

RASUL MIR (19th century), the Kashmiri romantic poet was a contemporary of Gami and Miskin. His poems, of which 79 remain, are remarkable for their rich sensuousness. Some of them are in the traditional *vātsun* form while others are *ghazals*. Rasul Mir used the *ghazal* form so artistically that it is now a part of Kashmiri literary tradition.

If love is the theme of his poems, music is its vibrant note. Alive to the musical possibilities of language, the poet uses words, speech, rhythm, internal rhymes and inflexion with an ingenuity that leaves the reader spellbound. In the skilful use of alliteration and assonance, Rasul Mir stands unrivalled in Kashmiri poetry. The reader receives some fine samples of his poem in the translations provided in this book.

G.R. MALIK (b. 1946) is Reader in the Post-Graduate Department of English, University of Kashmir, Srinagar. In this monograph, Dr. Malik examines Rasul Mir's poetry against the background of his life and times.

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Rasul Mir

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RASUL MIR

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda. 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

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Rasul Mir

G. R. MALIK

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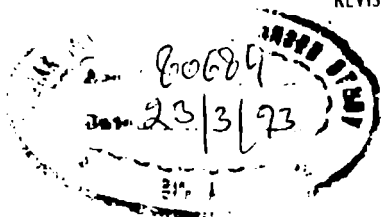
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Preface

I do not know whether I would ever have thought of writing about Rasul Mir had the Sahitya Akademi not asked me to do it. However, having been entrusted with the job, I have tried to do it as well as I could. I am fully conscious of my limitations and shall be extremely grateful to scholars of Kashmiri language in general and Mir specialists in particular if they kindly let me know of the lapses and shortcomings in this monograph. To the most prominent authority on Mir, Mohammad Yousuf Taing, I should acknowledge my debt here : but for his pioneering work in editing the collected poems of Rasul Mir, it would have been very difficult to prepare this monograph. I am also thankful to Professor Rahman Rahi, one of the most distinguished poets of modern Kashmir, and a former Professor of Kashmiri in the Kashmir University, for some fruitful discussions I had with him about Rasul Mir. Last but not least, my heartfelt gratitude is due to the Sahitya Akademi which invited me to write this monograph and condoned a lot of delay on my part in writing it out.

In this monograph very few Kashmiri words and verses have been used in the original and those only when it seemed absolutely necessary to illustrate some point. Such words and verses appear in the Roman script where I generally follow Sir George Abraham Grierson from whose practice I have not deviated except for strong phonetic reasons.

In the English rendering of Kashmiri verses, words like 'thou', 'thy' and some other archaic words and expressions, common to poetry and translations of poetry, have not been used because they are now regarded as obsolete and out of date.

G. R. MALIK

The Man

*Rasul chhu zaniith din-u-mazhab rokh te zulf chyon
Kave zani kia gav Kufr te Islami nigaro*

Your countenance is Rasul's religion, your hair his sacred law,
Wherefore should he care then for ~~Kufr~~ and Islam?

No authentic biographical account of Rasul Mir is available; one does not even come across the threads which could be put together to form one. So far only three good essays have been written about Rasul Mir. These are, chronologically speaking, Abdul Ahad Azad's essay on him in his work, *Kashmiri Zuban aur Shairi* (The Kashmiri Language and Its Poetry) and two learned discourses by Mohammad Yousuf Taing. One of them is the Introduction to Taing's Urdu brochure on Rasul Mir and the other his exhaustive introduction to the collected poems of Rasul Mir. These essays, though otherwise perceptive and insightful, are deficient as far as the poet's personal life is concerned. This is in no way a reflection on the worth and competence of the authors but is solely attributable to the non-availability of any materials. Both Azad and Taing have collected information about the poet from the available sources, mostly oral, personal memoirs. Azad makes a specific mention of having visited the native village of the poet and meeting his descendants but all that this labour has yielded is the reiteration of the common legend that the poet had died very young. Taing has tried to gather information from all persons who were somehow related to Rasul Mir through their ancestors but, as in Azad's case, this labour has not borne the fruit that it deserves.

Biographical details of the poet apart, even his dates are unknown which makes it very difficult to place him in time, a placement which, though not indispensable for literary appreciation, is yet of invaluable help. His probable period of death (about which there is little agreement) is also based on conjecture and estimates. According to Prof. Muhi-ud-Din Hajini, Rasul Mir died in 1870. This is also the view of Naji Munwar and Shafi Shauq. According to T.N. Khazanchi, Rasul Mir was born and died sometime between

1825 and 1885. Taing has concluded the biographical section of his introduction to Rasul Mir's collected poems with what he calls "an important discovery". He claims that a judicial document, dated 1889, has been discovered which bears on it, among other signatures, the signature of Rasul Mir. This would clinch the issue but for certain reservations to which reference is made later. However from the scrutiny of the material which is available, it seems that Rasul Mir was born either at the end of the eighteenth century or in the beginning of the nineteenth century and died sometime between 1865 and 1875. This has been deduced from the following.

Legend tells us that Mahmud Ghami, after reading some of the compositions of Rasul Mir, had predicted his early death and he did die young. About Mahmud Ghami's year of death there is a broad agreement. He is said to have died in A.D. 1855 at the age of ninety so that his year of birth would be A.D. 1765. If Mahmud Ghami reacted to young Rasul Mir's early compositions as an established elderly poet, Rasul Mir must have been born either at the end of the eighteenth century or in the beginning of the nineteenth century. There seems to me no hesitation in accepting the first part of this legendary account, Mahmud's reaction to the early compositions of Rasul Mir, but the second part of the account, the coming true of Mahmud's prediction and Rasul Mir's early death, is, however, improbable in the face of stronger evidence to the contrary.

Apart from Mahmud Ghami who was older by several years than Rasul Mir, Maqbool Shah Kralawari and Abdul Ahad Nazim were his two illustrious contemporaries, and Pir Muhi-ud-Din Miskin, who died at a fairly advanced age in 1920, was his younger contemporary. All of them held Rasul Mir in great esteem and wrote *ghazals* in imitation of his popular ones. There are authentic reports of several verse-contests between Rasul Mir and Nazim in which the former would, almost invariably, come out victorious, if there could be any victories and defeats in the world of art. Fortunately the dates of these poets are known. According to Prof. Ghulam Mohammad Shad, the editor of Nazim's collected poems, Nazim was born in 1816 and died in 1851. Maqbool Kralawari's year of death, according to Taing (introduction to Maqbool Kralawari's collected poems) is 1877. Moreover Rasul Mir was a disciple of Sheikh Ahmad Tarabali, a famous spiritual guide of the age, who died in 1845.¹ Given the

1. This is the view of Naji Munwar and Shafi Shauq in their book *Kashri Adbuk Tawarikh*. According to M.Y. Taing, Tarabali died in 1862.

authentic oral accounts of Rasul Mir having had a reckless and extremely colourful youth, he must have turned to his *murshid* (spiritual guide) at a sufficiently mature age. This clearly suggests that the poet was born either in the late nineties of the eighteenth century or in the first few years of the nineteenth century.

Evidence about the probable date of Rasul Mir's death comes from a very authentic source, Pir Muhi-ud-Din Miskin's *mathnavi*, *Zeba Nigar*. Before Miskin, Rasul Mir had toyed with the idea of writing a *mathnavi* based on the love story of Zeba and Nigar but did not ultimately write it.² Miskin refers to this at the end of his poem where, in addition to paying a glowing tribute to Rasul Mir, he states the date of the composition of his *mathnavi*. The following is the translation of the relevant verses :

Mir Shahabadi, undoubtedly an unrivalled master of his day,
 Made it known sometime in the past that he would write *Zeba*
Nigar
 But notwithstanding the publicity that was given to it, the poem
 never saw the light of the day.

As a poet and a lyricist he was undoubtedly supreme;
 May God grant peace and rest to his departed soul !
 But to write a sustained account in verse is a tough task
 Whose difficulties are known only to those who attempt it.

