

## INDO-PERSIAN NARRATIVE LITERATURE

**Overview** Indo-Persian literature is something of a Cinderella in the histories of Indian literature. Neither fully 'Indian' nor authentically 'Persian/Islamic', it has fallen between these two stools and represents a failure on behalf of most (but certainly not all) scholars to recognise hybrid literatures. This is a serious oversight since the amount of literature written in Persian in the Indian subcontinent up to 1850 is far greater than that produced in Persia (Iran) proper. This should not be a surprise, however, as from the start of Muslim rule in Ghazni (c. 1000 CE), on the northwest edge of India, Persian became the court language of nearly all Muslim courts in the region. The establishment of the mystical brotherhoods, mostly in the Sufi tradition, was also responsible for fostering sung poetry and popularizing Indo-Persian literature among the whole population. As Muslim rule moved into the Hindu heartland and even into the deep south, Persian literary genres moved with it, flowering most spectacularly in the Mughal courts at Delhi and Agra, as well as in the Deccan (central India).

Over the span of six centuries (13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>), two or three great names stand out. One is Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 CE), who flourished during the period of the Delhi Sultanate and wrote both prose and poetry. Another name, at the other end of the chronological spectrum is Ghalib (1797-1869), who wrote exquisite poetry in both Persian and Urdu. Ghalib takes us beyond the heyday of Indo-Persian literature, when the mantle of Muslim literature was passed on to the Urdu language. But it should be pointed out that even during most of the colonial period, until 1835, Persian remained the official language in the territories under British rule.

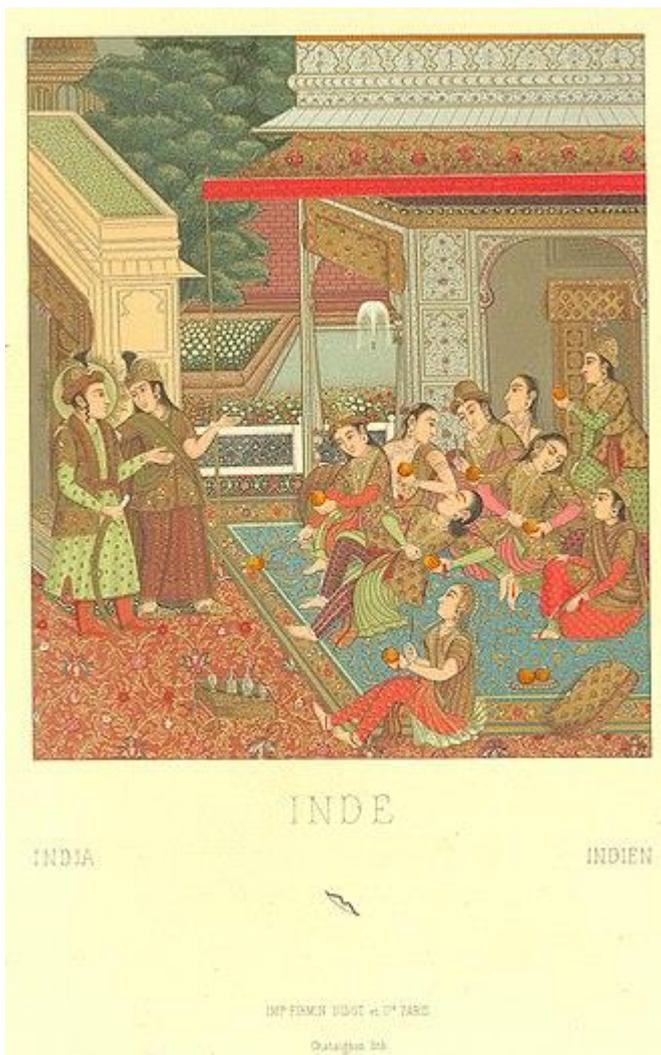
While the most significant piece of Indo-Persian storytelling is undoubtedly the *Hamzanama* (see separate essay on this text), a number of other important works also appeared. Several of these narrative texts are retellings of stories that derive from Indian sources but are nonetheless remarkable for that; it should be remembered that most Indian texts are themselves adaptations or revisions of earlier variants.

**History** With founding of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206, the wealth of Muslim rulers attracted many excellent poets and scholars from Persia and Central Asia to India. The shift of the Sultanate's court from Delhi to Daulatabad in central India in 1327 then contributed to the spread of Indo-Persian literature to that region and further south, as well. During this late phase of the Sultanate, the Indo-Persian genre of *masnavi*, romantic stories told in rhymed couplets, were popular as were historical tales.

By the beginning of the Mughal Empire, in 1526, Persian language and literature was becoming well-known among Hindus who helped to administer the empire. The apogee of the tradition was achieved during Akbar's rule (1556-1605), when several Sanskrit narratives (*Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Kathasaritsagara*) were translated into Persian and produced in illustrated manuscripts. When book printing began on a larger scale in early 19<sup>th</sup> century India, Indo-Persian publishers rapidly achieved high standards, bringing forth numerous innovations in the arts of calligraphy, manuscript illumination and bookbinding. Moreover, with the introduction of lithography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, India became the main centre for the production of Persian books and journals.

