

# **HISTORY OF PERSIAN GHAZALS IN MUGHAL INDIA**

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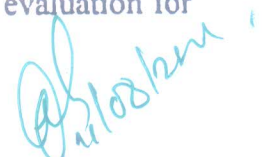


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## INTRODUCTION

Literature is an important source of history and history owes much to the literature of a period. Persian literature has aided the study of medieval and early modern India in significant ways. The study of Persian poetry is an important area of research in history. It has helped in understanding the political sphere, cultural trends, intellectual currents and the relationship of all these with each other in medieval India. Persian poetry is of interest because the language itself carries a tradition which is one of the older literary traditions in the world, the ideas dating back to the pre-Islamic era. In India, Persian ghazals were one of the most popular forms of poetry during the Mughal era of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It had a wide circulation, even to the common people at large. A range of emotions, thoughts, literary conventions and a whole world of ideas were embedded in it. The study of Persian *ghazals* in Mughal India will help us to understand the society and the cultural trends of the period. This was the period when the style of *tāza guī* (literally: speaking “fresh”, in other words, ‘originality of expression’) was emerging as one of the favourite styles of writing among the poets. There was a close connection with the emergence of this trend and developing literary taste of the Mughals, which makes this study all the more important. To state clearly, the aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the history of Persian *ghazals* in Mughal India, trace the trajectory of the genre along with the lives of a few well-known *ghazal* poets.

### **A Political History of Persian language and literature in Medieval and Early Modern India**

North India’s contact with Persian culture can be traced back to at least the 11<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of Ghaznavid kingdom. According to Meena Bhargava, Punjab was the first area in the sub-continent to “imbibe and inculcate the learning of Persian language and its literary traditions”<sup>1</sup> with the arrival of Mahmud of Ghazni and his successors who established the Ghaznavid power in Punjab in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The rule of the Sultans of Delhi from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the promulgation of Persian as the court language and encouraged the trend of patronizing Persian scribes, writers and poets, including the Sufis, *Ulama* and other men of talent who had migrated from Central

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<sup>1</sup>Meena Bhargava, *Understanding Mughal India Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Orient Black Swan, 2020), p. 14

and South-West Asia. Persian language crept into the countryside and small towns owing to the revenue grants (like *imlah*, *auqaf*, *vazائف*, *idararat*) given to these learned men. This further contributed to the “cultural integration of north India with Perso-Islamic identity (as opposed to Arab culture), known as ‘*ajam*.’”<sup>2</sup>

According to Meena Bhargava, Sufi *khanqas* had a big role in “encouraging the evolution of the Persian literary tradition”; they helped in the spread of the language to people at large, cutting across religious affiliations.<sup>3</sup> The writings of various Sufi saints were in Persian, which provided people a valid reason to learn the language.<sup>4</sup> As far as the reach of Persian was concerned, Bhargava argues that, “by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Persian had developed as a language of the state and a language for intellectual and religious discourse.”<sup>5</sup> It also became a language of the “migrants from Persia and Central Asia, local converts from Islam, and also Hindus who wished to pursue a career in state service.”<sup>6</sup>

It was possible for Hindus (particularly the educated communities like Kayasthas, Khattris etc.) to learn Persian due to the policies of rulers like Sikandar Lodhi (r. 1489- 1517 CE) who initiated the teaching of Persian to Hindus by providing them access to the *madarsas*.<sup>7</sup> A continuation of Sikandar Lodhi’s policy can be seen during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar, when he promulgated Persian as the language of administration at all levels.<sup>8</sup>

All these developments coalesced during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and furthered the expansion and efflorescence of Persian literary culture under the Mughals. However, Persian was not the first choice of early Mughal rulers like Babur and Humayun. Turkic was their mother tongue. Babur was among the well-known literary figures of the Turkic language and literature, recording his memoir in the same language.<sup>9</sup> Humayun also patronized Turkic and frequently held sessions of Turkic poetry at his court.<sup>10</sup> Bairam Khan, Akbar’s tutor and *wakil-us sultanat* was also a noted

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<sup>2</sup>Bhargava, *Understanding Mughal India*, p. 14

<sup>3</sup>Bhargava, p. 15

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Turkic poet of the time.<sup>11</sup> Even though, Turkic remained a spoken language of the Mughals till the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it eventually could not develop as a literary language of the Mughal court.<sup>12</sup>

The Sur Afghan rulers (1540-1556 CE) gave Hindawi a semi-official status during their rule. They continued a practice initiated by Lodhi sultans of transcribing Persian decrees of chancellery in the Devanagari script.<sup>13</sup> It was only from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Akbar that Persian gained the status of the official language of Mughal administration. A further boost to the rise in the status of Persian was provided by the immigration of a large number of Persian literati to India. This immigration began during the reign of Humayun and was given further impetus by Akbar's policy of "fostering social, cultural and intellectual links with Iran. Akbar projected his empire as *dar-ul aman* ("abode of peace") and a retreat for the wise and the learned."<sup>14</sup> In 1585/6, Hakim Humam, famous physician in Akbar's court was sent to Iran, predominantly to "identify the literati and persuade them to come and settle in India."<sup>15</sup> Abd-ul Qadir Badauni attributed the arrival of a large number of learned men in India to "the extraordinarily tolerant atmosphere in India."<sup>16</sup> It is an established fact now that poets and Persian writers came to India largely in search of better fortunes, some fled from religious or political persecutions of the sectarian Safavid regime,<sup>17</sup> whereas on the other hand, as Alam argues, in India, "the space for accommodating oppositions and conflicts was widening, subsequent to the Mughal policy of *sulh-i kul* ("peace for all")."<sup>18</sup> Following the Lodhis, Akbar had continued the policy of obliging several Hindu communities who wished to join the imperial service as *muharrirs* and *munshis* ("clerks, scribes and secretaries") the permission to attend *madarsas* to study the nuances of Persian language. Knowledge of Persian and appreciation of Persian poetry were highly prized virtues of learned men in Mughal India. Many Mughal emperors, members of the royal family as well as administrators composed verses in Persian. Along with the culture of composing and patronizing poetry, works of translations were also undertaken. *Singhasan Battisi* was translated in the reign of Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan as well

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Muzaffar Alam, 'The Pursuit of Persian Language', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 320

<sup>16</sup> Alam, 'The Pursuit of Persian Language', p. 321

<sup>17</sup> Alam, p. 321

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



as Aurangzeb. Classical works, works on mathematics, astronomy, medicine, the epics etc., were also translated into Persian under the Mughals. Persian grammars and commentaries on idioms, phrases, and poetical proverbs were prepared by scholars of the Persian language who were from both communities, Muslim and Hindu.<sup>19</sup> Persian had thus emerged as a language of learning, knowledge and high culture in 16<sup>th</sup> century North India.<sup>20</sup>

By the seventeenth century, Mughal India also emerged as a centre for Persian language and literature. In this context, there is a need to understand Persian poetry in India during this period, as India was the most important centre for Persian culture. Poetry provides insights into the development of the culture of language and the places in which it came to be practiced. In the words of Ali Mahmudabad,

Since poetry and especially popular poetry reflects the tropes, language, culture and indeed ‘sensibilities’ of the period in which it is written either by subverting these or by promoting them, it can serve as an important snapshot of prevalent social, political, religious and even economic exigencies.<sup>21</sup>

Poetry can serve as an important primary source which can widen our perspectives about any given period. But this study attempts to take the study a step further and highlight some important aspects of the history of the popular genre of Persian *ghazals* in Mughal India, focusing on the factors that played an important role in the development of the genre in India. One such development relates to the emergence of a new style of writing known as *tāza guī* (“originality of expression”). This style of Persian prose and poetry began from the sixteenth century and lasted to the nineteenth century. In this style the use of metaphors rooted in Indian culture increased. The poets strove to bring newness in themes and composition in this period. *Tāza guī* found expression in *ghazals* but was not limited to this genre alone.<sup>22</sup> Any study of the history of *ghazals* would be incomplete without understanding the formal structure or form of the

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<sup>19</sup> Muzaffar Alam, ‘The Culture and Politics of Persian in Pre-Colonial Hindustan’, Sheldon Pollock ed., *Literary Cultures* (California University Press, 2003); Muzaffar Alam, ‘Pursuit of Persian Language’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 32, 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1998)

<sup>20</sup> Bhargava, pp. 16-17

<sup>21</sup> Ali Mahmudabad, *Poetry of Belonging: Muslim Imaginings of India 1850- 1950* (OUP, 2020), p. 38

<sup>22</sup> S.R. Faruqi, ‘A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-i Hindi’, *Annual of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 29 (Allahabad, 2004), pp. 46-7

genre of *ghazal* and what distinguishes it from other forms of poetry. The next section is dedicated to the discussion of the formal structure of Persian *ghazals*.

### What is *Ghazal*?

The study of the history of the genre would be incomplete without addressing the most basic, yet pertinent question of what a *ghazal* is. *Ghazals* are lyric poems, ideally consisting of seven to twelve verses, where each verse is an independent unit as far as subject matter and contextual continuity are concerned. However, there can be shorter and longer *ghazals*, a short one often consisting of five verses.<sup>23</sup> One verse (*sh'er*) is complete in itself and can yield a whole range of thoughts, emotions, mood etc. Renowned poet Javed Akhtar, in a poetic discussion compared the form of *ghazal* to “a box of assorted biscuits”, where every *sh'er* (“couplet/verse”) is a complete statement.<sup>24</sup> The skill of the poet lies in his ability to express the essence of human experiences with intensity, but with few words.<sup>25</sup>

Each *ghazal* consists of units of two-lined verses called a *bayt* (“house”). Each *bayt* is made up of two hemistiches called *misra* (which may or may not rhyme). But the two initial hemistiches of a *ghazal* and a *qasida* (“panegyric”) always rhyme. Sometimes a single hemistich can be split into two rhyming halves. This is called *musammat* (i.e. verse with internal rhyme). The following verse is an example of a *musammat*:

*Sarmāyā-i-mastī manam ham dāyā-i hastī manam*  
*Bālā man u pastī manam chun charkh-i dawwār āmadam*<sup>26</sup>

I am the capital of intoxication, and also the wet nurse of being,  
I am high and lowliness, I came like the revolving sky.<sup>27</sup>

In the above verse, the words “*manam*” in the midst of the verse is the same as the last word, which provides the internal rhyme and rhythm to the verse. The components of a *ghazal* can be understood from the following *ghazal*:

<sup>23</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Two Colored Brocade*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 22

<sup>24</sup> Javed Akhtar, “*Ghazal kyā hai?*” (UnErase Poetry, 2017), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0uMdkoKS0w> last accessed on 03/02/2021

<sup>25</sup> Akhtar Qamber, *The Last Mushaira of Dehli*, tr. of *Dehli ki Akhri Shama*’ by Farhatullah Baig (Orient Longman, 1979), p. 23

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Schimmel, *Two Colored Brocade*, p. 20

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

*Agar ān turk-i shirāzī ba-dast ārad dil-i mā rā*  
*Ba khāl-i hinduvash bakhsham Samarqand wa bukhārā rā*  
  
*Ba-deh sāqī may-i bāqī ke dar jannat na khvāhī yāft*  
*Kinār-i āb-i ruknābād wa gulgasht musallārā*  
  
*Ze ishq-i na tamām-i mā jamāl-i yār mustaghništ*  
*Ba āb wa rang wa khāl wa khat che hājat rū-i zebā rā*  
  
*Ghazal gufī wa durr sufī be aa wa khush be khvān ‘hāfiz’*  
*Ki bar nazm-i tū afshānad falak aqd-i suraiyyā rā<sup>28</sup>*

The opening verse of the *ghazal* is called *matla*’, which in this case is:

*Agar ān turk-i shirāzī ba-dast ārad dil-i mā rā*  
*Ba khāl-i hinduvash bakhsham Samarqand wa bukhārā rā*

Here, the last words of the two lines of the verse rhyme with each other. The closing verse where the poet gives his pen name (in this case, “*hāfiz*”) is called *maqta*’:

*Ghazal gufī wa durr sufī be aa wa khush be khvān ‘hāfiz’*  
*Ki bar nazm-i tū afshānad falak aqd-i suraiyyā rā<sup>29</sup>*

The connecting thread in *ghazal* is rhyme and meter,<sup>30</sup> and not so much the content. The rhyme scheme of *ghazal* is *aa, ba, ca, da* and so on. The rhyming word or a phrase that occurs at the end of a *misra* and is repeated throughout the *ghazal* is called *radīf*. In the above *ghazal*, “*ā rā*” is the *radīf*, which remains the same throughout and occurs in the last line of each verse. The same sounding word which precedes *radīf* is called *qāfiya*. Unlike *radīf*, *qāfiya* can be changed. In the above *ghazal*, “*Bukhārā*”, “*musallā*”, “*zebā*” and “*suraiyyā*” are the examples of *qāfiya*.

Certain metaphors have been used to describe the structure of *ghazals*. One of the ways to understand a *ghazal*’s character is by understanding it as “atomistic”, that is, each verse is closed in itself and can subsist without other verses. When one focuses on the complete composition, it

<sup>28</sup><http://www.sufinama.org> , last accessed on 03/02/2021

<sup>29</sup><http://www.sufinama.org> , last accessed on 03/02/2021

<sup>30</sup>Poetic meter is a literary device which gives rhythm to the poem and decides the specific number of syllables and emphasis in the verse. The usage of long and short vowels in the poem depends on meter.

can be regarded as “carpet-like”, that is, the verses are connected to each other only by rhyme, like a finely woven garden carpet whose various images are meaningful and “yet, whole of its beauty is more than sum of its part.”<sup>31</sup>

Another genre of classical Arabic and Persian poetry, *qasida*, also has a similar external form- it has a monorhyme (i.e. the verses have the same end rhyme) and uses the same meters as that of *ghazals*.<sup>32</sup> However, the difference between the forms of the two genres is the length of the poem. *Qasidas* are usually as long as over hundred verses or more than that.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes, poets introduced a new topic by reverting to the opening rhyme scheme *aa* and thus “stand[ing] out from the general sequence *xa*.”<sup>34</sup> From later times, Schimmel informs us, one can find *qasidas* with three or more such secondary *matla’* (“opening verse”). On the other hand, *ghazals* are relatively short, consisting of seven to twelve verses. Another major difference between *ghazals* and *qasidas* is that the former is primarily love poetry (but not limited to the theme of love) and the latter is written as “praise, satire or description, generally directed to a patron, worldly or spiritual.”<sup>35</sup>

An extremely important component of *ghazals* is the “pen name” (*takhallus*) of poets, which sometimes carried out the function of establishing the relationship between the composition and the poet. A pen name was used by a poet to emphasize one of his qualities or ideals. Sometimes, a pen name could be given by master or mystical mentor.<sup>36</sup> Pen names could be a shorter version of the name of the poet. The last verses provided the space for poets to praise their composition. But with Urfi Shirazi (1555-1590 CE), self-praise became a defining trait of his personality. According to Badauni, Urfi was a “poet of lofty disposition and right understanding and composed poetry of all kinds well, but on account of too much vanity and arrogance that he had acquired, he fell from the hearts of people.”<sup>37</sup> Poets were apprehensive of their pen names being used by others as it accompanied the threat of attributing the verses of one poet to the other or could bring the charge of plagiarism. There is an anecdote related to the *takhallus* of Naziri

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<sup>31</sup>Annemarie Schimmel, *Two Colored Brocade*(University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 9

<sup>32</sup>Schimmel, *Two Colored Brocade*, p. 24

<sup>33</sup>Schimmel, p. 25

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 24

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 26

<sup>37</sup> Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab utTawarukh*, vol. III, ed. and tr. Wolseley Haig (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1925), p. 179

Nishapuri (d. 1612/13). A poet of the same name was asked by Naziri Nishapuri to change his *takhallus*. The poet changed it only when Naziri paid him 10,000 rupees to drop the ‘ye’ and make it simply “Nazir”.<sup>38</sup>

### **A Brief History of Persian *Ghazals***

There are many kinds of arguments regarding the emergence of *ghazals*. A few scholars like Akhtar Qamber argue that the beginning of *ghazals* goes back to *qasidas*. The opening part (*tashbib*) of a *qasida* was an invocation of beauty (either in the abstract or in nature). The second part was devoted to celebration of earthly beauty or love, especially addressed to the beloved. According to this line of argument, this latter part became detached in due course of time from *qasidas* and developed into an independent genre called the *ghazal*.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, other scholars argue that *ghazals* originated as an offshoot of an earlier Iranian folk poetry. A third strand of argument comes from scholars like A. Mirzoyev who argue that both Arabic and Persian elements played a part in the development of the genre of *ghazals*.

Shibli Nomani, in his monumental work, *Sher-ul-Ajam*, argued that *ghazals* came into existence by the time of the famous Persian poet in the Samanid court in Bukhara, Rudaki (d. 894 C.E.).<sup>40</sup> In his view, it was with Hafiz (c. 1315-1390 C.E.) that the genre reached its apogee as the poet brought together Sufism, philosophy and ethics in *ghazals*, which thus far had remained pre-occupied with the matters of love.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Waris Kirmani argues that although *ghazals* existed in spirit even before Sa’di Shirazi (d. 1291/2 C.E.), the renowned poet and author of *Bustan* and *Gulestan*, but it was only with him that the genre acquired its technical shape.<sup>42</sup> There is however a general agreement among scholars that the earliest evidence of written *ghazals*, with proper form had emerged by the 12<sup>th</sup> century, “when for the first time sizeable collection of them are known to have existed in the *divans* of Persian poets.”<sup>43</sup> From the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, *ghazals* also became an increasingly important expression of mystical love.<sup>44</sup> Since then, according to J.T.P. de Bruijn, “fusion between the secular and the mystical in Persian

<sup>38</sup>Shibli Nomani, *Sh'er ul 'Ajam*, vol. III, (Cawnpore, 1920), p. 144

<sup>39</sup>Qamber, p. 25

<sup>40</sup>Shibli Nomani, *Sher-ul-Ajam*, vol. V, p. 33

<sup>41</sup>Nomani, p. 39

<sup>42</sup>Waris Kirmani, *Life, Times and Works of Amir Khusrau Dehlavi* (National Amir Khusrau Society), p. 167

<sup>43</sup> J.T.P. De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poem* (Curzon Press, 1997), p. 55

<sup>44</sup>Bruijn, p. 55

*ghazals* has become such an essential characteristic that, in most cases, it is extremely difficult to make a proper distinction between the two.”<sup>45</sup>

One can agree with Waris Kirmani that *ghazals* developed overtime, reaching its most refined form by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. According to Bruijn, Sa’di Shirazi participated fully in the development of *ghazals*, which made the poem “a vehicle of mystical emotions”<sup>46</sup> and provided a “transcendental potential” to the genre.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, for various scholars and literary connoisseurs, Hafiz Shirazi has been regarded as the greatest poet of *ghazal* as he we have noted above in the arguments of Shibli Nomani.

As we have seen, the Indian subcontinent held a place of importance in the larger Persianate world by 12<sup>th</sup> century. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, *ghazals* had also become an important part of Indo-Persian literature soon after and contemporaneous with the developments in Persia. The poets of the Indian subcontinent like Amir Khusro (1253-1325 C.E.) and Amir Hasan Sijzi (1254-1337 C.E.) played an active role in shaping and popularizing *ghazals* and made significant contributions to the development of Persian literature. Their *ghazals* were circulated, read and imitated in different parts of the Persianate world. Their verses were also discussed and reworked by poets in the Persianate world. Amir Khusro is regarded as “the first great poet of the Persian tradition in India.”<sup>48</sup> Kirmani elaborated on the style of Khusro’s *ghazals* saying that, “his *ghazals* are lyrical in quality, aloof from the philosophical considerations and devoted ... to pure poetry... enriched...with fine music and melodies of India.”<sup>49</sup> Further, according to Kirmani, the imagery and the spirit of Khusro’s *ghazals* came from India’s literature and life, including folk-lore and folk-music, as he often sang his *ghazals* with music which contributed to the popularity of his *ghazals* in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>50</sup> Khusro’s impact on the literary and musical sense of the Mughals was quite strong. By virtue of India’s place in the Persianate world and the contribution of these poets as well as other factors (which will be discussed in the following chapter), by the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, *ghazals* had become a well established part of the Indo-Persian literature.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 59

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 60

<sup>49</sup> Kirmani, p. 172

<sup>50</sup> Kirmani, p. 172

The three *ghazal* poets (i.e. Sa'di, Hafiz and Amir Khusro), along with other poets like Jami, Baba Fighani, Amir Hasan Sijzi (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries) along with others, came to lay strong foundations of the tradition of Persian *ghazals*, which was further worked upon and strengthened by the poets of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Persianate world, which is a major focus of this study.

### **Historiography**

Most of the scholars in early works on the history of literature focused on the discussion of Persian language and literature in the court of Mughals. E. G. Browne wrote an important work which deals with the development of the Persian language and literature beginning from the earliest times to 19<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>51</sup> He traced the development of Persian literature along with the political outline of Persia wherein the poets of the Mughal court only made up a small part of the study.

Shibli Nomani undertook a similar venture in Urdu, in his 5 volumes, in which he lays out basic rules and themes of all genres of poetry.<sup>52</sup> One of the volumes is dedicated to a few major poets of *ghazals*, in the period of our study. This particular volume is extremely informative in reconstructing interesting aspects of the lives of poets in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries and also makes details comments on their styles of writing. Muhammad Abdul Ghani placed Persian *ghazals* in the context of the times in which they were composed by highlighting the poets in the court of the Mughals as well as the Deccani sultanates.<sup>53</sup> This book critiques an earlier view that suspected the capability of Indian scholars, poets and rulers of Mughal India to comprehend, compose and judge Persian poetry. Ghani attempted to dispel this view and determine India's right place in the Persian world.<sup>54</sup> According to Ghani, it was because of the constant immigration of poets from Persia, Bukhara and Samarqand that India remained a center of Persian language otherwise it would have fallen into disuse. Further, Ghani says that it was due to "his (i.e. Akbar's) keeping touch with the fresh bands of Persian emigrants...that he could keep pace with the Persian elite in the standard of taste and display of knowledge."<sup>55</sup> Despite bringing out the genius of Indian writers, Ghani still gives an upper hand to the Persian poets

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<sup>51</sup>E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia, vol. I, II, III, IV* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1909)

<sup>52</sup>Nomani, *She'r-ul-'Ajam*

<sup>53</sup> Muhammad Abdul Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court* (Allahabad: The Indian Press Ltd, 1930)

<sup>54</sup> Muhammad Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature*, vol. III, p. 229

<sup>55</sup>Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature*, p. 279

from Iran who had come to India crediting them for the growth of Persian language and literature. The standards of Iran and Central Asia were believed to be representative of the developments and trends in Persian language and literature. Ghani's book brings out important contributions by Hindustani writers of Persian like Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi<sup>56</sup>(d. 1595 CE), while also giving us a good survey of poets who were patronized in the courts of the first three Mughal emperors. However, he only gives marginal space and agency to the efforts of the rulers and the styles followed by Mughal poets.

Ghani also argued that by the middle of Aurangzeb's reign, there was a lack of patronage from the nobility and the immigration of poets diminished. He thus called this phase as 'stagnation period'.<sup>57</sup> One problem with this argument is that it is similar to the 'dark age' theory (put forward first by James Mill) that towards the end of Aurangzeb's period there was decay in every sphere of society, culture and politics. Another problem with this argument is the implication that the decline in the number of immigrant poets in India was due to the lack of patronage. Ghani argued that patronage networks thrived because of the immigration of poets from Iran and Central Asia. This argument is not convincing because Persian literary works produced in India increased manifold and people from different social and cultural backgrounds began to produce verses in Persian.<sup>58</sup> Ghani did not comment on the contribution of poets in the court of Mughals to the development of Persian language and literature. Thus, works like that of Ghani continued to consider Iranian standards and register for understanding and critiquing Persian language and literature and judged the Persian poetry of Mughal India on those standards. This remained one of the major trends in the historiography of Persian poetry in Mughal India.

The works of Hadi Hasan<sup>59</sup> and Nabi Hadi<sup>60</sup> sharpened the focus on the study of the role played by the emperor, members of the royal family and nobles in promoting the growth of Persian language and literature. Their works provide a good survey of the important poets, dominant styles of writing as well as royal patronage to poets in Mughal courts in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>56</sup> Shaikh Abul Faiz Faizi was son of Shaikh Mubarak and brother of Abul Fazl, the court chronicler of Akbar. Faizi was given the title of *malik us shuara* ("poet laureate") in 1588 CE.

<sup>57</sup>Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature*, p. 287

<sup>58</sup>Muzaffar Alam, 'The Culture and Politics of Persian in Pre-Colonial Hindustan'; Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia* (Harvard University Press, 2017)

<sup>59</sup>Hadi Hasan, *Mughal Poetry: Its Cultural and Historical Value* (1951)

<sup>60</sup>Nabi Hadi, *History of Indo-Persian Literature* (New Delhi: Iran Culture House, 2001)



One framework of studying poetry involved the study of various literary conventions, structures, metaphors and influences over Persian poetry. Works like *Necklace of the Pleiades*, *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, *A Two Colored Brocade*, began to focus much more on analyzing the importance of metaphors and what kind of uses they were being put to, in the poems.<sup>61</sup> Changes in the understanding of metaphors or differences in their treatment, the politics of the use of imagery and the ambiguity of the verses became established facts and a focus of research. The relationship between courtly life and Persian poetry began to attract attention. In order to prove one's literary caliber as a poet, there was an intense competition to create new metaphors. Deciphering those metaphors became a source of courtly entertainment. Annemarie Schimmel's work brings out these various influences on the subject of Persian poetry and also focuses on the courtly milieu in which the poet was producing his work. She has shown the continuity of metaphors and themes in the genre over a long period of time. Schimmel makes a crucial point that artistic forms were essential parts of Persian poetry and not just ornamental additions.<sup>62</sup>

In the study of Persian poetry, some scholars have also focused their attention on the different uses of poetry and the link between poetry and politics of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century. Muzaffar Alam traces the growth of Persian language in South Asia and argues that Persian poetry was an important part of the political culture of Mughals.<sup>63</sup> Alam underlines certain features of Mughal Persian poetry, which he then linked to the larger question of the political culture of Mughals. He argues that Persian literary culture had themes and ideas from pre-Islamic Persia and became a vehicle of liberalism in medieval Muslim world. In Alam's view the Persian poetic culture could create a social and religious group of allies who believed in the same humanistic and Universalist views as the Mughal emperors and the officials.<sup>64</sup> Alam shows that the ideals which shaped Mughal political culture were also seen in Persian poetry composed in the courts of Mughal emperors. He argues that Persian poetry was an active agent in the politico-cultural life of Mughals and the subcontinent. He takes up different verses and shows that there were issues

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<sup>61</sup>Franklin Lewis and Sunil Sharma ed., *The Necklace of the Pleiades: 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*, (Leiden University Press, 2010); Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab ed., *Metaphor and imagery in Persian poetry*, Iran Studies, (Brill, 2012); Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992)

<sup>62</sup>Schimmel, *A Two Colored Brocade*, p. 14

<sup>63</sup> Alam, 'The Culture and Politics of Persian in Pre-Colonial Hindustan'

<sup>64</sup>Alam, 'Culture and Politics of Persian in pre-colonial Hindustan', p. 171

related to temples, idol worship, critique of religious leaders, theme of wine houses, love, Sufi leanings etc., in the works of Mughal poets, which facilitated the “cultural conquest” of India.<sup>65</sup> Alam’s work on Persian poetic culture in Mughal India represents that trend in historiography where a close link between poetry, the larger political culture including the imperial vision of the Mughals is seen. They also focus on different ways in which poetry was put to use under the period of study. These works show that Persian language and poetry were active agents in the process of empire building and consolidation under the Mughals.

Another framework for studying poetry was to narrow down the focus from Persian poetry to specific genres like *ghazals*, *qasidas*, *masnavis* etc. Paul Losensky’s work *Welcoming Fighani*, added much to the secondary literature on Persian *ghazals* by focusing on the *ghazals* composed in Safavid and Mughal courts.<sup>66</sup> He brought the focus on the popularity of the genre and the various factors responsible for it. He shows the complex and multifarious ways in which the poets of the Safavid and Mughal courts engaged with the *ghazals* of classical Persian poets. He raises pertinent questions about the role of education and the training of poets. However, the work dwells much on closely studying the engagement of Mughal-Safavid poets with specific *ghazals* rather than explaining the social and cultural processes. Another limitation of the work is that it does not have much to offer when it comes to the question of the literary environment of Mughal India.

