SAGAR xxi

SAGAR a south asia research journal

volume xxi • 2013

SPONSORED BY THE SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE,
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

SAGAR 2012-2013

SAGAR a south asia research journal
volume xxi •• 2013

THE TRANSLATION ISSUE

Dedicated to Dr. Kathryn Hansen

EDITORS' NOTE

This year, we are pleased to present a special issue of *Sagar* in honor of Dr. Kathryn Hansen. Unlike other issues, we focus here on the subject of translation and feature a diverse selection of translations from Urdu, Hindi and Sinhala. Along with these translations, in an exclusive and insightful interview, Dr. Hansen reflects on the importance of translation to South Asian Studies and her decades-long engagement with translating Indian theatre resources. Though *Sagar's* themes will change annually, translation will be a recurring feature in the pages of *Sagar.* For the English language reader, *Sagar* will showcase writings outside the commonly translated canons of South Asian literature. For specialists of particular linguistic regions in South Asia, the journal will acquaint them with a range of unfamiliar literary, popular, and non-literary texts. It is our hope that such exposure will facilitate comparisons, perhaps drawing out common currents in the writings of South Asia or stimulating collaborative research.

We are also excited to announce that "The Translation Issue" is *Sagar*'s inaugural peer-reviewed volume: submissions to *Sagar* will henceforth be blindly reviewed by faculty reviewers at UT-Austin and other institutions and managed by a collective of graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin. In this issue, the selected translations have been arranged chronologically. We intend this sequence to stimulate dialogue across language, region, and genre. For example, how might we compare the experiments in prose undertaken by Mahagama Sekera in Sri Lanka with those of Nirmal Verma in India? How might we understand the 1980s Urdu public sphere through the poems of Parveen Shakir in conversation with the travelogues of Raza Ali Abdi? In light of Kathryn Hansen's fascinating insights on her own translation practice, we might view all five translations as individual steps towards communicating larger configurations of knowledge.

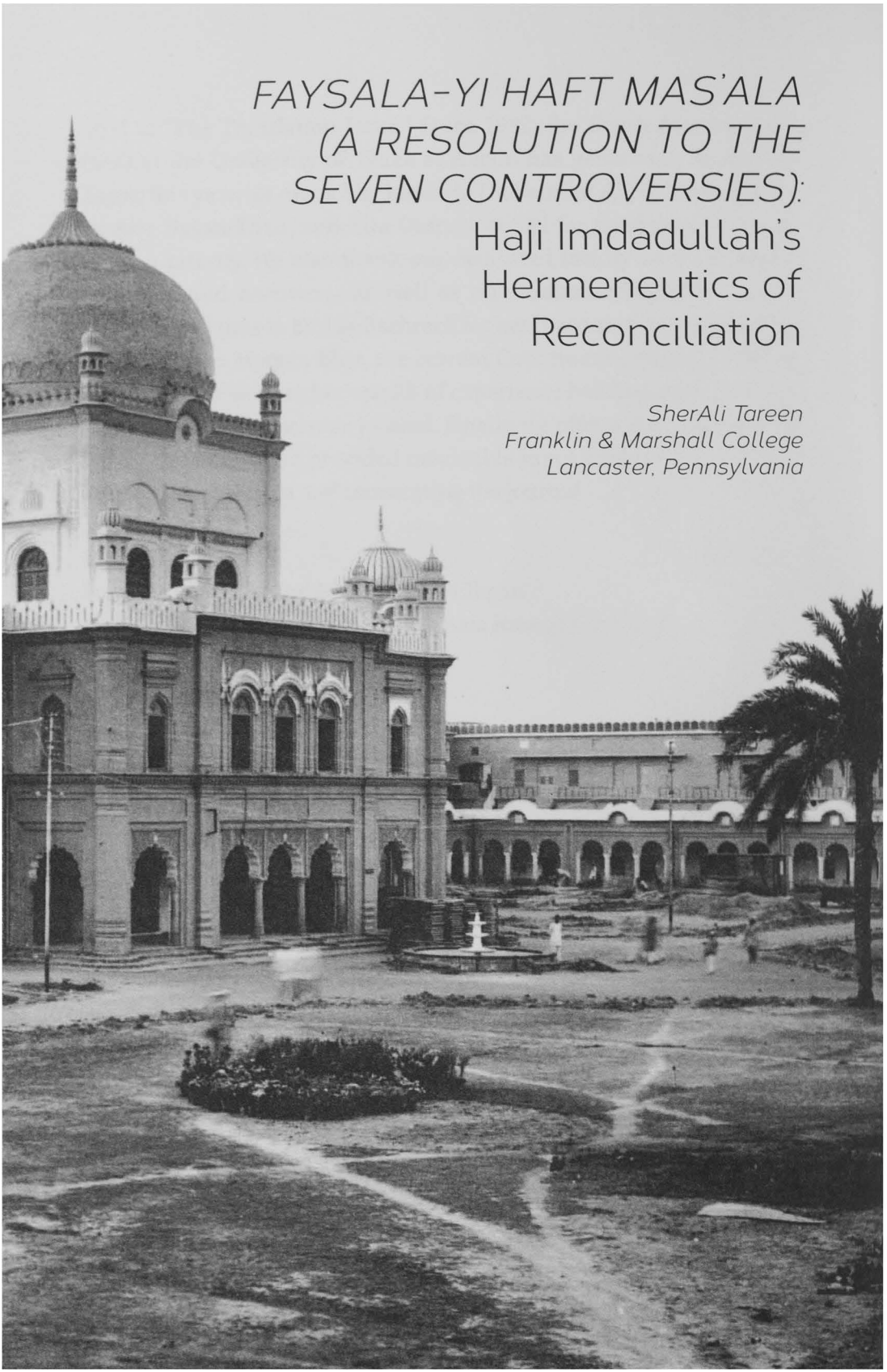
We wish to thank several institutions and individuals who contrib-

uted to "The Translation Issue." Since 1993, the South Asia Institute (SAI) at the University of Texas at Austin has generously supported *Sagar*; this year, we owe a big thanks to Dr. Kamran Ali, Dr. Rachel Meyer, Alia Hasan-Khan, and Rita Omrani at SAI for continuing to make *Sagar* a priority. We also thank our dedicated faculty advisors, board members and reviewers, as well as our tireless editorial collective members. Thanks to Emilia Bachrach for her input on the interview. We are grateful to Morgan Blue, the current Coordinating Editor of *Velvet Light Trap,* for sharing her wealth of experience heading a student-run, faculty-reviewed academic journal. Finally, we offer a special thanks to Dr. Rupert Snell, who provided invaluable input while we were thinking about translation and reinventing the journal.

Sincerely,
Suzanne L. Schulz and Matthew D. Milligan
Co-Editors-in-Chief, *Sagar: A South Asia Research Journal*

FAYSALA-YI HAFT MAS'ALA (A RESOLUTION TO THE SEVEN CONTROVERSIES): Haji Imdadullah's Hermeneutics of Reconciliation

SherAli Tareen
Franklin & Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania



TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The text translated below is an excerpt from Haji Imdadullah Muhajir Makki's (1814-1899) *Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala* (A Resolution to the Seven Controversies), written in Urdu and published circa 1897. Haji Imdadullah was a preeminent Sufi master and scholar of the Chishti Sabiri Sufi order. He was from the small town of Thana Bhawan in Uttar Pradesh, North India. Imdadullah is a towering figure in the intellectual genealogy of the reformist ideological orientation/Islamic seminary, the Deoband Madrasa, established in the North Indian town of Deoband in 1867. Imdadullah served as the Sufi master of the pioneers of Deoband, Muhammad Qasim Nanautvi (d.1877), Rashid Ahmad Gangohi (d.1906), and then later Ashraf Ali Thanvi (d.1943), all major figures in the intellectual history of South Asian Islam. Imdadullah wrote a number of texts in Persian and in Urdu, primarily dealing with Sufi thought, practice, and metaphysics. Imdadullah was charged with sedition on account of his alleged organization of militias against the British in the 1857 mutiny, though his involvement in the war remains unclear. After some miraculous escapes from the British who were determined to arrest him, Imdadullah fled to Mecca where he lived in exile for the last four decades of his life (hence the title *Muhajir Makki* or the Meccan exile). However, he continued to maintain close connections with India and trained a number of disciples who went on to become some of the most prominent Sufis and scholars in South Asian Islam.

Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala, written in Urdu, is one of Imdadullah's lesser-known texts. It was written in response to intensifying intra-Muslim rivalries and conflicts on critical questions of law, theology, and everyday practice. More specifically, this text was addressed to the pioneers of the Barelvi and Deobandi schools/ideological orientations (*masalik*) in North India. In the period following the 1857 mutiny, in which Indian Muslims were brutally defeated by the British, the

learned elite of Muslim India were divided into competing 'ideological orientations' (*masalik,* sing. *maslak*), each with contrasting programs of religious reform. The Deobandis and Barelvis were among the most prominent of these reform movements.

The pioneers of the Deobandi and Barelvi schools included some of the most accomplished legal scholars and Sufi masters in modern South Asia. Their rivalry centered on competing imaginaries of the Prophet's charisma and the limits of his normative model. At the heart of their conflict were the critical questions of how the prophetic norm (*sunna*) must manifest in the everyday lives of the masses and how to guard religious practice from the threat of heretical innovations (*bida'*, sing. *bid'a*). The nature and scope of the Prophet's knowledge, especially knowledge of the unknown (*'ilm al-ghayb*) was also a pivotal point of disagreement. These rival ideologies of reform contributed to one of the most abrasive and intensely fought polemical battles in the history of South Asian Islam. Their showdown has produced a fair number of oral and written polemics, rebuttals and counter-rebuttals, juridical and theological pronouncements of anathema (*takfir*), and traditions of storytelling that valorize some scholars and caricature their rivals. Today, more than a century after this conflict first began, it has spiraled well beyond its origins in North India to such places as Britain, North America, and South Africa. Haji Imdadullah's *Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala* was among the first works, if not the first, that attempted the complicated task of resolving the disputed questions that animated the Deobandi-Barelvi rivalry.[1] Imdadullah was personally invested in pacifying this conflict since he had disciples from both the Barelvi and the Deobandi schools, though he was best known as the Sufi master of the founders of Deoband. Although Imdadullah was not trained as a legal scholar like his Deobandi disciples, this text is a remarkable example of a Sufi scholar's interpretation of complicated legal ques-

1 For a more detailed analysis of this polemic, see SherAli Tareen, *The Limits of Tradition: Competing Logics of Authenticity in South Asian Islam.* PhD Dissertation. (Durham: Duke University, 2012).

tions about the limits of heretical innovation (*bid'a*) in Islam. In this text, Imdadullah strived to bring Deobandis and Barelvis closer to each other by identifying common ground in their ideological positions. Ironically, following the publication of this text, Imdadullah's ecumenical exegesis had the opposite effect of each group claiming that he had endorsed their reformist program. Indeed, the remarkable durability of this conflict suggests that Imdadullah's attempted reconciliation was less successful than he would have hoped. However, given the metastasis in doctrinal rivalries and sectarian violence in post-colonial Muslim South Asia, perhaps Haji Imdadullah's hermeneutic of reconciliation is even more relevant today than it was a century ago when he wrote *Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala.*

Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala is a relatively short text (around 10 pages) that contains Imdadullah's discussion on seven contested ritual practices and doctrinal questions. These include 1) the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*), 2) transmission of blessings to the deceased (*fatiha-yi murawwaja*), 3) celebrating saint anniversaries and listening to music (*'urs wa sama'*), 4) calling out the name of someone other than God (*nida'-yi ghayr Allah*), 5) holding a second prayer congregation (*jama'at-i thaniya*), 6) God's capacity to lie (*imkan-i kizb*), and 7) God's capacity to create a second Muhammad (*imkan-i nazir*). The translation presented below includes Imdadullah's own introduction to the text and the entirety of his discussion on the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, what is popularly known as the *mawlid* or *Eid-e-Milād-un-Nabī*, the Festival of the Birth of the Prophet (*Urdu*). During the nineteenth century, no other question was more extensively and fiercely contested by the Indian Muslim scholarly elite than the permissibility of the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. Therefore, it is not surprising that the longest discussion in *Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala* was also devoted to this question. Moreover, the hermeneutic Imdadullah derived in addressing the question of the *mawlid* anchored his discussion on other contentious questions also. Popularized first in Fatimid Egypt during the eleventh century, today the *mawlid* is ob-

served in almost all Muslim communities.

The *mawlid* is observed during the third month of the Islamic calendar, on the twelfth of *Rabi al-awwal* (Shias celebrate the Prophet's birth on the seventeenth of *Rabi al-awwal*).[2] In the South Asiancontext, the most contested element of the *mawlid* is what is called the *qiyam*. The *qiyam* refers to the practice of standing up in exaltation of the Prophet to offer him salutations and to receive his blessings in return. The effectiveness of the *qiyam* rests on the belief that the Prophet personally appears at multiple gatherings of his birthday celebration to transmit his blessings to the participants.The opponents of the *qiyam*, such as the Deobandis, argue that a belief in the Prophet's simultaneous appearance at multiple *mawlid* gatherings threatens to divinize the Prophet. On the other hand, the supporters of the *qiyam* consider it a most virtuous practice that honors God's most exalted creation, the Prophet. Both Deobandis and Barelvis agreed that the *mawlid* was in essence a commendable practice. They were bitterly divided, however, on the question of whether the attitude with which Indian Muslims practiced this ritual had turned it into a heretical innovation. In *Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala*, Haji Imdadullah attempted to curate a hermeneutic that might heal this division.[3]

2 See Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London: New York: Routledge, 2007).

3 I would like to thank Dr Ebrahim Moosa, Dr Carl Ernst, and Mawlana Waris Mazhari for reading this text with me. I would also like to thank the reviewers for their suggestions on this article.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

HAJI IMDADULLAH'S INTRODUCTION

What follows is from the humble Imdadullah al-Hanafi al-Chishti. I have written this treatise generally in the service of all Muslims and in particular of those who are connected to me. I believe that it is among the absolutely established principles that mutual harmony is a source of worldly and religious blessings and disunity is a cause of worldly and religious harm. These days certain secondary issues (*masa'il-i far'iya*) have produced such disagreement that they have resulted in all stripes of malignant and contentious disputes. And the time of the scholarly elite and the religion of the masses are going to waste.

For in truth these disputes are driven by differences of mere semantics and the goals of the competing parties are the same. I feel greatly perturbed by the general condition of Indian Muslims and especially of those with whom I am personally connected. Therefore, I felt compelled to write and publish a brief treatise on the aforementioned problems. I sincerely hope that it will dissolve these conflicts and polemics. Certainly at this moment there is no shortage of disputes or of disputers. In this treatise, I have only selected those issues on which my own disciples are in opposition. This is so for two reasons: 1) there are so many conflicts brewing these days that it is difficult to keep a count of them and 2) by focusing on a limited number of issues concerning only my disciples, there is a greater probability that I will succeed in forging agreement. Had I engaged every contentious question occupying Indian Muslims today, it would have been difficult to achieve any resolution.The most debated issues among my disciples are seven, five of which relate to ritual practices and the other two doctrinal. While arranging my elucidation, I have kept in mind that the most contentious issues are given priority followed by

ones that are less controversial. Using this format, I have elaborated resolutions to these disputes that seemed most appropriate according to my inherited ethos (*mashrab-i faqir*). I pray to God that this essay will prove helpful in eliminating this internecine conflict, and if the distinguished readers also agree and profit from it, that they will not forget to remember me in their supplications. And please, if anybody is thinking of writing a response to this treatise, he should not bother because to engage in debate is not my objective.

ISSUE ONE: CELEBRATION OF THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY (*MAWLID*)

DEFINING HERETICAL INNOVATION (BIDA')[4]

Everyone agrees that the mere recollection of the birthday of the Prophet,the leader of the world and the pride of humanity, is a cause of worldly and heavenly peace and blessings. The dispute is only regarding certain stipulations, particularities, and conformities. Among these the most contentious practice is that of the *qiyam* (standing up to offer salutations to the Prophet). Some scholars forbid such affairs, in accordance with the Prophet's statement "every innovation leads to misguidance," and most permit them, according to the Prophet's saying "the proofs of the virtues of *dhikr* [spiritual remembrance] are unrestrained."

Justice is in defining heretical innovation (*bid'a*) as the induction of the non-religious into the domain of religion (*ghayr din ko din mayn dakhil kar liya jaway*), as it becomes apparent by reflecting on the Prophet's - Peace be on him- saying "whoever innovates in this matter of ours, that which is not part of it is rejected" (*man ahdatha fi 'amrina hadha ma laysa min-hu fa huwa radd*).

4 The sub-headings in the translated text are my own. I have provided these to highlight the key conceptual themes discussed in *Faysala-yi Haft Mas'ala* and to make it easier for the reader to follow the trajectory of Haji Imdadullah's arguments in this text.

THE BOUNDARIES OF CENSURE AND TRANSGRESSION

Now if someone does not consider these particulars of the Prophet's birthday celebration as the ultimate object of worship but simply as permissible (*mubah*) in essence, then that is not heretical innovation. Furthermore, if one understands the causes of these particularities as the object of worship and finds in these particularities some form of expediency (*maslaha*), then that is not heretical innovation. For example, if one does not believe standing during the performance of the *mawlid* as worship in its essence but instead regards hallowing the remembrance of the Prophet as the ultimate object of worship and has designated this form because of an associated expediency, then that is not heretical innovation.

So for instance if one understands the remembrance of the prophet's birthday as approved (*mustahsan*) at all times and because of an expected convenience, such as the ease of continuity from one year to the next, one designates a specific date for that occasion to take place, such as the twelfth of Rabi al-awwal in the Islamic Calendar, then that is not heretical innovation. The detailed arguments on these problems are extensive and for every instance there exists separate reasoning. Certain forms of expediency (*masalih*) are also mentioned in treatises on the celebration of the Prophet's birthday.

If any information were not available in detail, then those who designate the common good rely on the example of the ancients. To them this mode of determining the public benefit is sufficient. In this situation, a particularity is not censurable. The particularities, practices, meditations, stipulations, and rituals of schools and shrines belong to this category.

However, if one understands these particularities as equal to the obligatory rituals of the religion, such as praying and fasting, then no doubt in that situation these particularities will represent transgressions. For example, if one believes that were the *mawlid* not held on its designated date, or if the standing up at the end of the ceremony (*qiyam*) does not take place, or if the provision of sweets is not ar-

ranged for, then the blessings (of the ceremony) will not be received, then certainly this belief is prohibited. Such a belief represents a transgression of legal limits. Just like understanding a permissible action as prohibited and blameworthy is unjustified, so too is turning a permissible practice into an obligation. In short, in both of these cases there is a transgression of limits (*ta'adi-yi hudud*).

