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Modernity in Urdu Poetry and the Enigma of Miraji (A Review Article)

GEETA PATEL. *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism, and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002. 470 pp.

FAIZ AHMED FAIZ, Ṣanāullāh Dār, *'urf* Miraji, and N. M. Rashid, three canonical poets of Urdu, were born in consecutive years: Rashid in 1910, Faiz in 1911 and Miraji in 1912. They grew and wrote amidst the tumult of the twentieth century: the anticolonial movement and the growth of nationalism, the clash of political and economic ideologies, world war, and the insidious stirrings of modernity. Those tumultuous times fashioned the direction of their creativity but also allowed them to respond individually, self-consciously, independently.

Urdu poetry in the 1920s and 1930s was Iqbal's (1878–1938) domain. A great deal has been written about Iqbal's philosophy and his worldview as expressed in his poetry and lectures, and about the impact of his "vision" of a Muslim nation. Iqbal did not reject the past, but argued for a way to go forward seamlessly, within the tradition. On 10 April 1936, two years before Iqbal's death, the first All India Progressive Writers' Conference was held in Lucknow. The Progressive Writers made it clear that it was the *duty* of Indian authors to develop a literary agenda which discouraged reactionary and revivalist views on questions of family, religion, sex, war and society, and to combat biases supporting communalism, racial antagonism, sexual libertinism, social exploitation and so on. Liberating sex from the repressive hold of the middle class and rehabilitating it as a force in society, and therefore as a theme in literary production,

fascinated them as well. But all this presumed a break with tradition that I would argue was utopian and artificially constructed. One could grow within the tradition, while branching out from it, but never honestly achieve complete severance.

Of the three, Faiz Ahmed Faiz (d. 1982) was the inspired socialist who sensuously molded the image of beauty and love into socialist verse. His language is a Persianized melodic Urdu, mellifluous, sonorous, strong and rhetorical. N. M. Rashid (d. 1976) appears as a restless, excitable, feverish poet, painfully aware of the decline of his world and culture. He established himself as a poet of modern sensibilities grappling with fears, doubts and uncertainties. His poems are written in a free style which employs strong resonance and repetition for effect. His language is also Persianized. Miraji's (d. 1949) verse was experimental in form, theme and content. He wrote sensuous impassioned poetry that was full of skepticism. He died young from the excesses of alcohol and other substance abuse and this early death marginalized him temporarily from the literary canon. It also encouraged the development of myths and legends which painted him as sexually perverted and eccentric. Nevertheless, despite his short-lived career, his leadership of the Ḥalqa-e Arbāb-e Żauq (Society of Those of Discerning Taste) in Lahore influenced the molding of modernity in Urdu poetics. While Miraji may not be placed on a par with Ghālib, Mīr, Saudā, or Iqbal, he holds his own special niche.

Though they wrote different kinds of poetry, the three, Faiz, Rashid and Miraji, interacted and corresponded on poetic subjects. In fact, Rashid talks of Miraji in the same breath as Mīr and Ghālib. He says that their frustration and loneliness, their pain and claustrophobia are shared or collective, but in the understanding of their poetic selves, their experiences are filtered through the sieve of their individualities.

Mīr hō, Mirzā hō, Mīrājī hō,
Nā-rasā hātʰ kī namnākī hai
Ēk hī čīkh hai furqat kē bayābānōṅ mēṅ
Ēk hī ṭ̤ūl-e alamnākī hai ēk hī rūḥ jō bē-ḥāl hai zindānōṅ mēṅ
ēk hī qaid tamannā kī hai

Mīr hō, Mirzā hō, Mīrājī hō
Apnī hī żāat kē ghirbāl mēṅ čʰan jātē haiṅ[1]

[1]N.M. Rāshid, "Mīr hō, Mirzā hō, Mīrājī hō," in his *Kulliyāt-e Rāshid* (Lahore: Māvarā' Publishers, 1988), pp. 341–2.

Be it Mir, Mirza or Miraji
their hands damp, unfulfilled
in the wilderness of separation their cries are one
they feel the same misery
the spirit which wilts imprisoned is the same
the curb of desire is the same.

