Translation

Sajid Hussain

Facing exile, facing taunts*

<https://doi.org/10.33063/diva-419088>

Introduction:¹ Sajid Hussain (1981–2020) was born on 16 January 1981 in Mand, Balochistan, Pakistan. He received most of his education in Karachi. He held a BA in Economics but his main interest was literature, and in 2012 he completed his MA in Balochi and English at the University of Balochistan, Quetta.

In 2002 Sajid Hussain joined the Baloch Students Organization (BSO) which, in addition to organizing Baloch students, also has a political agenda.² After a few years, however, he abandoned his political activities and devoted himself increasingly to writing.

As a man of the written word, Sajid Hussain was first and foremost a journalist. His English was excellent and he had a flowing pen. He achieved great success as a journalist, and before going into exile he worked for Pakistani newspapers such as Daily Times and The News, as well as for Reuters. His writings covered sensitive topics such as drug trafficking and human rights violations in Balochistan. In 2012, he had to flee Pakistan due to threats made against him because of his journalistic activities. He spent some years in Oman, Uganda and Dubai before coming to Sweden in mid-2017.

In 2015, when he was living in Dubai, Sajid Hussain founded the online magazine *Balochistan Times*.³ This English and Balochi news magazine addresses current issues in Balochistan including human rights, political violence, abductions, and killings, as well as social and cultural issues. It also contains a literary section, where pieces are published in Balochi and English. Due to the broad scope of the work, he recruited a number of talented co-workers to help run the magazine, and even after his death articles and literary pieces continue to be published on the *Balochistan Times* website.

Soon after his arrival in Sweden, Sajid Hussain got involved with the Balochi Language Project at Uppsala University.⁴ Together with Professor Mousa Mahmoudzahi of Velayat University, Iranshahr, Iran, he launched a Balochi-English online dictionary in February 2019.⁵ He was furthermore engaged in authorship, text edition, and translation work. Sajid Hussain was also my main source of inspiration while writing *A Grammar of Modern Standard Balochi*, which was published in December 2019.⁶

In an interview with him carried out by Hammal Haider in February 2020 and posted on YouTube on 1 May the same year,⁷ Sajid Hussain endorsed the orthographic system for Balochi proposed by the Balochi Language Project. This script system was also adopted by the magazine *Balochistan Times* in spring 2020.

Sajid Hussain taught Balochi at the Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University. In January 2020 he was admitted to the MA programme in Iranian languages at the same department and began writing his MA thesis on Balochi argument structure as illustrated by religious sermons and

1 See also <https://thebalochistanpost.net/2020/05/sajid-hussain-obituary/> (Retrieved 2020-08-18)

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baloch_Students_Organization (Retrieved 2020-08-18)

3 <https://balochistantimes.com/> (Retrieved 2020-05-02)

4 <https://www.lingfil.uu.se/forskning/the-balochi-language-project/> (Retrieved 2020-08-18)

5 <https://www.webonary.org/balochidictionary/> (Retrieved 2020-08-10)

6 <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1372275&dswid=9941> (Retrieved 2020-08-10)

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Troo9srFXY> (In Balochi) (Retrieved 2020-05-10)

* Translated, with introduction, by Carina Jahani, Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, Sweden, E-mail: carina.jahani@lingfil.uu.se

political speeches. He was busy with this work when, on 2 March 2020, he went missing. On April 23, after several weeks of searching, he was found drowned in the River Fyris just north of Uppsala.

Sajid was a true lover of literature and was very well read in both English and Balochi literature. His love for the written word led him to engage in literary criticism as well as creative writing. The short story translated here as *Facing exile, facing taunts* is one of his masterpieces. It is semi-autobiographical, and although he claimed in a note to the original text that the characters in the story are purely fictional, it is clear to anyone who has known Sajid and his friends and co-workers that these personalities are largely inspired by his close friends and acquaintances. No one will miss the refined sense of satire in the original story. Even if some of it is lost in the English translation, particularly when Sajid is joking about Balochi dialect differences and the misunderstandings they cause, it is my hope that readers of the English translation will also detect and enjoy at least some of the subtle humour in the story.

