

Preface

The most widely read book in the Indian Subcontinent next to the Gita and Qur'an, representing one-fifth of the world population, is Divan-e-Ghalib, the collection of *Urdū* love sonnets by the 19th century poet, *Ġhālib*. The sonnets of *Ġhālib* resonate in the voices of maestros from street-side cafes to elegant courtly palaces throughout Asia, making *Ġhālib* a poet of the people. *Ġhālib* is not merely an Asian phenomenon; scores of scholars from Moscow University to the University of Chicago have based their doctoral theses on the style and thoughts of *Ġhālib*; they have critiqued his style and compared him to the best poets of the world: Rumi, Sa'adi, Hafiz, Shakespeare, Shelley, Pope. Those who have grown up in the Indian Subcontinent or who have ever lived there cannot avoid exposure to *Ġhālib*'s verses in their daily lives. Required reading in schools and colleges, *Ġhālib* is labored upon by millions trying to decipher the mystery and magic of his two-line couplets that range from spontaneous expression to extremely complex and convoluted poetic thoughts that but a few can visualize, let alone understand. Regardless of the simplicity or difficulty encountered in his verses, nothing is ever straightforward; there are nuances, there are similes, there are traps hidden in every couplet that *Ġhālib* wrote. This is part of what makes him so challenging to read and so thrilling to understand.

Love Sonnets of Ġhālib is the first complete English translation, explication, lexicon, and transliteration of *Ġhālib*'s *Urdū* love sonnets. The difficulties in translating across cultures and languages were overcome by including a detailed explication, keeping the translation on a literal level because of the pragmatic difficulties of a rhyming translation, though several have been attempted. A detailed glossary of terms and lexicon is included in the book to clarify oft-repeated themes that might be new to some readers. Notably, the glossary

contains many compound words created by *Ġhālib* that require special clarification. This book can serve as a reference for readers of *Ġhālib*'s *Urdū ghazals* in any language. Those able to read the *Urdū* script are abetted in understanding word meanings and their subtle nuances as used by *Ġhālib*. The transliteration aids with pronunciation and the use of *izāfat* or connections between letters. The transliteration is also of benefit to those who are not fluent in *Urdū* script, and this falls in line with transliteration in other scripts such as Hindi, Bangla, etc. A book of this scope could not have been written without the help, motivation, and assistance of many people. Foremost here was the encouragement given to me by *Dr. Farmān Fatehpūrī*, the most widely recognized *Urdū* scholar of our time. When I showed him my limited work years ago, he patiently read every word and while encouraging me to improve on it, he challenged me by asking why no one had yet published a complete translation and explication as I was contemplating? The answer was that it would present an undertaking of mammoth proportions. I accepted this challenge, and whenever I came up against an obstacle, I returned to *Dr. Farmān Fatehpūrī*, who assured me I could do this if I studied the dictionaries well and not relied upon the interpretations of others, who may have assumed many meanings. As it turned out, as I looked up just about every difficult word in the dictionaries published in *Ġhālib*'s time, I was able to identify many differences in the *Urdū* authoritative texts that did not conform to present-day dictionaries. I read through most available *Urdū* explanations of *Ġhālib*'s *Urdū* poetry authored by renowned scholars, I poured over most of the works published on *Ġhālib* in English, including sporadic translations, rhyming and literal, as well as other books written by the Western and Eastern authors on the subject of South Asian poetry. I consulted with the faculty teaching *Urdū* and Persian in American universities and had the rare opportunity of having my long-time friend and associate, *Vidā Salehī*, a published Persian poetess herself, review and critique my choice of words in the translation and explication sections. She also secured for me Old

Persian literature by traveling to Iran to help understand some of the most complex compound constructions in *Ġhālib*'s work. She also took on the most difficult and patient task of teaching me Persian and demonstrated to me the difference between “*raff*” and “*būd*,” as *Ġhālib* would have liked to see it done. I am also thankful, in a very special way, to my long-time confidant and friend *Sīmā Khān*, who, in her own ways, helped me understand the meaning of many verses.

Many obligations are due to *Dr. Farmān Fatehpūrī*, my life-time mentor, for writing the Introduction and for his affectionate style that inspired me with the energy I needed badly to complete this work.

This was a labour of love for me. It took several years to complete, having undergone scores of revisions. The fine editing and critique by *Subūhī Sultān* was pivotal in identifying the errors in transliteration, grammatical issues in the explication and translation. The detailed editing by Karl Monger was exemplary. My incessant critic *GulAfshān* did more than just pursue me in completing this work--she made sure that I did it. My friend Steven E. Shear's appreciation of this work was important to me. Many others have assisted me with their labour and suggestions including *Arshad KḤattak*, who worked on the digital files, *Sīmā Jamshed*, who typed the most difficult section on transliteration. My brother *Riāz*, who diligently poured over the glossary and lexicon section. Above all, I am thankful to my family, who endured through the trials and tribulations of writing this book that resulted in the inevitable transformation of *Sarfarāz K. Niazī* from an ordinary mortal into a *Ġhālib* addict. Alain De Botton's, “How Proust Can Change Your Life” can be easily replicated for “How *Ġhālib* Can Change Your Life.” How the thoughts of *Ġhālib* affect the lives of its readers is remarkable as I experienced it the first hand. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Frances Pritchett at Columbia University for offering many suggestions to me along with her continuous admonishments that a perfect translation of *Ġhālib*'s verses into English cannot exist. I agreed with her and it was this clear appreciation that made me combine a literal translation with explication to achieve my

design.

I am thankful to *Sultān Ahmed*, nephew of Sadequain and heir to the works of Sadequain, for giving me permission to reproduce the works of Sadequain in this book that are surely rare and totally delightful. I am thankful to the editors at Rupa & Co., for their incessant efforts in making this work as error-free as possible and for the appreciation of Rupa and Co., for bringing this work to the readers.

Whereas many people and institutions have helped me correct the mistakes in the book, it is inevitable that a work of this nature cannot be error-free; any remaining errors are altogether mine, however. I hope that the readers of this book will be kind enough to point these errors to me and offer their suggestions on improving this work for future editions. I can be reached at niazi@niazi.com, or through Rupa & Co. or Ghalib Academy of America. The translation put forth in this book qualifies for a literal translation wherein I have tried to capture the subtleties of the construction of thought. The choice of words may often seem abrupt but it remains an accurate reflection, as best I could come up with, of how the verse had been written—subtle, and often abrupt. I have translated the couplets into two lines, which may or may not be joined. In the case of continuous thought with no need for a pause, the two lines form a single sentence but with the capitalization of the first letter of the second line. In some instances, a pause was necessary and it was provided by a comma, hyphen, or a semicolon. In Persian and *Urdū*, there is no capitalization of words; as a result, all transliteration is in lower case except for proper names, merely for ease in reading rather than for correctness of transliteration. The Glossary and Lexicon section contains a dictionary and a description of various topics. In arranging it, I have followed the serial order of the *Urdū* alphabet. The delicate and deliberate choice of addressing the beloved as female was made despite many objections that can be rightfully raised since in *Urdū* poetry, the beloved is traditionally addressed as either male or as a neutral gender, the latter more in line with the lack of gender differentia-

tion found in Persian. The fact that in some instances, the beloved *is* a male is elaborated in the explication section.

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