This lack of focus on Mughal India is overcome with the work of Sunil Sharma.<sup>67</sup> His work focuses on the social history of poets, the complexity of their relationships with each other and the discussion of the landscape of imperial cities and topographical features found in the works of these poets. Sunil Sharma also explores the link between politics and poetry in Mughal India. He uses pieces of poetic compositions like *masnavi*, *rubai’yi* etc., written by different poets as a form of knowledge which has proto-ethnographic information of cities. He studies an important

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<sup>65</sup>Alam, ‘Culture and Politics of Persian in Pre-Colonial Hindustan’, p. 170

<sup>66</sup> Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Mazda Publishers, 1998)

<sup>67</sup>Sunil Sharma, ‘Novelty, Tradition and Mughal Politics in Nau’i’s ‘*Suz o Gudaz*’, eds. Franklin Lewis and Sunil Sharma, *The Necklace of the Pleiades: 24 Essays on Persian Literature, Culture and Religion*, (Leiden University Press, 2010); Sunil Sharma, ‘“If there is Paradise on Earth, It is Here, It is Here, It is Here” Urban Ethnography in Indo-Persian Poetic and Historical Texts’, Sheldon Pollock ed., *Forms of Knowledge in South Asia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia* (Harvard University Press, 2017)

topos of Persian poetry about the city- *shahrashub/ shahrangiz*.<sup>68</sup> An account of different aspects of the city like its people, architectural buildings, diversity of population, vibrant bazaars, can be found in such poetry. Sharma argues that such information is lost in historical memory but is preserved and transmitted through these poems.<sup>69</sup>

Under Akbar and Shah Jahan many new buildings were commissioned. According to Sharma, the vision of the emperors was made a part of the discursive realm of art by court poets.<sup>70</sup> Under Shah Jahan, poets were composing poetry which appreciated the architectural buildings and new cities which were established and conveyed the architectural vision of the emperor. The poetry of this period includes topographical material, including gardens, palaces, baths and also records photographic instances of urban life. He discusses the works of the poet laureate of Shah Jahan's court, Abu Talib Kalim Kashani who praised his patron while describing the greatness of the city of Akbarabad (Agra) and its architectural magnificence.<sup>71</sup> Kalim Kashani described the bazaars and provided a catalogue of the kinds of professionals found there. While discussing about poets, Sharma has focused much more on the conflict between Iranian and Indian poets. He has looked at poetic description of imperial cities by poets in Mughal India as a manifestation of the imperial outlook. However, his focus remained on the poetic genre of *masnavis*.

In his book on the 17<sup>th</sup> century *mushi*-poet, Chandrabhan Brahman, Rajiv Kinra used the poet's Persian *ghazals* as an important historical source as well as subject of study.<sup>72</sup> Kinra studies *ghazals* as an important source for reconstructing the world of a secretary-poet, Chandrabhan Brahman. Kinra's work also throws light on the role of the dominant style of writing, *tāzaguī* ("originality of expression") on the poetry composed in this period.

One important strand of historiography on Persian *ghazals* is related to the dominant style of writing, *tāza guī*, which emerged in the period of our study. The discussion surrounding it has

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<sup>68</sup> *Shahrshub* was an appellation for lover and also for young boy engaged in some craft or trade or was selling wares to the love struck poet. These kinds of poetry give us information about trades and crafts prevalent during that period. First time such *shahrshub* poetry was found in diwan of Masud Sad Salman. In Indo-Persian poetry, *shahrshub* is used in a larger context and no independent work on this genre was produced. Sunil Sharma, 'The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:2, 2004, p. 73

<sup>69</sup> Sharma, 'The City of Beauties in Indo-Persian Poetic Landscape', p. 73

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75

<sup>72</sup> Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire* (University of California Press, 2015)

coincided with the debate on *sabk-i-hindi*, a term coined in 19<sup>th</sup> century for poetry composed 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Indian subcontinent, which later gained prominence in the entire Persianate world. There has been a disregard in modern times (mostly among Iranian scholars who lay claims to “authentic” Persian language and its register) towards the *sabk-i-hindi* style of writing. The discontent among this group of literary critics and scholars is about the innovations made in Persian metaphors, which often gave way to multiple meanings. They have argued against the complicated new conceits, themes and imageries imagined by the poets of this period to push the limits of language. It involved “using old words to create new meanings” and this, they argued, led to the creation of mindless and convoluted images. This period has thus been regarded as a period of decay in the history of Persian poetry.<sup>73</sup> However, many scholars including S. R. Faruqi have criticized this conclusion of modern Iranian scholars and have defined the dominant features of this style of writing. This debate will be dealt with in much detail in chapter two of this study.

The above-mentioned scholars have put across many interesting arguments and frameworks for the study of Persian poetry. While these works provide the foundation for this study, the aim of this project is to carry out a historical inquiry into the development of the genre of Indo-Persian *ghazals* in Mughal India. This study will raise some important questions related to the history of Indo-Persian *ghazals* and attempt to provide some, if not all, the answers.

### **Research Questions**

The main questions addressed in the study are: Why did the genre of *ghazals* become popular during the period of study? How and where were *ghazals* composed and discussed? What purpose did *ghazals* serve? An attempt will be made to highlight important features of Mughal patronage network and whether it had any impact on the genre of *ghazals*. What was the peculiarity of Indo-Persian *ghazals* composed in Mughal India in this period? Since Jahangir was quite fond of poetry in general and *ghazals* in particular, the study will focus on some aspects of *ghazals* composed in his court. What were the most common themes and tropes of *ghazals* composed in Jahangir’s court? Most importantly, what kind of insight on the literary sensibilities

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<sup>73</sup> Jan Rypka in Karl Jahn ed., *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968)

and aesthetics of the educated elite in the Mughal court can we gather from the study of Indo-Persian *ghazals* composed in Jahangir's period?

### Chapterisation

This study contains three main chapters, each one referring to different aspects related to Persian *ghazals*:

Chapter 1 entitled “Multiple Sites of *Ghazals*” lists out different sites where *ghazals* were documented, composed, discussed and performed. There will be an attempt to grapple with the question of the popularity of *ghazals* in this period, which in the opinion of the scholar might be attributed to the peculiar structure/ form of *ghazals*, where each verse is a complete unit in itself. The study will highlight how this feature of *ghazals* could be the reason why the function of a verse of *ghazal* changed in different settings. In order to understand different functions of *ghazals*, the scholar has referred to a range of primary sources like *Jahangirnama*, the autobiography of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605-27), which is replete with poetry. It also gives an insight into a few poetic practices prevalent during this time. Another source for this study is *Majalis-i Jahangir* (a compilation of the nocturnal sessions held from 1608-1611 in Jahangir's court). The compiler of the text, Abdus Sattar bin Qasim Lahori informs us about the way in which a royal *majlis* (“gathering”) was held. In addition, a few poetic discussions in this source are instrumental in shaping our understanding about the importance of *ghazals* in state correspondences, particularly in carrying out a political dialogue with Iran. Thirdly, the letters of *munshi*-poet Chandrabhan Brahman (d. 1662/3 CE) give an insight into how the exchange of *ghazals* in private letters was a literary convention of the times and often led to creation of emotional and friendly bond among the parties involved.

In Chapter 2 entitled “*Ghazal* Poets in Mughal India: Pioneers of a New Age in Persian Poetry”, the aim is to focus on the culture of patronage of poetry under Mughals, by people from different classes, being fully active in the literary development of the genre of *ghazals*. The main purpose of this chapter in the dissertation is to throw light on the qualities and efforts that were required in that age to gain the status of a well-known *ghazal* poet. The other half of the chapter is about the importance of the role of patrons and the active part played by poets in the emergence of the style of *tāza guī*, which has remained the center of debate among literary scholars for decades.

Since the discussion about *tāza guī* is multilayered, an attempt will be made in the chapter to highlight how the poets in this period came to define the style through their *ghazals*. In order to focus on the lives, training, influences and verses of the poets, the most important sources are *divans* of some poets like Urfi, Faizi, Talib Amuli (1619-1627 CE), Naziri Nishapuri, Kalim Kashani (1628- 1652 CE), Chandrabhan Brahman etc. The writings of Chandrabhan Brahman such as *Munshi'at-i Brahman*, *Chahar Chaman* etc. are useful primary sources to get an insight into the life, training, influences and writings of a secretary-poet. Other sources which constitute the major chunk of information on poets are Indo-Persian *tazkiras* (biographical dictionaries of poets) which were compiled in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Tazkiras* also provide a window to the way in which the society and the *tazkirawriters* imagined the lives of poets. *Tazkira* in *Maasir-i-Rahimi*, in *Muntakhabu-t Tawarikh* by Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Tazkira Sarkhush* and *Tazkira Maykhana* are few important *tazkiras*, which supplement our knowledge about poets.

Another category of sources which throw some light on the different aspects related to the lives of poets, literary sensibility of the time and certain established practices in the administrative apparatus of the Mughal state are letters exchanged between different nobles like Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan (c.1556-1627 CE) and Abul Fath Gilani (d. 1589 CE) and those written by *munshi* Chandrabhan Brahman to officials, poets and his family members.

Finally, Chapter 3 entitled “The Content of Indo-Persian *Ghazals* in Mughal India” tracks some of the interesting features of the Persian *ghazals* composed in the Mughal court during 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Popular themes and metaphors employed in the *ghazals* are discussed while narrowing down the focus to the public and private courts of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. This chapter also seeks to comment on the literary sensibility and aesthetics in this period. In order to accomplish this task, the scholar undertook the approach of reading a few *ghazals* composed during this period. Since complete explanation of all the possible meanings of the *ghazals* is beyond the present skills and knowledge of the scholar, a kind of broad survey of few Persian *ghazals* is undertaken to highlight the peculiarities that the genre came to acquire during our period of study.

## CHAPTER 1

### MULTIPLE SITES OF GHAZALS

The form and content of *ghazals* made them one of the most popular genres of Persian poetry. The universality of emotions expressed through these verses, its inherent ambiguity and the scope for multiple interpretations of *ghazals* made them suitable for different settings and purposes. In this chapter, an attempt is made to understand the plausible reasons for the popularity of this genre of poetry. Did the form and content of *ghazals* make an impact on the popularity of the genre? Another aspect of the chapter is to highlight the multiple sites of Persian *ghazals* which ranged from the written form (in *divāns*, *bayāz*, albums and prose works) to built structures, material objects and the oral form (i.e. poetic recitations in public domain like literary and musical gatherings). The manifestation of *ghazals*' popularity was reflected in the multiple settings and occasions where *ghazals* were inscribed, circulated and discussed. The aim of the chapter is to closely study few such sites of *ghazal* composition and discussion and the different functions which *ghazals* fulfilled.

Scholars have pointed out various reasons why *ghazal* became such a popular genre of poetry and remains so. Jan Rypka links the development of *ghazals* in 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the growth of urbanity and town life.<sup>74</sup> Julie Scott Meisami argues that *ghazals* were highly conventional and highly flexible. In its period of popularity, it remained both substantially stable to ensure its continued appeal and sufficiently flexible to meet the changing needs.<sup>75</sup> She stated various factors- *ghazals*' brevity, inherent ambiguity of diction and style (and hence its potential for polysemy) and its universally appealing subject, giving it a flexibility and a spontaneity, which made it a genre for all seasons.<sup>76</sup>

Paul Losensky argues that there were some profound changes in the social situation, function of poetry, its authors and the audiences. He also underlines the fact that poetry had spread across all the urban classes of society by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, from wealthy merchants to lowly craftsmen.<sup>77</sup> Most of the people wrote for a local audience and circle of friends. Small shops, coffee shops

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<sup>74</sup> Jan Rypka in Karl Jahn ed., *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), p. 252

<sup>75</sup> Meisami, p. 242

<sup>76</sup> Meisami, , p. 273

<sup>77</sup> Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Mazda Publishers, 1998), p. 136

etc., became the avenues for poetic assemblies.<sup>78</sup> However, Losensky does not elaborate on the factors which led to the spread of poetry from courts to the coffee shops in the work. In agreement with Jan Rypka, Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Losensky, Sunil Sharma also sheds light on the importance of patronage centres adding to the widespread popularity of *ghazals*. He argues that many historical factors were tied to innovative literary developments, which occurred in literary circles with respect to *ghazals* as well as other poetic forms and genres.<sup>79</sup> According to Sharma, *ghazals* remained popular outside courtly circle because of its quotability, ambiguity as well as vibrant and dynamic literary form.<sup>80</sup>

The popularity of *ghazals* can be attributed to the fact that they are shorter in comparison to *qasidas* and *masnavis*. *Ghazals* can express a range of universal emotions, which appeals to everyone across time. The specificity of *ghazals* lies in the fact that each unit of a *ghazal* forms an independent unit. The only binding force in a *ghazal* is the rhyme. The poet's skills are put to test while composing a *ghazal* as a whole range of emotions and thoughts, with a possibility of multiple interpretations have to be expressed in a single verse. This peculiar feature of *ghazals* can be a possible factor why *ghazals* became so popular. The independence of each verse allowed the poet to dwell on different topics, ranging from emotional to philosophical to political matters in a single composition depending on the context and setting in which it was reproduced or recited. This made *ghazals* conducive to composition, discussion and even performance in multiple settings and fulfilling a range of purposes, from being a carrier of amicable political correspondence to strengthening social ties or eliciting an overwhelming response from the audience or the readers.

The universality of emotions, thoughts, exhaustive stock of metaphors along with new conceits and the form of *ghazals* as well as the inherent ambiguity in it contributed to the increasing popularity of *ghazals* and its spread to different sections of the society from the educated clique employed in the Mughal administration to Sufi saints as well as to people from different socio-cultural backgrounds and age groups. With the primary sources giving less information on the social spread of the genre and the audience/ readers of *ghazals*, an attempt to study closely the

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<sup>78</sup>Losensky, pp. 138-139

<sup>79</sup> Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia* (Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 11

<sup>80</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, p. 10



different settings could help in drawing some inferences about the kinds of people who were involved, in any capacity in the poetic activity centering on *ghazals*.

Meisami argues that *ghazals* were put to manifold functions like entertainment, recitation in response to an issue of immediate topical importance, diversion in the form of music and as backgrounds for courtly meetings.<sup>81</sup> Due to the novelty of the form of *ghazals* and the universality of its theme, the genre appealed to its audiences in different capacities, which made it an ideal form of poetry to be composed, discussed and performed in varied settings and carry out different functions in each context.

### **Poetry as a sign of civility and high culture under Mughals**

The educated elite in Mughal India were required to imbibe certain values, codes of conduct and managerial skills. One of the important requirements included literary civility, cultivated by the study of Persian literature. According to Rajeev Kinra, literature was an important attribute of overall civility at the Mughal court.<sup>82</sup> Poetry was part of the everyday life in royal court, *bazaars*, *madarsas*, offices etc.<sup>83</sup> Kinra argues that, "... for men of pen, to be Mughal state secretary was to be a poet."<sup>84</sup> He further emphasizes that in many cases, the language of poetry was the language of politics.<sup>85</sup> Literary works in different languages, including Persian "was a prime vehicle for communicating key aspects of Mughal social and religious policy."<sup>86</sup>

Mughal education system was therefore, evolved through various regulations to suit the demands of imperial administration. Education in Persian was made accessible to communities irrespective of their religion. Persian language thus, reached people from different backgrounds. In order to acquire social and professional mobility, knowledge of Persian language and acquiring humanistic education became a necessity. The syllabus was designed in such a manner that education ingrained civility, a certain ethical code of conduct and a value system among the educated elite. Reading poetry was also an indispensable part of primary education. During the reign of Akbar, there was a regulation regarding education, found in *Ain-i-Akbari*, which sets out

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<sup>81</sup>Meisami, p. 241

<sup>82</sup> Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 38

<sup>83</sup>Kinra, p. 10

<sup>84</sup>Kinra, p. 11

<sup>85</sup>Kinra, p. 10

<sup>86</sup>Kinra, pp. 10-11

the rules, curriculum and pedagogy for elementary and secondary education. The following part of the regulation is focused on learning of poetry and acquiring poetic skills:

“...the boy should learn some prose and poetry by heart, and then commit to memory some verses in the praise of God, or moral sentences, each written separately. Care is to be taken that he learns to understand everything himself but the teacher may assist a little. He then ought for sometime be daily practiced in writing a hemistich or a verse and will soon acquire a current hand. The teacher ought specially to look after five things: knowledge of the letters; meanings of words; the hemistich; a verse; the former lesson...”<sup>87</sup>

In this regulation, the focus remains on teaching subjects which helped in running the state machinery on ethical grounds. Among other subjects, poetry was taught from the beginning of educational training. Pupils were expected to learn the verses of classical poets by heart at a young age and try their hands at poetry from childhood. Importance of poetry in curriculum under Mughals is also reaffirmed in a letter, which Chandrabhan Brahman wrote to his son, TejBhan wherein he cites the important books and poets whose works one should read to become a good *munshi*. He then provides an extensive list of works on history, ethics, and norms, on statecraft, epistolography and accountancy. In the long list of poets whose works Chandrabhan read from a young age included classical poets like Sanai, Fariduddin Attar, Sa'di, Hafiz, Amir Khusro, Hasan Sijzi, Jami, Firdausi and advised his son that it was only after mastering these works, that he should move on to read the works of the later poets like Ahli, Vahshi, Muhtasham, Naziri etc.<sup>88</sup>

An important function of poetry in the lives of Persian speaking/ knowing people was to polish their language. *Ghazals* proved to be one of the most essential aides in fulfilling this purpose. The purpose of reading poetry was to refine the language and have a command over it. Poetry was thus, not only limited to professional poets. What can be inferred from a range of compositions by princes, courtiers etc., is that Persian poetry was a part of the political elite culture. Sunil Sharma argues that a humanistic outlook was a part of Mughal education system.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> H. Blochmann tr., *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. I by AbulFazl (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), pp. 278-9

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a *Munshi*', *Comparative studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24: 2, 2004. pp. 62-3

<sup>89</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, p. 29

Knowledge of Persian poetry and the classics was expected from people enrolled in the imperial service. An entire way of life wherein knowledge of Persian poetry was well established (by 17<sup>th</sup> century) was embraced by non-Muslim communities as well.<sup>90</sup>

### Poetry in epistolary exchanges under Mughals

Since poetry was an indispensable part of the educational curriculum and training of *munshis* (“state secretaries”), it also flowed into the epistolary networks at all levels. The letters exchanged between Jahangir and Shah 'Abbas also included verses of *ghazals*.

According to Rajeev Kinra, literary civility was a part of the epistolary network as literati and other intellectuals routinely circulated poetry among fellow connoisseurs via extensive Mughal postal service. These letters included literary suggestions (*islāh*), appended poetry as a gesture of courtesy, or were used to punctuate a thought.<sup>91</sup> Chandrabhan Brahman, for example, compiled his writings, including his official and private letters. These letters are replete with his *ghazals*. At times, these were written to make his writing more effective and at other times he exchanged *ghazals* in the letters for *islāh* from his patrons and poet-friends. Kinra argues that "poetry was also used in such letters to simply add literary fervor to otherwise mundane correspondence."<sup>92</sup>

In a letter Chandrabhan Brahman wrote to Shah Ihladiya, whose official title was Ikhlas Khan, he expressed the longing to meet him and complained to his friend of not having written to him in a long time. He punctuated the entire point of the letter by playing on a common literary theme of the poet longing for an absent beloved:

I've had no news of my dear friend today;

Yesterday's promise is gone, and I am empty inside today.<sup>93</sup>

*Khabar nadaram az an yar-i mihrban imroz*

*Guzasht wa'da-yi di chi-st dar miyan imroz*<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, p. 29

<sup>91</sup>Kinra, p. 46

<sup>92</sup>Kinra, p. 175

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 183

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Rajeev Kinra opines that such poetry and Mughal letter-writing culture could function as a kind of social bridge, connecting people of diverse backgrounds, classes, and occupations through common literary and mystical idioms of Persian verse.<sup>95</sup> They reduced social distances and promoted a robust form of everyday civility. These letters provided space where literary matters and technicalities were discussed. Chandrabhan also wrote many letters concerned with the literary scene as he wrote in a letter to his poet-friend, Muhammad Jan Qudsi:

A Bouquet from the Garden of Unity, sent to the Banquet of Purest Intellect, Mulla Muhammad Jan Qudsi

Nightingale of a Thousand Tales, may your gracious character, nestled amid the orchards of melody makers' expression, be forever loquacious and full of *ghazals* and sweet songs! In this bountiful age, which is among the most rarified and distinguished eras [in history], the one who most delights in literary capital [*naqd-i sukhan*] and best evaluates the masters of expression [*qadr-i arbab-i sukhan*] is none other than your angelic self, that mine of eloquence and good taste [*ma'dan-i fasahat-o-balaghat*]. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon all wayfarers in the land of meaning and wanderers through the valleys of poetry to remit their literary wares [*mata'-i sukhan*] from every region to the bounteous assembly of that great sophisticate of the world. Although the worthless poetic merchandise of this insignificant speck [*mata'-i sukhan-i kasid-i in zarra-yi bi-miqdar*] is not nearly so fine that I may dare to venture to offer it for such a purpose, nevertheless, in the hopes of editorial guidance, I have set down a freshly composed *ghazal* here with my broken pen. I can only hope that the benefit of your revision will raise it to another level.

*Mā rā hamesha ba dil ghairat-i sabā bāshad*

*Ki āshnā-yi sar-i zulf-i u chi rā bāshad*

My heart is forever jealous of the breeze

Wondering why it too cannot caress the tips of her tresses

*Kunad zi parda tamāsha-yi kārnamā-yi husn*

*Agar kasi ba hijāb-i tu āshnā bāshad*

One who possesses even a passing acquaintance with your veil

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8

Would weave from that cloth a spectacular tale of epic beauty.

*Ba chashm-i har ki rasad nūr-i dīgar afzāyad*

*Ghubār-i ku-yi tu ham-rang-i tūtīyā bāshad*

An uncanny new light blazes in the eye of whoever enters your lane  
When the dust of the road, [instead of blinding], is a healing collyrium.

*Tu dar tariq-i mohabbat kaj āmadī sad bār*

*W' agar na rastī-yi rāh-i rahnumā bāshad*

A hundred times you have come crookedly down the path of love-  
Otherwise the straightness of the road  
Would have easily shown you the way.

*Ba jurm-i rafta agar 'uzr khwāsti sahl ast*

*Ba 'uzr-i rafta khata' gar kuni khata' bāshad*

To seek forgiveness for past sins is simple enough;  
To use past forgiveness as an excuse to err again, that is truly a crime.

*Na jīns-i 'ilm ba dast a\āmad-o-na naqd-i 'amal*

*Asar kuja ba tahi-dasti-idu'a bāshad*

It produces no commodity of knowledge, nor any monetary benefit:  
Buy why would you expect a return on investment from empty-handed prayer?

*Barahman az tu haman bih ki gosha-gir shawi*

*Ki muddā'a hama dar tark-i muddā'a bāshad*

Brahman, it is best to detach and consign yourself to a corner,

For the highest achievement, after all, is in renouncing the very idea of achievement.<sup>96</sup>

This letter shows that there was a close bond between Muhammad Jan Qudsi and Chandrabhan Brahman and poetry was one of the binding factors of their relationship with each other. The literary exchange was quite common between the two. In one letter written by Muhammad Jan Qudsi, he praised Chandrabhan Brahman for his literary innovativeness. Even a single verse of *ghazal* was good enough to put across Chandrabhan Brahman's mystical ideas with his friends and family. In the letter to his son, TejBhan, he wrote extensively on how to cultivate the kind of habits, temperament, and civility that he considered to be the essential traits of any successful Mughal gentleman. Like other places, here too, he expounded at length upon the moral necessity of treating the material world with an air of "detachment" (*be-ta'alluqi*). The same philosophy of detachment was the subject of a verse which he quoted in the letter to Muhammad Jan Qudsi.

It can thus be argued that verses of *ghazals* played an important role in presenting the contents of letters in a concise form. *Ghazals* filled these letters with a personal touch, emotion, and philosophical ideas, as and when required. It required a certain kind of training and education, which facilitated the exchange of broad-minded, unorthodox, multicultural ideas, reflected in the tropes of the poetry found in these correspondences. For all these reasons, *ghazals* were suitable for epistolary correspondences as they carried forward the humanistic outlook of Mughal India through its verses. These correspondences were not supposed to be lengthy, so adding the most impactful verse of a *ghazal* would have occupied less space and emoted more clearly with elegance. Such import given to the use of poetry in state and personal correspondences is reflective of the degree of cultural refinement of the times.

A verse of *ghazal* was equally suitable to carry forward political dialogue between Mughals and Safavid ruler, Shah Abbas. Some discussions were recorded in *Majalis-i Jahangiri* regarding the letters exchanged between Jahangir and Shah Abbas. The following *sh'er* ("verse") was enclosed in the letter:

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<sup>96</sup>The letter and the verse are quoted in Rajeev Kinra, pp. 187-8.

*Humnashīnīm be khyāl-i-tu wa āsuda dilam*

*Ke īn wisālī ast ke dar pāye gham (i) hijrānash nīst*<sup>97</sup>

I sit together with your image and my heart is at rest

This is a union that is not followed by the grief of separation.<sup>98</sup>

Jahangir was very particular about the kind of *sh'er* which should be sent as a reply to the above-mentioned *sh'er*. So he commanded the poets and others present in the assembly that he wanted them to compose verses that were at par with the above-quoted verse. He further demanded that the verses should carry the themes and subjects discussed in the letter in brief (*mī khwāhīm ke tamāme-i-mazmūn-i-nāme ke be Shāh mī navīsīm, dar ān bayt yāfte shaved yāni ke īn majmal-i-ān mehfil mafassal būde bāshad*).<sup>99</sup> A detailed discussion of the sessions devoted to the selection of verses to be sent in response to the above-quoted verse will be made in chapter three of this study. However, Jahangir's intention of claiming political and cultural superiority over Safavid Iran can be gleaned from the literary discussion followed by recitation of Naziri Nishapuri's following verse:

*Shādam az dil ke maye-i-shauq-i-tu madhoshash kard*

*Khabar az rashk-i-wisāl o gham-i-hijrānash nīst*<sup>100</sup>

The verse talks about the drunken state of the lover's content heart, that he has no sense of either the jealousy of union or the sorrow of separation from the friend/ beloved.

Jahangir rejected this verse, complaining that "an elder brother does not write like this or about such things to his younger brother" (*barādar-i-buzurg be barādar-i-khurd chanīn namī*

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<sup>97</sup>*Majalis-iJahangiri*, p. 233

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Corinne Lefevre, "The Majalis-iJahangiri (1608-1611): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 55 (BRILL, 2012), p. 264

<sup>99</sup>*Majalis-iJahangiri*, p. 198

<sup>100</sup>*Majalis-iJahangiri*, p. 205

*navīsad*).<sup>101</sup> Here, one verse of a *ghazal* was important not only to put across the message clearly but also to portray Jahangir as the "big brother" or superior of Shah Abbas. Jahangir's concern about sending verses at par with the ones sent by Shah Abbas points to competition in the field of cultural superiority between the Mughals and the Safavids. But from Jahangir's reference to himself as "*barādar-i-buzurg*" (elder brother), one can argue that Mughals did not feel inferior to Safavids in any respect. They patronized poets from different regions and backgrounds which was an indicator of a just and cosmopolitan empire.

Thus, it can be argued that through poetic exchange in official correspondences, Jahangir was carrying out a political dialogue through a verse of a *ghazal*. Probably, *ghazals* were a more suitable medium for this correspondence because an independent verse could carry the message with a certain emotional quotient and friendly companionship between the two leaders of two strong empires. Thus, a closer look at literary discussions shows that the verses were not only written to add elegance to the correspondence but were actively and consciously crafted to carry out political dialogue and maintain amicable relations between the two powers.

### **Documentation of *Ghazals* (*Divāns* of poets, *Bayāz* and *Muraqqa*)**

*Divān* is the term widely used in Arabic and Persian to designate collected poems of a poet. According to Francois de Blois,<sup>102</sup> many Arabic philologists of the Abbasid period assembled the works of pre-Islamic Arab poets, which had been orally transmitted, into *divāns*. Many poets of Abbasid period often collected their own poems, however in some cases, their *divāns* were put together posthumously by others. The earliest manuscripts of *divāns* of pre-Mongol period have survived mostly as works copied two or three centuries later by Safavid literati. It is difficult to say whether these *divāns* were based on the earlier, lost copies or were assembled on the basis of poetry found in anthologies. Many *divāns* were put together by editors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Some poets published multiple *divāns*. For instance, Amir Khusro collected his poems, written at different points of time in his life in five different *divāns*, each was accompanied by an introduction in prose. Similarly, Jami had written three *divāns*. On the other hand, the works of a

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<sup>101</sup> *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p. 205

<sup>102</sup> Francois de Blois, "Divan: iii. Collected works of poet", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. VII, Fasc. 4, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/divan#pt3>



poet, including shorter and longer poems along with prose writings were put together in a complete collection, which were usually called *kulliyat*.