Sajid was a highly motivated, reliable, capable and talented co-worker who left us far too soon. He was also a very kind and gentle man with a big heart for the people around him. His passing has left a huge void in the lives of his co-workers and friends. He is survived by his wife, Shahnaz Sajid, whom he married in 2010, and by his two children Taheer Baloch, born in 2011, and Shahan Baloch, born in 2015.

“Son, your work on earth is done.”⁸ May you rest in peace.

* * *

The story of my exile began on that unfortunate day when an ill-fated interest in literature came over me. It seems that every writer I liked had been in exile at some time. Marquez had been, Kundera too. Some had angered the government, others the army. By following in their footsteps I invited trouble into my hitherto trouble-free life. If I had known that following Marquez would cause me harm, I would never have fallen into that trap. Of course I believed that once one of us becomes a great author the critics will write “this man is the Marquez of Balochi literature.”

Everyone does these kinds of meaningless things when they’re young. I had a friend who always kept a stone in his pocket, and all day long he used to scratch his forehead with it. Because in a film Mithun Chakraborty had a red mark on his forehead. Mithun disappeared from the public eye, but the dent on my friend’s forehead remained.

That’s why it’s better to admire a movie star than a writer. A cousin of mine liked Sanjay Dutt. He went and did bodybuilding. I’d become entangled with Franz Kafka and soon was drinking twenty cups of tea and smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. Because most great writers have an ulcer.

A person who is ready to give himself an ulcer to become a writer is not likely to shy away from the sacrifice of going into exile either. So ever since my youth it has been my desire to do something so great that the enemy would be obliged to drive me into exile. They say that if you wish for something from the bottom of your heart, the door will be opened for you. In His generosity, God opened the door for me to enter the Baloch Students Organization just to fulfil this one wish of mine, and He bestowed upon me the blessing of exile from my country.

But mind you, since I went into exile people’s taunts and reproaches are killing me. If someone has indigestion in Kalatok, we’re the ones who face the reproach: “Here the Baloch are poor and destitute while you’re enjoying the luxuries of Europe.”

This kind of criticism always ends with the same admonishment: “Don’t forget you got your asylum by using the name of these poor Baloch.”

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xZBkOmtt8M> (Retrieved 2020-06-20)

So you mean we mortgaged the whole land of the Baloch and struck it rich in Europe by seeking refuge to save our ill-starred lives. The mere fact that someone says hello to us here makes us happy, so how can we cure the indigestion of the poor Baloch?

We really long to upload a photo on Facebook, but we can't out of fear of the pointed reprimands that follow. Sometimes you've just taken a shower and are standing in front of the mirror, and all of a sudden you feel like today's the day to take a picture. Your skin is a little bit fairer and your hair is thicker. On top of that, it looks like your eyebrows have trimmed themselves. This happens by chance once a year or so. But you know that if this nice looking fellow who's admiring himself in the mirror takes his picture today and puts it on Facebook many will burn with jealousy. Those friends at least who are left back home without any security or even electricity and have no share in the God-given privilege of travelling around the world will burn to ashes.

In the rain, on the lawn, in front of a tall building, now's the time for a selfie.

But no. The fear of reproach gets the upper hand.

I have a friend here who cleans train cars at night, sleeps until noon and smokes hash in the afternoon. When he's high he either engages in politics on the phone or gives us a list of the evils of exile. His European name is ABC and back home he's called Allah Baksh Chorasī⁹ because he was born in 1984. But we call him Allah Baksh Glass, because he stacks two water glasses on each other and smokes hash in them instead of in a cigarette. One day he says: "It would have been better to graze the sheiks' camels than to end up in Europe. At least Mum could have sent some dates. To hell with a country where you can't even get a date to sweeten your mouth after smoking."

I don't know about the connection between hashish and the Baloch soul, but I can testify that the Baloch in the Gulf are ten times better off than we are. Every month there are gifts arriving for them; sometimes the wife has sent a pair of sandals, and sometimes the mother has sent some pounded dates of high quality. The best thing is that once a year they can travel home and see their wife and children.

