

Nuskha-e Hamidiyya p 184, Nuskha-e Arshi #217 p 98, Jain Ghazal #211, Raza p 246

Composed in or before 1821

1.

کیا ہے ترکِ دنیا کاہلی سے

ہمیں حاصل نہیں ہے حاصلی سے

I renounced the world because I was lazy

I gained nothing from gaining nothing

Vocabulary:

Tark-e duniya- renouncing the world, particularly, renouncing the world of desires

Hasil: gain, revenue, benefit

Be hasili- lack of gain, benefit

MAF: This is an unexpectedly ‘simple’ she’r with a sarcastic swipe at the so called “pious” people. The protagonist says that abandoning the world, which he did out of sheer inertia, brought him nothing. He did not get any closer to God by relinquishing the world. It could also be that the poet is mocking his own self. One of Ghalib’s endearing qualities, which he shares with Mir, is that he is capable of making fun of himself, or looking at himself with a dispassionate but not inimical eye. The play on hasil and be hasil adds to the elegance of the she’r.

2.

خراجِ دیہِ ویراں یک کفِ خاک

بیاباں خوش ہوں تیری عاملی سے

A fistful of dust is what I receive as tribute from the wilderness

Desolation, I am happy to be your tax-collector

Vocabulary:

Kharaj: tax, especially land tax

Deh: village, countryside

Viran: desolate

‘Amil: tax official, governor

MAF: The grammar of the second misra’ creates a pleasing perplexity: Who is the ‘amil in the she’r, the protagonist or the addressee? If we take the protagonist to be the ‘amil, then it means the lover-protagonist who roams in the desolate wilderness is happy to receive a fistful of dust by way of kharaj. If the ‘amil is wilderness and it extracts a fistful of dust as kharaj from the lover protagonist, then the latter is happy to offer it.

The beautiful ambiguity of the sher comes from a device used with great effect by Ghalib and Mir, and some Indo-Persian poets: the use of the word *se* which, like the Persian *az* has been used to mean ‘from’, and also (depending on the context) ‘with’. Here we get one meaning when we read *se* to mean ‘from’ and another meaning when we read *se* to mean ‘with’. The economy of expression shows the mastery of the poet in excellent light.

3.

① پَر افشان ہو گئے شعلے ہزاروں

رہے ہم داغ اپنی کابلی سے

A thousand flames reached the skies

I was so lazy I didn’t go beyond being a scar

Vocabulary:

Par afshandan: to flap the wings, that is to fly

Kahili: laziness

Dagh hona/rahna: to be sad, to be disappointed; to be scarred (by pain)

MAF: A dynamic image is created with wings flapping and fanning flames even though it may imply that the flames, once they rose into the sky, were lost or extinguished. There are at least two possible interpretations: 1) The flames of desire, of longing, of ambition, rose high into the sky. Even if they eventually disappeared, they did aim high and reached a certain elevation. Maybe they served their purpose by going high and thus disappearing. The protagonist was lazy, an under achiever. He was saddened by his lack of action, or even the will to act. The disappearing flames thus became a scar on his heart. 2) The protagonist couldn't achieve anything but a scar, which signifies burning, fire, heat. But his scar came from just sitting in one place, like a callous.

The theme here is the same as in the matla', but the matla' is more elegant because of the economy of words and the delightful play on hasil and be-hasili.

4.

خدا یعنی پدر سے مہرباں تر

پھرے ہم در بہ در ناقابلی سے

God, that is to say, the Being is kinder than a father

I roamed from place to place because I didn't accept His Grace

Vocabulary:

Pidar: father

Na qabili: lack of acceptance

MAF: The keyword here is *na qabili*. The protagonist did not accept God's existence or God's word; that is why he couldn't find God. The tone of voice is sombre, grand, but the theme is tragic. The protagonist refused to accept, or was incapable of receiving God's Grace. He doesn't explain why he was na qabil. Was it because he was such a great lover of freedom from all

fetters and bounds that he didn't accept even God's bounty? Or was it that God created his non-acceptance? Or is it because he was created incapable of acceptance?

In every way, the sher is an elegy of the human experience.

Also notable is the fact that the concept of God as Father, or the idea of an anthropomorphic God as father, is Christian. Perhaps Ghalib picked up the theme from there, or perhaps he was commenting on the fact that God 'The Father' seemed to be most kind to the Christians while the Indians, or the Muslims were not favored? In Hinduism God is both father and mother; God is srijanhar. Perhaps the protagonist did not accept God's existence or God's word that is why he couldn't find God. Or, he did not accept God's help.

5.

اسد قربانِ لطفِ جورِ بیدل

خبر لیتے ہیں لیکن بے دلی سے

Asad, I surrender to the elegant, ruthless cruelty of Bedil

He inquires about my news, but half-heartedly

Vocabulary:

Lutf: elegance of style

Jaur: cruelty

Khabar lena: to be solicitous; it can be used in a sarcastic sense too

Be dili: lack of interest

MAF: According to Jain, Bedil here doesn't refer to the poet Bedil, but to the beloved; our poet Asad is surrendering to the cruelties and affections of the beautiful beloveds. They do enquire about the lover(s) but with disdain. *Bedili* here means *bad dili*.

Jain's interpretation fails because he gives no illustrative example or a reference to a reliable dictionary, to affirm that *bedil* and *bad dil* have the same or similar meanings. It is possible to have another perhaps more intricate reading of the she'r. Ghalib, especially when he was young, was an ardent admirer of Bedil's poetic style. Here he is referring to the elegance and difficulty of the style.

Khabar lena, means 'being solicitous'. Bedil's style is so dense or ambiguous that his considerateness in giving expression to his ideas and telling us about them seems no more than a half-hearted effort. In reading Bedil, the reader is expected to come to the level of the poet. Bedil was the master of *khiyal bandi*, a style that preferred abstraction over concrete experience. Ghalib too was a master of *khiyal bandi* and practiced it all his life.

Another possibility is that Bedil is actually the name or *takhallus* of a friend and Ghalib is having some fun at his cost. But we have no information about such a friend of Ghalib's. The *Nuskha-e Hamidiyya* has the word Bedil in bold implying that it is a proper noun. Nonetheless, the she'r thus remains something of an enigma.

I like this ghazal because it has an air of Mir about it; perhaps the meter and the *radif* produce this color:

Dil-e purkhun ki ek gulabi se

Umr bhar hum rahe sharabi se