poetry which deals with the special, individual activity of the Self, but even such poetry "must take account of purely poetical values, must eschew rhetoric and make no concession to public opinion". In pouring forth secrets of the Self and dilating upon the role of Islam in the world, Iqbal thought that he was giving to the people what he wanted to give them. But in fact, he was unconsciously playing to the political environment. Doubtless, his distrust of Western civilization and faith in Muhammad was a mainspring of his thought. But then this did not necessarily require the cacaphonous insistence on belief, self-improvement, urge to power, the commitment to moral and political success, which we find in his inferior poems. After all, Yeats was very like Iqbal in many ways. Yet he did not give up his poetic role, he made "after the manner of his kind/ Mere images". Iqbal, by contrast, set out to construct a philosophy. And unfortunately it is his "philosophical" poems which are held out by critics as his best. *Masjid-e Qurtaba* (The mosque of Cordova) is a magnificent but soulless edifice. Yet it has been written about ad nauseam while a truly great poem like *Zauqo Shauq* (Desire and love and loving) has been largely ignored. Even in many of his philosophical poems Iqbal is a great poet, but because of his poetry rather than his philosophy. He felt like a romantic, and often wrote like one. In his best work he shows the same delicate feeling for complex words which is the hall-mark of Shakespeare, the greatest Romantic of them all. Yet he liked to imagine that he was a thinker first and foremost, and that was his dilemma. Pare away the rhetorical and the philosophical verbiage and the great poet emerges in all his glory of doubt and anxiety, of vision and apocalypse.

The Problem of Interpretation in Mir Anis

A distinct element of tragedy in the Marsiyas of Mir Anis is unmistakable. But is it tragedy on the same level as the Greek? Disregarding for a moment the schematic construction of tragedy provided by Aristotle, we see the participants in Greek tragedy forming two distinct sides. On the one side are ranged the humans, sinful and passionate, victims of their own greatness. On the other side are arrayed the divinities. The minor gods are partial realisations of the great god, Zeus, who is the underlying motive and moral force of the universe. This force is at war with its own self inasmuch as it condemns men for being human though it is itself the creator and destroyer of men. Gods are expected to provide order and cohesion to the world. Yet they condemn Oedipus to a life of blindness, and Orestes is pursued by the Furies. Hippolytus is dragged to death by the wild horses of Poseidon and Hercules becomes the unintended victim of a frustrated wife's despair. Both the humans and demigods are caught in a web of circumstance. They struggle to break through the web and in the process are ensnared all the more. Human crimes assume the proportions

of ritual suicide.

The three great Greek tragic writers have used the same themes differently. In his *Electra* Sophocles shows "how a horror can be sapped of its strength, how a crime can be so drained of its power to shock that we are left in full sympathy with the criminals, how an offence against nature can be made acceptable". What happens to Electra and Orestes after the murder of Clytemnestra takes second or even third precedence when compared to the main theme of murder itself. By a subtle transformation of their roles, Sophocles reverses the natural relationship of victim and murderer. But he does not let us forget the events which have led to the matricide which is the theme of the play. The murder of Clytemnestra has become necessary because of the murder of Agamemnon. This has been shown by Aeschylus too in his own *Agamemnon*. However, the murder of Agamemnon in itself is not the only source of the events described in Sophocles' *Electra*. Aeschylus' play points up the tragedy inherent in the departure of Agamemnon to the Trojan war. He would not have been killed if he had not gone away, giving Clytemnestra the opportunity to be unfaithful to him. But the wheel does not stop here. There would have been no Trojan war at all but for the carrying off of Helen by Paris. And there would have been no Paris to carry off Helen if there had been no judgement of Paris. This chain could be lengthened ad infinitum. Neither Sophocles nor Aeschylus is unaware of the vast backdrop against which their tiny humans perform. Thus there is no treatment in isolation. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to assign praise or blame.

Euripides' treatment of Electra differs from that of Sophocles. While the backdrop remains relevant, the *Electra* of Euripides shows "how the horror can be magnified, how a crime can be made repugnant, even when committed in the name of justice, so that we are left utterly dismayed by the experience". Further, as John Gassner says, Euripides' *Electra* is a "radical writer's protest against vengefulness and hysteria".

