CHAPTER – IV
MIRA: THE WORLD OF MYSTICISM

*Mira* (1970) explores the phenomenon of sainthood through the story of Mirabai—the sixteenth century Rajput poetess saint. Mirabai by her unconventional living subverted the traditional ideals of womanhood and challenged the then existing social order. Her mystical love for Krishna dislocated the social order and ruffled the conservative Rajputs. The action of the play takes place in the early sixteenth century—Mewar, a primary state in the North western India. It practices the concept of theatre that exists in our country in the form of Tamasha of Maharashtra, Yakshagana of Mysore, Bhawani of Gujarat and Jatra of Bengal. But as Gurcharan Das confesses and accepts - "It needed the young Martin Benzell of LMama to introduce me to the magic of theatre - to teach me that theatre could be created minimally with body movements of the actors.

*(Three English plays, 16)*

The legend of Mira is a common and familiar name in Indian household. She was the Princess of the Rathore clan of Merta in Rajasthan. Mira was born in 1557 in far off Mewar in the village Kurkhi to Rao Ratan Singh— the founder of Jodhpur. Right from her childhood, she could know of no other love but for her dear Krishna. This could not be tolerated by the conservative, custom-ridden family and marriage was regarded as a remedy to relieve her of the divine intoxication. She was married to the heir of the mighty state of Chittor - the cynosure of all Rajputana eyes and lover to the conquering Moghuls. Her husband was the valiant Bhojraja, the eldest son of Rana Sangna, whose name is writ large for all times to come in the annals of Rajasthan as the solitary figure that would allegiance to nobody,
but would rather experience all the hardships of life. He bore the banner of Rajput chivalry and inherited all the marital qualities. It was this family into which Mirabai was born. She left no stone unturned to please her husband and see that his mandates were obeyed. She stood out a sublime figure of a devoted wife, an ideal that could be the boast of any Hindu lady. But in her love for Lord Krishna she could accept no compromise. To her that was supreme over all duties—spiritual, moral or temporal. After finishing her household work, she would feel that all the time was the Lord’s. But this frantic display of self-surrender and utter recklessness of form and formalities greatly irritated the mother-in-law and other ladies of her husband's family.

Bhojraja died while Mira was only twenty-three and only ten years had elapsed after her marriage. She now felt more at liberty to carry on her devotional practices. But soon things changed, and, at the instance of his counsellors, Ratan Singh, the new Rana of Mewar and Mira's brother-in-laws started persecuting her. Mira bore patiently all the humiliations to which she was subjected, in the name of the Lord without any complaint. The persecution of Mira continued day and night and she was ridiculed for mixing freely with the ensured mendicants and for dancing before the Lord's image.

Mira was a herald of a new age— the age of Bhakti. With great force she proclaimed the message in tears. She was of the brotherhood of saints-Saints like Kabir and Surdas. Guru Raidasa showed her the way home and she stuck to it with unsuring dedication. At last she is at peace with herself but detached from the phenomenal world.
Mira is forgotten in Rajasthan. The mercantile middle class in Gujarat presented her memory over the centuries and this was linked to the rise of the weaving communities. It was Mahatma Gandhi who revived her memory in the twentieth century when he joined the freedom movement in 1915. Following his example, Tagore named his daughter after Mira.

_Mira_ by Gurcharan Das is spread to a length of eighteen episodes. There are in all five characters representing Mira, Rana (husband) Jai (her cousin and Uda (Sister-in-law) and Jhali (her maid). The plays prologue expresses Mira's state of mind, her devotion, her pain, her anguish, her barenness and the lords and the beginning of a new journey emphatically her marriage day. Das explains his intent as:

I imagined Mira as a high-spirited young bride, who comes and shatters the emotionally charged atmosphere of formality in sixteen country Mewar, a state much burdened by a sense of its historical identity. I focussed on the evolving relationship between a husband and wife. Initially there is novelty, the embarrassment of two young people discovering each other in the typical Indian situation where physical touch precedes emotional contact. As the novelty wears, the Rana becomes absorbed in the affairs of the state and the imminent war with the mughal... She naively runs after him and he withdraws further. As she discovers that her husband is not equal to her love, she becomes disillusioned with marriage.

*(Three English Plays*, 14)
At the start of the play, the disillusionment of Mira is established. She speaks in despair - "I am Mira. I am an ant on a matchstick lit at both ends" (101). Their marital incompatibility is revealed in “Isn't the bed small for the Two of us?” (title of scene two)

Here Rana leads Mira to their nuptial bed, passing before the wooden image of Kali.

