

C.M. NAIM

Mir on His Patrons

[The following consists of excerpts from my translation of Muḥammad Taqī Mīr's autobiography, *Ẓikr-e Mīr*. They throw interesting light on Mīr's education and his dealings with his many patrons. Except to indicate the dates for some of the events mentioned, all references and annotations have been excluded. The page numbers at the end of each excerpt refer to the first printed edition of the book: 'Abdu 'l-Ḥaḡ, ed., *Ẓikr-e Mīr* (Aurangabad: Anjuman-e Urdū Press, 1928).]

ONE day that certain uncle of mine [Sirājud 'd-Dīn 'Alī Khān "Ārzū"] asked me to eat with him. But when he spoke to me nastily, I was disgusted and got up without touching the food. Since I expected nothing from him, I left his house in the evening and took the road to the Jāmi' Masjid. But somehow I lost my way and ended up at Ḥauḡ Qāzī, which is a small reservoir of water near the mansion of Vazīru 'l-Mamālik I'timādu 'd-Daula. As I was getting a drink of water, a man named 'Alīmu 'l-Lāh approached me and asked, "Aren't you Mīr Muḥammad Taqī Mīr?" I asked, "How did you guess?" He replied, "Your crazy ways are well known. Since the day he heard some of your subtle verses, Rī'āyat Khān—son of 'Azīmu 'l-Lāh Khān, the husband of I'timādu 'd-Daula Qamaru 'd-Dīn Khān's sister—has been most eager to meet you. If you would meet him through me it would also provide me a way to pay him my respects."

I went with the man and met Rī'āyat Khān. He received me civilly and made me his companion. I gained some succor from him and was freed from the clutches of indigence. [67]

When [Aḥmad] Shāh Durrānī attacked Lahore¹ and Shāh Navāz Khān (son of Zakariyā Khān), who was the *ṣabadār*, fled from Lahore, the Vazīr [I'timādu 'd-Daula Qamaru 'd-Dīn Khān] and Ṣafdar Jaṅg and Īshar Siṅgh^h [the Rājā of Jaipur], the son of Rājā Jai Siṅgh^h, a prominent zamindar, took Prince Aḥmad Shāh, the son of the Emperor [Muḥammad Shāh] with them and went out to do battle. They had reached beyond Sirhind when the Vazīr was hit by a cannon ball and the aforementioned zamindar decamped. Then Ṣafdar Jaṅg and Mu'īnu 'l-Mulk (son of the martyred Vazīr) placed Prince Aḥmad Shāh on an elephant and attacked the Afghans.² I was with the aforementioned [Ri'āyat] Khān on that journey and performed many services. [68]

One moonlit night, a young singer was performing before the Khān on the terrace. When the Khān saw me, he said, “Mīr Ṣāhib, please teach this boy a few *rēkhta* verses of yours so that he might properly set them in [the mode of] *basta* and sing [for me].” I replied, “I cannot possibly do that.” He said, “Please, for my sake.” Since I was dependent on him I had to obey, and I taught the boy five *rēkhta* couplets. But it sat heavy on my delicate nature and, after a few days, I took to staying at home. The Khān sent kind messages but I didn't go, and gave up my position [in his household]. The noble nature of that man did not like to leave this faqīr in need. Out of regard for me, he gave my brother, Mīr Muḥammad Raḏī, a horse from his own stable and put him in his service. When, after a very long time, I went to see him, the Khān apologized profusely; I replied, “What is past is done with.”

After things went on that way for a while, I sought employment in the household of *Navāb Bahādur* [Jāvid Khān] and was successful. The *bakhshī* of his army, Asad Yār Khān, informed the Navāb of my condition and got him to excuse me from the requirements of keeping a horse and serving [in the army]. He [Asad Yār Khān] used to respect me a great deal and also helped me a lot. May God be kind to him. [70–1]

Ḍulfiqār Jaṅg, the Mīr Bakhshī, due to the animosity of Navāb Bahādur, lost his position, and the rank of Amīru 'l-Umarā' was bestowed upon Āṣaf Jāh's son, Ghāziū 'd-Dīn Khān Fīrūz Jaṅg. He left for the Deccan to put things there in order, but died on the way from cholera. Now the robes of

¹8–12 January 1748.

²Battle of Manupur, 11 March 1748.

the rank of [Mīr] Bakhshī were put on by his son, ‘Imādu ’l-Mulk. During that time I stopped meeting with friends altogether and devoted myself to studying the *Muṭavval* [the famous treatise on Rhetoric by Taftazānī].