In most *divāns* and their modern editions, poems are grouped by genre. Within each section, the poems are arranged alphabetically by the last letter. The arrangement of *divāns* usually begins with *qasidas* followed by shorter poems, *ghazals*, *qi'tas*, and *rubay'is*. However, earlier copies of *divāns* might not follow the same scheme. The compositions could also be grouped by subject. Many editors and compilers of the *divāns* provide additional information about the lives of the poet, family background, journey, struggles, literary style, and characteristics. It is the preface of Faizi's *divān* that provides information about his life as well as his account given in various contemporary *tazkiras* and chronicles like *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Muntakhabu-t Tawarikh*, *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, *Haft Iqlim*, *Majmua'-al Khas*, *Majmua'-al Nafai's*. His *divān* also provides a painting depicting him accompanying Akbar and his various courtiers along with his writing and seal. Similarly, in the introduction of the edited copy of the *divān* of Talib Amuli, the editor has dealt with the life, experiences, journey and patronage of the poet in great detail, filling it with anecdotes related to his life. Similarly, the introduction and preface of the *divān* of Abu Talib Kalim Kashani provide a detailed insight into his life, the number of verses, his journey to India and the story behind his pen name. *Divāns* often prove instrumental not only in recreating some aspects of poet's life but also document their compositions, including *ghazals*. They are the repositories of all the *ghazals* of poets.

Apart from *divāns*, *bayāz* ("small notebook") is another text where *ghazals* of different poets are reproduced. *Bayāz* is an important source because it shows that people maintained personal diaries to keep their favourite verses at hand. *Bayāz* is the little "notebook" which lovers of poetry carried around with them for recording the verses which they liked or found interesting.<sup>103</sup> It could include some verses by the owner and by poets, living and dead. Such notebooks were maintained by people of different class ranging from emperor (Jahangir), Mughal office holders or poets like Sa'ib and Bedil, who included the verses of Chandrabhan Brahman and many other poets. *Bayāz* were maintained by anyone who was passionate about poetry. These notebooks provide a glimpse of the poetic world of those who maintained them. Chandrabhan Brahman in

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<sup>103</sup> Frances W. Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 64

*ChaharChaman* provides an account of the literary milieu of Lahore city where young boys brought their notebooks in the evening in public spaces. He writes:

...and, since this is also the day when schoolchildren have the most free time, from every street and lane young boys with notebooks in hand and flowers in their hair [*bayāzdar hast wagul bar sar*] come strutting around the bazaar [*khiramanbasair-i bazaar mi aayand*], in keeping with the ways of youth...<sup>104</sup>

Maintaining *bayāz* became an easy way of having access to one's loved verses and being able to memorise and recite in everyday conversations. Pritchett informs that some students maintained notebooks devoted only to certain kinds of poetry; for instance, to the works of living poets or finest poets etc.<sup>105</sup> *Bayāz* are important sources where *ghazals* or its few verses are found in large numbers. Such notebooks formed a channel through which many verses were preserved and disseminated over time and space. According to Pritchett, *bayāz* was closely linked to the genre of *tazkiras*, as the former could become the latter, if an introductory note or some relevant information about the poet is provided by the compiler of *bayāz*. One might disagree with the degree of equivalence between the two forms but the similarities between the two are undeniable.

*Bayāz* was compilation of works of different poets spread across time and space, put together in a single notebook on the aesthetic sensibility and poetic taste of the person who maintained the notebook. Such sources provide an insight into poetic taste of people in Mughal India. *Bayāz* helps in estimating the extent of poets' popularity in any period of time. Jahangir maintained a diary where he recorded the verses that appealed to his literary sensibility. In one *majlis* ("literary gathering"), Shaikh Jamili had composed a *ghazal*, the word play involved in the *ghazal* impressed the emperor and he commanded for the *ghazal* to be recorded in his diary. Closely related to *bayāz* were *muraqqa'* ("album"). Shamsuddaula Shah Nawaz Khan informs in *Ma'asir ul Umara* that,

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire* (University of California Press, 2015), p. 148

<sup>105</sup> Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, p. 64

Zafar Khan had made an album with a selection of the poems of every poet, who had been connected with him by ties of intimacy, written in their own handwriting, with the likeness (painting) of the poet on the back of the page.<sup>106</sup>

Since *bayāz* and *muraqqas* contained only few verses of poets, it points towards the fact that only few verses of *ghazals* were more impactful than others; and often, only select few verses were recorded instead of the entire *ghazal*. Such practices can be understood as a form of reception of verses by the readers. They noted the ones they liked and left the rest. The same person could like verses of all kinds or might prefer poets writing in one particular style whereas, some people preferred verses of poets who composed in different styles. Therefore, a closer study of *bayāz* and *muraqqas* has the potential of revealing some aspects of literary taste and sensibility of people in Mughal India.

### ***Ghazals in Jahangirnama***

One of the most important texts for *ghazals* was prose works. Poetry can express ideas and thoughts of all kinds with the ability to create a strong impact on the readers. The practice of adding poetry to prose was an established tradition. One of the most important autobiographical works of early modern India is *Jahangirnama*, of Mughal emperor Jahangir (1569-1627), completed by Mutammad Khan<sup>107</sup> and later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by a historian named Muhammad Hadi.<sup>108</sup> The *Jahangirnama* is an interesting source of the history of the Mughal Empire and an engaging autobiographical text. The use of poetry and anecdotes add immensely to the readability of the text. The text is dotted with several verses - at times used to punctuate thoughts, at other times, to support the claim of divine kingship or to appreciate the beauty of landscape or flora and fauna of different kinds.

Jahangir was inclined to appreciate the natural beauty, flora, and fauna of different areas. His image as a naturalist is brought out by the detailed descriptions of pair of cranes, a tiger, and a

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<sup>106</sup>H. Beveridge, (revised, annotated), completed by Bains Prasad, *Ma'asiruUmara, vol. II* by Shamuddaula Shah Nawaz Khan (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1952), p. 1019

<sup>107</sup>Mutammad Khan was the personal secretary of Jahangir. From 1622 owing to Jahangir's illness, Mutammad Khan wrote the memoirs and brought it to the emperor for editing and correction. Wheeler M. Thackston, (translated, edited and annotated). *The Jahangirnama. Memoirs of Jahangir the Emperor of India* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. ix.

<sup>108</sup>Thackston, *The Jahangirnama*, p. ix

tigress, pictures of different kinds of birds and flowers, etc.<sup>109</sup> Natural elements, seasons, praises of gardens, flowers, rain became important subject matters of poetic verses composed in his court. The aesthetics of a place, like gardens, a city, or a region were appreciated using poetry. That is why the description of springtime and the flowers of Kashmir can be found in *Jahangirnama*. The following verses were placed in the section about the description of the valleys, flowers, springs, and mountains of Kashmir. The beauty of the geographical features of Kashmir was versified as beauty of the beloved. Jahangir was absolutely in awe of Kashmir and added the following *ghazal* to the description of the region:

The coquettes of the garden displayed themselves, cheeks adorned, each like a lamp.

Buds give off the fragrance of musk from beneath their skin, like musky amulets on the arm of the beloved.

The melody of the dawn rising nightingale sharpens the desire of wine-drinkers.

At every spring a duck puts its beak to drink—like golden scissors cutting silk.

A carpet of flowers and greenery laid out in a garden: the lamp of the rose lit by the breeze.

The violet has twisted the ends of her locks, tying a tight knot in the heart of the rosebud.<sup>110</sup>

Poetry was also used to commemorate unique events as well as to make an impact on the readers. At one instance in his memoirs, there is a story of a pair of cranes, their separation and consequent death. The theme of the plight of lover on being separated from his beloved was quite popular. The pain of this separation was so unbearable that the lovers died. The impact of the story is strengthened when following lines followed the story:

My body melted away in heart-rending separation.

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<sup>109</sup> As is shown by Corinne Lefevre, 'Recovering a missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahangir (r. 1605-27)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (2007)

<sup>110</sup> Wheeler M. Thackston, (translated, edited and annotated). *The Jahangirnama. Memoirs of Jahangir the Emperor of India*(Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 322

My soul-searing sigh burns like a candle.  
 My day of gaiety has turned as black as the night of grief.  
 Separation from you has made me like this.<sup>111</sup>

One can see how an extraordinary story found its culmination in a verse of *ghazal*. The poet talks about separation which burned his heart and soul and its extreme heat melted away his body. The effect of the heat of separation is manifested in the “soul-searing” sighs, which “burns like a candle”. In the above-quoted verse, the poet also plays on the dichotomy of light and darkness, represented by gaiety and grief respectively.

It has been noted that literature was an important attribute of overall civility at the Mughal court. The exchange of poetry on public occasions and many private and public gatherings was common. In one such gathering Jahangir, a literary connoisseur like many other men in the Mughal state, recited a *ghazal* which he claimed to have composed at the spur of the moment:

What am I to do now that your arrow of grief has penetrated my heart?  
 Before the evil eye arrived one comes after the other.

You strut drunk, and the whole world is intoxicated by you.  
 I burn incense against the evil eye.

I am struck dumb at the idea of traversing the road of union, and I cry out in  
 the hope that no one knows.

I am drunk in union with the beloved and disconsolate in separation. Alas for  
 such grief that torments me.

It is time to admit helplessness, Jahangir.  
 Offer your head in hopes that a spark of light may come to help.<sup>112</sup>

Each verse has a different theme in the above-quoted *ghazal* and is a complete unit in itself even when read independently of the whole composition. A Few stock metaphors are put to use, for instance, the lover’s drunkenness in the love of the beloved, who could be a human figure or god. The theme of the agony of separation and living in the hope of union is the central theme, which

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<sup>111</sup>Jahangirnama, : *Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, p. 266

<sup>112</sup>Jahangirnama, p. 130

is related to the Sufi ideas of love of god and embarking on the journey to be united with the almighty. One interesting belief which finds a place in the *ghazal* is that the state of contentment (here, the drunkenness of the world) might be ruined by the evil eye. The practice followed in India was and is to burn *aspand* (“wild rue”) to ward off the evil eye. Jahangir points to the same practice and says that the poet burns *aspand* so that the evil eye does not ruin the state of joy of being drunk by the drunkenness of the beloved. This feature of *ghazals* allowed the intervention of the audience at the level of reception and made *ghazals* quotable in different contexts.

### ***Ghazals in Literary gatherings/ poetic assemblies (mushā'iras)***

The popularity of *ghazals* could also be attributed to their performance in literary and musical gatherings. Poetry was also meant to be performed for an audience. It was to be heard in poetic contestations (*mushā'iras*) or as *qawwalis* in royal courts or Sufi *khānqahs* (“hospices”); or at celebration of *urs*<sup>113</sup> celebration of famous Sufi saints at their *dargahs*. Sunil Sharma opines that professional poets sometimes composed and declaimed their own verses and in addition to that, there was a special class of people whose oral skills were prized for various reasons like their mellifluous voice, beauty, place of origin or connection to powerful people.<sup>114</sup> Some poets had their poems read by a professional declaimer (*ravi*),<sup>115</sup> whose oratory skills were highly prized.

*Majalis-i-Jahangiri* gives interesting insight into the way *majlis* was held. Courtly literary sessions were conducted in a similar fashion like a court but, here, the human side of Jahangir was prominent. There was an officer whose duty was to receive petitions and compositions before it was presented to the emperor. Additionally, there was a protocol officer (*duago*). Courtly etiquettes were strictly followed, with the audience and poets performing *kornish* (“salutation”) in front of the emperor. One could speak with the permission of the emperor. Jahangir took personal interest in correcting poets and, thus, often criticized or praised them on various aspects like the technicalities of poetry, correct use of words, which added weight (“*wazan*”) to the verse. These literary sessions point towards Jahangir’s interest in and knowledge of Persian poetry. He often commanded poets to recite the verses of his liking again

<sup>113</sup> *Urs* refers to the death anniversary of Sufi saints. On this day, a celebration was held at the dargah of the saint with people coming from different places to pay their respect to the deceased.

<sup>114</sup> Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court* (Harvard University Press, 2017), p. 53

<sup>115</sup> Sunil Sharma, ‘Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Persian Texts’ in Francesca Orsini and Katherine Butler Schofield ed. *Tellings and Texts Music Literature and Performance in North India* (Cambridge; Open Book Publishers, 2015), p. 283

or to compose verses in the same mode or on same subject matter. For instance, in one such session, he forgave poet Hayati, whose earlier compositions he had not liked and had asked him to compose better verses, which he later appreciated greatly, so much so that he had asked him to recite the last lines again.<sup>116</sup> He is also seen to be playful at times in his comments and compares the works of different poets. For instance, in the 83<sup>rd</sup> session, he had asked poets like Naziri Nishapuri, Mullah Shakibi and Sayida Gilani to compose verses at par with the verses which he had received from Shah Abbas. In this session, he asked Shakibi if his verses were better than Naziri's and asked him to present those.<sup>117</sup>

In one such nocturnal session, Jahangir announced that a conceit occurred to his mind. After he recited the opening verse (*matla'*), praises were showered upon him. It gives an insight into the way *ghazals* were composed in literary sessions. As the night went by, suitable *qāfiyas* (rhyming word which occurs before *radīf*) were discussed and that's how one after the other Jahangir finished composing his *ghazal*, praises were again showered on the emperor for his literary talent. Abdul Sattar claimed the poetry of Jahangir appeared simple on sight but was deeply profound and inimitable. He used the term *sahl-i mumtani'* ("easy yet inimitable"), which was a desirable feature of literary works. But it could not be produced by everyone. In order to produce such compositions, one had to be a poetic master. One can disagree with the high praise showered by him on Jahangir's poetic caliber.

*Ghazals* were one of the favourite genres of Jahangir as he claimed in a few literary sessions. In the 81<sup>st</sup> session, he claimed that he disliked *qasidas*.<sup>118</sup> In another session, he reiterated the same thing while discussing different poetic genres. He preferred *ghazals* and *rubayis* over *qasidas*, as poets, in order to please their patrons and boast about their capabilities, often spoke ill about the ancestors. His interest in and fondness of *ghazals* and *rubayis* can also be gleaned from the fact that most of the recorded discussions and performances mentioned in *Majalis-i Jahangiri* were related to these two genres of poetry.

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<sup>116</sup>*Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 90<sup>th</sup> session, p. 223

<sup>117</sup>*Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 83<sup>rd</sup> session, p. 204

<sup>118</sup>Arif Naushahi and Moeen Nizami (ed, introduced and annotated), *Majalis-i Jahangiri* by Abd al-Sattar ibn-i Qasim Lahori (Tehran: Miras-i-Maktub, 2006), p. 198.

Many literary discussions recorded in *Majalis-i-Jahangiri* were centered round either newly composed *ghazals* by the poets in the court or the *ghazals* of poets like Jami, Hafiz, Amir Khusro etc. One of the most important sites where *ghazals* came in the public domain in oral form was literary gatherings. *Majalis-i-Jahangiri* gives interesting insight into the way in which a *majlis* was held. *Mushai'ras* were held at different levels, from royal gatherings to the ones which were organized by nobles, learned men, in shops etc. In these gatherings, poets would contest against each other. Composing *ghazals* on one *tarah* ("rhyme scheme") was a common practice. In literary gatherings, *tarah* was decided beforehand and the poets had to follow the prescribed *tarah*. Impromptu composition of verses on a *tarah* was a very popular practice in literary gatherings. This required long practice and stern discipline. The poets would bring their compositions and recite it. Detailed discussions on various aspects of them would follow. If the emperor liked *ash'er*, he would ask for it to be repeated and sometimes told his officials to copy it. The poets were rewarded handsomely if the emperor liked their compositions.

Another practice was that the emperor would compose or recite *ash'er* and would ask others to join in. *Jahangirnama* is replete with such instances:

Amiru'l-Umara happened to recite this line of poetry: "Leave us alone, O Messiah, for we have been killed by love. Your restoring one life is equivalent to a hundred murders." Since I have a poetic nature, occasionally, voluntarily and involuntarily, a hemistich or line of poetry pops into my head. I composed this line: "Do not turn your cheek from me, for I am not without you for a moment. Your breaking one heart is equivalent to a hundred murders." After this was recited, everyone present who had a poetic nature composed a line in the same mode. Mulla Ali-Ahmad, who has been introduced, previously, came up with a pretty good line: "O miibtasib, fear the weeping of the old man of the Magi: your breaking one vat is equivalent to a hundred murders."<sup>119</sup>

Another practice was that a line of *ghazal* was composed in imitation of a *ghazal* of some other poet and everyone joined in to compose verses on the same metre and theme. An instance of this is narrated in *Jahangirnama*:

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<sup>119</sup>*Jahangirnama*, pp. 138-139



Once "...Khan-i-Khanan had composed a *ghazal* in imitation of the hemistich that goes "For one rose it is necessary to endure the trouble of a hundred thorns." MirzaRustamSafavi and his son MirzaMurad also tried their skill in poetry. Extemporaneously the following opening *ghazal* line popped into my head: "It is necessary to quaff a goblet of wine in the face of the garden. There are many clouds: it is necessary to quaff much wine.

All those present at the party who had poetic talent composed *ghazals* and presented them. Apparently the original hemistich was by Mawlana Abdul-Rahman Jami<sup>120</sup>...<sup>121</sup>

One important aspect of the royal literary gatherings was the discussion which took place on different aspects of poetry. For instance, the phrase '*safed wa syah wa surkh*' from Amir Khusro's *ghazal* was one of the most commonly discussed topics in terms on poetic discussions. Jahangir ordered Naziri to recite the *ghazal* from Amir Khusro's *divān* and warned him that the *ghazal* is a difficult one. However, Naziri did not agree and claimed that it was not that difficult.<sup>122</sup> Abdul Sattar's agency is very important as at this point, he praised Jahangir for his knowledge of the complexity of poetry (which, he argued, many had lacked). When Naziri disagreed that the *ghazal* of Amir Khusro was not that difficult, Jahangir questioned his intelligence and advised him to conceal his lack of knowledge and to not waste his time in trying to grasp the meaning of the *ghazal*. He also seems to have passed comments on Naziri, telling him that in India, the *radīf* "*safed wa syah wa surkh*" was very important in terms of understanding and appreciating beauty, making a sarcastic comment that being an Iranian, 'what do you know about the importance of "*safed wa syah wa surkh*"'.<sup>123</sup> Jahangir was appreciative of the aesthetic sensibility in the Indian subcontinent. Many Indic themes and practices were subjects of verses composed in his court, as we noted earlier that the practice of eating *pān*, *supārī* and the redness of beloved's teeth (a result of chewing *pān*) was a subject of discussion in a few sessions.<sup>124</sup> In many other sessions, Jahangir can be seen discussing and explaining the

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<sup>120</sup>Nuruddin Abdul-Rahman Jami (1414-1492) was the premier literary figure of Timurid Herat, a prolific poet and author.

<sup>121</sup>*Jahangirnama*, p. 265

<sup>122</sup>*Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 155

<sup>123</sup> "*Shuma qadr-i aan safed wa syah wa surkh ra cheh danid?*", *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 199

<sup>124</sup>*Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 199

importance and beauty of the same *radīf*. The discussion of this phrase was linked to the beauty of the colours of the *mainabird* which was found in India.<sup>125</sup>

### ***Ghazals* in Musical gatherings**

Oral and performatory aspects of poetry were closely linked to music. Many literary compositions were sung to music. Some of the verses of classical poets became quite famous among the audience. Chandrabhan Brahman wrote in his memoirs that a song was made out of a quatrain which he had recited impromptu in a literary gathering.<sup>126</sup> The quatrain was a praise poem for Shah Jahan and was performed many times in emperor's presence.<sup>127</sup> Along with quatrains, *ghazals* were also popular in musical gatherings. It was the structure/ form of *ghazals* which made it suitable to be performed with music. According to Peter Manuel, the rhyme and the refrain in *ghazals* provided certain rhythm to the verses which blended well with music. He further argues that, “*ghazals* are not meant to be silently read, but to be heard, ideally at literary gatherings (*mushā'iras*). Owing to its meter, its refined, flowery diction, its generally erotic content, and above all refrain-like end-rhymes the *ghazal* lends itself to musical rendering.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, he reads *ghazals* as both, a literary and musical genre. The double rhymes (*qāfiya* and *radīf*) in *ghazals* elevate the difficulty for the poet but also lend a musical tone to the whole composition.<sup>129</sup> An incident mentioned in *Jahangirnama* can be crucial in speculating how *ghazals* were given a musical tonality. Jahangir wrote about the day when Prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan) had sent Ustad Muhammad, the flute player, “who is without equal in his art”<sup>130</sup> to Jahangir's court. Ustad Muhammad played a tune on a *ghazal* which he had composed for the emperor.<sup>131</sup> For a master flute player to have composed a *ghazal* and then play a tune to render it a musical tone would have added immense value and popularity to the composition. The probability of *ghazals* becoming popular must have increased manifold when they were sung in assemblies. Badauni in *Muntakhabut Tawarikh* provides a list of poets of all degrees in the court of Akbar. Among the long list of poets, there were some who used to be famous for their singing

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<sup>125</sup> *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 169

<sup>126</sup> Rajiv Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, pp. 40-1

<sup>127</sup> Kinra, p. 41

<sup>128</sup> Peter Manuel, 'A Historical Survey of Urdu *Ghazal* Song in India', *Asian Music*, vol. 20, no. 1 (University of Texas Press, autumn 1988- winter 1989), p. 94

<sup>129</sup> Manuel, p. 94

<sup>130</sup> Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, p. 220

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220

as well. One such poet was Qasim Kahi.<sup>132</sup> Badauni gives an account of his talent and states that he set the opening couplets of his *ghazals* to music, “so that they have become known throughout the world and are sung in all assemblies, enlivening alike the banquets of kings and the gatherings of mystics.”<sup>133</sup> This account tells us that *ghazal* singing was popular in all kinds of gatherings.

*Ghazal* singing served as a form of entertainment for the elite class. But for some Sufi *silsilas*, musical gatherings were integral to their path of union with the god. Certain practices like collective recollection of the name of God (*zikr*), ritualized listening to music and mystical poetry (*sama'*) etc., were institutionalized.<sup>134</sup> During *sama'* sessions, music was played and mystical poetry was recited in order to induce a state of ecstasy (*wajd*) in the audience, which often led to spontaneous dance or frantic rhythmical movements.<sup>135</sup> In *sama'* sessions, the *ghazals* were presented through performances by *qawwāls* (professional singers). According to Peter Manuel, the earliest references to singing of *ghazals* in South Asia can be found in *qawwāli* (group devotional music).<sup>136</sup> *Qawwāli* is an energetic, highly rhythmic genre, generally performed outdoors by a group of singers and accompanists. It is designed to inspire intense devotional sentiment and ideally, mystical trance (*fana*).<sup>137</sup> In the courts, the performers of *ghazals* could be courtesans or professional male musicians.<sup>138</sup> The Chishtiya and Suhrawardia Orders of South Asia were admirers of the *qawwāli* and Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki is said to have died in 1236 C.E. while in a musical trance induced by a *qawwāli*.<sup>139</sup> *Ghazals* were mostly associated with the concept of love, which was often “divine love” (*ishq-i haqiqi*) expressed in

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<sup>132</sup>Qasim Kahi belonged to Kabul. He was well versed in various arts including composing enigmas, elocution, writing history and had knowledge of mysticism of Sufis. Badauni also informs us that Qasim Kahi, in his early days, also associated with Sufi Shaikhs. But condemning the poet, Badauni writes that, “..he was always surrounded by a crowd of *qalandars*, lewd fellows and courtesans.” He had also written a treatise on music. Abdul Qadir Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol III, Wolseley Haig (ed. and tr.) (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1925), pp. 242-8

<sup>133</sup>Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol. III, p. 244

<sup>134</sup> Alexander Knysh, ‘Sufism’ in Robert Irwin ed. *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. IV (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 83

<sup>135</sup> Alexander Knysh, ‘Sufism’, *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. IV, p. 83

<sup>136</sup> Manuel, p. 95

<sup>137</sup> Manuel, p. 95

<sup>138</sup> Manuel, p. 96

<sup>139</sup>Adam Nayyar, ‘Origin and History of Qawwali’, LokVirsa Research Centre (Islamabad, 1988),

<https://sites.google.com/site/sufiqawwali/home/history-of-qawwali> (accessed on February 3, 2020)

terms of “earthly/ human love” (*ishq-i majazi*). The concept of love was equally emphasized by Sufi mystics. It was the imagery of love which gave a mystical character to *ghazals*. The *ghazals* of Amir Khusro were particular favourites in the Mughal court and in Chishti circles.<sup>140</sup>

Jahangir, in particular, was quite fond of the *ghazals* of Khusro and initiated many discussions about the poet’s verses during literary sessions. Abdus Sattar Lahori noted in *Majalis-iJahangiri* that, “at bedtime all kinds of singers and musicians gathered around the ruler as he drank wine.”<sup>141</sup> Singers usually performed a single poem for hours.<sup>142</sup> *Qawwāls* often repeated a phrase or a verse indicating both the obvious and hidden meaning by emphasizing and repeating various words and syllables, taking the audience into the discovery of hitherto not obvious meanings.<sup>143</sup> There were many stories of people dying after reaching an ecstatic state. Interestingly, one such account of *qawwāli* held in Mughal court provides a good example of the effect, which *ghazals* sung to music had on the audience. Jahangir recounts in his autobiography that a group of singers performed a *ghazal* which is popularly attributed to Amir Khusro. The singers repeated the verse *har qaum rāst rāhey, dinī wa qibla gāhey* (“every nation has its own path and direction for prayer”).<sup>144</sup> The emperor enquired about the meaning of the verse. The seal engraver, Mulla Ali Ahmad came forward and narrated the story which his father had told him about Nizamuddin Auliya that once while observing a group of Hindus offering prayers at the bank of Yamuna river, the saint recited the first line of the verse (*har qaum rāst rāhey, dinī wa qibla gāhey*). To which Amir Khusro responded by reciting the second verse: *man qibla rāst kardam bar samt kaj kulāhey* (“we have made our *qibla* straight in the direction of one with his cap awry”),<sup>145</sup> looking in the direction of Nizamuddin Auliya. Having finished the sentence, Mulla Ali Ahmad collapsed and died on the spot. To be sure about it, the emperor got him checked by the *hakims* but no disease could be diagnosed.<sup>146</sup> This incident left the spectators confused and astonished at the intensity of the impact which the *qawwāli* had on Mulla Ali Ahmad. Abdus Sattar wrote that when Ali Ahmad repeated the phrase “*bar samt kaj kulāhey*” twice, he became unconscious and

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<sup>140</sup> Manuel. P. 96

<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Sunil Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, p. 56

<sup>142</sup> Sharma, p. 56

<sup>143</sup> Adam Nayyar, ‘Origin and History of *Ghazals*

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in *Jahangirnama*, p. 109

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in *Jahangirnama*, p. 109

<sup>146</sup> The incident is mentioned in *Jahangirnama*, p. 109 as well as in *Majalis-iJahangiri*, 76<sup>th</sup> session, pp. 184-6

fell on ground.<sup>147</sup> Sometimes verses of some poets acquired mystical power that they created a very strong impact on the audience. In this case, a verse of a *ghazal* (with music and the background context) became a medium of reaching the state of ecstasy and union with the divine. For Jahangir, such poetic and musical gatherings were an important source of relaxation as well as an opportunity to engage with poets, singers and other courtiers. Most of these sessions were concluded with Jahangir discussing the significance, technicalities or the meaning of poetry.

Sama' sessions were also held in the hospices of many Sufi saints and during the celebration of the death anniversary of saints or famous poets, in the premises of their tomb structures. In the context of such musical gatherings, one can speculate that the purport of *ghazals* acquired greater meaning as they were also the carriers of the philosophy of the saint or the *silsila* to which he belonged. Such gatherings would have provided a space for the saints and the followers of an order to propagate their beliefs and practices to people through the medium of poetry and songs; in many cases, *ghazals* played that crucial role. Many times Persian *ghazals* also incorporated Hindawi couplets and were performed on such occasions. There are several such bilingual *ghazals*, which are popularly attributed to Amir Khusro and other Sufi saints. Even though, this attribution can be challenged but the possibility of performance of such bilingual *ghazals* cannot be completely ruled out. It would have widened the outreach of the songs and the ideas and beliefs of the concerned order and saint.

### ***Ghazals, Built Structures and Objects***

Other important sites of *ghazals* were built structures as well as material objects. Some pertinent issues raised in this section are related to the link between poetry, space and material objects. Did inscribing poetry in general and verse of a *ghazal* in particular add to the value or importance of a space and objects? Why were verses of a poet inscribed on the walls of his tomb complex?

Verses inscribed on walls of built structures fulfilled many functions. In religious buildings like mosques and tombs Quranic verses adorn the gateways, compounds and pillars. In Indo-Persian architecture, inscribing poetry added an aesthetic symmetry to the built spaces. Poetic verses

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<sup>147</sup>*Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 185

inscribed on buildings also provided crucial information about the date, patronage and architects of the structures. This informative function of inscribed verses is exemplified in many cases.