Actor 1 : Bow to mother!

Actress 1 : She hesitates.

Actor 1 : Bow to her. Kali is our family goddess.

Actress 1 : I don’t like her face.

Actor 1 : What?

Actress 1 : Mira is frightened………

Actor 1 : Kali will give you a son if you worship her(2.104).

Mira is surprised at the size of the bed—“Isn't the bed small for the two of us?” and “In my father's home they always gave me a big bed to sleep in. Don't your have enough beds in the palace?” (2.104). Mira and her husband Rana discover each other with much embarrassment. The novelty reduces their world to a narrow territory with each one hemisphere for the other. Gradually the charisma of newness vanishes and Rana becomes absorbed in the affairs of the state and in the imminent war with the Mughals. Mira feels
rejected and frustrated at the suspension of infatuation and yearns for physical and emotional satisfaction. Her unsatiated sexuality finally makes her learn that her husband is no match to her love, hence gets entrapped into an ennui. All efforts of Mira to enliven their sapping sexuality go vain.

Actor 1: I don’t want anyone with me - I just want to sleep. Meera, the Rana is tired. He has to prepare for war.

Actress 1: Mira will massage the Rana. Does the Rana care for Mira?

Actor 1: Yes

Actress 1: Mira’s heart is like a horse on an open plain—easily let loose but hard to restrain.

Gurcharan Das has painted Mira as a woman full of sensitivities, who cannot be happy with the discharge of unquestioning duties and exhibits discomfort under the cover of Patriarchal ideology.

Actor 2: Mira is the Rani of a magnificent palace!

Actress 1: Where palaces are magnificent, fields are poor and granaries are empty.

Heavy marital responsibilities noose her to disinterestedness and the burden of domestic patriarchal responsibilities reduces Mira to only “a Rani”.
Actress 1: The Rana must also rule the Rani. He only thinks about the kingdom.

Actress 3: Mira only thinks of love.

Actress 1: He only thinks of war.

Actress 3: He is a conqueror.

Actress 1: The real conqueror first overcomes himself. (3.106)

Mira's marriage goes to rock when she fails to protect her by becoming the mother of a son. Her failure debases and devalues her wifehood too. She is now branded as a barren. Consequently she is disillusioned and is unable to play obeisance to Kali the family deity. As a refuge she turns to Krishna and entreats him to give her a son. This gift of son she believes, would bring her husband back. Rana unable to understand her preoccupation with Krishna, thinks that she has a lover, "a snake’s poison with a wasp’s sting are better than an unfaithful wife (13.128). The sister-in-law Uda (Actress II) suspects her of infidelity. Mira confesses “I feel like a monkey with a snake in its paw” (8.121). Once again Mira transfers her love to the image of Lord Krishna and "I must have gone to sleep with you in my arm... I had a baby in my arm. He had shining black eyes and a black dress and a black turban". (10.123) and she lives in a golden cage (sc.x).

The last two scenes explore the tragedy of her husband Rana who undergoes much misery due to his wife's loss and transformation into saint Mirabai. Sri Krishna becomes a symbol of greater reality transcending in
this process of realization. She wins back herself public respect as well as esteem. Her gain through sainthood is described by Kumkum Sangari as:

Though she is rebel once she chooses the divine Krishna for a lover, her spiritual idiom becomes that of a chaste, and dutiful wife who observes in every minute details her household tasks. A feudal order in her support, not her enemy and her concern is to find fulfillment through, an even more intense involvement in a spiritual recreation of the God's wife's temporal role.

(Mirabai and Gandhi: Reformulating Patriarchies)

This myth-based play also interprets the popular legend concerning Mira and how a royal conspiracy is ‘planned to kill her but she is miraculously saved’. Once a poisonous Snake is concealed in a basket but when she opens it, the snake turns into a garland of flowers. In another attempt on her life, a deadly poison is mixed with her drink which she knowingly drinks, but once again emerges unscathed:

Rana sent a cup of poison.

Mira drank it and laughed.

Bells on her flying feet

Mira drank it and danced away (14.130).

