

Young Sana' ullah's moralizing response to sexual and scatological scenes (they were "bad") presages some of Miraji's later discussions on the moral ambivalence with which sexuality and physical pleasure were treated by his contemporaries. Miraji felt that his desire for women, including the desire recorded in his poetry and in the gesture he made of adopting a woman's name, could be explored in his childhood fascinations with nature and women's clothing.<sup>60</sup> His desire for women, according to him, was always thwarted, never realized. Miraji's lament echoes that of the poet-lover of classical Urdu poetry—insistently spurned, forever yearning, never satisfied. In "Self-Portrait," rather than establishing continuities between his poetic imagery and the earlier poetic traditions he also incorporated into his work (*bhakti*, Urdu ghazals, Sanskrit love poetry), he returns to the stories of his childhood to find precursors of his later imagery. He began his piece with Mirabai and alludes to her later influence on him, but he never goes back to her in these forays into his desire.

In his early work (poetry and prose), looking (*nazar*) was the mode through which Miraji articulated his sexuality. Held, by his own accounts, from physical consummation of his desire, Miraji moved toward several valences of looking, rather than literal touching, to speak sexuality.<sup>61</sup> Looking, when employed conventionally by him, expressed a desire for someone (or something like a text)—desire that could be potentially realized or averted. In its less conventional sense, looking was in lieu of physical union: merging with beloved or text. Looking in this case replaced touching. When desire was consummated, looking was rendered through pleasure, when repulsed or repudiated, inflected with pain. But Miraji also wrote about the ways in which his expressions of desire (for an object or for its own conclusion), rather than attaching to a woman's body, were routed through obsessive descriptions of scenery, weather, clothing, story. Thus, when looking was the form that "touch"—contact or performance—effectively took, desire could be seen as doubly distanced from body-to-body contact: first, by touching through looking, and second by transmuted bodies into natural or sartorial images.<sup>62</sup> Nature and clothing, nature dissolving into clothing, or nature emanating through clothing, became the processes of fetishization that signified want.<sup>63</sup>

Scenes from Miraji's childhood gave him the language through which

his sexuality as an adult found its expression. Halol was the site from which lush metaphors for the "thick, dense" seductive pleasure of looking emanate/exude, while Sindh, with its hot, barren topography, provided/granted/bequeathed him with the language to describe the parched dryness of pain when desire was thwarted.

#### EARLY LAHORE YEARS

The last move Miraji made with his family was to Bustan in 1921. A few years later his father was transferred to Sukkur, but by this time his parents had sent Miraji to finish his education in Lahore, where he lived with his half brothers, Ata' ullah and 'Inayat' ullah, in the boarding house attached to MacLagen Engineering College, the school the older boys attended. By the time Miraji came to Lahore in about 1926, the Khilafat movement had ended and alongside it the huge national *satyagraha* that had convulsed the nation.<sup>64</sup> From April to June 1925, Lahore was unsettled by a massive strike on the northwestern railways, provoked when a union leader was dismissed.

In the meantime, a tradition of writing political poetry in Urdu had been firmly established. There was, of course, Iqbal. But accompanying him were Zafar Ali Khan, Hasrat Mohani (who was later to join the Progressive Writers' Association), Muhammad Ali (Jauhar), and Brij Narayan Chakbast.<sup>65</sup> Political poetry seems to have been written in two registers. One was in a bared form, where the politics sat on the surface of the poem, lodged in its syntax, grammar, and language. Zafar Ali Khan, writing in Lahore in *Zamindar*, the journal he edited, clothed the nakedness of this kind of lyric in a dry humor, close to the tautness of a political cartoon. One sees his cast of humor, perhaps educed from *Qasidah dar hajv* (Odes of satire), in poems like "Liḍar ke nauyyat" (Special quirks of leaders).<sup>66</sup> The other form of political poetry encrypted politics into the language of passion, translating into the world of the ghazal and *gīr*, and of the *nazm* as it was coming into its own as a formal designation, sentiments that were clearly political. Both forms of writing left their legacies in the verse written by Progressive writers; the second, in addition, came to an unusual

fruition in Miraji's work. When in the late thirties and early forties Miraji wrote essays on his contemporaries (Faiz, Rashid, Tajvar Samari), he spoke of both kinds of political lyric as representative of new thought and styles of the time (*zamāne ke naye uslūb o tafakkur*).

After being sent back to Lahore, Miraji entered the ninth grade of Muzang High School, where he met people who were to remain his life-long friends—Salim Soz, Din Muhammad, Nazir Samari, and Bashir Ahmad. His brother Ata' ullah, a poet whose pen name was Laṭīfī, invited Miraji to join his circle of literary friends; these men, Maḥmūd-dīn Tāsīr, Sirājud-dīn Aḥmad, Nizāmī, Badrud-dīn Badr, and Maulavī Ghulām A'bbas, initiated him into their world. Miraji started writing poetry and prose under the pen name "Sāḥarī" and called his bedroom *Sāḥar khānā* (Sahari's room), although he had used his given name for his first work, a collection of essays that he distributed as a pamphlet to his friends and publicized from Sahar Khana.<sup>67</sup> By age sixteen, in 1926, Miraji had already published—children's fables that appeared in the weekly *Phūl* (Flower).<sup>68</sup>

It was at that time in Lahore that he met the first person he fell in love with, Bashir Chand.<sup>69</sup> Throughout his life he wrote passionate letters to him that evoked the anxious despair of a lover who knew his desire was troubling and unrequited: "My love! I'll tell you truly, the love I've felt for a man and a woman has left me destitute."<sup>70</sup>

While he was working on his matriculation, Miraji met the only other person he is said to have loved—Mira Sen, whom he called his "nemesis." According to N. M. Rashid, who saw her picture, she was a tiny, dark, uninspiring Bengali woman—Rashid thought of her as an unlikely instigator of the lifelong passion Miraji is said to have had for her. Another source of information on Mira Sen, Mrs. Din, who went to college with Mira Sen's sisters, says that the girls, daughters of a Bengali professor who taught in Lahore, were the toast of Lahore. Mira, the most beautiful and the most coveted, was trailed by hosts of entirely enraptured swains. She was also the most publicly intelligent of her siblings, participating in debates where she usually bested her opponents. That she formed the centerpiece of Miraji's desire, and that stories about his attempts to meet her accrued like/as legends is not surprising. These stories, about Miraji's meeting with Mira Sen, form the basis of the "How Miraji Got His Name" tales.

### *Miraji Sees Mira Sen: As Nagi Tells It*

The only thing that seems certain about her was that she was a 13- or 14-year-old Bengali girl who lived on Lek Road in Lahore, and Miraji fell in love with her at first sight. Another tale [told] about him was that Mira Sen studied at FC College [Forman Christian College] and Miraji tried to talk to her in front of the YMCA, but she, anxious about him, walked on. What happened to Miraji after that is well known. He first changed his name and then his entire being. He began to wear a mala around his neck, abandoned his home, and for the rest of his life wandered the world. In one of his letters, Miraji writes that he spent 13 years in Mira Sen's servitude. There is a picture of Mira Sen tucked into a newspaper in Miraji's papers. Two letters he wrote to her and never posted were found among his effects. This long imaginary love and emotional connection indicates an extraordinary scene. . . . He felt a kind of madness that manifests [itself] in his poetry. This is the visible face of Miraji's personhood, and one that he held onto.<sup>71</sup>

### *Miraji Sees Mira Sen*

Miraji was in a lull between high school and university, studying for the entrance exams. He and his friend Salim Soz were sitting on Punjab University's hockey field one day when two Bengali women—Mira Sen and Protima Das—walked past. Miraji was so smitten with Mira Sen that he stopped studying; as a result, he failed his exams.

Mira Sen was a student at FC College. Trying to get close to her, Miraji would visit their mutual friend at the same school, Muhammad din Farazdaq, whose sitting room was next to Mira Sen's. Miraji would ask his friend to write fiction stories that he could then edit and have published, presumably to gain Mira Sen's attention. When he found out that Mira Sen's friends called her "Miraji," Sana' ullah changed his name to hers.<sup>72</sup>

### *Miraji Observes Mira Sen*

One of Miraji's friends lived in a house that shared a wall with Kinnaid College, where Mira Sen went to visit her friends. Miraji and his friends would congregate there, drink, and scrutinize the girls who

went to Kinnaird through a peephole they had dug into the common wall. Miraji caught sight of Mira Sen, fell in love with her, and began to follow her home.

Only once did he gather the courage to talk to her. Just as she reached home he walked up to her and said, "I have something to say to you." Mira Sen turned to look at him but remained completely silent, her face empty. Then, without a word, she walked into her house. Miraji never tried to talk to her again, but he continued to keep track of her until she left Lahore.<sup>73</sup>

The tautness drawn out between seeing and wanting, the silent conjuring of a beloved's fervor chased down a trail of speculative questioning working through yearning's contradictions—those traces of tenderness, those angled falterings of coy bashfulness—so that the lover could keep hope alive, are plainly and eloquently spoken in the *naẓm* which opens *Sah ātishah* (With fire), the book of poetry Miraji compiled just before his death.<sup>74</sup> Composed in Lahore and written in the cadences of longing pressed into conversation, this *naẓm*, "Āñkh micolī" (In the blink of an eye), is one of the few whose emotional pulses actually seem to syncopate with details that punctuated and leavened Miraji's life. In its naked language the gaze, the glance, the glimpse, is not assuaged, soothed, or eased by the dense visual iconography of fetishism that Miraji speaks of when he talks about his passion in "Nāmukammal sailf-portrait." Instead it voices, simply, and by pulling time apart, so that the moment which is also a movement, a blink, a glimpse, expands to calibrate desire. Reading gestures as measures of time, longing is told in the imaginary exchanges (*guftagū*) that ostensibly took place between Miraji and Mira Sen (or her double, the "any woman" who turned away):

How I love this woman  
I walk past my house a little way, glimpse her, wish she were here.  
Quickly, how quickly she eludes my glance  
What should I believe, does she abhor me?  
But this! She looked down so soon, so quietly  
What should I believe, does she know my longing  
And this? When our eyes meet, she shuts her door, and

I, destitute, wander.  
Never to see her again  
Well, yes . . . her friend emerged. Looked me over, went away.  
What ought I think, did she come because she was asked?  
What did I really witness: their laughter, graceful, sounded that  
moment  
when in a quick turn of passion . . .  
was it defeat exulting  
or a spoon of courage?  
What can I expect, what can I presume  
does she despise me, or breathe yearning, if she hungers so  
why must it take so long? If she hates me so  
what must she imagine? Why tease me so,  
endlessly? Yes,  
I have news of her,  
yes, this my love's prayer, absolute, sure, flawless gold its faith. Yes,  
how I long  
for that girl, who lives so close to my house.