I attempted this task and accomplished it
 With the grace of God in 1293 A.H.³

Miskin completed his poem in 1293 A.H. (A.D. 1875) when Rasul Mir was presumably not alive, although we are not told about the time that has elapsed between his death and the composition of *Zeba Nigar*. It is almost certain that his death must have occurred

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2. Abdul Ahad Azad (*Kashmiri Zuban aur Shairi*, vol. II) would assure us that Mir had written that *mathnavi* and that Mahjoor had seen a manuscript copy of it somewhere but in spite of strenuous efforts the manuscript has not been discovered so far. For strong literary reasons, I feel that Rasul Mir did not write the *mathnavi*. A lyrical temperament, such as his, fails in a narrative poem of considerable length where it cannot sustain its tempo. Perhaps Rasul Mir did try to write it because of having publicly committed himself to the venture.
 3. *Zeba Nigar* (Srinagar : Ghulam Mohammad and Noor Mohammad, *Tajir-i-Kub*, undated), p. 86.

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after 1855, the year when Mahmud Ghami died, as he lived several years after Mahmud's death. In the face of this evidence Rasul Mir could not have been alive in 1889, as the judicial document referred to by Taing would suggest. Was the signatory some other Rasul Mir or is there an error in Miskin's *Zeba Nigar* is a question which must remain unsettled for the time being. Taing's suggestion, in his Urdu monograph on Rasul Mir, that the poet died in 1867 is nearer to the truth. If Rasul Mir died either in the late sixties or in the early seventies of the nineteenth century, he lived for around three score years and ten—and the myth that his life was cut short is untenable.

To determine the age of Rasul Mir was not merely to satisfy a curiosity which we naturally feel for a poet in whom we are interested but for two very important literary purposes. The first of these is to determine the length of his life which is of essential significance for a proper evaluation of his achievement as a poet and the second is to define the nature and rationale of his response or lack of response to his milieu.

As to the first, Rasul Mir's untimely death would have excused many of his characteristic faults although literary criticism does not and should not know any partialities. Allowance would perhaps have been made for the supposedly unactualized possibilities although discerning eyes would have seen through the actual that there was little which could be identified as the unrealized potential. Once it is admitted that the poet lived a normal life, the task of literary evaluation is greatly facilitated.

Let us now try to define Rasul Mir's attitude to his milieu. According to the dates suggested above, Rasul Mir's life spans over the reigns of three different sets of rulers in Kashmir. He was born during the Afghan rule over Kashmir which began in 1752 and ended in 1819 with the Sikh conquest of Kashmir. The Sikhs ruled for twenty-seven years—the years of Rasul Mir's youth and manhood. The Sikh rule ended in 1846 when, under the Treaty of Amritsar, Kashmir was handed over by the British to the Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh, in return for a sum of rupees seventy-five lakh and some political concessions. It was during the Dogra reign that Rasul Mir and most of his illustrious contemporaries died.

Of the three sets of rulers, the Afghans were the worst. Their rule was a period of relentless persecution, ruthless economic exploitation of the masses by the rulers and, politically, a period of continuous instability. No section of the masses could escape the inhuman cruelties at the hands of the harsh Afghans. Brahmans,

Muslims (both Shias and Sunnis) and Bombas of the Jhelum Valley, all suffered alike. It was virtually a reign of terror in which no one, not even a foreign visitor, could breathe freely. George Foster who visited Kashmir in disguise during this period was stunned by what he saw. He describes Haji Karim Dad Khan, the father of the then governor of Kashmir as one who was "notorious for his wanton cruelties and insatiable avarice". About his son, Azad Khan, he writes that even a casual mention of his name produced an instant horror and involuntary supplication of the aid of their (that of Muslims) prophet.⁴ No wonder then that Lawrence commented :

It must have been an intense relief to all classes in Kashmir to see the downfall of the evil rule of the Pathans, and to none was the relief greater than to the peasants who had been cruelly fleeced by the rapacious *sardars* of Kabul. I do not mean to suggest that the Sikh rule was benign or good, but it was at any rate better than that of the Pathans.⁵

As Lawrence suggests, the Sikh rule, though mild in degree, was no better than the Pathan rule. One of the Sikh rulers banned the *azan* (the Islamic call for prayer) and the gathering of Muslims in the Jama Masjid. It was during the Sikh rule in 1831 that Kashmir experienced a great famine which was caused by a heavy snowfall in early October. Vigne, who visited the valley in 1835 after the great famine, writes :

The villages were fallen in decay. The rice-ground was uncultivated for want of labour and irrigation. Shupian was a miserable place, and Islamabad was but a shadow of its former self.⁶

With the accession of the Dogras to the throne of Kashmir there was, however, a change for the better. Kashmiris saw for the first time the beginnings of the rule of law and were comparatively prosperous and free from care. Both Sir Francis Younghusband and

4. G.M.D. Sufi, *Islamic Culture in Kashmir* (New Delhi : Light and Life Publishers, 1979), pp. 293-294.

5. Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir* (London, 1895, Indian reprint Srinagar : Kesar Publishers, 1967), p. 158.

6. Quoted in *Islamic Culture in Kashmir*, p. 294.

Sir Walter Lawrence testify to the plenty of food and cheapness of articles of food during this period. With Partap Singh's accession in 1885 conditions improved still further as the State came under the indirect control of the British who introduced several useful reforms.

In spite of these developments the condition was not so sunny. *Begar* (forced labour) was still common and took a heavy toll of lives every year. Land revenues and exactions on produce and other articles of trade were unbearably heavy. Some other traders lost about half of their income in levy. The means of communication were rough and scanty and people in the countryside groaned under the yoke of tyranny perpetrated by the lackeys of the ruling class.

It was in a milieu like this that Rasul Mir spent his life. He must have seen the worst of the prevailing tyranny and exploitation as he belonged to the countryside where the rule of law seldom prevailed. Himself a *muqaddam* (village chieftain), he must have sometimes acted as a convenient instrument of the all-pervasive tyranny and exploitation but, what is surprising, his poetry shows little or no trace of the surroundings in which he lived and moved. In fact this negligence of the surroundings is a dominant trend of all the Kashmiri poetry written before the advent of modern age. The only exceptions are some humorous pieces and a few *shahr-ashubs*.⁷

The aesthetic underlying this kind of poetry—that art has little to do with life except to provide a way of escape through momentary pleasure—suited the feudal ethos. Paradoxically it suited both, the feudal lords and the oppressed masses. To the former it provided a pleasant way of spending their leisure and to the latter it served as a means of escape. This is the reason why we have in this poetry, on one hand, an obsession with earthly pleasures—beauty, youth, love and liquor—and, on the other, a pre-occupation with the inexorability of fate, the transitoriness of life and the tyranny of death. *Chakhri* and *rouf* was the most popular form of singing during Rasul Mir's day and continues to retain some of its popularity even now. It is a form of communal singing in which a party of singers, all playing on different musical instruments, sing together. Such groups of singers were a common feature of the nineteenth century Kashmir. Every village had one or more such singing companies. Rasul Mir was himself the leader of one such singing party and must

7. *Shahr-ashub* (lament for the city) is a poetic form peculiar to Persian, Urdu and Kashmiri. It is a kind of narrative which describes the misfortunes befalling a city or a society.

have moved from place to place spell-binding people with the extraordinarily charming music of his own songs most of whose characteristics would remain unrevealed if this fact is not borne in mind. The singing companies would usually sing during the night in large gatherings. The social value of these musical concerts was to wash away care and anxiety from laden hearts through nights of singing and revelry. Some other forms of communal singing prevalent in Kashmir like *nende bath* (songs sung while deweeding paddy fields) and labourers' chants as they carry heavy loads share this social purpose.

Oral tradition has acquainted us with some personal traits of the poet. He is said to have possessed a charming personality and a fine figure. He wore a short beard and moustache and was always elegantly dressed. He was open to experience and had very few inhibitions. He believed in and lived a free, full and uninhibited life. His youth was spent in reckless experiences of free love. Of these love-affairs, the most famous was the one with Kongi. Kongi was a Hindu girl who was with Rasul Mir in the *maktab* (a kind of basic school) of a *moulvi* (religious priest) who, according to the prevailing custom, taught them the elementaries of Persian. Rasul Mir's association with Kongi matured into a life-long love-affair, serving him as a source of inspiration and fittingly celebrated in his poetry. He has exhausted all beautiful names and tender epithets to address his first love.

Rasul Mir also loved wandering around and visiting different places. Almost every year he would take a trip to Pugal Paristan and return home after long intervals. This information is supported by the internal evidence supplied by his poetry where he is morbidly preoccupied with the contours of a female body and, almost in every poem, refers to the sensitive parts of a woman's body so vividly that the effect is often aphrodisiac. He was conscious of the fact that his life of free love had cost him his name and reputation but would console himself for being so popular with those who believe in love :

Rasul, how does it matter that you have gained notoriety for
hankering after blossom-lipped beauties;
Be of good cheer for lovers cherish your name and regard you as
a paragon of faith.