Once again Krishna is her saviour who is now her protector equal to the role of a husband. This highlights the central idea of Bhakti movement that devotional love can grant personal support with god even in the
material world. In this way Mira transcends herself to lofty heights of divinity and under this magical spell she even forgets her husband:

Actress 1: Alive, you don't see your soul. Dead you don't see your corpse. My soul is the universe. The universe is my lord. Krishna. I am he who I love and who I love is I. (14.130).

Mira's control over her carnal self is her mastery over self, which evolves as sainthood bringing in complete peace within her. Her new self is bemoaned by her husband as - "I have lost the war, I have lost my wife".

The last two scenes explore the tragedy of Rana who suffers the misery and pain of his wife's loss and transformation into saint Mirabai. This crush of patriarchy is detailed by Madhuri Chatterjee as:

Das uses the historical material and substances it with dramatic diction. The scene “Don't ask the Blindman the way (title of SC XVII) focuses on Rana's poignant cry. The house is doomed. There will be no more Rana's no more victories, no more Kali, no more Mewar. It is over (137).

The play concludes with Mira as the bride but not to Rana as it occurs in the prologue. Lord Krishna replaces Rana and two lapse into a fit of frenzy with the cry of Mira – “I am free -free from life and death and time. Look at this light… I am blinded. But how I love my blindness” (Sc. X VIII)
Mira by resisting patriarchy constructs new social frameworks through individual assertion. By resisting patriarchy, she escapes from all womanly roles. By contesting hegemony and domination, she reconstructs the feminine self. Thus instead of the old tale where Mira was totally adsorbed in Krishna’s worship from childhood, Das constructs a new Mira who seems to turn to God because of her emotional and sexual frustration. He changes the traditional story line by making Mira the frustrated wife of a warrior who is so much occupied with stately affairs that he fails to fulfill the Purushartha of Kama. Rana does not take the biological needs of his wife seriously. Mira is filled with vacuity; ... “Love is a creeper, Jhali; it withers and dies if it has nothing to embrace” (10.124). Mira yearns for love but Rana fails to affirm and re-affirm her feminity through explicit sexuality. Her agony is the cry of being wanted and needed psychology, the play eloquently details the different motives for men and women for engaging in sex. DeLamater concluded that men have a recreational orientation toward sex in which a physical gratification is the goal and a relationship is not required. By contrast women have a relational orientation toward sex in which sex is integrated into the relationship as a way to convey intimacy. Another determinant of relationship satisfaction for both men and women is equity. An equitable relationship is one in which a person feels that what he or she puts into and gets out of a relationship is equal to what the partner gets into and gets out of the relationship. Mira's dissatisfaction is due to her feel of being “under benefitted” due to less sexual gratification. Her meaning of love wants a partner as mind and body to live along with adopting a way of life. This love conflict between Mira and Rana makes a subtle hint on the typology of love. According to J.A. Lee., there are three primary love styles.
A- Eros - or romantic love.
B- Storge - or friendship love
C- Ludus - or game playing love.

There are also three blends of these love styles.
A- Mania - eros + ludus (manic love)
B- Pragma - Storge + ludus (practical love)
C- Agape - eros + storge (pure love)

Women typically score higher than man on pragma and storge and men score higher on ludus. Under the noose of ludus, Rana seems less willing to commit to a relationship but retain his royal honour and service his kingdom Robert Sternberg (1988) also labels three basic components of love-

1- Passion
2- Intimacy
3- Commitment

This is illustrated as
Because of the boon of "Empathy accuracy" women are skilled at expressing love through verbal and nonverbal emotions. Feminine traits like gentleness, sensitivity and warmth are nurturant and emotionally supportive to marriage. That is why Mira appears democratic, passionate but deferential when she pleads attention, care and love from her spouse. Rana here stands in sharp contrast to Mira. Apparently his style of communicating love and no-love ungirds his social power. Because of his strictly scripted role, Rana voices his choice in a directive manner and the pretext is task-focussed image. Mira too has a duty and a role but excels in her transformational spirit. Still she is evaluated less favourable in her social and personal role than Rana. Her "pushy" and "aggressive decision" makes her conformist. Being a woman Mira cannot initiate a love activity. Everywhere sex is
understood to be something female’s home that males want. Whereas men demand independence in love making, women demand for connectedness. Women may balloon their breasts, botox their wrinkles, liposuction their fat to offer men the youthful healthy appearance that man desire. Das points this through Mira’s nervousness in appearing before Rana with unruly hair:

Actress 1: Mira suddenly nervous. Jhali, its he. Quick, go away. No, come here. My hair isn't even combed. And my forehead is naked. Oh…
(10.123).