However, if one does not understand these particularities as necessary in the meaning of a normative legal requirement but from the point of view of receiving certain blessings, then that is not censurable. For instance, while performing certain rituals, one must attend to certain specifications, without which the profound effect (*asr-i khass*) of those rituals is not realized. For instance, some rituals must be performed while standing. If performed while sitting, they will not produce their profound effect. With this consideration, if one understands standing up during the performance of the *mawlid* as necessary and the proof for arriving at this conclusion is the experience, mystical illuminations, or the inspiration of the inventors of these practices (*muwajjidan-i 'amal ka tajrabah, kashf ya ilham*), then that is not heretical innovation.

Likewise, if one understands the practice of the *mawlid* in a specific form as a cause of certain blessings or spiritual influences, and based on one's own experience or based on the trustworthiness of a discerning individual one understands the salutation to the Prophet as necessary since the profound effect will not be produced without the salutation, then there is no reason to call this heretical innovation. This belief is an inner matter (*'amr-i batin*). Its condition cannot be known without a thorough investigation. To cast aspersions on someone through mere conjectural reasoning is not wise. For example, certain people blame those who abandon the practice of *qiyam*. Surely this blaming is out of place because normatively the *qiyam* is not required. Why the blame then? In fact, this blaming produces undue insistence, about which the jurists have said that from repeated and undue insistence, even a commendable practice can turn into a sin

(*israr se mustahabb bhi ma'siyat hota hai*).

CENSURE AND COMMUNAL TABOO

But from every instance of censure, to reason that the person who is censured must be a firm believer in the necessity of the *qiyam* is also not correct because there can be multiple reasons for that censuring to have taken place. Sometimes, it is indeed someone's belief in the necessity of the *qiyam*. On other occasions, it is merely because of conflicts about customs and habits, whether those habits are worldly or based on any religious reasoning. And yet, at other times, the reason behind a censure is that because of the censurer's accusations against a particular community, a certain practice comes to be associated with that community as a symbol of their poor faith, irrespective of whether the original accusation was justified or unjustified such that if an individual sees someone else involved in that practice, he instinctively guesses that this person must be of that community and hence goes on to censure him.

For instance, if a saintly or elderly figure enters an assembly and everyone stands up in respect but one person keeps sitting, then that person is censured, not because of having abandoned a normative legal obligation, but because of having opposed the rules of the assembly. Similarly, it is a widespread habit in India that after the completion of the *Qur'an* during *Tarawih* prayers during the month of Ramadan, sweets are distributed. Now if someone were not to distribute sweets, then he would be censured, not because of having opposed a normative legal obligation but only because of having abandoned a healthy tradition. Or for instance, in times of old, to chant "*bi-haqq*" was specifically associated with the *Mu'tazilites*. Now if someone overheard a person saying "*bi-haqq*," he would automatically presume that that person must be a *Mu'tazilite* and would hence censure him. And based on this presumption, he would also draw deductions about that person's other beliefs and oppose him on those too. In any case, merely the act of being censured cannot become the indicator of someone's

doctrinal commitments.

Now for example, if a commoner does happen to hold this very belief that the ritual is necessary and normatively required, then only in his case will heretical innovation arise. For those people who do not hold this kind of a belief, the performance of the ritual will remain permitted and approved. For example, the extremists consider *raja'at-i qahqari* (never turning one's back on a sovereign) as necessary, so will turning one's back be considered a heretical innovation for everyone who does so? And some of the scholars (the *'ulama*), only after witnessing certain excesses of the ignorant masses, such as singing, reciting, etc., as they take place in the assemblies of the ignorant, impose a single and uniform injunction on all the celebrations of the Prophet's birthday. This is also contrary to justice.

For instance, some preachers expand on subjects of popular culture in their sermons or in some preaching sessions; because of the mingling of men and women, some temptation takes place - so will all the assemblies of preaching be forbidden?! "Because of one flea you don't burn the entire carpet" (*bahr-i kikay tu galimeh ra ma suz*).

THE PROPHET'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNKNOWN ('ILM AL-GHAYB)

As far as the belief that the Prophet himself appears on the occasion of his birthday celebration is concerned, to declare this belief as unbelief and polytheism is excessive. This is so because the Prophet's appearance at this gathering is possible, both according to rational (*'aqlan*) and according to revelatory (*naqlan*) proofs.

Rather, at certain spiritual stations, the effulgence of the Prophet's presence can indeed be detected. And as for the doubt regarding how the Prophet knows that he has to be present at multiple locations simultaneously, this is a weak doubt. When one considers the breadth of the Prophet's spiritual knowledge that is established from both traditional proofs and from mystical revelations, this is sort of a trivial matter. In addition to this, you cannot even begin to argue about the

power of God [to enable the Prophet's presence at multiple places simultaneously] and it is also possible that the Prophet remains in his place and the intermediate veils are removed.

From every perspective, this matter [the Prophet's knowledge of the multiple locations where his birthday celebration is being held] is possible. But from this, it does not become necessary to believe that the Prophet possesses "knowledge of the unknown" (*'ilm-i ghayb*). Knowledge of the unknown is among the specificities of God's essence. But knowledge of the unknown possessed by God's creation is not essential to His being; that knowledge is gifted to creation through the signs of divine lordship. Such knowledge is not only possible; it can also be actualized. So how could a belief in something possible be polytheism and unbelief?

Now of course, for every possible thing, actuality is not necessary. To hold such a belief is contingent on finding a proof. If someone finds a proof, for example if someone has an unveiling or is informed by someone else who has gone through an unveiling, in that case the belief is valid. Otherwise, without any proof, it would be a fanciful mistake. In such a situation, it would be necessary for him to retreat from his error. But it cannot be polytheism and unbelief in any way. So a brief investigation into this matter is that which has been aforementioned. And my personal perspective on this issue is that I participate in the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. I am indeed attached to that assembly and find it a source of pleasure and satisfaction.

THE ETHICS AND ETIQUETTE OF DISAGREEMENT

As to a resolution to this controversial question, one should keep in mind that from every perspective, this is a disputed issue and each group advances arguments based on revelatory proofs (*dala'il-i shar'i*). These proofs in turn are vulnerable to strengths and weaknesses, as is the case in most secondary disputed questions (*masa'il-i ikhtilafiya shar'iya*). Thus the elite should act on that which they have realized through their intellectual inquiry. And they should not harbor any

enmity or scorn for another faction. Also they should not view their opponents with antipathy and ridicule, nor judge them to be heretical or as people who have gone astray. In fact, this dispute should be viewed in the same way as the disagreement between the Hanafis and Shafi'is. And they should keep the conventions of mutual amity and open communication, the expression of peace and love, and the exchange of greetings current.

They should abstain from refutations and repudiations. They should especially keep away from the senseless drivel of retrograde *bazaris* that insults the dignity of the people of learning (the *'ulama*). In fact, in these kinds of issues, they should completely refrain from writing *fatwas* and from signing and sealing *fatwas*, for that is foolishness!

They should be considerate towards each other. For instance, if an opponent of the *qiyam* participates in a gathering hosted by the proponents of *qiyam*, then it is preferable that the *qiyam* not be performed in that assembly, provided, of course, that the possibility of disruption does not arise. And if the *qiyam* were in fact to take place, then the opponents of the *qiyam* should also reciprocate the gesture of reconciliation by containing the excesses and the transgressions of the masses in a gentle fashion. A gentle approach of this sort would also be more beneficial to their overall project [of religious reform].

As to those who are in principle opposed to the *mawlid*, when they do participate in the reverential salute to the prophet (*the qiyam*), it is best if they remain silent on these matters. On such affairs it is best if they not even raise these issues. Wherever these practices are customary and habitual, in those places they should not oppose them and wherever they are not habitual, there they should not initiate them. The point is that they should refrain from producing all forms of dissension and controversy.

Both the proponents and the opponents of the *mawlid* should articulate their respective positions in a way that generates mutual harmony. So for instance, the proponents of the *mawlid* should say: "Even

our opponents have arrived at the same conclusion as us. On some occasions they prevent the occurrence of this practice and stay away from it, even though often this strategy is not very profitable."

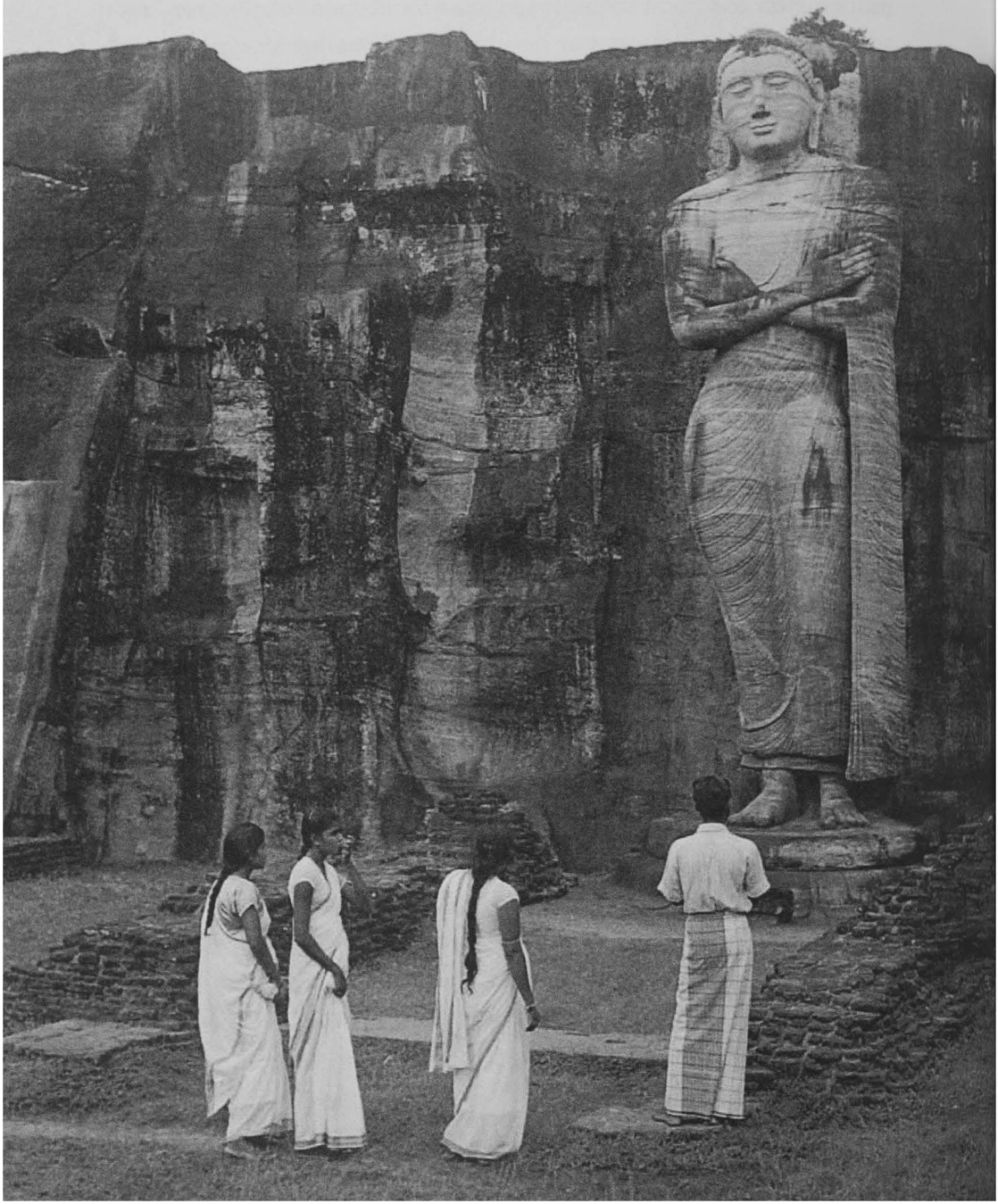
And similarly, the opponents of the *mawlid* must also give a favorable interpretation of the position of the proponents: that they (the proponents) too must support the *mawlid* because of this very reason of minimizing dissent or because they have been over-powered by their love for the Prophet. And they give people permission to participate in the *qiyam* in order to propagate a favorable disposition towards other Muslims.

As for the laity, they should follow the research provided by a devout and serious scholar. They should not oppose people from other points of view and they should especially refrain from insulting the dignity of the *'ulama* of other religious groups, for doing so is tantamount to small mouth and big talk. From backbiting and envy, even good deeds go to waste. One should always abstain from such actions and guard oneself from hostility and prejudice. And the masses should not read complicated books and articles that contain intellectual expositions on contentious questions. That job is that of the *'ulama* (the scholars).

Otherwise, the laity begins to think poorly of the *'ulama* and it raises the specter of skepticism. The applicability of this article is not limited to this controversy alone. This article is extremely useful for and applicable to most contentious issues, especially those mentioned here and those which are the likes of them; such as shaking hands and hugging on the occasion of the two *'eids* or after preaching sessions, or after *fajr* and *'asr* (morning and mid-afternoon prayers) and the five daily prayers, the repetition of the proclamation "There is no God but God" after the five prayers, the kissing of hands, the kissing of feet, and several other affairs that are causing a great deal of hue and cry these days. In all of these matters, mindfulness to the substance of this essay will prove beneficial, as they are all based on the very principles that I have elaborated.

"HANDA ELIYA" (THE MOONLIGHT): Mahagama Sekera's Experimental Prose

Garrett Field
Wesleyan University
Middletown, Connecticut



TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Mahagama Sekera (1929-1976) hailed from Sri Lanka's village-born, and Sinhala-educated population. The united vote of this constituency transformed the 1956 General Election into the first post-independence election of South Asia to result in a genuine power shift in favor of the masses, and a switchover in official state language, from English to Sinhala. Michael Roberts has designated this social stratum the "revivalist elite."[1]

Raised in a Sinhalese Buddhist family, Sekera grew up in a village just outside of Colombo, and studied in state-subsidized Sinhala-medium schools. At the age of 16, he completed a course at the Government College of Fine Arts, and in 1950, obtained admission into the Nittambuwe Teachers Training College. In 1951, the young graduate obtained his first job as an art teacher at the Hewavitharana College.[2] Although he had found employment, the economic reality was very bleak for the majority of students who studied in Sinhala (and Tamil). The salary, and status, of English teachers was double that of the "vernacular" instructors. Teachers in Sinhala and Tamil medium schools were expected to teach a variety of subjects, in schools with poor equipment and lack of textbooks. The English-medium teachers had first-rate equipment and specialized teaching duties.[3] Sinhalese schoolteachers believed that these disadvantages would disappear if Sinhala became the official language of the state. In 1956, after the Official Language Act replaced English with Sinhala, teachers and creative writers like Sekera were seriously empowered.

1 Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation: Sri Lanka Politics, Culture, and History* (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), 298.

2 H.M. Moratuvagama, ed., *Mahagama Sekera saha Kalāva* [Mahagama Sekera and the Arts] (Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers, 1978), 190-194.

3 Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 338.

Sekera was a lyricist, poet, author, artist, and movie director. Sekera's literary project was an intensely personal quest to locate a sense of authentic Sinhalese Buddhist selfhood, and part of the "cultural revolution" that defined the nation as Buddhist.[4] I say "part of," with a caveat—some of Sekera's aesthetic predilections challenged, from within, the more nativist forms of Sinhalese nationalism. Poet Gunadasa Amarasekera criticized Sekera for using the "foreign" free verse style, instead of Sinhala poetic meters. Sekera replied,

> Meter limits freedom. It forces the poet to create within the confines of the length and width of a fixed frame. Meter and rhyme impose a "childish sweetness" on the poem, restricting the poet's authentic voice...Just because free verse is a poetic structure used in foreign countries, does not mean we cannot adapt it for our country. Some argue that free verse is not appropriate to the tradition of Sinhala poetry. They claim that free verse poetry in Sinhala...has never improved our own poetry...and they oppose it just because it is unloaded from a foreign country. Though it is something foreign, in the hands of an expert poet, it becomes fitting for our country. That is true only if the poet is one whose mind and heart are of the land.[5]

After the 1956 General Election and the Official Language Act, "the principle of nationalization became a major aspect of economic policy...to free the economy from the control of the European and In-

4 I formulate this idea keeping in mind Harshana Rambukwella's characterization of Sinhalese nationalism. See Harshana Rambukwella, "The Search for Nation: Exploring Sinhala Nationalism and its Others in Sri Lankan Anglophone and Sinhala-language Writing," Unpublished PhD thesis (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong, 2008), 4.

5 All translations are by Garrett Field, unless otherwise indicated. Mahagama Sekera, 1966, in Dipachandi Abeysinghe, *Siri Gunasinghe saha Nūtana Sinhala Kāvyaya* [Siri Gunasinghe and Modern Sinhala Poetry] (Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers, 2000), 117-118.

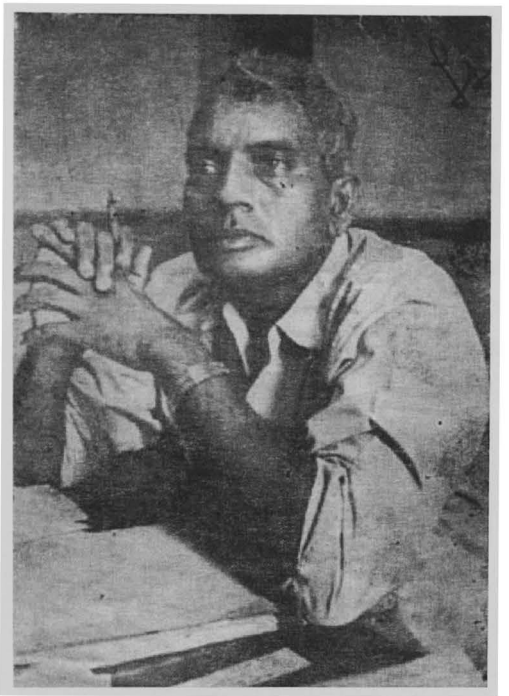


Fig. 1: Mahagama Sekera / www.mahagamasekera.org

dian capitalists."[6] This economic milieu is evident in how Sekera metaphorically conceives of a European poetic style in terms of a corrupting *foreign import* ("unloaded from a foreign country").

Coupled with his liberal embrace of Western literary forms, Sekera also embraced what Gayatri Spivak terms "strategic essentialism," the way subaltern groups reinforce essentialist claims to forge collective identity. In the introduction to his long free verse poem *Rajatilake, Lionel, saha Priyanta* (1967), Sekera posits an inherent Sinhalese base identity, ("when someone writes with thoughts of a Sinhalese person born on the Sinhalese land..."), but emphasizes its dynamicity in relation to the "ancestor's path." His thoughts also betray a romanticism that conceptualized art is a mirror of individual personality:

> 'Traditionalism' does not mean blindly following our ancestors' path. It is not something that you can consciously strive for. It is an effortless expression of the artist's personality. Tradition is something that ought to naturally flow into the artist's work. It is embodied...Based on the artist's own nationality, their craft will befit their country's tradition. When someone writes with thoughts and aspirations of a

6 W.A. Wiswa Warnapala, *Civil Service Administration in Ceylon: A Study in Bureaucratic Adaptation* (Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1974), 277.

