

Nuskha-e Hamidiyya, p 198-99; Nuskha-e Arshi, Ghazal # 223 p 101-2; Raza, p 247; Jain, Ghazal #217

Composed in 1821

گر یلس سر نہ کہینچے تنگی عجب فضا ہے
وسعت گم تمنا یک بام و صد ہوا ہے

If despondency shouldn't arise, stricture has a wonderful ambience

The vastness of desire is like a hundred breezes that blow across a single terrace

Vocabulary:

Yas: despondency, disappointment

Tangi: stricture; narrowness of (mental or physical) space

Ajab fiza: wonderful or strange ambience

Sar khenchna: To arise, to appear

Vus'at: breadth, extent

Vus'at gah-e tamanna: the expanse of the territory or area of desire

Bam: terrace

Hava: breeze; desire

MAF: Stricture can be enjoyable if despondency doesn't raise its head. The space of hope and desire is vast. It's a terrace where hundreds of breezes blow.

A very interesting, masterly she'r with a flow (ravani) unusual for Ghalib's early verses. The theme is not profound but there is a sense of expansiveness, or spaciousness of imagination. Note the deft employment of *tangi*, one of Ghalib's favorite words because of its multivalence. Here too, it implies both scarcity and narrowness. *Ajab fiza* works perfectly with both meanings and adds a sense of mystery.

The second misra' complements the first perfectly. Desire is boundless even if the protagonist is confined or restrained in a narrow space or circumstance. The contrastive agreement between *yak* (one) and *sad* (hundred) and between *tangi* (narrowness) and *vus'at* (spaciousness) makes the *ajab fiza*.

Yak bam and *sad hava* are joined with a *vao*, but it is not a simple *vao-e atf*. It is, in fact, *vao-e tashbihi*. That is, it creates two situations: *yak bam* is equivalent to a hundred breezes. And, *yak bam* is the same as a hundred breezes.

A new idea is broached by the suggestion that disappointment can curb or sour the imaginings of desire. *Yas* is a situation when one gives up hoping, certain that the desired objective will never be achieved. *Tamanna* on the other hand has possibilities of realization. The word *hava* becomes most interesting in the context of *tamanna*. If we read it to mean 'desire', then the narrator seems to tell us that a hundred or myriad desires can be generated or made active by just observing from a terrace.

Sad hava has another meaning: from the one terrace you can enter a world of myriad breezes.

I have called the she'r masterly because of the inventive uses of the language. Every word is well chosen and the *rabt* between the two lines is smooth unlike so many she'rs from the early verses where one line is perfect and the other one is forced.

2.

برہم زن دو عالم تکلیفِ یک صدا ہے
مینا شکستگان کو کہسار خون بہا ہے

Translation 1:

The sound of one echo is enough to destruct the two worlds;

For those who broke the wine jug,

The mountains are blood money

Translation 2:

Take the trouble to utter a single cry, the whole world will be destroyed

For those whose stoups of wine are broken, the mountain is the blood money

Vocabulary:

Barham zadan: to put upside down; to destroy; to lay waste

Taklif dena: to ask (someone) to do something, especially a difficult thing; to entice (someone)

Mina: a jug or stoup of wine which was often made of stone in ancient times

Mina shikstagan: those who drink wine; those whose stoup of wine is broken

Kohsar: mountain

Khun baha: blood money

MAF: The she'r is obscure; therefore, I have offered two translations.

The one echo from breaking the wine jug is powerful enough to disarray the two worlds. The *mina* is made of stone so it has an affinity with *kohsar* (mountains). In this way mountains are blood money for breaking the mina. Obviously the breaking is symbolic of a deeper upheaval, perhaps surrender, but it is also a sacrilege, therefore blood money. But the question that needs to be addressed is: Who are the *mina shikastagan*? And why is the *sada* so powerful that it can destruct two worlds?

Perhaps another way of reading this ambiguous verse is to go with a Sufistic interpretation. The *mina shikastagan* are those who have renounced the world. It is a convention that those who wish to give up wine drinking break all the appurtenances of drinking, like the stoup, the jug, the cup, the glass.

Those whose stoups of wine are broken (have been broken, by some agency, or by themselves) will be given a whole mountain, or series of mountains, by way of compensation (blood money). The stoup of wine is clearly a metaphor for the world, or the mundane worldly connections. Ghalib brilliantly uses the metaphor *mina shikastan* in both literal and metaphysical senses. So those whose stoup of

wine is broken have renounced the world. Or, taking the literal meaning, those who drink wine freely and when the jug or the stoup is empty, they throw it away in disgust (this is also almost a convention: to throw away the jug, etc. when there is no wine left.)