When Ṣafdar Jaṅg had Navāb Bahādur killed through deceit and a whole world of people suffered,³ I too lost my position. Then Mahā Narāin, the Dīvān of the Vazir [i.e., Ṣafdar Jaṅg], sent me something through his own Dīvān, Mīr Najmud ’d-Dīn ‘Alī, whose *takhalluṣ* was “Salām” and who was the son of Mīr Sharafu ’d-Dīn ‘Alī “Payām,” and expressed great desire to see me. I placed my trust in his bountiful hand and spent some months in comfort. [71–2]

After two or three months, Rājā Jugal Kishōr, who had been the *vakīl* [of the governor] of Bengal during the reign of Muḥammad Shāh and had been living in prosperity, came and took me to his house and requested me to look over and correct his verses. I didn’t find them worthy of correction and scrawled a line across most of them.

In the meantime, Rājā Nagar Mal, who had been [Muḥammad Shāh’s] Dīvān of *Khālīṣā* and *Tan*, was elevated to the position of Nā’ib Vazīr and given the titles of Mahārāja and ‘Umdatul-Mulk. Because he gave shelter in his own house to the oppressed of the city and did justice to them, those who were in power became his enemies. And so when he attended on the Emperor he was himself a magnificent and awe-inspiring sight and his soldiers were fully at the ready. He did not let himself be deceived by those who wished ill to him and he lived towering over others. At that time, Ṣamṣāmu ’d-Daula, the Mīr Bakhshī, died of consumption.⁴ His son, an utterly worthless fellow, was appointed in his place. [75]

One day I complained of the hard times to Rājā Jugal Kishōr. That noble person blushed with shame and said, “My own shawl is full of holes.’ Otherwise, I wouldn’t deny it to you if I had anything.” Then one day he rode out to the house of Rājā Nagar Mal and, after mentioning me to the Rājā, had me sent for. I went and was introduced to the Rājā by him. The Rājā greeted me warmly and said, “It is a poor man’s banquet, and you will get your share of it.” I was relieved and took my leave. Another day, when there was some occasion to recite poetry, the Rājā remarked, “Each

³27 August 1752.

⁴Ṣamṣām died in July 1756. His death, in fact, preceded the Rājā’s promotions by a year or so.

verse of Mīr's is like a string of pearls. I find his style [*tarz*] most pleasing."

In this fashion I visited him several times but failed to get any reward. Since my condition was already dire, I became desperate and early one morning, after prayers, I went to the Rājā's house. Jai Siṅgh, his head mace-bearer [*mīr-dahā-e čōbdārān*], met me at the door and asked, "Is this any time for an audience?" I replied, "But I am desperate for subsistence." He said, "People call you a dervish. But you don't seem to have heard that 'Not a particle may move but when commanded by God.' No exceptions are made here. You should be more reconciled and patient. Everything has its fixed time. You have just a little more to go. But [first] you must see the Rājā's eldest son." I was put to shame [by his words] and returned home.

Subsequently, I went one night to the house of the Rājā's son, Rā'ē Bahādur Siṅgh^h. His doorkeeper stopped me and said, "It is not possible to see him at this time." I had no choice but to turn back. Another night, after the 'Ishā prayers, I went there again and found that the doorkeeper was absent. I asked someone, "Where did the doorkeeper go?" He replied, "He had such a bad headache that he couldn't be here tonight." Taking it to be a sign that God was inclined towards me, I entered and proceeded to the audience hall and met [the master of the house]. We had a session of poetry [*ṣuḥbat-e she'ṛ*]. Khvāja Ghālib, who was a robust young man and acquainted with me, told [Rā'ē Bahādur Siṅgh^h] all about me and had a salary fixed for me. I received it for one year.

Another night I attended on the Rājā [Nagar Mal]. He fixed a salary for me and also gave me a year's arrears. He said, "You should come and see me often." After that I used to visit him—like his regular retainers [*mulāzimān*]^h—in his house-garden after the 'Ishā prayers, and would stay there till midnight. As a result of this service I was able to live a pleasant life. [78-79]

At that time it was widely reported that the glorious banners of the Emperor [Shāh 'Ālam II] were fluttering over Farrukhabad.⁵ The Rājā sent me to Ḥusāmu 'd-Dīn Khān, who was close to the Emperor. I went and exchanged pacts and promises, then came back. In the meantime, the youngest son [of the Rājā] who did not like me because I was specially close to his older brothers, persuaded his father that it was best for him to