> Sinhalese person who was born on the Sinhalese land, and who has knowledge of Sinhala literature, it will naturally gel with the national tradition.[7]

Believing any literary style could be transformed into something authentically Sinhalese, Sekera cultivated an interest in English literature. His songs articulate a fondness not only for Sinhalese Buddhist literary culture, and the nationalist pastoral imagination, but also Victorian English literature. As a lyricist, Sekera based three songs, "Gī Potai, Mī Vitai" (A Book of Verse, a Flask of Wine), "Galā Bahina Jaladhārāvak Sē" (Like a Flowing Stream), and "Oba Mā Turulē" (You, in my Embrace), on Edward FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (1859). Such an endeavor seems contrary to the then Marxist strand of politics that inveighed against British imperialism. This may have been permissible because of the undeniable cachet this poem held throughout South Asia.[8] From the point of

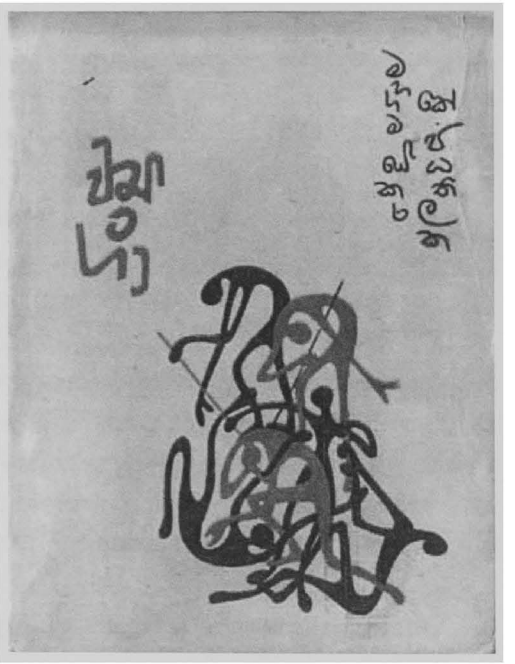


Fig. 2: Sekera's design for the cover of Vyānga / www.mahagamasekera.org

7 Mahagama Sekera, *Rajatilake, Lionel, saha Priyanta* [Rajatilake, Lionel, and Priyanta] (Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers, 2006 [1967]), vii.

8 South Asian poets translated the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* from English into at least eleven languages. (See Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature 1911-1956: Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995); and the Encyclopedia of Indian Literature, Volume 5.)

view of reception, it is doubtful that the majority of Sinhalese listeners knew these songs were based on translations of English poetry.

K. Jayatilake co-authored Sekera's first book, *Vyangā* (Allusion) (1960).[9] Jayatilake's Part II included short pieces of terse metaphorical prose. Sekera's Part I consisted of a diverse mix of free verse, poems with meter and rhyme, and short prose entries. Some of the prose compositions are extremely puzzling. Others are revisions of Sinhalese cultural legends. For example, Sekera wrote monologues for characters (the thief and princess) of the 14th century Buddhist folk tale, *Kuṇḍalakēshī*.[10] Sekera's seventeen poems in *Vyangā* focus on death, romance, the pain of rejection, the imagination symbolized as a seductive woman, fishermen at sea, and the tragedy of prostitution.[11]

Moonlight and Romance in Peradeniya Poetry

Perhaps the most baffling composition in *Vyangā* is "Handa Eliya" (The Moonlight). The piece is an experiment in the Sinhalese literary convention of *vyangā*, i.e. allusion, or suggestion, (hence the title of the book). Though it is not a poem, it calls to mind the highly allusive free verse of Siri Gunasinghe. Gunasinghe's poems

9 Mahagama Sekera, and K. Jayatilake, *Vyangā* [Allusion] (Colombo: Pradiya Prakashakayo, 2005 [1960]).

10 The story was fresh in his mind. He was composing a musical adaptation of it that he staged in 1961.

11 Modern Sinhala poetry is divided into five schools: the first and second generation of Colombo poets; the *Hela Havula* (Pure Sinhala Fraternity) poets; the Peradeniya poets; and the People's poets of the 1970s. The "Peradeniya School" commenced with Gunadasa Amarasekera's 1954 *Bhāva Gīta* (Meaningful Song), and Siri Gunasinghe's 1956 *Mas Lē Näti Äṭa* (Fleshless, Bloodless Bones). Sekera's poetic style is very reminiscent of these poets. Early on, he experimented with Amarasekera's five and seven beat meters that filled the pages of Bhāva Gīta. Sekera found his niche in his fourth publication, *Mak Nisāda Yat* (The Reason Is), a long poem in Gunasinghe's free verse style. Sekera would remain faithful to his rambling *vers libre* style up through his last work, *Prabuddha* (The Sage), published posthumously in 1977, a year after his untimely death.

often required tremendous decoding work, causing Gunadasa Amarasekera to derogatively designate them as "gūṭha tēravili" (mysterious puzzles).[12] In Sekara's "Handa Eliya," the phases of the moon trigger a powerful memory of a particularly pleasurable and painful romance.

Arguably, the story invites more interpretation and speculation than it allows for comprehension of a clear narrative. In the narrative, a first-person masculine narrator curses the pale moonlight of the waning crescent. When he is shrouded in darkness he can open his eyes without fear. The enveloping blackness stirs a memory of the fondness he once felt for the milky white moonlight. A girl named Nanda had invited him to gaze at the golden disc. But Nanda throws a stone into the pond, making the reflection of the moon break into pieces. The man is crushed. He curses the pale light again and is consoled when the moon fades away, yielding thick darkness. As the moon begins to wax towards fullness, the man questions whether the full moon is the same one he gazed at with Nanda. Recalling his pleasurable experience, he praises the beauty of the moonlight.

The Peradeniya poets of the 1950s and 60s shared a common interest in the theme of moonlight and love.[13] Siri Gunasinghe wrote a poem of the same name, "Handa Eliya" in *Mas Lē Näti Äṭa* (Fleshless,

12 Gunadasa Amarasekera, *Sinhala Kāvya Sampradāya* [The Sinhala Poetic Tradition] (Boralasgamuva: Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2009 [1996]), 194.

13 This may stem from poems like first Sinhala panegyric, *Pärakumba Sirita (The Character of Parakramabahu)*, composed in 1415 by an unknown poet. In the poem, the moon and moonlight are metonyms for the burning love of the king's consort. This is the 129th stanza of *Pärakumba Sirita*, in which the moon stands for erotic feelings: K.D.P Wikremasinghe (trans.) (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena and Company, 1970), 284:

> Hoisting the fish flag, and preparing the bow with the lotus arrow,
> Cupid comes on the horse of soft breezes fanning the fire of separation.
> The moon is like fire. I could not sleep with my eyes closed all alone on the bed.
> Good friend, please summon King Parakramabahu here in the moonlight.

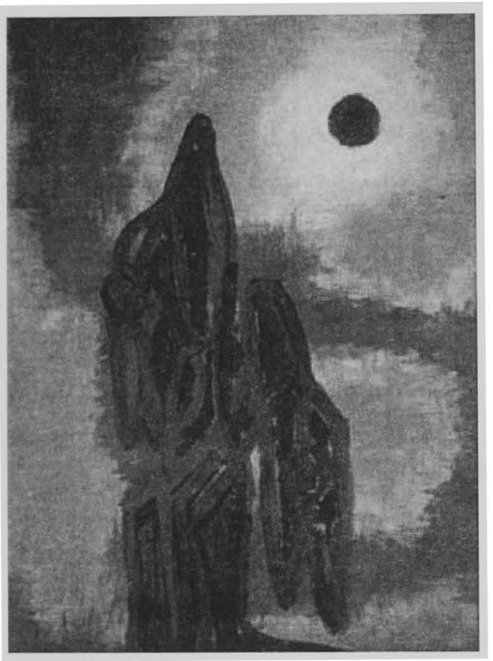


Fig. 3: Sekera's painting "Weeping in the Moonlight" (1969) / www.mahagamasekera.org

Bloodless Bones) (1956).[14] Madawale Ratnayake composed the poem "Sanda Eliya"[15] (Moonlight) in *Mārayūḍhaya* (Demon Warfare) (1960).[16] Gunadasa Amarasekera wrote about moonlight in "Sandē Māyam" (The Moon's Illusion) in *Amal Biso* (1961).[17]

A masculine first person narrator is the deictic center in these poems. In Gunasinghe and Amarasekera's compositions, the soft moonlight streams onto the narrators' bed and keeps them from sleep. The moonlight is a seductress. In Gunasinghe's imagination, the moonlight's "touch" is a harsh reminder of the narrator's separation from his lover:

> [Addressing the moon:] Poetry written about
> Your delicate face,
> Your soft heart,
> Your shawl of light,
> Conceals your cruelness

14 Siri Gunasinghe, *Mas Lē Näti Äṭa* [Bloodless, Fleshless Bones] (Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers, 1998 [1956]).

15 "Sa" or "ha" at the beginning of Sinhala words are interchangeable and do not effect the meaning of the word. "Sa" is used in writing, and "ha" for speaking.

16 Madawale Ratnayake, *Mārayūḍhaya* [Demon Warfare] (Maharagama: Saman Prakashana, 1960).

17 Gunadasa Amarasekera, *Amal Biso* (Boralasgamuva: Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2009 [1961]), 109.

And harshness.
Even when I look with open eyes,
What I see is
Cruelness;
Harshness

O Dark Clouds: cover up the moon
Like the shoulder frill of the Kandyan sari.[18]
Do not approach me
In this coquettish way,
Raising your cloud cloth.
Get out of here, out of my sight!

There was a light in her eye –
My sister, who is gone.
Even if one thousand shining stars
Light up like you,
Her absence is a dark cave.[19]

The narrator of Amarasekera's "Sandē Māyam" accepts the moon's flirtatious advances in the final stanza:

Why, Moon Princess, do you life your cloth?
Not letting me sleep, trying to seduce me?
You struggle to summon me towards you.
So: show me the path in the moonlight[20]

In Madawale Ratnayake's "Sanda Eliya," moonlight is a metaphor

18 The shoulder frill covers the chest of the woman, like the clouds "cover" the moon.

19 Siri Gunasinghe, *Mas Lē Nāti Äṭa* [Bloodless, Fleshless Bones] (Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers, 1998 [1956]) 83-85.

20 Gunadasa Amarasekera, *Amal Biso* (Boralasgamuva: Visidunu Prakashakayo, 2009 [1961]), 109.

for his lover's smile—it awakens joy in his heart, like moonlight causes the water lily to blossom in the evening. The absence of moonlight (the absence of her smile) is darkness (the pain of separation).

The water lilies in my heart
Joyfully awaken
From the waves of smile
On the tips of your lips.
Like the moonlight
Breaking through the clouds
And streaming in the sky.

So thickly amassed
It can be sliced into pieces:
The darkness of separation
In the world of my heart.
On such a day
Your smile's moonlight
Deposited in my heart;
It is blanketed in black.[21]

The changing moonlight in Sekera's "Handa Eliya" is both a trigger for a flashback and a symbol of the emotional ups and downs of romance. In the translation, I have remained faithful to Sekera's idiomatic use of five-dot ellipses. One insightful anonymous reviewer suggested that these signify silence and incompletion. Considering the fact that Sekera devoted his third book of verse, *Heṭa Irak Pāyai* (The Sun Dawns Tomorrow), to shape poetry (concrete poetry), a close attention to punctuation is in order here.

21 Madawale Ratnayake, Mārayūḍhaya [Demon Warfare] (Maharagama: Saman Prakashana, 1960), 109.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

What rubbish..... pale on the courtyard and garden..... it is also streaming into the black room..... if there's a tiny hole, this anemic light can creep inside..... need to close the window.

Fine..... now the house is pitch black..... not even a drop of light..... now I can open my eyes and relax without fear..... the house is completely dark.

That day, there was blackness precisely like this. The house, the courtyard, the lake, all covered in black.....

Nanda showed me the moon had dawned.....

"Come..... see, the moon is out".....she said..... "They say it's a good day for moon gazing....."

I came to the courtyard and inched near her. Reaching closer, I peered over her shoulder.....

On the second day of the month, it had perched right above the lake..... like a silver line.....

How long we watched that moon! The more we stared, the more exquisite it became.....

It matured, day by day, little by little.....

The half moon's desire is, without a doubt, to be full..... We stayed put for a long time, until it fulfilled this wish..... Finally it surfaced, shining brilliantly from the lake and coloring the world milky white..... Not an inch of darkness...the house, the courtyard, the garden, and the mind are pure white..... Like milk flowing from a silver disc..... Nanda seems to be laughing..... The milk flows on and on.....

Perched on the bank, we peered at the moon perceived in the lake's water.....without a word..... like two mutes.....

Suddenly, Nanda picked up a rock, and flung it at the moon's place in the water..... It shattered into pieces upon pieces.....

"Hey! Why'dja do that.....?" I blurted out. I looked at her in disgust..... She picked up another stone..... "Don't!" I grabbed her hand.

"The moon will shatter again."

She didn't consider what I said. Picked up a stone and threw it right at the thing. Just when the moon was assembling itself together, it disassembled.....

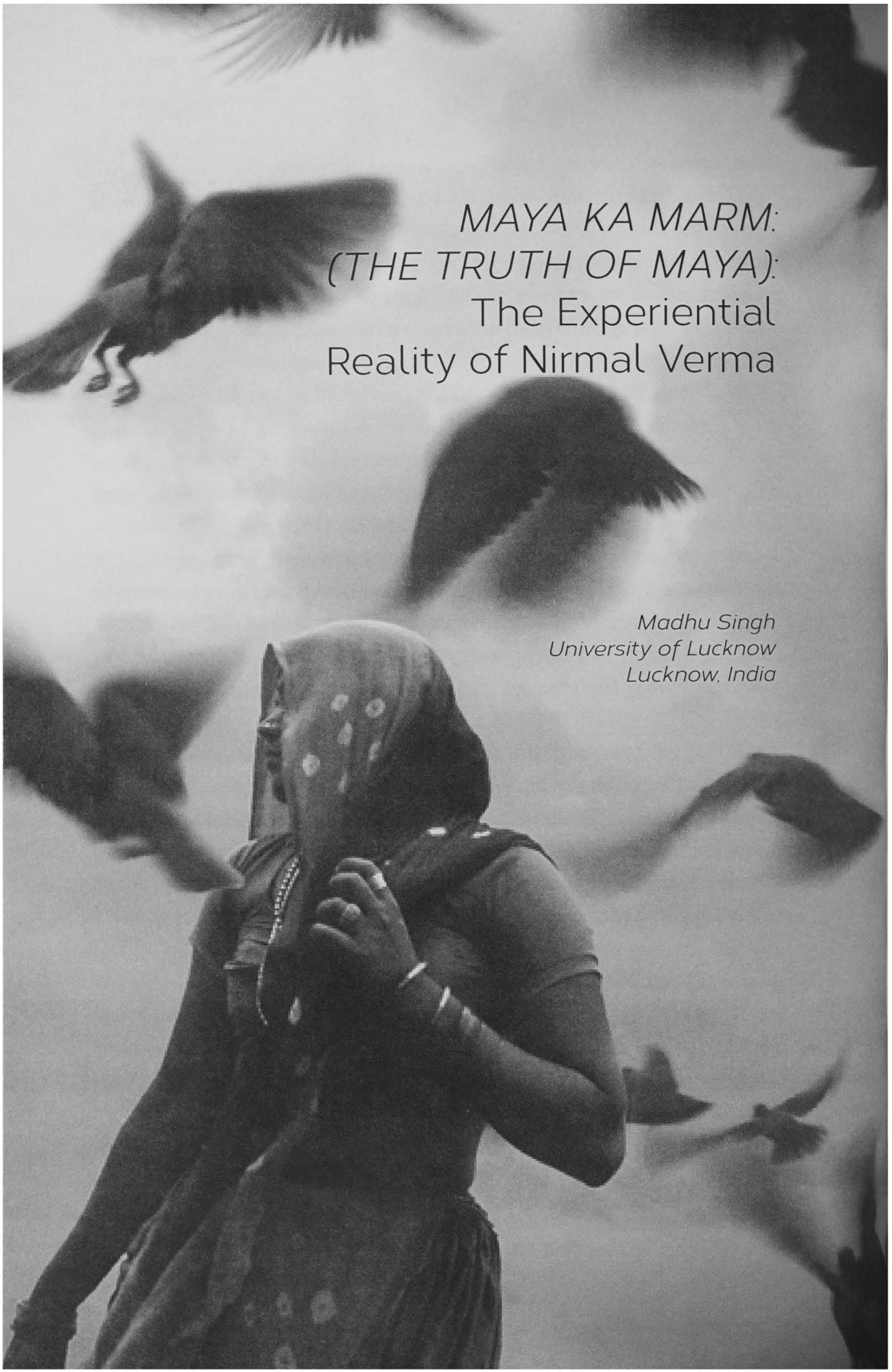
The following day the moon began to vanish. I thought it would never creep away. But it did..... What's more, darkness fell as the light waned.....

No "little by little".....it would be better if it just disappeared at once. For sure, this is what the moon desires also.

Damn it!..... What is this pale rubbish? The trees look like ghosts – cemetery tombstones – the rubbish really pricks my eyes when I see it – how much healthier is darkness than this anemic light?

Hey moon: I was expecting you on the fifteenth. Your ugly light is worthless..... There, fine..... not even a tear of light..... like the earth is covered in a black blanket..... I'm covered in darkness..... How beautiful is the dark? Now I can open my eyes without pain..... I like the darkness more than the changing light..... the whole life is darkness..... what's good for me is the dark.....

What.....? From where does this moonlight leak?..... sneaking like a robber..... through the darkness. Worthless, filthy light..... But I must see from where it descends..... I see, it's the really small moon of the month's second day..... before on the lake..... a new moon, yet exactly like the moon that dawned before..... no difference at all..... How cozy is this soothing moonlight!



MAYA KA MARM: (THE TRUTH OF MAYA): The Experiential Reality of Nirmal Verma

Madhu Singh
University of Lucknow
Lucknow, India

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

A distinguished writer and translator, Nirmal Verma (1929-2005) holds a special place in the world of Hindi fiction because of his contribution to the 'nai kahani' or 'new story' genre, which was experimental and innovative in its treatment of subject matter and in style. Other practitioners of the 'new story' were Mohan Rakesh, Bhisham Sahni, Kamleshwar and Amarkant. They believed that art could not be alienated from the material world and hence "both thought and emotion were equally important in the context of the *nai kahani*."[1] Among his contemporaries Nirmal Verma was the first to break the conventional mode of storytelling and address the problem of man's existential anxiety.[2] He wrote of "the existential dilemmas of individuals wandering across a European landscape, humming Mozart, and reflecting on Heidegger; or of bohemian intellectuals of the Indian capital, suffering inarticulate tensions in relationships while pursuing their avant-garde interests in humid, beer-drenched terraces of Delhi."[3]

Though deeply grounded in his own literary and philosophical traditions, Verma came under the influence of the best in European thought and literature during his long stay in Czechoslovakia in the 60's—a politically turbulent period in European history. Poems of Ferdinand Pessoa, diaries of Rilke, journals of Andre Gide, philosophy of Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Simone Well, existentialism of Kierkegaard, Sartre and Camus, novels of Flaubert, Kafka, Thomas Mann, Woolf, Octavio Paz and many others shaped his literary and critical sensibility. Though Verma's artistic adaptation of Western cultural

1 Bodhprakash, "Modernism, Western and Indian," in *Writing Partition: Aesthetics and Ideology in Hindi and Urdu Literature* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2009), 36.