In his poetry he also repeatedly refers to the places which he would often visit--Achhabal, Khannabal, Mattan, Nishat, Shalimar,

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Sona Lank—to name only a few. These places also include Tashawan, the famous abode of prostitutes in Rasul Mir's day. Of all the places, however, the place to which he returns again and again with tenderness and affection is his native area, Dooru and Verinag. This area is one of the most bewitching beauty-spots of the valley of Kashmir. Its numerous springs, particularly the serene and placid spring of Verinag; its flower gardens filling the air with colour and fragrance; and the distant view it commands of the Banihal range of mountains, left such an unerasable impression on the sensitive mind of Rasul Mir that he keeps on referring to it—sometimes even where it seems irrelevant.

Rasul Mir also paid visits to the various shrines of Kashmir of which he makes a specific mention in his poetry. Annual fairs were held at these shrines which would attract thousands of people. These occasions brought lovers together in a society which was governed by moral taboos and where non-conformists like Rasul Mir were very rare.

Rasul Mir's later life, however, seems to have been quite sober and serene. He became the disciple of a *murshid* (spiritual guide), Sheikh Ahmad Tarabali and, according to a report, had another *murshid* at Tral. It was during these days that he tried to dabble in mystic poetry which was not, by any stretch of imagination, his forte, and wrote a poem on the death of the prophet. In his last days he had shut himself up in the shrine of Amir-i-Kabir at Dooru in whose courtyard he now lies buried. Nearly a century after his death the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages devised a fitting epitaph for his grave-stone :

Here lies asleep the ebullient and vivacious poet of Kashmir
Rasul Mir, whose poetry is aglow with undying sparks of earthly
beauty.

The Poet

Shahmar zulfav nal volham rood afsanai
Von vante kam afsane parai, bal maraio

Your serpentine locks, coiling round me, have reduced me to fiction
What fiction shall interest me now?

Rasul Mir's total poetic output consists of seventy-nine poems in Kashmiri and a *ghazal* in Persian. Of the seventy-nine poems, in Kashmiri the authorship of four is doubtful. In Taing's standard edition they are the poems entitled, "Nar Lalawun Thovnam Moori Lo Lo", "Karinam Gray Kot Goum", "Suy Goum Travith Bal Bave Kasty" and "Gate My Mar Sone Kane Doorani". The last of these is clearly not Rasul Mir's as its style unmistakably proclaims. The other three are mere hotch-potch, bits of Rasul Mir mingled with inexpert and unpoetic interpolations. The solitary *ghazal* in Persian is just an in occasional amateurish exercise and has no special merit. Rasul Mir's poetic method and stature is, therefore, to be judged by the remaining seventy-five poems. Genre-wise, these poems, apart from one poem about the death of prophet Muhammad, consist of *vatsun* and *ghazal*--two of the main forms of Kashmiri lyric.

Vatsun is a purely indigenous art form of Kashmir and owes its origin to the Kashmiri folk-song, some of whose characteristics it still retains. A stanza-sequence of three lines followed by a refrain, it is similar to two main forms of Kashmiri folk-singing, *rouf* and *vanavun*, both sung by women. Lyrical to the core, the *vatsun* expresses the feelings and emotions of the protagonist who is generally a woman which again is in accord with its origination from folk-tradition. A folk-tradition is the most natural manifestation of the collective psyche of a people and nothing can be more germane to India's collective unconscious than the idea of woman as the seeker and man as the sought-after. No wonder then that the most successful practitioners of the art form in Kashmiri have been women like Habba Khatoon and Arnimal.

A male poet, to be successful in this form, would always have to play the woman and to maintain such a pose may be easier in a

dramatic work but is extremely difficult in a lyrical form, like the *vatsun*, which, in essence, is the expression of the author's personality. Slips in the attempt to effect such a pose have given rise to amusing situations in Kashmiri poetry. A poet starting off on a correct note becomes oblivious of his female role in the course of the poem and introduces contradictory notes again and again. It is surprising that even on revision these contradictions have not been removed.

Rasul Mir was aware of the artistic implications of this problem and tried to effect a bold and revolutionary change by altering the sex of the speaking voice from female to male in most of his lyrics. This lent a note of realism and authenticity to his poetry and made it appear more natural as the speaking voice was freed from the fetters of an artificial pose. Noteworthy among the *watsans* which have a male protagonist are the ones entitled "Rosh My Rosh Ha Posh Maliya Lo", "Lala Royes Pyale Kem Berye Lo", "Voly Kasturiye", "Syod Roz Thod Tul Niqab" and "Rinde Poshmal Gindnay Drayi Lo Lo".

Some of his *vatsuns* follow the tradition and have a female protagonist. The poems entitled "Salas Antani Baliye", "Gatshte Wesye Antan Aste Lo Lo" and "Me Chhu Mooray Lalawun Nar" are the most prominent among them. It is a tribute to Rasul Mir's genius that in these poems he has played the woman very successfully. Abdul Ahad Azad singles out this aspect of Rasul Mir for special praise.

There is a third group of Rasul Mir's *watsans* in which the sex of the protagonist keeps shifting. "Hariye Thavakna Kan Te Lo Lo", "Kari Vegun Doore Dan", "Roz Damah Ha Jananai" and "Vante Latye Tas Myane Zar" are some of these poems. Except for this weakness, these poems are as good as those in which the male and the female voices act as the protagonists. The three-fold division of Rasul Mir's *vatsuns* on these lines, which is equally applicable to his *ghazals* also, is, therefore, descriptive in nature and should not be taken to have any evaluative signification.

The *ghazal* was formally inaugurated in Kashmiri by Rasul Mir. His elder contemporary, Mahmud Ghami, who has an edge over Mir in depth and variety, did write a few *ghazals* but they lack the artistic finish which is the hallmark of Rasul Mir's *ghazals*. The form came from Persian but so skilfully did Rasul Mir adapt it to the literary tradition of Kashmiri as to make it an integral part and permanent feature of it. It was for his *ghazals* that Rasul Mir became his

contemporaries' envy and a model for the poets who came after him. Among his contemporaries Nazim, Maqbool Kralawari and Miskin tried to write *ghazals* after his lines and metres but could seldom equal him. Among his successors, Mahjoor, Azad, Rasa, Rahi and others have paid glowing tributes to his skill in *ghazal* writing.

Since the *ghazal* came from Persian it was bound to bring with it the Persian influence. In the hands of a lesser artist this influence would have turned out into an undue intrusion into a flowing stream of poetry dominated by folk-tradition from Lal Ded and Sheikh Nur-ud-Din, through Habba Khatoon and Arnimal to Mahmud Ghami. Instead of assimilating the *ghazal* into this tradition, a lesser artist would have indulged in a lifeless and mechanical imitation. Like a true artist Rasul Mir had an instinctive knack of adapting the *ghazal* to the genius of the Kashmiri poetic tradition so that the readers accepted it without any feeling of its being strange or alien. Of course Rasul Mir cannot be entirely absolved from the fault of imitation. Some verses and occasionally whole poems are steeped in Persian vocabulary and imagery¹ and there are occasions when he follows the Persian masters like Hafiz and Rumi quite slavishly² but on the whole he has Kashmirized the *ghazal* widening thereby not only the horizons of Kashmiri poetry but also those of Kashmiri language.

The most predominant theme of Rasul Mir's poetry, both *vatsun* and *ghazal*, is the theme of love. It is not love treated in all or most

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1. See, for instance, the following verses :

*Khush kardeh buite khas sijdah
Dar kabae jan Kafire dil*

*Chashmi badam ya chhu brem, rashki ahuge harem
Nargise bage Iram, chani irfanuk qasam*

*Kas have faquiras te tabibas boh dile zar
My jouru jafa kenh lagem ny chare dawnie*

Examples of poems which are wholly cast in a Persian mould are the poems entitled, "Durdane Asith Be-khaber", "Tifli Ashkam Ra Gamat" and "Afat-i-Jan".