**Genres** India made a significant contribution to Persian narrative poetry when, at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Amir Khusrau, at the court of the Delhi Sultan, wrote *Hasht Bihisht* ('Eight Heavens'), as a response to a poem composed a century earlier in Persia itself. Coincidentally, this first important text of Indo-Persian narrative literature was also the first Persian book to be directly translated into a modern European language (Italian) in 1557. 'Eight Heavens' is both a cosmological term and an architectural form that developed in Persia. Khushal then adapted it as the central structure for a narrative poem composed in the manner of the *1001 Nights*. Within a frame-story about prince Bahram, Khushal included many folk-tales told to amuse Bahram as he sat in eight different pavilions. These eight pavilions are linked with the eight heavens in Persian cosmology, each with a gate and a special space decorated with a different kind of stone. Khusrau also made a significant contribution to the production of didactic *masnavis* written during the Delhi Sultanate.

In addition, Persian writers composed long narratives, such as the *Padmavat*, which is epic in scope and has many versions and redactions. The story concerns a 14<sup>th</sup>-century battle between a Hindu raja and a Muslim army but succeeds in turning these bare bones of history into a morality tale that expresses the joy of transcendental love and the union of a human soul with god. The most complete manuscript we have was written in Awadhi (a Hindi dialect) in 1540 CE by Malik Muhammad Jayasi. Although written from a Hindu point of view, it shows Persian influences in style and forms. Other famous narratives include adventure tales like the *Hamzanama*, while some narratives, like the *Tuti Nama*, were adapted from Sanskrit tradition. Still others were Persian retellings of biblical tales, such as *Yusuf and Zulaikha*, which is a version of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Probably the most famous version of this text was included in 'Seven Thrones' (*Haft Awrang*) by Jami (1414-1492 CE).



(image of a book cover taken from an illustrated manuscript of *Yusuf and Zulaikha*, c. 16<sup>th</sup> century)

**Historiography** Historiographical writing also experienced a special flowering when Persian poets came to India and served in the courts of Turkic rulers. One of the earliest histories of the world is the *Ṭabaqāt-e nāseri* by Menhāj al-Serāj Juzjāni (d. 1260), which narrates events from the Creation to the Mongol invasion of Delhi. Local histories of a single dynasty or a single ruler were common, too. Notable among these are five historical *masnavis* by Khusrau, each dedicated to a single figure. Other lesser poets composed similar mini-epics in honour of a specific Mughal emperor. Historical chronicles included several versions of an epic poem about Alexander the Great (*Eskander-nama*). This tradition continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a curious text entitled *Jarj-nama* ('The Book of [King] George [III]').

Biography and autobiography also flourished. Two important autobiographies were written during the Delhi Sultanate. The first is now lost but has been tentatively attributed to Muhammad bin Tughluq (c. 14<sup>th</sup> CE), one of the Turkic kings of the Delhi Sultanate. As he left no son, his cousin, Firuz Shah Tughluq, succeeded him and wrote his own autobiography, a 32-page memoir called *Futuhat-e-Firozshahi*. It is a series of disjointed anecdotes about the author's hunting and military expeditions, plus his comments on various topics such as medicine, astronomy and archaeology. In one passage, he describes how visiting governors brought him hordes of slaves, whom he meticulously recorded in a ledger and then credited back to the governor's provincial treasury. Later, we have the well-known Mughal-era texts of *Baburnama* and *Akbarnama* (both the subject of a separate essay).

A sub-genre within this broad category of historiographical writing is the brief biography of a poet. Called *tadkera* (*tazkera*, *tazkirah*), these short life-histories combined prose narrative with examples of their subject's poems in verse. This form relies primarily on the saint's poems or songs, interspersed with descriptions of their miraculous deeds (compare the essay on the *Periyapuranam* in Tamil). The earliest of these is *Tazkirat al-Awliyā*, a complex work of 72 chapters telling the lives of as many saints and composed by Shaikh Farid al din Attar in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. However, the most famous is probably Saiyid Muhammad Bin-Mubarak's biography of his mentor, the 14<sup>th</sup> century teacher Harzat Sultan-ul-Mashaikh of the Chishti order. The *tadkera* tradition continued right up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a large number were written. At a time, when Urdu was taking over from Persian, it seems that Indo-Persian writers decided to record Indo-Persian literary history by producing a flurry of these mini-biographies. One man, Laksmi Narayan Safiq (d. 1745), whose name shows Hindu influence, composed two important biographical anthologies of poets (*Gol-e ra'na* and *Sam-e gariban*).

Another, very popular, sub-category of this life-writing was the *malfuzat* ('dialogues'), which was a record of a Sufi saint's conversations with his disciples, including question-and-answer sessions. These texts typically include comments on the authenticity of the conversations and on the method of their collection. A good example is the *Favaid ul Faud*, compiled by Amir Hasan (d. 1328) who was a disciple of the famous Sufi saint Nizammudin.

**Cultural significance** Indo-Persian narratives represent a major transition in the history of Indian literature, forming a bridge from classical period to the early modern period. By taking material from Sanskrit story literature and refashioning it with Persian literary conventions and styles, these writers, coming from both Persia and Central Asia, forged a new kind of storytelling that contributed to the emergence of the novel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In some cases, the writers simply imported Persian models into the Muslim courts of India, where they took root and continued to thrive, albeit with some local variation, and ultimately passed on into Urdu, the language that took over from Persian in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became the vehicle for literary expression among Indian Muslims.

