

# *Mira* : Exploring Feminine Psyche in a ‘Total Theatrical Way’

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## **Abstract:**

Two things about Gurcharan Das fascinate both literary and non-literary world. One is his patriotic interest in Indian ethical values and the another his innovative approach in his writing. These two qualities of Gurcharan Das has beautifully amalgamated in his play *Mira*. The most astonishing thing about the play, *Mira*, is the use of innovative techniques to talk about feminine psyche. It is a play to be performed in one setting in one act. All actors are always on the stage having no exists or entrance. In this play we can trace a great Indian tradition of theatre which is called ‘Total Theatre’ technique in Western World. In India this type of theatre resembles ‘Tamsha’ in Maharashtra and ‘Swang’ in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Music, Dance, Techniques, Feminine Psyche, Playwright.

**Introduction:** In a very precise way we can put Total Theatre in a term which stands for a unified work of art where all elements : music, dance, spectacle etc. work together. Here all the mechanical resources of the theatre are put to use. This form of theatre does not need any special stage setting. It can be performed in any open area with ease. In western world of literature this form of theatre is made famous by Steven Berkeff, an English author, playwright and theatre director.

In *Mira*, the playwright applies the denaturalized form of western ‘Total Theatre’. In this regard Madhuri Chatterjee rightly says. “Das has attempted to combine the Indian legend of Mira with the sophistication of western total theatre in the play, *Mira*” (235). To show the feminine psyche, Das instead of exploring external life of systematic thinking, concerned with exploring and delineating of the psyche of Mira with examination and presentation of the inner being of a woman. This type of theme suits to the technique of Total theatre form of drama Das utilizes imagination, colour, light, darkness, music dance, song as literary devices to divulge into the feminine psyche. That is why there is very scanty physical actions shown. Much of the play is all about music and songs and dance. There is a background music which goes on throughout the play. Here he explores and exposes the wail of the incarcerated psyche of his female protagonist *Mira*, imprisoned in the four walls of domesticity. A characteristic feature of the play *Mira* is not only to articulate woman psyche but also to present a critique of the canons of patriarchy. It scrutinizes the position of women in a male dominated family as well as social set up.

*Mira* in this context proves to be a journey of woman’s salvation. Here, Gurcharan Das upsets the much interpreted view of women struggling against domination and endorses the claim that woman can transcend the burden of her social roles. In a very theatrical display Gurcharan Das takes Woman on a

spiritual voyage where he can discover her latent potential and transcend the boundaries set up by patriarchal system.

Here in the play, the playwright has not used the direct names of the characters. Instead, he uses Actress I for Mira, Actor I for Rana (her husband) Actress 2 for Uda (her sister in law), Actor 2 for Jai (her Cousin) and Actress 3 for Jhali (her maid), The action of the play, *Mira*, takes place in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Mewar, a princely state in the North Western India. *Mira* is a successful play, as a non natural theatre with a lot of songs and dances. The play interprets the popular Indian legend concerning Mira, a saint poet. In the prologue of the play, Gurcharan Das expresses Mira's state of mind, her devotion, her pain, anguish and the beginning of a new journey of life after her marriage to Rana. Talking about the central concern of the play. Madhuri Chatterjee has a point when she asserts: "The play explores the phenomenon of sainthood through the story of Mirabai, the 16th century Rajput poetess saint" (235). *Mira* has its stake as a play that raises the issues of many contemporary concerns like, the issue of women empowerment, conflicts in husband-wife relationship, disillusionment in institutions of marriage, question of identity and search for completeness, assertion of feminine values in the patriarchal set up of the society, the value of devotional love and faith etc. By making an Indian legend the base for his play, Gurcharan Das has also tried to uphold the traditional and mythical values of India. The main plot of the play revolves round the most important theme in the play, i.e. Mira's transformation from a woman into saint. As in "Introduction" to *The Three Plays*. Gurcharan Das himself makes it clear: "Saints come naturally to Indians.... In my twenties I began to question what it meant to be a saint and this led me to write *Mira*. (Das, 10) Precisely speaking, the play tells the story of a woman who under certain circumstances transforms herself into a saint. The rhythmic and almost musical dialogues in the play suits both the form and theme of the play *Mira*. Mira being a medieval saint poet is expected to speak in a very lyrical type of tone. That is why Gurcharan Das has found the Total Theatre technique suitable for the play *Mira*. Moreover to talk about feminine psyche the language and dialogues must be poetical and musical. Mira lived in a time of political turmoil. At that time, there was a great historical clash between Hindus and Muslims, i.e. between Rajputs of India and Mughals. Mira, being a member of the Rajput clan and a wife of a king, greatly affected by this political turmoil and in one way or the other the consecutive wars and violence had also their own effects in transforming Mira into a saint. Mira married Rana Sangha, the ruler of Mewar and as it happens with all women, the marriage comes as a turning point in the life of Mira after her marriage to Rana. Being a wife of an orthodox Rajput king, marriage for Mira meant nothing but the unquestioning duties and the total subjugation to the patriarchal ideology. Gurcharan Das has portrayed Mira as a woman of full of sensitivities, who cannot be happy with her married life because she finds:

Actor 2 : Mira is the Rani of magnificent palace.

Actress 1: Where palaces are magnificent, fields are poor and granaries are empty. (Das 119)

Gurcharan Das, while visiting feminine psyche through the protagonist asserts clearly that it is freedom that women aspire for most. If it does not come in the relations of man and woman, women try to

find it in bhakti or devotions to divine i.e. migrate from the bitter reality of real world and find solace in imaginary one. As happens in case of *Mira*, when she is weary of her relationship with her husband she transcends herself as a beloved of Lord Krishna where she feels salvation, satisfaction and freedom in putting herself as a wife of her devotee. The narrative of *Mira* thus deals with struggle for reaching the central position. It is another matter that even it may happen in imagination. What Gurcharan Das wants to explore is that even after passage of so many years the status of women has not changed in India. Here Gurcharan Das draws attention to the growing injustice to women in the patriarchal society by drawing on history in a lesser innovative way of theatre, that is, 'Total Theatre'. Further in his exploration of feminine psyche he points out a crucial aspects of women and that is the feminine psyche of reaching completeness in being a mother because woman feels complete only when she becomes a mother. In a patriarchal society such a woman is never respected who fails to produce a son. As Ashish Nandy says: "It is her motherhood that the traditional family values and respects; her wifehood.... It is through her son (heir) that her self respect is protected and she traditionally exercises her authority" (Nandi, 75). Mira's failure to produce a family heir, i.e. a son, makes her conditions more vulnerable. It is also the main reason behind her disillusionment with the married life because she thinks.

Actress 1 : He has to love me, for me to give him a son. A single lamp, no matter how bright, always casts a shadow. Put another one besides it and the darkness of both disappears. (107)

To be envious of each other has always been part of fault in human relations and Mira is victim of this envy. To explore more about feminine psyche the playwright talks of jealousy of Uda towards *Mira*. To add to her misery and vulnerability, Uda, her sister-in-law, is jealous of Mira. Uda inflicts mental as well as physical tortures to Mira mainly for the two reasons, the first being, Mira's not abiding the aged long family tradition of paying homage to the family Goddess Kali, and the second reason is Mira's failure to produce a male child for the family. Uda even suspects her of infidelity.

The accumulation of all the above mentioned causes compels Mira to go introvert and make her disillusioned with the materialistic life at this juncture Gurcharan Das finds an opportunity to delve into the feminine psyche through the character of *Mira*. She starts to feel herself as a discarded thing. Now in the introvert conditions of her mind, Mira feels a strange kind of solace and she unconsciously turns to her personal God, Lord Krishna, the dark erotic God of love. Now she transfers her devoted love to the image of Lord Krishna and starts to consider him as her husband. Also, it was the central idea of Bhakti Movement that with devotional love one can meet ones God even in the material world. They used to consider the soul and the God as husband and wife. About this particular feature of Indian philosophy, Gurcharan Das says, "The third is the passionate belief that I or my soul can become one with God through unconditional love and devotion. This is the central idea of 'Bhakti' (Das, 11). Now Mira devotes herself totally in the worship of her God. Her devotion proves so great that she finds a strange kind of peace of mind under the magic of her devotional love, she even forgets her husband, Mira says:

Actress 1: Alive, you don't see your soul, Dead you don't see corpse. My soul is the universe. The universe is my God, Krishna. I am he who I love and he who I love is I. (130).

In this way, Mira transcends herself into a saint through her devotional love and Gurcharan Das succeeds in exploring feminine psyche of reaching for fulfillment if not in the bitter real world, in the world of imagination, devotion, love or Bhagti. Mira sings: "Mira's heart feels so light I am free-free from life and death and time" (Das 138).