2. Compare, for instance, the following :

Hafiz	:	<i>Sarvi chamani man chira saili chaman na me kunad</i>
Rasul Mir	:	<i>Sar bo wandai ay sarvi chaman tarfi chaman chaman wolo</i>
Rumi	:	<i>Bishnow az nai chun hikayat me kunad Waz judie ha shikayat me kunad</i>
Rasul Mir	:	<i>Naie zare nishc yare kenhas door Hai nare zoltham toleay dil</i>

of its ramifications; Rasul Mir limits himself to one particular form of it, sexual passion, and here too he is concerned only with its physical dimensions, ignoring the spiritual aspect and mystique of sex. With him this passion is almost an obsession which he can never elude. The ideal woman--an embodiment of physical charm--that he loves is an epitome of the whole beauty that permeates the universe of existence. He sees her image in all beautiful objects and concepts. His utmost love and devotion and worship is meant for her as she embodies in herself not only the beauty of physical objects but also the sanctity of the most cherished and revered symbols of religious life :

Your countenance is Rasul's religion, your hair his sacred law
Wherefore should he care then for Kufr and Islam?

Her face is my Kaba and her eyebrows are its arches
This is where lovers bow in the sovereign path of love.

Her face when unmasked bloomed like the first dawn of spring

But when she veiled it with her hair--as sanctified as the Night of Honour⁴ my day was darkened.

This sometimes, as in some of the verses quoted above, borders on sacrilege and even heresy but could anything convey more effectively the extent of the intensity and sincerity of his passion. Everything with him ultimately converges on love. Religious worship and recitation of the scripture which, in normal circumstances, are exclusively meant for God have value and validity as a means to this end :

My day--it passed in beseeching the Lord to fill your heart with
mercy,
My night--in reciting to this end the thirty parts of the scripture.

If the poet looks forward to a future life, it is only to meet his beloved :

Ever since she left me I have been fading and pining for her;
May I now wait and hug her on the day of Resurrection.

4. Shab-i-Qadr--the most sacred night according to the Quran. It was in this night that the Quran began to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Muslims spend this night in worship and remembrance of God.

All this would have been mere fantasy had it not been based on the poet's actual love-experience. What redeems Rasul Mir's sensuous love-poetry is that it takes its origin from his own diverse love-experiences. His readings in Persian poetry and acquaintance with the indigenous tradition of the folk-song supplies him with moulds into which he casts his love-experiences but that never undermines the note of sincerity and authenticity that characterises them. A greater artist would have gone further; he would have devised new moulds or changed and remade the old ones; he would have found new counters to catch the exact curve and edge of his peculiar experiences. Rasul Mir does not go that far but the fact remains that his poetry is ultimately traceable to his personal experience. If it is sheerly sensuous it is because the avenues to other aspects of love are not open to him.

This sensuousness and earthliness are the most abiding charms of Rasul Mir's poetry and imparts to it health, vitality and a life-affirming quality. Rasul Mir loves life in all its beautiful forms and manifestations—the most beautiful of them being his beloved, a woman of flesh and blood. The consciousness of death which tends, in most cases, particularly with Kashmiri poets, to induce other-worldliness acts, with Rasul Mir, as a spur to augment and accentuate the love of this life and lends to it an epicurean note. This accounts for the recurrence of the *carpe diem* theme in his poetry :

O Friend, tell my love that death is the end of life;
Let us then drink and frisk and fawn in the garden of life.

Tomorrow Rasul Mir shall mingle with the dust
O love, why then should you be indifferent now?

Many poems of Rasul Mir are variations of this theme and repeat in different ways, "gather ye rose buds while ye may". The tone of such poems is comparable to poems like Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Rahman Rahi's "Kathi Myani Mashouqe Mate Dite Dol" (O Love, be not Averse to my Suggestion) though Rasul Mir's poems do not always succeed in achieving the greatness and depth of Marvell's and Rahi's poems.

The theme of sensuous love befits Rasul Mir's genius so squarely that every other theme seems alien to it. Mysticism, quite a fashion then, refuses entry into his world. Whenever he has made attempts to bring in mystical subjects; they clearly seem to be incongruous

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impositions. A poem is moving on smoothly with the theme of love running like a current through it when, all of a sudden, a mystical note intrudes like a stumbling block to check the flow. "Gatshte Vesye Antan Aste Lo Lo" (Go Friend and Slowly Fetch my Love) is a pure love poem, begins on the right note and moves in a smooth way until Mansoor al-Hallaj makes an appearance, which is absolutely out of tune with the context. Similar is the case with the poem, *Masa Lay Teeri Mijganai Te Lo Lo* (Aim Not at Me the Arrows of Your Eyelashes). A light love poem, it begins correctly but then pantheism intrudes into a context where it has absolutely no place. The poem "Ya Fatah" deals as a whole with a mystical subject and it is unquestionably the weakest of all poems of Rasul Mir. This is equally true of another independent poem, "Vafat Namai Ansarwar", a poem about the death of Prophet Muhammad. The poem lacks the intensity and sparkle which is characteristic of Rasul Mir's love poems. In this kind of poetry (poetry dealing with religious and mystical subjects) Rasul Mir's elder contemporary, Mahmud Ghami, and poets like Abdul Ahad Nadim and the mystic poets of Kashmir, are more at home. Rasul Mir remains a poet of love, first and last.

If love is the theme of Rasul Mir's poetry, music is its technique. Primarily a singer, Rasul Mir is always alive to the musical possibilities of language and exploits them to the maximum. In this connection it is very significant to remember that he was himself an amateur singer and led a singing party, moving from place to place and singing *chakhri* and *rouf*. Some knowledge of this particular form of folk-singing is essential to appreciate the musical dimensions of Rasul Mir's poetry. It seems that most of his songs were composed for occasions of singing and would surely have been different if written with a different purpose. Poems like "Kali Bare Hai Gatshi Gulistan", "Kout Goum", "Chav Mai Jami Jami", "Rinde Poshe Mal" and "Dil Hai Nunem Tsurī Lo Lo" are metrically what they are because they were written for certain occasions of singing.

Rasul Mir's practical dealing with singing lent a sharper edge to his native musical sense with the result that he uses words, speech rhythms, internal rhymes and inflections like an expert musician and leaves the reader-listener, to be precise--spellbound. His is a poetry which is primarily meant to be *sung* and not to be read, and if we forget this we are likely to miss the real Rasul Mir.

In the skilful use of alliteration and assonance and the shuffling and interplay of internal rhymes, Rasul Mir stands unrivalled in Kashmiri poetry. What is more important is that it is not an occasional charm or an ornament of his poetry; it is its warp and woof; it is integral to it. You do not have to spend any labour to find illustrations of this from his poetry; take any verse at random and you will find it there. And he does it all so effortlessly as to leave us dazed. Consider, for instance, the following verses :

Sine seemin dishith ne saman roy saman saman volo

*Madnas vantasay antasay ar
Vadnas chhum ne zanh tshen te lo lo*

*Badam chashme yane mutsraven
Tane chhum matsravan te lo lo*

*Bo sharmi gajis shar me gomo kar me zonum hai
Az kor me Karmai lon sarai bal maraio*

*Matsi nindray vuzenovnas, petsi atash gondnam
Metsi Rasul Mir motsi ma kali bali maryai my rosh*

*Yas path chhas devanai, shama zan reevanai
Kas vane tas parvanai, parvane karith tsolmai*

Although this kind of music is difficult to be fully appreciated unless one knows the Kashmiri language, some of it may trickle down even for a non-Kashmiri, through the interplay of sounds, if an effort is made to read the lines aloud.

This music is at once the strength and the weakness of Rasul Mir's poetry. Because of this his poetry has a greater appeal to the ear than to the mind. He is so enamoured of sound that he does not take proper care of the sense. Not that 'sense' becomes a casualty with him but that it is always subservient to the sound. Had he been as careful about the sense as about the sound he would have been a better poet but then he would not have been Rasul Mir. If for this morbid preoccupation with sound he has been charged with superficiality, the charge is not wholly without substance.

Apart from music Rasul Mir has very little to offer as a literary artist. He is less concerned with the semantic possibilities of words

than with their sound and reverberation. Metaphor is not organic to his poetry though we do come across beautiful metaphoric expressions at places like speaking of breast as a cradle and making effective metaphorical use of *suttee*. Some similes are also noteworthy for their visual appeal; for instance, the following :

Look at my lofty-necked beauty, drops of sweat on her rosy
cheeks,
Nay drops of rose water, shine like stars sailing over the moon.

