

THE MIRROR AND THE MANIFESTATION: ANALYZING MIRZA GHALIB'S CONCEPT OF REALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF *TAJALLI*

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Abstract

Mirza Ghalib (1779-1869) is one of the most influential and leading poets in Urdu literature. His poetry is a compendium of philosophy, faith, secularism, and gnosis, which is quite paradoxical. In his metaphysics, his epistemology creates a distinct dichotomy between the seen and the unseen. It explores and hints at the creation and the Creator sailing through the waves of real and unreal. The present study investigates his poetry in light of Ibn-e-Arabi's (11-65-1240) lens of Tajalli or the metaphor of the mirror. It explores how Ghalib creates a difference between the worlds. What is his idea of reality, and how does he achieve affirmation of the attributes of God as the prime source of His creation? How does the universe, as a self-disclosure of God, find expression in his poetry? Moreover, the study debates that Ghalib's concept of reality holds the attributes of God at the heart of His creation, which serves as a mirror which reflects His attributes. The study finds that for Ghalib, this world of matter is unreal because it was brought to existence; moreover, it will come to an end; therefore, all perceivable realities are unreal. The only Real is God. He wished to be known; therefore, He created the universe, which is in fact a mirror to reflect His tajallis. The beauty in the universe is the beauty of His beautiful names.

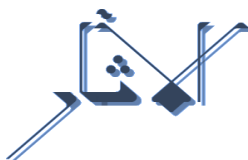
Keywords: Mirror, manifestation, mysticism, universe, heart, gnosis.

Introduction

Mysticism as a distinct strand is present in almost every religion in the world. The quest for God or a Supreme Being is in man; however, the path is different across faiths. The need of God is of paramount importance in human life, although without it, there would be an extreme gap which would be difficult to fill. Moreover, the people of God in this world of matter and elements yearn to achieve closeness to Him. This desire for proximity has multiple levels as per the need and desire of the adept. The mystic poets explore themes of God, death, the hereafter, self-realisation, etc., in their poetry. Moreover, the poets from the sub-continent have a stronger inclination towards such themes, which belong to mysticism (Sufism). The great poets of indigenous languages and of Urdu delve deep into mystical realms.

The study aims to explore and interpret the poetry of Ghalib with an insight taken from the mysticism of Ibn-e-Arabi. It critically evaluates and interprets the journey of the speaker of Ghalib's ghazals, focusing on the spiritual journey which begins with self-doubt and confusion, the real and the unreal, the question of existence, and its unclear answers. Further, it touches upon the purification of the self and its illumination. Moreover, it also aims to uncover the Unity of Existence and how it is viewed and treated by the speaker in the selected Ghazals. The study contends that Ghalib is a mystic poet; however, to understand his mystic and spiritual flights, the mystical concepts of Ibn-e-Arabi serve best because he gives a systematic outline of the gnostic realisations.

The present study views the poetry of Mirza Ghalib in terms of mysticism, specifically, focusing upon the metaphor of *Tajalli* (manifestation), which was given by the renowned Muslim mystic and philosopher Ibn-e-Arabi. The study argues that Ghalib's poetry is a journey of the seeker from the known to the unknown and from the world to the other world. The seeker covers several stages of achieving self-realisation through multiple rungs of the ladder. Ghalib's



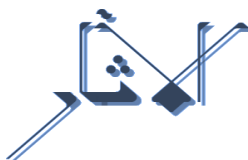
poetry has been a hallmark of *ma'arifa* (gnosis); however, the attempts to interpret it in light of Ibn-e-Arabi's philosophy are scanty and require attention. Ibn-e-Arabi is one of the leading Muslim philosophers and thinkers who has given detailed accounts of mystical experiences relying upon the Glorious Qur'an. He extracts his mystical ideas from the verses of the Qur'an and reveals the secrets of the self, life, death, manifestations, and attributes of Allah. He describes that this universe is the reflection of the countless names of Allah, His attributes give life to His creation, and it reflects them. Hence, the universe is the macrocosm created by Allah because it is the manifestation of His attributes; likewise, these attributes of Allah also reflect in the mirror of the heart – the heart of the believer.

