Mirza Ghalib in a Time Warp

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A Review of the Comedy by Manish Vidhani





(Left) A Painting Depicting Mirza Assadullah Khan Ghalib (Right) A Scene from the Play

As a part of the recently concluded The Best of Pierrot's theatre festival, Dr. M. Sayeed Alam and his troupe performed "Ghalib in New Delhi" on 26th April, 2008 at Sri Ram Centre here in New Delhi.

The play showcases Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, the erstwhile former Urdu poet's adventures in the modern day, in his second birth. Ghalib, once he is informed about his posthumous fame, decides to take a rebirth to experience it first hand (the fame that eluded him during his lifetime) and appears at the ISBT. The plot revolves around Ghalib facing an incessant identity crisis and his desperate attempts to fight it. He is famous, but only through the voice of Jagjit Singh and the screen portrayal of Naseeruddin Shah.

His luck brings him to stay with Jay Hind, a Bihari boy, in the servant quarters of Mrs. Chaddha, a typical Punjabi *auntyjee*. Ghalib's character evolves in a subtle way as the play progresses. From his absolute intolerance towards incorrect grammar to his understanding of the 'star couples' in Bollywood, Ghalib endures it all.

Despite it being a riotous comedy, I couldn't help but notice the following. The voice of Niti Sayeed, lacked the boom that a theatre artist is known for, to the extent of being inaudible at times. It stood out in stark contrast with the other cast members. Also, a few scenes such as the one with the *hawaldaar* could have been done away

with. But all said and done, the performance received a well deserved standing ovation from the audience.