

## Mir's Universal Compassion

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It is difficult to conceive of a piece of literature devoid of love or compassion. Urdu 'ghazal' is no exception. But there is no poet in Urdu whose verses are so deeply concerned with the pain and grief of humanity as those of Mir Taqi 'Mir'. His statement is mostly personalised, often in the imagery of unrequited love and yearning for the beloved. But the meaning encompasses more than personal sorrow or hurt.

*"Shaayed kissoo ke dil ko lagi us gali men chote,  
Men baghal men shisha-e-dil choor ho gaya".*

(Perhaps in that lane (where the beloved lives) someone's heart received a blow, here in my side the glass vessel of my heart has been splintered).

Those who are acquainted with English poetry may hear in this couplet a distant echo of the meta-physical poet, Donne, of his famous lines about not asking for whom the bell tolls for it tolls

for us..." no man is an island". The lines have been mentioned not to seek any comparison between the two poets, but only to convey the nuances of Mir's couplet to those who are not familiar with Urdu poetry. In all probability the person who received the blow was Mir's rival for his beloved's attention. Still Mir feels his pain. The ambit of significance contains Mir's compassion for all humanity.

'Shisha' or 'shisha-e-dil' is a re-curring symbol in Mir for its fragility and sensitivity; it also melts easily, as easily as it gets broken. The imagery has been used with magical effect in a string of connected couplets:

*"Ja ke Poochha jo ek kaargah-e-meena men  
Dil ki soorat ka bhi ai shisha-garan hai shisha?  
Kahne lage ke kidhar jaata hai behka ai mast,  
Har tarah ka jo tu dekhe hai ke yan hai shisha,  
Dil hi saare thhe ye ek waqt men jo karke  
gudaz,  
Shakl shishe ki banai hai ,kahan hai shisha?"*

(I went where they make wine glasses and asked: O glass makers, do you have a glass made in the shape of heart? Came their answer: Whither art thou going O wayward man, as though intoxicated? The glasses you here of many kinds

*"Ham na kahte thhe ke mat dair-o-haram ki  
raah chal!  
Ab ye daawa hashr tak shekh-o barahman  
men raha ."*

(Did I not tell you: do not take the paths of the temple and the kaaba? Now the contention between the Shaikh and the Brahmin will go on till doomsday.)

The tone here is not that of self righteousness: (I told you so!) It is only a sad comment in a pensive mood.

Mir is well aware that sorrow and pain are inevitable in the world as it is constructed. Much of his poetry is also devoted to impermanence of everything: riches, pride, pleasures and, eventually life itself:

*"Kaha mainne gul ka hai ketna sabaat  
"Ye sun kar kali ne tabassum kiya,"*

(What is flower's permanence, I asked. The bud heard me and smiled.) The unsaid, ironic part of the couplet is that the bud's smile of amusement was the beginning of the end of the flower.

Mir was a tragic poet, indeed. But never, never a maudlin pessimist. He had a deep faith that the times would change. Among many examples, there is a delicious couplet that says: Mir, if I live I will embrace her and see my embrace complete, brimful of flowers. The original words are:

*"Jeete rahe to usse ham aaghosh honge Mir.'  
Labraez gul se dekhien ge jeb-o-kinar hum".*