The universe is a self-disclosure of Allah because it reflects His names(attributes), which are countless. Arabi quotes a Hadith-e-Qudsi in his Bezels of Wisdom that in the beginning there was God, and God was alone, then God thought about creation, and He created everything out of nothing. Hence, everything other than Him is the reflection of His attributes. Ghalib explores the relationship between God and Man, which begins from an existential crisis and leads to the Unity of Existence. The justification of God's existence as a sole real existence finds substantial expression in his *ghazals*. The world of his thoughts is complex because the persona of his poetry oscillates between hope and hopelessness, meaninglessness of this life, futility of worldly affairs and affirmation of Allah's control over everything. The persona of his poetry submits his will to his Lord and seeks nearness, which can guarantee his salvation. The stages of self-realisation are never the same in the case of different seekers of Allah; however, the study contends that the adept in the *ghazals* of Ghalib begins this journey from confusion, leading to existential crises, and the hardships in this world are a source of purification of the self, which leads to illumination of the self. The study explores this journey in light of the mystical concepts of Ibn-e-Arabi – manifestations and metaphor of the mirror.

The study investigates the poetry of Mirza Ghalib through the lens of Mirror and Manifestation metaphors, which are central to the mystical doctrines of Ibn-e-Arabi. There are a handful of studies which view his poetry in terms of mysticism and spirituality. The following studies on Ghalib's mysticism forward a variety of findings. Shah & Mahrukh (2025) assert that Mirza Ghalib stands out in the tradition of Urdu and Persian poetry, and his stature in thought and rendition is unique and unparalleled. Alongside the typical and conventional themes of love, separation, and pangs of life, he delves deep into the world of spirituality, which is profound and mesmerising. He frequently imbues his poetry with metaphysical, theological, and mystical dimensions which inspire awe and fascination in the readers.

His visionary approach to poetry, coupled with extraordinary problems of life, makes his themes universal as they pertain to humanity, regardless of colours and creeds. This is what makes his poetry relevant to all ages and times. Hameed and Anjum (2020) also argue that the poetry of Ghalib is not commonplace; rather, it is an exploration of the divine love, questions of existence, and human predicament. Going through these, he touches the subtle boundaries of divine love, hardships on the path of love, and spiritual flights of the adept. Moreover, the poetry of Ghalib has been subject to a range of religious interpretations among his scholars. However, one thing is established: he stands out from the rest in his vision.

Sajid and Butt (2023) also affirm the unique and distinguished approach of Ghalib to transcendent realities. His poetry excels the normal and transcends the boundaries of time and space. He views the present, past, and future as a continuum which is interconnected; hence, his poetry is a splendid weave of spiritual insights and realities of time. However, the use of symbolism is the mechanism which conveys such realities of life. Minucheher (2017) contends that Ghalib's poetry integrates the realities of life with spirituality; however, the vehicle, in



every case, is the use of symbolism. His symbols are tough to crack because they deal with transcendent realities. Therefore, his poetry is subtle and mystical. Shaheen and Zia (2020) argue that mysticism is not a commonplace and ordinary theme in poetry, but rather it reflects profound knowledge of the poets. It requires deep engagement of spirituality; mystical poets allow their mystical experiences to find expression in their poetry. Such mystical experiences are, in most cases, beyond the level of understanding of the people. Additionally, these experiences are utterly difficult to articulate because they belong to the deeper realms of human consciousness.

Through symbols, the mystic or Sufi poets dive into the spiritual worlds. However, it is the use of symbolic language which is crucial in the process of delineating spiritual experiences. To bridge the natural and the spiritual realm, the Sufi poets make use of analogies and symbols. Ali et al. (2023) argue that the Sufi poet's language moves around metaphors and symbols which related profound spiritual experiences. Through this medium, they can convey complex spiritual experiences. However, it is established that common colloquial language cannot capture the essence of spiritual experiences. Salahuddin (2020) asserts that it is a challenge of hermeneutics, which is complicated by means of the incorporation of symbols in poetry, and Ghalib loves it. His metaphor, symbols, and figurative language are perfect for spiritual and mystic experiences. His metaphors and symbols are mostly universal, although many of them are the product of his age and time, cultural context, and geographical locations.