Thus those who drink and have now their jugs/stoups/carafes broken will ultimately inherit a whole mountain by way of compensation. In other words, those who renounce the world, have ample (spiritual) recompense for their brave deed of renunciation.

The sada could be the sada of *Hu*. According to Sufi thought, God is best described simply as *Hu* or 'He'; that is why the famous Sufi chant: *allah hu*. Sufis also believe that if someone utters the word *Hu* with full power and full conviction, the world will be destroyed or become empty, because only God exists and once you invoke Him, everything else disappears. This is the derivation of the idiom *hu ka alam* which means total desolation and emptiness. Here is a wonderful she'r by Mir Dard:

mit jai'n ek an men sab khud numa'iyān

ham a'ine ke same a kar jo hu karen

All evidences of the self will disappear in the instant

We stand in front of the mirror and utter "hu"

3.

فکر سخن یک انشا زندانی خموشی

دود چراغ گویا زنجیر بے صدا ہے

Concentrating on making poems

Is in fact nothing but a prison house of silence entirely;

The smoke from the guttering candle is like a soundless chain

Vocabulary:

Fikr-e sukhan: to try to compose poetry; to sit down, or to intend to write a poem, or poetry; to deliberate upon the poem as one starts to compose;

Yak insha: entirely, through the whole act of writing (or even intent to write)

Zindan: prison

Zindani-e khamoshi: prisoner of silence

Dood-e chiragh: smoke from a lamp or candle

MAF: The angst or the concentrated restlessness that is the main part of the process of creating a poem is like a jail house of silence. That is, a poet can compose only when there is quietness. One usually writes at night with the aid of a lamp or candle. The smoke from the lamp spirals like a silent chain to become a metaphor for the ephemeral imagination and struggle to put thought into words. But more importantly, Ghalib is saying that a poet is rarely able to express, or communicate himself. Whatever he imagines is too delicate, too evanescent (in Shelley's words) to be constant. The language is a poor companion in the journey of poetry.

This she'r, glittering with rare metaphors, is an important statement in poetics as well. More than any other poetic tradition in the world, the poets of *sabk-e hindi* often complained that the language doesn't keep pace with thought. Whatever they imagine refuses to put on the material dress of words. Another aspect of the same point is to extol *silence* as superior to *speech*. Bedil has used these two themes in abundance. Ghalib has also a whole range of verses in his Persian poetry on the two themes.

4.

مازوني دو عالم قربان ساز يك درد

مصرأ نالنه نه سكته هزار جا به

Metricality worth the two worlds could be sacrificed over

The sound of one cry of grief

The line of verse in the reed's lament

is un-metrical in a thousand places

Vocabulary:

Mauzuni: metricality; the quality of poetry, hence poetry itself; well-measured or of proper quantity of rhythm such as in a verse

Saz: wherewithal; harmoniousness; capacity or capability; style or manner; a musical instrument

Misra': a line of a she'r

Saktah: break in meter; unmetricality

MAF: The voice of pain is worth more than all the mauzun voices of the world. Even the notes from the flute are not equal to the voice of pain because the notes from the flute can have (a thousand) breaks in meter.

In a way Ghalib is extending the theme of the previous she'r. One may have the fullest power of composing in meter, or be a poet in full expressive and communicative command, but this command is at best external, even mechanical for it depends on an artificial device, the meter. The Urdu metrical system is almost mathematically precise because it is fully quantitative. So in theory, anyone can compose a metrical text. Whereas the voice of pain or grief comes from the heart; it is not contrived or mechanical. Even the reed (the flute) whose sound is extremely similar to the human voice cannot compete with the voice of pain, because the reed's sound, although routinely described as a lament, is after all man made: it is the product of someone breathing or blowing into it.

The phrase *nala-e nai* is supported by the famous opening lines of Rumi's great Masnavi:

Listen to the reed, when its narrates its tale

And complains against the pains of separation

The word *saz* as used here by Ghalib is a feat of expression. *Saz* has many meanings, some of which are in fact quite different from each other and many of them fit here beautifully. The commonest meaning 'a musical instrument' is also quite appropriate.

5.

درس خرام تاكے خميازة روانى

اس موج مے كو غافل پيمانہ نقش پا ہے

For how long will it be possible for me to go on yawning in my craving for wine?