Miraji's complete absorption in Mira Sen apparently persuaded him that he was not interested in attending university. When his father realized this, he set out to find his son a practical, income-generating vocation. Subsequently, Miraji was apprenticed to his father's friend Dr. Nizamuddin and became a skilled homeopath. Although he did not want to pursue medicine as a career, Miraji continued to treat himself, his family, and his friends throughout his life.<sup>75</sup>

YOUNG LITERATUS IN LAHORE: WILD MAN  
OR METHODOICAL EDITOR?

Following his episode as an apprentice, Miraji began to write poetry in earnest, frequenting local Lahore coffeehouses and other haunts of aspiring writers and poets. As one of the most visible younger literary figures of the late 1920s and early 1930s, he became the nucleus of a coterie of literary neophytes. This was also the period during which he started a habit that

was to stay with him all his life: going to the library.<sup>76</sup> One senses, reading the quick edge of curiosity in his essays and the sensual pleasure suffusing his translations, the excitement he felt at hunting down new verse in the library and his taste of delight as he recited it.

In the library he discovered the love lyric of Japanese geishas in a limited edition, three-volume set of love poetry, exquisitely printed, interspersed with boldly etched gold plates and translated by E. Powys Mathers, appositely titled *Eastern Love*. These translations were to stay with him until his death, when he transmuted "Lessons of a Bawd" into the Urdu as *Nigār khānah* (Picture house; or House of portraits). His first translations from this collection included Li Po, Chandidas, and Amaru. In his sojourns to the library Miraji also found e. e. cummings, Cecil Day Lewis, Anna Akhmatova, Alexander Pushkin, Thomas More, the Brontë sisters, Baudelaire, Sappho, D. H. Lawrence, and Freud, and began the massive task of translating them, as well as many other writers, into Urdu. In 1936 or 1937, just as it had come out, he happened upon Charles Mauron's edition of Mallarmé's poetry, translated by Roger Fry:

This is an anecdote from about 1936 or 1937, when, while studying the literature and poetry of the West I encountered the work of Stephane Mallarmé. Mallarmé is the best known of the Western poets who favor the darkness of ambiguity [*mub-ham*]. I found some of his poems in an English collection. The art critic Roger Fry had translated them in moments of leisure. And after his death they had been published as a book. Mallarmé's pleasure in murkiness can be ascertained by the fact that even when they were translated in English, the poems had to be supplemented by a commentary. This work, of providing a clarifying exegesis, had been done by Roger Fry. But, his sort [of poetry,] the poetry of shadows and innuendo is not new. Following on Momin, Ghalib, too, evinced a similar style. I liked the technique of commentary Roger Fry used, to explain and unfold each poem. So when I translated Mallarmé's poems into Urdu, I wrote an essay to accompany it. And with it I also translated Roger Fry's points of clarity.<sup>77</sup>

But Miraji's family apparently did not approve of his new avocation as poet and translator. Miraji's brother, disgusted with his sibling, sold a sheaf of poems to the paper seller to be used for packaging vegetables. This

apocryphal fable is the seminal moment in melodramatic life plots of misunderstood, indigent poets who have to survive every adversity including displacement in a new nationalism which renders them superfluous (fit only for garbage, *kachra*), and one which tosses them out of the security of a good bourgeoisie household into the streets to roam reciting. The cinematic version of the tale is volunteered in *Pyāsā* (The thirsty man), a film directed Guru Dutt in 1957, with lyrics by the poet Sahir Ludhianavi. Miraji's story, told for the first time by his brother in 1978, mirrors the film, with one major difference. In the film the poet Vijay's work is salvaged by a prostitute, fallen but redeemed by her love for poetry and the poet. Vijay finds an ambivalent fame. Miraji is offered no such salvation. He, unlike Vijay, must surrender his soul to the woman to whom he is in thrall. His tragic tale offers the protagonist no reprieve.

Despite his family's lack of support, Miraji eventually got his first paying job by walking into the offices of *Adabī duniyā* (Literary world), a Lahore magazine of letters. In 1938, soon after he was hired, he was promoted to poetry editor and given a princely salary of thirty rupees a month.<sup>78</sup>

Miraji initiated several innovative projects for the magazine. He wrote terse political pieces and published poems as Vasant Sahay. The journal also printed his translations of international poets and writers, which he framed with long critical essays that advocated a revisionist canon of non-Urdu-speaking authors. This was a formidable project for which he did an enormous amount of background historical research that he folded into minutely detailed essays. To lay the groundwork in the essay "Vidyāpatī aur us ke gīt" (Vidyapati and his songs), Miraji began with a short synopsis on the history of Aryan religion (which followed the general profile of histories current at the time) from which deistic Hinduism focused on Vishnu worship emerged. To this he appended the blurring of Vidyapati's origins—in Bihar, but transferred to Bengal when Vidyapati was absorbed into the Bengali poetic canon as one of its premier poets. To recite Vidyapati—as a Bihari Maithili poet—Miraji extracted him from both the Hindi and Bengali canons into which he had been absorbed, by providing him with a regional historical context that incorporated biography into local royalist historiography. *Rivāyat, gīt, hikāyat*—the repeated customary ways of assigning lineage, scribing place and life through story, song, and habit that has lapsed unnoticed into the truths of belief—these Miraji

attempted to unravel and unwrap as he essayed archaeologies of knowledge in this and in other, similar work. These pieces introduced an Urdu-reading audience to writers often left off the list of “important” literary figures compiled for school curricula in India—writers he felt had been consistently marginalized at the time they wrote because they postulated or embodied alternative worldviews (including positions on sexuality), or because they came from groups, like women, that he felt had been excised at other moments from literary canons. Over and over again in his work, taking the Symbolists Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Poe as exemplary, Miraji examined the politics of canon formation, valuation dissembling as pleasure and aversion, and the exclusions based on them. In these exclusions he saw allegories of the dismissals rehearsed by his colleagues and observed under colonial auspices.<sup>79</sup>

For *Adabī duniyā* Miraji juxtaposed the works of widely recited Urdu writers against those of obscure, or freshly emerging Urdu poets whose work he also laced with critical essays. In pieces from this period, later collected in the volume *Is nazm meñ* (In this poem), Miraji addressed his concerns to a community of Urdu readers whose scope, he felt, was curbed by the narrow canon they embraced and understood as convention. Scanning the ontologies of influence, Miraji pried apart the places where influence was sutured to imitation. As a cautionary tale on the “proper absorption of influences” Miraji offered and the abject form of a display of access to colonial information, a pitiful simulation of mastery, an incantation of names denuded of knowledge or understanding—“People casually drop the names of Western gentlemen [they use] as examples while they declaim—about whom they know so little, that they don’t even know whether [these gentlemen] were poets or novelists.”<sup>80</sup> Miraji felt that, as an editor of a major literary magazine, he was under an obligation to broaden the universe of these Urdu readers whom he considered his compatriots by introducing them to alternative, foreign forms of writing that would push at the horizons of form and content. But these interjections had to be tempered by a stern, stoic rigor, and the fullness of a documented history.

The poetic journeys he embarked on in the *nazm* he composed during this period in Lahore he traveled until his death. He is considered one of the foreparents of *nazm* as a genre. In Lahore he began searching for idioms to craft *nazm*, twisting the tightly wound two-string ghazal and

pulling it out into the lingering temporality of desire. A moment, a blink of an eye, a quick surge of breath gave him the beginning and the end of a kind of rubber-band time that stretched into the finitude of longing, each upheaval, each subtle movement swelling out to fill temporal space. Ghalib and Mallarmé were his antecedents, their dense ambiguity gifting him a language that layered and turned in on itself, and turned out to draw in allusions from a panoply of lyric tongues. Time strung between poles and then lengthened out and arced around so that the past and present fused. The past in the present, past as present, the present an echo that calls out the past. The past as the present’s future. Events suspended between future and past. His translations from earlier poets became his poetry and his poetry filtered into his translations.

The languages of his compositions, which he also found in the work of his contemporaries, brought Braj, Awadhi, Hindi, Maithili back to Urdu. Miraji is notorious for his *gīt*, which have haunted him in the charges leveled against him that he was Hindu and took refuge in a language laden with Hindi words.<sup>81</sup> *Gīt* become the folk. In the long piece on love written for the Lahore radio station, Miraji transmuted his essays into voice. He took love lyrics from Baudelaire, Akhmatova, and Pushkin and tuned them down to sing alongside the sparer, more colloquial forms of *gīt*.