(Be it Mir, Mirza or Miraji
they are sifted in the sieve of their own self)

Since the late 1980s there has been a surge of interest in Miraji. Jamīl Jālibī first compiled and published the collected poetry of Miraji, *Kulliyāt-e Mīrājī* (London: Urdu Markaz, 1988), and then followed it with his comprehensive study of the poet, *Mīrājī: Ēk Muṭāla'a* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1990). There have been a series of publications since, the most recent being Geeta Patel's postmodernist study, the first in English. My initial reaction (I feel tempted to say *kaifiyat*) on reading Geeta Patel's *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings: On Gender, Colonialism and Desire in Miraji's Urdu Poetry*[2] was one of empathy with the earnestness and passionate involvement of the author in the subject of her dissertation, as well as exasperation (or *jʰunjlāhaṭ* as Patel would say) with her tiresome overuse of Urdu words and phrases.

The choice of a beautiful and evocative rendition of Yūsuf Ẓafar's experience as narrated to Shāhid Dehlavī on the facing page of chapter one, "Stories from a Childhood," excites the expectations of the reader:

> Sitting a little away from Huzur's Jali in beautiful Medina, lost in meditation, I was asking blessings for my friends as they came to mind, one by one, until no one's name was left unremembered. […] My feelings seemed to be dissolving and strings of pearl tears poured from my eyes when suddenly Miraji stood in front of me and said, "You've forgotten me—you didn't pray for me!" I prayed for him right away. (p. 14)

However, the inappropriate choice of then quoting Ghālib at the beginning of the chapter, and the infelicitous translation, only create mixed feelings in the reader. The book is divided into four parts. Part

[2]All references to this book are cited in the text.

One is a life story. Part Two focuses on the Progressive Writers' Movement and Miraji in relation to it. Part Three offers a deconstruction of self, language and masculinity, and Part Four *obsesses* on reading gender in a name. There are two appendices: the first a select translation of poems and the second working translations of prose and some poems.

The story begins in seamlessly poetic prose, but after barely recounting the poet's birth it is jarringly halted with a reference to Anīs Nāgī's book, *Mīrājī: Ēk Bʰaṭkā huā Shā'ir*,[3] (Miraji, a Wayward Poet). And then, Patel launches into a postcolonial reading of Nāgī's description of the Mohalla Balucha Muzang, a neighborhood of Lahore where Miraji was born and spent his early years. Patel gives undue importance to Nāgī's unimportant little book, going to the extent of comparing Nāgī's two-line description of the mohalla to E. M. Forester's *Chandrapore* (cf. p. 16). Nāgī writes: "Miraji's parents lived in a modest house in Muzang. The house was in the midst of the stench and filth of dirty open drains— — —Miraji lived in Lahore until 1941."[4]

Patel attributes her own sensitivities of a postcolonial awareness to Nāgī and tries to read his mind when she writes:

> The dirt and disease that Nagi pencils into Miraji's birth place follow the familiar contours of science, criminality and law—British nineteenth-century depictions of class and future promise. If you are born colonized into the meanness of a place like Muzang, where you are born overwhelms everything else […] So Nagi, too, describing Muzang, presages his portrait of the grown poet's insalubriousness, his "night-soiled clothes," and his "public masturbation," and his *āvārgī* his "vagabond ways." (p. 17)

She nevertheless gives us an alternate description of Muzang. Her source is one Mrs. Din [*sic*] who lived in Lahore in the 1930s and even knew Mira Sen, Miraji's unrequited love and inspiration for his own *takhalluṣ*. According to Mrs. Din, Muzang's winding lanes were crowded and animated, and it wasn't mean or dirty or gloomy. From here Patel

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[3]Lahore: Pakistan Books and Literary Sounds, 1991. This is a slim book consisting of 78 pages. Chapter One is devoted to a sketch of Miraji's life including a description of the neighborhood called Muzang. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

[4]Nāgī, p. 15. The text is broken with long dashes like the one above. Here I couldn't tell whether the sentence meant that Miraji lived in that house till 1941 or in Lahore but not in that house.

digresses into a winding, sickly-sweet narrative of the *galī* and *kūča* that resonate Urdu poets' unrequited loves and where desire and pain mingle, and the lane becomes an allegory of sorts for Patel herself as she tries to discern a relationship between the dust of the lanes and the poetic stance of Miraji. Patel's reader, befuddled and confused, is swept along trying to pick up fragments of Miraji's childhood from the flotsam of the Titanic, a burden that could have been postponed until later. The chaos brought by modernity, aggravated by the failure of technology as evidenced by the sinking of the Titanic, juxtaposed with the anticolonial movement in India is seen as the backdrop to Miraji's childhood.

