persian include *Mehr-e nīmrūz*, a universal history, published in 1855, which begins from creation and comes down to the death of Homāyūn (1556). Ġāleb originally intended to write a sequel to the book, named *Māh-e nīm-māh*, which would have covered the account from Akbar (r. 1556-1605; q.v.) onwards, but the plan presumably did not materialize. Another historical work by Ġāleb was *Dastanbū*, which provides an eye-witness account of the 1857 revolt and its aftermath. In addition, Ġāleb was also the author of a Persian prose collection, entitled *Panj āhang*, which was published initially in 1849 and again in an expanded edition in 1853. As its name implies, it comprises five topics: (1) suggestions on letter writing; (2) Persian infinitives, technical terms, and glossary; (3) a selection of the poet's Persian verses which might be quoted in conversation or in letters; (4) reviews and miscellaneous writings; and (5) Ġāleb's own Persian letters. The last significant Persian work by Ġāleb is *Qāṭe'-e Borhān*, a criticism of Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Tabrīzī's famous lexicon *Borhān-e qāṭe'* (q.v.). It was published in 1862, and a much enlarged edition of the work appeared in 1865 under the title *Derafš-e kāvīānī*. Its publication raised a storm of controversy and led to the appearance of a host of works both for and against the poet.

Ġāleb's claim to literary eminence rests primarily on his Urdu and Persian poetry. He holds an undisputed position among Urdu poets, which is universally recognized by all the critics. His favorite verse-form in Urdu is the *gāzal* (q.v.), to which he succeeded in endowing a great depth of feeling, a new



expression, and a fresh stock of intellectual imagery. Gāleb's extraordinary fame in Urdu literature has somewhat overshadowed his accomplishment in Persian poetry, but his contribution to the latter is equally important. In fact, he expressed a greater regard for his Persian verse, and considered it as a source of pride for himself (*Kollīyāt* I, pp. 161-62). He may be truly regarded as the last great exponent of the Indian style (*sabk-e hendī*) of Persian poetry, in which his own effort represented a synthesis of the trends associated with previous poets such as 'Orfī Šīrāzī, Naẓīrī Nīšābūrī, Ṭāleb Āmoli, Ḥazīn Lāhījī, Šā'eb Tabrīzī, Kalīm Kāšānī, and 'Abd-al-Qāder Bīdel.

A large portion of Gāleb's poetical output in Persian consists of *qaṣīdas*, most of which are addressed to the poet's chief patron, Bahādor Shah II. Other personages include the rulers of Rāmpūr, and the British monarch, Queen Victoria, together with several British viceroys and their officials. Additionally, there are poems in praise of God, the Prophet Moḥammad, 'Alī, and his son Ḥosayn.

Apart from *qaṣīdas*, Gāleb's Persian poetry is represented mainly by *gāzals* and *maṭnawīs*. His *gāzals*, though often structured upon the models of major poets, have a grace of their own that shows especially in the use of original similes and metaphors. Among his *maṭnawīs* which are eleven in number, the most prominent specimen is *Ābr-e goharbār*, a poem of nearly eleven-hundred couplets, first published in 1280/1860. According to Alṭāf-Ḥosayn Ḥālī, Gāleb intended to compose a versified account of Prophet Moḥammad's campaigns, but could only complete the introduction, which comprises the above-cited *maṭnawī*, while the part containing the actual account remained unwritten (*Yādgar-e Gāleb*, pp. 336-37).

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