Miraji’s “folk” poetry, his *gīt*, were a passion for him, written around the time that a revival of “folk” literary forms like *gīt*, street theater, and tales in local languages was taking place throughout the subcontinent, some of it under socialist auspices.<sup>82</sup> The first phase of the Second World War was under way. Popular sentiment against fascism had by 1936 coalesced into protests (by the Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Krishna Menon) directed at Franco’s armed revolt that took over the elected republican government of Spain. In Lucknow, the loosely organized Progressive Writers’ Association was preparing for their first conference.<sup>83</sup> Cobbled together with help from friends, relatives, and academics engaged in “Progressive” activities and paid for on a shoestring budget, the conference was held at the Raf‘ā-e ‘ām. This site had been inaugurated by a long history of political assemblies, including the 1920 one that passed the Khilafat resolution, and an agitation when the theosophist Annie Besant was sent to jail. The Raf‘ā-e ‘ām had recently reincarnated as a club for bridge players and beer and whisky drinkers, its politics sent into the hinterlands of memory by British

legislation reassigning its use. The conference drew together writers from all over India and was a small moment in a huge gathering of different constituencies in Lucknow on April 14, 1936. The Congress held a session at the Motinagar camp, as did the All-India Kissan Sabha in the days immediately preceding the Congress meetings. The Kissan Sabha called for land nationalization, zamindari (landrights holders) abolition, and cooperative agriculture.<sup>84</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress president, explicitly used "socialism" as a key solution, but he and Rajindar Prasad battled over socialist amendments;<sup>85</sup> in 1936 the All-India Students Federation was founded; so, it was particularly apropos that the leftist writers' association saw its first session at this historical juncture

On a bare dais, not even concealed under a dhurrie, Munshi Premchand (Dhanpat Rai) delivered the opening paragraph of his address:

The literature that is being promoted today is mostly of the statical, mystical, and romantic type, which is doing more harm than good. There is a great need for the evolution of popular literature which is in close contact with the naked realities of life, which is free from the dreamy and unreal haze of pure romanticism and which stirs in us our dormant energies to action, to the conscious realization of our backwardness and helplessness and national humiliation. . . . The pen was greater than ever . . . [it had to be put to use] against the tyrannies of form and figures of speech . . . [had] to resurrect our dead literature into something more vibrant, truthful, and inspiring to progress.<sup>86</sup>

The Progressive Manifesto was supplemented by several resolutions: to rescue literature from the moribund conservative classes; to bring the arts into closer touch with people and register the actualities of their life; to ask for a lifting of restrictions on the freedom of thought and expression, which the government had garroted under repressive press laws, the customs act, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act that proscribed Progressive literature.<sup>87</sup> This, then, was the ideological terrain on which Miraji composed his lyrics and in relation to which he wrote his many essays.<sup>88</sup>

#### *Walks on the Wild or Methodical Side*

Some of the earliest descriptions of Miraji's strange physical appearance are from this time. His biographers have produced contrasting pictures of him, Dionysian and Apollonian. Unlike portraits of Dr. Jekyll and

Mr. Hyde, however, where one person is transmuted into his/her opposite, the two versions of Miraji almost always run as parallel images. The Dionysian, which is prevalent, appeared in accounts by writers as various as Aijaz Ahmad, Shahid Ahmad Dihlavi, and Bashir Ahmad. The Apollonian persona was described by Yunus Javed of the *Halqah-e arbāb-e zāuq* (Circle of the men of taste) and by Akhtarul Iman in his stories about the young Miraji. The one biographer who attempted to integrate Miraji's two personae was Sa'dat Hasan Manto. Although Manto focused heavily on Miraji's wild side, his bemusement at Miraji's more regulated, restrained quirks creates a more complex persona.

Shahid Ahmad Dihlavi, who later hired Miraji to work on the journal *Sāqī* (Cupbearer), met Miraji at *Adabī duniyā* in the 1930s. His description of Miraji mirrors those of most writers who have published biographical essays on him. All the essays are caught in scopophilic vertigo sucked in by a fascination with abjection, circling around and around visual cues (enriched by smell), repeated obsessively as a way into the truth of Miraji. The images and the odor that suffuse/drench it becomes a measure of the man: he was extraordinarily disgusting-looking, exuding a grotesque charm that provoked the same ambivalent, morbid curiosity as an overflowing toilet that will not flush. Miraji wrapped himself in an overcoat during the summer's thick heat. His body smelled as though he hadn't washed in several days. Uneven stubble dotted his face. He wore a string of beads around his neck. Black, disheveled hair grew down his back in snaky ringlets and was so long that Dihlavi said the children in Miraji's neighborhood would run behind him down the street yelling *barī mem* (self-important lady).<sup>89</sup> Miraji would turn around, grab his hair, hold it out in bunches, and gesture to the children to come to him; they would walk up and fall silent for a few moments before resuming their chant.<sup>90</sup>

The Miraji that Dihlavi drew a portrait of was a wild, demonic, self-absorbed figure. Dihlavi corroborated his belief in Miraji's wildness with an incident to which he was privy: Miraji lived with his extended family in the same neighborhood as a well-known poet, Shaqa Kanvare. Kanvare kept mostly to himself and led a fairly regulated life, leaving for work every morning at the same time and settling down in the evenings for a good read. After about six years he realized that the strange man he had often seen by his house was the same person he knew well as an assistant editor of a journal that frequently published his poems.

One night, Miraji tottered home drunk and began pounding on the door of the house in front of his own. Immediately afterward he managed to enter the outer door of Kanvare's house and rang the bell. Kanvare opened the door and tried to have a conversation, but it ended abruptly when Miraji threw up the eighteen bottles of beer he had swallowed—and the woman on whose door he had initially banged came out screaming. Although this inauspicious encounter did not prevent Kanvare's subsequent friendship with Miraji, it was grist for Dihlavi's mill that Miraji was a thoroughly debauched person, a demon born inadvertently into a perfectly ordinary, perhaps even religious, household.

According to Dihlavi, Miraji's addiction to sensual habits (read masturbation) began when he was very young. He satisfied his wanton desires with prostitutes in Lahore's Hira Mandi, the bāzār Dihlavi believes was the source of the syphilis (never quite proven) that caused Miraji constant physical pain. Miraji tried to alleviate his torment by turning to books, but instead of allowing his mind some respite from his body, his taste in reading exacerbated the problem. His addiction to sensual needs, fueled by his reading, turned him into a case history like those he loved to read. And starting with the works of Havelock Ellis, Freud, and "ubiquitous" Hindus, he then went on to Baudelaire and Edgar Allen Poe. Under the influence of these notorious figures, Miraji lost touch with the clean-living world of his origins. Dihlavi, unlike Nagi, did not birth Miraji into a Muzang that handicapped him, but started Miraji off with a clean slate.

Curiously enough, Dihlavi's unhappy account of Miraji's life follows Miraji's own descriptions up to a point, then diverges dramatically. Miraji laid the blame for his unhappiness on his inability to ever actualize his desire for the people he loved. Following a Freudian turn, Miraji located the origin of his discontent in his childhood, but then his laments, as marked by unrequited passion, returned his autobiography to and aligned him with the lineage and genealogy of the lover from classical Urdu poetry. In contrast, Dihlavi blamed Miraji's unhappiness on excessive alleviation of various unwholesome desires. One can read in Dihlavi's anxiously sanctimonious description of these desires that they were the kind of "fixations" that could be endured and cured or withstood. So, Miraji is to be blamed twice over for falling prey to them: once for wanting it and the second time for not restraining himself. Although Dihlavi would probably be horrified

to realize that his analysis of Miraji's malaise followed Freud's and Havelock Ellis's catalogues of perverts and sexual deviants, his allusions to deviance ("masturbation," "nymphomania," "hypersexuality"), which appear to take Miraji's life in a different, more modernist direction, were actually consonant with both Ellis and Freud.

Unlike Dihlavi, when Akhtarul Iman talks about the Miraji he met he reminisces about an Apollonian Miraji—memories that are echoed by other young poets Miraji helped. In 1940 Akhtarul Iman walked into the offices of *Adabī duniyā* with some of his poems. It was then that he noticed Miraji, whom he had heard was collecting the works of little-known poets to be published by the magazine. Akhtarul Iman's recollections, corroborated by other writers to whom Miraji devoted time to discuss their poetry or prose, depict Miraji as an intense, gracious man. He is said to have had a remarkably ferocious intelligence that was evident even when he talked about day-to-day, mundane things. His acute mind was matched by a soft carefulness and courtesy. The image that stayed with them was of a soft-voiced man with a measured pacing—the antithesis of the "wild man" he was later made out to be. He was considered an exemplary critic, and writers who brought him their work remember him giving them gentle but rigorous attention, talking carefully through his critique. Even literati who did not like Miraji's poetry eulogize his oral and written criticism as remarkable for its style, humor, and accessible rigor.<sup>91</sup>

In addition, Miraji was generous with his money; he cared deeply about his friends and would rush to their assistance if they needed anything, sometimes even giving away his pay as soon as he had earned it—to a tongawala, for example, who needed cash for his daughter's wedding and had been telling Miraji about his predicament as he pulled him home.<sup>92</sup>

Unlike the self-absorbed, solipsistic, insane, socially inept person of the more widely circulated stories, the Apollonian Miraji who inhabits these alternative tales is someone who lived in and helped sustain a viable literary community.

#### *Triples, Plato's Chariot, or Freud in Another Key*

Like all the other writers who turned their phrases to resolve Miraji's ambiguities and his incommensurable quirks, Akhtarul Iman, too, attempted his own take on Miraji.<sup>93</sup> Akhtarul Iman had his first face-to-face

conversation with Miraji in Delhi after a conference that Miraji had attended. They had met previously through letters. Akhtarul Iman had written a *naẓm* while he was doing his B.A. at Anglo-Arabic College in Lahore, and performed it at several venues where it had been received with a great deal of acclaim. Having been published by *Sāqī* in Delhi, he wanted to get something into *Adabī duniyā*, so he sent the journal his *naẓm*. It was returned with a pleasant note from Miraji. Akhtarul Iman tried again, to the same response. Several years later Akhtarul Iman was in Delhi; Meerut, where he was to complete his M.A., was not a city in which he could survive. Looking for work in Delhi, he ran into the fiction writer Krishan Chandar at a friend's house. Krishan Chandar offered him the chance to coordinate a large literary conference in Delhi as a way of making some money. Miraji was to travel down from Lahore to attend, and had sent a message that he wanted to meet Akhtarul Iman. However, when it was time to actually come to the conference, Akhtarul Iman, insecure about his literary accomplishments, fled to visit his father. When he returned to Delhi he discovered that not only had Miraji not left, but that he still wanted to meet him. The meeting was arranged to take place at N. M. Rashid's house. Akhtarul, waiting inside for Miraji's arrival, heard a rich deep voice: "Has Akhtar come yet?" Then a young, fair man entered. That was the only time they met before Miraji moved in with him in Poona, and a few years later, died while in his custody.<sup>94</sup>