The next section of chapter one's "Stories" gives more biographical details of the poet's life: his early youth spent in railway towns in Gujarat, particularly Halol, and Sindh where his father, an assistant engineer for the railways, was posted. Patel traveled to Halol ostensibly to garner interpretive insights into Miraji's childhood landscapes, to verify them with the poet's own account and follow his lead in using them as a key to unravel his sexuality and poetic obscurity. She provides a lyrical description of the railway colony in which Miraji had lived:

> Larger houses still huddle close by. One that Miraji might have lived in is long and cool, yellow on the bottom, dusty white on top, nested back behind tall white walls, its slate yard leading to the kitchen [...] Trees—thick mango, long-leaved neem, and purple feathery jacaranda—lurch over it. A man smoking on a *chārpai* hidden in the veranda, [...] The trees, he says, are a legacy of the British. (p. 40)

Patel creates an interface between Miraji's personal account of the awakening of physical desire and the landscapes of Miraji's youth. This interface is constructed by embedding episodic scenes (1–4), extracted from a translation of Miraji's autobiographical essay, "Kučʰ Apnē Bārē mēṅ," in the section titled "Scenes from an 'Incomplete Self-Portrait'" (pp. 32–43). While the style itself is refreshing and new in theoretical writing, the deconstruction of the poet's sexuality, albeit from a different angle, nonetheless locates the poetic stance firmly within the parameter of the poet's very own experience. My point is that poetry need not always be a personal experience of the poet or writer.

The remaining sections of the chapter give particulars of Miraji's brief tempestuous life: in Lahore, Delhi, and finally Pune and Bombay, with Patel meticulously searching for details up to the very end, the last three years pieced together with help from Akhtar-ul-Iman and his wife,

Sultana. The author recounts the incident of the poet's glimpsing, falling in love, and meeting Mira Sen, and her rejection of him followed by the subsequent abandonment of a college education by the now lovelorn poet. She reconstructs Miraji's personality from the accounts of his friends and contemporaries (all of these were published posthumously and collected together by Jālibī in *Mīrājī: Ēk Muṭāla'a*) and dwells at length on Sa'adat Hasan Manto's oeuvre. Manto's piece titled "Tīn Gōlē," the title of the essay translated somewhat oddly as "Three Balls" by Patel, reflects Manto's perplexity when he meets Miraji and finds him to be an intelligent, articulate man, quite unlike the dense, obscure person he had a mental image of from the poetry. For Manto, the orbs wrapped in tinfoil kept on the table, and often in the poet's hands, mirrored Miraji's twinkling eyes. Was Miraji the person whose image his poetry created? Was his bohemian lifestyle a mask, a disguise for his clear intellect, a mere "persona" of unrequited love? Patel admits to being at a loss in answering these questions. She writes that readers demand coherence across different sites: prose, poetry, body, and personality, and Miraji's thwarting of all those expectations becomes one of his characteristics (p. 68). Miraji's prose style is lucid, but his poetry is opaque.

Let me address this issue of "lucid prose, opaque poetry." It is not as if all of Miraji's verse is opaque. He was prolific, so his verse is of uneven quality. Most of it is fairly straightforward, in easy lyrical language. On first reading, his poems in free verse appear obscure every so often simply because of unfamiliarity with the newness of the experimental form or the awkwardness of the length of lines. Some poems are virtually meaningless; others deliberately deploying unfamiliar symbolism for implicit sexual content or theme. Let us say that a handful of poems are opaque. His prose writings compiled in the volume *Mashriq-o-Maghrib kē Naghmē* (Songs of the East and West) are primarily expositions of poetry, introductory essays on Chinese poetry, translations, and so on. It is obvious that there is no room for opaqueness in this kind of prose. If he were writing fiction one could draw such a comparison. As for the mismatch between poetry and personality, was there a mismatch? And if so, surely Miraji is not the first creative writer who belied his reader's expectations.

