

ing reality of life, as will become increasingly clear from the chapters on Mir and Ghalib that follow, which discuss in some detail the eighteenth and nineteenth century background respectively.

II

THE ANGUISHED HEART

MIR AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

MIR TAQI MIR WAS BORN in 1723, in a century marked by social change, political upheavals, and a transition from the medieval to the modern. The reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) had stood for a negation of Mughal liberalism and aesthetic relaxation, and was characterized by calculated restraint and conservatism. His death in 1707 was followed by a dismemberment of the empire and assumption of independence by chieftains and governors, in the wake of his decision to divide the country, like any private estate, among his four sons. Simultaneously, the removal of restrictions placed on the mind and emotional make-up of man led to the release of imagination from religious beliefs imposed in an order based on authority, of instinct from attitudes rooted in orthodoxy, revival of music and the arts, recourse to mysticism, awareness of the human condition, and the birth of the Renaissance. The age witnessed the exuberant outburst of great poetry, the triumph of the vernacular, the making and perfection of Urdu from the imperfect idiom of Jafar Ali Zatal¹ and Vali² to the chiseled expression of Mir,

¹ Mir Ja'far Ali Zatal was a seventeenth-century poet whose humorous verses were extremely popular among the people of Delhi. Along with Mohammad Afzal Jhanjhanvi (d. 1625) and Faez Dehlavi, he occupies a historical place in the development of Urdu poetry in Northern India as distinct from the Deccan.

² Shamsuddin Mohammad Vali (1668-1741) is the last of the great Deccan poets. After his visit to Delhi towards the end of the seventeenth century, he adopted the chaste idiom of Delhi, and when his collection reached the capital in 1720 it was received with acclaim and gained instantaneous popularity.

Dard,³ Sauda,⁴ and Insha.⁵ The love of letters that distinguishes the age displays not only the triumph of poetry and a national pride in the common language, but also a freedom of the spirit. It is now that religious thought frees itself from the trammels of the conventional stamp, and the reformative movement of Shah Waliullah (1703-62) appears, which sought to rediscover truth buried under the debris of blind orthodoxy and prejudice, and which, in the next century, was to serve the cause of national freedom. To this end Shah Waliullah translated the Koran into Persian, and his son, Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1823) sanctioned the study of English, while his second son, Shah Rafiuddin, made a literal translation of the Koran into Urdu, and his third son, Shah Abdul Qadir, published the most popular Urdu version of the Koran in 1791.

The problem of Sauda in finally choosing Urdu, therefore, as for Dante in choosing the Illustrious Vernacular, was one which does not concern us today as we have inherited a literary language already well formed. Yet it is the final choice of Urdu that marks the beginning and flowering of the Renaissance and the emancipation of the mind from the darkness of didacticism and crude expression, almost exactly as in pre-Renaissance Italy.

Wherever you look, a poem full
Of apocalyptic sound appears;
Everywhere in my works is found
A tumult like the Day of Doom

³ Khwaja Mir Dard (1720-85) was a renowned mystic and musician and, as poet, ranks with Mir and Sauda. He was also a noted writer of Persian prose.

⁴ Mirza Mohammad Rafi Sauda (1713-80), was a satirical poet, but his lyrical poetry is also sometimes compared to that of Mir and Dard. It is as a satirist, however, that he will live, and his satire *The Incongruity of the Age* remains one of the best in the language.

⁵ Insha Allah Khan Insha (1757-1817) was a fine poet whose lyricism was killed by his courtiership of Sa'adat Ali Khan, the nawab of Lucknow. He is also the author of the first grammar of Urdu and the first Urdu tale in prose.

declared Mir; and the age lived in this fever and this spirit. Poetry did not remain the privilege of the noblemen and the few. It became widespread and penetrated the lowest strata of society. Musha'eras, or poets' gatherings, became the order of the day, and access to literary assemblies was sought by king and commoner alike. Nor was the function of appreciation confined to the literati: even the urchins of Delhi could distinguish the good from the bad. The common prostitutes, peddlers, and beggars alike asked Nazir⁶ to compose verses for them, which he did, glorifying man as never before or since; and Mir directed attention to common people and the poor.

The medieval age had been left behind. It had run parallel to the English in Urdu literature, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, when the literary field was dominated by the religious *mathnavi* or tale in verse, simple or allegorical, embodying orthodox ideas on virtues and morals, or by unsophisticated devotional verse such as had flourished during the Bahmani Kingdom in the Deccan (1374-1526), right from Bandanawaz Gesoo-daraz (1321-1422) to the author of the *Noor Namah* in the sixteenth century. With the decline of the Bahmanis and the coming of Quli Qutub Shah (ruled 1580-1611) to the throne of Golconda, we enter a different world, which was inherited by Vali and passed on by him to the precursors of the Renaissance.

By the middle of the eighteenth century doubts begin to assail the mind, the spirit of enquiry awakens, curiosity raises its head, questionings are heard like rumblings of thunder, the critical spirit, the spirit that refuses to take things on mere authority, is born, and the modern age has already begun, which stands for the more recent of recent things. Mir voices fundamental doubts:

⁶ Vali Mohammad Nazir (1735-1830) is a most remarkable figure in Urdu poetry. He was a great realist and has celebrated man as no other poet has done. In an age of the ghazal, he was a writer of long poems, and his odes are truly great.

What care you for decay or growth
Of life upon the earth?
The dust of many, so many, was used,
How much was created or made!

and casts aspersions even on the absoluteness of God's authority:

We, the helpless, are accused
Of independence, alas, the shame!
You act as it pleases you
And yet we are the ones who get the blame.

