



# THE IMPACT OF 'GHAZAL' ON THE INDIAN ETHOS

**DR. D. PARAMESHWARI**

Dept. Of English  
Nizam College  
Hyderabad  
(TS) INDIA

## ABSTRACT

*In the making of a refined Lucknowi culture and this hear tuning to note Umrao immortalized Ghazal and epitomized Umrao . from have Rekha has taken our where Umrao finishes and fine tune the ghazal as soul of Hindi Cinema Aishwarya tries to do her bit have. The major Literary form that has been used in Hindi Cinema is one of urdu literatures major genres, the 'ghazal' which has become popular in many north Indian languages. It is a much-loved literary form used by most of the great urdu poets, although many critics of Urdu Literature disdain it.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Ghazal is derived from a Persian literary form, consisting of simple, rhymed couplets mostly using stock imagery of passionate but unrequited love, full of misery and woe. An extreme example of this is Ghalib's address to a dead mistress:

*"Dard se mere hai tujh ko bekarari hay hay  
At last you are affected by my pain..."*

The ghazal often draws on Sufi influences, allowing it to be read as both profane and divine: the ashq, the ma'ashooq, the poet claiming that love has made him an unbeliever. The

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imagery is that of Persian poetry, the formal garden, the tulip and the rose and the nightingale, quite distinct from the imagery of traditional Hindu classical and devotional poetry with which it is sometimes erroneously compared. A striking feature of the ghazal is that the love portrayed is illicit desire which is always unrequited, the beloved being cruel and unkind to the lover. The gender of the beloved is often unclear, or may be male or female. Other forbidden pleasures form key elements of the ghazal, namely the celebration of the delights of wine and intoxication:

*“yeh masael-e-tasavuf, yeh tar a byan, Ghalib!  
Tujhe ham vali samajhte jo na bada xvar hota  
These questions of mysticism and your discussions, Ghalib!  
We would have thought you a saint, if you weren't such a drunkard!”*

The ghazal is a performative genre, usually recited in the poetry gathering, where is tarannum or sung in qawwali or semi classical style. The performed ghazal was an aristocratic genre which became popular in Lucknow in the late 1700s as declining court and feudal landowners were replaced by new landlords who favoured light classical forms over traditional classical music. It was sung in a wide range of styles by courtesans, who were trained singers and dancers. Even when they began to give public performances as concert halls and other venues and traditional patronage declined in the twentieth century, the ghazal remained an exclusive genre. For this Umrao is remembered for instilling a new life in to the unknown heritage and Rekha, masterfully executes the culture strokes on the canvas of Indian films.

This use of ghazal is seen in other forms of Urdu writing such as in the famous letters Ghalib, where verses in Urdu or Persian by Ghalib himself or by others, intersperse his prose.

This use of Ghazal is a kind of counterpoint to prose is ideally suited the popular film, where it serves similar functions as it highlights or summarizes the diegesis of the film's narrative. In the film this is heightened further by the fact that the ghazals are in Urdu whereas the surroundings dialogues are in more colloquial Hindi. The use of music removes the ghazal even further from the spoken word of the film and with the themselves of loss, nostalgia and sadness it remains one of the great pleasures of the film.

Given these elements, it is not surprising that the ghazal was taken up by film composers from the earliest days of cinema, while connoisseurs deplored the popularized style and hybrid music of the cinematic ghazal. It fell out of favor in film by the end of the 1950s and seemed to be a dying genre, until it was reborn on audio cassette, whose cheap technology introduced in to a mass market. The first wave of ghazal superstars emerged – the Pakistanis, Mehdi Hasan and Ghulam Ali- who sang in a new semi- classical, gentle and sweet style, accompanied by the harmonium and table. They were followed in the 1980s by a new

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generation of popular singers (Anup Jalota, Pankaj Udhas, Jagjit Singh, Roop Kumar Rathod all non-Muslims), who used an even more simplified style, a kind of easy listening that was soothing and sweet but had a classy air. The language was simplified and made more colloquial to be comprehensible to an audience which knew only Hindi, cassette and CD sleeves often glossed the Persian and Urdu words in English. This form of ghazal became very popular, its soothing gentle poetry appealing mostly to the middle classes and urban cities. One of the reasons for its success is undoubtedly its refined easy listening effect but the poetry itself remains important as a major medium for sad, romantic love songs, which have been largely squeezed out of cinema by upbeat dance numbers.

## WORKS CITED

1. The late Iqbal Masud and long conversations about Islamicate films, which helped shape many of my ideas on the topic.
2. Muhammad Sadiq, in his widely read history of Urdu literature is deeply ambivalent about the form (Sadiq 1995), which Pritchett 1994 attributes to the influence of the new poetics created by Azad and Hali in the nineteenth century.
3. Mirza Asadullah Beg Khan (1797-1869), Ghalib victorious is a pen name.
4. The recent history of the Ghazal as a song lyric has been traced by Peter Maneul, 1991.
5. See Kasbekar 2000 on viewing dances.