Love in this context is opined by Gurcharan Das as-

Love has long been a metaphor for religious experiences in India. An ancient passage in the Brihad Arnyaka Upanishad compares the attainment of freedom and enlightenment to the experience of new in his wife's embrace. (*The Difficulty of Being Good, 134*)

Mira as the protagonist has been portrayed as the flag bearer of love who hates war and violence and demands love and to be loved. As a dependent gender, she needs contact, nurturance and recognition. This love dependency is therapeutic for “…in love and in love making there is a process of repair to the low self esteem and sense of self that so many people suffer. For "being loved" allows us to see and experience ourselves differently. This love can enter into the well of longing or the emptiness that lives deep inside of us. It can feed us in profoundly important ways and transform deeply held images of connectedness”. (*What do women want*, 153).
Mira is ready all through the length of the play to play a beloved to Rana and Rana hides his sexual eagerness soon after his marriage settles to normalcy. Here Das explicitly displays how the same dynamics of love in unequal exchange leads Mira to fragile premises. Mira thinks of sexuality in terms of love and commitment whereas Rana thinks of sexuality in terms of sensation and good time. Mira beholds ‘sexuality’ as intimacy a unique and deeply personal experience, but to Rana sexual swinging was a pastime and more so a process of validation to see oneself reflected in the eyes of the woman who looked adoringly at him. Through sex, man satiate their need for attention and confirmation. To be a man is to command attention and authority.

Mira is the protagonist who is expected to be preoccupied with Rana’s needs- his food, his sleep, his comfort his leisure and to aid his dreams to fulfillment. She is not permitted to assert her sexuality leave aside articulating it in the privateness of her room.

Actress 3: You have been to see some one, haven't you?

Actress 1: Yes.

Actress 3: A man?

Actress 1: Yes.

Actress 3: Mother, she has a man! A Rani of this house after all I have done to keep her pure. What if anyone finds out? She also
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wants to make a liar out of me. I'm an honest woman.

Actress 1: You can tell the truth.

Actress 3: If I tell the truth I will be turned out of the house along with you.

Actress 1: Then do what you like. (18.138)

The frozen relationship between Mira and her husband soon breeds rigidity; Rana is oblivious to Mira’s marital dissatisfaction and fails to relate to her choice, need and desire. Through this some relationship one is made aware of the fact that men and women come to sex with different expectations and needs whereas men look to sex to affirm their identity; women approaches sex for connection. Love making bolsters male identity but for a woman it is a pathway for security, warmth, affection, love and economic protection.

Freud said "we are never made so defenseless against suffering as when we love. Love is less an experience of choice than of biological imperative. Through intimate relationship build hubs around which a person’s life revolves and from such intimate relationship or attachments, one or a couple draws strength and enjoyment of life. On the other hand severing bonds produce emotional detachment when Mira-Rana relationship suffers, Jai appears as an easy alternative for Mira to exit relationship. She exhibits, neglects, ignores Rana in making passionate love to Jai hublicly allowing the relationship to deteriorate.
Actress 2: You don't go up and embrace a man like that, I almost died of shame. Think of your sacred husband. What must he have felt and in front of everyone. If I had been the Rani.

Actress 1. Oh, I didn't mean I didn't think the Rana would... what shall I do? What will the Rana think?

Actress 2: The damage is done. (11.134)

Social censure deprives Mira of emotional coupling with Jai. She once again exhibits loyalty by waiting for Rana to reciprocate. In her perseverance, she has dim possibility of the return of her golden love deny day. When Jai leaves, hopelessness springs up once again bedimming her marital future. Her agony is described by her maid as- “No herb will cure love. She never eats anymore since the Rana stopped calling her... All day she tells me she had let the Rana down” (11.134).

Her insecure attachments marked by anxiety, ambivalence and possessiveness anchors her on Lord Krishna- the second husband substitute after dismissing Jai.

The play also exposes the double standard of our society whereby the adulterous woman remains a 'whore' ever for her love while wife is advised to be patient, since husbands faithlessness is only a slight wrong. Like the Indian wife, Mira internalizes the ideology of her own oppression and adopts “modest unchastity” in a moral manner. But according to the playwright the transformation of a human being into a love-obsessed Bhakti
saint has a different inner logic. As the actress Mira chants and sings, women of the world and goddesses of the heaven hear her call and leave their homes and husbands and honour to go to him. She abandons regal duties to attend the life of a wandering saint. The turning point was the bloody battle of Khanua in 1527, when the Mughals defeated the Rajput confederacy under the leadership of Mewar.