And even better than going home is preparing to go home. I was in the Gulf for some years and I saw how the Baloch in the Gulf were filled with pride before going home. They labour on the landlord's farm the whole year and get along on the milk and canned fish their landlord gives them, in order to save some money for the holidays. When it's time for their holiday they get a couple of really flashy outfits sewn up for them and buy a pair of high-heeled Muscat sandals. The poor things sacrifice their own needs and spend the rest of the money on perfume and soap for their relatives and friends. The wife wants an iPhone X in exchange for the ugly sandals she had sent. Mother's rotten dates were inedible but she needs Tang drink powder, Panadol pills, Axe Brand Universal Oil, band-aids, incense, and some herbal medicine. If she had needed all this for herself it would have been fine, but my friend in the Gulf is constantly in agony because his mother puts everything in a box so that for the whole year if a needy person appears she can solve their problem.

The only purpose of this mother's life is that if someone in town gets a headache or has a bad tummy, or if a guest arrives, then that someone should come to her for help.

The people in our town have never bought a single Panadol. Everyone knows that the medicine sold at Babu's medical store is fake; it can neither cure a fever nor relieve a headache. But foreign Panadol has always been among Mullah Patomah's belongings. Her only condition for dispensing it is being able to prove that you or someone in your household has a high fever. She won't waste her foreign medicine on just a headache or a cold.

"Mullah, Mullah, Mum asks if you could give her a Panadol?" Every week I went to Mullah Patomah's and pleaded for a pill.

"Who is ill?" Mullah began her questioning.

"Mum has a fever." My mother had told me to say that. Actually, she had a headache.

9 Chorasī means 84 in Urdu.

"Does she have a fever? Yesterday afternoon she was running after you, right? When did she get the fever?"

"Last night the mosquitoes bit her. Mum didn't know there was a big hole in the mosquito net! Now she's miserable. When Dad comes he will take her to Karachi." When I said this, Mullah looked at me with concern and I knew the lies were doing the job. "Mum says that when uncle Obayd comes from Muscat we will repay you." Now I was improvising.

"No need for repayment", she said. "If Mullah Patomah were repaid she would have been drowning in money by now." Mullah got upset but then immediately calmed down. "But the people in this town don't let me keep any pills. Let me look, maybe I can find one."

Mullah took her box into a corner and opened it just enough to be able to peep into it. Then she put her hand into the box through the opening, felt around a bit and took out a single Panadol.

"This is the only one left. Take it. Hopefully it will solve your problem."

Even if there had been a hundred pills in Mullah's belongings, she would still have said: "This is the only one." If you went back an hour later to get another Panadol she would again give you a single one and say: "This is the only one I have."

But to set the historical record straight, I want to make it clear that Mullah did get her repayment from me. I was the one who wrote her letters. This was in the days before telephones and mobile phones. From fourth grade on I could both read and write a letter. If a letter came from the Gulf, or if an elderly person or a woman wanted to send a letter, then I was the one to call. It's not that there weren't other literate people in town, but of all the children it was me and only me who could do this job, and since I was still small, people didn't hide their secrets from me.

The only problem was that I didn't know much Urdu. At school they only taught us greetings and prayers. "We are all well and we pray to the Lord, the Exalted, for your wellbeing." That was the full extent of my Urdu, but I would still play around and finish the letter.

The problem was when Mullah really got into her pure Balochi mood. "Tell me, my son, my dear Rahim, I have heard that your enemies have caught a fever. May Allah make you well. May I give you my share of life, my dear Rahim, you are worth everything."

When Mullah stopped, I took the point of the pen out of my mouth and started writing. "My Rahim Jan, I heard this days health of your enemies bad. Allah make you well. My life be with you, my expensive Rahim, I not worthy of you."

For years and years I struggled to understand why dear Rahim should be made well if his enemies had a fever. Only after studying Balochi classical poetry did I finally realize this enemy was none other than dear Rahim himself. Mullah's mouth and heart were not "worthy" enough to make her say that her dear son Rahim had a fever.

After greeting her son and asking how he was, Mullah started her complaining. "Your mother is old now. When I stand up I get dizzy, and even if I eat just a little I get indigestion."

When Mullah paused, my pen was let loose. "Your mother is old now. I get up, my eyes bring darkness, I eat small piece, my stomach blow up."

This was my first period of translation. Already at this young age I realized how difficult it is to translate words and sentences from one language into another. That is why even today I honour my friends who do translation, possibly more than they deserve.