⁵July 1771.

go to the Dakhinis [i.e., the Marathas]. Consequently they did not go to the royal camp, but instead set out for the City. I had no choice but to go along ignominiously, together with my dependents. When we reached the City, I left my wife and son at “Sarā’ē ‘Arab” [near Humāyūn’s tomb] and parted company with the Rājā at his mansion. A few days later, I attended upon Rā’ē Bahādur Siṅgh [the eldest son of Rājā Nagar Mal] and told him the full story. The young man did all that was in his power to help us in our plight. [121]

This humble man stayed at home like a recluse in those days. The Emperor often sent for me, but I did not go. Abu ‘l-Qāsim Khān—the son of Abu ‘l-Barakāt Khān, who had been the *ṣūbadār* of Kashmir, and a cousin of ‘Abdu ‘l-Aḥad Khān, the Regent—showed me much kindness, and sometimes we would meet. The Emperor, too, sent me something once in a while. (Verse:)

I compose a line once in a while
That is all that happens in my world [135]

This humble man had taken to staying at home at all times and desired to leave the City for good, but having no means was helpless to do so. [God, however, wished] to protect my honor and so it occurred to Navāb Vazīru ‘l-Mulk Āṣafu ‘d-Daula Bahādur Āṣafu ‘l-Mulk that if Mīr would come to him he would invite him. Navāb Sālār Jaṅg—the son of Ishāq Khān Mo’tamanu ‘d-Daula and younger brother of Navāb Ishāq Khān Najmu ‘d-Daula—happens to be the *khālū* [in this case, mother’s brother] of the Vazīr [Āṣafu ‘d-Daula]. On account of the old ties that my *khālū* [Sirāju ‘d-Dīn ‘Alī Khān, Ārzū] had with him, he said [to the Vazīr], “If the Navāb would kindly grant some funds for his travel expenses, Mīr would definitely come.” [The Navāb] indicated his assent. [Sālār Jaṅg] then took some money from the treasury and sent me a letter, saying, “The exalted Navāb has asked for you. It would be appropriate for you to get here any way you could.” I was sitting at home, disgusted with life. When I read the letter I immediately set out for Lucknow. God’s wish was in my favor. In a few days—with no friend or protector, without any guide or companion—I reached Farrukhabad. Muẓaffar Jaṅg was the lord of that city. He tried much to have me stay with him for a while but my heart did not take to that place. I left after a couple of days and finally reached my destination.

Right away I went to the house of Sālār Jaṅg, may God protect him,

who received me with much honor. He sent word to the Navāb as was proper and due. After four or five days, it so happened that the Navāb came to the mansion [of Sālār Jaṅg] to enjoy a round of cock fights. I was present there and paid my respects. He intuitively recognized me and said, "You must be Mīr Muḥammad Taqī." He then embraced me with utmost kindness, took me with him to where he was to sit and, addressing me, recited some of his own verses. I said, "Praise be to God. 'A king's verse is the king of verses.'" Out of extreme kindness, he then pressed me to recite some verses too. That day I [merely] recited some couplets of a ghazal. At the time of the Navāb's departure, Sālār Jaṅg said to him, "Now that Mīr has come here at your excellency's command, you are his master. You may assign him a position and send for him to keep you company whenever you wish." The Navāb replied, "I shall fix a salary and let you know." After a couple of days, he sent for me. I went and presented myself and read the panegyric I had written in his praise. He listened to it and, with utmost graciousness, accepted me into his service. And he showers on me much kindness and consideration. [138–40]

Here this humble man is with the exalted Navāb and passes his days in grateful prayers. His excellency went on a hunting trip to Bahraich; I accompanied him and composed a poem [*shikār-nāma*] about the hunt. Later, he went hunting a second time, up to the foot of the northern mountain.⁶ Those who went with him suffered a great deal from the hardships of that long and arduous journey, but they had never before seen such [wonderful] hunting and scenery. [The Navāb] returned to the capital after three months. This humble man composed another *shikār-nāma* and read it before his excellency. He selected two *ghazals* from those included in the *shikār-nāma* and himself turned them into [two] *mukhammas* in a most excellent manner. Further, liking the *zamīn* of one *ghazal*, he asked me to compose one more *ghazal* in the same *zamīn*. By the grace of God, that too was accomplished. [The Navāb] was pleased to appreciate and praise it as was its due. [147–8] □

⁶Mīr apparently accompanied Āṣafu 'd-Daula on both his annual hunting trips of 1782, Mīr's first full year in Lucknow.