At places he also makes creative use of the device of allusion, for example :

My fairy-faced love, as I shed tears at your door
I am reminded of the gardens of heaven beneath which flow
streams.⁵

Plurisignation, or, to use William Empson's term for it, ambiguity which is a hall-mark of great poetry on the semantic level as is metaphor on the linguistic level, is also very rare in Rasul Mir's poetry; indeed it is rare in all Kashmiri poetry. Such ambiguity is, for instance, present in the following verse :

Zulf zanjeer yaras vanas bo zar kot gowm

The first three words of this line can be read in three different ways : (i) "*zulfi-zanjeer yaras*", that is, we take, *zulf-zanjeer* as one compound expression and say that 'my love possesses a hair-like chain', (ii) "*zulf-zanjeer yaras*", that is, we take *zulf* (hair) as noun and qualify it by calling it *zanjeer* (chain), to say that 'my beloved's hair is chains', and (iii) "*zulf-zanjeer yaras*", that is, we take *zulf zanjeer* as yet another compound expression forming an adjective to qualify *yar* (beloved) to say 'my chain-haired beloved'.

Here is another example of plurisignation where ambiguity arises not from words but from their suggested meanings :

These argent domes on your jasmine chest filled with nectar
from above.
Unveil yourself and suckle your innocents and save their sinking
hearts.

5. The Quran presents paradise, again and again, as comprising gardens beneath which flow streams and rivers.

The full import of the word 'innocents' can be appreciated only in Kashmiri. The word used is *masoom* which literally means 'a sinless and innocent person.' In Kashmiri the word is applied to children, and used both as an adjective and as a noun, to suggest their tenderness and simplicity. Thus we can call a babe a *masoom* (innocent) child or simply a *masoom* (an innocent one). Rasul Mir uses the word in the latter sense for the lovers in relation to their beloved which has obvious Freudian connotations.

Rasul Mir in His Tradition

*Ath darde surets parde tulith gav su Rasul Mir
Mahjoor lagith aav beyi doobare ati roze. (Mahjoor)*

Rasul Mir unveiled the bewitching face of (the goddess) of love and compassion
And was reborn (to accomplish the mission) in the form of Mahjoor.

It is not all too pleasant a task to examine and evaluate a poet in relation to his literary tradition. It involves comparisons which constitute an acid test of a poet's intrinsic worth. This either elevates his status or brings to light the weaker side of his mind and art. Within his limits, Rasul Mir is a good minor poet but when placed in the context of the tradition to which he belongs, the lustre is dimmed to some extent but this, at the same time, enables us to define the essential nature of his genius and the distinct quality of his contribution to Kashmiri poetry.

The tradition to which Rasul Mir belongs is quite a complex one. Essentially rooted in folklore and folk sensibility, the tradition has grown over several centuries. In the course of its evolution it has been widened and enriched by influences from diverse sources particularly Persian poetry. From this point of view the most remarkable Persian poets are Sadi, Hafiz, Nizami, Rumi, Attar, Firdausi, Bedil and Ghani Kashmiri. Sadi's works—*Gulistan*, *Bostan* and *Pandnamah* (popularly known as *Karima*)—constituted the first formal syllabus of conventional education in Kashmir, besides the religious texts. Hafiz was characterised as *Lisan-al-ghaib* (the tongue and spokesman of the unseen) and his *divan* was used as a guide-book not only to interpret dreams but also to seek advice in day-to-day affairs of life. Nizami and Rumi were studied at an advanced stage and Bedil and Ghani were among so many other poets who were studied by the more ambitious readers.

This was the education that Rasul Mir had in his childhood and boyhood. As a child he studied the Quran and Sadi's *Gulistan*, *Bostan* and *Pandnamah* in a *maktab* and later he seems to have studied most of the Persian poets mentioned above.

It is important to bear in mind that this poetry was taught and studied from a mystical perspective. Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi's *Mathnavi* was regarded as the most significant work from this point of view. It was considered to be an able exposition of the Quran in the Persian language. Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Attar's *Pandnamah* was generally used as a supplementary reader together with Sadi's works, and his *Mantiq al-Tair* was read with as much regard and reverence as Rumi's famed *Mathnavi*. The mystical point of view was so dominant that even those verses of Hafiz which exclusively deal with wine and sex were mystically interpreted. The most notable of Rasul Mir's predecessors in Kashmiri poetry--Lalla Arifah, Shaikh Nur-ud-Din and Mahmud Ghami-- had also a mystical orientation. Lalla was a practising mystic and wrote mystical poetry of a very high order which, because of the great veneration in which she was held by all sections of Kashmiri population, was memorised by most Kashmiris and became a part of day-to-day conversation. Shaikh Nur-ud-Din Nund Rishi, though less profound and accomplished as an artist than Lalla, succeeded in establishing a greater rapport with the populace. His simple and unsophisticated exhortations in versified Kashmiri had a great appeal for the common man and became an inseparable part of the common speech. Like Lalla, Nur-ud-Din Rishi was also a practising mystic. Mahmud Ghami had not only imbibed the influence of Lalla and Nur-ud-Din Nund Rishi but had also studied the Persian mystical poetry. Consequently he himself wrote mystical poetry of sorts. This all-pervading mysticism was reinforced by the various mystical orders that existed in Kashmir. *Murshids* belonging to these orders would enlist disciples both literate and illiterate. As mentioned earlier, Rasul Mir himself was associated with at least two different *murshids*.

How did Rasul Mir respond to this kind of education and upbringing? How much of the Persian and Kashmiri poetry that he read did he assimilate, and in what manner? An artist assimilates all influences including his real-life experiences and then transforms them through his creative imagination. This transformation is not reproduction but creation for which the artist's experiences serve as the raw material. If the raw material reappears as it was received in the original experience or is ill-assimilated and consequently expressed in a faulty manner, the artist lacks creative imagination. Rasul Mir's imagination does not always succeed in effecting the creative transformation of his experience. This is particularly evident from his response to his education and upbringing. The Persian

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poetry he undoubtedly read seems to have left him untouched. Of course he shares his lyrical fervour with the Persian *ghazal* writers but this lyricism has always been and continues to be the most dominant feature of all oriental poetry as it is in accord with the subjectively-oriented Eastern temperament. Rasul Mir found this lyricism in harmony with his own genius but both its depths and heights are denied to him. It is futile to look for such mellifluous lyrical expressions in Rasul Mir's poetry as, for instance, the following :

*Ma quissae Sikandero Dara na khandeaim
Az ma bejuz hikayate mehro wafa ma purs.* (Hafiz)

I do not peruse the tale of Alexander and Darius;
Ask me nothing except the plaint of love and faith.

*Hargiz na mirad aun ki dilash zinde shud be Ishq
Sabt ast ber jaridae alam dawami ma.* (Hafiz)

Never can he experience death whose heart receives life from
love;

Our immortality is indelibly writ on the annals of the world.

*Hubab-war berandazam az nishat kulah
Agar ze roye tu akse bejam-i-ma uftad* (Hafiz)

Drunk with joy, I shall toss my cap into the air
If my wine cup receives a single reflection of your face.

*Guftah boodam chu biyayee gam-i-dil ba tu begoyem
Chi begoyem ki gam az dil birawad chu tu biyayee.* (Sadi)

I had thought of revealing to you my heart's anguish on
meeting you;

How can I do so as my anguish vanishes as soon as you come?

*Dili ki ashigo sabir buwad magar sang ast
Ze ishq ta besaboori hazar farsang ast.* (Sadi)

A heart which is loving and patient at the same time is but a
stone;

As a thousand leagues separate love from endurance.

However Rasul Mir did introduce and popularise some features of metre and versification borrowed from Persian. Besides this he

considerably enriched the Kashmiri poetic diction by introducing in it scores of Persian names, words and expressions such as Sam, Rustum, Jamshid, Siaush, Mani, *ahu-i-harem*, *bag-i-Irem*, *mah-i-Nakshab*, *shamshad quamat*, *rashk-i-ghazal*, etc. Apart from this the exceedingly rich and multidimensional Persian poetry has exercised little or no influence on him.