I want to make it clear to my Baloch brothers that if exile in Europe was such a pleasant thing I would not have been nostalgic about Mullah Patomah's letters and her Panadols. Exile is a disease, and this disease makes you remember things at home that you couldn't even dream of: sleeping under a shed made of date palm leaves at lunchtime in the summer, and looking for any movement in the decomposing palm leaves; lying on the bedding piled up on the cot outside the door and reading a ghost story; sprinkling a sheet with water and covering yourself with it at night in the summer; gathering outside the house with your family each new moon, and checking who's first to see the moon;

mother's scolding that we should only take a little of the stew; getting a sweet from Auntie Nazal after helping her churn butter for a couple of hours; chasing the sheep and goats at sunset and tying them up; keeping watch for the fox at night so that it won't eat the chicks; gathering up the clothes and dishes in the courtyard before a storm and running into the house; and the moist smell after the first rain of the year.

If we have any time left after these useless nostalgic dreams in our European exile, then we will go to Mr Trump and complain about Pakistan.

When we got word that Trump had won the election, our friends in exile were so overjoyed you would think Mr Trump's grandfather's cousin had been a Baloch. "This is the end of Pakistan. This crazy fellow will do something about the Punjabis." Allah Baksh Glass took two glasses and went into the washroom.

"Yes, Trump actually became president of the USA just to do this very job. He will definitely take revenge for the Baloch." I gnashed my teeth.

Three years after Trump's election, on a day not long ago, Glass asked me: "Do you think Trump is aware of the Baloch question?"

"He must be, 'cause if the Baloch question is not settled there will be never be a solution to the world's problems."

The fellow did not like my answer. But when we were still in Balochistan our leaders had fooled us into joining the BSO by saying that America had made all the necessary preparations; the map of an independent Balochistan was even ready. All that remained was for the Baloch to make the effort. We thought if America is on our side, it means bye-bye Pakistan.

For two years, whatever actions we took, nobody so much as raised an eyebrow. Sometimes we burned the flag of "God-gifted" Pakistan, sometimes we stood outside the army camps and cursed the soldiers, but nobody took the least notice of us.

Knowing that America was on our side bolstered our confidence. We were so certain we had dear America's blessing upon us. Whatever trace of fear remained in our hearts vanished, because our leaders' words had indeed been proven true: the Baloch are brave and the Punjabis are cowards. So now we went about our business more brazenly than even animals would dare.

At least, until we made the Pakistani army, the Falcons of Iqbal, really mad.

When the Falcons stood up against us, they struck with such fury that the lion cubs didn't know which way to run and hide. The brave cubs ran to the mountains, while the cowards, like us, ran abroad.

Now our brave leaders send messengers every day: "Go and ask America to tame the Falcons." If the Americans were not aware of our predicament, then our leaders should not have lied to us, saying that the map and all the rest were ready. If our leaders trusted in their own strength and courage, what have we done wrong to make them taunt us, now that we are old and worn out.

Even when we were married off nobody asked us what we wanted, so why on earth would Trump pay any attention to us?

Four years have passed but Glass has still not been able to bring his family to Europe. I've been trying to survive without my family for two years. So it's not for nothing that when Glass and I see a little child running around in town I almost start crying, and he runs and kisses the child's cheeks. I've told him at least a hundred times that it's a crime here even to touch someone else's dog, let alone their child, but who can make Glass understand? I can't sleep for fear that one day the damned fellow will bring a bad reputation on the Baloch.

Actually, not everyone living in exile is as miserable as we are. There are also the few odd prosperous Baloch exiles, rare as Mullah's Panadols. If you take Glass's word for it, there are three kinds of exiled Baloch.

The first kind are those who live in America, Canada and Great Britain. These countries are the most fortunate, rich and politically influential in the world. So any Baloch who has gone there is higher in rank than Baloch who live in the European Union. If you compare them with the social stratification of Balochistan, we can call them the Rind and Lasharis of the exiles. They are the noble-men among the exiled Baloch. Most leaders of political parties and sons of tribal chiefs live in one of these three countries, which is why “the distribution of their inheritance is never settled” and they never stop fighting. They’re always trying to trap each other. A few white-skinned senators know them, and sometimes they can be glimpsed in the back rows of the European Parliament or at a session of the United Nations.

But not even these upper-class refugees ever get a chance to meet Trump.