Persian writers also contributed to the European orientalist's discovery of classical Indian texts in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Dara Shikoh's translation of the *Upanishads* (*Sirr-e-Akbar*, 'The Greatest Mystery,' 1657) was taken by Bernier to France, where it was translated into Latin. And that Latin translation is what reached the German thinker Schopenhauer, who then praised it saying 'It is the most satisfying and elevating reading (with the exception of the original text) which is possible in the world; it has been the solace of my life and will be the solace of my death.'

As we have seen, Indo-Persian writers also made a vital contribution in various types of historiographical writing. The biographies and autobiographies of Muslim rulers, particularly those of the Mughal emperors, are regarded not only as among the finest in India but in pre-modern world literature as a whole. The period from 1200-1850 also saw the development of historical writing, ranging from expansive world history to regional chronicles. Not only did these stimulate the field of historical writing within India, but it also provides today's historians with invaluable information about those six centuries.

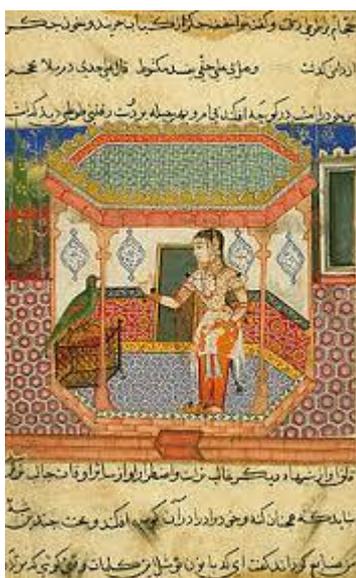
Finally, Indians can look back at the cultural mingling represented by Indo-Persian literature—Sanskrit dictionaries compiled by Persian scholars, Persian translations of Sanskrit classics and the blurring of Hindu-Islamic elements in Sufi writers. They can admire these examples of hybridity with pride and some hope that today's India can find similar syntheses with which to reconcile the deep divisions in society.

## Texts

### 1. Tuti Nama

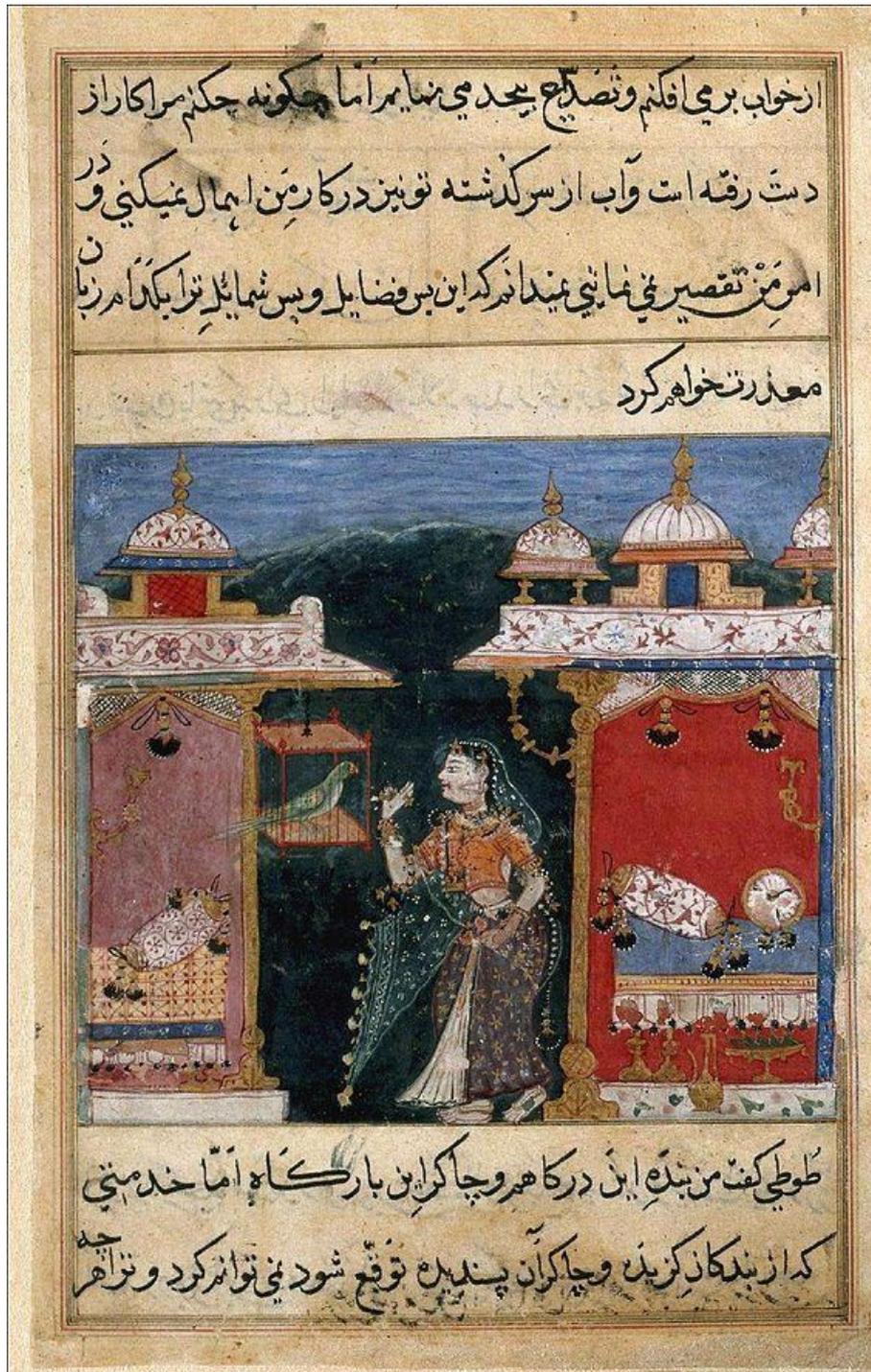
History: The *Tuti Nama* ('Story of the Parrot') is probably the best-known Indo-Persian narrative and exemplifies the role of these stories in Indian literary history. Written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by a physician named Nakhshabi (d. 1350?), it is an adaptation of an earlier Sanskrit text *Sukasaptatī* ('Story of 70 Parrots'). Curiously, Nakhshabi had already written a Persian translation of that Sanskrit text while in Persia; when he migrated to India and found a position at the court of a minor Muslim ruler in north India, he decided to try his hand at a Persian version of the story—not a translation but a retelling. In his *Tuti Nama*, he reduced the number of stories from 70 to 52, but retained the frame-story, which is that a parrot tells one story every night in order to prevent its mistress from having a love affair while her husband is away. This delaying tactic of storytelling is familiar to us from the *Thousand and One Nights*, and many of the stories in the *Tuti Nama* are well-known from other collections. Several versions of the tale-telling parrot were written in Persian, Sanskrit and other Indian languages, but this is the iconic text, which was later produced as an illustrated manuscript, with 250 beautiful miniature paintings commissioned by Akbar (the Mughal Emperor) in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Later, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this illustrated manuscript version of the story was revised by Dara Shikoh, who included only 32 tales, which became the one that eventually reached Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through versions in Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese, Italian and English. Some of these retellings are not so forgiving as the original Persian (or Sanskrit); for instance, the wife is killed when the husband returns. By the time the famous Italian writer Italo Calvino (1923-1985) got hold of the story, it had changed radically and the parrot is revealed as a prince.