The mystical element in Persian and Kashmiri poetry seems to have altogether eluded him. We do not find in him the kind of poetry that Lalla and Shaikh Nur-ud-Din (not to speak of Rumi and Attar) wrote before him. As is clear from his poem, "Wafat Namah Ansarwar", he did not succeed even in writing a *nat* in which his elder contemporary, Mahmud Ghami, made quite a mark. Nor, in spite of himself, could he write a *mathnavi*. Rasul Mir's attempt to render the famous opening verse of Rumi's *Mathnavi* is an apt illustration of this particular flaw of his genius. Rumi's verse reads :

Bishnav az ny chun hikayat me kunad
Waz judaie ha shikayat me kunad.

Listen to the flute how it tells its tale of woe
And sings of the pangs of separation

And Rasul Mir says :

O friend , you have removed me from the reed-bed
And burnt my heart like that of a bee's.

Not only is Rasul Mir's verse an instance of the failure of expression in that it combines incongruous images (the reed and the bee) without succeeding to establish a relationship between them, but also is it a very inapt use of Rumi's idea. In Rumi's verse the reed-flute appears as a fully developed metaphor for an experience which would not have been communicable in the same way through a different mode whereas in Rasul Mir it loses its identity and does not signify anything substantial.

Sadi's influence, to our great surprise, is almost totally absent from Rasul Mir. What is astonishing is that, having read Sadi as the first of the courses of his study, Rasul Mir should exhibit no trace of his influence on his poetry.

Critics of Rasul Mir have often tried to compare some of his verses with those of Hafiz and there is no doubt that he does remind

one of Hafiz. Ostensibly both of them deal with the theme of love but a close critical examination reveals that this apparent resemblance is misleading. Even verses where there is some superficial verbal similarity are seen, in the ultimate analysis, to have different levels of significance. Hafiz, for instance, says :

*Man az aun husni rozafzoon ki Yousuf dasht danistam
Ki ishq az pardae ismat buroon aurad Zulaikha ra.*

I had learnt from the ever-burgeoning beauty
that Yousuf possessed
That love forces Zulaikha out of the veil of chastity.

This verse has been compared with Rasul Mir's :

Your countenance is like Yousuf's and once Zulaikha learns of it
Tearing all her veils she will rush out, like a lunatic, into the
open.

This is undoubtedly one of the successful verses of Rasul Mir but in comparison to Hafiz's verse it looks thin. Apart from the stylistic beauty of Hafiz's verse, even the presentation of the experience in it is radically different from that of Rasul Mir. Hafiz generalises a particular experience drawing from it a universally valid aesthetic principle (the interaction between Beauty and Love); Rasul Mir particularizes his experience and makes the appeal of beauty dependent upon an informer.

Even when the two poets are describing the beauties of their beloveds' bodies, the verses that they produce are different in their semantic signification and verbal melody. Rasul Mir often refers to the spellbinding eyes of his beloved :

In your beauty's reign, gazing at your eyes and begging,
The sun and Jamshid wait with cups in their hands.

and

Your eyes are like almonds—pure magic from Bengal. Singing of the same subject, Hafiz says :

*Aan chashmi jaduwanee abid-farib bin
Kesh kaarvani sehr bedunbale me rawad.*

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Your hair, helped by the light of your face, robs my heart all
night :

What a daring robber who carries a lamp in his hand !

*Kahl-ul-jawahiri beman aur ay nasimi subh
Zan khaki nek-bakht ki shud rahguzari dost.*

O morning breeze, get for me the eyesight-restoring antimony
From the auspicious dust in the pathway of the beloved.

*Ay nazneen sanam tu chi mazhab giriftaee
Ket khuni ma halal-ter az shiri madar ast.*

O heart-ravishing love, what religion have you adopted,
That our blood has become more lawful to you than mother's
milk?

What ails Rasul Mir is that he is wholly entrapped in the
contours of a woman's body whereas Hafiz uses love as a means to
an end which lies beyond the superficial attractions of the flesh :

*Jamali shaks na chashmastu zulfu arizu khal
Hazar nukte darin karubari dildarist.*

A person's beauty does not lie merely in his eye, hair cheek and
mole :

Love knows a thousand subtleties beyond this.

*In ki me goyand aun behtar ze husn
Yari ma in darado aun niz ham.*

They say stateliness is greater than beauty;
But my love has this as well as that.

Add to this the countless gems that one goes on culling as one reads
Hafiz, such, for instance, as :

*Darin chaman gule bekhar kas na me chinad
Chiraghi Mustafavi ba sharari Bulahbist.*

No one has picked up a thorn-free rose from this garden :
The lamp of Mustafa is always accompanied by the spark of Abu
Lahb.

Asman bari amanat na tuwanast kashid
Qurae fal bename mane divaneh zadand.
 Heavens refused to shoulder the burden of the Trust
 And then, O madness ! it fell to my lot.

Man az begangan hargiz na nalam
Ki ba man har chi kard aun ashina kard.
 I have no grouse against the strangers;
 Whatever befell me was the handiwork of those near and dear to
 me.

Kas nadanist ki manzil-gahe maqsood kujast
In qadar hast ki bangi jarase me ayad.
 No one knows of the ultimate destination;
 We only hear the tinkling of a caravan bell.

It will be unfair to expect this kind of poetry from Rasul Mir but when compared with poets like Ghani Kashmiri and other Kashmiri poets--poets who are not geniuses of the first order--Rasul Mir's poetry does not fade. A verse of Ghani reads :

Ta tu gil aludi ay mah panjae chun aftar
*Shud mara wirde zaban litani kuntu turab.*¹
 O moon, as you mix water and clay with a hand bright as
 sunshine

-
1. This verse appears in a slightly different form in some sources :

Dast alulah be-gil ay mah hamchun aftar
Shud mara wirde zaban ya litani kuntu turab.

O sunlike moon, as you soil your hands with mud
 I go on reciting, "Would that I were clay!"

The verse, in any form, is not found in any of the standard editions of Ghani's Divan. In sources where it appears, a legend is associated with it. It is said that when the famous Persian poet, Saib, visited Kashmir for the first time, he went on a boating trip to the Dal lake. In the course of the trip he chanced to see a very beautiful Hindu girl cleaning her hands with mud and water at a particular place on the bank of the lake. Dazzled by her charm, Saib exclaimed the first hemistich of this distich. Another boat was passing by from which somebody completed the verse with the second hemistich. Astonished to hear a hemistich in such powerful and chaste Persian, Saib enquired about the person and was told that it was Ghani, the celebrated poet of Kashmir.

Another legend tells us that Saib had come to Kashmir precisely to see Ghani whose poetry he had read and from whom he wanted to know the meaning of a particular verse in which the poet had made use of a powerful Kashmiri symbol--*krata pan* (The potter's thread).

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I go on reciting, "would that I were clay!"

The same idea appears in Rasul Mir as,

As you mix water into clay, I crave moment after moment
Would that I were this clay!

Although Ghani's juxtaposition of the sun and the moon gives a subtle beauty to his verse, it must be granted that in this particular instance Rasul Mir's verse is equally good.

That Rasul Mir appears to be a reasonably good artist by the side of artists of lesser order is clear from a comparison of his love songs with those of Mahmud Ghami. Although Mahmud Ghami's range is wider than Rasul Mir's, the latter has a definite edge over him as far as love poetry is concerned. Both of them wrote poems with an identical title, *Divaneh Karith Tsolmai* and Rasul Mir's poem is richer and more melodious although some of the verses are given to both in the standard editions of the collected works of the two poets published by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. Two other poems in both bear partial resemblance in their themes as well as titles. Mahmud's poems are *Kerthes Metsi Divanai* and *Mau Rosh Masa Rosh Hasa Marematio Way*, and Rasul Mir's poems are *Boze Kerthes Metsi Divanai* and *Shamar Zulfav Seet Kerthes Mareh Matio Way*. Rasul Mir's poems are undoubtedly more chiselled, more accomplished and more mellifluous than Mahmud's. Similarly when the two treat the *carpe diem* theme Rasul Mir, because of his emotional involvement with earthly beauty, gives a better account of himself than Mahmud does.

