

SarmadSehbai*

MIRAJI: The Return of Anima

Miraji, Judah's son, the lord of autoeroticism defies the generative order of nature by wasting his seed and deflating the masculine to androgynize him. His attire is forbidding, he is an early day hippie, a modern punk, a walking theatre who appears among the straight people with a pointed moustache, long hair and an opera length string of beads. In his hands roll the triplets of tiny globes; totems of beauty, love and death.

An articulate broadcaster, a leading intellectual, editor of a prestigious literary journal and a critic par excellence, Miraji, while mastering the 'other' alters the social codes of identity through his ambiguous poetry and curious guise of anonymity. He is no martyr or a crusader but a fallen 'Adam' tied to his belly and genitals; the twin demons of human existence.

What significantly makes Miraji different from his contemporaries is his awakening of the feminine, the anima, which by the early twentieth century was repressed by the dominant narratives of Hegelian idealism and Marx's dialectical materialism. In the Subcontinent these narratives found expression in Iqbal and later in the manifestoes and poetry of the Progressives of the thirties.

Iqbal in his dazzling flights of consciousness pursued an ideal man, who soared above the waist, while the Progressives romanced with the masses to idealize the universal Proletariat. In their aerial ascensions to metaphysical ideals the body was a hindrance. Body as such is considered low and vulgar in the high seriousness of our literature. It is

linked with the baser mortals while the 'sublime' is reserved for gods and godlike men. But the body remains a signifier of the instinctual being, the very tone of the ethnic skin of human beings. The new 'Adam' of Iqbal and the universal Proletariat were not of flesh and blood but disembodied haloes of cerebral inventions. In their utopian heights man was not discovered on earth but in heaven. The paradisaal bliss was an escape from the original sin; the body.

With the loss of the 'instinctual', there was more of *ta'akkul* and *tafakkur*, intellect and philosophy in their work; the essence had become prior to existence. Such was the schizophrenia of the early twentieth century. Miraji dramatized this inane split of rationality and passion, of body and the mind. The aerial heights of the idealists were without the touch of earth, the warmth of flesh and blood, without the tactile feel and the kinesthetic experience. Their two dimensional figures were representational without an earthly presence or what Camille Paglia calls chthonian, something miasmatic and muddy, the pre-natal darkness, the unconscious, the womb where Miraji retreated, as there was too much noise and din of pragmatism, rationality and predictability in the dominant art practices. His desire to escape into a jungle or darkness of a temple or a cave or to be alone in some comfortable zone was the desire for the unconscious, the womb.

Both the Progressives and Hegelian idealists were patriarchs, phallic ideologues with moral authority, projecting a male gaze that denied the feminine principle. To confront the father and the male machoism, Sanauallah Dar became a woman; Mira.

In representational art, the narrative takes over by deferring the rawness and the presence of the experience. But as Mirza Ghalib tells us there is no *jalva*, revelation, without *kasāfat*, the materiality of things, it's the presence and not re-presenting of things which creates great art.

Miraji's interest in myth also points to his preoccupation with the body as mythology embodies the

projections of human imagination. He is a pagan priest who animates ordinary things and turns them into mythic experiences. Miraji carries in himself the dark-skinned Dravidian women who are fulsome unlike the two dimensional picture-queens from the Persian miniatures. Like Gauguin's Tahitian women, they walk bare on the earth.

Miraji eroticized the otherwise stoic and cerebral tone of Urdu poetry by embodying the desire into flesh and fantasy into a palpable sensation. In his awakening the body, he had libidized the high seriousness of literature with orgies of senses and colours. He liberated Urdu poetry from the dominant narratives and rigid forms of poetry. His free use of Braj, Avadhi and Hindi evoked the Hindu past; an answer to the Persianized diction of Iqbal, Rashed and Faiz, who looked towards the court tradition of refined Urdu, cleansed of the native ethos.

Miraji's awakening the feminine against the patriarchy was a threat to the high moral code of both the Progressives and Iqbal's didacticism. His bodily intervention into their narrational representations was a disturbing presence. It was not him 'freeing the verse' but 'freeing the body' that had invited their wrath.

Marginalized and excluded from their fold like Manto and Ismat he was labelled by the Progressives as an individualist, morbid and sexually sick poet without any direction or purpose. But Miraji didn't stop for the buzz words of his times; he went on sculpting images from his own biographical experiences. He refused to merge into the given social persona of some white collared revolutionary. He remained insoluble for the mainstream.

Miraji'sonanism was not simply to delink himself from the normal social practices, but also to hermaphrodize himself for a unisex experience. Each time he masturbated he deflated the oppressive male and awakened his anima, the feminine self. Sanallah Dar castrated the male and feminized himself by calling himself Mira.

His journey from Sanaullah to Miraji is through falling in love with a Bengali girl Mira Sen. Dedo, the land owner of TakhtHazara becomes Ranjha and Izzat Baig becomes Manhiwal as these transformations are performed through the alchemy of love. Love disrupts identities and destabilizes the power hierarchies. It's through love that Sanaullah becomes Miraji. But, why Miraji? Why not Mira Sen? The word 'ji' is a form of addressing someone with love, respect and devotion.

Mira 'ji' is not a name but a calling for his beloved Mira. Perhaps at some time Sanaullah Dar addressed Mira Sen for her attention by saying 'Mira ji listen to me,' and she did not respond. It appears that Sanaullah had stilled that image by freezing the words 'Mira ji' that turned into an eternal cry in the wilderness, 'Miraji! Miraji!' It became like Munch's scream frozen in silence and thus becoming endless; a continuous calling for Mira.

We know how Heer became Ranjha by incessantly calling for Ranjha, '*Rānjhā Rānjhā ākhdī maiñ āpē Rānjhā hoī.*' Like Heer, Sanaullah Dar had embraced his double, the feminine in him and had become Miraji.

(Read at the National Seminar on Miraji organized by the Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature at LUMS, on November 2, 2012)

*Sarmad Sehbai is a poet, playwright and director of theatre and television plays.