Among Miraji's papers was a complete manuscript for a book he called *Sah ātishah*. Akhtarul Iman had been left as the de facto executor of Miraji's estate, and as such felt he was under an obligation to ensure that Miraji's manuscript be published. But it took him many years to do so. One constraint was his finances, which could not sustain the cost of taking a book to print. Another was the detritus of pain and rage that Miraji had bequeathed to the friend who cared for him. But before his own death, Akhtarul Iman, struggling to come to terms with the anguish of Miraji's betrayal by his friends and anger at the way Miraji treated him, turned to print for expiation and catharsis, and wrote two pieces on Miraji. One, "Guftanī nā guftanī" (What should or should not be spoken), leaves us with the tale of their history together. The other, "Mīrājī ke ākhirī lamḥe" (Miraji's final moments) offers what previously Akhtarul Iman had only spoken aloud, his recollections of Miraji's last days.<sup>95</sup>

In "Guftanī nā guftanī" Akhtarul Iman chances his analysis of Miraji, as a prelude to the story of their friendship. Miraji's many faces, like the three balls of gun-metal gray he rolled incessantly between his fingers, could be culled down to three. Three balls, three names, three faces, three personalities: a structuralist triad. One was Sana' ullah; the second was Dār; and the third Miraji. Sana' ullah wore heavy earrings, grew his mustaches into long Pathan curls sometimes and shaved them off other times, and was always ready to leaven the hackneyed with humor and laughter. This was his asylum from a life that lagged behind success. Dār, plagued by nervousness, lost in sexual illness, constantly in vigil before anxiety, had as his role models Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe. He was caught in a hell without alleviation. Miraji was the "super ego," the lord of the symbolic. To him was given the mastery of the universe of literature (complete control over Urdu literary history) and the confident will to bend the course of Urdu poetics, prose, and criticism. He strolled the Urdu literary scene with impunity.<sup>96</sup>

Miraji became one of the main figures in the Lahore literary scene, and it is clear from the poem "Jaṅgal meñ piknik" (Picnic in the jungle),<sup>97</sup> which he wrote with his friend Qayyum Nazar, that belonging to a community of like-minded, playful writers was important to him. The critical discussion he later wrote about the poem opens with intentional misreadings that depict it as a catalogue (doubling as dictionary) of repeated monotonous words, useful as a playful vocabulary list for children. Readers who long for propriety may be able to sense the poem's music, but will only understand it as meaningless. They, Miraji implies, bring meaning and word so decorously together that each seems to flow naturally from the other without a break. If, however, as Miraji proposes in the piece, one is willing to abdicate oneself to freedom from meaning, and give up the urge to couple word with its signified, one can lose oneself in the visual journeys traveled in the poem.

In this poem words are superfluous, exorbitant, shoving and pulling at each other and the reader. As words double and accrue seemingly senselessly, the question of their meaning appears superfluous. So, says Miraji, allow yourself a luxury. Give up your desire to find sense. Give it up and let the question of meaning go. Indulge yourself, Miraji informs us: let



yourself float into the space of the poem and allow its movements to cradle and carry you. All you have to abrogate is the impulse that accompanies signification. What you have to abrogate is that impulse that as it chaperons signification pushes you out of the space of the poem toward the elsewhere of what it means, word by word. If you can let the question of meaning go, then the poem's words will pull you in their wake, to see in another way. You will travel with the eyes (sight-lines) that tour the poem: from the jungle's enclosure down to a richly textured ground (shadows, springs, paths, thorns, motes of dust, insects), and then soar up to branches, parrots, and birds. They move downwards again, to streams, single buds sprouting, clothing you, in closing with a sweep of fragrances and visions. Then this enchanted world dissolves, thinning out into writing, and the abraded tip of a pencil scribbling tiredly on a scrap of paper. The poem finally ends, playfully: with laughing friends, poets gathered to enjoy the poem's musical magic. Sharing the poem takes them into its world and metamorphoses their circle into a throng picnicking in a jungle.

"Jañgal meñ mañgal honā." As the reading of the poem ends it resurrects the question of meaning. Meaning is not found in (the) solitary pursuit of the abstinent extraction of juice from a word. It is discovered in camaraderie, when words are handed around a group, caressed, repeated, doubled, punned. A word can be called out to mean something, not just once, but twice. *Ivār*, the "Sunday" of the title, plays against the word *mañgal*—Tuesday, festive rejoicing—with which Miraji ends his short essay. Tuesday meets Sunday, the week curves around in the promise of a joyous, boisterous celebration in a deserted spot.<sup>98</sup> The pleasure of this small group of listeners—fellow literati—evokes the safe space in which Miraji's poetry had found a home: the *Halqah-e arbāb-e zāuq*.

#### *Circle of the Men of Taste: Miraji in the Mainstream*

One day in the bāzār, two writers exchanging casual information about their lives discussed the idea of beginning a group that would meet regularly to discuss each other's work. Although writers met occasionally through the predominantly Marxist Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), the men, Nazir Ahmad Jami and Sher Mahmud Akhtar, felt they needed to form another, nonpolitical organization.

The Halqa, originally known as the *Bazm-e dāstāngo* (Storytellers' gathering), began modestly in 1939. Its inaugural meeting, held on folding

chairs in Sher Mahmud Akhtar's home, Lakshmi Mansion, opened with a story read by Nasim Hijazi.<sup>99</sup> At the next gathering, on the first of October, the name of the fledging organization was changed to *Halqah-e arbāb-e zāuq*.<sup>100</sup> The Halqa met wherever it could find space, and was chaired by different writers. Each meeting began with one or more readings by poets, fiction writers, and essayists who needed a place to present their work.

One of the mainstays of the Halqa in its early days was Qayyum Nazar, who brought many of his friends with him, among them Miraji, who, along with Yusuf Zafar, became a leading member. Miraji first attended the Halqa on August 25, 1940, but his reputation was so entwined with the group that in popular renditions of the Halqa's history, he is even credited with starting it.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, Miraji did affect the Halqa profoundly. Before he arrived, the meetings focused almost exclusively on readings, without accompanying critiques. Miraji transformed it from a group where writers met merely to exchange work and congratulate themselves on their brilliance to one that resembled the laughing gathering of friends he created in "Picnic in the Jungle": trenchantly critical of one another.

The careful close reading of poetry that Miraji did for *Adabī duniyā* became the norm for the Halqa. He brought a style of critique that combined aesthetic appreciation with rigorous analysis. As a critic he was not combative or confrontational; he was unfailingly polite, respectful of and attentive to different perspectives. He also believed in the efficacy of spending time reading and understanding other writers' works as a way of learning about one's own. These characteristics of his, when applied in public communal settings, set the tone for a convivial but effective literary forum that welcomed a variety of literary styles and political positions.

The Halqa grew rapidly through word of mouth, becoming a popular, multivalent literary organization. Contrary to subsequent representations of it as a forum that shut out socialist writers, its records show that members of the Progressive Writers' Association, such as Krishan Chandar, Rajindar Singh Bedi, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz, read alongside writers with very different political and poetic beliefs, like N. M. Rashid and Yusuf Zafar.<sup>102</sup> The Halqa encouraged collaboration between social realist writers of prose and fiction, the more modernist experimental poets who wrote prose poetry, and those poets who were reorienting older forms like the ghazal to political concerns.

Because of the range of literature it produced, the Halqa embodied the world of Urdu literature in the 1940s. The same kinds of stylistic juxtapositions, interchanges, and interactions were also occurring in literary journals located in other urban areas. One of the first such magazines was *Sāqī*, in Delhi. More—*Nigār* (Painting), in Lucknow; *Jama'* (Collection), Delhi; *Adab-e laṭīf* (Literary delights), Lahore; *Humāyūn* (Eminent), Lahore; *Shahkār* (Masterpiece), Lahore; *Dāstān* (Epic), Lahore; *Prīt laṭī* (Beautiful necklace), Amritsar; *Akḥbār-e hindūstān* (Newspaper of Hindustan), Lucknow—soon followed.<sup>103</sup>

#### DELHI YEARS: THE WILD MAN TAKES HOLD — BEGINNING OF A DECLINE

Radio had its uncertain beginnings in Bombay, in 1926, around the time that it began to be established in Britain. But backed by inadequate private capital, the Bombay and Calcutta stations lapsed into receivership.<sup>104</sup> In the early 1930s the moribund technology was revitalized by the government of India. An assortment of sometimes conflicting explanations were given to bolster this move: fear of guerrilla broadcasts from the Congress that would foment sedition in the 1930s; fears that people, deprived of local stations, would be influenced by Russian and western Asian radio propaganda; enthusiasm for radio as a venue of rural education, radio as a technology that would bring India together as a nation.<sup>105</sup> By 1935, after many rancorous disputes about control, a decision was made to establish a station in Delhi, managed by the Department for Industries and Labor that would reach out to the area between Lahore and Allahabad. It would be run by someone sent out from England and broadcast programs in English and Urdu.<sup>106</sup>

On January 1, 1936, All-India Radio (AIR) in Delhi broadcast for the first time. Under the jurisdiction of Lionel Fielden, sent from the BBC, the newly inaugurated station attempted to attract competent, creative Indians to select and design programs (music, ghazal, poetry, plays) by promoting special, well-paid positions for program assistants.<sup>107</sup> Fielden hired S. S. Niazi as one of the people to fill this post (for music), then recruited A. S. Bokhari from Government College in Lahore as station director.