*Ghazals* and quatrains often do not provide information about the structures but they are laden with complex thoughts and philosophy. Jahangir recorded that in the year 1618, when they stopped near a tank in Hindaun, there was a stone terrace in the middle of the lake. On one of the pillars, these few lines of poetry were inscribed, which impressed upon Jahangir and he had them copied:

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best  
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,  
Have drunk their cup a round or two before,  
And one by one, crept silently to rest.<sup>148</sup>

Similarly, the following verse is inscribed on the tomb of Anarkali<sup>149</sup> in Lahore:

*Tā qiyāmat shukr gūyam kirdagār-i khvīsh rā*  
*Ah gar man bāz bīnam rū-yi yār-i khvīsh rā!*

I would give thanks to God until the day of resurrection  
Ah! Should I ever behold the face of my beloved again!<sup>150</sup>

Another example of *ghazals* inscribed on the walls of tomb is Shaikh Fazlullah or Jamali's tomb in Mehrauli Archaeological Park. He was a Sufi and a poet during the rule of Lodhis and lived till the reign of Humayun. His pen name was Jalali, which he later changed to Jamali.<sup>151</sup> He accompanied Humayun on his Gujarat campaign and died there in 1536.<sup>152</sup> His body was brought to Delhi and his living chamber was converted into a tomb and his body interred there in

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<sup>148</sup>*Jahangirnama*, p. 290

<sup>149</sup>According to popular narrative, Anarkali was a slave girl in Akbar's harem, with whom Jahangir (Prince Salim then) fell in love. It is believed that this story enraged Akbar so much that he ordered her to be buried alive; however, lack of mention of this incident in any contemporary sources lead historians to dismiss it as a popular tale. The tomb was completed in 1615 CE.

<sup>150</sup>Quoted in Ebba Koch, "The Mughal Emperor as Solomon, Majnun, and Orpheus, or the Album as a Think Tank", *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World* 27, 2010, p. 303

<sup>151</sup>Salim Zaweed, "Medieval Monuments of Mehrauli: Reality and Myth", *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, vol. 76 (2015), p. 748

<sup>152</sup>Zaweed, p. 748

1536.<sup>153</sup> On the one hand, it is believed that the tomb was built prior to his death in the year 1528-9; whereas, according to Shah Nawaz Khan, the author of *Ma'asir-ul Umara*, the tomb was built by Shaikh Jamali's son Shaikh Gadai after his death.<sup>154</sup> The walls of the tomb are adorned with names of Allah and Quranic verses. Under the ceiling of the tomb, Persian verses are inscribed. Salim Zaweed reproduced the translated verses that are quoted below:

1. (Even) if our wickedness amounts to blasphemy still we look to Thy forgiveness hopefully
2. At Thy threshold we stand ashamed because Thy dogs can take no rest at night on account of our lamentations
3. Should I have the honour to approach the curtain of Thy secret, the angel would take pride in becoming our port
4. Being covered with the dust of Thy street, we are contemptible in the eyes of the (common) people, (whereas) in the estimation of the perspicacious our (outward) wretched condition is an honour.
5. By the cloud of Thy beneficence, the dust of sin has been washed away but the blot of our shame could not be removed.
6. On the day of separation from Thee, nothing but the sorrow we feel for Thee comes to console us in our helplessness and loneliness.
7. O Jamali, resort for protection to the door of the Friend, for our salvation can be attained at the door of the Beloved
8. In Thy love our restlessness has passed beyond bounds; it is hoped that Thou wilt feel pity on our wailing
9. How could the beautiful face of Thy forgiveness have become unveiled if our sinfulness had not shown it face
10. Although we deserve (Thy) wrath for our guilt, we cherish hope from Thy kindness

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<sup>153</sup>Zaweed. P. 750

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 751

11. We can attain the honour, dignity and glory of the angels if Thou (benignly) viewest my humility.
12. If we become guardian of the curtain of Thy Secret, (even) an angel will not be deserving of acting as our porter
13. By a drizzle from the cloud of (Thy) beneficence Thou washest away the dust of guilt from our ashamed face
14. Cast Thy eyes on Jamali with kindness (and) pay no heed to our idleness and shortcomings
15. O (God) Thy mercy.....from (Thy) wrath, and O (God)Thy kindness ordered Thy wrath to depart
16. Wherever they speak of Thy immense forgiveness, people's sin is not weighed there against (a grain of) barley.<sup>155</sup>

Tomb-complexes of many poets are adorned with inscriptions of verses from some of their famous *ghazals*. Tombs of Amir Khusro, Shaikh Jamali and Ghalib are some of the examples. We can argue that inscribing verses of *ghazals* in poets' tomb-complex was a way of remembering and immortalizing their creativity and celebrating their poetic legacy. In this context, even a single verse of a *ghazal* can function as carriers of poets' philosophy and creativity. By inscribing the verses on built structures, they were carried down to a large number of people who visited the structure. It was also one way of carrying forward the verses, the ideas and philosophy of the saints or poets for future generations.

Inscribing poetry on built structures also added more meaning and value to them. Similarly, in the case of material objects, a small poetic verse added value. From *Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, we can gather insight that poetry was often presented to the emperor along with or independently as a gift. When poets came to visit the emperor, as Shakibi (from Deccan) did, as had been recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> session, he presented a *bayt* ("verse") to the emperor. Similarly, in the 24<sup>th</sup> session, there was a discussion about a suitable gift which should be sent to Qulich Khan from emperor's side, in return for the *nazm* ("poem") which he had dedicated to Jahangir. Similarly, a quatrain composed by poet Shakibi Isfahani for Jahangir was inscribed on the hilt of the special "dagger"

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<sup>155</sup> As quoted in Zaweed, "Medieval Monuments of Mehrauli: Reality and Myth", pp. 751-2



(*khanjar*) of the emperor.<sup>156</sup> This quatrain consisted of names of Jahangir as well as Akbar. At another instance, Naziri Nishapuri composed a *ghazal*, with one verse about a wine cup (*pyāla*), which got inscribed on a special royal wine cup. The poet composed the verse of the *ghazal* in such a way that it added value to the wine cup by indicating the quality of the person who possessed it (i.e. Jahangir).

We have noted that the unique form of the Persian *ghazals* i.e. each verse of a *ghazal* considered as a complete unit as well as the universal theme of its content provided the genre with a ‘suitability’ and ‘quotability’ factor. *Ghazals* were thus flexible enough to be used for fulfilling different functions in different settings. In order to compose verses that were complete units in themselves, poets were expected to go through rigorous training and practice. This is the theme we will take into consideration in the next chapter.

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<sup>156</sup>*Majalis-i Jahangiri*, 24<sup>th</sup> session, p. 60

## CHAPTER 2

### GHAZAL POETS IN MUGHAL INDIA: PIONEERS OF A NEW AGE IN PERSIAN POETRY

Mughal India emerged as abode of peace (*dar al aman*) in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>157</sup> Many poets from Central Asia and Iran came to seek patronage under different patrons in Mughal India. This movement began actively after Humayun re-established Mughal rule in India even as many Iranian architects, scholars, physicians, poets and many others came in large numbers to Mughal India.<sup>158</sup> This immigration continued through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Iranians, as well as non-Iranian poets contributed immensely to the shaping of Persian language and literature in India. At the same time in Safavid Iran the lack of patronage, and religious persecution, compelled the literati and men of talent to turn towards India. In the conception of many poets, India was a land of wealth and immense opportunities to further their careers and pursuit of literary excellence. Besides, India was known to have intellectual freedom and literary flair and appreciation. Many poets thus came to India to gain material wealth and status.<sup>159</sup> The Mughal patronage system was robust enough to accommodate the immigrants from other parts of the Persianate world.

During the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Persian literature witnessed the emergence of a new literary style of writing called *tāza guī* (“originality of expression”). *Tāza guī* was a popular style among poets as well as the audience of poetry during this period. Hence a discussion regarding the various factors which led to its emergence, popularity and the role of poets and patrons in shaping the idea of *tāza guī* and freshness in compositions will be discussed in the chapter. There is a debate regarding this particular style of writing, which will be the subject of discussion later in the chapter. But before that the chapter will first examine the different categories of poets in Mughal court and some dynamics of the patronage system in Mughal India.

#### I

#### **Different categories of poets in Mughal court**

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<sup>157</sup> Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language of Mughal Politics”, p. 348

<sup>158</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, p. 24

<sup>159</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, pp. 3-4

*Ghazals* appealed to a wide audience of different backgrounds and age groups. It also became one of the favourite genres of poets. *Ghazal* poets came from diverse social and professional backgrounds. There was a hierarchy that was recognized among them in terms of status. At the highest level were the professional court poets. They were poets of certain repute, in the employment of the emperor or an influential rank holding administrator-patron. Akbar began the practice of conferring the title of *Malik-us-shu'ara* (“poet laureate”) and the first poet laureate of his court was Ghazali Mashhadi (c. 1565-1571 CE), followed by Fayzi (c. 1579-1595 CE); Talib Amuli was the poet laureate in Jahangir’s court, followed by Muhammad Jan Qudsi (1582-1646 CE) and then Abu Talib Kalim (c. 1628-1652 CE) under Shah Jahan. There were several occasions when court poets were weighed against gold or silver. According to Hadi Hasan, poets were weighed against silver and that Shah Jahan weighed three poets in his court – Kalim, Saida and Qudsi on different occasions.<sup>160</sup>

The Mughals patronized hundreds of other poets, too. Accounts of poets present in Akbar’s court were provided by Abul Fazl in *Ain-i Akbari* and Abdul Qadir Badaoni in *Muntakhabu-t Tawarikh*. Poets presented verses time and again and impressed the audience with their wit, literary genius and intelligence.

The duties of court poets were not clearly defined but they were manifold – they included recording socio-political events, eulogising their patrons’ deeds, safeguarding their honor and singing their praises. We see the evidence of such adlibbed praise in an anecdote retold by Hadi Hasan. Once, an ambassador from Iran was said to have arrived at Akbar’s court, presented his credentials and then read out the following quatrain:

The Ethiopians are proud of his African guards; The Turk of his Turkish spears;  
Akbar of his vaults full of gold; but, Abbas, of Ali’s sword, Zulfiqar<sup>161</sup>

Faizi gave the following extemporaneous reply:

Elysium is proud of its water of Lethe;  
the sea, of its pearls; the sky of its stars;  
‘Abbas, of Ali’s sword, Zulfiqar;

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<sup>160</sup>Hadi Hasan, *Mughal Poetry*, p. 57

<sup>161</sup>Hadi Hasan, *Mughal Poetry*, p. 40

but the two worlds are proud of their Akbar in Allahu Akbar<sup>162</sup>

At another instance, when the sultan of Turkey reproached Shah Jahan with arrogance by proclaiming to be the ‘King of the world’ and called Shah Jahan just ‘King of India’, Kalim Kashani replied: “since the numerical values of *Hind*(India) and *Jahan* (world) were the same, Shah Jahan needed no other arguments to claim that he was the king of the world.”<sup>163</sup> Poets produced chronograms to commemorate special occasions. Khwaja Hasan Marawi, poet in Akbar’s court composed eight verses whereof the first hemistich gave Jahangir’s birth year, i.e. 977 A.H. (1569 CE) and the second hemistich gave Murad’s birth year 978 A.H. (1570 CE).<sup>164</sup> Saida Gilani (Bebadal Khan), a prominent poet in Jahangir and Shah Jahan’s court recorded the fall of a meteorite in the year 1621-22 and the location where meteorite fell was dug up. Upon digging deeper hot iron was found. Jahangir ordered Mutammad Khan to make swords and dagger by mixing 3 parts of “lightening” iron with other iron. Bebadal Khan composed and presented the following quatrain for the event:

The world attained order from the world-seizing monarch,  
And during his reign raw iron fell from lightning.  
From that iron was made by his world-conquering order  
A dagger and a knife and two swords<sup>165</sup>

In the above quatrain, the poet carried out dual functions – commemorating a unique event and praising the emperor in whose realm such extraordinary events took place. Here, the poet is also making a case for divine kingship of Mughals. The source of raw iron is manifested as lightning, which was associated with the divine. According to the poet, divine intervention was made in order to facilitate Jahangir in maintaining world order with the help of strongest swords and dagger and thus, quell any opposition against his rule. The poets were also given additional charge of different offices when the need arose. Talib Amuli, for example, was made seal engraver by Itimad-ud-daula. However, the poet could not perform the duty very well so he was made *mustaufi* (“auditor”).<sup>166</sup> The court poets were also given different kinds of folios or

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<sup>162</sup>Hadi Hasan, p. 40

<sup>163</sup>Hadi Hasan, p. 40

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 35

<sup>165</sup>*Jahangirnama*, p. 363

<sup>166</sup> Nomani, vol.III, p. 176

responsibilities. Sunil Sharma argues that court-poets performed double and triple duties sometimes as musicians, storytellers, calligraphers, teachers, administrative officials. Livai Pirzada-yi Sabzavari both sang and chanted. He is mentioned in the *Muntakhab* under the list of poets. Badauni wrote that he was, "...peerless in the valley of song and chanting."<sup>167</sup> Mulla Shakibi was conferred upon the title and responsibility of being the *sadr* of the *suba* of Delhi by Jahangir. Another poet named Hakim Ain-ul Mulk belonged to the family of the celebrated logician Jalauddin Davvani and was unparalleled in the treatment of ophthalmia.<sup>168</sup> One of the well-known poets of this period was Naziri Nishapuri who came to associate himself with Khan-i-Khanan. He lived as a trader in Ahmadabad and came to the court when summoned by Jahangir. Similarly, Hayati Gilani, who belonged to a common family, was a trader by profession. He used to visit Kashan for trade and participated in *musha'iras* ("literary gatherings") held by local poets there. This trend could possibly mean that being a second-grade poet was not enough to sustain themselves. This is why poets engaged in various professions. However, another explanation for this trend could be that there were immense opportunities for poets given their literacy skills, and they were free to seek patronage under different patrons or engage in business ventures. Being attached to the court also gave them an opportunity to be employed in the administration in different capacities. Poets were thus, actively involved in the running of the administration.

According to Paul Losensky, by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, poetry spread throughout all the urban classes of society.<sup>169</sup> Fluency in the poetic tradition gained a new importance as a sign of good breeding, education and a prerequisite for participation in the cultural life of the court.<sup>170</sup> Along with full time professional poets, members of the royal family patronized and composed poetry. Babur was a poet and composed his verses and autobiography in Turkish, which was translated into Persian by Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan in the year 1589.<sup>171</sup> Muhammad Abdul Ghani claimed that Akbar was credited to have composed some verses.<sup>172</sup> However, it was Jahangir who was most fascinated with poetry in general and *ghazals* in particular. His autobiography is replete

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<sup>167</sup>Quoted in Sunil Sharma, "Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Indian Texts" in *Tellings and Texts*, p. 287

<sup>168</sup>Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol. iii, p. 320

<sup>169</sup> Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*, p. 136

<sup>170</sup> Losensky, p. 136

<sup>171</sup> Ghani, Vol. I, p. 49

<sup>172</sup> Ghani, Vol. III, p. 13

with verses from *ghazals*. He even claimed to have composed a few and reproduced them in the *Jahangirnama*. The text is replete with many verses which were composed by the royal princes, administrators, nobles like Mirza Ghazi, Amir-ul-Umara, Mutamad Khan, among others. They were active participants in the literary discussions and recitations, and provided *tarah* (meter and restraint) on which many *ghazals* were composed in such assemblies. One of the most well known officers of Mughal administration was Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, who was a polyglot and a poet. His pen name was Rahim and he is known to have composed verses in different languages. Another official was Zafar Khan who was made governor of Kabul and later, Kashmir, under Shah Jahan is remembered for his military service as well as for his patronage of poets. Shah Nawaz Khan recorded in *Ma'asir-ul Umara*:

He [Zafar Khan] used to give money to Iranians, and was specially generous and kind to poets. Eloquent men giving up their homes turned hopefully to him, and received such favours as they had hoped for. The most noted of the moderns, Mirza Sa'ibof Tabriz, when he went from Iran to Kabul, was filled with admiration by his warm welcome and liberality, and lived in his company in India for a long time.<sup>173</sup>

The royal women were well educated and were connoisseurs of poetry as well. The sources are silent on the history of poetesses of this period but this does not mean that women were not involved at all. Aurangzeb's daughter, Zebunnisa was a poetess and it is believed that she wrote a *divān* ("collection of poems"). However, scholars are divided on the issue of the authenticity of the *divān*. Women usually wrote with the pen name *makhfi* ("unknown"), which further complicates the task of historians and literary scholars who study history of the literature of the period and women's involvement in it. If the accounts of *Kalimat-ul Shuara* (i.e. *Tazkira-i Sarkhush*) by Mohammad Afzal Sarkhush is to be believed, there was a poet with the pen name *maye* ("wine"), who was in the retinue of Nur Jahan and thus gained an opportunity to present poetry in the royal court.<sup>174</sup> It is a crucial piece of information as it sheds some light on the fact that royal women were also poets as well as patrons of poetry. However, due to the lack of enough sources, any more speculation on them is avoided in the chapter.

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<sup>173</sup> Shah Nawaz Khan, *Ma'asir-ul-Umara*, vol. II, p. 1018

<sup>174</sup> Nomani, vol. III, p. 9

It has been highlighted that literature was an important attribute of the overall civility at the Mughal court.<sup>175</sup> The exchange of poetry was common on public occasions as well as in private settings and informal gatherings. Talent for literary style and wit could facilitate social intimacy and professional mobility. A case in point was the career of Chandrabhan Brahman, the *munshi* (“secretary”) in Shah Jahan’s service. His literary credentials helped him further his career, as he wrote in *ChaharChaman* about his meeting with Shah Jahan. He was introduced to the emperor by his patron Afzal Khan’s<sup>176</sup> nephew, ‘Aqil Khan. Chandrabhan Brahman recounts that:

When the *faqir*’s turn came, a sample of this supplicant’s expertise in the broken (*shikasta*) script, which is not devoid of correctness, entered into [the emperor’s] alchemical gaze and a *ghazal* produced by my humble nature also reached the august and magnificent imperial ear, earning a measure of appreciation and ever delighting his discerning taste.<sup>177</sup>

On the basis of the above account, it can be said that Chandrabhan’s artful expression in lyric forms like *ghazals* and *rubayis* gave him a notable status among some of the well-known poets of this period. His literary genius also brought many promotions and rewards whenever he presented his verses in public occasions and festivals.<sup>178</sup> Chandrabhan’s case highlights that the job of a *munshi*, along with working on the accounts also included taking active part in the cultural life of the court, to be one of the elite literati in the court who composed and recited poetry for special occasions and public functions.<sup>179</sup>

According to Paul Losensky, the “sociological growth of poetry” began in 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries and continued in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>180</sup> Poetry had become an important virtue of the cultural refinement of those who had some access to education. The contemporary *tazkiras* are rich in the information about amateur and part-time poets who were representatives of different professions like potter, engraver, baker etc., and other “commoners”.<sup>181</sup> Badauni included a poet named

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<sup>175</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 38

<sup>176</sup> Afzal Khan’s real name was Shukr Allah Shirazi (d. 1639 A.D) who had come to India from Persia in 1608. He was in the service of Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan and later had joined the retinue of Shah Jahan while he was a prince. Afzal Khan was a crucial mentor to Chandrabhan Brahman early in his career.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 169

<sup>178</sup> Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, pp. 170-1

<sup>179</sup> Kinra, p. 38

<sup>180</sup> Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*, p. 137

<sup>181</sup> Losensky, p. 137

Tali'i from Yazd who was a penman and wrote *nastaliq*<sup>182</sup> well. He was also engaged in business of bookselling in Agra. For many poets, proving their skill at poetry brought rich gifts, honor and even professional or social mobility. Sunil Sharma rightly argued that the talent as well as social background of the *ghazal* poet was an important factor, if he wished to gain access to the court and a generous patron.<sup>183</sup> There were many poets who came from different professional backgrounds. For instance, there is an example of a poet with *takhallus* 'maye' ("wine") who belonged to the community of flag bearers called *kalals* and was in the retinue of NurJahan, which provided him access to the court to present his verses in the court.<sup>184</sup> For poets, there was a scope for social mobility based on their talent. In one literary gathering under Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, a poet happened to recite a hemistich as a *tarah*. No poet could compose on these lines except Mulla Shaida, who was an ordinary servant under Khan-i-Khanan. Ultimately, he was introduced to the emperor and received a stipend and *jagir*.<sup>185</sup> There were several poets who belonged to humble families like the poet named Qasim Ali "Ghubari" who "...was in his youth very handsome, and used to sing at social gatherings, and was then for sometime servant to the Khalifa of the age (Akbar) [and] became a man of some importance, and acquired the title of Khan..."<sup>186</sup> Badauni also informs us that Ghubari was embarrassed that his father was a grocer. Another poet whose father was a grocer was Kami Sabzavari in the service of Khan-i-Khanan. His father came to India and became a trader and the poet joined the company of poets and finally ended up in the service of Khan-i-Khanan, working in his library.<sup>187</sup> These poets were an important part of the literary culture of the period as it shows that poetry was widening its audience and was reaching out to people from all walks of life. Only a few of these poets succeeded in winning the royal patronage no doubt, but most of them wrote for a local audience and circle of friends. However, the fact that contemporary and later *tazkiras* gave space to poets of every stature along with a sample of their verses or gossips related to them suggests that poets catered to wider audience and occupied an important place in the society.

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<sup>182</sup>*Nastaliq* is a style of writing or calligraphy in Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

<sup>183</sup> Sunil Sharma, 'Reading the Acts and Lives of Performers in Mughal Indian Texts', p. 295

<sup>184</sup> Nomani, *Sh'erul Ajam*, vol. III, p. 9

<sup>185</sup> Chhotubhai Ranchhodji Naik, *Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan and his Literary Circle* (Gujarat University, 1966), pp. 429-30

<sup>186</sup> Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol. iii, p. 399

<sup>187</sup> Naik, *Abdur Rahim and his literary circle*, p. 382



Another category of poets includes those who were closely linked to different Sufi *silsilas*. The relationship between *ghazals* and Sufism was not new. Persian *ghazals* had been a vital medium of propagating the religious discourse of Sufis. Amir Khusro was a poet, a courtier and a Sufi mystic who composed *ghazals* on different themes which are popular till today. This trend continued in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries when there were poets who were religious mendicants or were associated with some Sufi *silsila*. One such poet who had a religious bent of mind and composed *ghazals* in the court of Jahangir was Shaikh Jamili. Jamili's father was associated with Muhammad Ghaus of Gwalior, whose line of descent could be traced to the Shattari order of Sufism. Another poet whose association with Sufism remained strong was Talib Isfahani about whom Badauni wrote:

...At first, he was a religious mendicant and then he elected to become an official, and entered the emperor's service. He was sent as an envoy to the ruler of little Tibet, 'Ali Rai...<sup>188</sup>

At another instance, Badauni provides information about more such poets like Qasim-i-Kahi who

...was well versed in astronomy, rhetoric and mysticism of the Sufis, and wrote a treatise on music. In short, he had no equal in his knowledge of the mysticism of the sufis, the art of composing enigmas, history, elocution and various other arts. Although he had had the advantages of associating with the Shaikhs of former days, among them that lord of his age Maulvi Jami and others..." and Shaikh Husain Chishti...<sup>189</sup>

From Badauni's account, information on one poet named Shaikh Husain Chishti points to his connection with the Chishti order:

He is Shaikh Husain the Sufi, whose native place is Dihli, and as he is a disciple of Shaikh Salim Cishti he has chosen this poetical name. He was one of the Sufi members of the monastery at Fatehpur, otherwise known as Sikri. He has composed a divan and is the author of several works, one of which is "the Book of the Heart and Soul" written in verse, but in an Indian style...<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol. III, p. 367

<sup>189</sup> Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol. III, p. 243

<sup>190</sup> Badauni, *Muntakhab*, vol. III, pp. 297-8

The above survey of the backgrounds of different poets establishes certain things about the literary milieu of the period under study. Firstly, the field of poetry was enriched by the constant movement of poets from Central Asia, Iran and different parts of the subcontinent towards various centres of patronage in Mughal India. Secondly, the movement of poets was facilitated by the princes and nobles in different ways and their seats of administration became the nodal points of literary production in Mughal India. The royal and provincial courts were important venues for various literary innovations and production.

### **Education and training of poets**

The craft of poetry required rigorous training, immense creativity, along with an extensive knowledge about the classical literature, poets and the metaphors used in composition. As we have noted above, poets came from different backgrounds. Thus, making sweeping generalizations about their educational background would be a moot point. However, poets who came from an educated background usually received a holistic primary education where they read Quran, its commentaries, *mantiq* (“logic”), prosody, poetry, Arabic and Persian grammar etc. The specialised training for poets began at higher level of education. Some poets received training under a master (*ustad*). Sa’ib Tabrizi (1592- 1676 CE), for instance, received poetic training under Rukna Masih Kashi and Hakim Shafayi. Several professional poets were competent in other arts as well. For instance, ‘Urfi was well versed with grammar, logic and Persian prosody.<sup>191</sup> Faizi was well versed in unani medicine. Talib Amuli provides us with the information that he had studied *mantiq*(logic), philosophy, Sufism, *hikmat, khush-navisi* by the age of 15-16 years.<sup>192</sup> A large number of poets were multi-talented people who possessed skills such as storytelling, singing and calligraphy.

One of the most important and common poetic practice was writing imitation poems such as *istiqbāls*, i.e. poetry with the same rhyme and meter of another poet, but with a different theme. The practice of writing imitation poetry was a crucial literary tool in the education and training of poets. Paul Losensky discussed a variety of terms used to convey the meaning of different kinds of imitation and originality in Arabic and Persian poetry and poetics. The term *naziragui*,

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<sup>191</sup> Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature*, vol. III, p. 105

<sup>192</sup> Nomani, vol. III, p. 166

for instance, meant “speaking the parallel”<sup>193</sup> whereas, *jawabgui* (“act of poetic answering”) would add the idea of debate and inquiry to the concept of imitation, where the model poem became a problem or a question which required an answer. It can be understood as a reasoned debated across time between two poets. The most popular kind of imitation was *istiqbāl*, where the “act of imitation is presented as a form of social exchange.”<sup>194</sup>

Apart from the fact that imitation poems can help in studying how poets understood and recreated the poetic tradition, writing *istiqbāls* was also an essential part of a poet’s training.<sup>195</sup> In literary gatherings, the convention of composing *ghazals* on a given *tarah* (“rhyme and meter”) provided the poets with an opportunity to write *istiqbāls* and establish their literary credentials. Poetical contestations/*mushai’ras* was commonplace in urban public places like literary salons, tombs of Sufi saints on their *urs*, houses of officials or poets etc. These literary gatherings and *mushai’ras* provided the avenue for poets to indulge in this practice and sharpen their poetic skills. These gatherings were spaces for lively poetic discussions and were instrumental in shaping the poetic discourse. It was here that poets, patrons as well as audiences came in contact with one another. The feedback of the audience, technical correctness provided by other poets and patrons or connoisseurs of poetry as well as the competition with other poets turned *mushai’ras* into spaces of learning for poets. In the Persianate world, coffeeshops, the houses of officials or poets were some of the common venues for *mushai’ras*. The *tarah* for *ghazals* were usually decided beforehand but sometimes, the *tarah* was given impromptu and the poets composed and recited *ghazals* on the spot, which required immense poetic skill and knowledge. Many *tazkiras* narrate stories of such poetical contestations. Losensky narrated one such anecdote about a poet named Awhadi Balyani whose poetic skills were tested before when he wished to join a circle of poets at a literary salon in Iran. He was tested on the basis of his skills of writing *istiqbāls* to the works of poets like Amir Khusro, Baba Fighani and others. Thus, it can be said that this practice was a means of training as well as evaluating an aspiring poet.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup>Losensky, p. 112

<sup>194</sup>Losensky, p. 112

<sup>195</sup>Losensky, p. 205

<sup>196</sup>Losensky, pp. 205-6

According to Losensky, the literary gatherings where imitation poems were written and discussed formed an important educational institution in Safavid-Mughal poetic culture.<sup>197</sup>

A closer study of *istiqbāls* can provide an insight into different ways in which poets understood, engaged and reworked the works of other poets. Through this practice the poets willingly and publicly acknowledged the voice of the earlier master poets. The poets of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries also admired and cultivated their literary past through the medium of imitation and respond poetry. They paid homage to the classical poets by writing imitation poems. For example Sa'ib Tabrizi, in his *ghazals* called upon himself to emulate various poets like Fighani, Hafiz, Sanai in the following manner:

Emulate Fighani  
from among the fire-breathing poets,  
Sa'ib, if you are going to imitate  
Someone's collected works.<sup>198</sup>

In one of his verses, Sa'ib considered Hafiz as the master of eloquence, worthy to be imitated but extremely hard to match up with:

From among the melodious nightingales  
of this meadow, Sa'ib,  
be the disciple of the song  
of the melodious Hafiz.<sup>199</sup>

Sa'ib also provides a little glimpse into a literary *majlis* where either the participants or the leader of the *majlis* impose such models on him that there was no scope of improvement, i.e. made him compose verses in imitation of Hafiz's works:

Sa'ib, what can one do  
about the impositions of dear friends?  
Otherwise, to confront Khwaja Hafiz  
would have been blindness.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup>Losensky, p. 206

<sup>198</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 216

<sup>199</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 216

<sup>200</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 217

In another signature verse, the person who chose the model speaks out in Sa'ib's defense:

If he was weak in answering  
the lyric by Khwaja Hafiz,  
the fault's not Sa'ib's-  
the problem is mine.<sup>201</sup>

The works of classical poets were an integral part of the reading list of the educated class in Mughal India. We have seen how Chandrabhan Brahman advised his son Tej Bhan to master the works of classical poets first and then to move on to reading the works of contemporary poets. There was a very close relation between the works of poets of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries and classical poets because the former owed much of their poetic knowledge to the practice of reading classical poets.