After reviewing the available literature on the topic, it has been witnessed that there are some studies on Ghalib as a mystic poet; however, no study distinctly defines the parameters of mysticism, particularly, how the mysticism in Islamic faith is different from other faiths, and what constitutes it. The references to mysticism are often ubiquitous and unfounded. This challenge has been met by exporting the grounded theories of mysticism in Islamic faith, propounded by *Shaikh-e-Akbar* – Ibn-e-Arabi.

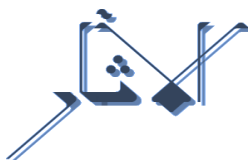
Conceptual framework

The Ibn-e-Arabi's theory of Mirror and Manifestation (*tajalli*) is the key to his metaphysical system, especially in the connection of the Absolute to the created world. He assumes that the universe is not something that exists outside God, but it is a well-polished mirror, which reflects the Divine names and attributes. The Divine Essence (*al-Dhat*) as a whole is a hidden treasure, which, according to Ibn-e-Arabi, wanted to be known; that is why it revealed its perfections in the form of the Most Holy Effusion (*al-fayd al-aqdas*). But a mirror needs a surface to reflect light and to Ibn-e-Arabi the non-existence or the fixed entities (*al-a'yan al-thabita*) is the receptive ability which receives the Divine Light to show itself in different ways.

The human, the Perfect Human (*al-Insan al-Kamil*), is the final reflection of this cosmic mirror. Although the other parts of the universe reflect certain Divine names in a disjointed fashion, the human heart is the only one that reflects the entirety of all Divine attributes in a single way. This is famously described by Ibn-e-Arabi in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, according to which God made the world a rough mirror, and Adam (symbolizing humanity) was the same spirit of the rough mirror that made possible the "clarity" of the Divine reflection. As a result, as a constant process of perpetual creation, the Absolute is forever revealing and concealing itself in the veils of phenomenal forms.

Discussion

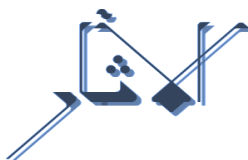
In the Islamic faith, the reality is understood in concrete and abstract phenomena. The first existence is the existence of God, which is eternal and everlasting. He has no beginning and no end, and there is nothing like Him. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an, "He is the First and the Last,



the Outward and the Inward; He has knowledge of everything” (The Qur’an, 57:3). All knowledge belongs to Him, and He is the source of all knowledge. He is the first because there was nothing before him, and he will be the last because nothing will remain but He. Every living creature will taste death. Everything will perish one day. This is a fundamental doctrine in the Islamic faith, which Ghalib beautifully puts: “When nothing was, God was; were there nothing, God would be/ Being was my doom, had I not been, what would I be?” (89). Ghalib’s world is divided between the seen and the unseen; to him, the seen world of matter and senses is replete with misery, and birth itself is a burden. The tragedy of life is the end of it because nothing remains, and nothing is permanent. All tragedies of ontological truth are closely associated with human existence. It is a confessional statement by Ghalib that there is no reality but Him. The world is a self-disclosure of God; if God had not wished so, nothing would come into existence, and Ghalib would be non-existent. It is the reflection of His beautiful names which give life to the universe.