All that we are allowed to say
In the affairs of this universe
Is to pass our days in grief and spend
Our nights in anguish weeping tears.

Finding the field of man's collective activity equally barren, Sauda attacks the social evils in his satires. Nazir questions the very basis of a society in which man wronged man, in which poverty and wealth held either extreme, and all human values lay crushed. The imagination of Dard, emancipated from the fear of narrow orthodoxy, soars up to God's own self.

When a social order is disturbed, when life is shaken at the very foundations, when, in the words of Ghalib,⁷

There appears the storm,
There, too, the Spring is on its way,

the most modern spirit of criticism and inquiry has unfurled its banner. The eighteenth century was a period of rising turmoil and quaking authority, when the foundations not only of 1857, when British imperialism triumphed over Indian nationalism, but of 1947, the year of the independence of India and Pakistan, were laid. It is now that the spirit of freedom

⁷ Asadunah Khan Ghalib (1798-1869) was the greatest poet of the nineteenth century. See the present author's book on him: *Ghalib: Selected Poems* (Rome, Is. M.E.O., 1969).

awakens, surprisingly coincidental with a similar movement in Europe where the floodgates of Revolt and Romanticism were opened by Jean Jacques Rousseau whose dates, 1712-78, overlap those of Sauda, Dard, Mir, and Nazir. Coequal with Rousseau's doctrine of "man was born free and everywhere he is in chains" Nazir proclaimed the equality of man in his great Ode on Man, each stanza of which is steeped in contrast and anger at the fate of man at the hands of man:

King is man, and beggar too,
Here on earth, the wretch also;
Rich and wealthy, poor and pauper,
He who fills with gold his coffers,
And one who begs for crumbs, is man.

But while Sauda and Nazir were concerning themselves with society, and Dard was seeking the divine image, Mir Taqi Mir, a more fragile and sensitive soul, was singing of the elements and transcendental beauty of life. Born at Agra (also known as Akbarabad) in 1723, the second son from a second wife of a much respected gentleman who lived the life of a dervish, he was advised by his father to adopt love as the principle of life for, said his father, "love alone rules the earth. Had there been no love the scheme of the universe would have remained imperfect. Life without love is full of anguish, and to lose the heart in love is the height of perfection. Love creates and love destroys. Whatever there is in the world is the glory of love. . . . Become the bulbul of a garden that is perennial. . . . Consider leisure a boon, and try to know thyself. . . ." ⁸

He received his early education from his father and his friend and disciple Syed Amanullah who died when Mir was only ten years of age, followed by his father soon after but in all probability a few years later, leaving his only treasure of some two hundred books to Mir's elder half-brother, and all his debts and responsibilities to Mir. In harmony with the ad-

⁸ *Zikr-e-Mir*, Mir's autobiography in Persian.

vice given at so young an age, as it were, Mir's circumstances created an atmosphere for the adoption of the philosophy of love as an active principle. In search of a living Mir came to Delhi, entrusting the affairs of the household to his younger brother. He succeeded in getting an introduction to a nobleman who was indebted to his father for past kindnesses, and was given a daily stipend of a rupee (now 20 cents, but more in value then). The nobleman,⁹ however, died within a year, in 1738, when Mir was fifteen, and he returned to Agra.

His life until his final return to Delhi is obscure. He is said to have madly but secretly fallen in love with a beautiful maiden of his own family and, the romance having been discovered, outraged his kinsmen, and he decided to leave home.¹⁰ It was, perhaps, under the shadow of this cloud that he left Agra again, in grief and sorrow, and relates the incident in the following words in *Illusion and Dream*, the verse tale which centers round the madness from which he suffered after this self-banishment:

⁹ *Amir-ul-umera Samsam-ud-daula.*

¹⁰ He has written a number of mathnavis, verse tales, dealing with love which, in tone and expression, seem autobiographical. One called *Mo'amlat-e-'Ishq* (Affairs of Love) narrates his love for a young maiden, obviously of his own family by marriage, and how, she being married, their love affair, becoming known, gave rise to a scandal. To avoid accusations they decided to part. We have evidence to believe that Mir did fall in love with a maiden of his own family, but that was before he left his native town for good, as is clear from the opening lines of the truly autobiographical mathnavi, *Illusion and Dream*. When Mir left Agra finally for Delhi he could not have been more than eighteen or nineteen years of age, perhaps less, and there is no evidence whatever that he was then already married, and much less that he also had children, of whom the mathnavi Affairs of Love speaks in Affair No. Six. But then, the line "I became indifferent to wife and children" may be either poetic exaggeration of the feeling of apathy for those near ones opposed to him, or an attempt to hide the autobiographical fact. His step-brother's strong denunciation of Mir to Khan Aarzoo leads one to a conjecture that this maiden may well have been his own step-brother's wife; but there is no evidence to prove that this was so. Yet it stands to reason that this brother should have been married about this time, and the opening Affair of the Mathnavi mentions how he had first only heard of her, which could not be the case with a blood relation.

My burdened heart was never free
Of cares; desires and hopes were vain.
When I reached the age of sense all those
Who were cordial became my enemies. . . .¹¹
Thus I decided to leave my home
With no provision for the way
Except a heavy heart which was
Like dust in the path of beauties fair.
A victim of sadness and despair,
I was banished from the city of love.
When Akbarabad I left my eyes
Were riveted to its doors and walls,
Loath to say goodbye and part
Except in grief from that loved scene. . . .
My fate brought me to Delhi, alas,
To know much sorrow and misery. . . .