From the emanation (*fiyaz*) of Mawlana Rumi,  
Sa'ib, this poem  
arose from the tip of my sugar-scattering pen  
without being sought.<sup>202</sup>

In these verses, Sa'ib admits that whether or not he tried to emulate Rumi, there was an unconscious effect of the great poet on his works. As a result of the long study and emulation of Rumi's work, the poet now lived within Sa'ib and spoke through him. There are innumerable verses of the poets of this period where they acknowledge the qualities of their predecessors' works. Sa'ib elsewhere likened the creative force of the past to the effects of wine:

He has gotten drunk  
on the goblet of Hafiz of Shiraz.  
In this way, Sa'ib's words are  
the wine of Shiraz.

The divans of every poet in Mughal court contained *ghazals* written in imitation of works of classical poets. Naziri Nishapuri was well known for writing response poems to Hafiz's works. Some of the *ghazals* with the same rhyme and meter are quoted below:

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<sup>201</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 217

<sup>202</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 218

Hafiz's verse:

*Bud āyā ke dar-i maykad-hā be kashāyand  
Gire haz kār farobaste mā be kashāyand*<sup>203</sup>

Naziri's verse:

*Har sehar silsile az payīye sabā be kashāyand  
Kaz kashādash girhe az dil-i mā be kashāyand*<sup>204</sup>

The above couplets are the *matla'* (opening verses) of the *ghazals* of Hafiz and Naziri. Naziri composed the whole *ghazal* with the same refrain as Hafiz's, where the refrain is “ā *be kashāyand*”.

In the nocturnal literary gatherings, Jahangir commanded Naziri Nishapuri to write verses similar to the *radif*, ‘*safed wa syah wa surkh*’ of Amir Khusro's famous *ghazal*. A few sessions were dedicated to the discussion of the particular *ghazal* of Amir Khusro, wherein Jahangir indulged in a lively debate with Naziri Nishapuri over many issues related to poetics like the aesthetic element of the verse, the cultural sensibility that came to be associated with the verses as well as many technical details of the art of *ghazal* composition. The centre of discussion became the *mayna* bird, which is found in the Indian subcontinent.

*Khush jāma zeb gasht tan-i khoob wa nāzukat  
Chun mayna-i lateef safed wa syah wa surkh*<sup>205</sup>

In these lines, the poet appreciated the beauty of the *mayna* bird. During the discussion that followed, Jahangir explicated that the *mayna* is very “gentle” (*lateef*), “slender/ delicate” (*nāzūk*) and “colourful” (*khush rang*) with a “melodious voice” (*khushāwāz*). The slender frame and the grace of the beloved are expressed in terms of the beauty of the bird and its colours (*safed*: white, *syah*: black, *surkh*: red). Jahangir further commented whoever has seen the bird in Hindustan will

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<sup>203</sup>Ghani, p. 99

<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 99

<sup>205</sup>*Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p. 169

appreciate the way in which words in the verse have been used to link the beauty of the beloved with the *mayna* bird.<sup>206</sup>

In another instance, when the discussion again ensued on the same refrain (*safed wa syahwasurkh*), Jahangir debated over the following verse penned by Amir Khusro:

*Az pān wa az supāri wa az kat wa chuna shud  
Dandān-i ān nigār safed wa syāh wa surkh*<sup>207</sup>

Naziri criticized the signification in the second line of the verse, which roughly translates as “the teeth of the beloved became white and black and red due to the habit of eating *pān* (betel leaf)”. An interesting discussion followed and Jahangir again commented that for the people of Hindustan, *safed wa syāhwasurkh* had an aesthetic value which would be difficult to behold by a person like Naziri who was not a native of the land.<sup>208</sup> In another meeting, there was a discussion regarding a quatrain which was written by Shakibi Isfahani and the emperor suggested change in the use of certain words to enhance the quality of the quatrain. Similarly, Akbar had also made a change in the *rubayi* composed by Hakim Humam on his journey to Kabul. He replaced the word ‘*dumbala*’ (with *ze raftanash ū*) because he thought that it sounded too heavy and rough/unskillful.<sup>209</sup> The literary gatherings thus organized were replete with such discussions on different technicalities of poetry and therefore served as a learning space for enthusiasts and connoisseurs of poetry.

### **Patronage culture under Mughals**

The discussion about the lives of poets and training would be incomplete without considering the dynamics of the patronage network in Mughal India. Apart from literary gatherings, *islah* (“technical correctness”) for poetry was provided by patrons or other poets. This was done while accompanying the patrons on their campaigns or via letters. An instance of the role of patrons as being literary critics is that of Chandrabhan Brahman, who sent his *ghazals* for *islah* everyday to Afzal Khan, his patron.<sup>210</sup> However, Afzal Khan died and on the orders of Shah Jahan,

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<sup>206</sup>*Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p. 169

<sup>207</sup>*Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p. 199

<sup>208</sup>*Majalis-i-Jahangiri*, p. 199

<sup>209</sup> Ghani, Vol. III, pp. 25-6

<sup>210</sup>Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 184

Chandrabhan Brahman came to work under Sa'd Allah Khan. Even then he tried to establish the same literary bond with his new patron and sent his *ghazals* for *islah* to Sa'd Allah Khan.<sup>211</sup> While respond poetry and imitations reiterated the importance of the classical poetic tradition, these practices did not prevent poets from innovating and bringing out their original creativity in the verses.

The patronage network in Mughal India facilitated the growth of a new style of writing by providing institutional as well as literary support to the poets and encouraging them to innovate and create new meanings in poetry. This trend can be seen in the context of the increasing popularity of a distinct style of writing, called *tāza guī*, which emerged in this period in the works of poets in Mughal India.

The literati in the Indian subcontinent attracted huge numbers of people of art, including poets in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Aziz Ahmad estimated that hundreds of poets made their way to Hindustan from Iran, in search of a better lifestyle, security, material wealth, literary freedom. These poets either came to the Deccan seeking employment opportunities in the states of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar or Golconda, or settled in Northern India under the patronage of various officials, royal princes and well-to-do poets who patronized other poets. Each noble had a closely-knit group that included entertainers, storytellers, and poets, who accompanied their patrons wherever he set up his court. Jocelyn Sharlet argues that patronage system in medieval Islamic societies was also uncertain and flexible, which, more or less, can also be applied to the patronage network in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Mughal India.<sup>212</sup> For poets without a secure place in the patronage network, time and circumstances could be very challenging. Nabi Hadi reproduced the journey of Talib Amuli (poet-laureate in Jahangir's court) on the basis of his reading of several *tazkiras*. According to these accounts, Talib Amuli travelled to different cities in search of patrons. He was invited to Qandhar by Mirza Ghani Beg Turkhan Nazim-i Qandhar. Due to heavy rains, travelling became difficult and he had to halt in Multan for four months. Later, Talib met Arshad Chin Qilich Khan who became his patron. Talib accompanied his patron to Agra and Surat. However, the problems of the poet increased when Chin Qilich Khan left for Peshawar on receiving the news of his father's death and did not take the poet with him.

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<sup>211</sup>Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 183

<sup>212</sup>Jocelyn Sharlet, *Patronage and Poetry in the Islamic World* (Tauris, 2011)



According to the *tazkiras*, Talib was in a miserable state when his patron refused to take him on his journey.<sup>213</sup> Finally, Talib's connection with other immigrants from Iran rescued him from misery. He wrote a letter to Jahangir's physician, Masih-ul Zaman Sadaruddin Shirazi who came to Ajmer and joined the service of Itimaduddaula.<sup>214</sup>

In order to deal with such uncertainty, which were aplenty, poets had to rely on social ties and poetic skills. Well-placed Persian immigrants provided some support to the newly arrived poets in Hindustan. They extended hospitality, provided some patronage, introduced them to the Mughal imperial court or ushered them into the presence of imperial nobles.<sup>215</sup> As a case in point, Mulla Shirazi was introduced to Khan-i Khanan by Mulla Shakibi.<sup>216</sup> Similarly, Hakim Abul Fath Gilani helped a number of poets like Urfi and Hayati Gilani.

There was also stiff competition among poets. It can be speculated that the literary taste of patrons had to be kept in mind while producing works for them. The poets wrote praise poems for their patrons and immortalized their deeds in verses. In return, the patrons endowed the poets with lavish gifts. Once poets gained the favour of patrons, they developed personal bonds with them. The patrons provided all kinds of support to the poets. For the patron, to spend their resources on cultural activities, including cultivating poetic culture added to his reputation as a learned and cultivated gentleman.

On several occasions in the *Jahangirnama*, we find references to the gifts and honors given to poets. For instance, Jahangir recorded the following:

I had previously summoned Naziri of Nishapur, an expert in the art of poetry who lived as a trader in Gujarat. At this time he came to pay homage. He presented an ode he had composed in imitation of Anvari's ode that begins: "What youth and beauty is this the world has regained?" I gave him a reward of one thousand rupees, a horse, and a robe of honor.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Nabi Hadi, *Mughalon ka Malik-us-shuara* (Allahabad, 1978), p. 185

<sup>214</sup> Hadi, *Mughalon ka Malik-us-shuara*, p. 186

<sup>215</sup> Aziz Ahmad, 'Safavid Poets in India', *Iran*, vol. 14 (British Institute of Persian Studies, 1976), p. 127

<sup>216</sup> Naik, *Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan and His Literary Circle*, p. 393

<sup>217</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 118

The patrons provided material wealth, lavish gifts, titles, privileges, important ranks in the administration as well as access to the royal court. If the poets wished to embark on the journey to the pilgrimage of hajj, their patrons would facilitate it, as Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan did for Naziri Nishapuri and many other poets in his literary circle.<sup>218</sup> The favours could be extended to exceptionally skillful poets by introducing them to the emperor. Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan introduced Shakibi Isfahani to Jahangir in a royal literary gathering, where the poet presented a *rubayi* (“quatrain”) as a present to the emperor, who bestowed him with favours.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, Talib Amuli, who was later bestowed with the title of *malik-us-shuara* (“poet laureate”) by Jahangir, was introduced to the latter by Itmaduddaula.<sup>220</sup> Khan-i-Khanan built a library in Ahmadabad, which housed rare books on different arts. He made the poets of his court write their own *divāns*, which were then kept in this library.<sup>221</sup> Sometimes, poets were employed in the service of the library. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to state that patrons provided poets with exposure and ample opportunities to excel.

Even though the poet and the patron developed a close bond with each other, there was no obligation on the poet to stay under one patron only. The poets were free to choose whether they wanted to stay under one patron or find patronage under others. When a poet struggled to establish himself into the vast patronage network in the Indian subcontinent, he ended up working for different patrons, either at the same time or over his lifetime. For instance, Urfi was patronized by Faizi but few bitter exchanges between the two reached an unpleasant conclusion and Urfi left his service. Then Urfi joined the literary circle of Hakim Abul Fath Gilani. After Abul Fath’s death, Urfi found patronage under Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan. Similarly, Talib Amuli also had many patrons at different points of time in his life.<sup>222</sup> There was constant movement of poets in the patronage network. Many poets looked for opportunities to serve in royal courts. However, this was not the case always. For instance, Naziri preferred to stay under the patronage of Abdur Rahim rather than joining the imperial court.

The patrons took keen interest in the progress of poets. The letters exchanged between Abul Fath Gilani and Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan point towards the possibility of a link between the

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<sup>218</sup> C. R. Naik, *Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan and His Literary Circle* (Gujarat University, 1966), p. 286

<sup>219</sup> *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 49

<sup>220</sup> Nomani, Vol. III, pp. 174-5

<sup>221</sup> Nomani, Vol. III, p. 12

<sup>222</sup> Hadi, *Mughalon ka Malik-us-shuara*, pp. 179, 181, 184, 185

support of a patron and the quality of verses that were composed in Mughal India. Both of them took personal interest in the progress of poets like ‘Urfi, Hayati Gilani and others. According to Abdul Baqi Nahavandi (writer of *Ma’asir-i Rahimi*, an account of Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan), these two men, Gilani and Khan-i-Khanan, encouraged the growth of the fresh style. According to him,

Present day men of taste and critics of poetry believe that the fresh style, which is now so praised among the poets and the style in which Shaikh Faizi and Maulana Urfi of Shiraz have written, was due to the direction and teaching of Hakim Abul Fath Gilani. In the same way, the kingly grants of the Khan-i-Khanan and his poetical discriminations have been powerful factors in the cultivation of poetry and poetic language and a veritable water of life...<sup>223</sup>

It shows that there is a link between patronage and the kind of verses that were composed in this period. There is a need to closely study the importance of this aspect in the lives of poets. The patrons were actively engaged in the process of defining the features of an emerging style not only by supporting the poets financially, but also by facilitating their learning and providing them with the impetus to create more “original”/“fresh” *ghazals*. The training which they received at the hands of patrons in Mughal India must have given a boost to the consciousness of “newness” of the age as it emerged in the *ghazals* written during this period. The final section of this chapter thus shifts the focus to *tāzaguī*, which came to be associated with *sabk-ihindī*, a term coined in the 19th century.

## II

### **Emergence of *tāza guī*: the new style of writing poetry**

According to S. R. Faruqi, the characteristic style of *tāza guī* includes new/ unusual combinations or compound phrases which became abstract; there was a preference for (a) using polysemic words, and using them in such a way that all or most the meanings can be derived from it. (b) using commonplace words in their less familiar meaning; ambivalence, silence, as well as a greater use of Indic themes and metaphors in verses.<sup>224</sup> Poets, whether Iranian or non-

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<sup>223</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 206

<sup>224</sup> S. R. Faruqi, “A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-i-hindī*”. *Annual of Urdu Studies*. Vol. 29. Allahabad. 2004

Iranians, whether living in Hindustan, Persia or Central Asia composed in this style at least from the sixteenth century.

One must remember that there were several styles of writing that co-existed in our period of study. There were several contemporary poets and literary critiques who often pointed out the follies of the *tāza guī* style. There were vigorous debates among the poets of *tāza guī* style and their critics from early on. Abul Barakat Munir Lahori (1610-1644 CE), a well-known poet and literary critic wrote a tract named *Kārnāma* in 1640. In *Kārnāma*, Munir Lahori pointed out defects of the new style of writing and its poets including Urfi, Talib Amuli, Zuhuri, and Zolali.<sup>225</sup> Rajeev Kinra argues that the critical reception of *tāza guī* was “far from uniform”.<sup>226</sup> The contemporary critics were aware that there were multiple ways of classifying newness and literary innovation.<sup>227</sup> According to Kinra, the aesthetics of *tāza guī* were contested all along where some poets experimented too much and other poets and critics criticized them for over doing it.<sup>228</sup> As a case in point, Kinra reproduced the comments of Abdul Baqi Nahavandi from *Maasir-i Rahimi*. Nahavandi was fond of the *tāza guī* style compositions but criticized some poets namely Kamaluddin Jismi of Hamadan for his “difficult and overly intricate verse” even for the sophisticated audiences.<sup>229</sup> Nahavandi further admitted that:

...his [Kamaluddin Jismi’s] oeuvre must be excused for the immaturity, nonsensicality, and all the other flaws that the work of *tāza-gūyān* in this day and age may be prone to.<sup>230</sup>

Kinra further argued that *tāza guī* style compositions often confused poets, patrons and audiences and there was continuous “negotiation in the courts, the literary salons, and the bazaars, over what constituted the appropriate way(s) to deploy poetic originality.”<sup>231</sup>

In the contemporary works on *tāza guī*, scholars have often referred to the style as “*sabk-i hindi*”. The term *sabk-i hindi* was coined by Iranian poet and scholar Muhammad Taqi Bahar (1886-

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<sup>225</sup>M. U. Memon, “Abul Barakat Munir Lahori,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/3, pp. 268-269

<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abul-barakat-monir-lahuri-indo-persian-poet-commonly-known-as-molla-monir-lahuri-b> accessed on 05/07/2021.

<sup>226</sup> Kinra, “Make it Fresh: Time, Tradition, and Indo-Persian Literary Modernity” in Anne Murphy ed. *Time, History and the Religious Imaginary in South Asia* (Routledge, 2011), p. 27

<sup>227</sup> Kinra, “Make it Fresh: Time, Tradition, and Indo-Persian Literary Modernity”, p. 28

<sup>228</sup> Kinra, “Make it Fresh”, p. 28

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Quoted and translated by Kinra, “Make it Fresh”, p. 28

<sup>231</sup> Kinra, “Make it Fresh”, p. 28

1951). This style has been looked at with disfavor and disdain by most Iranian and some Indian poets. The term has a negative connotation, which has affected the scholarly research on the *tāza guī* style of writing.

There has been a debate on this matter where scholars like S. R. Faruqi, Rajeev Kinra and Paul Losensky have countered the dominant narrative of the modern scholarship that characterized the period of *tāza guī*'s popularity as decadent phase and have made an in depth study of the verses written in this period in the Persianate world. Their works have shed light on varied aspects such as the historical context in which *tāza guī* style emerged, the defining features of the style, among others. The aim of this section is to build on the ground, which has been laid by these scholars and to argue that there were a few important conditions in this period, which favoured the growth of this style. Rajeev Kinra argues, quite convincingly, that there is a historical context which has to be put in mind while studying the emergence of *tāza guī* style. According to Kinra, there was a heightened sense of “newness in the air” in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century South Asia.<sup>232</sup> Elucidating it further, he explained that in South, Central and West Asia, “there were new types of global encounters which were transforming the intellectuals’ world-view and sense of epochal change.”<sup>233</sup> India was not alone in experiencing such transformations. However, India during this period emerged “as one of the world’s most wealthy, welcoming and tolerant locales, early modern India became the prime destination for an extraordinarily multicultural cast of global traders, artists, service professionals, and adventurers, seeking commercial opportunity and artistic patronage—Armenians, Iranians, Yemenis, Africans, Europeans, and many other besides.”<sup>234</sup> The multicultural influx added to the existing diversity of the subcontinent. Kinra argues that the “very fact that such radical pluralism was even possible fed the widespread belief that a new age of social and political potential had arrived.”<sup>235</sup>

Even though one person or group cannot be credited for bringing about a change in the literary taste of the audience or for inventing a style of writing, there is a need to underline some important historical and cultural factors that helped shape the literary style of writing and the aesthetic sensibility of the audience of poetry, in any given period of time. Thus, in this section,

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<sup>232</sup>Kinra, “Make it Fresh”, p. 12

<sup>233</sup>Kinra, “Make it Fresh”, p. 13

<sup>234</sup>Kinra, “Make it Fresh”, p. 13

<sup>235</sup>Kinra, p. 13

an attempt is made to highlight the importance of the agency of poets and literary connoisseurs in defining the characteristic features of the *tāza guī* style and in pushing the boundaries of Persian language and literature in accordance with the growing consciousness of “newness” of the age.

Before analyzing the features of *tāza guī*, as expounded by poets in their *ghazals*, one must keep in mind that the term “*tāza*”, just like any other word had different meanings in different contexts. Losensky informs us that *tāza* shares the basic meaning of *naw*, “new” or “novel”; yet, it has a richer stock of associations. It is used to describe living things; when applied to plants, it came to mean “fresh” or “succulent”. When extended to animate beings, it came to be associated with the terms “youthful” or “vigorous”.<sup>236</sup> When used for compositions, it could literally mean “fresh”, which is why many scholars who prefer literal translation have used the phrase “speaking the fresh” for *tāza guī*. However, it could also mean “original” or “rigorous”.

Poets were constantly defining this new trend of writing in their poetry. They were consciously engaged in the process of creating something new and original. They not only claimed to have ushered in a new era but also credited god as an incessant source of their creativity and originality. For instance Faizi, the first poet laureate of the Mughal Empire condemned any kind of imitation (from theft of poetry to different degrees of imitation). He wrote:

So that poetry might be adorned by you  
there must be new meanings and old words.  
Advance on the path of your heart and don't turn back-  
don't go circling around someone else's poetry.  
Purify the self-disciplined mind  
turn to the overflowing source.  
Poetry's thief can go nowhere  
where its hand will not cuff him on the neck.  
How long will you make your poetry from plunder  
throwing parties with other's candles?  
How long will you hoard others' ideas,  
sewing purses to collect other's cash?  
If I say to you, “Its not your idea,

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<sup>236</sup>Losensky, p. 198

and all these thoughts are not within your power.”  
 You cry out, “I’ve put them together well-  
 I’ve expressed his meaning better than he!”  
 Even were I to admit that you put together well  
 those words that you acquired from him,  
 the bride dresser, with her ambergris and sandarac,  
 does not claim to be the husband of the bride.  
 Abandon other’s imaginations,  
 for calling an adopted boy “son”, does not make him one.  
 Be happy with whatever God has given:  
 Be a seeker after God-given meaning.  
 How long will you go after other’s images?  
 How long will you be generous with other’s wealth?  
 sometimes hoisting the flag of *tavārud*,  
 sometimes throwing down the shield to *tazmīn*,  
 all this is due to the childishness of your method,  
 all this to your limited thought.<sup>237</sup>

In the above verses, Faizi condemned all kinds of plagiarism as theft of poetry. The poet has used metaphors of bride, adopted boy etc to refer to poetry. These verses, according to Paul Losensky, “depict borrowing as a violation of the intimate personal bonds between original writers and their thoughts- the plagiarist attempts to seduce a fiancée away from her betrothed or to kidnap a son away from his natural father.”<sup>238</sup> The capabilities of all poets were not the same according to Faizi; the ones who depended on other people’s works - even if they had the skills to present the work in a better form - still did not hold the same ground as those who had the “power” to compose original works. The poets who could not produce anything original were condemned as immature and short sighted to have relied on old methods (i.e. *tavarud*: ‘the unintentional coincidence of two verses’ and *tazmin*: ‘intentional quotation’) as well as being bounded by limited thought. For Faizi, it was important to push the limits of language and to turn to the only source of all creativity in a poet’s work, i.e. god. In Faizi’s judgment, poets who composed original work with new ideas and metaphors were way superior to other poets.

<sup>237</sup> Quoted in Losensky, pp. 195-6

<sup>238</sup> Losensky, pp. 196-7

Faizi initiated and ended his poems by laying out the path for poets to create exceptional poetry. Firstly, the poet had to use old words and create new meanings. In the literary culture of the period, they were clearly defining ethics for poets to work with. They could not borrow or steal ideas and imagery from others but still had to be well acquainted with the poetic tradition and be able to create something new. *Ma'ni-yinau*, that is, new meaning was emphasized as the most important poetic virtue. Secondly, a lot of emphasis was on ideas and thought. He cautioned poets to express the ideas of others in better terms. For *tāza guī* poets, original ideas, metaphors and thought had to be so unique that it grabbed the audiences' attention and indulged them in their works. Talib Kalim of Kashan (d. 1651), the poet laureate of Shah Jahan's court also boasts of his ability to draw on the creative energy provided by divine emanation:

I am Kalim on the Mount Sinai of aspiration,  
for I do not seek an abundance of meaning except from God.  
Since I have access to the table of divine emanation [*fayz-i-ilahi*],  
I do not look to the mendicant's begging bowl.<sup>239</sup>

In the verses above, Kalim plays around with his pen name and represents himself as a poetic prophet<sup>240</sup>, “a Moses of artistic creativity atop Mount Sinai.”<sup>241</sup> Kalim's signatory verses suggest that the purpose of “fresh” verses was to grasp the audience's attention:

If the market for poetry's wares  
is depressed these days, Kalim,  
Make the style fresh  
So that it catches the buyer's eye.<sup>242</sup>

In the above verses, poetry is presented as a commodity available for sale in the market. However, there is a slump in the market which can be dealt with by making the verses “fresh”. Depression in the market of poetry could mean that poetry of the “fresh” style appealed more to the aesthetic sensibilities of the audience in this period, which is why the poets advised others to write accordingly.

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<sup>239</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 198. Kalim grew up in Kashan, even though he was born in Hamadani, and is known as both Kashani and Hamadani. He served for sometime as poet laureate of Shahjahan, Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani*, f.n. 8, p. 198

<sup>240</sup> Moses was referred to as Kalimullah, “the one to whom God spoke.” Or simply as Kalim. Losensky, p. 198

<sup>241</sup> Losensky, p. 198

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 199



Chandrabhan Brahman, who had earned a good reputation among the poets as the speaker of the “fresh” style also expressed the same sentiment when he said:

*Brahman, īnghazal-i tāza rādīgarnamak-īst,  
Magarkhayāl-i-lab-ash bar dil-i kabābguzasht.*

Barahman, the savoriness of this fresh *ghazal* is something else;  
as if the thought of her lips has been sprinkled over my barbequed heart.<sup>243</sup>

In these verses, there is a sense of modernity in the expressions of the poet. He argues that the elegance of the fresh/new *ghazal* is “something else”, inexplicable, out of bounds of words and beyond any metaphor. The poet has said a lot by being unable to say anything direct about the beauty of the style. A number of poets of this period had used this literary device of silence in their verses, which according to S.R. Faruqui, came to be associated with a modern sensibility.<sup>244</sup>

Brahman, in another verse credited the divine power for the “fresh” *ghazal* he had composed:

Surely the words must have alit from the skies above  
for such a fresh *ghazal* (*ghazal-i tāza*) to have found my tongue today.<sup>245</sup>

Often in these *ghazals*, divine emanation was regarded as a consistent source for themes with subtle meanings and thoughts. The collective sense of awareness among the poets of this period and style that they were creating something new and original - building up on the foundations laid by the past poets - remained a dominant discourse in the *ghazals*. The terms that the contemporary poets and *tazkira* writers came to use for the classical poets was *mutaqaddimin* (“the ancients”) and they called contemporary poets by the terms *muta’akhhirin* (“the latest”) or *mu’assirin* (“the contemporary”) to distinguish them from the earlier masters.<sup>246</sup> Paul Losensky argues that, “a spirit of self-conscious innovation and experimentation was in the air.”<sup>247</sup> Different poets expressed their part in the creation of this tradition differently.

Talib Amuli is recognized as one of the masters of *tāza guī*. He wrote:

<sup>243</sup>Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 214

<sup>244</sup> Faruqui, “A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of *Sabk-i-hindi*”, pp. 2-53

<sup>245</sup> Quoted in Rajeve Kinra, ‘Make it Fresh’, p. 25

<sup>246</sup>Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 10

<sup>247</sup>Losensky, p. 201

We are Talib, the seeker (if talib is plural then it should be: we are talibe, seekers)  
 after the nightingale of melodious hymns,  
 The fresh manner (*ravish-i tāza* )  
 is our creation.<sup>248</sup>

In the signatory verses, Talib had played around with the meaning of his pen name “talib” which means “seekers”. Word play and creating poetry with multiple meanings was one of the most important features of *tāza guī*.