The play, *Mira*, is of much importance for the contemporary society for one more reason. In his play, Gurcharan Das has tried his best to uphold the feminine values by divulging into the feminine psyche. It appears that Gurcharan Das has used the legend of Mira in his play to have its say on the critical condition of women in the male dominated Indian society. By exploring the inner voice of the powerful female character Mira, Gurcharan Das wants to awake the Indian women for their rights. This theme of asserting women's rights with exploring their psyche comes forefront in the play. The play supports the cause of women for their empowerment. According to the playwright, for the betterment of the society as well as for the better human relationships, it is pertinent to rise the status of women up to the level where they can feel themselves economically as well as politically secure in the society. Gurcharan Das's *Mira* is not such a typical Indian woman who will follow her husband in every circumstances, rather she is so strong a woman to rise her voice against all the misdoings of patriarchal society. It is the exploration of feminine psyche that Gurcharan Das succeeded in showing the true self of Mira in particular and all women in general. Soon after her marriage, Mira proves herself as a strong woman who is much conscious about her individuality and who refuses to follow her husband's order to bow before the family goddess, 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. (Das 104)

Here, Mira puts an example before all those women who easily surrender against the tyrannies of male chauvinists. Unlike other typical Indian women, Mira asserts her value and follow her instincts.

Her second revolt against the patriarchal system is evidenced when she, unhesitatingly, asserts that her husband is also as responsible for her failure in conceiving a child and she says, "He has to love me for me to give him a son" (Das 107). The play also presents the real picture of the society where women are considered just the thing to produce heirs. In such a society women have been given only duties and obligations and not any rights. Even in our modern age, that boasts of its scientific progress and developments in many other fields, women are still being subjugated by their male partners. Every time and in every field she has to face the same repeated situation in her life that she can't do this because she is a girl; she should not go outside, because she is a girl.

The play *Mira* explores that women want equal treatment in the society. She no longer wants to remain at second position or play second fiddle in family as well as society. On the other hand, her male partner enjoys immense power over her. When she is a child there is an authority of her father over her, after

the marriage it is husband that dominates her and then it is the turn of her own children. And this vicious circle of male domination over her goes on without stopping and she remains subjugated throughout her life. In such a society, the birth of boy child is given importance. According to them, it is only boy that can give the economic as well as social security to the family. For such a pathetic condition of women, according to Gurcharan Das, it is not only men who are responsible but women are also equally responsible. It is not men who are their enemies, rather it is women themselves who, more than one occasion, prove themselves their own enemies. In the play, *Uda*, the sister-in-law of Mira, hates Mira out of jealousy. She even tries to kill Mira twice. Though Mira has to face all these difficulties, she never let herself go down and instead she fights for the right cause. As an individual she asserts her feminine values and when she finds that her husband is indifferent to her, she chooses to go into introvert where she can uphold her individuality in the company of her God, Krishna. In the end of the play, it is Mira and not Rana or saying in other words, it is feminine values and not the patriarchal system that has been shown victorious by the playwright:

Actor 1: I have lost the war;  
I have lost my wife. (133)

And moreover. Rana is compelled by the circumstances to accept the dignity of his wife, Mira. At the end, he is shown as a tragic husband who seems to repent over his faults;

Actor 1: I remember the day she arrived, she brought youth, love-so much of it... She used to follow me like a shadow, wherever I went .... She wouldn't eat until she had fed me by her hand. (136)

Thus, notwithstanding small text of the play, the female values get a large canvas, both theoretically as well as stylistically. It has its say on almost all the traditional as well as contemporary issues of Indian society. In a nutshell this play of Gurcharan Das has successfully divulged and explored into the feminine psyche in a very simple, rhythmic and musical environment of Total Theatre technique. Here lies the beauty of the play that even without any stage direction and without mentioning the direct names of actor and actress the play beautifully delineates and explores the feminine psyche to find out the solution of their predicaments in male dominated patriarchal system. Being a short and concise play, which is another important feature of Total Theatre, *Mira* fully entertains as well gives stick and befitting message to the people or audience. Gurcharan Das has concerned himself with the inner conflicts of Mira and displayed the feminine psyche in a very theatrical way with the help of Total Theatre technique. We have seen clearly that Gurcharan Das has a subtle and inimitable style. *Mira* is a play that is symbolic, sensitive and psychological at the same time. It successfully shows how saint like Mira subverted the traditional ideals of Indian womanhood and put a question mark on the social order created by patriarchal system of society. What can be more apt than to Quote Swaroop Ghosh, a well known director and actor : “In order to strike a chord with the audience, a play ought to reflect life and times while providing a perspective on issues. Going beyond entertainment, theatre should set in motion conversation and curiosity”. (Ravi, 15)



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