Drinking is like walking;

Every cup of wine gives you energy and motion

Vocabulary:

Dars: lesson

Kharam: gait, walk

Ta kai: for how long?

Ravani: the state of motion, movement; flow, flux, fluency, effusion

Ghafil: unmindful, ignorant, unaware, forgetful

Khamyazah: a yawn that signals longing for wine; yawn (due to sleepiness, etc.); strong desire for something (especially, khamyazah khenchna)

Paimanah: wine glass

MAF: A complicated she'r which should be remembered, at least for its novel metaphors and abstract imagination. My translation is more free than literal. The commentators before me (Asi, Kantoori and Jain) appear confused in interpreting this ambiguous she'r.

Khamyazah-e ravani, that is, the strong desire to get going, to flow, be in motion. The person being addressed is still trying to learn how to walk, how to put one foot after the other. So how long with this pedagogic activity go on? Don't you know that the wave of the wine (the power to be *ravan*) that you seek has nothing else but the foot print (of those who went before you) as its cup? That is to say, the wine of *ravani* is to be found only in the footsteps of your predecessors.

So what is this *ravani* and who is eager for it? Obviously, it is the poet-protagonist who is still trying to acquire bookish learning in the art of poetry. The fact is that the art of poetry can be learnt only from the example of others. In a Persian verse Ghalib has expressed the same theme in a less complicated (but admittedly less delightful) way:

harzah mashtab o pa'e jadah shinasan bardar

ay keh dar rah-e ukhan chun tu hazar amad o raft

Don't hurry forward futilely; keep to the path of those who know the way;

You, like whom thousands of others who came to walk the road to poetry and went away!

6.

□ گردش میں لا تجلی صد ساغر تسلی

چشم تحیر آغوش مخمور ہر ادا ہے

O radiant manifestation!

Bring into circulation hundreds of wine cups of comfort and contentment, because,
My eyes which embrace wonder are thirsty for your each and every act of coquetry

Vocabulary

Tajalli: manifestation, luster, brilliance, lightning,

Chashm-e tahaiyyur aghosh: eyes which have wonder in their embrace, that is, eyes which are fully struck by wonder

Makhmur: one who has khumar, hence, one who is thirsty

Ada: graceful manner or style, amorous gestures, coquetry, beauty

MAF: O beloved's radiant manifestation, bring a hundred glasses of soothing wine, because the wonderstruck eye is wallowing in your every *ada*.

A person who is caught in the throes of a hangover is very restless and needs wine.

The *makhmur* is the state of hangover when the alcoholic drinker craves for more and more wine. Thus *makhmur* means ‘thirsty’.

The rest of the she’r is simple. It has no particular excellence but makes good use of Ghalib’s favorite words: dars; tajalli; khamyazah; tahaiyur; ada. Still, the verse has exuberance, an excess, which appeals.

7.

یک برگ بے نوائی صد دعوتِ نیستاناں

طوفانِ نالئہ دل تا موجِ بوریا ہے

I possess no voice, no baggage, and yet I invite a whole reed jungle to a feast;

The storm of my heart’s lament doesn’t actually go beyond the wavy lines of my reed mat

Vocabulary:

Be navai: a state of being voiceless, having no speech or song; indigence or destitution

Barg: provisions or things for a journey, musical instrument, melody

Nayastan: reed grove, reed thicket or jungle

Mauj-e boriya: the wavy design on a mat woven from reed bark or jute or both

MAF: *Be navai* means a state of being voiceless and without possessions or destitute. In this marvelous she’r Ghalib has implied both. The protagonist has only one possession or barg, which is a boriya or a reed mat with a wavy design. This silent, indigent protagonist invites a jungle of reeds for a feast of music. The protagonist’s lament produces a storm which does not go beyond the waves of his reed mat.

The she’r presents a good example of another kind of ma’ni afrini or development of meaning.

Let us reflect on the abstract image of *be navai* or lack of possessions. Here lack of possessions is the *barg* or possession. The storm of laments rising in the protagonist's heart is the wave like pattern on the *boriya* (mat). Both the abstraction of *be navai* and the overwhelming emotion of the storm are thus reduced to the design on the mat.

Once more *yak* has been used by Ghalib to great effect because it contains or subsumes the two meanings of *be navai*: the lack of possessions and lack of sound, music, into one *barg*. *Yak* and *sad* (one and hundred) are congruent. A forest of bamboo implies a slew of musical instruments particularly the flute that are made from it.