2 Namvar Singh, *Kahani: Nai Kahani* (Allahabad: Lok Bharati Prakashan, 2012), 23.

3 Mahmood Farooqui, "The Atmabodh of Nirmal Verma," *Himal* 18, no. 4 (2006): 70.

codes and techniques were often seen by Hindi critics as "epitomizing Westernization,"[4] he was one of the few modern Hindi authors whose writing managed to judiciously blend Indian tradition and Western modernity. This was precisely why he stood at confluence of the two worlds, the East and the West, with perfect ease.

Nirmal Verma's fiction often centers on the inner experiential reality (*aantarik yatharth*) of an individual who is lonely and alienated suffering from an existential anxiety but "a readymade blueprint" of a story never appears before him. As Verma himself wrote of his process:

> I can see the shape of my story only in fragments. Sometimes I come to know the end of my story the moment I start writing but sometimes the end is not the one I had imagined. For me, a story does not spring from a definite idea and seldom does it originate from the fact that I had consciously decided to write on a specific subject. To say in brief, a story for me is to view the landscape of blurred feelings in a glow of words.[5]

It was his exploration of the *aantarik yatharth* that distinguished his 'new story' from the progressive writing of the preceding two or three decades.

Memory and time played a crucial role in Verma's fiction. He believed that raw experiences transform into stories only when they undergo the rite of passage through "memory"—entering the world of a writer's creativity.[6] Memory was like a window that allowed inner and

4 Annie Montaut, "Translating a Literary text as Voicing its Poetics with Metalanguage: With Reference to Nirmal Verma and Baldev Vaid," in *India in Translation through Hindi: A Plurality of Voices*, edited by Maya Burger and Nicole Pozza (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 103.

5 Nirmal Verma, *Sahitya ka Atmasatya* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2005), 139-40.

6 Nirmal Verma, *Shabd aur Smriti* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1976), 19.

outer realities to come together. Time, for Verma, was "eternally contemporaneous (*chirantan vartaman*) with past and future intertwined with a never-ending present,"[7] thus past was only a part of the "eternal present" within which its independent existence became meaningless.

Verma's fiction is marked by a great sensitivity and refinement and a "mellow, impressionist mood,"[8] which matches his "liquid, lyrical" style.[9] His distinctive style also adapts into Hindi many striking turns of phrase and syntax from English with natural ease. He believed that each word is a 'small' abstraction; it chisels the formless mass of life and infuses it with a new life force. For Verma, each story and every sentence of the story is in itself a witness to reality and yet distinct from it. In this sense no story or work of art could be realistic; it could never be.[10]

The images that Verma describes in his fiction are delicately evocative, adding elegance and charm to his prose. For example, when he writes about "the azure slices of limpid sky peeping through the pale yellow sunlight"[11] or when he describes "water-drops sliding languorously on the rain-washed, bare telegraph wires, the blades of wet grass trembling in the air, the delicate flutter of the bird bathing in the water,"[12] we can see how well he was fine tuned to the wonders of the natural world. The reader is struck by a sense of this wonder as the narrative flows spontaneously and time stands still until the story ends.

Written in Verma's unique language and style, the present story,[1] from his first volume of short stories *Parinde* (1959), is about a jobless

7 Nirmal Verma, "Kala, Mythak aur Yatharth," in *Lekhak ki Aastha: Sahityik Nibandh*, edited by Nandlal Acharya (Bikaner: Vagdevi Prakashan, 2001), 26.

8 Jaidev, *The Culture of Pastiche: Existential Aestheticism in the Contemporary Hindi Novel* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993), 46.

9 ibid.

10 Nirmal Vermal, *Har Baarish Mein* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2006), 148.

11 Nirmal Verma, *Parinde* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2012), 31.

12 ibid.

Fig. 1: Nirmal Verma in Prague, photograph by Erich Einhorn / www.outlookindia.com

young man who meets a little girl one rainy day in the hills. The narrator is touched and transformed by the sheer delight with which she sails her paper boat to reach out to a "magical world." This encounter brings him face to face with a moment of near epiphany—one of those Proustian *moments privilégiés* or "privileged moments."[13] What may appear as illusion or as figment of imagination carries within it the quintessence of life. The little girl's story continues well beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries, beyond the immediate truth

13 Proust, Marcel. "Swann's Way," in *Remembrance of Things Past* vol. 1, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2012), 30. As a way in which to explore such moments in Nirmal Verma's short fiction, I have referred here to Proustian "privileged moments." This concept is discussed in Swann's Way, the first book of his seven-volume monumental novel Remembrance of Things Past (In Search of Lost Time) in which an experience of a "privileged moment" involving a madeleine causes Marcel, the narrator, or Proust, the author, to experience childhood memories of his (imagined) village Combray where on Sunday mornings his aunt would dip the madeleine in her own cup of tea and offer it to him. The sudden burst of memory generated by a taste of the madeleine dunked in tea has become one of most famous metaphors in French literature.

and reality and into a sort of "aesthetic adventure."[14] In this story, as well as in several others, Verma made use of Proust's notion of "privileged moments"[2] defined variously as moments of enigmatic ecstasy or euphoria, strange joy or sudden revelation as a result of the direct sensory experiences. He found "Proust's world to be a world of similarities and associations, in which one object reminded us of another, where one memory emerged from another like the peel of an onion."[15] Inspired by Proust Verma said that time is like a spiral in which the climactic points are illuminated by *anayaas samay*, or "involuntary moments," which glow at small intervals across the entire landscape of the past.[16] The present story resurrects the past through accidental and involuntary memories, recalling a very Proustian conception of life and the mingling of past and present. As memory takes hold of the mind, the past no longer remains a past but becomes a part of the undivided time of the eternal present. By the end of the story, the narrator ceases to be a self-alienated individual and transcends his struggles with modernist experiences and anxieties, achieving a more holistic vision of life

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT[17]

It poured last night. Now it is drizzling. A few forgetful sprays of rain drift in and land on the books on the table, the old rug on the floor, and the worm eaten legs of the bed. But I don't shut the windows, I can't. The darkness that had quietly settled in the room last

14 Nirmal Verma, *Har Baarish Mein* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 2006), 149.

15 Nirmal Verma, *Shabd aur Smriti* (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1976), 119.

16 ibid.

17 In my own translation, I have sought to stay as close as possible to the register, style, and punctuation of the original. To bring the translated story across to the international readers, certain expressions in Indian English have been replaced by the international variants, though at times I have opted Indian English, given its own autonomy and charm.

night has shrunk into the dampness of the corners as a stale griminess. Even at this age, I avoid lighting the lantern during daytime—I don't know why, but something inside saddens and suffocates me. It makes me feel as if someone in the family has died and that the stony eyes of the dead are staring from the wall... Perhaps my mother had said something when I was a child. As I lie on my back and stare at the rafters on the ceiling, I find my mother's wrinkled and anxious face etched there. I close my eyes and the rafters become invisible, but not her face...

My thoughts are as worthless as I am, so I'd better not think today. The old damp plaster will drop off anyway, exposing everything; let me not disturb it now. As I go downstairs it suddenly strikes me that I haven't smoked a cigarette since morning. I feel happy, partly with the idea of having a cigarette and partly because it offers me an excuse to leave the room for a while.

Outside, the pale and weak rays of the sun scatter for a while before the warm, moist gusts of wind sweep them away. As the wind wreaks havoc in my hair, I keep wrapping a shawl around myself—but what to do with my eyes, which blink helplessly, perforce remaining half open to as to avoid potholes of muddy water. It's holiday time for the schools and children rush out of their homes to be out in the open as soon as the rain stops. In joyful delight, they splash and jump in puddles of rainwater. Suddenly, a stone lands in the puddle next to me and a few drops of muddy water splatter on my *kurta*. If I hadn't heard the peals of merry laughter behind me, I would not have realized that this mischief was deliberately aimed at me.

I rolled my *pyjama* to the knees and did not turn back to have a look, though in my heart of hearts I wanted to. For a moment, I also regretted deciding to come out of the room. Then, I thought: *Maybe I should go back?* But the mere thought of the room's darkness and dinginess made me shudder, and so, slipping and sliding, I dragged myself forward. Somehow, I crossed the lane next to my house, then turned right and walked alongside a two-foot high brick wall. The un-

even earth on the other side of the wall, covered with grass, leaves and stones, drops down to a steep slope to the brook, carrying the gurgling torrent of muddy water from the nearby lanes ceaselessly into it.

"Amma ri!"

Shaken by a thin, suppressed shriek trembling in the air, I suddenly stopped in my tracks. There was this little girl who had slipped on the wet grassy slope that dropped behind the little brick wall to the brook below. With one of her tiny fists, she clutched on to the grass while the other helplessly swayed in the air for help holding onto a tiny paper boat. I sprang forward, seized her hand and pulled her up. She puffed and panted, stumbled her way up the slope and stood beside me. I lifted her up and placed her on the road across the wall. She looked intently at me for a moment with her big deep eyes and then bent down to peel off the mud from her knees. I saw that a bunch of unruly hair that fell on her back was knotted with a light red ribbon that fluttered in the wind. I was of two minds—should I wait there a while or consider my duty done and move on. Of course, I did want to speak to her before I left, but the little girl would not even look up. I searched for something to say that would overcome her shyness and lessen the reserve between us, but failed to find suitable words. So, instead of standing there like a fool I preferred to quietly move away. But...That very moment, she looked up at me with those deep big eyes and softly murmured a 'thank you', as a weak smile played on her trembling lips. I was taken aback. There was hardly any sign of gratitude on her face but it was obvious from her good manners that she certainly came from an educated and cultured family.

Holding her little chin up a little, I asked, "Did you get hurt?"

She looked at me for only a second and then, finding herself before a stranger, shyly lowered her head.

"I never fell down— only slipped a little on the mud below. I was charmed by the way the child had made a distinction between '"falling" and "slipping", and laughed rather too abruptly. Perhaps she was offended by my laughter, for she withdrew from me and pretended

to gaze intently at the water gushing down the *nullah*. I touched her shoulder gently. She must have felt my touch because she flinched her neck a little, hunched up her shoulders but still did not turn back to look at me.

Then, suddenly from somewhere a clod of earth fell into the *nullah* with a big splash and showered our clothes with water. This time she looked at me – her eyes smiled with curiosity.

"It wasn't me!" I feigned ignorance.

Now she laughed, as if someone had unwittingly teased her, as if she meant to say that she knew everything and she wasn't fooled that easily. She moved a little closer to me and inspected my hand, which carried the signs of mud and earth left by the stone. She was now certain of my mischief but instead of saying something she smiled and looked at me mysteriously.

"Look over there!" At once, my eyes followed her finger. Her voice tinkled with innocent appeal and wonder. But I could not find anything strange or unusual over there, there was the sky, the white fluffy clouds, the electric wires trembling in the wind-- the pearly rain drops clinging to them glistened and slid along.

"Plop"—something fell into the *nullah*. This time the spray of water did not reach us, it only drenched the green foliage that grew alongside and the yellow blades of grass.

I knew it was her. But, I gave her a questioning look.

"It wasn't me either! I did not throw the stone". She was smiling and to convince me she opened up her tiny soft palms for me. I took her hands in mine. Soaked in the tender delight of laughter, her shyness melted away and the distance between us eased.

"But why did you go down the slope?"

Waving the paper boat pinched between her two fingers, she said: "I wanted to sail it in the water."

"What if you got drowned--?"

That my fear was so ridiculous and childish was proved by a shake of her head.

"I have sailed my boats lots of times before – and never got drowned!"

"Never?"

"Yes, never—you can ask *Jiji*!

Jiji?" Then, suddenly, a thought struck me that I shouldn't have asked this.

"My big sister. She made this boat for me."

"Oh! I see."

I saw the paper boat in her hand, which had been crafted out of an old newspaper—it was pointed on the ends like the beak of a bird and a tiny pyramid stood at the centre.

"Child, where do you stay?"

"I won't tell you."

"Why not?"

"I'm not a child."

"Who are you, then?"

"Lata Mathur!"

She blushed and tossed back the red ribbon that had come loose and hung on her face nonchalantly. The clouds had now scattered. The azure slices of limpid sky peeped through the pale yellow sunlight.

Across the *nullah*, the water-drenched roofs and damp walls clung to each other and shivered in the sun. A thick and muddy flow of rainwater was still cascading down into the *nullah*.

The telegraph wires, rain-washed, stood completely bare. Whenever a bird perched on them, it started off a spray of rain drops... one, then the other, and then a few drops slid languorously but didn't fall. A misty gust of wind passed over us, and Lata Mathur's ribbon fluttered. My unkempt hair, too, was blown about in the wind and became more disheveled. Noticing this, she laughed. I, too, laughed to see her laughing merrily. Then, we laughed together. Soon, we were talking like buddies. I was no longer a stranger to her, and to me she was no longer a child, but Lata Mathur. My age was left far behind—as though

it had never existed or had any connection to me. Her shyness and fear had disappeared as if she had known me for ages. Her little fingers were held by mine...like some tender petals nestled within my palm. Our gazes blew over the sparkling, molten-silver water of the *nullah*. At the slope of the *nullah*, we spotted a few wandering lambs who sniffed at the wet grass and the muddied leaves, and moved on leaving their distorted shadows behind in the water.

A strong gust of wind arrived and a few strands of grass and leaves got startled, flew alongside the *nullah* for a while, and tumbled down into the water. Lata Mathur caught hold of her frock that blew in the wind and pulled it firmly down to her knees.

"Home! See there."

But how could one know where? Her finger gave only the vaguest sense of direction as she pointed in the air! There were only ruins of old, dilapidated houses, wandering pathways straying through the grass, and bright curtains peeping through the windows—where did her finger actually point at?

"See anything?"

"Isn't it that one?" I bluff.

And I, too, point in the same direction. A little away from it, on the other side of the lane, I try to locate my room at a distance and point it out to her.

"Is it that over there? My school is there too," she exclaims.

"School? But I haven't seen one. Anyway, since you say, it should be there. Today must be a holiday for you, then."

"It's a holiday for everyone. Don't you have a holiday too?"

"Holiday? Yes, it's a holiday for me too—though it's holiday for me every day."

For the first time I accepted my joblessness and idleness without any qualms.

"Why?" The big eyes on Lata rani's chubby face were filled with wonder and disbelief.

"No one can have holiday everyday—everyone has to go to work."

"But I don't have to work so I can have a holiday every day."

For the first time I raked the ashes of penury on my long and gloomy period of joblessness without pain. The emptiness arising out of my destitution that once pinched me still remains but it felt as if it was no longer my own but someone else's. I could observe it from a distance with complete detachment, and accepted my being on a prolonged "holiday" naturally and normally.

Was I miserable in the morning? I felt as though I was walking barefoot on the wet grass down the hilly slope. The dense shade over me trembled in the air and showered memories like dry leaves.

Life feels so light...

On the sky above a small cloud had enveloped the sun. The light had become fainter and in the flowing water of the waterway many muddy images appeared and disappeared.

"Your *Jiji* makes lovely boats!" I stroke the little boat nestling like a dove in her hands.

But Lata Mathur sat straight-faced lost in her thoughts as if I was not there at all—perhaps her little mind had got hinged on some stray thought.

"*Jiji* often tells me a story. A long, long way from here, across the seven seas, is a small country nestled among mountains of precious jewels where sand all of silver blows with the air. My *Jiji* says that all the houses there have their own lakes and golden fish swim in the blue water day and night. Bridges made of colorful flowers stretch across these lakes and people go out for walks on them every evening. You know, only girls can pluck flowers there and that too only to put them in their hair."

Seeing me smile, Lata Mathur, suddenly, became quiet. With eyes downcast, she said slowly: "You know, all this is true—my *Jiji* has told me this".

"But what made you remember this story all of a sudden?"

Her eyes silently rested on my face.

"Didn't you tell me just now that you don't have to work and you

can have holiday every day? In *Jiji*'s story, too, people don't have to worry about work, they have holiday every day."

"Oh ... So, we, too, are there in your *Jiji*'s story!"

"*Jiji* says that sometimes people from that country come floating on clouds to visit our homes at night."

"Have you ever seen them?"

"No, No one can see them, because all of us are asleep... They sometimes quietly sneak into our dreams. You must have seen them lots of times?"

"What?" I was startled as if I had suddenly woken from sleep.

"Dreams"—she said.

"Oh... dreams!"

We stare silently at the patterns that the rays of the sun created and destroyed on water. A bird hopped down from the little brick wall and flew to the edge of the *nullah* and dipped its tiny head in the water.

"Who could reach that strange country across the seven seas?" I wondered.

The little girl giggled.

"You don't even know this much? You know, someday those people would surely call us there. You just wait and see."

"When?"

"The day when this paper boat flows down the *nullah* and reaches their country."

"But how would they know?"

"Of course, they would know! When they see my boat, won't they know that it's me, that I have launched the boat in water?" Her eyes became alive with a limpid yet dreamy radiance... as though the strange land across the seven seas had suddenly sprung up before her, very close to her... the bridges of flowers, the silver dust flying all over, the white velvety clouds reflected in the blue waters of the lakes in which swam the gold fish... as though all these were secured tenderly in the tiny lap of Lata Mathur's little paper boat.

For a moment I felt...the past days of gloom were now over and my age no longer burdened me. The present moment no longer tied itself to tomorrow but to me... a person that I am today. Everything had gone into the translucent shell, which carried no burden, faced no barrier... which rose and fell, fell and rose on the drowsy waves of sun and water to the farthest edge of timelessness...

At the hazy threshold of time my childhood, my mother's wrinkled face... everything... swam like patches of blue mist on the canvas of trembling, shivering sunlight. The musty smell of dreams rolled down the colored wings of a butterfly in drops and was soon lost in the yellowed grass on the tomb of forgetfulness... where a few flowers had sprung up, the flowers were wet...