He found accommodation in the house of Sirajuddin Ali Khan Aarzoo, the uncle of his half-brother, and a well to do and influential poet and man of letters. Not much is known of his stay with Khan Aarzoo, and the events that took place during this period are confused and open to conjecture. He suffered an attack of insanity and fell a prey to hallucinations in the course of which he saw a beautiful face in the moon which enticed him into love and haunted him day and night. The treatment prescribed bordered on the sadistic, and is described by Mir as nightmare in the verse tale referred to above and in his autobiography *Zikr-e-Mir*. The illness has been ascribed to the unsympathetic treatment he received from Khan Aarzoo, but reasons for it must lie elsewhere, for instance, in the adolescent love affair, which was of great intensity and whose scars he carried for the rest of his life, and which sublimated his conceptions of love and life.

After he recovered from his illness he continued to live

¹¹ Obviously because of his love for the maiden.

with Khan Aarzo and, it stands to reason, completed his education in Persian and Arabic, and perhaps took lessons in versification from him, and began to acquire a reputation as a poet. At some stage, more likely at this time than before, his half-brother wrote to his uncle asking him to desist from befriending Mir. "Mir Mohammad Taqi," wrote his half-brother, "is a perfidious fellow. Pay no attention to his education, nor patronize him."

One day when Khan Aarzo had asked Mir to lunch with him, he is reported to have said something which Mir took ill and immediately left Khan Aarzo's house and went to the public tank at Hauz Kazi. A stranger, recognizing him by his eccentric ways which had already become known, asked Mir to accompany him to the house of a nobleman who was anxious to meet him. Thus, Mir secured the patronage of Re'ayat Khan, the son-in-law of E'temadul-daula. This was in 1749, the year of Muhammad Shah's death and the crowning of Ahmad Shah as the emperor. Re'ayat Khan was, however, killed in action against the Marathas not long after, and Mir had to fend for himself again. But his reputation had now reached its peak and he had become so popular that crowds collected to hear him recite his verses, and followed him whenever he went out, as he himself relates:

This oppressed Mir was once so full of youth,
And noise and bustle the soul of his poetry.
Like magic was the piece of paper on which
He wrote his verses, People gazed wide-eyed
As he recited, so wondrous was his style.
Wherever in Delhi this heart-struck poet went
A tumult as of Doomsday followed him.

It was, thus, easy for him to find patrons as everyone wished to bask in his glory and have him exclusively to himself. But times were hard. Heads fell faster than hail. Delhi

was ravaged by murderous adventurers and ruthless marauders, wringing from Mir the cry:

Thieves and robbers, Sikhs, Marathas,
Kings and beggars, all desire;
Only those have peace who've nought,
Penury alone is riches here.

The nobles and the poor suffered alike. Blood flowed down the streets of the city. There remained neither certainty of life nor honor and wealth. Man became indifferent to man; and Mir migrated to Lucknow at the age of sixty-six, to live in loneliness and grief, and die at the age of eighty-eight in 1810, preceded by his wife, a son, and a daughter.

The span of his life covered a century of tragic and momentous events, of the transformation of the economic, social, and political structure of society. He came to be involved in this historical crisis. As a member of the small intellectual minority in an age when intellectualism was at a low premium, he could only voice affirmation of the historical process or protest against the iniquities of time and the suffering it caused the sensitive of mind and soul. Since the poet could do no more to change the world, he found security in the marvelous psychic and creative resources within himself. The nature of his experience heightened the anguish, and Mir found solace in the living but philosophically disciplined world of his imagination peopled with birds and flowers, in which the seasons, such as the Spring, assumed the form of living beings, and existence and nonexistence became one. The instability of human glory led him to a more permanent view of life, the bloodshed and hatred to love of beauty, the mutability of wealth and power to transcendentalism. His poetry is a true reflection of his experience and life. It was his very breath, and there is nothing artificial or professional about his art. He was primarily a poet of love, a theme that had been impressed

upon his mind even in childhood. No other poet has shown such understanding of the heart as Mir has done, producing on its fragile strings melodies filled with the music of the spheres. Consequently, he could bring to Urdu poetry nobility and grace, and a wider universal appeal. He was a true representative of the Renaissance and presented its ideals:

Meet one who is a man and keep his company
Who does not pride himself on knowledge and ability;
When eloquent, a world may flock to hear him speak,
When silent, in himself a whole world he should be.

His conception of man is, thus, noble, and raises him to a height nearest God, to the position of a god, without deterring from the divinity of God, which only one who had known the inner light and ecstasy of creation could comprehend:

The be-all and the end-all
Of life we are alone;
Apart from our own selves
Existence is unknown.

All grace and humility
To us alone are drawn;
The object of our worship
We consider man alone.

Reality without us
Would never have taken form;
Men of sight acknowledge
Man as the worshiped one.

We had appeared to view
And know ourselves alone;
But then, this mystery
To a chosen few is known.

But his real attitude is transcendental:

We're not as simple as we seem:
It's only when the sky revolves

For years that from the curtain of dust
Man appears.

Transcendental too in his attitude to love, the object of which is celestial and of which he is never oblivious, Mir goes beyond the physical and enlightens the nature of Reality:

There surely is a reason,
O Lord, for this rotation
And endless whirling: Love fills the entire
Space of heavens.

Since the duality of the physical and the divine remains by virtue of the accidents of birth, which is inconsistent with any steady philosophy which must look at life as a continuity and whole, Mir makes his attitude quite clear by defining the essence of his transcendentalism:

In one breath you have consumed
The cosmos and the world:
O Love, there is love
To consume thee as well.

Thus, existence, despite its varied aspects, remains one unity whose warp and woof are made up of the same thread, the distinction between the earthly and divine being removed by the all-destroying and all-creating love, the principle on which the scheme of the universe depends.