Jahangir was also fond of the *tāza guī* style and often commanded poets in his literary circle to compose *ghazals* with *tāzagi*. In *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, Abdur Sattar informs us about a poet named Shaikh Jamili. He presented his *ghazal* in the royal poetic assembly, which he had written on the same parameters (*zameen*) as the one in Shah Abbas’ letter. He had written the poem with “freshness” (*sheikh Jamili ghazali be tāzagi gufta āvurda ast*)

*Gharqeh lajeh ishqīm ke payānash nīst*  
*Tālib-i-dardī dardīm ke darmānash nīst*  
*Man be dil ba tu shab o roz wisāli dāram*  
*Wāsil ān ast ke dard o gham (i) hijrānash nīst*<sup>249</sup>

The poet used the theme of “unending love” (*ishqīmke pāyānah nīst*) and the resulting “endless pain” (*dardīm ke darmānash nīst*) which are sought by him. In the next verse he means to tell the lover/ friend that “in his heart they are united day and night” (*man be dil ba tu shab o roz wisāli dāram*) and “it is this union/ friendship which has no pain and grief of separation” (*wāsil ān ast ke dard o gham (i) hijranash nist*). Jahangir was extremely impressed by the composition as well as the word play involved in it. ShaikhJamili was the son of Jalal Wasil.<sup>250</sup> Jamili made use of his father’s name in the verse and was able to encapsulate the subject of friendship between the two

<sup>248</sup>Losensky, p. 199

<sup>249</sup>*Majalis-iJahangiri*, p. 232

<sup>250</sup>Shaikh Jalal Wasil was “of Kalpi, which was the chief town in the Sarkar of the same name in the suba of Agra) was “one of the spiritual successors of Shaikh Muhammad Ghaus (Shattari order-in Gwalior).Early in his career he acquired perfection (in learning), but later he no longer allowed such matters to burden his memory and gave himself wholly to the delight of listening to the chants of mystics, and to fits of religious ecstasy. His (Akbar) majesty has very high opinion of him.” Badauni, *MuntakhabutTawarukh*, vol. III, pp. 196-197

rulers aptly with the word play. Jahangir was impressed by the word play involved and the connection which the poet had made in with the name of his father.

Another well-known poet of this style whose influence looms large in Persian poetic tradition is Sa'ib. He is believed to have taken the *tāza guī* style to new heights. He claimed:

Sa'ib with the new style (*tarz-i naw*)  
that you introduced,  
you gave a fresh perpetuity  
to the royal house of poetry.<sup>251</sup>

The term used by Sa'ib in the above verses is *tarz* (“mode”), which has been translated to mean ‘style’. But there were different technical terms that were construed with *tāza* to refer to different features of the *tāza guī* style. S. R. Faruqi argues, “It is quite likely that *tarz* meant “manner”; *ravish* meant “mode, general deportment, behaviour”, and *shevah* signified “practice”.<sup>252</sup> So Sa'ib claimed to have brought freshness to the “royal house of poetry” by introducing the new manner of presenting poetry. Manner or mode in poetics refers to the mood and emotions invoked in the poem which could be satiric, ironic, comic etc. The broader meaning of style in poetics refers to all the choices made in order to create the poem’s meaning. It can include technical choices, such as short or long lines, varying punctuation or omitting punctuation, or using a set rhythm or rhyme scheme as well as poetic choices such as diction, form and subject matter. Style can also include mood of the poem as well. The innovation in *tāza ghazals* could refer to the innovation of diction or sometimes in subject matter or in symbolism, allegory, metaphor and so on. In the verses above, Sa'ib claims to have brought everlasting glory to poetry by introducing a new manner of composing and presenting poetry. The idea that poetry needed to be saved is also present in his verses; however, it was more apparent in the verses of Kalim.<sup>253</sup>

The spirit of originality and innovation remained the most pervasive aspect of *tāza guīghazals*. However, in order to compose “fresh” poetry, the poets had to firstly master the works of earlier poets. The “fresh” *ghazals* drew from the old stock of metaphors, re-imagined and significantly widened the scope of their use in newer ways. The poets of the new style admired and cultivated

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<sup>251</sup>Losensky, p. 219

<sup>252</sup>Faruqi, p. 5

<sup>253</sup> Check footnote number 11 in this chapter for Kalim’s verse.

the literary past. *Tāza guī* was not a complete break with the past. It came to refer to the use of same “old words” to generate new meanings and thereby create an updated, fresh (*tāza*) sensibility for a new era in an increasingly interconnected world. Paul Losensky shows in his work on imitation that for poets, the destination of new and original works, with subtle thoughts and conceits could only be accessible by mastering the works of master poets and then to build further on that tradition.

That familiar look, Kalim,  
became the model for my thought.  
It familiarized me with thousands  
of exotic images and tropes.<sup>254</sup>

Kalim thus wrote that it was the familiarity with the Persian literary tradition which made it possible for him to have come up with numerous exotic images and tropes, which were the other defining features of *tāza guī* as will be discussed further.

The practice of emulation of some classical poets’ works was a common driver of innovation in Indo–Persian literary culture. Even though Sa’ib boasts of having introduced *tarz-i naw* to the “house of poetry”<sup>255</sup>, he also acknowledges his debt to the past:

Whoever, like Sa’ib, is an old acquaintance  
of the new style (*tarz-i tāza*)  
Speaks with the verve  
of the nightingale of Amul’s garden.<sup>256</sup>

In the above verses, Sa’ib acknowledges Talib Amuli’s importance as a master of the new poetry. The metaphor of “the nightingale of Amul’s garden” is used for Talib.<sup>257</sup> Another fruitful inference drawn from the couplet is that by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, few poets were now regarded as masters of the new style. Their works had reached the audience in the whole Persianate world and had inspired many poets to adopt their manner, diction, metaphors etc.

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<sup>254</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 201

<sup>255</sup> Refer to footnote number 20 in this chapter for Sa’ib’s verse.

<sup>256</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 199

<sup>257</sup> Losensky, p. 199, f.n. 13

In another verse, Sa'ib, had to seek help from the earlier master of Persian poetry, Hafiz for his “fresh poem”:

Sa'ib sought aid from Khwaja (Hafiz)  
in this fresh poem,  
So he could do the work of Christ  
in bringing poetry back to life.<sup>258</sup>

This time the poet explicitly states that the purpose of his “fresh” poems was to bring poetry back to life, drawing the inspiration from the resurrection of Jesus in Christianity as metaphor. The intellectual world of the poets was exceedingly rich and incorporated knowledge from multiple cultures and traditions.

Another feature of *tāza guī* which the poets emphasized in their poetry is the importance of “new meanings” (*ma'ni-ye naw*), exotic tropes and images. Losensky argues that, “poets and critics described their imagery and figures of speech as *gharib* (“strange”/ “foreign”) and *begana* (“unfamiliar”).<sup>259</sup> Thought and idea were considered central to the art of poetry. Faizi emphasized heavily on the significance of bringing new ideas and thoughts in poetry. The goal of the poets was to display their wits with novelty and originality. Abul Fazl wrote in *Ain-i Akbari* that, “poets strike out a road to the inaccessible realm of thought and divine grace beams forth in their genius”.<sup>260</sup> Although, Abul Fazl criticized poets who sold their poetic skills for money and used their words against the wise, he admired those who joined words, “for, by this means lofty ideas are understood.”<sup>261</sup> Sa'ib wrote about the delight of exotic tropes and images, as they seemed to transport the poet and the audience to an unknown land:

Whoever knows the delight  
of exotic tropes and images,  
Sa'ib, will know  
of our fresh style.<sup>262</sup>

Friends strive after freshness (*tāza gi*) in wording

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<sup>258</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 219

<sup>259</sup> Losensky, p. 201

<sup>260</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, trans. Blochmann, p. 548

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548

<sup>262</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 213

Sa'ib strives after unfamiliar (*begana*) meaning.<sup>263</sup>

Sa'ib clearly stated the distinction between him and those poets who sought *tāzagi* in words. He claims to have entered the territory of unfamiliar meanings, which required the audience to be actively and imaginatively engaged with his verses.

He lays out that difference again in another verse:

Among all those with fresh imaginations,  
Sa'ib's imagination  
with its delicate images stands out  
like a lock of hair across a cheek.<sup>264</sup>

In the above couplet, the metaphors of delicate images, lock of hair, which had been extensively used for appreciation of beauty of the beloved, was used in a strikingly different way to appreciate the power and limitlessness of the poet's imagination. It stands out amongst the imaginations of all the other *tāza guī* poets as a lock of hair stands out and enhances the beauty of the beloved's face. The face of the beloved becomes the face of poetry, adorned by the imagination of Sa'ib's "fresh" images.

Talib Amuli wrote about the "fresh" style that:

Like the garden of time,  
I am an old rosebud, Talib,  
My fresh (*tāza*) spring,  
is my new meaning.<sup>265</sup>

Chandrabhan Brahman calls for newness at a literal level:

*Brahman dar radīf-i tāza mazmun-i tāza bar basti*  
*Nihāl-i tāza zībātarnamāyadnawzamīnīrā*  
O Brahman, plant a fresh theme in a fresh refrain;  
A new shoot always looks prettier in new sod.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>263</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 214

<sup>264</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 231

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in Losensky, p. 199

<sup>266</sup> Quoted in Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 221

Brahman plays around with the word “zamin” which means “earth”/ “ground” but also has a literal meaning, namely, the prosodic “ground” referring to *ghazal*’s formal pattern. Thus, the literal ground for planting new flowers also becomes the literary ground through which the poet deploys his “fresh theme” (*mazmun-i tāza* ).<sup>267</sup>

*Tāza guī* encapsulated varied characteristics and each of them held an equally prominent place in the *ghazals* composed during this period. Some verses made use of metaphors which were polysemic and exhausted all the possible images which could be drawn from them. Whereas a few verses, when read without the prior knowledge of the poet’s style would appear to be written in the same manner as any Persian *ghazal* written during the times of classical poets, the distinguishing factor could either be the claim of the poet to have created something “new” (*tāza*) or it could be the uses to which old metaphors were put to. Old metaphors and themes were rephrased and re-imagined, giving due credit to the past poets for making the innovation possible by providing the poets with the rich stock of metaphors. Sometimes, the distinguishing feature of a verse could be extreme level of difficult metaphors and thought which often led some poets to compose verses with absurd meaning. However, this was not the case with every *ghazal* composed in the new style, as later critics came to argue.

Thus, it can be said that the poets in the Indian subcontinent played a key role in building the boundaries for the ground on which the new literary style, *tāza guī* emerged. There was a collective self consciousness among patrons and poets of this time that they were engaged in a crucial task of re-working some aspects of the Persian literary culture, but this process was not to be understood as a disregard for tradition, neither was it a break with the works of past poets. The *ghazals* composed in this period provide an insight into the creative imaginations of the poets which was crucial for the definition of one of the most popular styles of writing which emerged during this period. However, it does not mean that there were no other styles of writing. Having discussed the importance of patronage network in Mughal India and the agency of poets, we now venture to explore some features of Indo-Persian *ghazals* that reflected continuity from an earlier poetic tradition as well as innovative changes particular to the period of study. In order to do that we will focus on the *ghazals* composed in Jahangir’s period.

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<sup>267</sup>Kinra, ‘Make it Fresh’, p. 25

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE CONTENT OF INDO-PERSIAN *GHAZALS* IN MUGHAL INDIA

In this chapter, the focus shall remain on highlighting some aspects of the content of Indo-Persian *ghazals* which drew heavily from the past and also bore an innovative streak of Mughal India in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were different styles of *ghazals* like *wāqai-goi*, where the whole composition described one event or a happening; *falsafa*, which was replete with philosophy; *taghzal*, where the feelings of love and the state of the lover were the main themes, and *Khayālbandi/ mazmūn āfreenī* which meant “novelty of topics”, wherein poets experimented by creating new meanings.<sup>268</sup> In this chapter, an attempt is made to highlight important features of Indo-Persian *ghazals* composed in this period. One of the central features of the genre of *ghazals* is emotionality. *Ghazals* were based on universal emotions and touched upon a wide ranging spectrum of audiences in different ways and leaving them with myriad emotional experiences. The emotional quotient of *ghazals* was sometimes so high, as Kinra informs us, that Chandrabhan Brahman often wept while reciting his *ghazals*.<sup>269</sup> In this chapter, we will attempt to address a few points about the emotional quotient of *ghazals* and the state of the lover as expressed in the verses. Closely tied to the emotionality in *ghazals* is the aspect of inherent ambiguity. In *ghazals*, there is a lot that the poet tries to express and there is even more which is concealed. This feature enhances the beauty and elegance of *ghazals* and brings a mysterious bend to the composition, as we will discover later in the chapter. The chapter, thus, seeks to highlight the fact that Persian *ghazals* had been much more versatile in terms of the themes they covered. The usual argument is that *ghazals* are primarily love poems; however, in this chapter we will shed light on *ghazals* that were imbued with philosophical and radical thoughts, embodied free thinking and they became one of the dominant ways of criticising orthodox ideas in Mughal India.

The discussion of the history of Persian *ghazals* in Mughal India would remain incomplete without taking into consideration the reign of the Mughal emperor Jahangir, because as noted earlier, Jahangir was quite fond of *ghazals*. A section of the chapter will thus narrow down the focus on a few *ghazals* composed in his court. This is not to argue that literary developments can

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<sup>268</sup>Nomani, *vol. III*, pp. 20-22

<sup>269</sup>Kinra, p. 217



be studied in direct relation to the political leadership. The main subject of the discussion in this section would revolve around the kinds of *ghazals* which the emperor appreciated and the functions they fulfilled in his court. In the course of the chapter, comments about the aesthetic sensibility and the literary taste of the period will also be made.

## I

### **Persian *ghazal*: an emotionally charged genre of poetry**

*Ghazals* incorporated a wide range of material - gnomic, encomiastic and satiric, but they widely remained identified as a vehicle for expressing the varied experiences of love.<sup>270</sup> J.T.P. De Bruijn argues that, “the theme of love is so pervasive that it touches all forms of mystical poetry...however, no form of poetry is as closely tied to the theme of love, with all its ramifications, as the Persian *ghazal*.”<sup>271</sup> They are replete with human emotions of all kinds - love, suffering, longing, hope and despair, the joy of spring, autumnal sadness -which encapsulates the readers’ wishes and worries. A wide range of subjects or themes including the beauty of nature (gardens, flowers, trees, birds); the pleasures of the tavern; abstinence and piety; virtue, vice and contentment; the changes and chances of life; death and nothingness, but most importantly, love- *ishq-i majāzī* (“earthly love”) and *ishq-i haqīqī* (“divine love”).<sup>272</sup>

One of the most dominant features of *ghazals* is the fact that it remains replete with emotions and feeling of love and appreciation of the beauty of nature or beloved, along with the multiple contexts in which headiness of wine is used to express the state of the lover. Metaphors came to be dominantly used in *ghazals*, many of them borrowed from the natural world.<sup>273</sup> For instance, the *bulbul* was mad with passion for the *gul* (“rose”), the *parvana* (“moth”) burnt itself out in the *shama*’ (“flame”). But in these compositions, the experiences of bliss, ecstasy and triumph were short-lived. What remained long lasting was *soz o gudaz*, which meant torment and sorrow of requited or unrequited love, jealousy of rivals and amorous humiliations. The *raqueeb* (“rival”) is another prominent feature in *ghazal* love triangle of ‘*ashiq-mashooq-raqueeb*’.<sup>274</sup> Often *raqueeb* was a product of imaginings of the poet. The lover believes that the whole world is attracted to

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<sup>270</sup> Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 237

<sup>271</sup> Bruijn, p. 53

<sup>272</sup> Akhtar Qamber, p. 25

<sup>273</sup> Qamber, 27

<sup>274</sup> Qamber, p. 28

the beloved.<sup>275</sup> Along with *soz-o-gudaz*, the states of *hijr* and *vasl* dominate the world of lover in the *ghazals*.<sup>276</sup> *Hijr* means the pain of separation and the unstable state of mind in the absence of the beloved whereas, *vasl* is the union with the beloved, which is very rare and in case the beloved is god, it is unattainable. The lover in *ghazals* is always hopeful of being one with the beloved. The journey to the path of union with the beloved (i.e. god) became an important theme of *ghazals*. The desire to meet a long-separated friend and the resulting gaiety is another very dominant theme of *ghazals*, which remained quite popular in Mughal India as can be gleaned from many private letters written by Chandrabhan Brahman to his patrons, friends and family. In the letter he wrote to Islam Khan, he attached a “*ghazal* that immediately sprang to mind with the thought of the pleasure of your (Islam Khan’s) company.”<sup>277</sup> The verses of the *ghazal* are in tune with the feeling of solitude he felt due to his inability to meet his friend:

No one knows my condition in this solitude;  
 No one knows the condition of an indigent stranger \_\_\_\_\_ 1

My eager hands so small, your skirt so great;  
 These insufficient arms cannot attain their objective \_\_\_\_\_ 2

I come madly with my passionate forehead prostrate on the path to you,  
 For one does not journey the path of love on erect legs \_\_\_\_\_ 3

The dust of your lane is a pearl collyrium for the eye;  
 Mere ointment brings no relief to the lover’s sight \_\_\_\_\_ 4

What will be the fate of Brahman’s frail heart  
 If the medicine from your charm factory fails to arrive?<sup>278</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 5

In the *ghazal*, according to Kinra, “Chandra Bhan casts Islam Khan in the role of an absent beloved and himself in the part of a tormented lover hoping for a glimpse of her to relieve his suffering.”<sup>279</sup> The verses express the suffering of the lover due to his inability to meet his friend/beloved. The emotional quotient in the verses is often heightened by the exposition of the pain

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Kinra, p. 183

<sup>278</sup> Kinra, p. 183

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 184

experienced by the lover. In verse 3, the poet stresses on the fact that it was impossible to reach the lover, “except in complete submission and prostration”<sup>280</sup> which is why the lover “has the look of a madman as he makes his way to his beloved, because he is constantly hunched over, crawling etc.”<sup>281</sup>

Naziri Nishapuri also wrote a *ghazal* of which the central subject is the bond of friendship:

How happy it is for the two united hearts (friends) to initiate a discourse together!

To talk of the past occurrences, to enter into long complaints! \_\_\_\_\_ 1

To wipe off slowly the effects of anger from each other’s heart,  
With ready-made excuses for seeking re-union; \_\_\_\_\_ 2

What hast thou done for thy own self, Naziri, that thou wouldst do to us?  
I swear by god that it has become incumbent to avoid thee.<sup>282</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 3

The poet captures the bond one shares with a friend or if extended, these same feelings can be applied in case of a beloved, very well. This ambiguity present in *ghazals* is one of the most distinguishing features of the genre, as we will discuss in the next section. The emotions invoked in these verses are universal. In these verses too, the poet wishes a reunion with the friend and to indulge in long conversations, complaints, etc. The pleasure of this rendezvous is such that the poet keeps looking for excuses to meet his friend again.

### **Ambiguity in *ghazals*: identity of the beloved**

Scholars have agreed that one of the most characteristic features of *ghazals* is its inherent ambiguity which opened avenues for polysemy and gave flexibility and spontaneity to the verses.<sup>283</sup> *Ghazals* were written primarily as love poetry or in praise of beauty (whether natural or human). The conversation between poet-lover and beloved was the central focus of *ghazals*. The identity of the beloved in *ghazals* has always remained ambiguous. The poet achieves refinement by using many conceits which became more diverse as the genre reached different areas in the

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., f.n. 19, p. 314

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, f.n. 19, p. 314

<sup>282</sup> Quoted in Ghani, vol. 3, p. 79

<sup>283</sup> Sharma, *Mughal Arcadia*, p. 10; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 273.

Indo-Persian world. The sources of imagery are vast and diverse.<sup>284</sup> For instance, war vocabulary was used in the *ghazals* with spears, daggers, rapiers and javelins used in the service of love. In these compositions, the eyebrows of the beloved became swords; or, eyes became arrows and side-locks acted as bows.<sup>285</sup> In one verse, Naziri Nishapuri referring to the strength in the arms of the beloved expresses it in a different style:

*Az kaf name dehad dil āsan rabuda rā*

*Dīdīm zor bāzuyī nā āzmuda rā*<sup>286</sup>

He does not give easily from his hand the easily-captured heart,

We realize in full the strength of that uncouth arm.<sup>287</sup>

In this verse, the poet conveys the idea that the lover's heart is in full submission towards the beloved. However, the poet also emphasizes the irony of power and strength in the arms of the 'tender beloved' which does not let loose the lover's heart.<sup>288</sup>

The conventional image of the beloved in *ghazals* is usually that of cruelty, hard-heartedness and indifference.<sup>289</sup> The beloved in Persian *ghazals* is usually portrayed as an executioner, tormentor, an enemy, an oppressor, an idol, a charmer, a friend, a *sāqi*, a *pari*, a stranger, seducer, etc. In another verse, Naziri highlighted the torment the lover experienced due to the inability of the beloved to keep her/ his promises:

*Chu khanah-i-sarkasht sat (ast) ehad ra bunyad*

*Ze (az) har taraf seeme wazid o zanshud*<sup>290</sup>

The above verse means that the promise of the beloved is like a thatched roof that a gust of wind could cause a rupture in it. Fragility of the promises of the beloved was an old theme, worked upon by many poets before Naziri as well. However, he used the metaphor of *khanah-i-kasht* ("thatched roof") to reiterate the lover's complaint about the brittleness of the beloved's promises.

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<sup>284</sup>Qamber, p. 28

<sup>285</sup>Qamber, p. 29

<sup>286</sup> Quoted in Ghani, vol. 3, p. 85

<sup>287</sup> Ghani, vol. 3, p. 85.

<sup>288</sup>Nomani, vol. III, p. 146

<sup>289</sup>Qamber, p. 29

<sup>290</sup>Nomani, p. 152

The concealed identity of the beloved in *ghazals* often adds to the ambiguous nature of the composition. Beloved – whether a man, woman, Sufi sheikh, a close companion or god– was addressed either in masculine gender or with gender-neutral Persian pronoun *tu* (“you”).

There were several kinds of beloveds in Persian poetry. The element of attraction for men was deeply steeped in Persian *ghazals*. According to Meisami, “homoerotic love was acceptable and tolerated in that society”.<sup>291</sup> Ehsan Yarshater as well as Meisami argued that the masculine gender of the beloved in early Persian poetry (i.e. 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries) could be attributed “to the manners and protocols of courtly drinking gatherings.”<sup>292</sup> Many verses are dedicated to the Turkish youth, who served as “soldier-cupbearers”<sup>293</sup> who were often present at royal drinking gatherings, a setting most conducive for composition of *ghazals*. Such gatherings often provided a conventional fictive setting for *ghazals*.<sup>294</sup> These Turkish slaves could become a cause of envy and “brought hundred rival eyes upon them”.<sup>295</sup> Many epithets like *turk*, *but* (“idol”), *sanam* (“beloved”), *pisar* (“boy”), *dust* (“friend”/“companion”), came to be frequently used for the beloved in Persian *ghazals*. According to Meisami, “the portrayal of the experiences of love is central”<sup>296</sup> and the description of youthful boys should not be taken literally but both, as ideal and fiction. The masculine gender, used for the Turkish youths around the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries gradually became a literary convention.

Sufi mystics brought in a further complexity and richness to *ghazals*. The connection between *ghazals* and mysticism added a new dimension to the identity of the beloved in the genre as well as inaugurating the phase of mystical *ghazals*. The central focus of Sufi thought has been on the tenet of love, which was further explored in *ghazals* where the poets imagined the relationship of love with god being the only beloved. The experiences and emotions of earthly love (*ishq-i-majāzī*) were used as an analogy for the experiences in the love of god (*ishq-i-haqīqī*). Overtime,

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<sup>291</sup>Meisami, p. 246

<sup>292</sup>Meisami, p. 248

<sup>293</sup>The term “soldier-cupbearer” is used by Ehsan Yarshater in the context of those Turkish slaves who combined the war-like qualities of a warrior and the social refinements of a sociable wine server in the courtly drinking parties. Ehsan Yarshater, ‘The Theme of Wine Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry’, *Study Islamica*, No. 13 (Maisonneuve& Larose, 1960), [www.jstor.org/stable/1595239](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595239), p. 52.

<sup>294</sup>Meisami, p. 248

<sup>295</sup>Qamber, p. 25

<sup>296</sup>Meisami, p. 251

the increasing popularity of mystical *ghazals* might have increased with the increasing influence of Sufi orders.<sup>297</sup>

Scholars attempt to guess the gender of the beloved by reading closely the attributes described by the poets in the compositions like curly locks or red lips. However, in order to guess definitely the gender of the beloved, one has to be aware about the concepts of beauty and attributes associated with different genders at different points of time in different cultures. It would be an exercise in vain to find an answer to the question of gender of the beloved in *ghazals* because the very form and the style of the genre inspired the poets to deliberately conceal or highlight only certain attributes of the beloved. They kept the identity of the beloved ambiguous to make their compositions more versatile and suitable for different settings and interpretations, a factor which made *ghazals* one of the most popular genres of Persian poetry.

### **Intellectual currents in Indo-Persian *Ghazals***

*Ghazals* have been studied largely in the context of love poetry. In this section, however, the horizon of the study of *ghazal* would be widened to include the study of *ghazals* as expressions of philosophical ideas and radical thought. The stock of metaphors and imagery available to the poets of Mughal India already bore an imprint of a questioning spirit, liberal ideas and philosophical musings. With the emergence of Mughal India as the “abode of peace” (*dar al aman*), as the centre of multilingual literary engagements combined with the spirit of “newness”/ “freshness” (*tāzagi*) in literature during our period of study, it provided an avenue to poets to experiment with diverse ideas and forms in poetry. *Ghazals* imbued with philosophical ideas were written prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (specially *ghazals* of poets like Sa’di, Hafiz); however, the style was taken to a higher level by poets in India like Faizi, Urfi, Chandrabhan Brahman, Zuhuri, to name a few.

For the poet laureate of Akbar’s court, Faizi, the loftiness of ideas and thought as well as striving to push the limits of imagination and creativity were pertinent elements for poets to create original work.<sup>298</sup> We have discussed in the previous chapter about the emergence of a new literary sensibility which strove to create new meanings with old words, keeping up with the

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<sup>297</sup>Meisami, p. 272

<sup>298</sup>Faizi’s instructions to poets to create original work have been discussed in the previous chapter, pp. 19-21.

thousand years old poetic tradition. The poets in the Indian subcontinent, who were in the forefront of defining the standards of the new literary aesthetics, pressed on the importance of sublimity of thought and original ideas. Muzaffar Alam argued that Mughal poetry was a “fine blending of rhetoric excellence and grandeur of thought, in which thought occupied a superior position.”<sup>299</sup> Alam’s claim can be substantiated by the following verse composed by Faizi, emphasizing upon the power of sublime thought and sheer emotionality which cleared his poetry of unrefined components:

Do not be surprised if there are no dregs in my poetry  
because I have refined this wine by filtering it through the heart.<sup>300</sup>

Another prominent poet, Ghani Kashmiri (d. 1688) composed the following verse in the new style of *tāza guī*, which celebrated the tradition of applying henna and compared its colour to the “colourful themes” in his poetry, which were a result of his poetic thought:

The luminous presence of your beauty set me to poetic thought.  
You applied the henna and I created colourful themes.<sup>301</sup>

According to many scholars like Losensky, it was Baba Fighani who initiated the practice of investing old words with new meanings.<sup>302</sup> Whether *tāza guī* began with Baba Fighani or later, is a debate which is out of the purview of this chapter but what is significant is the development of a literary sensibility which gave much import to idea. For instance, Muzaffar Alam informs us that, “Babur also pointed to the importance of idea (*ma’ni*) and ecstasy (*hāl*), together with colour (*rang*) in a good poem.”<sup>303</sup>

Persian *ghazals* have borne the flag of liberal outlook; questioning and criticizing religious orthodoxy and its flag bearers have been an integral subject matter of the genre. Various metaphors and imageries have been created from religious themes such as *kāfir* (“infidel”), which has been used as an epithet for the beloved; “idolatry” (*but parasti*) and going to temple as a symbol of rebellion had become commonplace in the imageries of *ghazals*. Muzaffar Alam

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<sup>299</sup>Muzaffar Alam, ‘The Culture and Politics of Persian in Pre-colonial Hindustan’, Sheldon Pollock ed. *Literary Cultures in History* (University of California Press, 2003) p. 171

<sup>300</sup> As quoted in Alam, ‘The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan’, p. 172

<sup>301</sup> As quoted in Alam, ‘The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan’, p. 172

<sup>302</sup> Alam, p. 171

<sup>303</sup> Alam, p. 171

categorically states that the poets in this period composed verses taking idolatry and temple going as a mark of their religion. He writes that, “the idol (*but*), to them (poets), was the symbol of divine beauty; idolatry (*but-parasti*) represented the love of the Absolute; and they emphasized holding the Brahman in high esteem because of his sincerity, devotion and faithfulness to the idol.”<sup>304</sup> Mughal poets considered the pious (*zāhid*) and the sheikh as hypocrites and sought “the eternal divine secrets from the master of the wine house (*mughān*), and in the temple rather than in the mosque.”<sup>305</sup> Faizi thus wrote:

Give up the path of the Muslims  
if you desire to come to the temple of the Magi and see the esoteric  
mysteries.<sup>306</sup>

Urfi, another well-known Persian poet of the 16<sup>th</sup> century wrote in the same vein:

The lamp of Somnath is [the same as] the fire at Sinai;  
the light spreads from it in all directions.<sup>307</sup>

For Urfi, the temple, the wine house, the mosque and the *Ka’ba* were the same and the divine light pervaded everywhere.<sup>308</sup> The same kind of message echoed in the following verse of Nasir Ali Sarhindi (d. 1696), who was a major poet of Aurangzeb’s time:

The image is the same behind the veil in the temple and the *haram*.  
Though the firestones vary, there is no change in the colour of the fire.<sup>309</sup>

The above verse refers to the idea that nature (in the form of fire) does not differentiate between Hindu and Muslim, whether it is burning in a temple or in *haram* (holy place for Muslims). Moreover, the poet supports the view that different paths lead to the same god as he wrote that “the image is the same behind the veil in the temple and the *haram*”. Similarly, Naziri Nishapuri’s following verse suggests that religion seems irrelevant where love pervades:

The infidelism and faith are not necessary conditions in love, O Naziri,

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<sup>304</sup>Alam, “Persian in Precolonial Hindustan”, p. 169

<sup>305</sup>Alam, “Persian in Precolonial Hindustan”, p. 169

<sup>306</sup> Quoted in Alam, “Persian in Precolonial Hindustan”, p. 169

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 170



I may show thee an infidel who possesses saintliness.<sup>310</sup>

The poet stresses on developing a humanistic outlook, which calls for looking at everyone from the prism of love rather than the faith they belong to. The same humanistic idea lies behind the following verse by Urfi:

The lover is indifferent to Islam and infidelity  
The moth (flying into the flame) does not distinguish  
Between a lamp placed in mosque or in temple.<sup>311</sup>

The verse suggests that love is a bigger force than any religion; it exterminates all kinds of differences erupting from religious differences. In yet another verse, Urfi celebrates the diversity in the Indian subcontinent:

Urfi, so live with good and bad, that when you die,  
The Muslims wash your body and Hindus cremate it.<sup>312</sup>

The verse is particularly interesting as the poet stresses not on leaving one's own religion but calls for cultivating the virtue of respect for every community, as well as being open to accepting the differences of religion, opinions and rituals respectfully.

