

## Mīrajī

### Life

Sanā'ullah Dār, better known by his pen-name Mīrajī was born in 1912 in Lahore. In 1926, at age 16, Miraji published his first short story in the children's magazine *Phul*. In 1938, Mīrajī joined the staff of the literary magazine *Adabī Duniya* as its poetry editor and continued to make his mark in the Lahore literary circle through his participation in literary associations. During this period, he was a well-respected poet and editor, and briefly belonged to the Progressive Writer's Association, but he gradually fell out of disfavor with the Progressives because he differed with them on the idea of "progress."

Since the PWA was a largely Marxist endeavor the Progressives were dedicated to depicting the reality of the peasant and the worker, their hardship and suffering. Thus, the idea of "progress" enshrined in the PWA manifesto was concerned with destroying the hierarchies of class, caste and feudalism. Mīrajī attended the meetings of the Progressive Writers' Association, but he gradually fell out of favor with them.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this are many— Mīrajī's odd appearance, his alcoholism, his "sexual perversity" (he was bisexual), and most importantly of all, his resistance to the Progressive Writers' agenda.

Mīrajī disagreed with the Progressives on the meaning of the word "progressive," arguing that it should include progressive ideas of sex and sexuality as well.<sup>2</sup> In addition, for Mīrajī, "progress" was not an abstract idea, but was embodied in ordinary working-class people, such as the washer man, the clerk and the boatman, whose unfulfilled desires for sex, for passion and love ought to be subject of poetry. Mīrajī was accused by the Progressives for writing obscene poetry, and defended his poetry by stating that there was nothing obscene about his poetry, "I consider the sexual act and its dependencies a great gift of nature, and the greatest pleasure and blessing of life, and the contamination civilization has associated with sex displeases me."<sup>3</sup>

From 1942-1944, Mīrajī worked at All India Radio, but he was fired from his position because of his alcoholism. In 1946, he moved to Bombay and unsuccessfully sought work in the Bombay film industry. He died in 1949 at the young age of 37 and left behind a corpus of more than a thousand poems in many different genres—*nazm*, *gīt*, *ghazal* and *hazal*.

### Poetry

Mīrajī is one of the founders of Urdu modernist poetry and borrowed freely from whatever poetic traditions inspired him—French symbolism, ancient Greek poetry, English and American modernism, and even ancient Chinese poetry. Specifically, Mīrajī drew on the poetry of the French symbolists, especially Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé, to create symbolist Urdu poetry.<sup>4</sup> He was also a prolific translator and translated the works of a variety of poets from D.H. Lawrence to Baudelaire and Sappho.

He combined these Western influences with Sanskrit, Braj and Awadhi metaphors, images and religious symbols in his poetry and adapted folk forms such as the *gīt* (song) to Urdu, and he experimented with setting his poetry to meters from various different poetic traditions. Mīrajī's mixing of meters and forms was a result of his considerable erudition and a creative, self-conscious foray into hybridity. Mīrajī thus forged a new modernist aesthetic in Urdu poetry, and his influence continues today.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Patel, G. "The Terms of the Encounter: Miraji and the Progressive Writer's Association" pp. 83-130

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Miraji, *Apni Nazmon ke Baare Main*, 477; translation by Khadeeja Majoka.

<sup>4</sup> See Patel G, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> See Patel G, p. 51.