Mira's myth has been an embodiment of understanding of a people dependant on the miraculous and the divine. Myth can be interpreted, re-interpreted, reweighed, re-assessed and deconstructed to retrieve their lost bearings. Mira-myth though traditionally linked to past still exists and unchallenged by oblivion, Das' effort at interpreting Mira in new-coinage has constructed new social framework through individual questioning.

As sum total of folk theatre it sublimates traditional values on one hand and questions its currency within the prevailing social set up. Das' craft correspondent with Antonin Artaud who rejected the Aristotelian theory of drama. Brecht and Artaud are similar in their concepts but while Artaud wanted his audience to critically watch a performance using the tools of reason and analysis Artaud’s approach was surrelistic. This shows that Artaud is closer to the ritual and folk theatre of Indian than to the classical one. He seems to put more emphasis on dance and rhythm than on speech and plot. Artaud believes that folk theatre questions the patriarchal codes of society in India and deals with modern concepts of repression and psychology. V. Rangan expresses similar idea in his evaluation of Karnad’s plays:
Folk imagination is at once mythopoeic and magical. In the folk mind, one subsumes the other. Folk belief, besides being naive has a touch of poetry about it which works towards a psychic adjustment. All folklore is religious after based on animism because the primitive imagination extends its vision from the natural, in which it is steeped and with which it is saturated, to the supernatural which to the folk mind is also an extension of the former.

(Myth and Romance in Nagamadala or their Subervision, 199)

_Mira_ is more of a ‘newness’ in terms of myth and folk stage-craft. These two experimental devices has won him acclaim in the west but the critics of the East disapprove of this bold attempt. Uma Parmeswara of University of Winnipeg writes in _World Literature Today_:

I found this play rather disappointing when a writer inscribes his own fiction on a traditional story dear to the ethos of a people or when a playwright plays around with traditional dramaturgy I expect some esthetic or philosophical returns. (76.2 Spring 2002)

Kusum Haider in her article "Engaging in Theatre," writes about its uneasy theatricality:

Mira was written for the La Mama Theatre of Newyork whose trained dancers and musicians were able to add flesh to the rather skeletal text that we have now. Offfand one can think of two troupes in India that could combine
the skills and attributes required for a successful presentation of this work. It is a bold experiment that deserves to be seen on our stage but is more likely to languish unperformed owing to the intrinsic difficulty in staging.


Staging of the play made *Mira* worth-reading and worth-watching. The entire play was infused with music and invigorated with drama and scripted in aphoristic dialogue as ritualistic theater-stuff. Consequently Das felt a few inches taller. Elaborating on rave reviews he writes:

There have been many productions since, including Alqul Padamsee’s visual enactment in Bombay and backward projected studies. It was stylish but static. There was even a production in Spanish with a lovely translation by Erique Hett that was published by the Instilo National de Bellas Artes. M.K. Raina’s production with Jawahar Wattle’s music brought back some of the energy but none paralleled the glory of La Mama Productions.

*(Three English Plays, 16)*

*Mira* is structurally a one-act play, unstructured to be performed in one setting. All actors are on stage all the time, with no exit or entrances. Further the actors are more vocal and less performers. They speak their dialogue on stage but do not generally enact what they say. Technically it is a beautiful blend of the oriental theatre with the verbal theatre of the west. Action and dance go on parallel motion without one interspersing the other.
The dialogue continues throughout the dance, as a visual and emotional aid to the actor's words. *Mira* is a brilliant treatise on body movement or space which are being talked today by Peter Brooke or Artaud.