Connected with this is his notion of the heart which is the seat of emotional consciousness, and is awakened by a perception of the external world through the senses. It stands for more than the corporeal organ which can be transplanted, and is bound up with the supraconscious state of gnosis and transcendental experience. It is active even when no feelings are being expressed, and is directed wherever the eye looks. It watches all that is within, and is thus distinguished from life which includes both fate and destiny, and which is subservient to and dependent upon divine will or command: "Be:

and it came into being,"¹² and represents the earthly and destructible element. The heart, on the contrary, is the eternal and undying principle, that which partakes of the Supreme Ultimate, the God of all Emptiness and Life. This alone explains the apparent contradiction between Mir's and the East's emphasis on the transitoriness and ephemeral nature of life, the world of illusion and shadows on the one hand, and the principle which exists in itself, the Thou of the sufi, the Way of the Taoist, Nirvana of Buddha, the Word and God of occidental religions, the heavenly heart which is the seat and the germ of all existence and being, the supreme energy, which manifests itself when the heart is absolutely still and in harmony with the still center that gave it birth. It is not a mere symbol based on poetic convention, as others like 'bud,' 'painting,' 'the poor man's lamp,' and many more are not in Mir.

To look for Mir's mind one has, therefore, to look at his verses on the heart, of which he is the greatest poet, and through which he expresses a whole philosophy of love and life. It is in the heart that his father's advice to follow the path of love becomes concentrated. And the heart becomes in Mir the symbol of this love and is thus distinguished by him. It is the heart that acquaints him with the essence of all being, and shows him the way:

Become acquainted with the path of the cleft heart:
You'll find the way then to the loved one open up.

He calls it by a hundred names, the seeking, the bereaved, the knowing, the happy, the lost, the conscious, and many others. It is the heart alone that lasts, the true heart. All else passes:

Halls and pillars, palaces, dust and earth, all pass:
Lay then the foundations of the ascetic heart.

Without the heart no spark is lit, no fusion takes place and no explosion:

¹² Koran: III, 47.

Ever since created was the heart
The body has been ablaze.
So fell this spark
The mantle went up in flames.

He pounds his heart, cuts it up, in the imagination at least, when it fails to respond to the call.¹³ He raises it to the highest station to rule the world. It occupies a central place in Mir's poetry as a pivot on which the plan of love and life revolves. It is his whole philosophy, a message to his generation and humanity to awaken to a fuller way, a deeper realization of life.

If we pursue Mir's thought minutely it is surprisingly akin to the English Blake's maxim that "without contraries is no progression." Yet Mir fuses the contraries to produce the spark through the catalytic agent of the heart, both the outward manifestation and the inner awareness of the principle and harmony of existence, the temporary and the eternal, the Many and the One reflected in the mirror of his eternal mind:

The garden of the world bloomed all except
This wonder and this mystery:
What we had taken to be the heart
Was only a bud in a painting.

and more pointedly:

If one has the eye this world
Is like a house of mirrors:
Within the walls the face
Is visible.

What stops the heart from realizing its ultimate aim and union with the Supreme Ultimate is the getting involved in regret, the ultimate handicap of that philosophical impossibility, the flesh:

¹³ I am indebted to my wife for this aspect of Mir's thought.

Being all desire from head to foot
Has made a slave and servant of me;
Or else, had I been heart all free
Of desire, God I would have been.

This may be termed a romantic attitude; and Mir is a Romantic, as great a one as William Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, with whom he is contemporary and shares the creative quality of an imagination which believed in, and saw, the invisible behind all things visible, the unseen power active everywhere, which gave to the world its shape and color, not merely the memory of something seen in a forgotten past in some pre-existence as by Plato, but vital and alive, almost perceptible to those who were gifted with feeling and sight. This is not just religious faith, as in Dard whose poetry is the expression of the mystical comprehension and belief in the oneness and unity of God. In Mir it is the principle, the very soul of existence, an intuitive realization of the unseen order, and imaginative awareness of a cosmic unity which gives to things identity and name. The English poets did not possess this quality of the imagination which gave to Mir the insight and consciousness of an almost physical presence of the transcendental spirit. The religious attitude confines it to identification, and approaches it through the intercession of a being already near the identified, without which no identifiable approach is possible. In its intensest form it amounts to absorption and eradication of all consciousness of duality in a state of ecstatic identity, as in the case of the Persian mystic Hallaj, thus moving away from the imaginative and poetic as something fraught with danger, to the central article of faith, that it might pervert intention and belief, the same perhaps which lay behind the condemnation of the poets in both Plato and the Koran. In Mir, on the contrary, it is a quality of creative imagination which sees the unseen in the visible, the colors of the garden, the motion of the stars, the opening of the bud, the anguish of the bulbul's heart, in

the same way as he sees the intensity of his emotions in physical form, palpitating within and throbbing to the naked eye.

This is the quality common to the great Romantic poets of England already named, a quality no other poet of Europe has displayed, and no other poet of the East besides Mir has possessed. It did stand in danger of being frustrated in him by many disappointments and vicissitudes of life, or of swinging to the other extreme of being lost in a preoccupation with the eternal to the exclusion of material reality. Fortunately, Mir's vision was so complete that he never strays too far. In fact, every jolt he received at the hands of life, every setback he suffered, only confirmed him in his belief and the consistency of his attitude. He escapes other dangers inherent in the romantic approach, of fancy and dreams, and the exacting demands which the romantic outlook imposes on the mind, of vagueness or approaching the fantastic in the conception of the unseen order of things. Mir was so clear in his mind about the Absolute, and his transcendentalism was so perfect, that he does not waver; and each veil on the face of Beauty, every motion of the wind and the waters, each feeling of anguish or joy, communicated to him the message of the order that lay beyond, and connected up the moment of existence with moments that were and were to be in a continuity of what was and was to come. So perfect is the vision, so deep his belief, that it lifts him out of the mire of everyday things into the celestial atmosphere.