When Miraji lived and worked in Lahore as the editor of *Adabī Duniyā,* he was at the zenith of his literary influence. He was also the convener of Ḥalqa-e Arbāb-e Żauq. The membership of the Ḥalqa intersected with that of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) and included Progressive Writers like Krishan Chander and Rajinder Singh Bedi. Patel notes that: "Over time, and with the approach of independence, the

modernists (*jadīdiyāt*) embodied by the Halqa separated out from the Progressives (*taraqqī pasand*) who belonged almost exclusively to the PWA" (p. 84).

Patel feels that prior to the separation members of the two organizations discussed issues related to the vexed terrain of what constituted *jadīdiyāt* or modernity and how it differed from *taraqqī* or progress. Delving into Miraji's essay, "*Na'ī Shā'erī kī Bunyādēṅ*" (The Fundamentals of New Verse) she attempts to define/explain Miraji's position vis-à-vis the two camps and also how Miraji differentiated between writers who were social realists, and thus mimics, and the general idea of "progress." She concludes that Miraji's position is a fluid one. This is how she chooses to explain it:

> I write of Miraji as though he "belonged" to a specialized (local) community of self-defined urban literati who produced work in Urdu. If "local" is linguistically defined in opposition to rather than in conflation with geography, then people who share language, write in it, publish in it, and form an imagined community across space, across cities, across different locales, can perhaps be said to partake of a local community. (p. 85)

Patel skirts the issue of modernity, new verse in Urdu and how it can be distinguished from progressive writing. Instead she digresses by giving a comprehensive account of the Progressive Movement and Miraji's location in it. In an early essay, "Na'ī Shā'erī: Ēk Imtiḥān" (New Poetry: A Test), Shamsur Rahman Faruqi responds to questions regarding new poetry: in what ways it differs from old poetry and whether and how it is different from progressive writing.

> The new poet has only two possessions. His own crushed, trampled and wounded self and the awareness of his self's vibrant, stirred up, sensitivity and ability to express. But this expression is not for a platform or a worldly compulsion, or to endorse or deride, support or detract. It springs from the sparks that fly from the collision of his self with the world. The new poet regards poetry simply as poetry, not a philosophy, program, demonstration, debate, instruction, legacy, advertisement, or news. The new poet regards himself as uncommitted in every way. [...] The question whether new poetry is different from progressive poetry and whether new poetry is ahead of progressive poetry are peculiar questions. New poetry is different because its stimuli and creative forces are different. [...] *The important question that needs to be asked is whether new poetry is a reaction*

> *to progressive poetry just as symbolism in France was a reaction to the heavy romanticism of the nineteenth century.*[5]

Though the PWA chose to ostracize Manto, Ismat Chughtai and Miraji under ideological pressure from the Communist Party, they were not able to fully succeed in their campaign against Miraji while he was alive. My point is that one can focus more centrally on Miraji's role in the world of the poets and literature of his time, and not have to understand Miraji through the foil of a putative marginalizing relationship with an organization such as the PWA. After all, Miraji, in spite of his failing health during the last two years of his life, possessed certain powers as a critic and editor, unlike Manto or Ismat Chughtai. An interesting question is: what would Miraji's impact have been if he had lived another thirty years?

Geeta Patel seems to be unduly fascinated by what she calls the gendered implications of Miraji's pen name.

> His name—a woman's name—could have easily placed him in a lineage of poets who took pen names, but the gendered implications of the name, coupled with the dissonance produced by his "obscure" though beautiful poetry, circumvented his placement in a literary tradition. (p. 13)

Patel's feminist epistemic approach to Miraji, though interesting, is nevertheless unfathomable to readers in the Urdu world. Most educated people in India or Pakistan would not confuse "Miraji" with "Mirabai." Perhaps Patel's writing from outside the culture makes her more sensitive to the nuances of gendering names. This may seem appropriate for a readership located in the West.