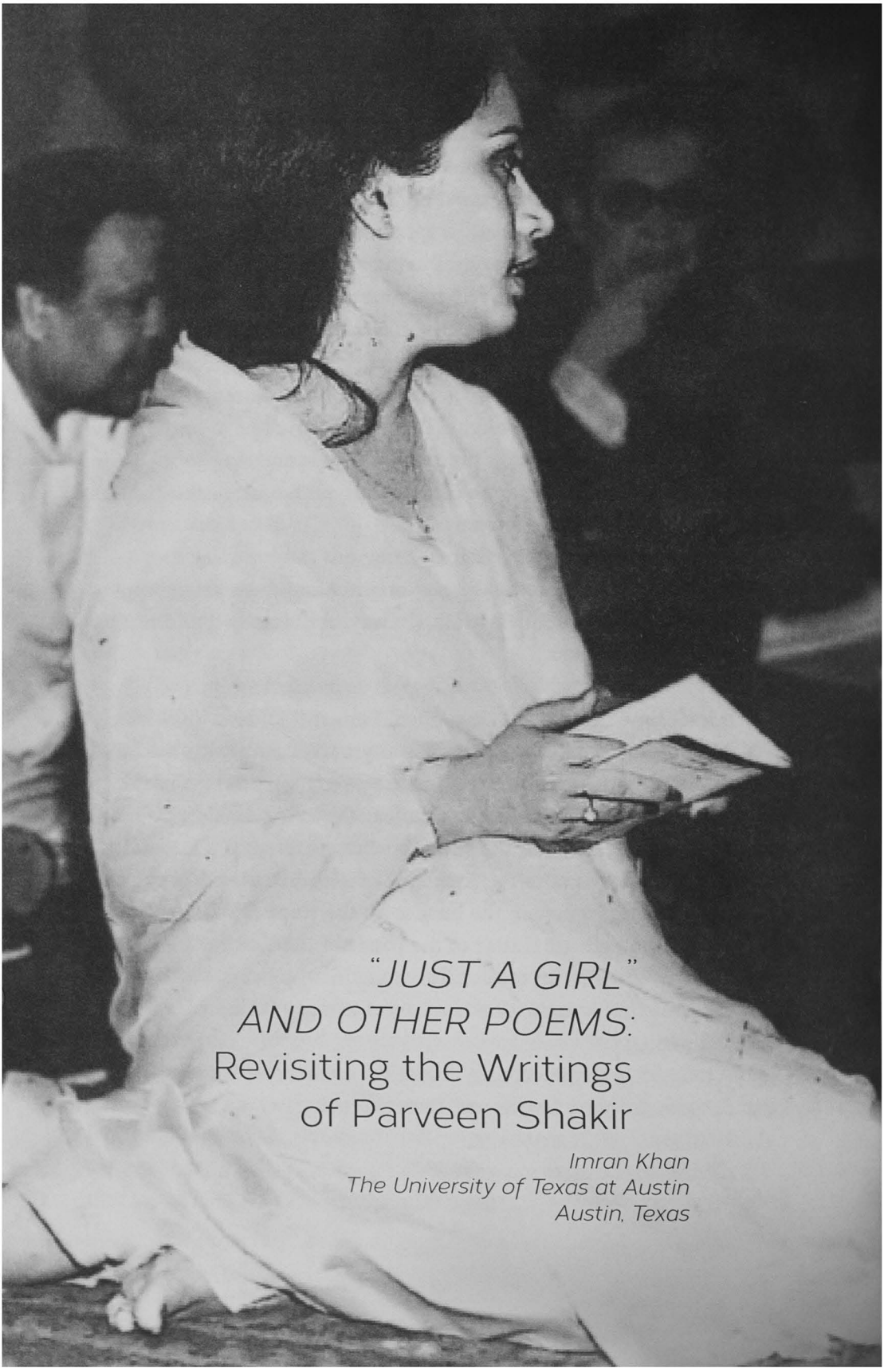
And I felt that life was so light.

Suddenly, I heard the tinkling of laughter and the joyous clapping of Lata Mathur. Her boat was sailing away, bobbing up and down on the white foamy waves...

I looked at it... and I kept watching it as it sailed away ...

A long time has passed since then. I am still jobless, but I hardly visit the employment exchange office anymore. I am mostly confined to my room. But whenever it rains and a weepy-mistiness creeps into the room... then, like today, I find an excuse to have a cigarette and leave the room. Gazing at the water gushing through the *nullah* I often think wistfully about the incident. I feel the blades of wet grass gently trembling in the air, the bushes on the slope bending over the *nullah* and the delicate flutter of the wings of the bird bathing in the water...all of them seem to murmur something quietly...Through the profound mysteriousness of the waves of melody the essence of illusion bellows.

"A long, long way from here, across the seven seas, is a small country...." Again the story begins and I start listening.



"JUST A GIRL" AND OTHER POEMS: Revisiting the Writings of Parveen Shakir

Imran Khan
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century saw a significant number of women receive acclaim for their skill in Urdu prose and poetry. Many of these writers, such as Ada Jafri, Kishwar Naheed, and Fahmida Riaz, have been hailed as voices of feminism by the Urdu literary establishment. However, one prominent poet has been largely ignored as a feminist writer; instead, she has been relegated to the ranks of poets of love and romance. Critics, in restricting themselves to surface-level readings of the love poetry of Parveen Shakir (1952-1994), have overlooked how these and other poems significantly address gender and societal issues. In the following selection of poems, I have sought to highlight Parveen Shakir's engagement with the lives of women, children, and the poor in a society that reserves most of its rights and privileges for upper class men.[1] I suggest that critics have failed to recognize Shakir's poetry as feminist because it does not directly challenge and question male dominance.

Shakir, despite winning several poetry awards and honors, does not appear in Rukhsana Ahmad's canonical work of feminist Urdu poetry from Pakistan, *We Sinful Women* (1991).[2] This collection, the first of its kind in the world of Urdu literature, includes the poetry of Ada Jafri, Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, and Ishrat Afreen, as well as lesser-known feminist poets such as Sara Shagufta and Zehra Nigah. Even on the rare occasion that Parveen Shakir has been included amongst the feminists of Urdu poetry, such as in Ambreen Salahuddin's *Feminism in Modern Urdu Poetesses* (2005)[3], she has been referred to as "the poetess of fragrance." *Fragrance*, the title of Parveen

1 These poems have been selected from Parveen Shakir's anthology, *Mah-e-Tamām: Kuliyāt* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1999).

2 Rukhsana Ahmad, ed., *We Sinful Women* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1991).

3 Ambreen Salahuddin, *Feminism in Modern Urdu Poetesses (1857-2000)* (Lahore, Pakistan: West Pakistan Urdu Academy, 2005).

Shakir's first poetry volume, was published when she was twenty-four years old. Although Shakir produced and published several more volumes in the remaining eighteen years of her life, the poetry she composed in these early years, widely recognized as highly *feminine* rather than *feminist*, is foregrounded at the expense of her later work.

As I hope these poems will demonstrate, Parveen Shakir raises awareness about social issues by compelling the reader to empathize with the subjects of her poems, rather than by directly challenging societal norms of patriarchy. Recent scholarship on feminism has shown that feminism is not only practiced through vocal and direct resistance to male dominance. Feminist agency is also acted through strategic silences, and by appropriating and subverting the nature of patriarchal practices normally considered repressive towards women.[4]

This sample of poems demonstrates a spectrum of issues including women in the workplace, sexual harassment, arranged marriage, children's labor, women's experiences of being objects of desire, and even sectarian violence in the city. Most importantly, perhaps, even those works previously categorized as "love poems" deserve reconsideration as many deal with the difficulties faced by women in expressing and experiencing love on their own terms. Urdu poetry composed by women differs from classical Urdu poetry in which women's bodies were the subject of men's lust and fantasies.[5] The love that women write about in Urdu poetry reflects their own desires and pleasures, their satisfaction with bodily sensations, their disappointment, and even betrayal.[6] Parveen Shakir used her poetry to give voice to women's experiences of love and romance in Pakistan.

---

4 See Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

5 See Christina Oesterheld, "Islam in Contemporary South Asia: Urdu and Muslim Women," *Oriente Moderno*, 23, no. 84 (2004): 217-243.

6 ibid.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

JUST A GIRL (FROM VOLUME ONE: FRAGRANCE, 1977)

In my cold room,
I am sitting saddened
From half-open windows
Moist winds enter,
Touching my body
Torching it somewhat
Taking your name over and over,
They tickle me

How I wish I had wings,
I would fly to you
How I wish I were the wind
Having touched you I would return
I am not however, anything but,
In iron fortresses
Accused of life-imprisonment,
Just a girl!

NICK NAME (FROM VOLUME TWO: MARIGOLD, 1980)

You call me Doll
You are quite right!
I appear like a doll to all playing hands
Whatever you make me wear will suit me
I do not have a color
Hand me off to any child

I do not oppose anyone
My waking and thinking eyes
Whenever you wish take my sight away
Wind me up and hear (my) words
Or take away my power of speech
Fill the parting of my hair, apply vermillion
Love me; settle me in your eyes
And then, when you've had your heart's fill
Take me from your heart and put me away in some niche
You call me Doll
You are quite right!

STENOGRAPHER (FROM VOLUME TWO: MARIGOLD, 1980)

Before the glittering morning
When sleep dissolves in the body like honey
And by the hands of the morning breeze each pain's grip is untied
At that time of healing
All raw wounds of the body,
All parched dreams of the person,
Waking up considering them worthless
And surrendering oneself to the season's cruel wind
All day meaningless numbers
And purposeless names
Keep typing mindlessly and with aimless hands
Occasionally, as the need may demand
To tolerate the sweet and bitter words of the bald boss
And like a stone statue, remaining quiet at everything
Then late in the evening
When even the birds have returned to their nests
From the cold furnace of the office

Taking a scorched-like face
Bending from the tiredness of centuries
Holding up the drooping shoulders
Fearing hungry eyes, cat calls that escort her home,
Dodging those doers of courtesy
She takes a step
One stenographer
Returns to her home
And gripping a broken wall perhaps she says every day
Lord!
Such a day should come
I should have a roof over my head

A SAD POEM (FROM VOLUME TWO: MARIGOLD, 1980)

On one side matrimony
And on the other side
Is the soul-purifying fire
Should I keep watching the snow falling on me
Or grab the hand of light
O' Lord of water and fire
Give me my verdict
Should I be buried alive
Or grab the hand of life

GHAZAL (FROM VOLUME THREE: SOLILOQUY, 1985)

One day he would have had to bid me farewell
No matter how much he had loved me

All seasons come and go
The season of sorrow should have also migrated

How could have wolves attained me
Had he protected me

Pride did come across from my tone
It was his right to complain

Some of it was my fault, or why would he
Break off association in this way

I only had but one demand of him
That he should have respected my love

GHAZAL (FROM VOLUME THREE: SOLILOQUY, 1985)

Even a stone may shed tears of blood for a moment
When the promise of dreams is lost forever

May such a rain shower upon my city that
Washes away all hearts and all windows

Until apprehension is the guardian
How can someone sleep at night

Rain and growth are in His hands
But someone has to sew the seeds in dirt

For three seasons, for whom the mother waits
That child is lost in the fourth season

A DIFFICULT QUESTION (FROM VOLUME FOUR: REFUSAL, 1990)

From behind the canvas curtains
A thirteen or fourteen-year-old face peeked
That face
Was fresh like the first blossom of spring
And eyes
Transparent like first love
But in her hands
Were lines from having been cutting vegetables
And in those lines
Were congealed ashes from washing pots
Her hands
Were aged twenty years more than her face!

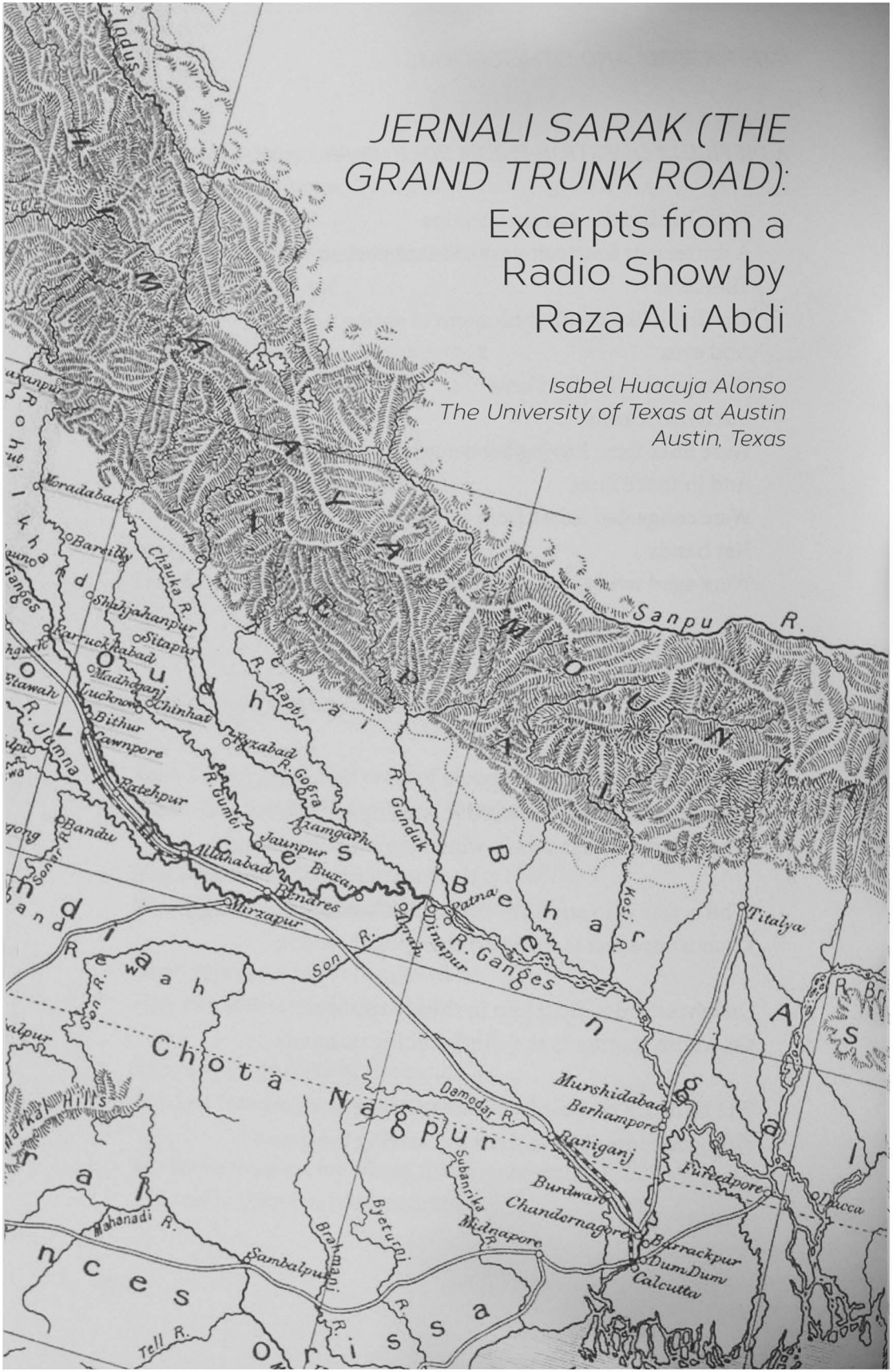
GHAZAL (FROM VOLUME FIVE: FOAM OF MIRROR, 1996 – PUBLISHED POSTHUMOUSLY)

My city is kindling, the wind is burning
What kind of fire is this in which the wind is melting

Who is this who strolls in the garden brandishing a dagger
From whose fear is the wind changing direction

On whose order did it join in the conspiracy
On whose murder is the wind rubbing its hands

The birds are cowering and the trees are terrified,
With what intention is the wind leaving the house



JERNALI SARAK (THE GRAND TRUNK ROAD): Excerpts from a Radio Show by Raza Ali Abdi

Isabel Huacuja Alonso
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

In 1985, Raza Ali Abdi, an Urdu writer and radio broadcaster, wrote and produced a radio program for the BBC's Urdu services about the Grand Trunk Road, a 2,400-kilometer road that traverses the subcontinent from East to West. The program was called *Jernali Sarak*, which means "road for generals" or "road of generals" and is another name for the Grand Trunk Road. But in India and Pakistan most people call this timeworn road that has linked the eastern and western limits of the subcontinent for hundreds of years by its more affectionate name, G. T. Road.

Jernali Sarak was serialized in thirty-six episodes of approximately fifteen minutes each. Listeners could follow an episode without having heard previous ones. The show was first broadcasted in 1985, and it enjoyed a wide listenership in Pakistan, India, and several Gulf countries. Abdi converted the radio script into a book by the same title and first published it in Lahore and Aligarh in 1986.[1] The book, however, is a bit different from the original script. To make the text more readable, he edited the interviews, added phrases, and cut a few passages.

Abdi was born in 1936 in Roorke, India (present-day Uttarakhand) and migrated with his family to Pakistan after Partition. In 1981, he joined the BBC Urdu in London, but retuned to India and Pakistan many times to prepare and record radio programs. Abdi is not only a veteran broadcaster, but also a prolific writer. He has published over a dozen books – travelogues, short story collections, and children's books – and several articles in scholarly journals. He is also a music enthusiast and collector of rare gramophone records and has written a book about Indian film song lyricists.

In *Jernali Sarak*, Abdi begins his trip in Peshawar and ends it in Calcutta. He visits countless villages, towns, and cities that sprung up along the Grant Trunk Road, and as he travels across the subcon-

1 Raza Ali Abdi, *Jarnaili Sarak* (Karachi: Saad Publications, 1989).

tinent, he meets with people of all walks of life: *fakirs*, singers, children, old women, and intellectuals. In Peshawar, for example, he speaks with celebrated truck artists who display their artistic skills on the trucks and public buses that parade the streets of Pakistan. In a village in Punjab, he speaks to an aged cemetery caretaker about British graves and about the Anglo-Sikh wars. As he travels on this old road, Abdi recounts the history of the region and its people, shifting effortlessly between past and present.

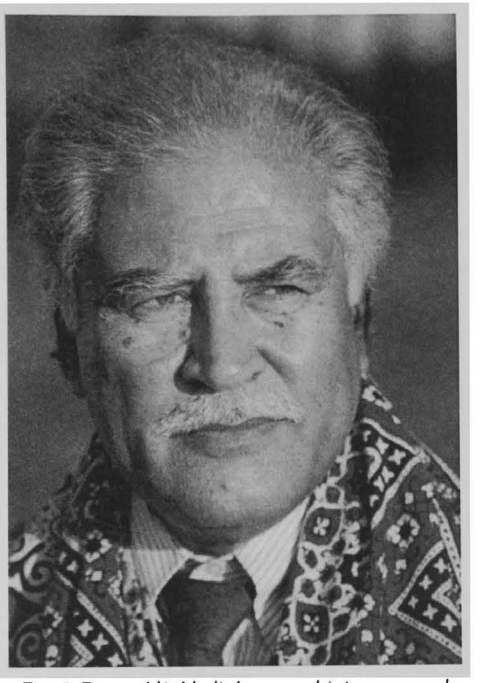


Fig. 1: Raza Ali Abdi / onepakistan.com.pk

The program maintains a positive tone, but Abdi by no means idealizes the places he visits or the people he meets. He addresses the difficult problems that plague the region, not with exasperation or indignation, as some English-language travel writers have done, but with genuine concern, compassion, and sincerity. For example, he talks about the influx of Russian arms in Peshawar and the ways it has marred the region, and he interviews a young boy who works in a mechanic shop in Kanpur and cannot afford to attend school.