Therefore, Ghalib makes a wish that it would have been far better for him if he had not been created by God. Since God is the ultimate truth and reality; hence, no other truth or existence could be ideal. Thus, to him, the real is God, and apart from Him, everything is just a walking shadow. It is quite evident from his verse that his firm belief related to the impermanence of all life, specifically human life, defines his idea of reality. Human life is a journey from the unknown to the known; the learning of knowledge is continuous. Wisdom is linked with knowledge. Hence, for Ghalib, the reality is not what is seen but what is hidden. Arabi in *Futuhāt* (III: 92) argues that the entire world is the self-disclosure of God. God was a hidden treasure, and He revealed Himself through His attributes. Arabi theorises how God brings things from non-existence to existence; He creates things out of nothing. God brings forth the things from – to us – an unknowable existence to a knowable existence. What things have gained from accepting existence in the exterior world is to be distinguished for themselves and for others. *Tajalli* (Self-disclosure) is at the root of Ghalib’s concept of reality. To Arabi, it is *Tajalli* which is the sole reason for the existence of everything. However, it is the choosing of God that He created Adam and all the universe; without His will, Adam would be in a state of non-existence. Ghalib’s belief that it is the *Jawā gari* (*Tajalli*) or self-disclosure of God, which is quite difficult for the adepts to uncover, as there are multiple veils which hide it. However, he is quite firm in his belief that once the veils are lifted, reality encompasses the adept and brightens all darkness in them.

God is the ultimate truth. Moving forward, he comes to the attributes of Him, stating that all creation reflects His attributes. Ghalib says, “Who manifests Himself in all this, no one can make out/ there is a veil which cannot be lifted, vain the effort to do so” (487). The universe is a macrocosm which is equal to a mirror. The universe is a combination of God’s attributes; hence, it is a self-disclosure of God because God discloses His names through it. Hence, one way to know Him is to comprehend His names, which manifest in the universe. However, Ghalib further argues that in His essence, He is unknowable; however, in His attributes, He is everywhere. There are veils which one would like to lift, but cannot lift; the only *tajallis* that are in the mirror of the universe are of His names. Therefore, for a lover, it is a vain attempt to lift the veils to see Him in His essence. Nevertheless, the mirror manifests His attributes and reveals Him. Hence, it serves as a mirror for His *tajallis*. In the metaphysical philosophy of Ibn Arabi, God’s *Essence* (*Dhat*) is absolutely transcendent and unknowable. He is Infinite, and Human intellect is finite; therefore, human perception can never grasp Him. However, through His *Attributes* (*Sifat*) and *Names* (*Asma*), He is knowable, which continuously manifest throughout all of creation. The Absolute Identity (*Huwiyyah*): This concept highlights the

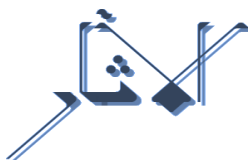


Divine Essence as perceived in its transcendence, apart from all things. Often referred to as the "Absolute Identity," this rank represents the unknowable aspect of God, veiled from creation and beyond human perception (Arabi, 2004; pp. 88).

He is unique, and there is nothing like Him. Such a unique creator lives in solitude. His disclosure is everywhere yet cannot be seen. Ghalib writes that no eye can see Him because He is unique and beyond what is known. "Who can ever see Him, He is One and Unique/ Were there two, we'd see them, Conflicts would ensue" (61). Arabi asserts that God is *al-Ahadiyyah* (Absolutely unique). Moreover, He is beyond all human comprehension and the essence of all existence. He is Immanent, that is, His uniqueness is supreme, and there is nothing in the universe that shares it. Thus, Ghalib acknowledges His uniqueness, asserting that He is "One and Unique". Since there is nothing like Him, He cannot be compared with nothing; however, it is the beauty of His attributes which are a window to Him. It is through this disclosure that He reveals Himself. Otherwise, His *Dhat* is unique and beyond comprehension. Ghalib, in the same couplet, negates all possibilities to see Him in His essence because to him there is nothing like Him. If this could not be the case, there could have been some possibility of coming across Him. In this context, Ghalib further says, "The beauty of the rose gives us the desire to look at it / Ghalib the eye should be aware of all that is lovely" (127). Here, Ghalib, as a visionary explores the beauty of nature and his belief that it is the beauty of the beautiful God which discloses itself in nature. He invites the readers to witness the names of God. The eye seeing can lift the veil and cherish all that is lovely in the universe, turning the act of seeing into a deeply spiritual experience. He often suggests that the universe is a reflection of the Beloved, and the perceptive eye recognises this beauty everywhere. Arabi explains that the universe functions as a polished mirror. Just as an object reflects its image outward, Allah's infinite and hidden attributes—such as His Beauty (*Jamal*), Majesty (*Jalal*), Mercy, and Knowledge—are reflected into the manifested cosmos. The universe is the external manifestation or "unfolding" of these divine realities.