Indo-Persian *ghazals* stressed continuously on building a society and culture based on love and rationality imbued with a spirit of questioning. Muzaffar Alam rightly argues that, "Persian poetry which had integrated many themes and ideas from pre-Islamic Persia and had been an important vehicle of liberalism..."<sup>313</sup> it helped in significant ways in creating and supporting "the Mughal attempt to accommodate diverse religious traditions."<sup>314</sup> The verses quoted above stand as proof for their liberal ideas and carried an ethos of non-sectarianism. According to Muzaffar Alam, Persian facilitated the "Mughal cultural conquest in India"<sup>315</sup> and quoted the following verse composed by Urfi to substantiate his argument:

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<sup>310</sup>Ghani, vol III, p. 82

<sup>311</sup>Shireen Moosvi, "Three Iranian Voices in the Renaissance under Akbar", *Studies in People's History*, 5, 2, (SAGE, 2018), p. 14

<sup>312</sup> Quoted in Shireen Moosvi, p. 14

<sup>313</sup>Alam, p. 168

<sup>314</sup>Alam, p. 169

<sup>315</sup>Alam, p. 170

We have received wounds, we have scored victories,  
 But the hues of our garments have never been stained with the blood of  
 anyone.<sup>316</sup>

The liberal ideas propagated in *ghazals* are often accompanied and influenced by Sufi thoughts and practices. According to Harbans Mukhia, Persian *ghazals* are the “best literary manifestation” of the Sufi thought and practice.<sup>317</sup> Some Sufi mystics often adopted stances which were different, and opposed the stances of the ruling class and the *ulama*. This difference came to be manifested in the form of dichotomy, expressed ideologically in terms of two world views: the world of the heart and that of the head, which became central to the *ghazal* poets.<sup>318</sup> For Mukhia, the counter-position between the head and the heart is that of argumentation and feeling, of hegemonic ambition and universalism. Often the *ghazals* influenced by Sufi thoughts upheld the experience of heart and love, which is universalistic, and were filled with feelings of love, affection, pain of separation, etc.<sup>319</sup> For the *ulama*, Islam was to be manifested through the acts of conquest, subjugation and humiliation of the people of other faiths, whereas for the *ghazal* poets, it was love (manifested as *gham* “sorrow”), which dissolved all kinds of antagonisms.<sup>320</sup> The dichotomy which Mukhia discussed in his article was present but in a limited sense. The genre of *ghazal* was not devoid of discussions of power, conquest and hegemony, unlike what Mukhia argues. The verse of Urfi quoted above is about conquering but without bloodshed. The message runs deeper than just the message of love and harmony. It speaks the language of victory and conquests. However, Mukhia interestingly argues that through the language of love, *ghazal* poets celebrated the image of Majnun and his ‘insanity’ as a lover rather than the inhuman ‘sanity’ of the pursuit of success by the mighty and the dominant.<sup>321</sup> The Sufic undertones present in *ghazals* in the “notion of unbounded love for the sweetheart, or *gham* or the fundamental Sufi notion of *fana* (“self-annihilation and immersion in the beloved, i.e. god”), argues Mukhia, can also be understood as vehicles of dissent.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Quoted in Alam, p. 170

<sup>317</sup> Harbans Mukhia, “The Celebration of Failure as Dissent in Urdu *Ghazal*”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 33, 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 872

<sup>318</sup> Mukhia, p. 872

<sup>319</sup> Mukhia, p. 873

<sup>320</sup> Mukhia, pp. 876-7

<sup>321</sup> Mukhia, p. 874

<sup>322</sup> Mukhia, p. 879

The difference in approach to religion and tenets of Islam also came to be manifested in open support to the practice of wine drinking. Wine drinking stands against the tenets of Islam and the *ulama* did not support the practice. To express their disregard for the orthodox elements of religion, poets frequently used the trope of drunkenness caused by wine of love. Due to heavy impact of Sufism, the “headiness” (*masti*) caused by wine drinking came to be regarded as a chance to be closer to the almighty. The court poets of Jahangir were quite influenced by Sufi thoughts and carried forward the spirit of questioning and disagreeing with the orthodoxy through verses. Talib Amuli, the poet laureate of Jahangir’s court thus wrote:

I do not condemn unbelief, not am I a bigoted believer,  
I laugh at both the *shaykh* and the *Brahman*<sup>323</sup>

Talib Amuli chose to tread the middle path by refusing to be a bigoted believer and accepted those who did not fall in line with his thoughts on religion. However, those who held authority in the matters of religion like the sheikh and Brahman were the recipients of his ridicule. Shireen Moosvi argues that Urfi mentions Hafiz in his poetry and followed him in his defiance of orthodoxy, but also goes much beyond him and in doing so, perhaps crosses the limit of what was permissible in Akbar’s time.<sup>324</sup>

Kufr, no; Islam, no; Islam mixed with Kufr, no!  
I know not (from them) what reason God had in inventing us<sup>325</sup>

Here, he is unconvinced not only by Islam and Hinduism but also by Akbar’s religious thought which was believed to accommodate elements of “Brahmanical philosophy with Islamic pantheism”.<sup>326</sup> His contempt and criticism was not limited to orthodox clerics but often put the political power holders under the scanner. At another instance he wrote:

Demolish this village which has its foundation on *multiplicity* and then  
see,

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<sup>323</sup> Quoted in Alam, “The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan”, p. 170

<sup>324</sup> Moosvi, “Three Iranian voices of Renaissance under Akbar”, p. 14

<sup>325</sup> Quoted in Moosvi, “Three Iranian voices of Renaissance under Akbar”, p. 15

<sup>326</sup> Moosvi, p. 15

What it is to be the master of *unity* and to possess kingdom of Eternity!<sup>327</sup>

A mixture of the criticism of orthodoxy as well as the state, use of established themes and richness of thought and philosophy made Urfi's *ghazals* extremely popular and interesting. Apart from radical thoughts, the peculiarities of Urfi's style were "forceful diction" (*zor-i-kalam*), new and original combinations of words and fine metaphors and comparisons and continuity or congruity of topics.<sup>328</sup>

The influence of esoteric beliefs remained strong in Indo-Persian *ghazals* such that many tropes, themes and metaphors from Persian literary culture continued through this period. A poet whose *ghazals* were heavily coloured by such metaphors and themes was Chandrabhan Brahman, who began his career during the reign of Jahangir and remained in the service of Mughal emperors till the period of Aurangzeb.<sup>329</sup> He had acquired a respectable place among the *tāza guī*poets of this period whose verses were appreciated by poets like Sa'ib Tabrizi and found place in the *bayāz* ("notebook") of Bedil (1644- 1721 CE).<sup>330</sup> Chandrabhan Brahman used the stock metaphors but provided his own twist to them by indulging in wordplay and use of polysemic words and phrases. The *ghazals* of Chandrabhan Brahman ended with his penname, Brahman, where he mediated playfully on the meaning and nature of *brahmanness*.<sup>331</sup>

It is incumbent upon us to serve the idol, Brahman;  
How can any image that resides in the heart be erased?<sup>332</sup>

(*lāzim āmad bar sar-i mā khidmat-i but barhaman*  
*Mahw kai gardad har ān naqshī ki dar dil-hā nishast*)<sup>333</sup>

In the above verse, the poet is playfully dealing with the cliché of the Hindu as idol worshipper, only to assert that the true "idol" worshipped by the Brahman is, in reality, the abstract universaltruth which can be seen only through mind or heart's eyes.<sup>334</sup> According to Kinra, the

<sup>327</sup>Ghani, *History of Persian Language and Literature*, vol. III, p. 119

<sup>328</sup>E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, vol. iv, p. 248

<sup>329</sup>Rajeev Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 1

<sup>330</sup>Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, p. 59

<sup>331</sup>Kinra, p. 23

<sup>332</sup>Quoted in Kinra, p. 23

<sup>333</sup>Ibid.

<sup>334</sup>Ibid.

poet is drawing on the mystical idioms of Hinduism and Islam to express a mystical theme.<sup>335</sup> In the closing lines (*maqta*) of his *ghazals*, Brahman is playful with his pen name in unusual, clever and unexpected ways, as we will study in the next few *ghazals*.<sup>336</sup> For instance,

Majnun's turn in the factory of love is over;  
A Brahman has taken up this ancient legacy today.<sup>337</sup>

(*guzasht naubat i majnun zi kār-khāna-yī ishq*  
*Barahman ast dar īn kuhna dūdmān imroz*)<sup>338</sup>

Here, Brahman offers a play on his identity as a Brahman and the stock themes of the Indo-Persian poetic canon where *majnun* became a symbol of the quintessential mystical lover, longing for his beloved. Brahman's writings were heavily influenced by mystical thoughts. Kinra argues that mystical dimensions of both Islam and Hinduism are found in Brahman's writings and personality. It was a part of his personality that informed his approach in the matters of daily life and human existence.<sup>339</sup> His Sufi bent of mind was not seen as a threat to his identity as a Brahman. Rather, he asserted that his identity as a Brahman made him "more attuned to the esoteric intellectualism and spirituality of Sufism".<sup>340</sup>

Brahman's *ghazals* also represent a blend of the new aesthetic with a deep mystical sensibility.<sup>341</sup> According to Kinra, Brahman's *ghazals* were woven around the duality of *surat* ("outer appearance"/ "form") and *ma'ni* ("hidden meaning"/ "deeper spiritual meaning").<sup>342</sup> He composed the following verse:

Put forth such tears from your flowing eyes, O Brahman,  
That you can fetch fresh water for the priests.<sup>343</sup>

(*birekht ashk chunān barhaman zi dāda-i tar*  
*Ki āb-i tāzaba rūy-i barahmanānāward*)<sup>344</sup>

<sup>335</sup>Ibid., p. 23

<sup>336</sup>Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Quoted in Kinra, p. 47

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 217

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 10

<sup>343</sup> Quoted in Kinra, p. 217

The first line draws on the common poetic trope of poet crying floods of tears in the absence of the beloved. Kinra argues that these are mystical, Sufi tears. Brahman added a twist in the second *misra* (“line”) where he says that one must cry so much that enough “fresh water” (*āb-i tāza*) could be collected to fetch and present (*barūyāwardan*) to the class of Brahmans, probably for use in ritual bathing.<sup>345</sup> Kinra highlights the implied contrast between Brahman’s own mystical and esoteric awareness as a poet-lover-mystic and the formulaic, exoteric rituals of the other Brahmans.<sup>346</sup> Similarly, in another verse, he wrote:

I have an especially intimate bond with my sacred thread  
Which keeps on reminding me that I come from [a line of] Brahmans.<sup>347</sup>

(*mā rā ba rishta-i zunnār ulfatī-yikhāssast*  
*Ki yādgār-i man azbarahmanhamīdāram*)<sup>348</sup>

The interplay on his *takhallus* also comes across clearly in the above verse. It could mean: “I have a special respect for my traditions, and thus the sacred thread is especially important to me.”<sup>349</sup> However, according to Kinra, it could also mean: “I have so transcended superficial religious practices that the only thing that reminds me of my Brahmanical heritage is this slender thread.”<sup>350</sup> One possible interpretation could also be read in the sense of existential angst and alienation: “I have become so confused by all my religious experimentation, with Sufism and such that I need this thread to remind me who I really am.”<sup>351</sup> The most prominent feature of *tāzaguī* style of poetry, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, is the possibility of multiple interpretations by exhaustingly using words and metaphors with multiple meanings. Brahman’s verses point to the innovative ways in which poets used the space provided in the closing verses of *ghazals*. The closing verses often also became the avenue for propagating philosophies, playing around the identity of the poet and so on.

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 218

<sup>347</sup> Quoted in Kinra, p. 219

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

Another interesting feature of *ghazals* composed in this period is the expression of philosophical thoughts by poets. As we have noted in the above verses, the beliefs of mysticism remained important themes of this period. The letters and poetry of Brahman are also replete with his thought process and philosophical musings. According to Kinra, in Brahman's view it was essential for those who were engaged in worldly pursuits- right from clerks, accountants, to the most powerful men- to cultivate a refined "habitus of mystical disinterestedness amidst the bustle of worldly activity."<sup>352</sup> In the letter to his son TejBhan, Brahman wrote that even if professional obligations made it difficult for people to take up the mystical path of the Sufis and yogis by renouncing worldly attachments completely, the former should atleast strive to emulate the humility of great men. He further stressed upon the moral necessity of treating the material world with an air of "detachment" (*be-ta'alluqi*).<sup>353</sup> Some of his *ghazals* also reflect his philosophy of *be-ta'alluqi* and mystical attitude:

A liberated man ensnared by the abandonment of desire  
Does not let either of the two worlds into the sanctum of his heart<sup>354</sup>

(*kaunainrāba khalwat-i dil rah namādihad*  
*Āzāda'iki tark-i tamannāgiriftaast*)<sup>355</sup>

The poet stressed upon the fact that attaining liberation was possible for those who were not too trapped in the bustle of the world. Not letting any achievement or non-fulfillment affect the heart and soul with such intensity that one lost touch with one's self remained an important message from the poet. Again, in another verse he advised:

Brahman, it is best to detach and consign yourself to a corner,  
For the highest achievement, after all, is in renouncing the very idea of  
achievement.<sup>356</sup>

*Barahmanaztuhāmīnbihkigōsha-gīrshawī*  
*Ki mudda'āhamadar tark-i mudda'ābāshad*<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 62

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Quoted in Kinra, p. 63

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Quoted in Kinra, p. 188

The above verse is written in the same sense where the poet gave primacy to the idea of detaching oneself from another worldly aspect, i.e., the idea of achievement. The key word used by the poet in both these verses is “*tark*” which means to abandon or renounce. The philosophy of renouncing and detaching oneself from worldly pursuits had been a part of the intellectual traditions of the Indian subcontinent from ancient times. This very concept of detachment influenced many compositions of Brahman.

## II

### ***Ghazals* in Jahangir’s court: tradition, innovation and diplomacy**

Persian *ghazals* composed in Mughal India celebrated the spirit of questioning, a scientific temperament, and also possessed a contempt for orthodoxy. All these features remained prominent during the time of Jahangir as well. Jahangir was also highly interested in the literary tradition, conventions and technicalities of the genre. His private and public assemblies were adorned with recitation of classical poetry and provided a space for poets to create a name for themselves in the world of Persian literature. Many of the nocturnal literary sessions held under Jahangir were dedicated to composition, performance and appreciation of *ghazals*, which, Jahangir claimed, was one of his favourite genres of poetry.<sup>358</sup> Jahangir was a connoisseur of poetry. He not only patronized prominent poets of the age but also composed poetry. He had a sound knowledge of Persian language and literature, which made him often quote from the works of Hafiz, Jami, Khusro, Anvari and others.

Many instances in *Majalis-i Jahangiri* establish the image of Jahangir as a highly cultured and unbiased emperor who criticized and corrected poets during literary discussions. He often criticized poets over technicalities of poetry. For instance, in one literary discussion, as Abdul Sattar Lahori noted, Jahangir corrected poet Hayati Gilani that the term ‘*nāma*’ is not used in relation to works like *Bustan wa Gulistan*.<sup>359</sup> *Majalis-i Jahangiri* is full of such instances where Jahangir is seen to make comments on the quality of the verses or whether use of a certain term fits well with the whole composition or not. In another session, he commented on the quatrain composed by Shakibi Isfahani criticising the use of term “*bin*” in the second *misra*, which,

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p. 188

<sup>358</sup> Abdul Sattar Lahori, *Majalis-i Jahangiri*, p. 269

<sup>359</sup> *Majalis*, p. 223



according to him, “made the verse weak/bad/spoilt” (*zabunsakhte bud*).<sup>360</sup> In the first recorded session, Taqaiyai Shushtari Hakayati presented verses from *ghazal* of Shaikh Rajab of Shiraz to which Jahangir suggested that, “instead of the word “*ūst*”, the word “*kīst*” seemed more suitable in recitation” [*be jai (ūst) lafz-e (kīst) khwāndan fasīhtarast*].<sup>361</sup> Jahangir was equally unbiased in criticizing works of classical poets like Jami. In one session of the poetic discussion, the courtiers and the emperor were extemporaneously reciting verses in imitation of a hemistich of a verse from Jami’s *ghazal*, which was as follows:

For every rose it is necessary to endure the trouble of a hundred thorns.<sup>362</sup>

Since the verse had become popular and proverbial at that time, Jahangir ordered to bring the entire *ghazal* to him. However, the whole *ghazal* failed to impress the literary critic in Jahangir. He commented that, “Aside from the one hemistich, which had become proverbial in our time, he had not done much with the rest. It was extremely simple and pedestrian.”<sup>363</sup> He portrayed himself as a just, unbiased and learned emperor and literary critic. Jahangir’s interest in literature, poetry and specially *ghazals* makes his reign an important period of development for the genre of *ghazals* in Mughal India.

The rest of the chapter seeks to highlight the fact that the most commonly used metaphors and themes of *ghazals* produced in the court of Jahangir were clear reflections of his personality, outlook and aesthetic taste. Akbar initiated the practice of holding discussions with religious leaders of different sects and religious groups. The spirit of questioning religious authority and striving towards integration of different viewpoints had been an important aspect of the religious outlook of Mughal emperors. Jahangir also imbibed the same spirit and often indulged in debate with religious scholars over various aspects of Islam. According to Lisa Balabanlilar, Jahangir “celebrated his dynasty’s acceptance of diversity and rejection of narrowing political codes, patronizing political writings which emphasized the independent nature of justice and

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<sup>360</sup>*Majalis*, p. 60

<sup>361</sup>*Majalis*, p. 7

<sup>362</sup>Jahangirnama, p. 265

<sup>363</sup>Jahangirnama, p. 265

desirability of religious tolerance.”<sup>364</sup>The poet laureate of Jahangir’s court, Talib Amuli, carried forward the spirit of questioning and disagreeing with the orthodoxy in the following verse:

I do not condemn unbelief, nor am I a bigoted believer,  
I laugh at both the *shaykh* and the *Brahman*<sup>365</sup>

Jahangir, following his father, often “conversed with the good of every religion and sect.”<sup>366</sup> Both Akbar and Jahangir revered holy men who lived an austere life and represented the mystical form of devotion. He often visited ascetic Jadrup Gosain,<sup>367</sup> as the emperor described his meeting with the yogi in *Jahangirnama*. Praising the ascetic Jahangir wrote that, “He is not devoid of learning and has studied well the science of the Vedanta which is the science of Sufism.”<sup>368</sup> Jahangir often found similarity in the tradition of piety in Hinduism and Islam. His inclination towards mysticism did have an influence on his literary taste in *ghazals*. As we have discussed in the previous section, Sufism was closely intertwined with the genre. Jahangir was quite fascinated with the idea of mystical love, which gets reflected clearly in his *ghazal*:

What am I to do now that your arrow of grief has penetrated my heart?  
Before the evil eye arrived one comes after the other. \_\_\_\_\_ 1  
You strut drunk, and the whole world is intoxicated by you.  
I burn incense against the evil eye. \_\_\_\_\_ 2  
I am struck dumb at the idea of traversing the road of union,  
and I cry out in the hope that no one knows. \_\_\_\_\_ 3  
I am drunk in union with the beloved and disconsolate in separation.  
Alas for such grief that torments me. \_\_\_\_\_ 4  
It is time to admit helplessness, Jahangir.  
Offer your head in hopes that a spark of light may come to help.”<sup>369</sup> \_\_\_\_ 5

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<sup>364</sup> Lisa Balabanlilar, “The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Cambridge University Press, Apr., 2009), p. 179 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27756044>, accessed on 16/01/2020.

<sup>365</sup> Quoted in Alam, p. 170

<sup>366</sup> Balabanlilar, “The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure”, p. 180

<sup>367</sup> Jadrup Gosain was an ascetic *sanyasi* who lived in a secluded place near the town of Ujjain during the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir. The ascetic later shifted to Mathura in 1619. We find an interesting and detailed account of his lifestyle and his meeting with the Mughal emperors from *Jahangirnama*, pp. 209, 283, 285, 313, 314.

<sup>368</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 209

<sup>369</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 130

We have already quoted the above *ghazal* in chapter one and noted that the central theme of the *ghazal* is the lament of a lover for his beloved, who could be a human figure or god. The theme of agony of separation and living in the hope of union is the central theme, which has its connection with the Sufi ideas of love of god and the embarking on the journey to be united with the almighty. Verses three to five are about the Sufi idea of love where “earthly love” (*ishq-i majāzī*) came to represent a much deeper spiritual and “true love of god” (*ishq-i haqīqī*). In verse three, the poet is dreaded about the idea of union with the beloved but at the same time, he is also hopeful. Verse four is slightly more complicated where the poet is talking about both, the state of drunkenness resulting from the union with a beloved as well as about the pain of separation that the mystical lover has to endure. This duality of feeling was central to the experience of love for the mystical lover. In the closing verse (*maqta'*), Jahangir mentions his pen name and laments about the helplessness of the lover. Yet, he is hopeful that a ray of light can help him end the sorrow. He was probably invoking the metaphor of light to suggest that the agony of the lover was so intense that only divine intervention could save him. He could also be praying that through divine intervention he could be united with the beloved or that the pain of the poet could only be put to an end by his union with the deity. A verse could have many possible interpretations and it was left to the audience to interpret it for themselves.

The themes of love and wine continued to remain popular in Jahangir’s court. Jahangir personally appreciated the effects that these two themes had on the quality of *ghazals*. There was a Sufic undertone to the love and drunkenness which were found in these compositions, which can also be gleaned from the above *ghazal*.

Jahangir appreciated description of beauty through *ghazals*. Compositions for the description of beauty of nature, different seasons, flora and fauna were very popular in his court. Jahangir’s image as a naturalist is clearly reflected in his liking for different seasons, flora and fauna in the *ghazals*.<sup>370</sup> *Ghazals* were heavily loaded with imageries and metaphors from nature, used to describe the beauty of the beloved. Qamber argues that

...the imagery of formal, terraced gardens, typical of Persian and Mughal taste was added. The beloved was compared to whatever was in the

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<sup>370</sup> Corinne Lefevre, ‘Recovering a Missing Voice from Mughal India: The Imperial Discourse of Jahangir (r. 1605-27) in His Memoirs’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (BRILL, 2007)

garden, gentle as the zephyr or spring showers, slender as cypress with the mouth like a bud, teeth like drops of dew, eyes like almonds or the *nargis*.<sup>371</sup>

The metaphors of red flowers like rose or tulip represented the blushing cheeks of the beloved; hyacinth or violet reminded the poet of the curly locks of the person admired.<sup>372</sup> These metaphors are used by Hasan-i Ganjavi<sup>373</sup> (d. 1160-1 A.D.) in a *ghazal* quoted below. He elaborated upon the idea that there are parallels between love and nature:

The fragrant rose blooms in the garden;  
It seems to me, this is the face of my Fairest,  
The tulip in the green meadow appears to the eye  
As the face of the beloved sitting beside me;  
From afar, the intoxicated narcissus  
Is my sweetheart's eye looking out for me.  
When I see the violets, I say to myself:  
'These are his locks, or else my emasculated body.'<sup>374</sup>

Mughals' love for gardens inspired poets to compose their works with a heavy influence of the images drawn from a garden or to compose *ghazals* which were set in a wine-drinking garden party. The admiration for gardens can be traced back to the period of Timur and his descendants who built suburban gardens with luxurious tents and canopies in and around Samarqand, Herat, Kabul and other such centres of cultural efflorescence.<sup>375</sup> Babur was fond of Timurid gardens and accompanying literary-elite culture, which resulted in the beginning of the construction of imperial gardens by Mughals in India. For Babur, garden parties served as "an effective device through which to establish personal ties with the imperial elite, affirm the loyalty of the ruler's retinue, and develop social cohesion and camaraderie."<sup>376</sup> Like his great grandfather, Jahangir was also immensely fond of natural settings and his interest in landscapes, flora and fauna looms large in the descriptions and paintings of different flowers, plants, animals and birds found in his

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<sup>371</sup>Qamber, p. 29

<sup>372</sup>De Bruijn, p. 63

<sup>373</sup>Hasan-i Ghaznavi was a 12<sup>th</sup> century poet in the court of Bahram Shah of Ghazna of the Ghaznavid dynasty.

<sup>374</sup>Quoted in De Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, p. 64

<sup>375</sup>Lisa Balabanlilar, 'The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure', p. 177

<sup>376</sup>Lisa Balabanlilar, 'The Emperor Jahangir and the Pursuit of Pleasure', p. 182

autobiography. His literary world was also deeply intertwined with his interest in nature. While describing the beauty of springtime and flowers of Kashmir, Jahangir wrote the following *ghazal*:

The coquettes of the garden displayed themselves, cheeks adorned,  
each like a lamp.

Buds give off the fragrance of musk from beneath their skin, like musky  
amulets on the arm of the beloved.

The melody of the dawn-rising nightingale sharpens the desire of wine-  
drinkers.

At every spring a duck puts its beak to drink—like golden scissors cutting  
silk.

A carpet of flowers and greenery laid out in a garden: the lamp of the rose  
lit by the breeze.

The violet has twisted the ends of her locks, tying a tight knot in the heart  
of the rosebud.<sup>377</sup>

Singing praises of the beauty of the flowers of Kashmir instead of praising a human or supernatural beloved became the main function of the above *ghazal* in *Jahangirnama*. Kashmir is compared to a garden and praises are heaped on different creatures present in this garden, including the flowers and the nightingale. In the second couplet, “buds” are the main subject of the poet, for whom the “musky amulet on the arm of the beloved” becomes a reference point for the fragrance of buds, instead of the other way round. This particular *ghazal* is interesting as it has brought together diverse metaphors like “golden scissors” used for the beak of a duck, “silk” used for the crystalline water of the springs in Kashmir, metaphor of “carpet” laid out in a garden, “lamp of the rose” and finally, violet which reminded the lovers of the curly locks of their beloveds, had been transformed into a beloved itself. In this composition, the creative imagination of the poet can be seen best in the fact that different flowers have been imagined as lover and beloved and thus the poet writes that “the curly ends of the violets have tied a knot in the heart of the rosebud”.

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<sup>377</sup> Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, p. 333

The *ghazal* is laden with metaphors and images found in a garden, much in proximity to nature. Such metaphors pleased Jahangir as at several instances in his life, he quotes from Anvari, Hafiz and others, mostly to punctuate his thoughts on the beauty of a garden or a natural landscape. For instance, while appreciating the beauty and greenery of Gulafshan garden along the edge of Jumna river, Jahangir wrote that,

The following lines by Anvari are appropriate to that place:

It is a day for enjoyment and revelry in the garden,

it is a day for a market of flowers and herbs.

The earth gives off an aroma of ambergris,

rose water drips from the breeze's skirt.

