

IT IS NOT LOVE, IT IS MADNESS

Mirza Ghalib

Introduction to the Poem

Mirza Ghalib, one of the greatest poets of Urdu and Persian literature, often explored themes of **love, longing, pain, and the human heart's contradictions**. In this poem, translated into English, he reflects on his own passionate feelings, which the beloved dismisses as “madness.” Instead of denying it, Ghalib accepts the charge and shows how this so-called madness gives meaning to his life and even increases the beloved's glory. The poem captures the **intensity of love, the persistence of desire, and the acceptance of suffering** as part of the lover's destiny.

Love as Madness

The beloved accuses the poet that what he feels is not love but only madness. Instead of being insulted, the poet embraces the word “madness.” For him, **love is naturally irrational, excessive, and uncontrollable**. By calling it madness, the beloved only confirms the depth of his devotion. This opening sets the tone: love may not fit into logic, but for the poet it is still true and meaningful.

Madness as a Source of Fame

The poet goes further and argues that his madness is not useless. In fact, it is this very madness — his wild passion and constant yearning — that gives the beloved her fame. People talk about her beauty and importance only because of the poet's extreme devotion. Thus, what appears to be madness is also a way of **immortalizing the beloved's name in poetry and memory**.

The Desire to Maintain a Relationship

Ghalib pleads with the beloved not to break ties with him completely. If she cannot return his love, he requests at least to remain connected in some way. Even being her enemy is better than being ignored. This shows the **desperate need for any kind of bond**, even if it causes pain. For the poet, **total separation is unbearable**, while even hostility keeps the connection alive.

Love Beyond Society's Judgment

The poet criticizes the gossip and scandal that arises if he is seen with the beloved. He asks: why should meeting him be considered shameful? If society cannot accept it publicly, he suggests at least a secret, private meeting. This highlights how **love is often trapped between personal desire and social restrictions**. For the lover, however, love is sacred and should not be judged by others.

The Lover as a Stranger

The poet admits he is just a stranger to the beloved, not part of her close circle. Yet he asks, what harm is there if a stranger loves her? Love does not require permission or recognition. It is a natural response to beauty and worth. The poet humbles himself, accepting that his love may be one-sided, but he still claims the **right to feel and express it**.

Acknowledging the Beloved's Greatness

The poet also praises the beloved, saying that her charm and beauty are her own natural gifts. She does not depend on others to prove her value. If someone fails to recognize her greatness, it is their ignorance, not her loss. Here, Ghalib shows **respect and admiration for the beloved** beyond his own personal longing.

The Shortness of Life and the Urgency of Love

Ghalib reflects on the nature of life. Life is short and fleeting, passing as quickly as a flash of lightning. But even in this brief span, there is enough time for love. This expresses his **philosophy of living fully in the moment**. Instead of worrying about life's brevity, he finds meaning in filling it with passion and devotion.

Love Beyond Logic and Debate

The poet refuses to argue about whether love is real, lasting, or practical. To him, such debates are meaningless. Even if love is not what others think, even if it is just another “dilemma,” it still gives his life purpose. This shows Ghalib's **acceptance of love as a mystery** that cannot be explained through reasoning.

A Plea for Permission to Love

The poet begs the beloved to at least allow him the freedom to cry, plead, and express his emotions. Even if she gives him nothing else, granting him the space to love and suffer would be a gift. This shows the **humility of the lover**, who does not demand union but only the chance to express devotion.

Rituals of Love and the Beloved's Cruelty

The poet declares that he will continue the rituals of love — waiting, yearning, weeping, writing poetry — even if cruelty is the beloved's constant habit. He accepts that pain is part of love. The beloved's harshness cannot destroy his passion; instead, it becomes part of the sacred ritual of longing.

Persistence of Desire

At the end, Ghalib (using his poetic name *Asad*) admits that union with the beloved may never happen. Still, the desire itself is enough to keep him alive. Even if he never receives

fulfillment, the hope, yearning, and teasing will continue. This reveals the **endless nature of desire**, which is more important than actual possession in Ghalib's philosophy of love.

Conclusion

"It is Not Love, It is Madness" is a deeply emotional poem where Ghalib presents love not as a logical agreement but as a **passionate madness** that defines human existence. He accepts pain, separation, and even humiliation as part of love, while still finding joy in devotion itself. The poem portrays the contradictions of love: it is madness yet meaningful, painful yet sweet, hopeless yet eternal. Through this, Ghalib captures the **universal human experience of longing, desire, and the beauty of unfulfilled love**.