*Mira* also practices Brecht's ‘verfremdung’ to focus on discontinuous identity and on female changeability. The physical confines of the royal home are challenged as *Mira*, ideological threaten the demarcation of the private sphere. Because Mira- the actress adopts a non-conformist role, she commands a “full and understanding auditory. No spatial structure is free of social implications, including those of gender, hence *Mira* derives much force through walking into the garden or groveling in her private chamber before the idol of Krishna. Gurcharan Das has internationally infused *Mira* with contemporary relevance by such innovations. This brings fresh the memory of Habib Tanvir who performed Brecht’s plays in the style of folk theatre. The movements of *Mira* hence allow us to consider the subversive aspects of female in marriage. Mira's marriage does not require, or even consider the whole of her being, therefore it initiates the split between appearance and reality. Ideologically woman has to retreat into her ‘inner’ being in order to find spaces that are not physically controlled. Such contradictory enterprises are doomed to failure because there are no inner spaces in the absence of the outer ones. Gurcharan Das through this act of writing has attempted to fashion privacy through literacy space. It seems Das is aware of the fact that non-conformity as secrecy of rebellion indicates the extent to which women are divided whose public and private lines are forced apart under male gaze. So much so that women's criteria for self-appraisal are male. The fact that they are forced to experience themselves in relation to man works like a knife and thereby experience the
dichotomies of virgin where intellect/body, reproducing vessel /decorative figurine. Male objectification fiction is not only a placement of women in relation to men but a specific female experience.

That Mira speaks in aphoristic dialogues holds the play tightly – “Marriage without love is no food at all”, “A tiger dies and leaves his skin behind; a man dies and leaves his name behind;” “it takes two to make a son”, “The chariot can't go anywhere on a single wheel” “when a dog barks at the mountain who gets hunt, the dog or the mountain”, The best riders fall the hardest”, “only cats know cats”, “be a peasant in peace than a prince in war”, “The bird chooses its tree, not the tree the bird”, “war is the festival of death”, “There is never a good war”, “courage is blind”, “A wise soldier is humble”, “war degrades life”, “Life is sorrow”…”, “Love is life a creeper, it withers and dies if has nothing to embrace”, Such expression reflect oppositional consciousness as the by-product of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal. Her “unhappy consciousness” a form of alienation that makes her at once a participant in the culture that oppresses her and a stranger to it.

Each relationship has its own vocabulary and Mira's is that of philosophy borne out of extensive and fervent completion. Much can also be attributed to her verbalizing emotions that had almost ripped her marriage apart.

Karnad too fashions emboldened female desires like Gurcharan Das in *Bali: The Sacrifice*. Karnad's female seems to have marked an apogee here. Sexuality here seems to cut through the patriarchal order unabashed and unashamed. The female voiced through the character of Queen desires
sexual gratification not as conscious attempt to produce children but to meet the need of the flesh, the call of the body. This sexual ferocity is referred to in the play as:

Mahout: But I tell you I have known a few women. They say there are six types of women.

King (gravely): And what about seventh?

Mahout (stumped): I only thought there were six.

King: No one's written about her. While she sinks her teeth into the man and drinks blood, plucks his entrails like strings the man head only laughs and sings. 

(\textit{Collected Plays}, 232)

The Queen in \textit{Bali} like \textit{Mira} is unembarrassed bold and resolute. If the Queen has the cheek to leave the king lying next to her and slip away from the palace to make with an Elephant keeper. Mira has the audacity to hug Jai right in front of her husband with all comeliness. When Jhali warns her Mira is clever enough like the Queen to manoeuvre and manipulate the patriarchal order and win the situation to her advantage.

Like the queen of Karnad's \textit{Bali}, Mira has an uncanny way of realizing the truth called communication with God under the effect of divine mesmerizing music of the flute of Krishna. Just as the Queen feels liberated from the bondage of patriarchy by mating with the Mahout. Mira feels liberated from a world of sterility by denouncing patriarchal traditions. Mira
gets rejuvenated by her presiding deity, fills her with warmth and gratifies her without any burden of conceiving a son. Mira like the Queen desires sex for pure pleasure of it as can be traced in the following conversation borrowed from *Bali*.

Queen (Suddenly laughs, tousles her hair): Yes, I can. For you. You could have taken another wife. You didn't

King: Of course I didn't

Queen: Sometimes I wished you had

King: You did

Queen: Yes, purely for bearing children. Then I could make love to you- for its own sake- to make love. You don't know how I have pined for that. And now I can look forward to it

*(Collected Plays, 211)*

The traditional Indian woman is burdened with the idea of bearing a child, more especially a son, for her family. A barren woman in an Indian society is looked down upon. Women themselves have a deep-rooted notion to bear an heir for their family. But here the mythical Mira emerges a modern woman. Unfettered and unabashed to live life on her own terms.