The frame-tale: A merchant has to go on a long journey, leaving behind his beloved wife, Khojasta. Saddened, he asks his trusted birds, a mynah and a parrot, to keep her entertained while he is away. After he leaves, the wife ventures to the roof-top and sees a handsome stranger, whom she falls in love with. Through a go-between, she arranges to meet him the following night. When she tells the mynah not to tell her husband, it pleads with her to change her mind, but Khojasta gets angry and tries to strangle the bird. When the mynah escapes, she turns to her parrot with the same request: don't tell my husband. The parrot, having seen what happened to the mynah, adopts another tactic. The parrot says, 'Fine, but first listen to a story I will tell you. It will make you a more skilled lover.' She agrees and the parrot begins his tale, which enchants Khojasta. The time for the nocturnal tryst with her lover passes without her noticing and so the danger is averted. And the same is true of the next 51 nights, until the merchant returns. When the parrot tells him the truth, rather than rage at his wife he praises the parrot for saving her honour. The wife repents, and the couple are happily reunited.



(Illustrated manuscript of the *Tuti Nama*, c. 1570)

*Representative tale:* One night the parrot told Khojasta about a young Brahmin man who fell desperately in love with a princess. The situation was made worse by the fact that he had no chance of succeeding in his love quest because he was poor. Then he finds a magician who gives him a bag of beads, which turns him into a woman and he gains entry into her chambers. Once inside, the Brahmin reveals his true identity to the princess. But then the princess's brother falls in love with the Brahmin dressed as a woman, and the Brahmin has to flee to avoid revealing his true identity to others. Eventually all is well as the king understands the charade and rewards the brave magician and permits his daughter to marry the poor Brahmin. As day breaks, the parrot concludes the tale by advising Khojasta to remain happy with her husband.



(illustrated manuscript of the *Tuti Nama*; a parrot speaks to Khojasta at the beginning of the seventh night, c. 1570)

## 2. Padmavat

**History:** A second major Indo-Persian narrative also begins with a parrot. This is the epic poem of *Padmavat*, which tell the story of princess Padmavati. Again, like the 'Story of the Parrot,' it exists in multiple versions in different Indian languages, but the ur-text is that written by Malik Muhammad Jayasi in 1540. Although he wrote in the Awadhi dialect of Hindi, he used the Persian script and is considered a Sufi poet. His original manuscript does not survive, but it was copied many times, often with inner-linear Persian translations. The earliest surviving manuscript is dated 1675. A Bengali translation of the *Padmavat* was completed about the same time, after which the story enjoyed popularity in Bengal right up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, inspiring poems and plays adapted from this medieval story.

**Historicity:** Since the plot of the *Padmavat* is the controversial love of a 13<sup>th</sup>-century Delhi Sultan (Alauddin Khalji) for a Hindu queen (Padmavati of Chittor), it has been subjected to the truth-test by historians (and others less qualified to adjudicate on its historicity). Scholars point out that several Rajasthani oral tales and chronicles (such as the 18<sup>th</sup>-century *Bahrulamvaj*) do include reference to the core story, but these references might themselves derive from Jayasi's manuscript of 1540. It is interesting to note that the Italian traveller Niccolao Manucci mentions the story in his *Storia do Mogor* (1715), although he transfers the action to the time of Akbar in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Still other historians have pointed out the discrepancies in the dating of the events in the story, but most accept that Sultan Khalji did attack and capture the Hindu kingdom Chittor in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century and that some women of the royal court were killed and/or raped during the assault. The final word should probably go to Jayasi, the poet, himself, who concluded his story with these words: 'I have made up this story.'