Moreover, it is noticed that Ghalib's self-doubt sometimes brings him close to the truth and sometimes drifts him away. However, his tilt to accept the truth is dominant here and there. "When but for you, nought else exists/ why then O Lord this noisy fray?" (37). Ghalib sheds all his doubts by admitting the fact that there is nothing but He. He is the real *Wujud* (existence). However, in a manner of questioning, he argues that if God is the only Being, then from where the universe has come or what we see around, what is it? He questions the paradox that if God is the only true reality and nothing else truly exists, then what is the source of the world's conflicts, noise, and duality? It expresses amazement at the illusion of multiplicity when the Creator is singular. Here, Ghalib focuses on the creation of God. His attention is absorbed by the wonderful material realities present in the universe. Here he seems to be in a state of self-doubt, that although God is the only real existence, then why on earth is there this material world? Arabi in *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* declares that there is nothing but Him. Moreover, Existence can only benefit from Him. Every (*'ayn*) entity is dependent upon His manifestation and cannot appear without it. The presence of the possibility is the mirror, and He is the onlooker. Every entity, according to itself, is the image of it, whether an angel or human, a horse or an orbit (*falak*). All possible things are the shapes in possibility; it is the divine manifestation that earns them their being; the mirror earns them their shapes (1-4).

Every (*'ayn*) entity is a possible being and is the creation of the Necessary Being. Ghalib makes it clear, "Of whose capricious pen does the traced image complain? / In the paper dress of plaintiff all these painted forms remain" (15). What it has to do with the ultimate Reality, or from where it has come, or whether it exists or not, is another way to put it. Arabi does not

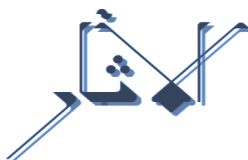


regard the universe as a separate and independent entity but as a vast and multifaced mirror that is created by God to reflect His attributes. There is no form in the universe which has an independent existence; rather, it works as a mirror capable of reflecting the *tajallis* (rays) of the Divine Essence. Its example is just like an object facing a thousand mirrors, which create a thousand reflections. Hence, the multiplicity of the universe is only the reflection of One Ultimate Truth.

Likewise, the heart of the faithful is a polished mirror capable of reflecting all the divine names. Comprehensively (Austin, 1980:45; Chittick, 2010: 225). Arabi further says that it was the will of The Real to see the essences of His most Beautiful Names in a mirror that would contain the entire affair. Arabi calls the all-inclusive universe a cosmic mirror; the universe functions as a cosmic mirror of manifestation. Through this metaphor of a mirror, the question of existence becomes simple. In this context, Arabi quotes a famous Hadith-e-Qudsi, “*I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known; so I created the creation and made Myself known to them*”. Ghalib’s doubt answers that nothing would exist if God had not chosen so. God desired to reveal His attributes, His beautiful names; it is the will and desire of Him to reveal Himself through His names. Otherwise, nothing would exist. He created everything because He wanted to be known. Adam would never have stepped out of the unseen if God had not made this revelation. Hence, the whole creation of God is the reflection of His *Tajalli*. It is the *tajalli* of His attributes. Since the universe is the manifestation of God’s attributes and He loved to be known, He created everything; everything that He created was present in His desire, in His mind. Therefore, Ghalib affirms that this whole creation of God is a result of *Khyal* (God’s Idea of creation, His thought of creation).