Greek tragedy thus presents man's eternal conflict with God or society. It makes use of myths handed down from pre-history, but the meaningfulness of the myths goes on changing

with the change in Greek social thought. Such was the power of liberal thinking in Greek culture that the tragic poets were able to re-interpret the myths and also attempt a reconciliation between religious belief and changing social thought. As Werner Jaeger has said:

> The spirit of Greek Poetry is tragic because it sees in our moral destiny the indissoluble evils between every event, even the noblest of human endeavours, and the rule of heaven. Life became more and more rationalised in the sixth century, and the Greeks began to feel that men were responsible for their own actions and sufferings. But even that change of feeling did not invade the moral sentiment of thinkers like Solon or Theognis, Simonides or Aeschylus, so far as to destroy the last strong core or belief in Moira—the belief which is still active in the fifth century tragedy, the belief that "whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad". Misery deserved and misery undeserved, each is "moira of the gods". For God is the cause of every thing that happens, be it good or bad.

The conflict between this religious conception and the ethical idea that man is fully responsible for the results of his actions runs through all Greek poetry, although sometimes beneath the surface. In the world of Mir Anis too, God is the cause of everything that happens. But questions of Fate and self-determination are not even hinted at. There is no conflict here between God and man because God does not intervene in human affairs. God is certainly on the side of Husain but he does nothing to mitigate Husain's tragedy. Husain submits to God's will. In fact, he is the instrument of God's will, which prevails through his defeat and death. Husain is not torn by doubts and fears. He is not an uninnocent victim of circumstance like Clytemnestra or Oedipus. The good men and the bad are clearly ranged for and against Husain. It is essentially a Platonic world, a world in which all things are well-ordered. There is no scope for interpretation or reinterpretation of the events which lead to the death of Husain. The

question of the original source of events, which plays so powerful a role in Greek tragedy, is not admitted at all. Husain's departure from Madina and his ultimate defeat a few weeks later on the battlefield of Karbala are treated in isolation. There is no half-light of ambivalence surrounding the characters of Anis. Each of them runs true to type. The ultimate result of conflict between Husain and his adversaries was that Husain died, but he perpetuated the truth in whose cause he had suffered untold hardships.

I need not emphasise the common ground that the Marsias of Anis and the Greek tragedies traverse. The sources of both are religious. Both began as celebrations of certain events of religious significance. But the resemblance stops here. As Jaegar has shown, the artistic conflict in Greek tragedy is between rationalism and religious faith. The underlying conflict is between the growth in the power of man, the anger of the gods, and of the circumstances that such power inevitably creates. Discussing the thought of the Greek political philosopher Isocrates, Jaegar says:

> Isocrates believed that the political world is subject to the law of tragedy, whereby wealth and power are sometimes conjoined with infatuation and licentiousness and are threatened with destruction by these cancerous growths. It is poverty and abasement which really teach men, for they inculcate self control and moderation. Thus, experience shows that it is usual for the lowly to be exalted, since humanity leads them to higher things, while the mighty are easily cast down.

The essence of tragedy is that once the lowly ones became exalted, like Oedipus, they at once attract the wrath of the Eumenides. The exalted ones of Mir Anis are not cast down by the Eumenides. They are part of a universal scheme which is religious and mystical in character.

Thus no interpretation of Mir Anis can be valid if it disregards the Islamic-religious nature of his Marsiyas. The Marsiyas are religious poems. There is no point in treating them as