Soon after he moved to Delhi, Bokhari became the deputy controller of broadcasting, and his brother, Z. A. Bokhari, took over as director.<sup>108</sup>

A. S. Bokhari, in consonance with Fielden's preference for a staff with wide-ranging ideas and interests, invited members of the Lahore literary scene to work for him.<sup>109</sup> Those who migrated to Delhi included Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sa'dat Hasan Manto, and N. M. Rashid. Miraji, too, was recruited; he apparently arrived in 1941 and, because he had broadcasting experience with All-India Radio in Lahore, was hired by the station as a regular scriptwriter in December 1942.<sup>110</sup>

Miraji moved during one of the most tumultuous periods in colonial history; the war was approaching Indian borders (Singapore fell on February 15, 1942, Rangoon on March 8, Andamans on March 23). The All-India Congress Session at Bombay passed the "Quit India" resolution in August of that year ("for mass struggle on nonviolent lines on the widest possible scale"), which was immediately followed by mass arrests of Congress leaders. The resolution marked the failure of the Cripps Mission. Delhi exploded into *hartals*, strikes, and clashes with police, as did Bombay, Calcutta, Patna, Lucknow, Kanpur, and Ahmedabad. From August on, the violence spread to rural areas. The British response—brutal reprisals—sent the movement underground: student terrorist attacks against police, army, and communication, and quick forays by groups of peasant saboteurs. The "Quit India" movement was described by Lord Linlithgow, the viceroy, as the "most serious rebellion since that of 1857."<sup>111</sup>

When Miraji arrived in Delhi, he cleaned up his appearance by getting an "English" haircut, trimming his trailing mustaches, and buying a "good" three-piece suit to replace his sweaty overcoat.<sup>112</sup> He also acquired a metal ball the size and shape of a lime and began covering it with the silver foil linings of cigarette boxes. He kept the ball in his pants pocket with a sadhu's seed necklace and a conch shell; the three objects became worry beads for him and he played with them constantly. When asked about these things, which he called "frauds," Miraji would smile secretively but make no reply.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to working as a scriptwriter and news translator for AIR, Miraji also composed twenty-four songs for the station. His assistant, a young man called Visvanandan Bhatnagar, befriended him. Bhatnagar

described Miraji as a very strange man with long hair and a deep, rich voice who wore ordinary clothes. His one special characteristic, according to Bhatnagar, echoes Dihlavi: his ability to attract people. All who met Miraji found themselves drawn to him.<sup>114</sup>

Despite his charisma, however, in Delhi Miraji began to lead a less settled life. He began to be depicted as someone accelerating rapidly toward decline, as an almost entirely unregenerate “degenerate” who drowned his frustration in rot-gut alcohol when he found he could not satisfy all of his fantasies. Miraji hated thinking about even the ordinary needs of his body. Bhatnagar would bring food to the recording studio and leave it in a cupboard, hoping that his friend would see it and remember to eat. And he could be equally lax about money. One day, Dihlavi and another friend of Miraji’s found him lying unconscious on the road by Andheri bazaar. With the help of a tongawala, they managed to pack him into a vehicle and take him home. Before putting him to bed, they found five hundred rupees crammed into his pockets. The friend took the money home for safekeeping and returned it several days later. Miraji, who in the meantime had forgotten about the money, was puzzled by suddenly being given this huge sum.<sup>115</sup> Unlike the biographical narratives from Lahore, in which Miraji is either a drunken Dionysian wild man or a sedate Apollonian editor, the Delhi stories focus exclusively on Miraji’s wild side. There is a great deal more information about his evenings, when he was likely to drink, than there is on his daytime activities, when he worked.

Miraji was fired from his full-time job with AIR after only two years; his friends give two different explanations. One is that he did not get along with his immediate boss, whom he considered a fool. When his boss asked him to revise a radio play he was writing he refused because he felt the revisions would ruin the script. The two argued and Miraji was fired. The other reason given is that he was caught spending the night on the sofa in the office; since AIR had a policy forbidding employees from living on their premises, they fired him.

After he left AIR, Miraji started working a series of jobs, earning, according to Bhatnagar, between 100 and 125 rupees per month, which barely covered his living expenses. He wrote a regular column, “Bāteñ,” for *Sāqī*; wrote *Vidyāpati*, a play for the station that was broadcast in January 1945, and was an intermittent announcer for the radio.

His sojourn in Delhi proved productive for Miraji, even as it took its toll on him. He started a new circle of the Halqa, drawing into it many of his colleagues from AIR: Rajindar Singh Bedi, Mukhtar Siddiqi, N. M. Rashid, Upendranath Ashk, Patras, Krishan Chandar, Aijaz Husain. All of the books published by him while alive were published in Delhi; three volumes of poetry: *Mīrājī ke gīt* (Miraji’s songs), *Gīt hī gīt* (Songs), and *Mīrājī kī nazmeñ* (Miraji’s verse).<sup>116</sup> In “Bāteñ,” Miraji tried his hand at a prose unlike anything he had previously risked. The column, with its loose structure, permitted him to muse. He ventured into topical issues and moments of philosophical rumination, infusing suggestive disquisitions on time, history, nature, science, creativity, love, and desire with his mastery over a vast array of sources, and leavening them with pithy anecdotes.

Writing for the radio had brought time into a different kind of focus for him. Radio broadcasts, readings, and recitals highlighted the constraints as well as the sensuality of rendering something within an immutable time frame. Time was marked out. It became a category of containment and pleasure. Its new resolutions filtered into “Bāteñ” and into the poetry (like “Yagānagat” and “Samundar kā bulāvā”) he was to write in Bombay.<sup>117</sup>

The translations that had been Miraji’s bread and butter in Lahore fell by the wayside, appearing only occasionally in his prose. He also composed fewer poems than he had in Lahore.<sup>118</sup> In *Sah ātishah* Miraji compiled merely seven poems from this time. Most of them seem to attempt the new topics that arrested his attention. “Jañg kā” (The upshot of war); a battle of words between daughter-in-law (*bahū*) and mother-in-law (*sās*), is perhaps an allegory of colonial clashes over the house/nation. “Yahūdī” (Jew) condenses the violence of genocide into the tense lyricism of the hunt. Its language, taken from Krishna bhakti, brings/conveys/conducts the war raging outside India home through its metaphors.

Trying perhaps to voice his ambivalence about his ability to compose lyric, Miraji also wrote about creativity and the conundrums that haunted the process of writing. In “Yā‘nī” (Because . . . , That is to say . . . ), rhymes linger on the travails of writing: “mañī sochatā hūñ ik nazm likhūñ / lekin us meñ kyā bāt kahūñ,” “I want to write a poem, / but what do I say in it?”; “dīl kahtā hai mañī suntā huñ / man māne bhūl yuñ cuntā hūñ,” “As my heart speaks to me I listen, / sifting through sensuous forgetting”; “pal ke pal meñ ik nazm likhūñ / lekin us meñ kyā bāt kahūñ?,” “Shall I write

in the space opened between one breath and another, / but what do I say in it?" The desired one, poem or beloved, speaks back: "kyuñ socate ho ik nazm likho / kyuñ apne dil kī bāt kaho, bahtar to yahī hai cup hī raho." Her words read ambiguously. They can be translated as encouragement or as disparaging: "Why think, just write the poem / well, just speak your desire it's probably better, to say nothing"; or "Why do you think you can write a poem / say what's in your heart it's probably better if you say nothing at all."

"Cheq" (Tease/teasing) is another conversation poem. The terse dialogue, scripted for two, recalls e. e. cummings, whose work Miraji had translated in Lahore. The published version of the poem in *Sah ātishah* is longer than the one in Miraji's *Sah ātishah* manuscript, which was published in *Tīn rañg*. In this second version, probably meant to be read on the page, desire measured in stripped phrases is filled in with cues to orient a reader as to who is speaking and whether the words are imagined or spoken. In the briefer *Tīn rañg* (or manuscript) version, the cues are peeled away from the poem, and the conversation, standing on its own, only comes alive when it is read aloud.<sup>119</sup>

The one consistent thing about Miraji's life in Delhi, as Bhatnagar tells it, was his evening consumption of alcohol, organized into a meticulous daily ritual. As long as Miraji worked regularly for AIR, he had enough money to pay for his daily brew. But after he lost his job and his income dropped, he began soliciting daily contributions from his friends at about four o'clock. Around five, after he had collected enough money, Miraji would walk quickly to Gol Market near the AIR offices, one hand clutching a bag with an empty bottle in it, slung over his shoulder, the other carrying tin foil balls. At the store he would buy a bottle of cheap local liquor and pour it into the bottle he had carried with him, swallowing his first few sips as he walked out. On days when he had more money, he bought the newspaper to read on the bus he would then take to Lodhi Road. On other days, when he had only enough to pay for the alcohol, he walked instead.<sup>120</sup>

Miraji began borrowing various sums of money. One night an irate creditor found him in a drunken stupor at the AIR studios and beat his face. When Dihlavi asked Miraji why he was bruised, he was told that he had been beaten by someone he didn't know. Miraji's more "sober" friends

began circulating stories that he liked to beat himself. Dihlavi said that when Miraji and his friends were drunk they liked to beat people, calling the beatings "omelets."<sup>121</sup>

Miraji pared his luggage down to his books, papers, and the few clothes he carried with him from place to place. He rented a house in Pal Bangash, a neighborhood deep in the heart of Old Delhi, for four months, then took turns living on various friends' floors for two to three months at a time; by 1945, he was using Dihlavi's *Sāqī* address as his permanent one.<sup>122</sup> Miraji's friends in Delhi began to lose patience with him. They stopped lending him money regularly and it became harder for him to find places to stay.

The final episode that led to his move to Bombay with Bhatnagar was financially fueled. Bhatnagar was completely broke, and Miraji wanted money both for himself and for his friend M. A. Latif. Latif was desperate to pay for his marriage and had invited Miraji to visit him in Agra to discuss the situation. Miraji and Bhatnagar decided to borrow the money they needed for themselves and for Latif from the local moneylenders, who were Pathans. The mythic mafioso of Delhi at the time, Pathans lent money at exorbitant rates and threatened their "clients" if they were not paid back promptly. After a short search they found a Pathan who was willing to lend them three hundred rupees. Bhatnagar kept one hundred for himself, while Miraji sent a money order to Latif for one hundred and spent the last hundred on clothes and books.

Bhatnagar was close to the end of a six-year contract as a clerk with AIR; both he and Miraji knew it would be difficult to repay the Pathans, so they decided to leave Delhi for a more lucrative place. They picked Bombay. Many of Miraji's Lahore friends had moved to work in the burgeoning Bombay film industry as script- and songwriters, and Bhatnagar had a close friend there. They felt that, with their contacts, they were more likely to find employment in Bombay than new jobs in Delhi.