**Synopsis:** Padmavati, princess of Singhal, has a beloved talking parrot. Her father, however, disapproves of her fascination and tries to kill the strange bird. The parrot escapes and ends up, after being captured by a rat-catcher, in the court of Ratnasen of Chittor. Ratnasen then listens to the parrot's description of Padmavati and is smitten with love. With the loyal parrot as his guide, he crosses the seven sea and arrives in Singhal, where he attempts to impress Padmavati by performing austerities in a temple. Padmavati hears of his actions and starts to long for him, but the two do not meet and Ratnasen is close to suicide before the gods intervene and save him. Eventually, Ratnasen attacks the fortress at Singhal, captures Padmavati and takes her back to Chittor, where they are married.

On the way, however, he is punished for his excessive pride in believing he has captured the most beautiful woman in the world. His ships are destroyed by a storm, although he and Padmavati are saved by the goddess of the sea. In Chittor, Ratnasen's love for her is tested by a series of incidents, which he passes. But then he has to placate his first wife, Nagmati. The drama takes a step forward when Ratnasen dismisses a Brahmin courtier for cheating in a game of dice. The disgruntled Brahmin ends up at the court of Sultan Khalji in Delhi, who listens to his description of Padmavati and falls in love with her. Soon, Khalji besieges Chittor and demands Padmavati. Ratnasen refuses and offers money instead. Negotiations then take place inside the fort and Khalji gets a sighting of Padmavati and his love is inflamed. Khalji captures Ratnasen and imprisons him in his fort in Delhi, but two of his loyal servants rescue him and take him back to Chittor. In Chittor, Ratnasen learns about a minor raja who tried to seduce Padmavati and challenges him to a fight, in which both men are killed. Then both Padmavati and Nagmati commit *sati* by dying on Ratnasen's funeral pyre. Meanwhile, Khalji's army reaches Chittor, and the women of the court commit suicide, knowing that defeat is certain. Khalji captures an empty fort and reflects on the nature of ambition and desire, telling himself that

'desire is insatiable, permanent, but this world is illusory and transient.'

नमस्तीसुवपुत्र



सौरीरुपुपडमावतीकेरा ।  
 जेहीसरवरमदहंसनशावा  
 देयकीन्दीअसीरुपुपुणा  
 लोनीवीलोनीकोकेहीकहै ।  
 मनमदगरबुनक्येकाहु ।  
 काएहहसिधलकीनप्री ॥  
 पुदपसगंपसोतीन्दहीकाया

दसासुशरानीसपहेरा ॥  
 तेहीसरवगुलीहंसकहावा  
 एकएकतेअधीकसहपा ॥  
 लोनीसोईजाहीपीउबदे ॥  
 बंदघाटीजेहीलागेउराहु ॥  
 दीनहीकीएछीहीनीसीअधि करी  
 मावछाडीकावरनौपाया ॥

गहीसोसोनेसोधेभरीसोहपसोहाग ॥ १ ॥  
 सुनतसुषीगेएनीहीएलोअसलाग ॥ १ ॥

(illustrated manuscript of the *Padmavat*, c. 1750)

### Texts in translation

#### 1. The first tale of the *Tuti Nama* (translated by F. Gladwin, 1801)

One of the princes of former times, whose name was Ahmed Sultan, possessed much riches and effects, with a numerous army, so that one hundred thousand horses, fifteen hundred chains of elephants, and nine hundred strings of camels of burthen, stood ready at his gate. But he had no children, neither son nor daughter. He therefore continually visited the worshippers of God, to engage their intercession in his favour; and day and night, morning and evening, was himself offering up prayers for a son. After some time had passed in this manner, the Creator of heaven and earth bestowed on the aforesaid king a son, of beautiful form, his countenance resplendent as the sun, and his forehead resembling the moon. From the delight occasioned by this event, the heart of Ahmed Sultan expanded like a new-blown rose; he bestowed many thousand rupees on dervishes and fakirs: for three months, the viziers, sages, learned men, and teachers in the city, were feasted; and he gave away costly dresses. When the above-mentioned son arrived at the age of seven years, he was placed under the direction of a master, perfectly versed in every kind of knowledge.

In a short time he read the alphabet, with the conjugations of verbs, and by degrees several other sacred texts, and acquired complete skill in the Arabic and Persian sciences. He also learnt the ceremonies to be observed in the royal council, as well as the rules for conversation and deportment at an imperial banquet; and met with approbation in the sight of the king, and all the nobles of the courts.

His father called him Miemun, or auspicious, and married him to a wife, whose body was fair as the silver moon, and her countenance enlivening as the sun. The name of this lady was Khojasta, or prosperous. Between Miemun and Khojasta there was such excessive intimacy, friendship, and affection, that every day, from evening till morning, they were inseparable: they slept in one place, and always sat together.