minor tragedies and there is no reason why we should be apologetic about their religious character. *Paradise Lost*, the medieval Provençal Romances, are not any the less poems because of their religious motivation. What matters in poetry is, as E.D. Hirsch Jr. says, what we value as poetry. The awareness that the Marsiya is a religious poem should be an aid, not a hindrance to our understanding of the poem. There is considerable validity in Kalimuddin Ahmad's observation that Mir Anis has reduced the stature of Husain and his followers to that of Lucknow heroes. But this does not detract from the value of the Marisyas as poems, as Kalimuddin Ahmad likes to believe. In fact it is a remarkable merit of these poems that religious heroes could become, and indeed have become, quasi-human in their beauty, valour and devotion to truth and could have still been endowed with an essentially human touch. Husain and his kinsmen appear in these Marsiyas as superhuman in their power of endurance and fortitude, but they still have their human vulnerability. For in the end each of them is cut down, though by a savage army of opponents who are as deceitful as Husain's people are just and honest. It must be remembered that hyperbole is a salient characteristic of the Eastern mind and its value as metaphor has been recognised even by Aristotle. The ancient Arab critic, Qudama Ibne Jafar, in his "Critique of Poetry" grants hyperbole a high position in the poetic repertoire. This conclusion need not neccessarily have been inspired by Aristotle, because Arabs traditionally recognised hyperbole as a legitimate device for heightening both description and narration. Thus in Mir Anis, the lengthy narrations of sorrow and lamentation in Husain's camp after the death of each hero and the heightened descriptions of the wounds inflicted on Husain and his men, were necessary poetic devices and not just the mannerisms of Lucknow culture violently grafted into the solemn landscape of Arab battles. Similarly, the impossible exaggerations of Mir Anis while describing the power of Husain's sword and horse (and also those of his followers) were acknowledged poetic conventions; the poems have to be judged within the context of those conventions.

The essence of the conventions developed by Urdu poetry

for the writing of Marsiyas was a certain kind of stylization: the construction of a synthetic world in which things were larger than life. The morning was not just any morning, it was a morning in fairyland or a dawn over paradise. The hot mid-day was just not any hot mid-day, but a zenith of the sun in hell. The evening was not just any evening: it was midnight in a deserted country graveyard. So also the sword, the horse, the battle, the blood-shed, the thirst and the loneliness. Separated from this convention, the Marsiya makes little sense—especially the Marsiya of Anis, which exploits this convention to the full.

The essence of hyperbole is that it should convince. This is rather a paradox but is really the secret of the power of Mir Anis as compared to other Marsiya writers. A hyperbole is convincing when it retains its essence of fact and employs that well-known device which Coleridge has termed (in another context, though) as causing the reader's disbelief to be willingly suspended. This comes about by the extensive use of imagery laced with metaphor which sometimes assumes the proportions of a symbol. Anis has used some well-known metaphysical symbols like "light", "flower" and "sky". But often enough he has confined himself to the use of metaphorical devices to strengthen the hyperbole, which itself is metaphor in a low key. Consider for example the use of hyperbole in this Qasida by Farrukhi, the tenth century Persian poet. I am giving a rough literal translation, because it is impossible to convey all the subtlety of the Persian in English.

> When on the day of battle, the king extends his hand toward the quiver of arrows, the dark Jupiter becomes darker with fear. The day the shield brings shade over his swórd and the bow gains the strength from his arrow, the wild lion himself gouges out his eyes and the bursting spleen of the rogue elephant comes out through his mouth. Many are the hands that his mace separates from the rein, and many the feet that his sword removes from the stirrup.

The power of these lines is undeniable. Perhaps even the Greeks cannot easily equal them. In spite of the power however,

the reader remains conscious that this all is make-believe and does not pretend to be even a shadow of the reality. By giving precedence to pure metaphor over hyperbole, Anis achieves a more startling effect. The effect, in fact, of reality. Consider this rough prose version of a stanza from Anis:

> The boys went fearless into the spears, and getting the lions' wind, the horses stampeded. The hearts of the unbelievers thumped and thundered in fear for their lives and so sweet were the wounds inflicted by the two that the wounded were dancing. The armies were swept away off the river bank; licking their lips, they expired.

This is the description of the battle of the youthful Aun and Muhammad, the ten year old nephews of Husain. By dexterously interweaving the fact of metaphor with the fiction of hyperbole, Anis has effected a suspension of disbelief. Consider the images: two children rushing fearless into a forest of spears: horses stampeding when they smell lions; the army being swept off the river bank and the death convulsions of the wounded creating the illusion of a ritual dance. The penetration of real life into make-believe has made all the difference. The point to be borne in mind is not that two ten year old boys could fight like this, but that we are being asked to visualise an ideal battle in terms of reality.