> When I tell people that I am working on Miraji and see their inaugural gestures of comprehension, I usually hasten to correct a possible misconception on their part and add that Mira*ji* was a twentieth-century male Urdu poet who died in 1949—not Mira*bai* the seventeenth-century's ubiquitous female *bhakta*. (p. 241)

A sizeable section of the book addresses a gendered reading of Miraji's name. Patel explores the possibility of collapsing the distinction between Mira Sen (Miraji's unrequited love), Mirabai and Miraji. She is

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[5]In his, *Lafāz-o-Maʿnī* (Allahabad: Shabkhūn Kitāb Gʰar, 1968), pp. 125–35. Emphasis added by me.

continuously puzzled by the gendering of the name and wants the reader to approach Miraji as a female voice articulated through a male personality; at least to keep open "the pause between name and gender" (p. 285). I don't agree, because I don't see the need for it. There are several poems in which Miraji addresses a female beloved whom he calls "Mira," but Patel has not included any of them in her book. It was fashionable in Miraji's time to invoke women's names in poetry. There is the example of Akhtar Shirani (1905–48) who wrote poems addressed to a beloved named "Salma." Poets like Sardar Jafri and Akhtarul Iman also mention names of beloveds such as "Sultana" in their poems. My point is that the so-called ambiguity of the beloved's identity or gender in the Urdu *ghazal* was old fashioned by the 1940s. In Panjab, Miraji's native region, names which did not necessarily indicate gender were especially common. Much of Patel's thesis relies on the potential for identity confusion inherent in the use of a cross-gendered name, yet the situation is quite common and does not seem to promote the psychological state she assumes. For example, such names as "Devi," "Iqbal," "Sati," "Krishna" and "Naseem" are given to males and females alike. "Miraji" is a *takhalluṣ*, not a name. Epistemically, the *takhalluṣ* is the writer's poetic identity, often evoking a sense of anguish which can then be absorbed in the last couplet of the poem. Examples are Dard, Dāgh, Ātish, Jigar, Firāq, Saudā, Majrūḥ, Fānī, etc. Patel doesn't discuss the honorific "jī," again common in Panjab. This is an important element in his name as it *distinguishes* him from Mirabai as well as from Mira Sen.

Patel falls back on the age-old argument that Miraji is exploiting the peculiarities of the grammar of gender in Urdu. Her problem is that the obscurity of gender does not necessarily carry the weight of meaning she implies. Often in her translations she excises the gendered pronoun herself, giving to readers in English *her* version of Miraji. Let us explore Patel's gendered reading of Miraji along with her deconstruction of the poem "Dēvdāsī aur Pujārī" (pp. 288–9 and 343–5).

Here it becomes crucial to raise the question of whom Patel is writing for? On one level her critique assumes little or no knowledge of "Indian tradition(s)" or of Urdu and Hindi, and yet she takes a rhetorical position which demands a level of semiotic sophistication that most of her readers will not possess. On the other hand, a reader who is conversant with Urdu poetry should have been supplied the original of "Dēvdāsī aur Pujārī" in order to draw her/his own conclusions with respect to the crucial interpretations that Patel herself makes. Here are a few examples. First, I would take issue with Patel's "translation" of the poem's title, for

my problems with her interpretation begin there. I would translate the title as "The Temple Dancer and the Worshiper," instead of leaving it essentially untranslated, the effect of which is to set the stage for a rather forced interpretation. The "forcing" begins with Patel's insisting, since the main characters are a "*dēvdāsī*" and a "*pujārī*," that the context must be a temple and that "the title transfers the poem into and unfolds it in a semantic or poetic lineage/space, the 'Hindu tradition'" (p. 289). This leads us to assume, as Patel would have it, a particularized gendered relationship between the *dēvdāsī* and the *pujārī*, i.e., female/male, and to assume further that the "third party" is an unnamed, ungendered deity, who happens to be absent but nevertheless accounts for the special psychological environment of *darshan* or gazing. Frankly, I do not see the reason to impose a literal reading of the context! Why does the gender of the *pujārī* have to be established? As a native speaker of Urdu, I can easily imagine a poetic instance where the gender of *pujārī* is ambiguous, particularly in a poem about desire. If one accepts this possibility, then contextualizing the poem within the "Hindu tradition" and deconstructing it through a grammatical and semiotic analysis becomes moot. Patel's arguments often force the gendered reading of pronouns and rely upon a manipulation of semantics, such as her discussion of the Sanskrit *drish* and the Hindustani *dēk*^{h} to suggest that the gaze of the *pujārī* is profane rather than sacred. Having read the original, I don't agree that the genders of the *dēvdāsī* and *pujārī* "are unveiled in the third and fifth line, correspondences are drawn between a 'she' and a masculine 'I.'" (p. 291). The fifth line contains the verb *dēk*^{h}*ūṅ*, a subjunctive that does not reveal the gender of the *pujārī*, probably intentionally so. Finally, I see in the line "*jaisē dēvī kī murat hī jī kar nāč rahī hō nāč!*" a reference not only to the dancer but to the goddess, that is, Patel's so-called missing deity.