From encountering the zephyr the face of the pond is as jagged as a sharpened file.<sup>378</sup>

Like other connoisseurs of poetry in this age, Jahangir was well versed with the tradition of Persian poetry and was equally an active participant in strengthening the foundations of “newness” and “freshness” in *ghazals* (i.e. the style of *tāzaguī*). “Newness” and “freshness” in *ghazals* were one of the pre requisites for poets to gain favours from Jahangir. His courts and gatherings were conducive for composition of *ghazals* in *tāza guī* style of writing. Jahangir quotes a few verses from Talib Amuli in his autobiography. Even though it is not known which verses belong to *ghazals*, it is still important to study them for two reasons. Firstly, the poet was the poet laureate in Jahangir’s court and in Jahangir’s opinion, “... since the level of his poetry, surpassed that of all others, he was enrolled as a court poet.”<sup>379</sup> Secondly, these verses were selectively quoted by Jahangir in his autobiography, so studying them carefully can provide us with an insight into the aesthetic sensibility and poetic taste of the emperor. The verses dwell on different themes:

Spring is much in your debt for having plundered the meadow, for the rose stays fresher in your hand than on the stem. \_\_\_\_\_ 1

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<sup>378</sup>*Jahangirnama*, pp. 306-7

<sup>379</sup>*Jahangirnama*, p. 320

I have so closed my mouth to speaking that you would say my mouth was  
a wound on my face that had healed. \_\_\_\_\_2

Love, from first to last, is nothing but singing and dancing. It is a wine that  
is enjoyable both new and aged. \_\_\_\_\_3

If I were a mirror instead of being a substance, how could I reveal you to  
yourself without a veil? \_\_\_\_\_4

I have two lips, one devoted to wine and the other apologizing for  
drunkenness”<sup>380</sup> \_\_\_\_\_5

The *ghazals* appreciated in this period stand out for their creation of new conceits, complex ideas and thoughts along with word play to produce polysemic verses. The above verses are a combination of new conceits created with seemingly same cultural material, presented in a different style. Verses three and five revolve around the importance of wine, drunkenness and love. In verse three, love is compared to wine, on the basis of the pleasing effect the two have on people. According to the poet, love and wine, whether new or old, can be defined as liberating acts of singing and dancing. The verse refers to the fact that it is the effect of love and wine which liberates people from the worries of the world and connects them with the divine, for a line of thought in mysticism believed that *sama*’ (spiritual singing and dancing) was one of the ways of reaching ecstasy and made union with god possible. Verse five complements well with the personality of Jahangir, whose love for wine was well known. The poet creatively puts forth the conflicting nature of humans here. The idea that a pair of lips, created to complement each other, is instead contradicting each other was written creatively so that the image immediately captures the imagination and attention of the readers. The same complexity and depth of thought can be seen in other verses of Talib Amuli. For instance, in the second verse, the poet wants to convey that he has sealed his lips, thus, signifying silence. However, he does it interestingly, by using the metaphor of “a wound on my face that had healed” for lips to convey the idea that the poet has not spoken for so long that his lips have been sealed together and they looked the same

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<sup>380</sup>*Jahangirnama*, p. 320

as marks of a healed wound on his face. The above verses seized the attention of the audience and engaged their mental faculty to interpret the verses. Such features appealed to the poetic taste of connoisseurs of poetry in this age.

The fact that these features of the new style of writing, *tāza guī* were appreciated by Jahangir can also be gleaned from the record of nocturnal assemblies held in his court wherein he often commanded poets to compose *ghazals* with freshness/ originality and in one literary gathering, he praised Shaikh Jamili for the *ghazal* which the latter had composed “with ‘freshness’” (*be tāzagi*) which was made to be recorded in his diary.<sup>381</sup> In order to understand the importance of *ghazals* in Jahangir’s period and his literary preference for *ghazals* composed in the new style, it is pertinent to discuss the literary sessions dedicated to the discussion regarding the selection of verses to be written as a reply to the verses attached in the letter of Shah Abbas, Safavid ruler of Iran.

We have already discussed in chapter one that *ghazals* were an effective medium for putting across ideas and emotions, so they were an integral part of official correspondences as well. Shah Abbas had sent a letter to Jahangir in which he wrote/ scribed the following *sh’er*:

*Humnashīnīm be khyāl-i-tu wa āsuda dilam*  
*Ke īn wisāliastke dar pāye gham (i) hijrānash nīst*<sup>382</sup>

I sit together with your image and my heart is at rest  
 This is a union that is not followed by the grief of separation.<sup>383</sup>

Jahangir was very particular about the kind of *sh’er* which should be sent as a reply to this *sh’er*. So he commanded the poets and others present in the assembly to compose verses which were at par with the verses written in the letter of Shah Abbas.<sup>384</sup> He wanted that the verses should carry all the themes and subjects discussed in the letter in brief (*mi khwahimke tamāme-i-mazmun-i-*

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<sup>381</sup>*Majalis*, p. 224

<sup>382</sup>*Majalis*, p. 233

<sup>383</sup> Quoted in Corinne Lefevre, “The Majalis-i Jahangiri (1608-1611): Dialogue and Asiatic Otherness at the Mughal Court”, p. 264

<sup>384</sup>*Majalis*, p. 198



*nāme ke be Shāh mī navīsīm, dar ān bayt yāfte shaved yānī ke īn majmal-i-ān mehfil mafassal bude bashad).*<sup>385</sup>

In the next few sessions, many poets including Saida Gilani and Naziri Nishapuri composed and presented their *ghazals*, but Jahangir did not find them appropriate to be sent as a reply to Shah Abbas. Naziri presented the following verse:

*Ishq-i tu wāqiye nīst ke ākhirgardad  
Har che āghāz na-dārad, gham-i pāyānash nīst*<sup>386</sup>

Here, the poet says that his love for the beloved is no happening or event with an end. He further compares it to timeless things that have neither a beginning nor an end. Jahangir rejected the verse on the grounds that the theme of love (*ishq*) was not suitable for a political correspondence. He commented that, “the word [*ishq*] was nowhere close to the concerns of state (*az kamālāt-i-sultanat basyār dūrast*)” and “one emperor does not write about such matters to another emperor (*bādshāhī be bādshāhī namī navīsad*)”.<sup>387</sup>

Another *sh'er* presented by Naziri was:

*Shādam az dil ke maye-i-shauq-i-tu madhoshash kard  
Khabar az rashk-i-wisāl o gham-i-hijranash nīst*<sup>388</sup>

The verse talks about the drunken state of the lover's content heart, that he has no sense of either the jealousy of union or the sorrow of separation from a friend/ beloved. Again, Jahangir rejected this verse saying that, “an elder brother does not write like this or about such things to his younger brother (*barādar-i-buzurg be barādar-i-khurd chanīn namī navīsad*)”.<sup>389</sup> After having rejected many *ghazals* presented in the sessions, it was Shaikh Jamili's verses which were finally chosen as a reply to the letter of Shah Abbas. Shaikh Jamili presented his *ghazal* in the royal poetic assembly, which he had written on the same parameters (*zameen*) as the one in Shah

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<sup>385</sup> *Majalis*, p. 198

<sup>386</sup> *Majalis*, p. 205

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

Abbas' letter. Abdul Sattar informs that, "Shaikh Jamili had brought the verses written with 'freshness'/ originality (*sheikh Jamīlī ghazalī be tāzgī gufta āvurdaast*)"<sup>390</sup>

*Gharqeh lajeh ishqīm ke payānash nīst*  
*Tālib-i-dardī dardīm ke darmānash nīst*  
*Man be dil ba tu shab o roz wisāli dāram*  
*Wāsil ānast ke dard o gham (i) hijrānash nīst*<sup>391</sup>

Although we have discussed the above verse in chapter two, let us remind ourselves of it again. The poet (i.e. Jamili) writes that the lover is immersed in the sea of love which has no end. He is the seeker of such pain, which has no cure. The poet further says that he meets the beloved/ friend every single day and night, in his heart, and this union is such that there is no pain and sorrow of separation. We can speculate that Jahangir was impressed by the composition because, unlike other poets who composed *ghazals* with the same refrain but did not write on the same lines as the verses attached in Shah Abbas' letter, Jamili composed on the same lines as the verse in Shah Abbas' letter by arguing that there is no separation between the poet/lover (in this case, Jahangir) and his friend (Shah Abbas) and the place of this union is the heart of Jahangir. We have also noted in chapter two that Jahangir was also impressed by the word play and the connection made in the verses between the meaning of the name of the poet's father (Jalal Wāsil) and the feeling of union or togetherness, which fitted well with the *mazmun* of the letter.

From the above discussion, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that *ghazal* was important not only to put across the message clearly and punctuate the emotions and thoughts expressed in the letter but was also used as an instrument of enforcing cultural supremacy of Mughals over the larger Persianate world. There were other times as well when Jahangir reinforced the supremacy of Mughals over other empires. In *Jahangirnama*, with a streak of pride he claimed that:

Followers of various religions had a place in the broad scope of his (i.e. Akbar's) peerless empire—unlike other countries of the world, like Iran, where there is room for only Shiites, and Rum, Turan, and Hindustan, where there is room for only Sunnis. Just as all groups and the practitioners

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<sup>390</sup>*Majalis-iJahangiri*, p. 232

<sup>391</sup>*Majalis-iJahangiri*, p. 232

of all religions have a place within the spacious circle of God's mercy, in accordance with the dictum that a shadow must follow its source, in my father's realm, which ended at the salty sea, there was room for practitioners of various sects and beliefs, both true and imperfect, and strife and altercation were not allowed. Sunni and Shiite worshiped in one mosque, and Frank and Jew in one congregation. Utter peaceableness was his established way.<sup>392</sup>

Here, Jahangir celebrates the cosmopolitan nature of Hindustan, criticizing Iran and Turan in the same breath, for being partial to a particular sect or religion, discriminating against others. Similarly, during the poetic discussions, he claimed to be superior to Shah Abbas by portraying himself as the “big brother” (*barādar-i buzurg*) and the latter as “younger brother” (*barādar-i khurd*). The claims of superiority were also reinforced by Jahangir through a symbolic painting of him and Shah Abbas, “who, according to a verse written on the painting, had come to Jahangir in a dream.”<sup>393</sup> Mughals used some symbols to represent their “universal powers” through paintings. Each king was standing on a symbolic animal with Jahangir standing on a lion and “meek” Shah Abbas standing on a goat.<sup>394</sup> Interestingly, the lion covers not just Mughal territories but also territories of the ancestors of the Mughals, Timur’s empire, resting its paws on Iran. Thus, the placement of animals can also be seen as an important way of claiming the status of “World-Conqueror” by Jahangir.<sup>395</sup> Just like the painting depicts the idea of friendship between the two kings but highlighting the difference in their stature, Jahangir reiterated that hierarchy in their relations by addressing himself as the “big brother” and his concern for sending a *ghazal* which was at par, if not better than the *ghazal* sent by Shah Abbas.

Similar claims of India’s cultural superiority over Iran were made in few verses of Chandrabhan Brahman’s *ghazals*. In one verse he wrote that:

*Sharaf bar khitta-i Irān-zamīn hindustāndārād*

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<sup>392</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 40

<sup>393</sup> Skelton, ‘Imperial Symbolism in Mughal Painting’, p. 177

<sup>394</sup> Skelton, p. 177

<sup>395</sup> Skelton, ‘Imperial Symbolism’

*Ki Shāh-i asrchīn man tūtī-yīshakkar-fīshāndārad*<sup>396</sup>

There's no doubt that India enjoys nobility over that land of Iran  
When the King of the Age (Shah Jahan) has a sweet-singing parrot like  
me<sup>397</sup>

In the above verse, the poet creatively claimed that, “his own melodious voice was proof positive of India’s cultural superiority over Iran.”<sup>398</sup> Likewise, in another verse, Brahmin wrote:

*Ba īrān mī barad afsāna-yī hindustān bulbul*  
*Barahman rā shakkar afshānī arbāshad hamīn bāshad*<sup>399</sup>

Carry this message from Hindustan to Iran, O Nightingale:  
That if they require a sugar-scattering Brahman, I am the one.<sup>400</sup>

For Rajiv Kinra, the above verse of Chandrabhan Brahman played on Rumi’s classical tale of the parrot who sent a message to India with a trader and Hafiz’s famous verse boasting that “all the “Indian parrots” would become “sugar-crunchers” as they echoed the “Persian candy” of his verse all the way over to Bengal.”<sup>401</sup> Kinra, argues that on aesthetic grounds, these verses are “imbued with inter-textual referents from the classical Persian canon”<sup>402</sup> which established the poets of this period “as competing players...largely playing by the same cosmopolitan rules, with the same canonical literary equipment, on the same cultural playing field.”<sup>403</sup> Kinra makes an important point that “boasting” (*fakhr*) or “self exaltation” (*ta’alli*) in the works of poets of Mughal India, “was a claim to literary and cultural superiority, to the ability to *outdo* their political rivals, wherever they might be in the wider Persophone world.”<sup>404</sup>

### **Indic customs and themes in Indo-Persian *ghazals***

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<sup>396</sup>Kinra, p. 226

<sup>397</sup>Kinra, p. 226

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup>Kinra, p. 224

We have noted throughout this study that India had become an important centre for the development of Persian language and literature in medieval and early modern period. As it happens with the trajectory of every linguistic development, languages or genres of literature incorporate certain concepts, values and vocabulary from the culture where it develops overtime. Various Indic themes, words, customs and values came to be a part of Persian *ghazals* composed in the period of study. Indic themes and customs had begun to find place in Persian poetry from atleast 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The most well known poet to have written extensively about the beauty and customs of India was Amir Khusro, who is well placed among the classical poets of Persian literature. The themes and metaphors used by him to appreciate various aspects about India were extremely popular in the court of Jahangir, as we have found from the record of his discussions with courtiers and other poets.

Jahangir believed in cultural superiority of India and its aesthetic sensibility, which is clearly visible from his inclination towards the *ghazals* of Amir Khusro, among other classical Persian poets. *Majalis* throws light on various sessions where *ghazals* of Hafiz, Sa'di, quatrains of Jami, Rumi etc., were recited, yet the discussions which followed the recitation or performance of Khusro's *ghazals* witnessed a personal interest on the part of the emperor, where he not only appreciated but also defended the *ghazals* of Khusro. As we will note, the subject of various royal literary gatherings under Jahangir, were devoted to the discussion about the *ghazals* of Khusro. According to Waris Kirmani, the defining characteristic of Khusro's *ghazals* was the "Indianness".<sup>405</sup> One *ghazal* by Khusro with the *radif* "*safed o syah o surkh*" remained the centre of discussion in four or five literary sessions. In the 70<sup>th</sup> session, one finds a verse composed with the *radif* "*safed o syah o surkh*"

*Khush jāmahzeeb gasht tan-i khoob o nāzuk*  
*Chun mayna-i lateef safed o syah o surkh*<sup>406</sup>

The poet made use of the colours of the *myna* bird and its beauty as a metaphor for the beauty and elegance of the style of the beloved. Recitation of this verse was then followed by description of the *myna* bird which is found in India and has these three colours on it, white, brown and black. Jahangir was an ardent observer of nature, including its flora and fauna. In his

<sup>405</sup>Waris Kirmani, 'Khusrau and the tradition of Persian *Ghazal*', pp. 163-174

<sup>406</sup>*Majalis*, p. 169

autobiography, he dedicated a section on describing the land, climate, flora and fauna of parts of Agra. He writes, “Melons, mangoes and other fruits are good in Agra and its vicinity. My particular favourite is mango.”<sup>407</sup> Along with fruits, he gives a vivid description of the flowers found in the region. Unlike his great grandfather, Babur, who disliked India and its climate, the vegetation and the wildlife, and the lack of gardens, Jahangir grew a liking for all things Indian. This substantiates the point that the likes and dislikes of Jahangir were attuned to the culture in which he was born and brought up. The above verse celebrates the elegance, beauty and colours of the *myna* bird. Jahangir appreciated the beauty of the colours of the bird as well as the verse.

In the 80<sup>th</sup> session of the *Majalis*, a discussion was again held on Khusro’s *ghazal* with the refrain *safed o syah o surkh*. Naziri complained that, “composing/ reciting that *ghazal* has been too difficult” (*guftan-i ānghazal-i mīrbasyārdushwārast*).<sup>408</sup> Jahangir made a bitter comment on the intellect of Naziri and thus his inability to comprehend the *ghazal* of such stature. He further advised Naziri that he should not make his folly known to people by raising such questions on the creation of a poet of Khusro’s stature.<sup>409</sup>

Following verse by Khusro was also discussed in one literary discussion:

*Az pān wa az supārī wa az kat wa chuna rang shud*  
*Dandān-i-ān nigārsafed o syah o surkh*<sup>410</sup>

Khusro writes that the teeth of the beloved are stained (black, white and red) because of his/her habit of chewing *pān*. Naziri did not find the subject matter of the second line good or strong enough. To which Jahangir replied by explaining that the beauty of *safed o syah o surkh* is proverbial or known in India (*Hindyān-i-mā khubī o zīnat safed o syah o surkh rā mī dānand*).<sup>411</sup> The practice of eating *pān* was particularly Indian. Here, he acknowledged the difference in aesthetic sensibility of people from different regions thus showing a sense of cultural pride.

The “Indianness” of the *ghazals* of Amir Khusro can be gleaned from this discussion and Jahangir accepted and appreciated such subject matters which appealed to the customs and

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<sup>407</sup> *Jahangirnama*, p. 24

<sup>408</sup> *Majalis*, p. 198

<sup>409</sup> *Majalis*, p. 199

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*

metaphors related to India. Indian aesthetics and customs took shape of new and innumerable metaphors in Indo-Persian *ghazals*, which became one of the major trends in *ghazals* under Mughals.

A few verses by Chandrabhan Brahman provide space to some practices and customs of Brahmans. In the following verse:

*Mārābarishta-i zunnārulfatī-yīkhāssast*  
*Ki yādgār-i man azbarhamanhamīdāram*<sup>412</sup>

I have an especially intimate bond with my sacred thread  
 which keeps on reminding me that I come from (a line of) Brahmans.<sup>413</sup>

Chandrabhan Brahman refers to the sacred thread worn by the upper caste Hindus, as mark of their caste and religion. This verse, Kinra argues, can be read in different ways as it has more layers and complexity from what is apparent in the first read. This verse makes a good case for the feature of complex wordplay, which we have pointed out in the above section as well as in chapter two. Kinra provides three different interpretations for this verse. The first being: “I have a special respect for my traditions, and thus the sacred thread is especially important to me.”<sup>414</sup> The second reading could be: “I have so transcended superficial religious practices that the only thing that reminds me of my Brahmanical heritage is this slender thread.”<sup>415</sup> The third kind of reading, according to Kinra, can be seen in the more general sense of existential angst and alienation: “I have become so confused by all my religious experimentation, with Sufism and such that I need this thread to remind me who I really am.”<sup>416</sup> The central point of these interpretations is the sacred thread, which can be read as a mark of the poet’s religious identity or as a sign of superficial religious practices of his religion, depending on the interpretation of the reader and the context in which the verse is being read.

Another verse which points to the ritual practices of Brahmans can also be read in multiple ways:

*Dāman-i isyānbaāb-i dīdashustambarhaman*

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<sup>412</sup>Kinra, p. 219

<sup>413</sup>Kinra, p. 219

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

*Lek naqsh-i sijda-yi but bar jabāndāramhanūz*<sup>417</sup>

I wash the robe of transgressions with my tears, O Brahman;  
But the mark on my forehead from prostration to the idol remains.<sup>418</sup>

Here, the “mark on forehead” (*tilak/ tika*) and the practice of prostration before the “idol” (*but*) are clear indications of his religious identity as a Hindu. These customs and marks of religious identity might have found space in Persian poetry from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (in the *ghazals* of Hafiz, Khusro, Sa’di and others) however in this period; these metaphors were subject to multiple interpretations and readings. Kinra argues that this verse can either mean that the poet has tried to practice monotheism but has now reached such a mystical stage where, like the Sufis, his tears have “washed away his earlier self”<sup>419</sup> but he cannot get rid of his “old idol-worshipping self off his forehead”.<sup>420</sup> Or it could be read as: “I may well dabble in Sufism, but don’t think that means I’ll abandon my traditions.”<sup>421</sup>

To sum up, the chapter sought to explore the versatility of the content of Indo-Persian *ghazals*. The sheer emotional quotient of the genre was expressed through the description of the state of the lover, the experiences of love, friendship etc. The themes, metaphors and images used in the verses in this period were heavily influenced by the conventional themes and metaphors of Persian literature; and at the same time were experimental and innovative in their own right, to invent new meanings, new conceits and multiple interpretations through intelligent wordplay. These features of *ghazals* were highly prized in the period of study, especially in the court of Jahangir. He was fond of themes that borrowed heavily from nature, Sufism and stressed on the originality and newness in ideas and composition. This trend had begun from an earlier period. However, these features gained prominence under Jahangir. His aesthetic sensibility was influenced by his cultural surroundings. His literary taste was also informed by a sense of cultural pride in Indian aesthetics, metaphors and themes. Finally, we also noted that often the emperor and poets of Mughal India, through their *ghazals*, claimed to be culturally superior to Safavid Iran.

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<sup>417</sup>Kinra, p. 220

<sup>418</sup>Kinra, p. 220

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.



## CONCLUSION

In the study of history of Indo-Persian *ghazals* in Mughal India, we highlighted the importance of two major factors which were responsible for the popularity of the genre of *ghazals*. The first major factor discussed in the course of the study is the form/structure of the genre and the nature of its content. Various scholars like Sunil Sharma, Annemarie Schimmel, Meisami and others have discussed at length about the content of *ghazals* and the universal themes and rich stock of imageries used by ghazal poets. Building on these studies as foundation, we discussed in the course of chapter one that the above-mentioned features made *ghazals* extremely connectible and thus, popular genre of poetry. In the chapter, we reiterated the importance of the form of *ghazals*. In *ghazals*, a couplet/ verse is a part of the whole composition and also functions as an independent and complete unit. The independence of each verse allowed the poet to dwell on different topics, ranging from emotional to philosophical to political in a single composition. This feature makes *ghazals* a unique genre as the whole composition is bound by rhyme and meter. A single verse of *ghazals* can be read as a complete poem in itself and thus, a verse or many verses of *ghazals* are suitable to be recited or quoted in different settings. It is in this context that we studied different settings where *ghazals* were composed, recited, performed and discussed in Mughal India and concluded that the independent units of *ghazals* made the genre flexible as well as universal to suit different contexts.

We also noted that the function of *ghazals* changed in different settings. *Ghazals* substantiated the narrative and made it more impactful for the readers. It also showcased the level of cultural refinement and knowledge of the writer. *Ghazals* were an effective way of putting across the ideas and emotions so they were an integral part of correspondences as well. They encapsulated the gist of the messages in the letters/ prose in fewer words with more effectiveness. *Ghazals* were also exchanged through letters as gestures of friendliness or good relations and the resulting longing to meet the friend; something which *ghazals* could express better than any other genre. The correspondence between Jahangir and Shah Abbas was carried out to maintain the friendly terms; a purpose fulfilled well enough by the *ghazals* exchanged between the two parties, as the theme of the *ghazals* was one's longing to be able to unite with his friend. *Ghazals* added an emotional quotient to the letters in different capacities, depending on the persons involved in the correspondence and the relation between them. When inscribed on structures and objects,

*ghazals* greatly increased their value. Verses inscribed in poets' tomb complex showcase poet's creativity and immortalized their talent, philosophy and poetry.

The universality of emotions, a range of thoughts, an exhaustive stock of metaphors along with new conceits, the form of *ghazals*, and the inherent ambiguity in it contributed to the increasing popularity of *ghazals* and its spread to different sections of the society from the educated clique employed in the Mughal administration to Sufi saints as well as to people from different socio-cultural backgrounds and age groups.

The period of sixteenth-seventeenth centuries forms an important milestone in the history of the genre of Persian *ghazals* for two reasons:

- Firstly, Mughal India had emerged as an important centre of Persian language and literature in this period, and
- Secondly, this period witnessed the emergence of a new style of writing called *tāza guī*.

The consciousness and desire of creating something new and original was dominant among the literary connoisseurs and poets of this period. In chapter two of this study, we discussed that the Mughal educated classes, literary patrons as well as poets were engaging with the concept of originality and newness in the sphere of poetry. It was discussed at length that the patronage culture in Mughal India facilitated literary innovation and experimentation by encouraging poets to engage their mental and creative faculties and create something new and original. The patrons of poets provided material wealth and creative freedom to enrich the literary production of this period. Knowledge of poetic tradition and technicalities was established as an important attribute of cultural refinement in Mughal India. The elite and the educated classes highly appreciated poetic skill and talent. This resulted in emergence of various centres of patronage in Mughal India. Some patrons closely monitored the training and growth of poets in their literary circle and established close bond with them. Patrons, literary connoisseurs and audiences of poetry appreciated verses which seized their attention and compelled them to use their imagination and mental faculties. Thus, the second important factor which facilitated the popularity of *ghazals* and the emergence of the spirit of conscious innovativeness in the genre in this period were the patrons, literary connoisseurs and poets of Mughal India.

The agency of poets in the literary milieu of the period was very crucial as they defined the contours of new style of writing in their poetry. In chapter two, we studied some *ghazals* of well-known poets in Mughal India who defined what constituted newness and originality of the new style of *tāza guī* and engaged actively in the process of creating something new and original. They gave precedence to God and unlimited thoughts which should not be borrowed or stolen from other poets. They often used the literary device of silence in verses which has been associated with modern sensibilities.

There were dual ideas in their *ghazals*: building something new but not as a break from the past, rather upon the age-old tradition of Persian poetry. According to the poets of this period, in order to create *tāzaghazals*/poetry, the poets had to depend on divine emanation and had to engage their creative mind to use old words with new meanings. This difficult task could be accomplished if one mastered the works of earlier poets. The poets who wrote in this style thus admired and cultivated the literary past.

In order to master the Persian literary tradition, the poets had to go through rigorous training by writing imitation poems, participating in poetic contestations, and train under various patrons and poets. We also noted that the discussions about *tāza guī* were multi layered and ensued debates among contemporary poets and connoisseurs of poetry. The major critique of *tāza guī* remained that in an attempt to create new conceits and meanings, poets often composed abstruse verses. This was a major drawback of *tāza guī* which later initiated debates about the aesthetics of the style that have remained unresolved even to this day. The lack of sufficient poetic knowledge and skills has restrained the scholar to take a stand on this debate. However, the aim of chapter two was to provide a broad survey of the various strands of *tāza guī* debate. At the same time the chapter threw light on the agency of poets and what they understood of *tāza guī*, expressed through their poetry. Thus, it is argued that poets of Mughal India were actively engaged in an important phase of the history of Persian *ghazals*.

The study of poetry as primary source can be helpful for historical writing. However, the limitation of using *ghazals* for writing empirical history is that it is immersed in emotions and the complexity of love and thought and so it does not give direct straight historical facts. The study of poetry gives valuable insights about the literary taste and aesthetic sensibility of the people of

a particular period. Thus, the study of the genre of *ghazals* provides some ideas about the aesthetic sensibility in Mughal India.

Sweeping generalizations about the historical development of a poetic genre can be misleading so the study focused on Jahangir's reign because he was fond of poetry. *Ghazals* composed in Jahangir's court were also reflection of his personality, outlook and aesthetic sensibility. The study of Indo-Persian *ghazals* composed in his court revealed some characteristics of *ghazals* composed during this period:

- a) *Ghazals* composed in *tāza guī* style were preferred for originality and newness. The *ghazals* in this period stand out for new conceits, complex ideas and thoughts along with witty word play to produce polysemic verses.
- b) Special importance was given to verses imbued with philosophical ideas, complex thoughts that grabbed the audience's attention. They were required to engage mental faculties to interpret different meanings of the *ghazals* composed in this period.
- c) The aspect of description of beauty in *ghazals* was much appreciated by Jahangir. Compositions for the description of the beauty of nature, its seasons, flora and fauna were very popular in his court. Jahangir as a naturalist is clearly reflected in his liking for different seasons, flora and fauna in the *ghazals*.
- d) Love and Wine: The effects which these two had on the quality of *ghazals* were also personal favourites of Jahangir. There was a Sufi undertone to the love and drunkenness which is found in these compositions. *Ghazals* were influenced by Sufi thoughts and carried forward the spirit of questioning and disagreeing with the orthodoxy through verses. Poets often stressed on the power of love over religion and called for building society and culture based on love and rationality imbued with spirit of questioning.
- e) Use of motifs and customs from Mughal India was there before Jahangir but he personally appreciated and preferred verses which met the standards of Indian sense of aesthetics and creativity.
- f) During his reign *ghazals* also functioned as a tool of diplomatic dialogue and enforcing cultural supremacy of Mughals over the larger Persianate world.

In the final chapter, there was an attempt to closely read a few *ghazals* composed in this period and highlight how they combined the features of an age old poetic tradition with the streak of newness and originality particularly popular in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries Mughal India.

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