The play *Mira* establishes the fact that a woman is never taken on her own worth. The patriarchal set up expects woman to surrender to the will of
the male decision makes without protest. This fact is illustrated through another facet of Mira's life detailed in the play. Mira's sainthood is not easily accepted being a woman and indulging in summoning in the company of men. She faces the ordeals like gulping down the cup of poison, or deftly handling a poisonous a cobra with an intent to kill her and some the royal prestige. But like Sita in The Ramayana, she proves her innocence and divine potential to gain sainthood Mira's divinity is her vicious against patriarchal oppression and Krishna the critic divine loves emancipates her from lowly desire of the mesh In a way, Mira is Gurcharan Das' concept of new woman enthused with feminism fighting the unjust norms of the patriarchal order. The play understudy projects Das a dexterous painter of the condition of a typical Indian female ruled by the patriarchal order bounded by tradition, but whose spirit remarks unbounded. Das also portrays the human lives which are stagnated in the mire of personal choices and sexual innuendoes. Rana very well illustrates this binding concern.

In the portrayal of Mira, Das shares much semblance with Mahesh Dattani, whose perception of new woman is not of the status of a homemaker who aspires for her own made world. The women of Mira's generation were eulogized by men for their beauty and loved to bask in their appreciation of their charms. Dramatists like Das, Dattani, Karnad, Tendulkar, and Padmanabhan have painted new women who gives importance, to her intelligence because this is what she thinks she requires living meaningfully.

Though Mira's piety and devotion was despised by her royal family, yet she bore unbearable torture with passionate spiritual wisdom. In short Mira's life resonates in the hearts of many in India today for many reasons.
First her songs express a kind of female liberation. In them her rejection and ever disdain of the wealthy and their life of riches also appeals to the poor. Then there is rebellion, which is seen as being against injustice within the family and within kinships in general. India even to this day reveres the self-expression of Mira who rebelled against her marital family though without a support. Because she radically overstepped the limits of the “Pativrata Paradigm”, women look upon Mira as a woman of new strength who withstood social criticism with unswerving courage. “Pativrata” connotates complete devotion to her husband- her Pati. But in broader contest ‘pati’ encompasses ‘God’- her savior, her protector and her lord and master. Mira denies this ideology in clear shades as her asceticism is adulterous. As a “Pativrata”, Mira demonstrates unmitigated devotion that is both denial of society and a transcendence of society. She, therefore, is the nature of limitless bhakti. Rajput women admire Mira not because she rejects the “Pativrata” role towards which they strive but because through bhakti she realizes the same role on a transcendental plane. In other words, Rajput woman emulate Mira as a moral exemplas, but they do it obliquely. They hold Mira to reverence not much as a “Pativrata” but as a “Bhakti”. This oblique emulation is very different from women's emulation of “Kuldevis” and “Satimatas”. A Rajput woman would desire benediction of a state or a “Kuldevi” to save and protect her husband and their family rather than seek Mira's blessings for their individual upliftment, enlightenment or salvation. Mira is an example of divine marriage, whereby she emphasizes the chasm between the transcendent world of the saint versus the ordinary world of the Rajput Woman.
Mira resembles Rani Padmini in affirming explicit violation of Bhakti code and social norms. Mira and Padmini violated the connection of parda, took on male roles and demonstrated unequivocal devotion. Distinctively Padmini leaves pardah to launch a military strategy to liberate her husband but Mira does to merge into Godhead. Both departures signal a crossing out of social convection and venturing into areas where danger to their fundamental image is predictable. Unlike Padmini Mira's image is tarnished and her family honour equally damaged due to her unconventional behavior. She elicits harsh criticism due to two reasons- first due to shifting identity – wife- not wife and later widow- not widow. and secondly by keeping the company of male renounces (the ascetics). Finally Padmini sacrifices her safety to save her husband whereas Mira sacrifices her comfort and her duty for communion with Krishna in both instances, the viranganas achieved their goals if Padmini's courage allowed her to liberate her husband Mira's allowed her to seek God. But unlike Padmini, she deviated from the female role to fulfill her aspiration.

In short Mira is -

“... contemporary retelling of a well –known story. The transformation of Mira from being a princess to a saint is told through a different perspective, making her more human and making her more endearing to the people. Her turbulent relationship with her husband Rana is in a way deemed responsible for pining for Krishna’s love, she is portrayed just another girl who happens to be a princess but with same desires and fallings of a young first. Here is
love jealousy, sadness and loss in perfect measure to make the play memorable.