For this publication, I translated the program's opening episode and an episode about Gujrat, Pakistan. The opening chapter serves as an introduction to the program, and is a bit more scholarly than the remaining episodes. Here, Abdi describes the road's route and talks to several professors and intellectuals about its history and general influence. The episode about Gujrat is more representative of the radio program's casual and spontaneous tone. Abdi visits a shrine, a mauso-

leum, a bazaar, and a school, and he talks at length to a local teacher about his family, the region's folktales, and local histories. The episode opens and closes with the melodious singing of an old man sitting outside a shrine who longs to visit the city of Medina. A bank manager living in Saudi Arabia was so moved by the old man's voice that he purchased a ticket to Medina and, in this way, fulfills the aged singer's long-held desire to see the city of the Prophet.

We can place *Jernali Sarak* in the genre of *safarnama* or travel writing as Abdi undeniably contributes to the rich tradition of writing about travel in Urdu. This tradition dates back to the nineteenth century, but the twentieth century marked the beginning of the boom, with outstanding writers such as Ibn-i Insha and Mustansar Hussain Tarar.[2] *Jernali Sarak* is part of this boom as Abdi, like his contemporaries, approaches travel writing in a creative manner. A skilled broadcaster and music enthusiast, he has a special sensibility to sound, and as he makes his way across the subcontinent, he introduces the listener to the sounds of the places he visits and to the voices of their inhabitants. He is mindful of radio's special ability to create a sense of intimacy and addresses his audience in a warm and unpretentious voice so that the listener feels that she is hearing the voice of an old friend or relative and not a radio broadcaster based in London. Abdi's aural sensibility also comes through in his writing style; he writes in simple, straightforward, and almost lyrical prose. While translating, I used both the book and the radio recordings because I wanted to capture the auditory dimension of this work and to emulate Abdi's writing style.[3]

2 See Ibne Insha, *Ibn-i Baṭūṭa ke taʿāqub meṉ: Safarnāmah* (Karachi: Maktabah-yi Dāniyāl, 1974); Ibne Insha, *Āvārah gard kī ḍāʿirī: Safarnāmah, Jamshed ke 101 kārṭūnoṉ ke sāth* (Karachi: Pāk Publisharz, 1971); Mustansar Hussain Tarar, *Undalis men ajnabi* (Lahore: Sang-e-Mil Publications, 1984); and Mustansar Hussain Tarar, *Moscow ki sufaid raten* (Lahore: Sang-e-Mil Publications, 2008).

3 To clarify my translation and make it more accessible to an English-speaking audience, I added a few footnotes. I would like to thank Raza Ali Abdi and Timsal Masud for their many insightful comments on this translation and Daniel Majchrowicz for sharing his knowledge about *safarnama* with me.

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT

INTRODUCTION

To begin my fifteen hundred mile trip to Calcutta on the Grand Trunk Road, I came to Peshawar. There it was – a city from a bygone time buried in the morning mist, a rooster's crow muffled under the bustle of buses preparing for an early departure. There they were – the towering minarets of the Mughal and Durrani mosques shimmering like gold under the fresh, early morning sunlight.

I was looking for the place where the Grand Trunk Road began. It was a quest for this magnificent road's first stone, for the so-called "zero point."

Someone told me that a large white stone could be seen near the old post office in the city's center. He said that perhaps this had been Grand Trunk Road's first stone, but that stone was no longer there. Upon hearing that, I left in search of the "zero point" stone. A tall, concrete building now stands where the English government's post office once stood. And in front of that building, by the edge of the street, I spotted a milestone lying face down, as if somebody had pushed it down to make a bridge over an open drain line. I quickly moved close to the milestone and bent down to take a good look. The engraving of this centuries-old stone had faded completely, but I could make out a big circle, and it seemed as if the stone was staring at me with an astonished, wide-open mouth.

This was the Grand Trunk road's first stone.

An auto-rickshaw driver saw me bending down and stopped by my side. I readjusted my bag over my shoulder, and asked him: "Ready to go?"

He asked me: "Where are you heading, sir?"

I said: "Calcutta."

He replied: "Take a seat."

For four hundred years, Grand Trunk Road has been making its way across valleys, mountains, green meadows, and flattened fields. It passes through Peshawar, rides alongside the Kabul River, and crosses the Sindh River to reach Hassanabdal, which they say used to be the most beautiful rest-stop between Kabul and Delhi. The road then takes a hard, reproving glance at the desolate ruins of the once magnificent city of Taxila and heads towards the Margala mountain pass, through which countless caravans and armies have made their way into India across the Hindu Kush mountain range, and have once again returned – through this very path – bearing stolen treasures.

The Grand Trunk Road brushes Rawalpindi, merely touching it, and misses Sher Shah's fort at Rohtas. On its way towards Gujrat, the road passes by Jhelum, where it listens to the timber factories' racket. And then, as if yearning to meet its long lost lover, the road dives across – not on Ranjha and Hir's mythic earthen pot, but on a century-old iron bridge – into Gujuranwala, the famed city of wrestlers. It cuddles up to Lahore, the city of the brave, says farewell to Pakistan, and makes its way into Amritsar. The Grand Trunk Road journeys through Jalandhar and Ludhiana, crosses boundless green fields and crystal blue rivers, and, before reaching Ambala, bows down in respect before the atrium of North India and journeys toward Kurukshetra, Karnal, Panipat, and then Delhi.

From here, the British-built road travels to Aligharh and Etah, and then, keen to meet the Ganga River, it heads to Kannauj. But Sher Shah's old road does not part ways with the Yamuna River, and instead continues straight to Agra, where it catches its breath before reaching Kanpur and Allahabad. It takes a quick glance at the tombs of dissident princes and the forts of great kings as it crosses Allahabad's city center. It arrives in Benares and, after drinking water from every *ghat*,[4] this now well-traveled and wise road enters Bihar and reaches Sahasram. Here, Sher Shah, the Grand Trunk Road's maker and the legend-

4 A *ghat* is a flight of steps leading down to a river or a mountain pass.

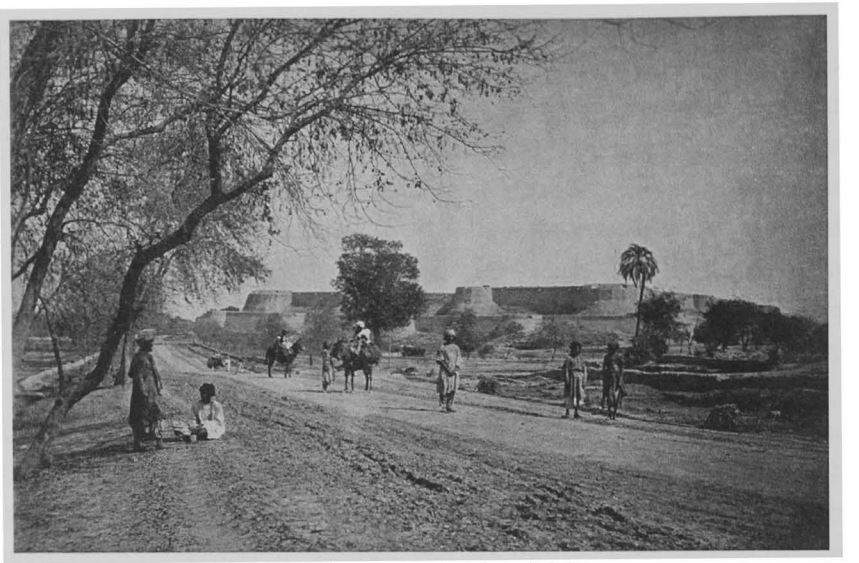


Fig. 2: Peshawar, 1878 / British Library

ary son of the Suri family, lies at rest on the cold dust of what was once his magnificent kingdom. The road leaves behind factories and mines as it exits Dhanbad and Asansol. It gets drenched in the rains of Bengal, and, wringing out its sari, it approaches Calcutta, its final destination, whose name's mere mention pierces the heart like an arrow.

Before I began my journey on this age-old road, I met Dr. Ahmed Hassan Daani, an expert on this topic, in the very modern city of Islamabad. I asked him why the Grand Trunk Road was constructed, whether it was built to fight invaders and protect Hindustan.

Dr. Daani explained, "You are right that defense was this road's primary purpose. Sher Shah was a Pathan, and he recruited soldiers from his own region. So, he needed a road to travel there. In my opinion, this is why the Grand Trunk Road does not pass through Attock and travels to Neelab and Neelam. That way, Sher Shah could recruit Niazi, Lodhi, Suri, and Shirani soldiers into his army."

He continued, "The Grand Trunk Road's other purpose was trade. In ancient times, goods grown or manufactured in India trav-

eled through land routes. Ashok built a road system. And so did the Kushan dynasty; and most Indian goods journeyed west through this land route."

"So, Sher Shah also built the G. T. Road to further trade," Dr. Daani concluded.

Dr. Daani also explained to me that during those times sea journeys were not common. People traveled to India from Central Asia and Iran (and vice versa) by land. Some journeyed on elephants and horses. Many walked. Travelers needed food, water, and lodging. So, wells, *bawliyan*,[5] guesthouses, and mosques were built along the G. T. Road. Guesthouses not only provided lodging for travelers, but also served as trading centers, where travelers settled big business deals and made important transactions. Sher Shah constructed the G. T. Road so that people, common men and women, businessmen, and armies, could easily travel back and forth between Sonargaon in Bengal, his kingdom's capital in the eastern side, and the Nilabh River, his kingdom's westernmost border.

Dr. Raadhey Shyam, a history professor from Allahabad University, shed light on several important issues. He explained why rulers constructed roads and talked about what happened in the guesthouses, pilgrimage sites, and mosques along these roads. I first asked Dr. Shyam if Sher Shah built the G. T. Road so as to cross locations that had already been developed or if those locations developed because of the G. T. Road.

Dr. Shyam responded, "It is difficult to tell because road construction began before Sher Shah's time. Since ancient times, rulers have tried to cover the entire country with roads. In my understanding, during the Sultanate period roads began to penetrate the interior, connecting towns and villages. In this manner, imperial control could reach villages and rulers could extract revenue. Building roads became a priority whenever an administration wanted to tighten control."

5 Bawliyan are wells with staircases that are often also elaborately ornamented.

Dr. Shyam also explained to me that during this time, guesthouses were extremely important. Travelers stayed there and talked about where they were coming from, where they were going, and for what purpose they were traveling. That information would eventually reach the king. There also were shrines and pilgrimage sites on the side of the road frequented by travelers, who shared all types of information. In this way, not only news about the country, but also news from distant lands reached rulers. And sometimes this information helped rulers crush rebellions and stop invasions.

Before meeting Dr. Shyam, I spoke with Dr. Hussain Khan from Peshawar University, who had recently completed research on Sher Shah's life. I asked Dr. Khan if it is true that the G. T. Road or a similar road had existed before Sher Shah's time.

Dr. Khan noted, "There were certainly roads, but this type of proper road system – the kind Sher Shah constructed – did not exist in ancient India. And in the medieval period, when the Delhi Sultans ruled, this type of road system did not exist either. Balban[6] tried to repair some roads and stop looting. But, a proper road made on what we can perhaps call 'scientific lines,' whose route was adjusted as time proved necessary, a road that travels from Bagh Nilabh to Sunargaon and later extended to Bhakkar and then from Agra to Khandesh and all the way to Chittoor, this kind of road, which Sher Shah built for his army and to improve people's lives, did not exist before his time."

I asked Professor Hussain Khan what kinds of facilities were available for travelers, if Sher Shah had constructed this road for the public.

He noted, "Sher Shah constructed 1,700 guesthouses. There was guesthouse after every mile. He built guesthouses alongside the G. T. Road and alongside smaller roads traveling to Multan, Khandesh, and Chittoor. And during mealtime, each traveler would be provided food.

6 Ghiyasuddin Balban was a thirteenth-century sultan of the Mamluk dynasty who preceded Sher Shah Suri by about 200 years.

A physician treated sick and injured travelers for free. Two scribes – one who wrote in Persian and one who wrote in Hindi – recorded the names of travelers and their personal information. The travelers' animals would also be fed just as the travelers were themselves."

Allahabad University's Urdu professor, Aqil Rizvi, told me about another interesting issue.

Dr. Rizvi noted, "We should also pay attention to one more thing. For the most part, people living on villages along the G. T. Road were (and still are) Muslims. Some claim these people were actually mercenaries that Sher Shah had recruited for his army. Others say that because Sher Shah was a Muslim ruler, he made sure Muslims settled along the G.T Road so that his army could travel undisturbed and safely reach Delhi. Sher Shah made other roads but none were as important as the G. T. Road."

After listening to Professor Aquil Rizvi, I remembered that I had read somewhere that when Sher Shah built the road from Lahore to Multan, he gave away land to his own people. It was these people's responsibility to make a living off the land and to take care of the road: to repair the road's edges, to spread hay, and to water the road whenever an important traveler passed through.

So, perhaps Sher Shah's descendants still live alongside this Great Trunk Road.

After completing this trip, I reached Calcutta, and like in Peshawar, I searched for the G. T. Road's stone, this time for its last stone. I had heard that this stone lies in front of the gate of the Calcutta Botanical Gardens. So, I went to the botanical gardens, and I asked a man standing in front of the gate if it was true that the G. T. Road ends here.

He looked at me surprised and said, "Ends here? The G. T. Road begins here."

"G. T. Road starts here? Strange," I thought.

People in Peshawar say the same thing as people in Calcutta. In Peshawar, people are happy, and they are also happy in Calcutta. May-

be this is what they call a king's ruling strategy.

GUJRAT'S SHAH DAULA

This city is Gujrat,[7] Shah Daula's Gujrat. And this is Hazrat Syed Kabir-u-Din Shah Daula Darya Ganj Baksh's mausoleum. His grave, elevated above the ground and surrounded by a *jaali*,[8] lies below archways. Some faithful devotees rest their foreheads on the jaali and fix their gazes on the sheet spread over the grave. Others, feeling fatigued, recline on the mausoleum's walls. A few more devotees bow before the Quran while swaying back and forth. Women gathered behind the curtain recite holy verses. Their muffled chanting, the fan's humming, the chirping of countless birds perched on trees outside the shrine, the ruckus of children playing in the courtyard, and the music of the harmonium accompanied by the blowing of an old and tattered bellow and by the melodious, aged voice of Baba Barkat Ali Khan,[9] who sits on the brick floor right in front of the grave under the shade of a tree and sings about his longing to see the holy city of Medina – all these voices mingle in the air of the mausoleum of Shah Daula.

This mausoleum once lay outside the city of Gujrat. Now, it is right in the middle of the city. As tumult and commotion migrated here from every corner, the city spread far, leaping over farms, fields, pastures, dunes, and waterways.

This land is home to many fascinating stories. Some swear that the seventy-meter-long grave of Adam's son is in this region, and they say his grave sometimes shrinks and sometimes expands. Others claim that the grave of Prophet Yosuf's son or maybe his grandson lies

7 Gujrat is in present-day Pakistan, about 120 kilometers north of Lahore.

8 A *jaali* is a perforated stone or latticed screen, usually with either floral or geometrical shapes.

9 A bank manager based in Saudia Arabia heard Baba Barkat Ali Khan's melodious song praise of Medina on the radio. He purchased a ticket to Medina for Baba Barkat Ali Khan and in this way fulfilled Baba's long-held desire to visit the city of Prophet Mohammed.

in another nearby town. And some books say that the bones of larger than normal humans were found in the Pabbi Hills. And about those hills, they say they are not really hills, but the ruins of the historical city of Pati Koti, whose tall and beautiful palace Alexander the Great had spotted across the Jhelum River.

After Pati Koti's demise, the Suryvansha dynasty built one more city: Udaynagar, the city of green meadows and fragrances. And now, lying between the Chenab and Jhelum Rivers, on the edge of the G. T. Road, that city goes by the name of Gujrat.

Gujrat!

The bazaar is packed with people, merchants, buyers, vegetable sellers, pushcarts, bicycles, scooters, motorcycles, cars, mosques, mausoleums, and the clinics of old hakeems.[10] The clatter of mechanics, the azaan on loud speakers, and the time-defying footsteps of the last surviving *tonga*[11]-pulling horses, this is today's Gujrat, the Gujrat where the humble potter's wheel lies idle and where the ironsmith's oven has turned cold.

Today, Zamindar College is very quiet. It is summer vacation and students are at home. College professor Ahmed Hussain Quiladari told me an interesting story about the origins of this new Gujrat.

"People say that this is an old town from Ramchandra's time. But its present population dates back to the time of the Mughal emperor Akbar. I heard that out there, where you can now see the ruins of a fort, there used to be a hill where two communities lived: the Gurjars and the Jaats. And these two groups used to fight a great deal. Akbar witnessed one of their fights while traveling to Kashmir and ordered that a fort be built there. And the fort was built. That was the Hijri year of 997. About this place a poet once said, 'Gujrat basa yeh Akbarabad.'"[12]

The numerical values of the Arabic letters of this line add up to 997.

10 Hakeems are Muslim physicians.

11 A *tonga* is a horse-drawn, two-wheeled vehicle.

12 Akbarabad became Gujrat.

Professor Ahmed Hussain's ancestors have taught youth in the village of Quiladari for several generations. His ancestors must have also witnessed that 21st of February in 1849 when India's fate changed. On this day the Sikh rulers lost the Punjab to the British army in the historic battle of Gujrat, and the land from Hugli to Khyber eventually fell under British rule. Professor Ahmed Hussain told me about a remarkable incident when I asked if any of his relatives had fought in the battle of Gujrat.

He explained, "My ancestors did not fight because they were teachers, but when the British took over my grandfather was alive. And I remember listening to him describe those times. My grandfather recounted that when the British army passed by our village, a British army officer climbed on top of a mosque's dome wearing his shoes. He looked through his binoculars and announced to his compatriots: "there are still a lot of Sikhs." The British army captured Sikh soldiers and locked them up in Ranjit Singh's *baradari*[13] in Gujrat. That night a strong storm hit Gujrat. It rained yellow water, and, early the next morning, the entire city was covered in yellow."

About this night a poet once wrote:

ba Gujrat bareed baraane zard[14]
ajab qudrate kirdigaar aamada

The numerical values of the letters of this Farsi couplet add up to 1274, the Hijri year of the Gujrat battle and the end of the Anglo-Sikh wars.

I went back to Shah Daula's mausoleum, but I did not see of any of those people with small heads and crazed eyes they call Shah Daula's

13 A *baradari* is a building with twelve arches.

14 This roughly translates to: It rained yellow water in Gujrat; It was God's strange resolve.

rats.[15]

Those who praise Shah Daula's miracles and services do not mention that this venerated saint used his devotees' donations for welfare. He made a canal of fresh water that traveled alongside the high bridge. This canal's arches and pillars were still standing during the British time and maybe they still are.