I have read the *she'r* without the *izafat*. *Arshi* reads it with the *izafat*: *yak barg-e benava'i* which is perfectly valid. But *yak barg benava'i* is more piquant. It must be remembered that the first meaning of *benava'i* in this *sher* is 'being voiceless, being bereft of or deprived of.' The theme becomes extremely powerful and tone somewhat satirical or self-mocking. I have no song, no tune, no voice, yet I am inviting a whole reed jungle to a feast of music. We know that each reed is potentially a flute, and thus full of sound.

The young poet brings off a metaphor which is a triumph of the imagination. He presents before us a parallel image to illustrate how impoverished he is. The lament of the heart is often described as a storm. And here, the storm doesn't rise beyond the 'waves' in my reed mat. The *sad tufan* and *mauj-e boriya* is masterful. So is the use of *boriya* itself, to strengthen the theme of poverty.

This verse is clearly about man's vanity, or his folly and ambition. Also, it could be a satire on those who think much of themselves but are in fact capable of nothing.

8.

اے غنچہ تمنا یعنی کف نگاریں

دل دے تو ہم بتا دیں مٹھی میں تیری کیا ہے

O rosebud of my longing, your palms adorned with henna,
If you give me back my heart, I will tell you,
What you hold in your fist

Vocabulary:

Ghunchah: bud or rosebud, a fist adorned with henna is like a rosebud

Nigar: floral or other designs made on the palm of the hands or soles of the feet with henna

Kaf-e nigarin: palm of the hand decorated with henna

MAF: The lover's heart is enclosed in the beloved's hennaed palm. The poet calls the closed palm the rosebud of desire. O rosebud, if you give back my heart I'll tell you what you are holding in your hand.

The clever construction of the verse makes it possible to read it in at least two possible ways. The beloved is holding the lover's heart in her hennaed palm and is asking him to guess what she has. He replies that she should return his heart first then he will tell her what she has. Or, he asks her for her heart first only then he will tell what she holds in her fist. It's a subtle conceit to describe the closed fist as the rose bud for which I long for, or the fist which contains my longings.

The she'r is a great example of the beloved's *ada*, that is, a mixture of amorous gesture, playfulness and coquetry. Although the conversation reported is one sided, it is obvious that the lover and beloved are face to face, and the lover is teasing the beloved. Such style of poetry is called *mu'amilah bandi* or *vaqu'ah goi*. Ghalib doesn't use this manner very often, but always to great effect.

9.

ہر نالہ اسد ہے مضمون داد خواہی

یعنی سخن کو کاغذ احرام مدعا ہے

Each of Asad's laments has the theme: demanding justice

That is to say, the paper on which his poems are written

Is the outer dress of his intent

Vocabulary:

Ihram: the seamless garment worn by the hajj pilgrims before entering Mecca; the determination or resolution to enter upon the performance of Hajj; hence, any resolution, any intention (for some grave thing)

Dad khvahi: crying out for justice or praise

Mudda'a: purpose, objective

MAF: Ghalib's laments are his poems that are crying for justice and praise. The paper on which they are written is their ihram.

Both the keywords in this she'r (dad and ihram) are a triumph of the poet's art of mastery of expression: *dad* means both 'justice' and 'praise'. In the context of poetry, both may become one. To praise a good poem is to do justice to it. In the present context, the poet's consciousness of his being a difficult, almost obscure poet suggests that he is seeking justice which should come in the form of praise.

Ihram is a multivalent word in Arabic. However, *ihram bastan* or *ihram kardan* in Persian also means to 'start on a project, to intend to do something.' Observe the following nuances of ihram in the she'r under discussion:

(1) *Ihram bastan* or *kardan* is just intention. It does not necessarily mean that the intention will be fulfilled. The poet is hinting that he *may fail* in fulfilling his intent. (2) *Ihram* is a sacred object; so is the paper on which poetry is put down. 3) *Ihram* is always white and seamless. So is the paper on which one writes. (White paper, instead of the handmade cream-yellow paper was not uncommon.) 4) The similarity between paper and plain, unsewn cloth is obvious. 5) The hint of the 'paper dress' worn by the supplicants is also clear enough. 6) The speaker himself asserts that what he is doing is *nalah* (lamentation). This brings us back to the *qurban-e saz-e yak dard*: A cry of pain is more powerful than the metricality of both worlds.