One day Miemun rode in a palanquin to take a view of the market-place, where he beheld a person standing with a parrot-cage in his hand. Miemun said to the parrot-seller. Tell me what is the price of this bird? The parrot-seller answered, 'The price of it is the sum of a thousand rupees.' Miemun replied, 'The person who could give so large a sum of money for a handful of feathers, and a cat's morsel, must be an ignorant blockhead.' To this, the parrot-seller was unable to give an answer. At that interval, the parrot thought thus to itself, 'If this rich man does not purchase me, his refusal will occasion evil and misfortune; for it is only by associating with great and intelligent minds, that the understanding can be improved.'

Then the parrot replied: 'Oh beautiful youth! endowed with riches, and master of every accomplishment, although I appear in your sight nothing but a handful of feathers, yet, through the power of wisdom and knowledge, I can soar above the sky; and the eloquent are struck with wonder, and are astonished on listening to my sweet discourses. The meanest art that I possess is, that any action of past time, or to come, I know at present: the business of to-morrow I am acquainted with to-day. Now, for instance, the caravans of Kabul will come to this city, and buy all the ointment that is in it. You must purchase all the ointment in the place; hoard it up, and sell it after the arrival of these travelling merchants, from which traffic you will derive considerable advantage.'

Miemun, having heard, understood and approved the words of the parrot, gave the owner a thousand rupees, the price of the bird; and having bought it, carried it to his own house. He sent for all the ointment in the city, and asked the sellers the price thereof. The ointment dealers said, 'The price of the whole is ten thousand rupees.' In the same hour he paid the aforesaid sum from his own treasury, and purchased the ointment, which he stored up in one of his palaces.

The third day, according as the parrot had predicted, the people of the caravan of Kabul arrived, and made great search amongst the merchants and traders, but could nowhere find out any ointment, because Miemun had bought the whole of that article in the city. The people of the caravan came into the presence of Miemun, and having bought the ointment for the sum of fifty thousand rupees, set out

for their own city. At length Miemun was much pleased and delighted with the conversation of the parrot, and bought another bird called a mynah, or mina, with the view that, by placing it in company with the parrot, the mind of the latter might be freed from the irksomeness of solitude; according to the saying of the sages.

"Kind fly with kind, pigeon with pigeon, hawk with hawk."

The intention of Miemun in placing the mynah along with the parrot, was, that these birds might be mutually pleased with the company of each other. One day Miemun said to Khojasta, " I am now going to perform a journey to a certain country, and shall also make a voyage in order to visit several ports. Whenever you have business to transact, or any weighty affair occurs, carry your intentions into execution, without the advice and consent of the parrot and the mynah." After speaking to this purport, he commenced his journey.

Khojasta expressed great sorrow at the departure of Miemun; and being separated from the possessor of her heart, she neither slept during the night, nor ate in the day. To be brief, the parrot dispelled the sorrows of her heart, by relating pleasant stories. At the expiration of six months, one day Khojasta, after having bathed herself, and adorned her person, was looking out of a window at the top of the house into the street; when a prince of another country, who had travelled into this city, having beheld the glowing cheeks of Khojasta, was distracted with love; and Khojasta also was fascinated at the sight of the prince. The same hour the prince sent a procuress to Khojasta, privately, with a message, that provided she would only take the trouble to visit his house any night, for four hours, he would present her with a ring estimated at many thousands of rupees.

At first, however, she did not agree to his proposal; but at length the instigations of the procuress prevailed; and she returned him for answer, that as day reveals, and night casts a veil over our actions, she would wait upon the prince after midnight. Early at night, after having arrayed herself in her finest and best apparel, she repaired to the mynah, and sitting down in a chair, thus reflected in her mind:

Because I am woman, and the mynah is also a female, she will certainly listen to my words on the present occasion, and give me leave to visit the prince. With this persuasion, she represented to the mynah all the particular circumstances of her case. The mynah advised her, saying, "You must not commit such an action, which is considered amongst your tribe as most heinous and disgraceful."

But as love had now gained the ascendancy over Khojasta, the mynah's refusal threw her into a rage. Seizing the bird fast by both legs, she pulled her out of her cage, and struck her against the ground with such violence that the soul took flight from the body, and she expired. Then, full of wrath and indignation, she came to the parrot, to whom she represented all her own desires, with the particulars concerning the mynah.

The parrot was endowed with understanding, and thought to himself: "If I refuse my consent, and raise objections like the mynah, I shall also be murdered." After making this reflection, he thus addressed himself to Khojasta, in the softest tone imaginable: "The mynah was a female, many of whom are deficient in wisdom; for which reason, those who are wise themselves ought not to reveal their secrets to any of the sex. Be not now uneasy or unsettled in your mind; as long as my soul continues in my body, I will exert my endeavours in this business of yours, and will gratify your inclinations. God forbid it should actually so happen! But if this secret of yours should be divulged, and your husband hear of it, I will make peace and tranquillity between you and him, like the parrot of Ferukh Beg." Khojasta asked, "What is the story of the parrot of Ferukh Beg? Tell it at full length, and you will oblige me."