In this region, the British period began in 1849. Before the Gujrat battle, the British army bitterly defeated the Sikh Khalsa in Chillianwala, near the Jhelum River and near the field where they say Alexander the Great and King Porus once fought.[16] Thousands of Sikh soldiers died at Chillianwalla. Sikhs were so brutally slain that people began calling this region the slaughterhouse. Munshi Amin Chand from Ambala traveled to Chillianwala nearly two years after the battle and found the remains of Sikh soldiers scattered throughout the field. The Sikhs were not able to burn their dead; the British built beautiful graves for their fallen soldiers.

These British graves lie outside of the famous Mughal emperor Jahangir's temporary burial place. I came here because I wanted to find out what happens to monuments after their patrons abandon them. I also wanted to see for myself the mausoleum that historians claim was once Jahangir Shah's burial place, but that local residents believe is the tomb of a Sufi saint whose name was Jahangir. On my way there, I met Mohammad Abdul Rahim, an old hakeem from Gujrat, and I asked him if he knew who was buried in this tomb.

---

15 According to a local legend, Shah Daula would grant fertility to barren women who prayed in his shrine and vowed to surrender their first-born child to the shrine's caretakers. The children offered to the shrine were called "Shah Daula's rats," because they had small heads and were believed to resemble rats. People also believed that if a mother did not fulfill her promise of giving away her first born to the shrine, then all her succeeding children would suffer similar malformations. The prominent Urdu writer Saadat Hasan Manto wrote a shorty story about the children of Shah Daula's shrine called "Shah Daula's Rat."

16 Alexander the Great and King Porus of the Hindu Paurav fought near the Jhelum River in 326 B.C. Porus's army lost the battle, but Alexander was so impressed by Porus's bravery that Alexander let Porus rule his own kingdom.

He explained to me, "People say a Sufi saint is buried here, but the truth is that the Mughal Emperor Jahangir was buried here after he died in Shopian. Ten or twelve villages were incorporated into the mausoleum's trust. A mosque and tomb were built here. Later, Jahangir's body was relocated to Lahore, but travelers continued to get food twice a day. Hundreds of kilos of flour were baked every day. More than a hundred fakirs and poor people were fed during the day and also at night. But now the trust does not provide for anybody. Now fakirs have to beg in bazaars."

I left Shah Daula's mausoleum behind and the voice of Baba Barkat Ali faded into the background. I spotted Jahangir's mausoleum, veiled behind fields and gardens. Outside the mausoleum, I found eight or ten graves made of pink plaster. At some point, they must have had crosses and angels, but now these graves are completely run down. The names of English colonels and generals had almost entirely faded off. I wanted to speak to a local resident and ask him who was buried in Jahangir's mausoleum, how did these British men die, and why are these graves in such poor condition? Out of the blue, I met a man who had answers to all my questions. Fazal Hussain has been the caretaker of this mausoleum for nearly forty years. He related such amazing stories about Jahangir's tomb and about the British soldiers' deaths that for once history simply had to accept defeat.

I suppose we can say Fazal Hussain is just a simple villager, but what he told me was certainly worth hearing. Far from Shah Daula's mausoleum and from Baba Barkat Ali Khan's songs about Medina, surrounded by Gujrat's farmlands, Fazal Hussain, wearing a turban, a long *kurta*, and a *tehmad*[17] and sporting a thick mustache, told me who was buried under the white dome.

"This is Hazrat Shah Jahangir Sahab Syed Pak's[18] mausoleum," he

17 A *kurta* is a long shirt and *tehmad* is a wrap wore by men.

18 Honorary terms.

said.

I asked him "Do you know when the graves of the English soldiers outside this mausoleum were built?"

Fazal Hussain explained, "These graves are from 1849. The English and the Sikhs fought a battle in Chillianwala. My relatives told me that after this battle the Sikhs fled here and hid in the homes of carpenters. The British followed them and threatened to kill anybody with a hair bun. So, Sikhs started cutting off their hair. Some Sikhs hid in the mausoleum. But when the English saw them, they started firing. They fired for one or two hours. All the officers that fired died. The English could not understand where the bullets were coming from.

"'The Sikhs don't have any ammunition. Then how are our soldiers dying?' they asked.

"So, the British gathered my relatives and other people from the village and asked them, 'Who is firing at us. Tell us who is shooting? Why are so many of our soldiers dying?'

"My relatives told the English that the saint buried in this mausoleum was a padre, a *syed*,[19] a sufi.

"'If you fire in his direction, the bullet will return and hit you. Don't fire at him.'

"After that, the English gathered their dead soldiers' bodies and buried them here."

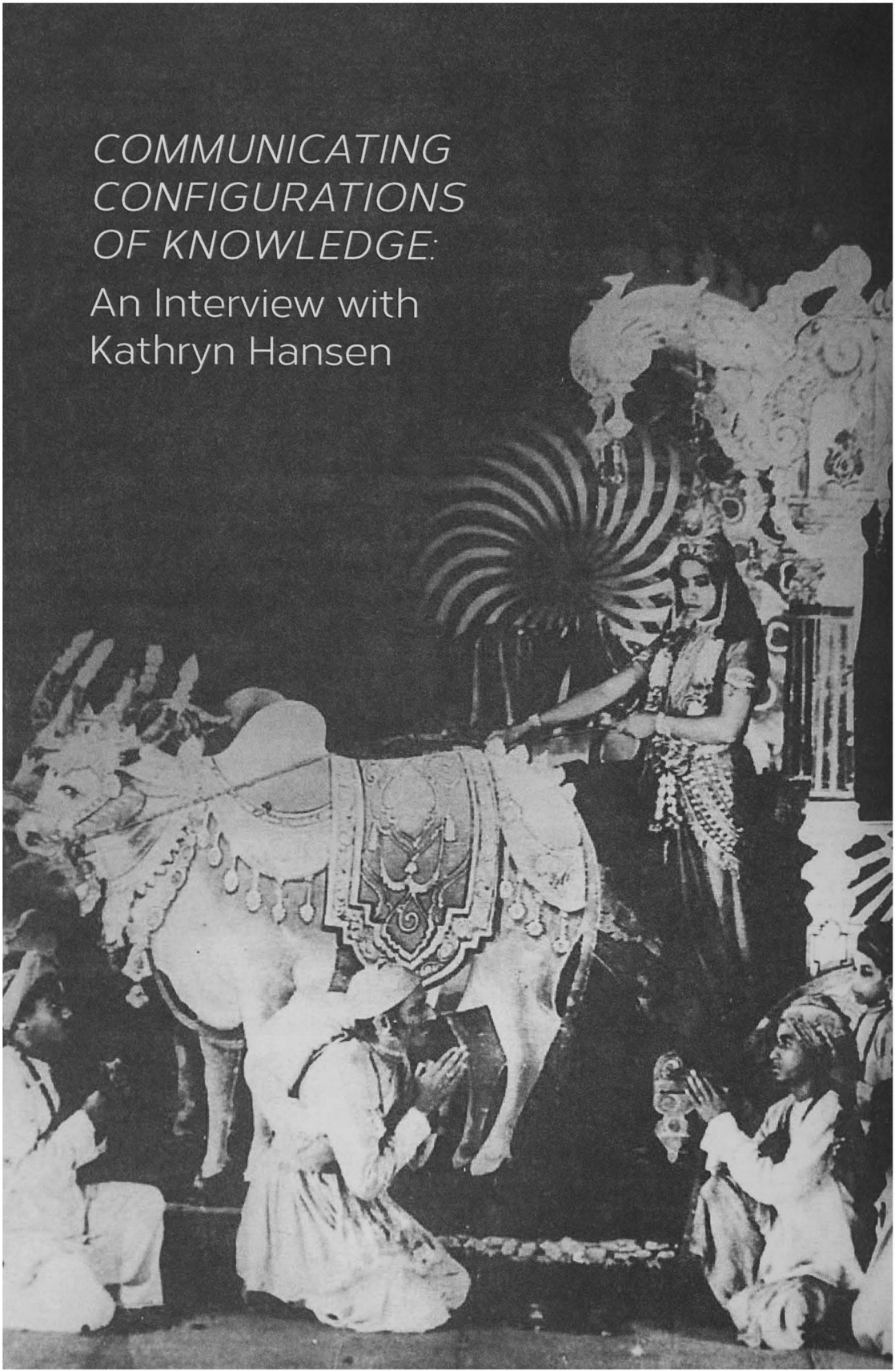
I then asked Fazal Hussain, "These graves are in terrible condition. Doesn't anybody take care of them?"

He said, "Now nobody takes care of them. The English used to take care of them. We take care of our own graves. We are not interested in the British. Animals graze here, defecate here. The English left. And, their importance also came to an end. Family members show respect. Strangers don't. If you have a relative, then you are worthy of reverence. Otherwise not."

19 A *syed* is a direct descendant of Prophet Mohammed.

COMMUNICATING CONFIGURATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE:

An Interview with Kathryn Hansen



THE INTERVIEW

In Kathryn Hansen's thirty-five-year career, she has produced an astoundingly large body of work examining several themes in South Asian theatre and literature. Her scholarship provides rich resources for those interested in theatrical and musical traditions in India, gender and performance theory, language politics, urban studies, and Indian cinema studies. In this interview, we discuss her contributions to these areas through her work as a translator. In her earliest work, Hansen translated a selection of stories by the "regionalist" writer Phanishwarnath Renu, which was published in The Third Vow and Other Stories *(1986). In her next book,* Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India *(1992), she included a translated excerpt from* Indal Haran, *transcribed from an All India Radio recording. As part of her extensive work on Parsi theatre, she translated a theatre history by Somnath Gupt,* The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development *(2005), as well as four autobiographies of prominent Parsi theatre personalities in* Stages of Life: Indian Theatre Autobiographies *(2011). She has also translated a number of articles on theatre history from English to Hindi for Indian academic journals such as* Natrang *and* Alochana.

–Suzanne L. Schulz, Sagar *Editor*

SLS — You have translated several different genres of writing from Hindi, Urdu, and Gujarati to English and have employed a number of innovative translation strategies throughout your career. Can you talk a little about the role of translation in your work? When have texts alone proved inadequate? When has it become necessary to supplement your texts with visual materials, appendixes and glossaries?

KGH — Translation has come to mean a lot of things to me. Fundamentally, translation is a bridge of communication that connects different groups by carrying meaning from one to the other. We tend to think of it as a way to expand the circulation of a text to new audiences. The activity of translating also involves the translator in a sustained search within the text for meaning. It produces deeper understand-

ing of how signification is constructed. I've found that translation as an intellectual process facilitates unexpected insights into linguistic choices and the mediating factors that produce them, genre, discourse, style, dialect, and so on. Bringing that more sustained engagement with the text into the translation is the big challenge we face as translators.

Images and other enhancements can enable apprehension of meaning, expanding the possibility of understanding, making it not entirely dependent on verbal cues and codes. Appendices and glossaries are schematic formats that make it easier to recognize details. They serve when complexity begins to obscure the perception of patterns. We have learned the practical benefit of these supplemental aids in our own exploration as researchers. What we tend to forget or underestimate is the struggle that the mind encounters when perceiving and ordering a new system. Translation is centrally about that process, about communicating configurations of knowledge.

SLS — How have your various strategies for translating, editing and annotating different genres of writing evolved? How have they overlapped with other aspects of your scholarly work?

KGH — As a language learner, I translated to make sure I understood the words and syntax and could convey a text in readable English. This is still an important aspect of how I teach Hindi: translation as auto-feedback. For my first book-length translation, the anthology of Renu's short stories, I thought annotation should be kept to a minimum in the interests of flow. Then with the Nautanki plays, the objectives were archiving and preservation, on the one hand, and re-contextualizing and re-presenting, on the other, so a fairly extensive scholarly apparatus was necessary. I didn't toy with the oral texts themselves: I treated the transcripts as artifacts, as sacrosanct. With Somnath Gupt's history of the Parsi theatre, I intervened quite a bit, enhancing the original with corrections, footnotes, illustrations, and

appendices to make it a more comprehensive (and hopefully interesting) reference. By the time of *Stages of Life*, my thinking about texts, authors, and selves had evolved with the literary theories of the day. I had moved away from the notion of the fixity of the word and its meaning, through the idea of multiple meanings, and to the possibility of meaning being ever fluid, constructed in performance.

SLS – For those who know you primarily as an expert on Indian theatre, can you speak a bit more about your early work on Phanishwarnath Renu? What unique challenges arose in translating Renu's writings? Why had his work resisted translation for so long?

KGH — My translations of Renu were something of a mish-mash, because of the ambiguity of the intended audience. They were done initially for a Western readership, then edited for publication in India, but without consistency. And there were other difficulties. Throughout my work on Renu, I had a lot of trouble finding experts who knew the local references. I was really interested in Renu's borrowings from oral culture (stories, songs, dramas), but I was only beginning to recognize the oral genres myself, let alone find anybody who knew about them. The process of discovery was much more than linguistic, and it really continued for years, as I turned to folklore and folk theatre as objects of study in their own right. The limits of my translations loomed large: it was very frustrating to be dealing with so many unknowns. I managed to produce something that was roughly workable, filling the gap for an author who was considered untranslatable precisely because of the local allusions and their obscurity. I suppose I decided that it was better to have something in English rather than nothing to represent such an important writer. For the anthology *The Third Vow*, I put untranslated words into a glossary at the back of the story collection. I didn't want to "intrude." And yet the curious thing was that Renu himself provided footnotes to his novels and stories. He had to gloss his own texts, such were their difficulty!

SLS – What in particular attracted you to Renu's story "The Third Vow" and its film version *Tisri Kasam* (Bhattacharya, 1966)? As you have written, the film is an anomaly among popular films of its time and is itself a kind of translation of Renu's regionalism—shot on location in Bihar and featuring folk instruments and regional language dialogues. Thinking about your shift from Renu to Nautanki, how did you adapt your translation strategies when you confronted the story, the film, and the other rich materials of *Grounds for Play*?

KGH — "The Third Vow" led me to Nautanki, because it revolved around an actress who works in a traveling Nautanki company. I needed to know more about the context of that folk theatre, and about its stories and songs, an example of which was present as Renu's story's subtitle, "Mare Gaye Gulfam." When I discovered a large cache of *sangits* (libretti) in London and connected them to the Nautanki/Swang performance style, I knew I had a major project in front of me. Out of this trove new imperatives emerged: to describe the repertoire, which was really huge, and to preserve the texts, develop an archive. I'll come back to the archiving piece in a minute.

In writing *Grounds for Play*, the main task was reclamation. I was in essence translating a lost cultural text, to bring it out of its marginality and obsolescence into the discourse of today. As far as the specific translation of a sample libretto, *Indal Haran* was one of the radio recordings I collected, and it had to be transcribed first. We developed a verbal transcript and also rendered most of it in musical notation. I used the sung material in *Grounds for Play* for musicological and metrical analysis. Thus I had gained a feel for — and technical grasp of — the rhythms of the lines, their patterns and variations, which was quite exciting. Could I carry any of this into an English translation? Impossible: this was going to be simply an exercise in storytelling.

Indal Haran is one of the 52 episodes of the great Alha cycle, the old oral epic of Bundelkhand. Even to have the Nautanki version of the story in English would be valuable, I thought. Well, stories have

Fig. 1: Nainuram playing a virangana *(warrior-woman) / Natya Shodh Sansthan, Kolkata*

their essential features — characters, time, place, action, and such — but when one is dealing with the word-for-word transcript of a poetic drama (and this probably applies to folktales and narrative songs too), the basic information often is missing. The names and places are altered, elided, alluded to in cryptic ways. The Nautanki text of *Indal Haran* was quite opaque in Hindi. Consulting other versions of the story was one way of filling in the blanks, making sense out of the abbreviated references. In the finished translation, I added crucial facts in brackets. The translation appeared in an appendix, an odd strategy, now that I think about it.

SLS — Speaking of brackets and appendixes, your translation of Somnath Gupt's history of Parsi theatre is really one of my favorites. Your supplements to Gupt's original text are embedded so lovingly from start to finish, creating almost a book within a book: you perform the usual prefatory notes explaining the limitations of your interventions and thanking your university (and so does he); your endnotes, rearrangements, and additional images enhance Gupt's own notes and images. For me, this method makes visible processes of knowledge accretion usually hidden. The resulting text is both a valuable source of information on Parsi theatre within the architectural and social en-

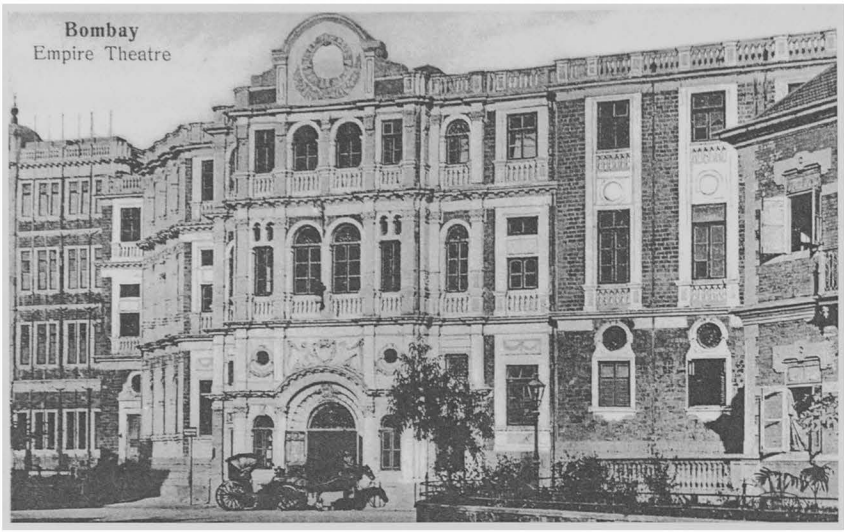


Fig. 2: Postcard of the Empire Theatre, Bombay, 1920s / Phillips Antiques, Mumbai

vironment of Bombay and a cultural artifact in its own right. Can you explain why you thought that translation of this text into English was "long overdue"?

KGH — I first translated some passages from Gupt for my own use. As time went on, I realized it was a core reference for me and could be useful for others as well. True, it was pretty dry, mainly an assemblage of details, not much narrative or analysis. To round it out, I intervened quite a bit, both to clean it up and correct some errors and to make it more appealing. The translation is not a book you can easily read cover to cover, but you can look things up in it, and it has an interest for the specialist. The apparatus was driven by the scope and variety of Parsi theatrical productions over a long period. Gupt was not an impartial source: but he understood the secular moorings of Parsi theatre and gave credit to all the communities involved with it. I suppose I translated this work to provide legitimacy to a forgotten art. When phenomena have a published history, they seem more real. Unless the history is published in English, however, it lacks authority, to say

nothing of the limitation on access. Books in Hindi pretty much get ignored beyond a small literati readership in India, and they go out of print very rapidly. Although certain publishers are making efforts to change this, the bias towards English-language publication in India is definitely greater now than when I began studying Hindi in the 1960s.