The cosmic order of the followers of the orthodox creed and the mystical poets is definitive and based on the strict doctrines of Islam or derived from them. Their state is not a state of vision or a splendid dream. It is one of passion and frenzy, as in Dard, the only poet consistently lost in the pursuit of his goal; or as in the other poets where it takes various forms of Good and Evil, rejection and acceptance, beatification and grief. Mir rejects the orthodox creed, in the imagination at least:

Wherefore ask the faith of Mir?
He sits in the temple now, 'tis said,
A caste-mark painted on his brow,
Long lost the faith of Mohammed.

His religion is love which he extols in different ways, both
wistful and affirmative:

The greatest sinner, Mir, was he
Who first adopted love as his
Religion.

and more positively:

Without love harmony
And joy will disappear;
The poets are true,
God is love.

And the idea expands into monism and immanence of God:

At times the rose, at times the hue,
At times the scent of the garden;
Never does that multifarious one
Appear to view as one.

His conception of the Beyond is intimately bound up with
his monistic attitude to Nature and Beauty:

Someone seemed to be
There though none called to me,
Even when I looked around
And called out anxiously.
Yet surely some beauty lies
Hidden behind the sky,
The stars wink constantly
And smile at her all night.

Mir was too individualistic to fall in line with orthodoxy
which a definitive creed demands. His imagination could not

be satisfied with the conventional pattern and landscape of
the religious conception. He seldom speaks of the Paradise or
Hell of the Koran. Death is a positive reality, and not the end
of life:

Death is a pause of life,
For we shall onward go
Having rested a while.

And life after death is a continuity of this existence, as this is
of the one before it:

A crowd of love's torments
Accompanies my breath,
Even to the other world I take
A tumult with me.

The Islamic belief puts man in the center, the very core of
existence. All things, therefore, are for man so that he glori-
fies the Maker, and God justifies His ways to men. Mir's in-
spiration is not satisfied with a one-sided picture. To him man
alone is not the privileged and favored of all creation, though
he is undoubtedly gifted with sight and emotion to be con-
scious of Time and Timelessness, which gives him an insight
into the act of creation as well as Creation as a whole:

The lamp was bequeathed to me
When neither breeze
Nor air had even been
Created in the world.

But that is because of the gift of the conscious heart which
man possesses. Otherwise, each object in Nature, everything
created, is endowed with sense and feeling, and is man's part-
ner in sharing the joys of existence both celestial and earthly:

Of whose love is the sea
Desirous? Each wave

That rises has its arms
Spread out for an embrace.

In other words, Mir looks at Creation as an entity and a whole. This no lesser poet could know, nor could this vision fire imaginations less creative. He is aware of this power and of that aesthetic vitality which gives substance to insubstantial things, life eternal to the inconsequential phenomena of every day life. This knowledge lies behind the secret of his happiness:

So full is her ocean of loveliness
That from the crest to the very trough
Of the stormy wave,
Wherever the eye of desire falls,
There's joy and joy and love's embrace.

In his attitude to Beauty Mir harmonizes the external reality with the inner vision, the abstract thought with concrete imagery:

In pursuit of your image
My distract thought
Has wandered everywhere
Like a pauper's lamp.

and achieves a unity of contraries through a quickening of the spirit, and an amazing understanding of the meaning of life.

The attitude of the English Romantic poets to Beauty is indeterminate. The intimations of perfection which they have are vague, as those of immortality are incipient. They have no clear perception of absolute beauty. Theirs is a haunting emotion, a vague agitation of the soul, but no comprehension of the substance and form of the Beyond. Blake is, perhaps, the only one of them to have some understanding of the Apocalypse; and through his great visions he could see the chaotic images of infinite beauty that have an aesthetic valid-

ity. In so far as he does that he imparts to the objects of his visions a singular power and a sense of profundity; and his expression takes on significant tones and a mysterious meaning. It does not, however, remain free of confusion. His imagination gets bogged in the process of clarification of the forms he creates to explain the significance of the apocalyptic visions; and what remains is a formless feeling, mighty stirring of the dark, indeterminate depth of the mind, awakening simultaneously many thoughts and ideas.

The breadth of Mir's inspiration is not so incomprehensible. His imagination does not run wild into an apocalypse of confusing visions. He has a clear picture in his mind of the nature of Beauty and the causes of Existence. Reality to him is a straight line from the Beyond to the Beyond, broken in the middle by a series of accidents which resulted in the crass deviation of creation, causing the gap in the line of Existence which must, eventually, be filled by the process of perception to join up with the continuous line lost in the finity of life. This accidental deviation into the world of imperfect reality causes all his sorrow and lies at the root of his great dejection. But the consciousness of the legacy of Love and Light, handed him before the cataclysmic break took place, sustains his heart and inspiration; and the knowledge that he will finally meet the lost trail and join it with the accumulated vitality of the experiences of accidental birth, leads to the triumph of his imagination, which is suffused with glory and effulgence:

Absorbed in splendor in this garden
Is that lustrous rose. Wherever you look
There's nothing else that is visible,
There is nothing else to see.