The parrot replied, "In a certain country was a merchant, named Ferukh Beg, in whose house was a sagacious parrot. This merchant, having occasion to travel, gave in charge to the parrot all his goods and chattels, and also his wife. After which he set out on his journey, in order to trade in different countries; and continued absent some time, transacting his commercial concerns. Shortly after his departure, his wife became acquainted and enamoured with a young Moghul. Every night she introduced this young Moghul into her house; they slept in one bed, and continued together in the same apartment till morning. The parrot saw these proceedings, and overheard all their conversation;

however he was as secret as if he had neither seen nor heard. At the expiration of a year and a half the merchant returned home, and inquired of the parrot all the particulars concerning his household. The parrot informed the merchant of all the affairs of his house; but did not tell any circumstances concerning the woman because it would have occasioned a separation between man and wife. At the expiration of a fortnight, the merchant was greatly astonished to hear from the tongue of a stranger all the circumstances regarding his wife and the young Moghul; according to what the sages have said — that musk and love cannot be concealed. In short, the merchant was enraged at his wife, reprov'd and punished her. The wife naturally suspected the parrot of having discovered to her husband all her pranks; and thus believing the parrot her enemy, she took an opportunity at midnight of plucking off the bird's feathers; and, flinging him out of doors, called out to the male and female slaves of the family, that a cat had carried away the parrot.

The woman concluded in her own mind that the parrot was dead; but although he had been greatly injured by the fall, still some life remained; and at the expiration of an hour the parrot's body recovered a little strength and power of motion, Near the place was a burying-ground, whither the parrot repaired, and remained some days in the hollow part of a tomb. He fasted all day, and came out of the hole at night; and, as travellers were used to alight in this burying-ground, and there eat their victuals, during the night the parrot picked up their leavings, and then, taking a drink of water, returned into his hole in the morning.

After some time, all the parrot's feathers having begun to grow again, he was able to fly a short distance, just from one tomb to another, and then perching himself: and he ate such seeds as he could discover. Early in the morning after that night on which the parrot departed, the merchant got out of bed, and came to the cage, when, seeing that the parrot was not in it, he cried out aloud and threw his turban on the ground, being greatly troubled in mind. He was so enraged at his wife that he separated her from his bed and board; and, giving no credit to her protestations, drove her out of his house. The wife thought to herself, as I am repudiated by my husband, all the people of the town will speak ill of me; therefore, it is most advisable for me to repair to the burying-ground adjoining to the house, and expire for want of food and sleep.

Summarily she went to the burying-ground, and fasted one day. At night the parrot called out from his hole, woman! shave all the hair off your head and body with a razor, and remain forty days in the burying-ground without food, when I will pardon all the sins you have committed during the whole course of your life, and will make peace between you and your husband. The woman was astonished at hearing this voice, and thought to herself, certainly there is in the burying-ground the tomb of some pious, just and upright man, who will absolve me from my sins, and restore peace and concord between me and my husband. Then, under this persuasion, she shaved all the hair off her head and body, and continued some time longer in the burying-ground.

One day the parrot came out of the hole or tomb before described, and said, woman Without my having committed any fault, you plucked out my feathers, and afflicted me grievously. It is well thou hast executed what my stars had ordained. However, I have eaten your salt, and from that consideration will act well and friendly by you, because I am the purchased parrot of your lord, and thou art my lady. I spoke the words which came to you from the hole in the tomb; namely, that I will unite you to your husband. Be assured of my fidelity, and that I am not a back-biter, that I should have told your faults to your husband; but, on the contrary, I have preserved my allegiance to your bread and salt. Behold, even now I am going to your husband, and will reconcile him to you."

The parrot, having spoken these words, went to his master's house, and, standing before him, made obeisance, imploring for the blessing of long life, and increase of riches. The master asked, "Who art thou, and from whence do you come? Then recollecting the bird, he said, "Where have you been for some time past, and in what man's house have you dwelt? Tell me every item of your story." The bird answered, "I am your old parrot, whom a cat took out of the cage, and imprisoned in her belly." The master asked, "How were you restored to life again?" The parrot replied, "You drove from your house your innocent wife, who thereupon retired to the cemetery, and, after she had fasted forty days with great grief and lamentation, the Almighty, in commiseration of her condition, restored me to life, and said, 'O parrot! go to this woman's husband, and make peace between them; be thou even an evidence in this cause'."

The sum of the story is this: he departed from his house, and, having mounted a horse, came to his wife, and said, "Alas, my love! I have persecuted you, without your having committed any fault ; but now pardon my transgression." Then he brought his wife home, and from that time they lived together in perfect harmony and good understanding, in the full enjoyment of love and delight.

Miemun's parrot thus finished the tale of the merchant's parrot, and said to Khojasta, "Arise quickly, and go to the prince, that your promise may not be broken and violated. If, God forbid, your husband gets intelligence hereof, I am ready to establish peace and friendship, like the merchant's parrot." Khojasta, delighted at these words, was ready to go to the prince; but, at that instant the dawn beginning to appear, she postponed her departure. As Khojasta had kept awake all night to hear the story, she now retired, and reposed herself on her bed.

2. Padmavat (excerpts from the *Padmavat*, translated by Thomas de Bruijn, 2012)



(Memorial to the poet Jayasi at Ram Nagar, Amethi, built c. 1650)

A. In this first excerpt, the author explains his inspiration for the poem.

Saiyid Ashraf is my beloved teacher [*pir*]; he showed me the bright path.  
He lit the lamp of love in my heart; a light glowed and my heart became spotless.

The road was dark and invisible; a light shone and I understood everything.  
the poet and the literary field.