SLS — Can you think of other works like this that might be translated into English? What kinds of theater, performance, and autobiography archives—a few of which you mention in *Stages of Life* — might continue to be sources for future scholars who hope to contribute to the kinds of historiography that you have developed in your own scholarship?

KGH — I know of valuable works in several Indian languages, and I'm sure there are other books in Hindi too. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, sketches of theatre personalities, life stories of actors, and notes on theatrical productions started appearing in India. First they were focused on English theatre. It was a kind of gossip, who's who on the stage, what's showing where. As theatrical activity came to be concentrated in the hands of Indians, similar vignettes about Indian actors filled the pages of newspapers and magazines. So there is quite a lot of performance history available, in English as well as in regional languages like Bengali, Tamil, and Marathi. Commercial theatre flourished first in urban areas – Calcutta, Madras, Bombay – thus, it's natural that the sources would be in those languages.

SLS — Coming back to the issue of the balance between commentary and translation, in *Stages of Life* how were you able to navigate this challenge? It seems you had to choose between the presentation of an "archive" that has a very strong voice and the orchestration of that archive into a coherent narrative/historiography through commentary/analysis. Is there a poet inside every translator?

KGH — Yes, and sometimes that poet gets support to emerge due to intellectual trends that might seem quite tangential. I had already been intrigued by the idea of multivocality when I began writing *Grounds for Play*. In Chapter 1, I experimented with crafting a multistranded narrative, playing off different sources (Renu's short story, the libretto of *Sangit Nautanki*, some interviews with actors) against each other. This kind of interlaced structure is now ubiquitous in TV serials and novels. But it's still not that common in academic writing. Similarly, with *Stages of Life*, my thinking about autobiography was influenced by deconstruction and performance theory. The word and its meaning had lost the aura of permanence and truth; canonical texts were no longer viewed with the reverence of old. This was a huge boon for folklorists and people who were working on popular culture, since it opened the door to all kinds of projects. The possibility of meaning being always fluid, always constructed in performance, really created an expansive space.

This theoretical shift freed me to take even greater liberties in translation. With the autobiographies of Parsi theatre actors, I had lots of misgivings about reliability, whether the narrators were telling the truth. It turned out that a couple of them didn't even write their own autobiographies; they used collaborators or ghost writers. But they were all great raconteurs, able to talk about themselves with gusto at great length. I had to cut all of the autobiographies severely, take out a lot, trying to leave the juiciest bits. In this book, I think I achieved the right balance of commentary to translation: about 50/50. There's a lot of information on the authors and the theatre contained in footnotes, appendices, and introductory material. I also have several sections that are totally interpretive or theoretical. Maybe translation in this case was an occasion for me to perform, so to speak, to develop themes and elaborate upon them. Those actors' voices gave me an opportunity to orchestrate translation with background material and release layers of meaning.

SLS — Can you say more about how your training in Indian classical music has come in handy at various points throughout your career? How has your musical background shaped your research and your approach to translation?

KGH — For a long time, I was interested in Hindi and literary matters in India, while on a completely separate track I was immersed in learning Hindustani (and later Karnatak) music. I had the good fortune to meet and study from a great master, the sitarist Nikhil Banerjee, while I was a graduate student. That experience carried me into a depth of appreciation that was quite transformative. For a number of years after finishing my PhD, I practiced sitar religiously, and when I lived in Canada I performed publicly and also organized a number of musical events.

The musical aspect of my engagement with South Asia merged with my academic work when I discovered Nautanki, a folk opera form. For the first time, I was able to focus on a literary tradition that relied on music for its unique character. My training in Indian classical music enabled me to get beyond the negative appraisal of Nautanki's musicality. Most recordings of Nautanki singing at that time were quite distorted. The technology wasn't up to the job of capturing the traditional outdoor presentation style, where actors sing with full voice and often in high register. I realized by interviewing singers that the melodies were formulaic but very appealing, and that the entire musical ensemble (including drumming

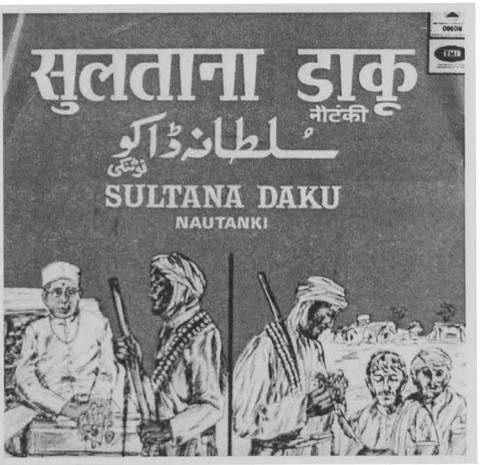


Fig. 3: Record jacket of the Nautanki Sultana Daku, *1970s / Personal collection of Kathryn Hansen*

on the *naqqara*, a specialized kettle-drum set) involved a lot of artistry. I wanted to write about how well-adapted the musical drama was to its environment, how moving it must have been for audiences in the days before mass media.

Then, I suppose, the idea of improvisation was something that I imbibed from Indian music. I went through a phase of trying to figure out how to play *alap*, being completely puzzled about how you improvise on a few notes so that it is your own invention, while conforming to the stylistics of *alap*. I would dream about how to do it, but still not be able. I think it is similar to a phase in language learning, where you understand the language and know a lot of words but are struggling to become fluent. You suddenly start speaking, like a child. Improvising was that kind of skill, and getting the hang of it had a big impact on my writing and translating. All of these activities are forms of expression, and for me the breakthrough into expression is a challenge and a thrill. Again, it's about apprehending a new system, configuring it, communicating it back.

SLS — Can you think of a way, perhaps using digital archives, that scholars might more readily present to readers the musicality and meter of forms of Indian theatre and performance? What should be the role of scholarship more generally in efforts to archive, preserve, and promote such forms (an effort you yourself undertook for Nautanki *sangits*)?

KGH — When we talk about preserving and archiving something like folk plays, we have to explore our assumptions about fixity and change. What is the thing we are trying to preserve? How fixed is it, and how mutable? Is change okay? What if change leads to contamination, or even extinction? Folklore theory has moved away from the concept of the Ur-text, the search for pure origins, the ideal form of the story or song. The prevalent opinion is that the object of study is the text/performance as we find it in the present moment, bearing all

of its changes, mediations and adaptations. The problem is that these changes can't be recognized if there is no prior entity for comparison. Personally, I'm not compelled to search for the "original form" of a story, song, or play; I don't care that much about the earliest manifestation of a text. But I am interested in boundaries, in what defines a genre, what endures to create continuity over time.

My approach has been to mobilize historical awareness and make use of different kinds of sources to create a longer view. By looking at a larger set of data, we can identify similarities and differences and create aggregates that reveal common characteristics. For example, Nautanki as a genre can be identified by its distinctive meters. These are visible in the texts of the nineteenth century as well as the performances nowadays. With a firmer grasp of how the genre coheres, preservation makes sense as an effort to record and document samples of it at a particular juncture. It's not as though these samples inherently possess greater legitimacy. They will probably acquire that added value by being archived. So archiving is an intervention, and we need to be clear about that. It does fix the text and reify its features. But it also has the power to make the text accessible. Again, "access" is not the same for everybody everywhere. Still, because of the possibility that access may broaden the reach of communication, I'm in favor of it.

I agree that with digital media becoming widely accessible, we have more tools now and can attempt a multimedia approach to preservation. I don't know of any models yet for this. Videotaping live theatre, especially musical theatre, is a challenge, and of course it is costly. Still, it is more common now for ethnomusicology monographs to include a CD or DVD. YouTube is a real instructional resource: there is so much amateur video that has merit. I expect the frontiers to keep shifting.

SLS — Let's return to "old media" for a moment — can you talk about your experiences having a dual publishing life in the United States

and India? What have been the rewards of publishing in both places? What kinds of relationships, legalities, and sensibilities must one negotiate in order to do this effectively? Have you ever felt there was something you couldn't say, had to say differently, or needed to say more emphatically in either context?

KGH — When I started going to India and meeting living authors, invitations came to translate their stories and publish them in little magazines in India. This was a different enterprise from my student exercises, translation for consumption as "literature." The stakes were higher in regard to accuracy and style, plus there was the issue of the Indian reader, who did not need (or want) awkward equivalents of kinship terms, food and dress items, or culturally specific vocabulary.

After *The Third Vow*, my interests turned towards folklore material that was equally obscure for Indian and Western readers. I would have been able to skirt the issue of the distinct readerships for a while, except for the fact that I became very involved with gender theory. Gender norms had been evolving in South Asia as elsewhere, but it really was a little cheeky to speak to Indian feminism, and insert my voice as I did with my article on heroic women (*viranganas*), where I argued for a third model after Sita/Savitri and the Shakti goddesses. Surprisingly, this piece has been the most reprinted of all my articles, and reprinted in books assigned on syllabi in India.

Over the years, networks grow to reflect the relationships we build. I look back with pride at the years I've enjoyed with my Indian friends who were leaders in women's studies, gender studies, and feminist activism. It's really such an honor to have known them, and their work and perspectives have created a context for my scholarly growth. They've helped me develop as no other network has.

I don't censor my presentations in India. I've found that academic audiences everywhere have very high standards, so it's essential to give one's best effort and be ready to defend one's argument. When I read a paper once at the Sahitya Akademi on female impersonation

and gender formation, the veteran artist Fida Husain was sitting in the front row, eagerly taking it in. He had been a female impersonator himself in his youth. The academics in the audience responded in their usual style, but he gave an appreciation in Hindi at the end that touched me the most.

As far as legality is concerned, earlier in my career I never worried about it. Piracy was the norm and nobody bothered about copyright. That's still true in some cases, but there's more of an attempt now in India to clear copyright and get permissions. With the Gupt book, we had to find the heir, who was a Superintendent of Police in Rajasthan, and get his consent—not easy! Over this duration, academic publishing in India has taken enormous strides and played a huge role in fostering South Asian studies globally. I'm immensely gratified to have been published by Rukun Advani's press, Permanent Black. It's only ten or eleven years old, but it has done remarkable work.

SLS — An SP in Rajasthan? Incredible! One thing that really strikes me about your work is that you have been able to convey the idioms of Bombay as well as those of the *qasbas* of North India. Because theatrical companies travelled extensively in India, your research compels us to understand both their cosmopolitan and local orientations. What has this aspect of your work taught you about the travels of Hindi, Urdu, and other languages of the theatre more generally?

KGH — Hindi, Urdu, and other languages of India are so capacious, they reveal so many variants and inflections historically as well as geographically. It's fascinating to think about how certain kinds of theatre and literature communicate with their audiences at different points along the social spectrum. I've looked at the Hindi literati's reaction to Renu's writing right after Independence and their buttoned-down approach to language. His fiction was saturated with localisms, and it challenged the idea of a standardized version of Hindi that they were promoting. Nautanki probably appealed to Renu's villagers because

it was still a notch more sophisticated than their own folk dramas. It had an allure, a promise of classiness that was carried through its Urdu verses. For cosmopolitan audiences, Parsi theatre did the same thing on a larger scale. It projected a European style of representation, drew on a broader universe of dramatic situations and tropes, and was linguistically quite eclectic. In each case, the appeal seems to be the expansion of boundaries, the encounter with new worlds. There is a desire to explore at the leading edge, which the language is able to facilitate because of its inherent plasticity. I've enjoyed working with this set of cultural media since Hindi links them all. These forms also defy some of the usual assumptions about social hierarchy, especially in the mutual exchange between the local and the cosmopolitan.

SLS — In *Grounds for Play*, you write that, "dictionaries are slanted mirrors of language and society, reflecting the linguistic tapestries constructed by social, political, and economic forces at different moments of history" (13). Here, you are discussing the sidelining of "nautanki" and its omission from standard Hindi and Urdu dictionaries. Thinking more broadly, especially about the centrality of translation and the dictionary in South Asian studies, what advice would you give junior translators inclined to move beyond the limitations of dictionaries and other accessible objects of study?

Fig. 4: Page from a lithographed sangit *(Nautanki chapbook), 1870s / India Office Library, London*

KGH — Knowing one language even extremely well is usually not enough. For anyone training to work in or translate from South Asian languages, I would stress the need to study Sanskrit, historical linguistics, and secondary languages as appropriate to one's field. This is because the borders between languages are so fuzzy in the South Asian context. One language interpenetrates another to a large extent. As far as dictionaries and their limitations, I'm afraid the problem is getting worse as South Asian languages are refashioned to catch up with the present. It has been a real challenge, collaborating on the translation of my scholarly articles into Hindi. Some of the theoretical and conceptual vocabulary has to be coined on the spot by the Hindi-speaking translator, and I wonder how it comes across—probably as even more obscure than the original English! Nonetheless, we need more and better translations, and part of the excitement of this kind of mental activity lies in the sleuthing.

SELECTED WORKS OF KATHRYN HANSEN

1986 — Renu, Phanishwar Nath. *The Third Vow and Other Stories.* Translated by Kathryn G. Hansen. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986.

1986 — Hansen, Kathryn. "*Bharatiya Lok Paramparaen Aur Adhunik Rangmanch* [Indian Folk Traditions and the Modern Stage]." *Natrang (New Delhi)* XLVI (1986): 22-29.

1988 — Hansen, Kathryn. "*Tisri Kasam* (The Third Vow): The Story and the Film." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1988): 214-22.

1988 — Hansen, Kathryn. "*Renu Ki Anchalikta: Bhasha, Rup Aur Vidha* [Renu's Regionalism: Language, Form, and Genre]." *Alochana (New Delhi)* 87 (1988): 37-54.

1988 — Hansen, Kathryn. "The Virangana in North Indian History: Myth and Popular Culture." *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 18 (Apr. 30, 1988): WS25-WS33.

1992 — Hansen, Kathryn. *Grounds for Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

1998 — Hansen, Kathryn. "The Migration of a Text: The *Indar Sabha* in Print and Performance." *Sangeet Natak* 127-128 (1998): 3-34.

1999 — Hansen, Kathryn. "Making Women Visible: Female Impersonators and Actresses on the Parsi Stage and in Silent Cinema." In *Women, Narration and Nation: Collective Images and Multiple Identities,* edited by Selvy Thiruchandran. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1999.

2001 — Hansen, Kathryn. "The *Indar Sabha* Phenonmenon: Public Theatre and Consumption in Greater India (1853-1956)." In *Pleasure and the Nation: The History and Politics of Public Culture in India,* edited by Chris Pinney and Rachel Dwyer. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

2002 — Hansen, Kathryn. "Parsi Theatre and the City: Locations, Patrons, Audiences." *Sarai Reader* 2002. The Cities of Everyday Life (2002): 40-49.

2003 — Hansen, Kathryn. "Languages on Stage: Linguistic Pluralism and Community Formation in the Nineteenth-Century Parsi Theatre." *Modern Asian Studies* XXXVII, no. 2 (2003): 381-406.

2004 — Hansen, Kathryn. "A Different Desire, a Different Femininity: Theatrical Transvestism in the Parsi, Gujarati, and Marathi Theatres, 1850-1940." In *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, edited by Ruth Vanita. New York: Routledge, 2004.

2005 — Gupt, Somnath. *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development.* Translated and edited by Kathryn Hansen. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2005.

2005 — Hansen, Kathryn and David Lelyveld, eds. *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

2009 -- Hansen, Kathryn. "Staging Composite Culture: Nautanki and Parsi Theatre in Recent Revivals." *South Asia Research* 29, no. 2 (2009): 151-68.

2011 — Hansen, Kathryn. *Stages of Life: Indian Theatre Autobiographies.* New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011.

CONTRIBUTORS

Garrett Field specializes in music of Sri Lanka and South India. His work has appeared in *Ethnomusicology Review*, and *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*. In 2013, he received the PhD in ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University for his dissertation entitled, *Music for the Majority: Sinhala Song and the 1956 Cultural Revolution of Sri Lanka*.

Isabel Huacuja Alonso is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation is on the history of radio broadcasting in colonial India and independent India and Pakistan. Her research was funded by fellowships from AIIS and AIPS. She was born in Mexico City, grew up on the US-Mexico border, and occasionally writes about South Asia for the Mexican magazine *Algarabia*.

Imran Khan is a PhD student and Assistant Instructor in the department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He currently teaches Urdu at UT-Austin, as well educational psychology at Austin Community College. His dissertation investigates discourses of Islam and feminism in twentieth-century Urdu poetry. Prior to joining the Asian Studies program, he taught social studies at Bowie High School in Austin.

Madhu Singh is an Associate Professor in the Department of English & Modern European Languages at the University of Lucknow, India. Her primary research interests include South Asian literature, Modern Hindi literature, and Indian progressive writing. She also writes on parallel cinema and Indian theater. Her translations from Hindi to English include works of short fiction by established Hindi writers such as Nirmal Verma, Bhisham Sahni and Muktibodh. She is currently translating *Thehre Hue Terah Saal,* a Hindi memoir of contemporary socio-political significance.

SherAli Tareen is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA. He received his PhD in Islamic Studies from Duke University. His work is on Muslim reform movements in colonial India. He is currently writing a monograph entitled "Islam and the Ethics of Authenticity: Tradition, Reform, and Innovation" that examines intra-Muslim polemics on questions of law and theology in 18th and 19th century India.

SUBMIT TO SAGAR

We accept submissions for our annual issues every October and response pieces for online publication throughout the year. Manuscripts should follow the 16th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style.* Entire essays, including block quotations and notes, should be double-spaced. Please remove any identifying information so that submission is suitable for anonymous review.

(1) Full-length research articles: Full-length-articles should be between 8,000 and 10,000 words and should include a one-paragraph article abstract.
(2) Original translations: Translations should be between 3,000 and 6,000 words and should be preceded by a 1300-1600 word introduction that contextualizes the text or excerpt. Please send a scanned copy of original source text along with your submission.
(3) Online essays: Online essays should be 1500 words or less, and where applicable should include images and or links to relevant images and recordings.

Please submit electronic copies of papers saved as Microsoft Word file and include a 150-word biography and publishable images with credits, where applicable. Submissions of articles and translations received after October will be considered for the following year's issue of *Sagar.* in the case of online essays, we will continue to publish them throughout the year. Send all electronic manuscripts and/or questions to sagarjournal@ gmail.com.

Sagar: A South Asia Research Journal
Sagar Editorial Collective
C/o South Asia Institute
University of Texas at Austin
WCH 4.132, Mailcode G9300
Austin, TX 78712
512-471-3550

IN THIS ISSUE:
translations of the work of:

HAJI IMDADULLAH
translated by SherAli Tareen

MAHAGAMA SEKERA
translated by Garrett Field

NIRMAL VERMA
translated by Madhu Singh

PARVEEN SHAKIR
translated by Imran Khan

RAZA ALI ABDI
translated by Isabel Huacuja Alonso

• • •

and a special interview with
KATHRYN HANSEN

SAGAR

a south asia research journal