I think what bothered me most as a reader was the excessive use of Urdu words in the text. Many of these words are not included in the glossary; and even if they were they would still serve no purpose for the informed reader nor enhance the meaning for the non-expert. Sometimes Patel trips herself with such transliterations as "Taḥrīq" (p. 3) instead of "Taḥrīk," "*baqvās*" (p. 30) instead of "*bakvās*," "*t̤arīqh*" (p. 221) instead of "*t̤arīq*," "faqt" (p. 173) instead of "faqat," and so on. In a Rushdiean fashion she gives multiple glosses within the text, creating more annoyance and confusion than clarity. For example, "*yagāngat*" is glossed as "oneness/solitude/isolation" (p. 215); city lanes is elaborated as "*galī* and *kūcā*," (p. 17). I want to ask who her reader is in such sentences as: "Miraji calls Champaner a famous ancient historical site (*masshūr tārīkhī muqām*), and

in that phrase is secreted the kind of history, the kind of local tales Miraji alludes to in one of the short richly suggestive prose pieces the poet wrote in the late forties [...]" (p. 38). What is the need for the *inaccurate* Urdu gloss? What happened to "ancient"? It should read "*mashhūr qadīm tārīkhī maqām*." Another example is: "… he spoke of both kinds of political lyric as representative of new thought and styles of the time (*zamāne ke naye uslūb o tafakkur*)" (p. 44). What is the use of this gloss? Such glossing appears whimsical but earnest. At times Patel's use of quotes from Ghālib appears to be employed for effect, such as in the beginning of the first chapter. What purpose does it serve? Excerpts from Miraji's verse would be more appropriate.

Though Geeta Patel's translations of Miraji's poetry are occasionally brilliant, sometimes they misinterpret the original. Overall her renditions are better than most I have read. In all there are nineteen poems in Appendix A, some of them have two versions, one published and one manuscript. The reader fails to appreciate or enjoy the different versions for several reasons, the most important being that the original poem in Urdu is not available in the book for comparison. What one has are Patel's two translations (one of each version), a situation that invites predicament more than enjoyment. An example will serve to illustrate my point: Patel provides two versions of the poem "Dēvdāsī aur Pujārī," title translated as "Devadasi and Pujari" (pp. 343–5).

First version (opening line, p. 343; emphasis added):

> Look, come see a dance, the dance, the
> *undefiled* dance of a devadasi

Second version (opening line, p. 344; emphasis added):

> Look, come see a dance, the dance, the *clean*
> dance of a devadasi

Urdu original (not included):

> *Lō nāč ye dēkʰō, nāč, pavitra nāč ēk dēvdāsī kā*

My translation:

> Come watch this dance, the dance, the
> chaste dance of a *dēvdāsī*

Replacing "*undefiled*" with "*clean*" doesn't mean much unless the original word was not "*pavitra*" in the manuscript but something else which was closer to *clean* than to *undefiled.* Understandably, writers often

rework their texts and save drafts of earlier versions. Patel's access to private posthumous papers of Miraji (all of which have eventually been published by others) alone does not justify including multiple translated versions. Perhaps a commentary on the nuances of the published versus the unpublished versions would have justified her selection. The "Dēvdāsī" translation also suffers from mistranslations.