(http://www.tribuneindia.com2012)

Equally weightly is another review wherein it is recorded:

*Mira* is the most ambitious of the three plays, of and also perhaps the work where Das Creativity and talent are displayed most emphatically. *The Newyork Times* called it “remarkable in the way it combined Indian legend with the sophistication of western total theatre. (it) has something of the quality of a dream ritual.

(http://gurcharandas.org/three english plays)

Gurcharan Das has exploited Indian mythology for a definite purpose. This use makes the play rich in Indian sensibility and tradition alongwith forceful focus on the complexity of human relationship. Here one also notices the subtle juxtaposition of the past and the present. If in Girish Karnad’s use of myths there is a perfect harmonious blend of reality and imagination, Das’s *Mira* is a clash between desire and reality. Through *Mira* Das has contributed immensely to project the indigenous culture and tradition to the western world.

*Mira* links the past with the present, the archetype with the real. Issue of the present world (man wo men relationship)finds its parallel in the Mira myth of the past which lends new meaning and insight through analogy, reinforcing the theme. Like Karnad, Das believes that the significance of a myth never dies. He valorizes myths to contextualize contemporary human
situation, thereby providing immense scope for living presenting Mira-myth in human conditions. He links the present with the eternal and the contemporary with the archetypal for a myth is –

To a greater extent are interpreted in the light of the beliefs of each epoch. By virtue of their being recorded in history, they constitute a kind of fundamental basis for humanity. They are sustained by such power that each new faith and new civilization has had to make do with their imagery – without acknowledging it.

(The Wordsworth Dictionary of Mythology, 15)

Presenting myths in human condition, Das projects the humane of the human. He also presents the absurdity of life with all its elemental passions, conflicts and individual’s eternal struggle to achieve perfection. Investing bits of myths, Das upholds ancient tradition and culture as infallible agency of hope and consolation as Ian watt say … it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in Primeval times and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies”. Douglas Stewart, the Australian playwright, speaking of the importance of ‘myth’ in the creation of national identity says –

The playwright, I think uses those myths by which the people live: the heroic gigantic or actual to which the living man can point and say “that is what I made of that is what makes us different from other people; that is what I believe in; those are my gods and my devils. If you were a Greek you needed to know about the valour of Achilles
and the crimes of Oedipus; if you are English you must know the dreadful folly of Macbeth, the darkness and splendor of kings…

(The Oxford History of Australian Literature, 226)

Mira, a myth of legendary heroine is widely used with varied shades of newness to affirm the distinctive identity of a good Indian woman. In Tagore’s novella *Yogayog* Mirabai plays a somewhat similar role, her life story and her character and songs serving as a inner reference point for his heroine Kumudini as she struggles to find dignity and meaning within a more than difficult marital relationship. Equally striking is the force of the dignity of the legendary character ‘Mira’ used by Shashi Deshpande in her English novel *The Binding Vine*. The Mira –like character of the Protagonist’s Urmila’s mother-in-law brings in a sense of wakening. Her writings and poetry break through the silence of Urmila’s life through articulations of isolation, injustice, oppression and suppression, even of marital rape with deep emotion and clarity. This character “… is at once both the saint Mirabai and not Mirabai.

Joining past and present in a place of shared experience live fully, to speak the truth and one of the first plays of post-independence India to use myth to make a contemporary tool of allusion was Dharmvir Bharati in *Andha Yug* (The Blind Age). The Play details the disintegrative result of the Kurushetra war, which forms the climax of the epic ‘Mahabharata’ this projects the great confrontation between good and evil, in which god himself participated as the deity Lord Krishna. Bharti uses this myth to paint the unavoidable sense of despair felt deep inside in the wake of the partition
of the country and the communal bloodbaths that blinded sense and sight as horrid aftermath.

*Mira* is also a statement on the new usage of myth. Traditionally myth was used for elementary usage as detailed by Karnad as:

Until the 19th century the audience had never been expected to pay to see a show. Theatre had depended upon patronage – of Kings ministers local feudatories, or temples, with the myth based storyline already familiar to the audience, the shape and success of a performance depended on how the actors improvised with the given narrative material each time the come on stage.

*(Three Plays, 5)*

With the rise of the new theatre the audience paid to see something new or at least a thing a the past with new colour and new currency. *Mira* is in this respect … a carefully packaged commodity (Three English Plays, 5) with as much entertainment in return as could be competitively fitted within the price of a ticket. It is after all the idea of entertainment whose success would be measured entirely in terms of immediate financial returns and the run of the play.