With contemporary Kashmiri poets Rasul Mir enjoyed an enviable position and his successors have always looked upon him with love and respect. Among his contemporaries Abdul Ahad Nazim, Maqbool Shah Kralawari and Mohi-ud-Din Miskin wrote *ghazals* following the same metre and rhyme-scheme as Rasul Mir had used and acknowledged his role as a pioneer in *ghazal* writing. All the three were accomplished artists in their own right and successfully handled other poetic forms than *ghazal*. Maqbool's *Gulrez* is an abiding masterpiece of Kashmiri literature and remains unsurpassed to this day for its brilliant narrative technique, its lucid and racy style, and its combination of lyricism and narrative skill. He also wrote some pungent satirical pieces and lots of charming *ghazals*. Nazim wrote *Masnavi Zain-ul-Arab* (borrowing its outline

from Attar's *Ilahi Namah*) and some lampoons and satirical verses in addition to his *ghazals*. Miskin's *Zeba Nigar* continues to be the sole guarantee of a permanent place for him in the history of Kashmiri literature. All of them, however, concede a position of superiority to Rasul Mir as a *ghazal* writer and a poet of love. Miskin, in a context where he is critical of Rasul Mir, calls him a 'unique master' (*ustad-i-yaganah*) and a 'complete master' (*ustad-i-kamil*).

Among his successors Haqqani, Asad Mir, Mahjoor, Azad, Ahad Zargar, Rasa, Rahi, Kamil and Dina Nath Nadim have acknowledged the greatness of Rasul Mir in one way or the other. Haqqani shares in common with him the Persian influence which, with the difference of degree, colours the poetry of both. Asad Mir consciously imitates some of the stylistic features of his great predecessor although he seldom succeeds in achieving the desired results. Ahad Zargar's poetry rings with the same reverberating music through the interplay of rhyme and cadence as one witnesses in Rasul Mir although it cannot be said with certainty that he had assimilated Rasul Mir's influence. Rasa, like Rasul Mir, derives his inspiration from the Persian masters though he has imbibed this influence more deeply than Rasul Mir. He is conscious of his affinity with Rasul Mir as he writes :

Rasul Mir wrote his heart-ravishing poetry before
Enamoured of him Rasa followed behind.

Rahi, Kamil and Nadim do not exhibit any very profound influence of Rasul Mir on their work but they have paid glowing tributes to him.

Mahjoor, the harbinger of the modern age in Kashmiri poetry, spoke of himself as the reincarnation of Rasul Mir :

Rasul Mir unveiled the bewitching face of (the goddess) of love
and compassion
And was reborn (to accomplish the mission) in the form of
Mahjoor.

At another place he wrote :

Fill up new bottles with Mir's old wine
And put it on sale in all taverns
And serve it around to others in cups.

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And in a certain sense he does represent the tradition of Rasul Mir. Like Rasul Mir he sings of love in full-throated ease and spontaneity and occasionally achieves remarkable musical effects by playing on words, rhythms and cadences. Mahjoor however does not pursue musical effects at the cost of sense. Besides love poetry represents only one aspect of his achievement. He has written poems on other subjects--nature, patriotism, socio-political problems. He has also widened the scope of *ghazal* by accommodating into it other subjects than those of love and beauty. Moreover one of the bases of Mahjoor's greatness is the way he handles language. Like a true artist he does not allow the Persian syntax and phraseology to unduly intrude into Kashmiri. Consequently, when compared with Rasul Mir, his language is chaster and nearer to, though not identical, with the spoken language.

Abdul Ahad Azad's attitude to Mir, as is clear from his *Kashmiri Zuban aur Shairi*, is highly adulatory. No wonder then that his early poetry bears a clear imprint of Mir's influence. But with the passage of time, as Azad's social concerns became intenser, he outgrew this influence retaining only that part of it which conformed to his purpose.

A survey of Kashmiri poetry reveals that Rasul Mir's influence has turned out to be one of those factors which determined the directions of modern Kashmiri poetry. From this point of view his most significant contribution consists in freeing Kashmiri poetry from the pernicious influence of an overwhelming mysticism. This may, from one point of view, represent one of his weaknesses but, at the same time, it made Kashmiri poetry more natural and realistic and though he lacks a healthy social-consciousness, his was the first decisive step to bring Kashmiri poetry nearer to life. From him it was only one big step to make this poetry responsive to the social upheavals of the day.

Translations

Prefatory Note

Poetry is never fully translatable but the kind of poetry which Rasul Mir writes is untranslatable. He can be appreciated and enjoyed only in the original. Sound effects, internal rhyming, rhythm and cadence play such great part in his poetry that they constitute its essence. Evidently they elude a translator's grip. Translating him is making an attempt at picking up the dew drops from rose-petals which lose their existence at the merest touch. The simile is used here to mean all that it can. A few examples may help illustrate this :

Wanan Zeba nigaras wanan kyah gay me yaras
Wanan manz pan maras karas bo mar kot goum

Apart from the internal rhyming of this verse : *nigaras, yaras, maras* and the repetition of sounds, 's', 'z', 'w', and 'm', consider also the word *wanan* which has been used thrice in three different senses. Such a verse defies translation and any attempt at it mars and destroys the verse :

Zeba tells her Nigar what has my love been told of?
In forests I shall kill myself, O, where is he gone?

Another verse reads :

Sitayi gath kare lole naras bale yaras path
Kam geet wani wani Ram kor tami Ram nigaro

The music that results from the repetition of 's', 'th', 'f', and 'w' sounds in this verse becomes the first casualty in translation and the second casualty is the two distinct uses of word 'ram', 'Ram' as Lord Rama and 'ram' in the sense of establishing control over something. In translation the verse loses all its original charm :

Sita went round and round the fire of love for the sake of her
love;
What love songs did she sing to control Rama!

Finally the whole poem, "Kali Bare Hai Gatshi Gulistan", can be cited to illustrate the point. No skill in translation can adequately communicate the haunting melody of the original which is the outcome of an appropriate choice of metre, the deft placing of the internal rhymes and a successful manipulation of speech-rhythms; the poet calling on his love, in plaintive notes, to beware of the universal inexorability of death--tomorrow or day after is death and the end of the blooming flower-garden :

Bali marehai te baliye marehai
Kali bare hai gatshi gulistan

Rasul Mir's poetry leans so heavily on his brilliant world-play and magic sound effects that in translation he almost ceases to be a poet. One way out of it is to take undue liberty in translating him so that some kind of compensation is made for what is lost. To this liberty, this author confesses to have been tempted many a time.

A major difficulty in translating Rasul Mir is that of handling the sex of the speaking voice. In Kashmiri *watsun* and *ghazal*, the protagonist is generally a female. Rasul Mir tried to alter this unnatural and artificial practice by changing the sex of the speaking voice from female to male but in many poems he sticks to the convention and in many others the sex of the protagonist keeps on shifting within the ambit of a poem. This has led to a confusion of sorts which, if faithfully adhered to by a translator, is apt to mar the very effort of translation. An effort is made here to remove this confusion by maintaining a kind of consistency but taking, at the same time, sufficient care to see that it does not, in any way, effect the import of the verse.

The liberty of assigning a title to each poem in translation has been taken which is not there in the original. This is, however, excusable on the ground that these titles broadly represent the central ideas of the poems.

Poems

My Heart's Comfort

My rose-cheeked love, smiling as a blossom and soft as a
rose-petal

Is my heart's ache as well as its soothing balm.

Alif your stature, *lam* your tresses, and *mim* your mouth

You educate my reason as does the scripture with *alif*, *lam* and
mim.¹

The sun paled as it saw your dazzling countenance

And the moon felt dizzy with envy and experienced an eclipse.

The hyacinth hangs its head in shame and the tulip bears a scar
on its bosom

As they see the skilful lay-out of the mesh of your hair and mole.

In the battle of love your henna-coloured hands serve as
bayonets;

Vain is the boast of rivalry be it from Rustum or Sam.

Like the rose-blossom I shall tear my garb and reveal my grief;

Why should I fear when I have lost my fame for you?

Pen and paper can scarce express my inner anguish;

My messenger is my lacerated heart, inquire from it of me.

Your countenance is Rasul's religion, your hair his sacred law,

Why then should he care for Kufr and Islam.

1. The Quran begins (after *al-Fatihah*) with *alif*, *lam* and *mim*. To the poet the three letters symbolize the whole scripture which is embodied in his beloved. Her stature represents *alif*, her tresses represent *lam*, and her mouth represents *mim*.

Thoughts of Death

O Love! look there where death looms large on the horizon
And tomorrow has nothing for us but the withering away of the
flower-garden.
O! this burning pain of love that has pierced down to my heart
How callous is she whom even the thought of tomorrow does not
move?