His poetry is undoubtedly full of the sadness of life, its impermanence and the mutability of human glory, grief at the loss of beauty and of Spring, the bulbul's anguished love

for the rose. But the times he lived in were out of joint; life was falling to pieces; and no one could escape the orbit of hopelessness and despair. Yet the passing events communicated to him something more positive, a philosophy of the nature of Reality:

Put each step here
With the greatest care;
This manufactory
Is a workshop, alas,
Of the maker of glass.

It is, thus, illusory, but with a difference. The illusion has a dual aspect, refractive and celestial, this-worldly and other-worldly, physical and transcendental, as elsewhere in Mir. He never allows us to forget the objective truth, and establishes a connection between the object and the subject through an awareness of Reality. That is why he never sheds tears but stops halfway:

My heart is filled to overflowing
Like a glass, O bearer of the cup.
If the flask of wine were brought to me
I'll fall upon its neck and cry,
And cry my fill.

Out of this desire emerges the method of Mir's thought, which transforms the world of men and matter to its insubstantial form, the reality as it appears to one transcending the panorama of illusory pictures. In the final analysis it is all a shadow play; and Mir lays bare the nebulous structure of Reality in moments of imaginative perception. The only substantial residue that remains is the insubstantiality of substantial things:

Though dust it is, a wave
It seems upon the face of the sea.

Life's deep and fathomless ocean
Is like a mirage, O Mir.

What to him was the pulse of life did not reside in the imagination, but in Love celestial whose source lies elsewhere than the corporeal heart or the world of shadows. It is the principle, the harmony, on which the scheme of existence itself rests, Love which creates and Love which destroys. But when the source dries up, what then, what then remains? And that is what happens in the words of Mir:

There was the day when love had surged
Within me like a wave; but if
You see the eye bedewed
Now it's a vortex and whirlpool.

It is, thus, the loss of the feeling heart which communicates the music of sadness to his soul:

The whole of life, so loved, was spent
In lamenting only the heart;
This lover of Love cannot remain
Happy or well at all.

What sustains him is the knowledge of a supreme being:

The whole of this universe
Is full of his effulgence;
Wherever the eye can see
He is the reality.

and of pre-existence in nonexistence to which we shall return. Pre-existence and post-existence are to him two aspects of the same reality, and this life is only the moment of separation in Eternity, sung so eloquently by the great Jalaluddin of Roum:

Listen to the flute and its complaints
And anguished tale of separation.

Mir's plaint is no less anguished in this state of separation which breaks up the continuity of Existence. He distinguishes the different aspects, although the song is the same.

Viewed closely, and in the context of the Renaissance, of which he is the fullest representative, he stands for the release of the spirit from the theological dictate of divine will as the basis of creation. While expressing the mystical equation of God-man from the orthodox point of view, the other great exponent of the spiritual Renaissance of the eighteenth century, Khwaja Mir Dard, is swayed by philosophical doubt about the why, the wherefrom, and the whither of existence. Hitherto the unquestioned answer had been the Koranic: "We are from God, and unto Him shall we return."¹⁴ But a man-God situation now appears which centers round the age-old problem: What is existence; where do I come from; where do I go; what is the purpose of my being? Dard is uncertain:

Blame was all
That we received;
What we were born for
Never achieved.

Do you perchance,
O Mir Dard, know
Wherefrom we came
And whither go?

The implication of a purpose in the first stanza is left unexplained, and the position resolves itself into negativism, leaving us where we were. The only conclusion seems the existencelessness of existence:

So like a spark
Is beingless being;
It's just as well
I've lived my term.

¹⁴ Koran: II, 156.

This implies invalidation of the Islamic (and the Christian¹⁵) conception, and of Reason, in so far as its limitation to reveal the Absolute truth is concerned, and leans dangerously towards the Existentialist position that "existence precedes essence" in the expression of Sartre. Even when Dard explains the mystical situation in terms of the divine:

You should not think the universe's plan
Is imperfect. There's a guiding hand
Behind its sorcery

the purpose of existence remains unsolved, recognition and worship of the Deity within ourselves or outside in Nature not taking us beyond the center of consciousness, for God is here above and outside of creation. Mir attempts an interim answer in terms of a man-God equation, and does, in fact, conform to the Existentialist view:

The be-all and the end-all
Of life we are alone;
Apart from our own selves
Existence is unknown.

The Reality without us
Would never have taken form;
The men of sight acknowledge
Man as the worshiped one.

It remains confined to man's egocentric world, and amounts only to a redemption of consciousness, the Ego, that which has developed out of external reality. In terms of this Mir's answer:

We had appeared to view
And know ourselves alone;

¹⁵ Consider the dual conception of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Son of Man, for instance, who, while serving as an intercessionary agent, brings God to the earth and shortens the span of the bridge over the gulf between divinity and worldliness.

But then, this mystery
To a chosen few is known

could be a possible way out of the predicament, but only in relation to a fragmentary view of life. But Mir moves on to a higher position and develops a more comprehensive attitude which places the definite in the ultimate, the limited in the unlimitable, existence in essence. He presents a conception of cosmogony which has its center in that which exists through itself, called by the Confucians the center of emptiness, by the Buddhists the terrace of living, by the Taoists the ancestral land or the space of former heaven. Arriving at it through an intuitive comprehension Mir calls it nonexistence or Eternity. This is primal energy which exists through itself and is the seed, the spirit, the animus and anima of the Secret of the Golden Flower.¹⁶ Until his creation as primal creature man abides in the Great One in absolute tranquillity which is disturbed by the note of individuation when human nature and life are separated. Thus Mir:

Since I have come into this life
I have found no peace or rest;
I wish my eyes had never opened
From my dream in happy nonexistence.

