

Ghalib Commentary:

Sher #8

Nuskha-e Hamidiyya, p 209-10, verse #6

Composed 1816

زباں سے عرضِ تمنائے خامشی معلوم
مگر وہ خانہ بر انداز گفتگو جانے

The longing for silence cannot be expressed through speech; but

She, the wrecker of life and home, knows only words

Vocabulary:

Khanah bar andaz: one who wrecks or destroys the house, hence, beloved

One of the great pleasures of reading Ghalib is relishing his fascination with words, but also with silence, or absence of words. Often in these early verses he gives precedence to the complexity of words, novelty of idiom, instead of emotional experience. But his preoccupation with words also pushes him to think about the power or inadequacy of language.

For example in the she'r under consideration, the poet wants to explore the speech of silence. The grammar of the first line supports two readings: 1) The desire to be silent and 2) silence as a means of communication of desire. Both these states of mind cannot be expressed to the beloved because she is *khanah bar andaz*, a careless, light hearted person who loves to talk.

The she'r presents a beautiful paradox: the expression of silent desires or the desire to be silent, both are liable to be broken by speech. Speech is not the only form of communication; silence has its own language.

The protagonist desires silence because he wants to be lost in contemplation; it could be contemplation of the beloved's beauty, as expressed in a she'r by Jigar:

Tere jalvoN meiN gum ho kar khudi se be khabar ho kar

Tamanna hai keh rah jauN ze sar ta pa nazar ho kar

Or, as Firaq Gorakhpuri, says:

Tum mukhatib bhi ho qarib bhi ho

Tum ko dekheN keh tum se baat kareN

But Ghalib's she'r is a cut above these because of the ambiguity of tamanna-e khamoshi and the implied assertion that silence is superior to speech. Note the unusualness of the mazmun (the desire to be silent) and the beloved's fascination with just the reverse: the need to talk. Now the beloved becomes the symbol of the ordinary people of the world and the speaker seems to be coming from a higher state of being where words wither away, pure communication remains. As Bedil said:

sukhan agar hama ma'nist nist be kam o besh

ibaratest khamoshi kih intikhab na darad

(Speech, even if it's entirely full of content and meaning

Would still admit of addition or subtraction;

Silence is a text, from which no selection is possible)

Ghalib, like all poets of the Indian style, was much taken with the problem of failure of communication, or the failure of words to communicate. Such themes were never touched by the classical poets.