With their newly gained expertise at locating Pathans, they managed to find another to lend them an additional hundred rupees to front their trip. Bhatnagar says that they packed their meager belongings in one very large suitcase, bought two train tickets and, after a long overnight train trip, arrived in Bombay at Victoria Terminus on the morning of June 7, 1946.

Bombay at this time was between two political convulsions. As Miraji arrived, the city had just begun quieting after the Indian naval revolt. The

revolt had been preceded and perhaps fomented by a smaller uprising: a mob that gathered in January to protest the Indian National Army trials that were then being conducted in Delhi.<sup>123</sup> It began, modestly, around the time that the British delegation to India was to leave. A small deputation of sailors refused to return to their ships after shore leave. Their demands: better treatment for Indians, withdrawal of Indian troops being used against Sukarno in Indonesia, and the release of the Indian Nationalist Army soldiers on trial in Delhi. They were quickly joined by another four thousand men from two other ships. Bombay exploded. Thirty thousand people fought back against a police picket, buildings were set on fire, trains canceled, workers went on strike. The city was under curfew for days as the violence smoldered.<sup>124</sup> April brought police strikes.<sup>125</sup>

Just after Miraji came to Bombay, the Muslim League council met there in July. The Simla conference with the British delegation which proposed a three-tier confederacy had been viewed with disfavor by the Muslim League. In the July gathering, Jinnah declared August 16 a direct-action day to protest the government's and Congress's bad faith. August saw Bombay convulsed by violence again.

Miraji spent his first two days in Bombay with Bhatnagar's friend, Mukhtar; then they parted. Bhatnagar, who was very ill, stayed with his friend for a while, then left for Delhi before fleeing to Ambala, Patiala, and finally Lahore to escape the moneylenders. Miraji moved in with an acquaintance, Nakshab Jarcavi.<sup>126</sup>

LAST THREE YEARS IN BOMBAY:  
REALLY MAD OR INSANELY REAL?

Shakespeare in Elysium—question about the meaning of a passage: "I marvel nothing so much as that men will gird themselves at discovering obscure beauties in an author. Certes the greatest and most pregnant beauties are ever the plainest and most evidently striking; and when two meanings of a passage can in the least ballance [*sic*] our judgements which to prefer, I hold it a matter of unquestionable certainty that neither of them is worth a farthing."

—Henry Fielding, in *A Journey from This World to the Next*. Epigraph intended for Roger Fry's collection of Mallarmé's translations.<sup>127</sup>

One of the best known and more sympathetic portrayals of Miraji was written at a time when there was a dearth of pieces being produced about him, in the 1950s and early 1960s. "Tīn gole" (Three balls), written by Sa'dat Hasan Manto, a novelist who also wrote short stories and scripts, describes his Bombay interactions with the poet. As a paradigmatic biographical ramble, "Three Balls" is, alongside Aijaz Ahmad's piece, one of the main repositories of stories in circulation about Miraji.

Manto had a long-standing acquaintance with Miraji, whom he considered a close friend. They had previously "met" through letters exchanged during Miraji's tenure as an editor at *Adabī duniyā*, arguing by mail about the title of *Mausam kī sharārat* (Seasonal mischief), a story that Miraji had solicited from Manto for the magazine; now, in flat number one, Hans Building, Bombay, the men sat across the table from each other for the first time, continuing their discussion of Manto's fiction that had begun with their correspondence. On the table were three balls wrapped in silver foil that Miraji continuously fondled—the balls that gave the essay its title and became the leitmotif around which Manto organized the stories he told. For Manto, the balls mirrored Miraji's twinkling eyes topped by a matted globe of ashen hair.<sup>128</sup>

Miraji's strange appearance lead Manto to assume that his conversation with Miraji would follow the contours of Miraji's dense, seemingly incomprehensible poetry.<sup>129</sup> He was, therefore, perplexed by the poet's sharp clarity and straightforward intelligence—a conversational style and intellectual demeanor so at odds with appearance. Miraji offered trenchant readings of Manto's work, even though his critiques seemed cursory.

Manto was initially bewildered by the paradox he encountered in Miraji—someone who was simultaneously readable and unreadable.<sup>130</sup> Miraji was accessible in ways that Manto had not envisioned because he had conceived of Miraji, through his poetry, as someone who was essentially incomprehensible. Also, Manto's expectations about Miraji had been colored by N. M. Rashid, another poet who wrote free verse and prose poetry. Manto saw Rashid as the antithesis of Miraji. Rashid's appearance, his prose, and his poetry were all accessible to Manto; he could actually understand them, so he expected the same kind of consistency from Miraji—complete inaccessibility.<sup>131</sup> Manto's confusion over Miraji's paradoxical

oddness was what most readers of Miraji, including myself, face: the obscurity of some of his poetry seems to belie the clarity of his prose. This capacity to thwart the expectations of readers who demand coherence across different sites (prose, poetry, body, personality) is echoed so often in narratives about Miraji that it becomes, along with the three balls, a leitmotif, one of Miraji's characteristics. Faiz Ahmad Faiz reiterates Manto's dilemma in his preface to Miraji's essays: Miraji's prose is lucid, his poetry opaque.<sup>132</sup>

The difference between Faiz's and Manto's discussions about the poet is that Faiz confines himself to Miraji's poetry, whereas Manto maps poetry onto biography and personality. The dichotomy maintained by critics between Miraji's poetry and prose parallels the separation by biographers of his personality into Jekyll and Hyde parts. Both are clues to particular anxieties about Miraji, but his work and appearance create discomfort not because the ability to read/not read him are located in two separate, differing places, but because they seem to occur simultaneously. Even his *nazm* are posited as incomprehensible—not because of an inherent truth, but rather because of the confusion created by obscurity founded in convention. Miraji is "difficult" as a writer or as a person because readings of his work and personality are not stabilized. He invites readings that are not familiar, so readers cannot get from him the certainty they feel with something more obviously familiar.

Many of the stories I heard about Miraji that seem to originate with and refer back to "Three Balls" do not keep sight of the paradoxical person Manto depicted; rather, they simplify Miraji into his "strangeness." In those Dionysian tales about Miraji that followed and relied on Manto's, Miraji became the object of a prurient desire for simple oddity; descriptions of Miraji in "Three Balls" provided a basis for later narratives in which Miraji was depicted as merely odd. Miraji's balls were the first signal and signifier of his "strangeness," but more signs rapidly followed: holy (Hindu) beads, long sinuous hair, and "French-cut" beard, all described in the biography penned by Manto. Unlike other biographers, however, Manto did not confine Miraji to a compendium of odd traits. Miraji's life-on-the-fringe paralleled his compatriots' who, like him, owned just one set of clothes that had to be stripped off at the launderer's to be washed. But Miraji, unlike his compatriots, exuded a quality of dervishness. For Manto,

he was a mad saint whose strangeness was not merely attributable to bohemian worldliness (unlike other poets who shared the same characteristics); rather, it epitomized a kind of monkish austerity, an otherworldliness. Indeed, the spectral appearance Miraji made to his friend Yusuf Zafar at Mecca—although anomalous because Miraji was not a conventionally religious figure but a mystic alienated from religious conventions and institutions—was in keeping with his "monkishness."

Manto's evocation of Miraji stands in direct contradiction to Aijaz Ahmad's, not in the details, but in the relationship of story to person. The two biographers, at narrative poles from each other in explanations of their "subject's" peculiar habits, echo other storytellers. According to Ahmad, Miraji constructed stories about himself, lived them, and eventually by default and in confusion, collapsed story and self, actually *becoming* the stories he circulated. In contrast, Manto's stories were manifestations of the way Miraji really was; there was no discrepancy or distance between story and person. To Manto, Miraji was not the self-conscious, self-absorbed orchestrator of narratives about some lifestyle he then aspired to live; he was not a poseur saint, a man of the world in disguise, imitating his fellow poets who felt they had to look and act the part of wild bohemians—he was the "real thing." In short, one biographer depicts a wild man who, in a desperate attempt to make himself over as one, eventually forgot that he was *not* one and so betrayed his "true nature."<sup>133</sup> The other tells stories of a wild man who, in his wildness, remained true to his "authentic self."<sup>134</sup>

The two biographers resort to two entirely different taxonomies as they convert details into character. For Manto, Miraji is a dervish, a poet whose lineage stretches back into the eighteenth century, lost in *junūn*, the ecstatic madness of love and longing. For Ahmad, Miraji is merely a multiply signified disreputable man dressing up in the gestures codified in and elaborated by twentieth-century taxonomies of insanity, criminality, homelessness, and labor/class.

#### *Bombay Stories: Poona Beginnings*

Miraji had been in Bombay for just a few weeks when Akhtarul Iman invited him to the mountains in Poona, where Iman had moved in 1944 to work at Shalimar Pictures as a scriptwriter. Shalimar was a small studio constantly on the verge of bankruptcy, so Akhtarul Iman and Miraji toyed

with the idea of starting a small production company that would fill the niche Shalimar's closing would open. Both men traveled by train to Hyderabad for the big Progressive Writers' Association meeting in 1945 to elicit financing for their scheme.<sup>135</sup> The meeting was a difficult one for Miraji, not only because they found no funding, but also because it was the first time he was publicly ostracized by the community of writers to which he felt he belonged. At the meeting, several writers called for a resolution to condemn and disbar writers like Miraji, Manto, and Ismat Chughtai, whose writings were considered "obscene" and thus thought to contravene the aims of the PWA. Fortunately, a group of famous poets and fiction writers lobbied against the resolution and it was not passed. But from that point on, however, Miraji was fair game at Association meetings in Bombay.

#### *Onto Bombay*

Miraji was a difficult guest: he got drunk, peed out the window, and apparently also threw up regularly, upsetting Akhtarul Iman's servant with whom Miraji was left when Akhtarul Iman visited Bombay. So after nine to ten months Akhtarul Iman suggested he move to Bombay and stay with his friends, Mulk Raj Anand and Mohan Saigal, in Dadar (then the outskirts of the city). An argument over Mani Rabadi, a young actress, disrupted the arrangement and Miraji had to move again, this time to Esplanade Mansions in the Fort area in the heart of Bombay. He was given a script to write by Mulk Raj Anand and lived off that money for a little while.