Even nonexistence is viewed as a dream, for who can prove its reality? But for this separation our position would have been different:

We should have freely known this garden
Like the intimate scent of the rose;
Then wafted we would have with the breeze,
And breeze itself we would have been.

Which shows that the cosmos and psyche are one, that both obey the same law. This is an expression of revolt against sys-

¹⁶ A Chinese doctrine, translated and explained by Richard Wilhelm and C. G. Jung, *I Ching* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 22.

tem and systematization, and is a vindication of man's destiny to exist, to strive, to change, to develop and look forward to a future, not only in the world, but Cosmos and Eternity, and he, therefore, welcomes the prospect of the return:

Although the journey from life
To post-existence was long,
Once I undertook it
I finished it in one breath.

There is, thus, a backward-flowing consciousness or energy which goes back to the psychogenic forces of the collective unconscious, the great mystery, and a forward-looking realization of life which soars to suprahuman heights, and returns to itself, from nonexistence to nonexistence, as a conscious spirit and not only an illusory being doomed to dissolution, thus achieving release from the shadowy world of image and form into which we had come as a result of accidents:

This world of no foundations lies
Along the path of a flood
Of accidents,
So do not ever care to build
Upon this desolate ruin.

Mir's affirmation of existence in nonexistence is on a higher plane of thinking and revelation where neither God is dead, as Nietzsche feared, nor man is an end in himself, which was the cause of Kierkegaard's anguish, and which is inherent in the modern preoccupation with "Self" and the belief that "inwardness" is the sole principle of Reality. Only a poet gifted with supreme intuition and the quality of divine imagination could partake in the divinity of life, which lifts the soul into the splendid realm of the Supreme Ultimate.

Mir has never been thought of as a mystic; yet he is not only a gnostic but presents a new system, a new path along which man could reach the divine through the hidden psy-

chogenic forces within him, the conscious heart which directs the inner self to the ultimate reality:

Caressing one another noise
And uproar rise with swelling waves;
What secret in the ocean, O Lord,
Inspires them with such ardent love?

The surging wave an arched eyebrow,
An eye indeed is every bubble,
And if some sweet one's talk is the pearl,
A sweet one's ear then is the shell.

His gnosis gives ample proof of his philosophic discipline which, though different from any other religious system, is akin to that of Buddhism, Taoism, and other systems of yoga which prove that psychic forces could be disciplined and transcendental experience brought within the reach of man, whose basis, though esoteric, is, nonetheless, psychological. Mir is aware of this principle of the bipolarity of life. It runs through his poetry as a living consciousness. It is the very warp and woof of the rich brocade of his imagination, and he sings of it with both regret and ecstasy:

Depart now we, the admirers
Of this picture gallery, and once
Gone we shall never return
To our old frames again. . . .

Mir is a poet par excellence, of all facets and the many-colored beauty of life, a consummate artist in words and imagery, one so gentle that even the breeze could disturb his calm:

I asked the rose at dawn,
How did the bulbul in affliction fare?
It pointed to some feathers
That lay scattered in the garden: There.

Though primarily a poet of love, even love disturbs the equanimity of his soul:

Serenely I walked along my own
Path, alone, O Mir;
For nothing by way of love has he
Started caviling at me.

and the chords of creation and death begin to sound in his ears:

Upturned were cups and spilt
The flask of wine;
Here in my drunkenness
Was uproar, noise,
And revelry.

He lived in two worlds, one celestial and divine, the other worldly. The celestial surrounded him on all sides. The world he saw as a vain and transitory place, a mere caravan-serai, and his suffering not as something abstract, but in the form of a material object with a separate existence of its own. He had the great quality of remaining aloof, even from himself, and outside of himself, and could see his own self as a separate object:

Even though I smashed the glass
I could not know
That we
Were familiar.

Thus he saw the flame within the intenser light of recognition and recollection of what was, the truth behind the shifting reality, what I should call insubstantialization. Hence we can know a great deal about his thought and eternal mind, the mind that expressed its purpose in terms of the all-perceiving heart, symbol of love and life, the world, and celestial light, and about the joys and sorrows, anguish and ecstasy. His feel-

ings become physical sensations, and time and timelessness become one in the world of changing shadows and substantial insubstantiality. Mir is a supreme magician who could prove the unproven, and unprove what to human beings has seemed for ever real:

One evening I walked into the shop of those who blow the glass
And asked: O makers of the cup, have you perchance a glass
Shaped like the heart? They laughed and said: Thou wanderest
in vain,

O Mir; each cup thou seest, round or oval, every glass,
Was once a heart that we have melted on the fire and blown
Into a cup. That's all thou seest here. There is no glass.

He created a burning beauty from the intensity and sensitivity of his nature, and used language with a sorcery that weaves a net of light around words, discarding the suspect and less perfect, making Urdu illustrious and noble. His influence over others, his fellow craftsmen and the discriminating, even the urchins of Delhi, remained lasting and deep, except over the crude, insensitive Calibans who occasionally defile the well of literature. The greatest poets of Urdu including Ghalib, Momin, and Dagh, and the others, owe a debt to him. They have borrowed so freely from him that one begins to marvel at the breadth and versatility of his genius.

To our day the magic of his imagery continues to haunt and enchant, and none can resist the compelling force and appeal his poetry possesses. Those who have failed to live in his world do not know what they have missed in their preoccupation with false gods—the color and the Spring, the song and the wave of the stormy sea, the silken breeze, the ethereal skies, the bulbul's afflicted love, and beauty everlasting, overshadowed, above all, by the hovering soul of Mir:

What care I for the joys
Of festivity? Having seen

The saki's eyes I've journeyed
Ahead of the lovers of wine.