Ever since my love took a fancy to others--my rivals,
I have been pining away like the moon in eclipse.
Her smile, which is sweetness itself is the panacea for all ills,
Why then not dance attendance on her like voluntary
bond-slaves?
My day is dying there behind the mount and my summer is fading
into the frosty winter;
Perchance my boatman may drop anchor--and then the eternal
silence.

Spring

Spring has stealthily glided in, my love, be no more cold and
indifferent;

Each corner of the garden is starlit with flowers.
The onset of early Spring, the almonds blooming around;
This hour shall pass off, you may or may not come.

My Cupid, I know you are clothed in beauty now
And see how demented with love I wander from place to place.
The hyacinths, coiling around the *arghawan* plants, hold them in
close embrace
Making me think of my love with tresses hanging down her
shoulders.
The morning-glory blossoms twisting and twisting around others;
If none exists for whom do they hang themselves?
The hyacinth--*suttee* itself--is burning alive in fire

Because the sweet-smiling rose frustrated her amorous impulses.
In the heart of the spring, the jessamines are afire with passion;
My love, deep-drunk with youth, is dressed in dazzling white.
She is the flower-garden and I, Rasul, its *bulbul*,
Shall I not complain to her who has ravished me with her
charms?

My Love is Gone

Having reduced me to naught my love is gone;
She is gone and isolated me from the *Kaba* and the temple alike.
My fair-statured love has left a pang in my heart;
Hysterical as I am, I shall catch hold of her like one who is mad.
That who has driven me mad and makes me melt like a candle,
With what unconcern does she pass me by forcing me to
consume myself moth-like in my own fire?
How fully is my archer equipped with the arrows of eyelashes
and the bows of arched eyebrows?
Shooting her arrows unmistakably she has made my bosom her
target.
That black mole on the rosy cheek, concealed beneath her
scattered hair--
The grain beneath the mesh--has tempted and entrapped me.
Her ravishing eyes, though they rob me of my faith,
Are yet the taverns of Divine nectar, and induce in me an ecstasy.

Remembering Her

Ever since I met my first love
She has not revisited me.

She unveiled her face, as smiling as the first day of spring,
And let fall her flowing hair, as dark as the Holy Night of Qadr;
And thereafter grew indifferent to darken my days for good.

Her drowsy narcissus-like eyes
Beguile the hearts of the lovers
And snatch repose from the large-eyed gazelles.

The fragrance of her body is the envy of flowers
And the houries dance to the tune of her ear-rings,
How then could I save my innocent heart?

And now pining for my love, my cypress stature is bent
And my heart is ever wailing;
O, wherefore this torment, I never taunted a wight in love.

Her furtive glances tore my heart
And put on me the chains of love
And after all this she broke the tacit pledge.

Rasul's mind is filled with a mortifying sense of wonder
In his search for the colourless in changing colours
And for the existence of Solitude in the tumultuous company.

For the Sake of Your Love

Stay a while, my carefree sweetheart, I fast for your love;
And these jingling golden bangles, I have got them made for you.

O friend, do not be cool but lend your ear to me,
I have threaded for your sake nosegays of unknown flowers.
My day, it passed in beseeching the Lord to fill your heart with
mercy,

My night, in reciting to this end the thirty parts of the scripture.

My moving cypress, look at my dry and thirsty lips,
When I shed tears in such plenty that streamlets flow with them.

My young and tender breast, which could hardly bear an eyelash,
Has now been torn asunder by the poisonous shafts of love

My name is tarnished as rivals heap ridicule upon me;
I gladly bear these taunts because I bear them for you.

O morning breeze, Rasul's passion of love is so intense
That it can ever bloom in flowers and send out fragrance.

Separation

Ah! this fatal distance and to survive through it;
This constant burning and pain and to have to live with it.
My doors are wide open so you come and let me live,
Without you I wither away like a rose which has yet to see its
bloom.
Your serpentine locks coiling round me, have reduced my reality
to a dream,
Being myself a piece of fiction, what fiction shall interest me
now?
My fears increase as beauty's rose-bush goes on shedding its
bloom;
My heart can hardly bear with the inevitable thoughts of death.
My upright stature is bent by the crumbling burden of love;
My back is double when I have yet to see the first dawn of youth.
In the garden of love my heart's scars are roses and my sighs
weave cypresses
And the tears that I shed water these shrubs.
The jeweller has confided to me many a secret in the dark :
'Jewels come from stones', says he (but what about my stone!)

My Careless Love

My sane and clear-witted love has strayed away from me,
Far away, beyond my reach, leaving me half-demented.

Like a wild *myna* wounded by a high-soaring eagle,
I look from twig to twig for my cruel love.

Ever since he has befriended my rivals
I have been undergoing an eclipse like the moon.

The proud eyebrows like delicately poised bows
Shoot at the target in a fastidious way.

When I see him in company he seems to shine
As the full moon shines in the company of the stars.

He it is who blooms in the rose and sings in the bulbul;
The bulbul and the rose-garden is just an illusion.

He Himself appears as Joseph and also as Zelicha;
He is both the lover and the beloved.

Hear, My Love

O, tell my fair love that she has stolen my heart
And left me weeping and wailing.

Shalimar is in bloom and it is high time
For lovers to embrace and to feast their eyes on flowers.

The darts of love have plunged deep into my breast
So deep that you, O merciless one, can see their traces on my
back.

My goddess is gracefully dressed in white with pomegranate
blossoms adorning her breast,
Enough is this to turn me mad and rove in her footsteps.

Unfulfilled Desire

My fair and bewitching love, you did not come;
I hear death's *footfall* and my desire remains unfulfilled.

O Weak of word, my simple heart besecches you :
"Why did you entice me, when this was to be the end?"

You went in hiding, forgot my love, and wasted my youth
Shall this indifference not melt even when I am consigned to
dust?

As the bulbul sees his rose he exclaims with the warmth of
passion and pride :

"O Love, shall I ever feast on your beauty's bloom!"

He, on whom you pinned your hopes day in and day out, is cross
with you;

O Rasul, with whom shall you be cross now and who will bring
you round?

My Sweet Flower-wreath

My inebriating flower-wreath is going out to play;
Irresistibly drawn by her shadow I applaud and hug it.

What a stately swan-like neck my Hindu princess has!
Lord, save her from the sinister looks of the evil-eyed men!
Will that detract a bit from your grandeur and grace?

Your black cascade of hair, though covered by a comely
head-wear,
Sends out waves of fragrance to all directions;
A word of praise for the maids too who decked you out.

This fragrant hair is finely wound into thin strings³
So fine and thin as to make the strings countless
And keep the lovers ever busy in the pleasant task.

Your anklet-bells, adding to the charm of your slim and fine
figure,

Resound so charmingly that they entice Lord Indra himself,

Why then should Rasul Mir not feel overcome by his passionate
love for you?

3. Winding a woman's hair into thin and fine strings was an essential article of a woman's make-up in Kashmir and continued to be in vogue well upto the middle of the present century.

Come My Kongi

Your lovers are drunk and have lost the sense of their being;
My Kongi, come, drink to them with your eyes and restore them.

Your rose-like cheeks have robbed the bulbuls of their sweet
twitter and the wise of their wisdom,
Aptly you have handed their guard to the charge of serpent locks.

Your mole, whose impress the tulip bears on her bosom,
enhances the beauty of your rosy cheeks

A negro king it is who has crept into a rose-garden

The two delicious pomegranates on your bosom, for which the
lovers pine,
Night after night I pray to the Lord to grant them to me.

A penitent Rasul is looking everywhere for his love,
Wailing harp-like as did Pir-i-Changi.

My Sweet Maid

My sweet maid, unveil your face and be not cross
After robbing me of my peace and rest.

Does it behave you to veil a face which is as fair
As the sun and the moon or the countenance of a hourie or a
fairy.

You are a rose-wreath from Paradise but your bloom is to fade
away.

And then you may rue your indifference to me.

My sweet charmer, with your tangled tresses
You ravished my heart and appropriated it for ever.

You drank to me with your eyes fair cups of inebriating wine
Now past all sense, I lie at your feet, forgetful of both the worlds.

Like a smiling rosebush you transport me into a world of bliss,
Keeping me ever in rapture with liquor exuding from your
ruby-like lips.

O! this passion of love, my whole interior is on fire
Nothing but the waters of union can extinguish this raging fire.

O Rasul, who but lovers like the moth and the *bulbul* can know
the torment of love;
To others it is as the beauty of the moon to the blind.

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