My sins had cast me in the salty ocean; he made me his pupil and put me in the boat of faith [*dharma*].

As a helmsman he firmly took my hand; I reached the landing on the shore.

He who has him for a helmsman will go swiftly and reach the shore.

He is a helper and companion for the distressed; where [the water] is deep he gives you his hand.

He is Jahāngīr and he is a Chishtī, he is spotless as the moon.

He is the master of the world, I am a servant in his house.

In his house there is one shining gem; it is Hājī Shaikh who is full of good fortune.

In his house there are two bright lights; God has created them to show the path. Shaikh Mubārak, who is like the full moon; Shaikh Kamāl who is spotless in the world.

These two are stable like the Pole Star; in this they even surpass the mountains Meru and Kīskindhā.

God gave them brilliance and beauty; he made them columns of the world.

As two columns they prop up the whole earth; with their weight they stabilize the world. When

someone has a vision [*darsan*] of them or touches their feet, his sins are taken away and his body becomes spotless.

Muḥammad [says], he who has a teacher and a pīr [guide] will have no sorrow on his way. He whose boat has both a helmsman and an oarsman will swiftly reach the shore.

B. In this excerpt, the poet begins his story.

It is the year 947 and the poet speaks the words at the beginning of his story. The Padminī is queen of Siṃhal Dvīp; Ratansen has brought her to the fortress of Cittor. 'Alā' al-dīn is the sultan of Delhi and Rāghav Cetan sang her praise to him.

On hearing this the *shāh* went to lay siege to the fortress; there was a battle between the Hindu and the Turk.

The poet and the bard are like a cup filled with *rasa*; near for him who is far away, far from him who is near.

Far from him who is near, like the thorn that sits next to the flower; near for him who is far away, like the syrup for the ant.

The bee comes from the forest to inhale the smell of the lotus.

The frogs sit next to it, but will never obtain it.

C. In this excerpt, the poet describes the fortress of a Sultan and includes himself in the scene.

On top of [the castle] are guards on all four sides; such is the incomparable abode of the sultan. He is first among men, he descends from 'Umar Khaṭṭāb.

White-washed verandas provide shade; there the splendid noblemen sit.

There is a minister present and learned pundits; there are also knights on horseback.

Some sit and read the scriptures; someone reads aloud a story from a book.

All bow their heads in the service of God; they bring their head to the ground seven times. Sweet-voiced singing enchants the heart; all the princes who sit there radiate.

There the poet Malik Muḥammad [the author] resides, nobody knows his secret; He is worth tons of millions, if he finds [the right] buyer

D. In this excerpt, the poet describes how Ratnasen tried to impress Padmavati with his asceticism.

The king renounced his kingship and became a yogī; in his hand he held a lute and he suffered from the separation. His body was unkempt and his mind rattled like a madman; he had become entangled in love and his hair was tied in knots.

His face that was like the moon and his body [that was anointed with]

sandalwood oil, he smeared it with ashes and made dust of his body.

He wore a belt, a horn, a ring and a puzzle; he put on the robe of the yogī, a string of beads and used a crutch.

Wearing his patchwork frock he took his staff in his hand; in order to become a mystic, he called out [an ascetic roar] and put earrings in his ears and a rosary around his neck; in his hand he had a bowl and a tiger skin on his shoulders.

He put sandals on his feet and held a parasol above his head; he took his begging bowl and donned red clothes.

He went around begging and prepared his body with penance and yoga;

I will achieve perfection when I get Padmāvati, for whom my heart pines.

E. This final excerpt describes Rantasen's struggle to obtain Padmavati's love in terms of a metaphor that likens the fortress to his body. Using Sufi terminology, much of it derived from Hindu practices, the poet explains how the hero must subdue the guards of the princess's castle (the passions).

Climbing the floors of the fortress (the *chakras* or spiritual points of the body), he finally enters the inner chamber (the mind), where the meeting with the beloved (god) occurs.

The fortress is crooked, like your body; examine it and see that you are its mirror image. It will not be conquered by a determined fight; he who knows himself will get it.

There are nine gates inside that fortress; five watchmen walk their beat there. There is a tenth gate that has a hidden entrance; it is an impossible slope and the path is very narrow.

Only a spy [who knows the secret] can get to that gate; when he jumps into the opening, he can climb in like an ant.

Underneath the fortress is a tunnel in a deep pool; I tell you, there is the path.

Like a thief who breaks open [a gate] to enter; like a gambler who makes a bet in a game.

Like a pearl diver who takes a plunge in the sea and only then will get the pearl; in that manner you should find that gate of heaven.

The tenth gate is tall like the palm tree; only he who has turned away his vision [from the world] gets to see it. He who goes with his breath and mind reigned in will climb it; he will plunge into it, like Kṛishṇa who dived into the ocean.

Master your mind and control your breathing; when you die, you will destroy the self. In public, talk only of worldly affairs; in secret, focus on what your mind desires.

The whole world is drunk, boasting of 'I', 'I'; when there is no 'you', all will be 'He'.

When someone dies once while he is alive, what can death do to him, who can beat him?

He is himself both the guru and the pupil; he is himself everything, even when he is alone.

He is Himself life and death, He is Himself body and mind;

He creates what He wants out of Himself, what need is there for another?

### **Reading**

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