The art of poetry is not necessarily that of realism. In spite of his crippling limitations, even Mir Anis was able to invent and improvise. Yet no invention and improvisation in the physical scale of event and occurrence can suffice in poetry which demands a finer type of dimension and a subtler level of improvisation. This almost invariably means metaphorical improvisation. In fact, Mir Anis was able to produce finer examples of metaphorical writing than the Masnavi writers just because, unlike the Masnavi writers, variety of events was not available to him. The monotony of his theme is offset by invention of metaphors. His poem being religious in source and substance, Anis could take very little liberty with the facts. His inventions in this direction, therefore, follow the safe beaten tracks of

keeping to the right side of Husain and his followers and only for the sake of verisimilitude, inventing parting scenes, dialogues, details of weapons of war, orations etc. Thus his real power of invention was directed towards piling up line after line full of metaphor and imagery. Consider the following descriptions of Husain, taken from various Marsiyas:

1. That beautiful face on whose sight
   the heart grows bright;
   black curling tresses like the
   dawn of the sun at mid-night.
   The glory of the brows that turns the enemies'
   heart to water and those eyes that put to shame
   the flower of heaven.
   The majesty of the pupils is apparent to all
   in God's world—like a lion crouching in
   dense and dank forests.

2. Tears were flowing on the face of that Presence (Husain)
   or dew was falling drop by drop from
   the sun-flower.

3. He came out from his tent like the rising
   sun and suddenly the wilderness was full
   of light. It was from his face that divinity
   was shining in the six directions.
   Not to speak of the morning, the face of the
   moon too was white.

These and scores of such other descriptions of Husain's face, sword, horse, his power of battle, come alive not because belief in a particular religion or in the goodness of a particular person persuades us of their truth, but because all the inventive genius of a great poet has gone into finding an imaginative construct for them.

Thus no interpretation of Anis can succeed without conceding that his Marsiyas are religious poems leaving little room for the poet to introduce themes of doubt and despair. There-

fore, in their very nature, these poems are not tragic poems. Indeed, they are poems of hope, because in effect they celebrate the ultimate victory of truth and goodness over falsehood and evil. These poems are conceived within a rigid straitjacket of convention which requires certain things to be taken for granted. As I have mentioned above, stylisation, sophistication and idealisation are the foundations of the conventions which govern the form that Mir Anis chose to work in. It is no use judging Anis with the standards set by Aristotle, just as it is no use judging the Greeks with the standards of Indian drama. Judgement in such cases is to be two-fold. First, it should be in the light of the universals which have been the test of good poetry all over the world. It is these universals which enable us to find merit in such diverse poetic traditions as the Chinese, the Arabic, the Greek and the English. Second, judgment is to be pronounced in terms of the special traditions and conventions in whose shadow a particular poet worked and wrote. It is this second standard of reference that should inhibit us from applying Aristotelean measurements to poems written in that version of the Indo-Iranian tradition which Mir Anis had inherited.

I have said that the world of Mir Anis is Platonic inasmuch as in spite of all its apparent clash and clamour of battle, it is a well-ordered world in which the two sides of the question are clearly marked. This world is Platonic in another sense as well, because everything in it is idealised. Plato had objected to poetry because it prevented the development of courage and self control. In the world of Mir Anis, courage and steadfastness are idealised and by pronouncing an ideal judgement on the ultimate victory of truth, Mir Anis might have been attempting some kind of a Utopian interpretation of the universe by effecting a compromise between religious belief in goodness and a realistic view of life which shows that the good does not always prevail.

Many critics, and I am one of them, have found much to blame in Mir Anis for his rhetoric, his attempts to appeal to the lachrymal glands and his unnecessary emphasis on trivial detail. Even his best Marsiyas are not entirely free from what to the modern critic must appear as lapses of taste. But here again the cultural traditions of the Marsiya come into play. More than any

