

# Ghalib

Dr. Frances Pritchett is among the greatest Ghalib scholars extant. She is from Columbia University, N.Y.

Recently I had an exchange of correspondence with her on Ghalib. Her reply to my letter indicated at the top was lost. Read bottom up. I hope you will enjoy reading it.

Dear Fran Pritchett,

I feel enormously uplifted by your response to my letter, and that too so fast. When you ask for a moon and are instead given a star, your faith in ethereality of life is reinforced.

Thank you for providing the two links that are supposed to indicate Ghalib's happy personality. The first one I was already familiar with, the second one I have no access to at this point. But I am with you on the idea that Ghalib was a life-loving personality, who could indulge in humor, wine, and flirt with women and participate in other joy-inducing activities. But that was only one side of his personality, there was another side to him also, without which he would

not have been the superlative poet that we know him to be.

All poets who write on human condition, are inherently sad. Thoughtful people can not but see the suffering as one of the realities of human existence. But it does not necessarily mean that they live a life of melancholy. Artists and other thinkers compartmentalize their lives: one part lives in the world, the other in their soul. Ghalib did exactly that. On one side he was intensely oriented to achieving worldly success, but on the other he was resigned to accept the builtin tragedy of human life. He wrote intense verses on the suffering of life. To think that they were merely his cerebral exercises would be a vast misjudgement of the architecture of his soul. My strength in this perspective on artists does not only come from my understanding of human life in general, but also on the basis that I am a poet also. So, Ghalib, in my view, was not only a cerebral poet but also a wounded-soul one. It is in the latter aspect of him that has gained him a high status in the realm of poetry.

Why this upliftment of Ghalib in modern times? It is because with the decline of the old culture of conservatism in philosophy and culture of life, people saw in Ghalib's poetry the unglossed and un-rationalized depiction of human suffering.

In his superbly sensitive love poetry they saw was one of the anodynes available to their suffering. His love for wine and less than idolatry relationship with God, further drew them towards him. His dialog-like unpretentious letters

even more enhanced their respect for his realism in all walks of life. It is just about seventy-five verses of Ghalib that have made lay people adore him. They do not care for his cerebral verses. In this selected genre of realism-verses, people find a vision of first the latent acknowledgement of the inherent suffering of life, then a liberation from it in form of the ridiculousness of life, its ironies. In them lay-people find that the real hero of human life is a human being, and not God.

I am sending you a short essay What Is Poetry? in the attachment below, which may or may not be relevant to what I have written above.

I had not intended to interview you in my request to meet you. I just wanted to meet

you, to discuss not only Ghalib, but also your experiences in India, of its civilization

and ethos. Also, in case you had been to Kashmir, I wanted to know your experiences

there. I was born a Kashmiri Pandit and lived my early years in the juxtaposition of

Hindu and Islamic cultures. I write a lot on Kashmir Problem.

But I believe now that my request to meet was a nouveau-fan-crush on you. How would

you spend time with a person unknown to you, who is neither in your field, nor a

celebrity,

nor a journalist seeking an interview. To punish my juvenile audacity, I have decided to

go without food for one day.

I live in Suffern, N.Y., thirty-five miles north of midtown Manhattan.

With a handshake in thought, I remain your fan,

Maharaj Kaul

What Is Poetry? | Kaul's Corner

**What Is Poetry? | Kaul's Corner**

On Saturday, April 27, 2019, 3:57:03 PM EDT, Frances Pritchett  
<fp7@columbia.edu> wrote:

Dear Maharaj Kaul,

Your approach to Ghalib- that he wrote melancholy verses because he was melancholy at heart- is contradicted by many anecdotes about his sense of humor told by his biographer Hali (here are some

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/meaac/pritchett/00ghalib/apparatus/ghalibiana.html>

of my favorites) and also by his own cheerful and enjoyable letters (best translated in

<https://www.amazon.com/Ghalib-1797-1869-Letters-Oxford-Paperbacks/dp/019563506X>

by Russell and Islam). If you look at both those sources and don't change your mind, we can proceed to discuss literary theory (for example, since all ghazal poets write melancholy verses, did they ALL have melancholy lives?).

As for interviewing me, where do you live?

Yours with good wishes,

Fran Pritchett

PS-

[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/meaac/pritchett/00ghalib/174/174\\_10.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/meaac/pritchett/00ghalib/174/174_10.html)

On Sat, Apr 27, 2019 at 1:56 PM maharaj.kaul@yahoo.com <maharaj.kaul@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dear Prof. Frances Pritchett,

I recently came across your site on Ghalib, oh! what a site it is.

Day in and day out I am absorbed into it. What an encyclopedic site it is, what a labor of love it must have entailed of you?

One element of Ghalib in it I did not find so far, Ghalib's personal emotional life as gleaned through his biography and poetry. It, perhaps, is in the site, I only may not have found it as yet.

While analyzing Ghalib's poetry - you are adept at that - you do not discuss the emotional

factors that may have influenced it. Though Ghalib was an intellectual, but more than that overall his poetry has been influenced by his personal suffering, which was perhaps much more than his joys. To me Ghalib was a very sad man, he viewed life as an unmitigated suffering. And that aspect of him we cannot leave out when discussing his poetry.

I have a personal request to you, which I have never made to a celebrity until now.

I would like to meet you for half an hour or so, to discuss Ghalib. Though I know that this

is doomed to a failure, but I thought there is nothing to lose in trying it out. I take comfort in Ghalib's

words:

Hum ko hai malum janat ki hakikat,

Per dil ko khush rakhne ke liye Ghalib ye khyal acha hai.

(I may not have quoted this *shair* accurately, but the essence is there)

With admiration,

Maharaj Kaul

[www.kaulscorner.com](http://www.kaulscorner.com)

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