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## **Ghazal**

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Ghazal is mainly a poetic form that has its roots in Arab cultures though it was developed in Persia and the Urdu-speaking world. Although some aspects of ghazal poetry such as *nasīb* and *tašbīb* can be traced back to the 7th century in Arabic poetry, the poetic structure of ghazal and its rich concepts of themes regarding love have been established and were enriched within the Persian cultural context from the 8th century until a notable popularity of ghazal appeared in the Urdu-speaking world since the 17th century. The ghazal was developed under the royal patronage in Persia as well as in greater India, from where it spread to other cultures through Sufi practices, political migrations, Parsi theater performances, and individual explorations into the subject. Prosodic constituents of ghazal such as *sher*, *beher*, *radif*, *qafiya*, *matla*, and *maqta* (discussed later in this entry), which in combination made ghazal distinctive among other poetic forms, gave rise to equally distinctive musical performance traditions associated with it in Muslim cultures around the world. Consistent with its origins as a poetic form, ghazal does not necessarily occur in combination with any musical culture, although it is known largely from presentations using Hindustani *raga* (particular moods stimulated by specific melodic phrases) and *tala* (meter). However, the main purpose of ghazal performance is to convey the aesthetic experience of poetry, rather than to emphasize the musical contents, unlike *dhrupad* or *khyal* performances of Hindustani music. Some ghazal singers with a Hindustani music background such as Begum Akter, Mehendi Hussain, Jagjit Singh, and Ghulam Ali have developed their own way of singing ghazal emphasizing Hindustani musical intricacies and nuances with ghazal lyrics; thus, their listeners are able to enjoy the poetry and the musical content at the same time.

The origin of the word *ghazal* is found in the Arabic language, which gives the basic meaning of its root, “spinning,” and a figurative sense of talking amorously to a woman, as noted by Petra de Bruijn. In Arabic, the word *ghazal* may mean a love poem written in any poetic form, as well as the themes of love in general such as praising women, the joy of reunion, the pain of separation, continuing to love in spite of pain, and so on. The beauty of nature and themes connected with consuming wine are other subjects addressed in ghazal poetry. Moreover, the images regarding love in ghazal poetry allow for mystical interpretation toward any love defined in Sufism.

Ghazals must incorporate graceful classical vocabulary, and at the same time euphonic, often alliterative figures. The poetic expressions are ambiguous and ironic in nature, allowing the receiver to interpret flexibly. Fanciful imagery and metaphors are indispensable in ghazal poetry. In addition to the theme and usage of the language, the ghazal is distinct from other poetic forms for its specific set of prosodic rules and its structural style.

In the Urdu-speaking world, a ghazal may consist of five to 15 *sher* or *bayt* (distichs or couplets). The best *sher* in a ghazal is known as *bayt-ul-ghazal* or *husn-e-ghazal*. There are two *ashaar* (rhymed lines) with equal *behr* (meter) in a *sher*. The first line of a *sher* is called *misra-e-ula* and the second line is called *misra-e-sani*. In this context, *radif* stands for a word, a phrase, or a suffix that is repeatedly added to the end of every second line of a ghazal. It is exceptional that the first *sher* of a ghazal, the *matla*, is made in a way that both lines shape a rhyme with the *radif*. There is another specific *sher* in a ghazal, the last *sher*, *maqta* or *maḳlasá* where the *takh-ul-lus* (pen name, the name of the writer known to the literary world) is mentioned. The other very important component of a ghazal is *qafiya*, meaning a word, words, or a suffix, plus words which are rhymed prior to the *radif* in all *sher* of one entire ghazal. Again, the *qafiya* should be maintained in both lines of the first *sher* of a ghazal called *matla*. All *shers* in a ghazal are independent from each other in their literal meaning, but they fit poetically together, comprising the main theme of the ghazal. Some but not all of these elements are reflected in the musical structure of an Urdu ghazal, as recitation of a ghazal is always different from singing a ghazal. In musical settings, singers rarely adjust the poetry to the melodic flow, but instead enact the opposite.

