**Meghan Hartman:**Alone in a hospital room, with only a book as his witness, he finally got his wish: he died. As he had lay deteriorating, his body slowly turning in on itself, he would say to Akhtar ul-Imān, his dear friend, “ilāhi! Agar Mīrā jī ko sahat nahin ho sakti to unhen maut de de. Kam az kam isī taklīf se to nijāt ho jayegi.” “God, if Mira ji can’t have health, then give him death. At least he will be free from this suffering.” So God listened to him.

He died in the evening on November 3rd 1949 in the King Edward Memorial Hospital of Mumbai. He was 37. But, it is hard to be sure which suffering exactly Mira ji was referring to. Was it the crippling loneliness after nearly all of his friends had abandoned him? Or was it his fellow poets kicking him out of the literary circles which Mira ji had considered family, unlike the conniptive kinship tie of his brother who had long ago sold some of Miraji’s work to serve as packaging for veggies? Or was it the tumors enflaming his body? Or was it the doctors threatening to “correct” him with electro-shock therapy, straightening out a “seemingly” بھٹکا ہوا شاعر, a wayward poet as one biographer later dubbed him, rather unceremoniously? Or was it amorphous frustrations that to be different, to be queer, to write startlingly new poetry in a new genre, would just land you in the pits of ridicule?

Maybe all those painful questions pulsated as intensely as the tumors engulfing his body. But isī taklīf, this suffering. His emphasis on particularity, this, isī, a demonstrative so sure of a “here” and “now.” So completely confident in space-time, in the halo of a moment seemingly demarcating the past from the future, as if a moment were a forge between two mountains.

This suffering. This. Mira ji had spent a life time of writing Urdu poetry, crafting a new genre of long narrative poems called nazms, which would unmoor our faith in a clean definition of time and space, mixing up the chain of past-present-future, unsettling any reliance on chronology really. His nazms would always measure our measurements of time and remind us: what is a millisecond from a cosmic perspective? What is a second to a god? What does that look like?

So maybe, as he withered on the hospital bed with his book and shouted out to God to be free of this suffering, this actually referred to a moment which had accumulated other fossil-moments buried deep with memories not only belonging to him – but memories of other epochs, like the time of a pre-colonial India without British oppression, without British technologies of cruelty in the forms of outright massacres, or more subtly suffused in the syllabi of schools…or the time of Prince Siddhartha, poised to become the Buddha, which then wound up painted on the walls of the Ajanta Caves, which then trickled from the open veins of those living rocks into the eyes of Miraji standing before them, who then wrote a poem about it. Ajanta ke ghār, “The Caves of Ajanta.” Fossilized space-time enchanted Mira ji.

But all of this is not to say that Mira ji was an escapist or apolitical, though many of his contemporaries and biographers lobbed such insults. Mira ji was much more brilliant than he received credit for…he understood that he was a creature of his social environment as much as he was an accretion of multiple time streams coalescing in his body. So as anti-colonial efforts gathered more and more steam, but began to ring in monochromatic colors, Mira ji meanwhile was crafting his non-identity politics, his slippery dance between inter-temporal dimensions, first darting to the time of gods in Krishna’s Brindavan, then taking a pit-stop at the beginning of time. His resistance came in these subtler ways, etched into the scaffolding and themes of poems, or the resistance to succumb to simple definitions of identity…he was always pluralizing and specifying.

Perhaps that is why Miraji liked small words like (isī meaning ‘this’) or magar (meaning but). He liked small words because he saw worlds in them. Proliferating worlds saved from the brink of extinction, always a kaleidoscopic fervor. He once wrote this about a tiny little conjunction we call “but:”

“مگر۔۔۔ یہ مگر بھی عجیب لفظ ہے۔ میں سمجھتا ہوں کہ یہ لفظ بڑھتی ہوئی زندگی کی علامت ہے جہاں

ایک فقرے کی ہستی معدوم ہونے لگے۔ یہ مختصر سا لفظ اسے موت سے بچا کر آگے بڑھا دیتا ہے۔”

“But – this is a wondrous word too. I understand that this word [but] is a symbol of ever-expanding life where the existence of a phrase would begin to slip into extinction. This somewhat brief word saves the phrase from death and amplifies it.”

His jagged ending of a life cut short is – or at least I’d like to think so – is his version of a “but.”  Though he died alone with only four people attending his funeral, his death has left him hanging in a wide open space, not exactly a void or an abyss, but a large expanse – the types of expanse he would write about in his poems, where you feel like the ecstasies of dissolving into a vital space, where breath and air start to merge. Though Mira ji lies buried somewhere in Marine Line Cemetery, he still speaks through his poems and essays. I would like to think that I can still hear your voice whenever one encounters the worlds you created in your poetry. One of your fellow writers once described your voice like this:

آواز بہت عمدہ اور بھاری پائی تھی۔ ریڈیو پر اکثر ڈراموں میں بولتے تھے۔”

“His voice had been rich and full of gravitas. On the radio he often used to perform plays.”

And another writer-friend wrote this:

میراجی گراموفون کی طرح بولتے رہے۔ یوں تو میرا جی کو گفتگو کا بڑا سلیقہ تھا۔ ”

“Miraji would speak like a gramophone. That was his flare in conversation.”

Mira ji, your voice still echoes in every present moment. We hear you.