The living heart is active everywhere, as in the realm of emotions, so in Nature for which he has a deep and intimate feeling bordering on love. He could paint its outward appearance in primary colors:

If you like to visit the garden, go
Now; for this is the month of Spring;
The leaves are green and flowering trees
Are in full bloom;
The clouds hang low
And rain is gently falling.

The heart feels like a throbbing wound,
The tears have turned to one red flood;
This crimson-faced poppy of love
Dries up life and drains all blood.

It awakens in him primeval emotions, both beauty of objective sights and awe of hidden powers. With the delight of a child living in a world of birds and flowers, Mir calls to his aid his inseparable friend, the little bulbul, to sound the note of warning:

This is the time when fresh, green leaves
Appear upon the trees;
And branch and twig of plant and shrub
Are bent with bloom and seed.

With blaze of roses' color, Mir,
The garden is on fire;
The bulbul sounds a warning note:
Go past, O sir, beware!

It communicates to him the sadness of the beautiful hour and of passing things:

Go into the garden
Like everything that's green;

Walk by the river's side:
How dear life passes by
Like a flowing stream.

And though he touched more somber chords of anguish and memory, nothing of his experience, nothing in the nature of Reality, could deprive him of the song in his heart, the music in his soul, the pure joy of love and life and things beautiful:

Come into the garden
Where hearts will be refreshed.
There I shall speak of sorrows
That befell the loving heart
And sing to the birds
My woe-filled plaints,
Relate to the rose the tale
Of my afflicted soul.

Although that beauty,
True rival of the Spring,
Thinks that vernal is
The color of our love,
On leaves that sere
In Autumn, I
Will write the sorrowful tale
Of my heart, as sad and pale.

The garden here is not merely an enclosure full of trees and flowers, nor the rose the flower we know, nor the bulbul the singing bird though resident in the garden. These are but symbols created by Mir to express emotions more subtle than the insensitive can understand. The garden is the close of life, and the fire that dyes the garden rich, love eternal. In his transcendentalism Mir creates new and newer worlds, and peoples them with the creatures of his feelings too abstract to be understood other than in terms of physical forms. For his was a lonely figure wandering through the mazes of air and sky, the universe of Existence and the Void, one with Life as

its visible companion in flesh and blood, full of regret and desire, regret at the great separation, desire for reunion with what was but no longer is—the state of bliss in what will be. Not in vain is he filled with the ecstasy of wine, smashing cups and flask, flying far ahead of the company of revelers on the wings of poetry.

Never before Mir, and never since, has poetry been so sheer and inspiring; never has poet reached the hidden powers of creation, the source and fountainhead of imagination so divine, compelling of love and life. Not even Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, or Keats reached the mysterious heights of which Mir writes with such simplicity and grace:

From door to door in the land of Love
Has spread the flame and fire of Hell;
Inflame us not, dissembling preacher,
This fire is not confined to earth.

This was the world he lived in, the pitch at which he felt and breathed. The intensity of his mind, the fire of his imagination, burnt at a heat no wings of angels could escape unscathed.

It is easy to misunderstand a poet like him and his symbols, therefore, for only those blessed with the love of Beauty and with vision can appreciate. And Mir has been maligned for symbols which minds of a lower order have only vulgarized:

How simple is Mir's heart that he goes
For medicine to the druggist's son
Who was himself the cause of his malady.

which does not mean merely what it says. The malady is the malady of Life, and the druggist's son the quack who endangers it. It is a concept more apt in our day and shows how we seek a panacea for life from those who are themselves diseased and incapable of solving the problems they are faced with, a desperate order looking up to one floundering in a morass.

Mir's mind could move in many directions, his eyes rolling in a fine frenzy to focus his gaze on the substance of the insubstantial. To appreciate poetry of this order one has to project one's mind a little beyond the immediacy of material reality. For, arising out of the hard facts of life, it takes us into the realms of the imagination. Any approach through the intellect alone is apt to disturb the intimacy of appeal, touch off a fruitless chain of reactions, and result in what Mir expressed so well:

It's at such gatherings
That lives are lost,
For Beauty does not spare
And love does not
Know economy.¹⁷

¹⁷ The selections from Mir are confined to ghazals from the First Diwan alone out of six. The edition used was the one edited by Abdul Bari Asi, published by Newal Kishore Press, Lucknow, 1940, supplemented by the 1811 edition of Mir's works published by the Fort William College, Calcutta. A few ghazals have been added from the other diwans, but cannot be considered to be representative of them.

III

THE MOLTEN FLAME

THE AGE OF GHALIB

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY in India was an age of upheavals, doubts, and uncertainties, religious controversies, esoteric doctrines, orthodoxy and moral recession, revolts and acceptance, decay and disorder, but also of hope as a new order was emerging like

Dispersed light in the mirror, a speck of dust
Caught in the sunlight in the window

to use Ghalib's imagery. With the passing of the care of Urdu and the culture of India to British hands under the treaty of 1765, British ascendancy had been acknowledged. The people still owed allegiance to the Mughal emperor, but found no glory at the court, which was incapable of inspiring any sense of national pride. Torn between the reality and a future still incomprehensible, they felt helpless if not stunned. Some were exasperated into taking up arms under the banner of religion, and some were lost in the pursuit of pleasures or apathy typical of defeatism. Psychologically it was a difficult period of warring loyalties, instinct demanding attachment to what was national, expediency suggesting alignment with a power that had virtual control of India. Attitudes underwent a change. The main pattern of culture remained oriental, but Western ways were making inroads into the minds of men. Since knowledge of alien manners and customs was superficial, and imitation inherent in the situation, a laxity became visible in life and morals, encouraged by the loosening hold of