Love poems are prevalent in the Arabic and Persian literature. *Nasīb*, the erotic introduction of a panegyric *qasida* in the Arabic language, influenced love poems in the Persian language. However, the first evidence for a ghazal composed following specific prosodic rules dates from the last quarter of the 11th century. This ghazal was identified in the *diwan* (manuscripts/collection of poems) of the poet Sanaai in Persia. In the 13th century, Jalaal-al-Din Rumi composed ghazals of mystical inspiration and religious expressions developing

the ghazal format to an important extent. The poets who lived in Shiraz, namely Saadi (13th century) and Hafez (14th century), brought ghazal poetry to a standard form and a dominant position of popularity among other poetic forms in Persia. Hafez has been the most popular and beloved poet in Persian history. He skillfully added new themes, motives, and imagery to his ghazals while well maintaining a balance of profane and mystical nature. The ghazal flourished in Persia during the time of popular poets such as Saadi, Rumi, and Hafez. After these poets, during the Timurid period, the poet Baba Fagani (16th century) wrote ghazals, liberating each line in an attempt to separate internal coherence. The ghazal spread to other cultures through the migration of the Persians, mainly as Muslim colonizers. It spread to India through Persian invasions that occurred from the 16th century onward and was developed in Urdu, a language nurtured through Indo-Persian cultural interaction. Musicians and singers were encouraged to develop various art forms that draw on culturally different sources such as *maqām*, *dastgah*, and raga. Also, the court patronized musical arts, specifically ghazal as poetry, chanting, and entertaining songs in the Mughal period.

Amir Khusrau is said to have introduced ghazal to the court of the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century. The outstanding poets of Urdu ghazals are known as Şaeb Tabrizi (17th century), Abd-al-Qader Bidel (17th century), and Mirza Ghalib (18th century). Conversing through ghazal verses as a graceful noble expressive art was a trend among nobles and aristocrats in Mughal India. Special events known as *mushaira* brought together an exclusive audience of poets and aspiring nobles to enjoy sharing knowledge and performance of Urdu ghazal poetry. This event was like a symposium where the *shayars* (male poets) could present their ghazal compositions to the experts to get feedback and at the same time enjoy and give feedback to others. In a traditional setting of *mushairas*, the ghazals were presented by shayars in two different manners, as *tah-tul-lafz* (rhythmic speech) and as *tarannum* (chanting). Today, female poets are welcome in *mushairas*.

In Mughal India, ghazal poetry written for both secular and mystical interpretations was adapted into *qawwali* singing, which is performed for Sufi shrines at mosques in Pakistan and India. Ghazals on romantic themes are sung mostly by the *tawaifs* (courtesans) who entertained male aristocrats and nobles. The *tawaifs* sang and danced while performing ghazals in *haveli* (private mansions) and in *mehfil* or *mujra* (salons). The singer was accompanied by a musician playing *dholak* (two-headed hand drum) and a *sarangi* (bowed string instrument) player. Later, a *harmonium* (bellows-driven keyboard instrument) player was added to the ensemble and the *dholak* was sometimes replaced by the *tabla* (pair of tuned hand drums). The great patron of ghazal in Moghul India was Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow, the last king of Awadh, who enhanced the Indian performing arts in the mid-19th century. Since 1857, when the political suppression of Muslim power was increasingly enforced by the British in Central and Northern India, the middle class adapted the prestigious ghazal art form to their entertainment events, thus contributing to its musical popularity.

Ghazal was introduced to Europe in the 19th century when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe translated Persian ghazals into the German language. Later, Goethe, Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), and August Graf von Platen (1796–1835) composed poems in German following the ghazal rhyme scheme. During the British rule of India, the ghazal was adapted in Nepal by Moti Ram Bhatta (1866–1896) who composed ghazals in the Nepalese language. Parsi theater troupes introduced Indian theater performances including ghazal to the Malay world during the British period. The Malay ghazal as practiced in Johor and Riau, however, is a rather musical genre that did not take over its poetic form.

**See also** [Asia, South: Indian Subcontinent](#); [Azerbaijan: History, Culture, and Geography of Music](#); [India: History, Culture, and Geography of Music](#); [Islam](#); [Love Songs](#); [Malaysia: History, Culture, and Geography of Music](#); [Qawwali](#); [Russia and Central Asia, Indigenous Music: Ancestral and Contemporary Practices](#); [Sufism](#)

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### Further Readings

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