other kind of poetry in the world, the Marsiya was intended to be recited before an audience. And the audience did not gather to admire the poetry. To most of the audience, then as now, a Marsiya reading session was a religious performance and listening to the Marsiya was a positively good act in the theological sense. To all intents and purposes, the Marsiya was a poem written to excite pity for the sad plight of Husain and to generate hatred against his murderers. The finer moral difficulties were not apparent to the audience of Mir Anis. He gave his audience precisely what they expected. Ideally fierce in battle, Husain and his followers became ideally given to lamentations on deaths and partings. Mir Anis gave way to bathos, sentimentality and excess of feminine dialogues much in the same way and for much the same reasons as Shakespeare gave way to coarse comedy and narrow chauvinism. That Shakespeare was able to endow even these things with a peculiar grace and power, only means that he was the greater poet. What we have to see is whether Mir Anis suffers by comparison to other Marsiya writers. It has been said that Mir Anis had so perfected his power of dramatic recitation that even the plainest lines assumed the proportions of magic in his recitals. We do not have a speaker of poetry today who even remotely approaches Mir Anis in this art. But the point is perfectly clear. Our interpretation of Mir Anis must take into account the fact that his Marsiyas are intended to be recited. Much of the empty rhetoric and too obvious appeal to sentiment evaporates and gives way to elemental passion when the Marsiyas are recited by a competent speaker. It is here, more than else where, that his superiority asserts itself over other Marsiya writers. Mir Anis took care to maintain a self imposed discipline in his dialogues and narrations which form the slack of the otherwise taut structure of his Marsiyas. The language spoken by no two characters is alike. His Husain retains a degree of dignity even when he or his people and their dead bodies are subjected to the vilest indignity. Consider the following lines:

1. He would not say, "I am the king of East and West." The master bent his head and said, "I am Husain."

2. Today, though I am without friend or support, yet my estate is high. Be not diffident, I too am Ali's slave.
3. The enemies would not give me a drop of water, fight them as we may. My son, your help now lies with him who will be the saqi of Kausar.
4. The wet-eyed Arab stallion was ahead and the King of sea and land was behind him.

The dramatic content of the apparently barren verses in the Marsiyas asserts itself through the discipline which distinguished the station and the rank, both spiritual and mundane, of the various persons. Other Marsiya writers fail because the tradition of hyperbole gets the better of them and proportion is invariably lost. Secondly, appropriateness of language also consists of its speakability, particularly in regard to Marsiya which was meant to be read aloud. The language of Mir Anis abounds with Arabicisms and Persianisms, yet he retains his contact with the spoken language. His style is not obviously "literary" as that of, say, Mirza Dabir. In this respect he reminds us of the letters of Ghalib, which have a just reputation for simplicity and easy flow of rhythm, and yet are dotted with Arabic and Persian words. The secret of both is that the level of cultured speech in those days was highly sophisticated and both have been able to work into, not away from its rythm.

The question that remains to be decided is about the relevance of such narrowly religious poetry as Marsiya. But the answer to this perhaps is contained in the formulation that I have referred to above—what we value in poetry is that which really matters. And I do not think it is really necessary for me to be a Christian before I can start enjoying T.S. Eliot or Donne. I am not shattered by the fact that Mir Anis is not a tragic poet in the Greek or even in the Shakespearean sense. I regard all attempts to treat Anis as an epic or tragic poet in the Western sense as a sign of inferiority complex. Evaluation of Anis should not be conditioned by borrowed responses and need not be depend on totally non-Indian standards for its validity. We have to meet Mir Anis on his own terms:

This fame of mine for the beauty of my
words is really for the reason that I
praise the illustration Imam. What
am I, What my voice, what my recitations?
Master, this all is the honour of being
thy servant.

A Ghazal by Ghalib

Preliminary Remarks

The basic principle underlying this analysis is as follows: because poetry consists of words, and words are made up of both meaning and sound pattern, the music of the latter creates the poem's meaning, and the meaning creates the poem's music. Both these processes work simultaneously and their interaction is such that a just assessment of the poem's meaning and significance cannot be obtained if they are considered separately. Words are the basic and fundamental element of a poem. It follows then, that a true study of poetry is only possible when, having first taken into account the words as individual entities, we then study their mutual interaction, and all the explicit and implicit associations and allusions that have arisen from their being woven into a textual fabric. The point to be stressed is this: when words are used in a poetic context, they acquire a stature over and above their apparent and literal meaning. Perhaps this mysterious gaining of stature comes largely from the music which results when words are arranged according to a given melodic pattern. For example, we cannot find in *fa'ilun, fa'ilun, fa'ilun, fa'ilun* the same music which we can in even in such a trite line as *main jalata raha ansuon*