Meanwhile, Shalimar Pictures finally closed after the main producer left for Pakistan as a result of partition. In the heat of the riots, Akhtarul Iman moved to Bombay. He was offered a house in Kala Ghoda by a friend who migrated to Pakistan. Akhtarul Iman offered the house to Madhusudan and Miraji, who lived together for a while. At that time Akhtarul Iman married Sultana Ali, whom he had met several years earlier when Sultana was thirteen and he and Miraji had visited Sultana's uncle, Asaf Ali, in Delhi. When her family fled Delhi for Pakistan in 1947, Akhtarul Iman wrote to her sister to send Sultana, who traveled to Bombay to be married. Following their wedding, the couple found a room in an apartment, where their first child was born. Akhtarul Iman's marriage prompted him to look

for a permanent job; with help from his friends David and Anjum Naqvi, who had contacts in the film world, he was hired by Filmistan as a scriptwriter on a regular contract. With his new job, Akhtarul Iman began earning enough money to support his young family and move them from their single room to a new, small house they bought in Bandra. Akhtarul Iman settled Miraji in with his new family<sup>136</sup> because he was concerned about Miraji's failing health when Miraji had stopped eating and his body had become depleted by diarrhea.

That finances concerned Miraji is evident from the anxious budgets he kept drawing up; stories of his cavalier attitude toward money are both verified and belied by the careful budgets he endlessly scribbled with seeming carelessness on small pieces of paper, left among his effects when he died. Although he was not willing to compromise his principles to make the money he needed to survive, Miraji did make several attempts to earn an income. He sent a collection of his ghazals, *naẓm*, and *gīt* to Qayyum Nazar, a publication that raised enough money to support himself and Akhtarul Iman for several months. Akhtarul Iman also arranged for Miraji to interview with a movie producer who was looking for a writer. At the meeting, Miraji was asked to write a treatment for a script, but he was so incensed at having to generate writing on the spot like a trained animal that he scribbled a short poem and thrust it back at his interviewer. He did not get the job.

Although much of his life in Bombay was confused and confusing, Miraji established a regular, rigorous daily routine around his writing, re-reading stories about the methodical editor of Lahore. Again he went to the library every day to read, find new books, or work on his poetry. Sheets of marked-up, annotated book advertisements and catalogues from local libraries and bookstores testify to his ongoing curiosity about a wide range of authors. He continued to write *naẓm*, and also took lessons to learn the words, rhythms, and meters of medieval Braj and Awadhi bhakti poetry in order to translate it into Urdu.

Miraji was almost obsessively particular about his poetry, scripting and signing each poem with a meticulous hand. He held onto early versions of his work even when he had a final draft. He kept updated lists of poems: where they were published and when, charts of poems collected into books and the categories into which they fell, alternatives for future manuscripts.

The poems he wrote in Bombay are some of his most lushly textured, densely synaesthetic, and beautiful, while also being among his most elegantly nuanced and simple. They roam the geography of desire and the terrain of philosophical speculation and certainty.

His papers also contain short schematic treatments of scripts he was trying to sell. Miraji revived his translations, embarking on three major projects—two on mystical poetry and a third on the complicated relationship between sexual and social mores and practices. As he familiarized himself with bhakti poetry, Miraji translated a set of poems attributed to Mirabai,<sup>137</sup> compiling them into a manuscript and drawing the frontispiece intended for publication. He also began translating the *Rubaiyāt* of Omar Khayyam; scrawled sideways on random pieces of paper, however, they were never polished like the verses of Mirabai. And he returned to *Eastern Love*, the anthology that had so inspired him. Miraji's drafts of *Nigār khānah* (House of Portraits), a book about Malati, a young prostitute being introduced to the seamier side of her trade, originally written in Sanskrit by Damodar Gupta, are translated in the script of a large, casual hand that is at odds with the particular neatness of his other work.<sup>138</sup>

Miraji even made one foray into the movies with a walk-on part as a Brahmin priest, or pujari. Stills from the movie are among the few pictures of him at this time. One, a close-up, captures his ascetic tautness—wide jaws, narrow mouth draped by bushy mustache under sharply delineated nose. The slight frown settled between deep-set eyes evokes the sense of a capacity for intense concentration. A zigzag bandanna is tied a-tilt the top of his shoulder-length disheveled hair; hoop earrings hang from elongated, jutting ears; necklaces circle his lean throat—one with a small locket, the other a double string of beads.

In a second photo he sits cross-legged, bereft of his bandanna, framed by a hanging cloth. Skeletal arms extend forward, his hands hidden by a pujari's accoutrements—burning incense, fruit, flowers on metal plate, water pitcher—in front of him. The edge of the dhoti he wears peeks above the flat surface hosting the priestly paraphernalia. A mandala is drawn on his narrow chest. In the background, at the edge of the photograph, squats a *chārpai*, a frayed covering tossed over it.

The final picture of Miraji, taken just before his death, shows a more restrained, cleaned-up version of the movie pujari. Wearing a starched white

shirt, wild curls pomaded into place, he stares out from a flat gray background. The movie stills embody the Miraji his biographers have chosen to depict, name, and identify—an emaciated, intense, ascetic figure. This photograph returns Miraji, from the figure cloaked in fantasy that one sees evoked by the movie stills, back to the ordinary.<sup>139</sup>

Just as Akhtarul Iman and his family were gaining financial stability, the producer of the movie Akhtarul Iman was writing the script for insulted him; he tore up his contract in front of the producer and stormed out of the studio. Sultana said that this early time in Bombay was one of their most difficult periods. She had left Delhi to live as a young bride in a foreign city, bereft of her familial support network. She and her husband had just purchased a house and needed enough money for a baby and a dependent—Miraji. No longer assured of a constant income, they had to survive on the scattered offers for writing that came her husband's way.

In another attempt to raise money, Miraji and Akhtarul Iman started, with the financial backing of a young entrepreneur named Nigam, the bi-monthly literary journal *Khayāl* (Thought). Sixty-seven issues of it were published. Akhtarul Iman says that he paid Miraji one hundred rupees a month for his services as chief editor.<sup>140</sup> The fairly extensive “board of advisors” the three men put together for the journal included several members of the Progressive Writers' Association—among them, Zoe Ansari. The all-out war that the Bombay chapter of the Association had declared on Miraji after the Hyderabad meetings resonated in gatherings of the journal board.<sup>141</sup> When, at Akhtarul Iman's behest, I asked Zoe Ansari about Miraji, he talked about the remorse he felt when he remembered his own treatment of Miraji before he died.<sup>142</sup> Miraji's translation of *Nigār khānah* was serialized in several early issues of *Khayāl*. When the first installment of Miraji's translation appeared in the journal, it incited the ire of the PWA in Bombay, which then devoted a meeting to Miraji's “pointless” reactionary text. Following a heated discussion, the members decided to demand that the translation no longer be published by *Khayāl* and asked Zoe Ansari to hand in his resignation from the board if the journal continued to serialize the translation. Zoe said that, in retrospect, he believed the active exclusion and anger against Miraji was a direct reflection of Miraji's unofficial banishment from Bombay's literary scene.

The next meeting of *Khayāl* was at Akhtarul Iman's house. Zoe Ansari



attacked Miraji, insulted his work, and insisted that the journal refuse to publish Miraji thereafter. Miraji was apparently very gracious. He questioned Zoe gently about his criticisms and tried to engage him in a conversation about what had made him so furious. The room fell silent as the two men conversed, one more and more heated, the other quietly patient. As the conversation drew to a close, Miraji indicated that if Zoe felt so strongly about the piece, the journal should not continue to serialize it. Zoe told me that he was appalled by his own cruelty during that discussion. Years later, he still regretted his part in ostracizing Miraji, preventing the publication of his work, and cutting off Miraji's access to a community from which he obviously drew sustenance. Zoe's greatest remorse was over his own refusal to acknowledge Miraji's remarkable capacity to encourage and support even violent, violating discussions about his work without rancor or retaliation. But at the time Miraji was, to him, merely a deviant.<sup>143</sup>

This form of ostracism was difficult for Miraji. When he first appeared on Lahore's literary scene, he was the hub of a network of literati. During that period, poets of many different literary and political persuasions shared common spaces where they exchanged work and engaged in critiques of one another's writing, the Halqa being one such site. Over the years, Miraji's literary community stood in for his family, because unlike many other poets, he had not created a conventional family by marriage to replace his family in Lahore; instead, his friends and compatriots supported and sustained him. Akhtarul Iman said that during this time, as Miraji began to feel the loss of his alternate family of friends, he fantasized about returning to Lahore to visit his mother, whom he loved dearly. He applied for a passport and kept it with him, always hoping that he would see her. Although he never managed to collect enough money to pay for a ticket, until his death he held onto the possibility that he might return.

It is important to remember that Miraji's ostracism was not necessarily "personal," although the rhetoric in which it was couched might lead one to believe that such was the case. But he was not the only writer subjected to this kind of treatment by the PWA—Manto and Ismat Chughtai were also persecuted. The harassment constituted a systematic exclusion and marginalization by the organization of particular kinds of writing, and the modes through which the exclusion occurred and the rhetoric that was used to underpin the strategies of exclusion intersected with those em-

ployed by the state.<sup>144</sup> That Manto and Ismat Chughtai were recipients of the same kind of treatment allows one to think about Miraji's situation in the context of a more extensive set of shifts in the literary world. Unlike Lahore in the 1930s, when the demarcations of literary stances were not so acute, the late 1940s produced sharp divisions between differing political and literary positions. Miraji made it clear by his behavior at meetings that he did not endorse or follow those demarcations. The boundaries the PWA established for those writers who belonged and those who did not were marked by their attitudes to writers like Manto, Chughtai, and Miraji. Inevitably these boundaries were negotiated in terms of writing about sexuality; that is, the PWA used their "sexual" themes as the reason for their exclusion. That three writers, whose writing differed as greatly from each other as theirs did, were chosen to mark the limits of inclusion for literary communities that considered themselves central says more about those limits than it does about the position of any one writer in relation to an imaginary center.