Published version of Urdu original:

Čupkē čupkē ḥērānī mēṅ yūṅ samj^{h}ūṅ
Jaisē dēvī kī mūrat hī nāč rahī hō nāč!
Yā b^{h}ūlē sē jal-pariyōṅ kī rānī d^{h}artī par ā'ī hō
Aur pānī kī lakīrōṅ aisē hiltī jā'ē, lahrāyē

My translation:

In my heart I wonder
That the statue of the goddess has come to
life and is dancing
Or the queen of a bunch of mermaids has
lost her way and come to earth
And she moves like ripples of water, sways

Patel's translation:

silently, silently realize in wonder that
like a goddess-statue come to life you are
dancing, dancing
like a forgetful queen of an army of water-
sprites descendedto to earth
and ripples on water stir so, flicker (p. 343)

While "silently, silently" can be a stylistic innovative translation of the echo construction "*čupkē čupkē*," to me it has the straightforward meaning "secretly, clandestinely, secretively." Patel has completely missed out the nuance of the idiom "*b^{h}ūlē sē*" (accidentally), which she translates as "forgetful." The poem's translation has several errors from misreading.

The title of another poem, "Āṅk^h-Mičōlī" (Hide and Seek), is translated somewhat oddly as "In the Blink of an Eye" (p. 346). Again, some subtleties escape the translator:

Hāṅ kitnī mujkō muḥabbat hai us laṛkī sē jō
rahtī hai
Kuč^h dūr yahāṅ mērē g^{h}ar sē

Maiṅ jātā hūṅ uskō dēkʰōṅ
Vōh mujkō naẓar kab ātī hai
Gar ājā'ē mujkō dēkʰē
Jʰaṭ naẓrōṅ sē čʰup jātī hai

My translation:

Oh Yes, I love that woman so, who lives
a little way past my house.
I go to see her
But rarely do I catch a glimpse of her,
And if I do, and she sees me
She quickly hides herself.

Patel's translation:

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?
(p. 346)

I am puzzled as to why Patel has chosen not to include the poem "Sahārā," which Miraji himself analyzed, for translation or analysis. The poem is about the experience of erotic pleasure. In his line by line explanation, the poet elaborates his feelings with respect to the difference between dew and tears. He calls dew the result of a night's erotic experience and says that while tears are salty, dew is tasteless. In other words, the experience of complete love calls for tears, a sharing of anguish. Miraji clarifies ambiguities: night is related to pleasure, dew is related to night, dew appears after the passing of the night, thus dew represents the culmination of pleasure, "*phūl*," i.e., the flower is the poet.[6]

Though she has not explicitly said how long the book was in the making, it comes across as an intense labor of love, a rediscovery or connection with her own roots. Her passion for poetry is revealed in flashes of brilliant translation, such as the following extract from the diffi-

[6]Mīrājī, "Apnī Ēk Naẓm 'Sahārā' kā Tajziya," in Jālibī, *Mīrājī: Ēk Muṭāla'a*, p. 496.

cult poem "A Night On the Far Side of the Wine Glass" ("Ābgīnē kē Us Pār kī Ēk Shām") (pp. 338–40):

> Get up, come to me … come to me … why
> so unsure?
> What were you drinking to? Why did you
> boast:
> I will drink the blood of my past life.
> Leave me, bring the sleeping dancer, who
> with her cold eyes
> with a single pat, puts my bounding heart
> to sleep in warm sighs. (p. 338)

Her analysis of the Progressive Writers' Movement is detailed, well documented and lucid. I particularly liked her exposition of their foremost critical theorist Akhtar Husain Raipuri (pp. 113–8, 122–6). One may not agree with her readings at times, nevertheless she represents an interesting perspective, albeit heavily influenced by the Western academy's emphasis on the methodologies of deconstruction. Her critical approach is refreshing in comparison to earlier handling of the subject by Subcontinental scholars. Her critique of established scholars like Jamīl Jālibī, Aiʿjāz Aḥmad, Muhammad Sadiq is bold, often strident and supported by her own reading of gender. The book does a good job of presenting a mosaic of Miraji, but is not entirely effective in contextualizing him within the modernist movement in Urdu.

Geeta Patel has written a book that succeeds in addressing the gap that many of us feel has developed during the frenetic reconfiguration of theoretical positions since the 1970s. The carelessness is transparent in the theorizing of post-structuralists who have ignored writing in Third World languages in favor of English texts. But the problem does not end here. It is our responsibility as scholars of the Urdu literary tradition to redirect the limelight away from Ghālib, Iqbal, Faiz, Ismat Chughtai and Manto, in order to increase awareness and appreciation of other voices. Patel validates the importance and viability of such research by widening the discussion on the meaning of Miraji's corpus, nevertheless disclosing the linguistic and epistemic challenges of such work. ❒