Ghalib asserts that this universe is a reflection of the indivisible beauty of God, the Most Beautiful. This is the supreme beauty which manifests in the universe and makes it beautiful; it is, in fact, the self-admiring beauty of the Lord that has given life to man and all. Adam would have been non-existent if He had not wished to be known. Everything we see in this world is simply a manifestation of that one supreme beauty. If the Divine did not possess the desire to witness and appreciate its own perfection, the entire process of creation would never have taken place. We exist because Absolute Beauty wanted to look at itself. All the universe is the manifestation of His beautiful names, and Arabi calls in macrocosm. Likewise, all the attributes reflect in the heart of the believer; therefore, it is a microcosm. The heart of the believer is a mirror where God sees His beauty. These are the cosmic mirrors which reflect the *tajallis* of the Most Beautiful. Arabi further argues that Adam is the prototype of the mirror through which God contemplates His own attributes and names. The divine qualities, such as the Forgiver, the Provider, and the Merciful, could not be expressed or witnessed without a manifestation like Adam. God remains in His absolute oneness if He does not reveal Himself; therefore, Adam would not exist. Thus, for Ghalib, the universe is a mirror, and the heart of the believer is also a mirror that reflects the *tajallis* of the Great God.

Ghalib further says, “The shine of heart’s-mirror is yet of first degree, no more / Passion’s energy will burnish it, I know now, and tear my clothes” (93). The created worlds are the mirrors; moreover, these mirrors are the material realities of the attributes of God. Ghalib believes that the beautiful attributes of God find expression in the external created world, i.e. it is the material world which has the light of God in it. God is the light of heaven and earth. Allah says in The Qur’an, “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth” (24:25). The heavens and the earth are the mirrors, but these mirrors are made of material; whereas the attributes of God are subtle, refined, and gracious. They give life and meaning to material realities. Hence, the *tajallis* of the Lord. Thus, Ghalib says, “The pure without impurity cannot come into being/



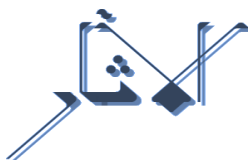
the garden's flowery is the rust on the mirror of spring air" (123). To him, the attributes of God are subtle, *lateef*, and refined; they are as is the wind of Spring, which gives life and colour to a garden, which is in fact a material expression of the subtle and refined wind of Spring. Likewise, all creation in the universe is made of material. So much so that light is also material, though it is a refined form of matter. Therefore, *tajallies* of God being subtle and refined reflect upon the mirrors which are material worlds, would it be the universe, a believer or the heart. In other words, Ghalib accepts the fact that the creation of God is the material world, which serves as a mirror to reflect His *tajallis* for human beings. However, one point is to be noted that it is all for the understanding of human beings, those human beings who strive to look for truth, and who have wisdom. Therefore, it can be affirmed that Ghalib's idea of *tajjali* and the mirror is not altogether abstract because it holds the created worlds as the face of a mirror.

Conclusion

There is a trend among critics and scholars to explore mysticism in the poetry of great poets; however, what is lacking is a proper conceptual or theoretical framework. That is why most of the interpretations are largely unconvincing and haphazard. To best interpret the poetry of a great poet in terms of mysticism requires a deeper understanding of mystical experiences and nuances, chiefly derived from the sacred texts of religion. The study concludes that Mirza Ghalib is a legendary poet of the subcontinent, and his poetry dominates the canon throughout the ages. There is no other poet in tradition who can be compared with him for several reasons, and one of the leading ones is his mysticism. There are several strands of mysticism present in his poetry; however, due to its delimitations, this study views his poetry specifically, focusing on the metaphors of the mirror and manifestation. Ibn-e-Arabi, a great Muslim theologian and philosopher, conceptualises these metaphors beautifully. The study, having taken insight from these concepts of Arabi, contends that it is one of the lucid ways to interpret the poetry of Ghalib by uncovering his ideas of the macrocosm and microcosm as a polished mirror which manifests the beautiful names of Allah. Reality is known only through the manifestation of the attributes of God, and besides it, there is nothing to know and to be known.

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