The rhetoric that was deployed in the 1940s to eject Miraji from the literary community to which he felt he belonged had certain ramifications on the stories that were told about him and those that were considered by his biographers to be paradigmatic. One example is the insistence on telling the story about Mira Sen as the only love story in Miraji's life, an act that effectively, though inadvertently, suppressed others. In a way, the Mira Sen stories become allegorical, explaining Miraji's name and his inability to find a conventional married relationship. At the same time, the Mira Sen tales resonate with the unrequited love that is "conventional" for classical Urdu poetry, thus provoking the same questions about the simultaneity of convention and the repudiation of it that haunts all of the stories about Miraji.

Although he played a part in the circulation of the Mira Sen stories as exemplary of his life, Miraji also told others that would, if added to the tales of thwarted love, produce a slightly different picture of his desires. The other love stories come from two different times in Miraji's life. One I have told before—Miraji's attraction to Bashir in Lahore, to whom Miraji wrote letters as he was also writing to Mira Sen. Another was told to me by Akhtarul Iman when I asked him about an autographed photograph of an actress we came across as we went through Miraji's papers together.

One afternoon in Bombay, Miraji had gone to the home of a friend

(Akhtarul Iman would not disclose the friend's name) to discuss poetry. An actress, Mani Rabadi, in whom Miraji's friend was "interested"—possibly even in love with—happened to be there. The three sat drinking tea and talking. Mani Rabadi began to haunt Miraji's imagination; he tried to pursue her, but without success. She never occupied his fantasy life in the way that Mira or Bashir did, but he developed an obsession for her and kept her photograph with him until he died.<sup>145</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: TALES FROM THE CRYPT

##### *Premature Burial*

"Where did he die? How?" I asked Akhtarul Iman.<sup>146</sup> I had been offered stories that had been circulated over and over, turned into hagiography, those that had appeared in writing and now in interviews. They began with Miraji's literary birth in Lahore and rapidly descended into descriptions of his degeneration. In his last weeks Miraji was remembered by many people as a body in decay—his difference articulated as disintegration. He became a body that peed and vomited in public places, a body that deteriorated into mania. Miraji was described to me in his final moments as a drunk by Shahid Ahmad Dihlavi; a junkie high on bhang by Manto; a person whose death seemed imminent when he could not control his urge to excrete by Akhtarul Iman. I wanted to hasten the telling of those stories of ever-impending death, to propel them toward conclusion.

The room was thick with the premonsoon heat as I asked questions of Akhtarul Iman, who, tired and ill, was stretched on a divan across from me and my mother in his rectangular Bombay drawing room, his face reflecting the yellow wide-weave cotton of the divan. He responded in his quiet, modulated voice.

"[Miraji] was so ill when we decided to put him into Bombay Hospital . . . he couldn't even make it to the bathroom. Sultana had to clean up after him all the time. His doctor was a fan of his, read a lot of his poetry. It was so ironic that the same doctor was probably responsible for his death. . . .

"He was reading a biography of Baudelaire when he died."

In my imagination I placed Miraji in a monastic garret; a stark, un-

adorned hospital room. I visualized a pallet, a steel frame, a square headboard constructed from metal tubes. Miraji was emaciated, flattened against a thin, hard, cotton mattress. As the afternoon heat dissipated into cool clamminess, I attenuated the body I saw in photographs to suit the image that occupied the fantasy.

"Did you know that he had electroshock therapy?" Akhtarul Iman asked.

"Why? Aren't electroshock treatments for the insane?" I heard the metallic edge of anxiety in my voice.

"Well, he was so, so sick. The doctor thought that it was the best thing. No one really knew what to do; it seemed right. He was such a difficult patient. He wasn't going to live long. His intestines were perforated and his liver was completely gone. He would steal food, have people hide food for him while he was in the hospital, and drink, too. Then he bit his nurse on her hand. I tried to tell him not to do it. I said to him, humoring him, wanting him to stop, 'Don't do it, she's pretty.' But it didn't work.

"Miraji didn't want the treatments; he begged and begged us not to allow them. He was afraid he would never be able to write again if he had shock therapy. He died the first time he was given the shocks. The very first time. The doctor told me that Miraji was so terrified they had to strap him down to a stretcher to get him out of his room to give him the shock therapy that killed him."

"How did you hear about his death?" I asked, biting lightly into the spicy sharp *bhatorā* that Sultana had placed in front of me. My mother touched my arm. I had forgotten that she was in the room with me, sitting on the sofa. The tape squealed and snapped to a halt. I flipped it over, clicked the recorder to restart.

"I was drinking tea, just like this, with Sultana. The hospital called and I was told that Miraji had died, during his first therapy. I remember the time—it was four o'clock on November third or the second, 1949. I told the hospital to dispose of the body. But I called back the next day. I took possession of Miraji's body and arranged for a funeral for that day, November third. Then I called everyone I knew, poets and writers, to attend the funeral.

"Do you know, no one wanted to come. I couldn't even find pallbearers. None of the people he had known, all those people, not one wanted to join

me to carry Miraji's coffin to the grave. Eventually I found three other people: Krishan Chandar, Mahindarnath, and Nigam. We—two Hindus and two Muslims—carried him to his grave. Miraji was buried at the Marine Lines Graveyard. His grave doesn't have a headstone. You'll never find it."

"Why didn't anyone come to Miraji's funeral?"

Akhtarul Iman's voice trembled and tightened with grief and rage as we closed our conversation on Miraji's death. "Bombay was responsible for his demise. He was ostracized here. The way he was treated was terrible. It still makes me angry that everyone abandoned him.

"This is the legacy I want to leave behind. You know that I had a difficult time with him, but I would have never wanted this, that his body, his grave have no meaning. If I say nothing more, I'd like you to tell people about what his end, the loneliness was like. . . . That no one wanted to carry his corpse to rest and no one attended the funeral."

### *Dying Twice*

. . . a death given, the gift of a death that arrives in one way but not another.<sup>147</sup>

Love sees no difference (Love's glance sees nothing between) between life and death  
the one who we live to see,  
she, faithless heathen, brings us to our death.

Muhabbat meñ nahin hai farq jine aur marne ka  
uski ko dekh kar jite hain, jis kafir par dam nikle.<sup>148</sup>

The following is the account of Miraji's death that Akhtarul Iman committed to print. It now stands as the authoritative version. My translation condenses Akhtarul Iman's essay, but holds onto his language.<sup>149</sup>

After Miraji moved in with me, he stopped producing blood almost entirely. He put himself on homeopathy for two or three months. I badly wanted him to try other medicines, but my proposals made him furious. He kept on getting worse. I had to overcome my response to his rage. At last, in desperation, I, on the advice of some doctors, got him to agree to other remedies. Only after I went over it time and again, did he finally accept that without medicines he would never be able to move around easily; he believed that if he were mobile, he might return to Lahore for proper care.

Some doctors I consulted had Miraji start a course of liver injections. He tried to get a permit [to go to Lahore], even took photographs of himself. Whenever he felt slightly healthier, and it was suggested to him that he go to the permit office, he would put off the trip. The liver injections help, they do not cure. I have no idea where he got this, but he came to believe fervently that the more he ate, the faster he would recover, and the more effective the injections would be. We turned into adversaries. I would recommend abstinence, moderation. He would slip off to the food vendors in the market downstairs and glut himself on everything that had been forbidden him. I would offer injunctions to the sick, tell my wife to keep an eye on him; she'd soothe him, he'd get angry, consume the food that had been cooked at home and then order up a parcel of apples to eat. His illness was in its final stages.

I quickly admitted him to a hospital in Bandra. But there he brought the other patients and the people working in the local restaurant around to his way of seeing, and persuaded patients who were in better health than him to give up their meals to him.

When Dr. Faruqi, the chief resident, and I found this out we were furious. We transferred him to King Edward Memorial Hospital. After a few days there, his mental state began to deteriorate. Dr. Kirodar called on an expert psychologist, who put Miraji in analysis. But Miraji refused to divulge most of his history. When I confronted him, he got angry at me, saying, "Akhtar! Listen, these people want to extract my complexes, steal my complexes from me. I don't want to let them. I won't let it happen. If I lose them, how can I write, what will I write. They are the substance of my creativity."

I tried and tried to convince him, but he remained adamant. Dr. Kirodar felt that electroshock therapy might work better. But there was no opportunity to try it.

Miraji needed blood transfusions; Mahindarnath gave him blood, but the possibility of workable cures was fading, and the transfusion was wasted. It did not help Miraji.

I went to visit him at the hospital every day. My wife often came along. Madhusudan and Mahindarnath would come. He would complain to each person in turn—I am being given this, but not given

that. We did everything we could to save him, but he refused to come along.

It was the night of November third. I was eating dinner. A telegram arrived from the hospital. I abandoned my food, and rushed to the hospital with Nijam Naqvi and my brother-in-law. I gazed at Miraji's corpse. On his face was dignity, love, innocence, composure, peace, tranquility. I could not believe that he was gone.

Miraji will never leave us. He'll stay with us; write letters to you when he comes back, stop suddenly while strolling along to phone a newspaper office. I went there myself the next day and tried hard, but partisanship had taken them over, the thick cloaking dust of fantasized animosity had hidden their humanness from them.

You must have known how many people attended Miraji's funeral, held in such a crowded city like Bombay: just four. My brother-in-law, Madhusudan, Prem, and I. Miraji was buried in the Marine Lines Graveyard.

His books, his papers, his essays, finished and unfinished. These few things he left behind. They are with me. I had them brought to me from Fort. His famous books are in the Halqa's caretaking. Miraji penned in every book himself, "for the *Halqah-e arbāb-e zaug*." When I was able, I sent those books off.

Qayyum! You didn't get to see him before he died. He was so reduced, looking at him was painful. He'd pray: "God, if you won't give Miraji his health, grant him death. At least he won't have to suffer so."

His face, hands, feet, back were coated in inflamed tumors. In his last days he read *Defeat of Baudelaire*. He had taken the book with him to the hospital. It kept him company until he died.

I want to write a complete, full, book on him, replete with details. *Khayāl*, the journal, died with Miraji."

Akhtarul Iman died in 1994.

## Two LITERARY MOVEMENTS: MARGINS AND CENTERS