The second kind are those who came with their families. They mainly live in the richer countries of the European Union such as Germany, France, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. At home they didn’t even have rice and chutney to eat, but here they live in nice houses and get a good subsidy from the government. The more children they have, the better the subsidy. Their children go to good schools, and if you run into them in town they will definitely tell you how quickly their child has learned the local language. “Miran, the little rascal, he knows German better than Balochi. The way he speaks it, you’d think his mother was a German.” Baloch refugees of this kind have advanced so far they praise both their wives and their children in the same breath. Well, will any of these people who are so glad about their children forgetting Balochi ever bother to grab Trump by the collar and tell him about all the Baloch activists who’ve disappeared? All that these refugees have left to show they are Baloch are some sets of Balochi clothes they keep in a closet to take out for Baloch Culture Day.

These are the “nomads” among the Baloch refugees.

The third kind are those who live in the poor countries of Europe, like Italy and Greece. They mostly came on boats and have the lowest status among the Baloch refugees. Their status is the same as that of slaves in Balochistan. These poor ones have just saved their lives, nothing more. They cannot engage in anything beyond themselves. They’re neither in Europe nor at home. They’re happy if someone sends them a penny or two from home. If their situation does not improve soon, then within a couple of years they’ll commit collective suicide. If Trump himself came and told them, “I will give you whatever you want”, they would ask for a decent pair of flip-flops.

How could these poor souls engage in politics?

Well, this classification that Glass has come up with is correct and based on scientific principles, but even good things have their flaws. Faced with this classification, the reader should not be misled into thinking that the Baloch refugees have set aside the social stratification of their homeland. Someone who was a low-class blacksmith at home has the same status here. Even if he lives in America or Britain, he is not higher in class and worth more than the unlucky refugees in Italy and Greece. These people take part in rallies and meetings just so that someone at home can say: “The chap socializes with tribal chiefs these days.”

Glass and I have a neighbour. A Baloch from Iranian Balochista.... oh please forgive me, may God have mercy on me, damned Satan... from *Western* Balochistan. There are many people from Western Balochistan in Sweden, and many of them fled to Europe during the time of the Shah. Our neighbour’s name is Mohammad Ali Irannezhad. Mr Irannezhad is a European in all respects. His coat and trousers, his flat cap, his daily routine, his dog, and his afternoon walks with the dog – all these things are European, but Mr Irannezhad’s manners are still those of a Baloch tribal chief.

Mr Irannezhad came to Sweden in 1980, a year after I was born. Back home his crime was having expelled the Shah of Iran, Mr Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and made Khomeini the ruler of the country. As soon as the evil Khomeini came to power he began getting rid of his sympathizers. Mr

Irannezhad barely escaped with his life and made it to Sweden. From that day on, he has not glimpsed his beloved fatherland again.

Back home, he was the nephew of the tribal chief of Baho, and he still has the manners of a tribal chief. Not that he talks about it the whole time. He is a well-read man and also a poet, and according to him it is the low-cast blacksmiths and musicians who have kept true Balochi culture alive: music, epic singing, weaponry, praise songs and cradle songs, embroidery and metalwork. But to show that he is the son of a tribal chief, he will definitely throw a few words into the conversation now and then to make it clear he comes from a noble line. For example he will never say “this is a good thing”. He always words it like this: “This is a noble thing”. If he wanted to say that he was a really naughty boy in his childhood he would say it like this: “Do you know about my childhood, my dear? When I was small, I had my own slave.”

Later on in the conversation he puts it more strongly: “At our castle, each person of noble birth had his own appointed slave. If he was elderly he had an elderly slave, if he was a *choild*, he had a *choild* slave.”

That’s right, in Western Balochistan they pronounce the word child as *choild*, and instead of spoiled they say *spiled*.

Well, Mr Irannezhad kept telling his story. “My slave must have been some two or three years older than I. Now, look how naughty I was. Every day I made this docile creature lie down on the ground and jumped on him.”

Mr Irannezhad told this heart-breaking story just to show what a really naughty child he was.

Allah Baksh Glass and Mohammad Ali Irannezhad are always quarrelling. Just like with the elite refugees, “the distribution of their inheritance is never settled”, so their quarrel never ends.

Sometimes Mr Irannezhad brings his vegetarian food and visits me and Glass for lunch. Like the European white-skins, he eats with a fork and spoon. Glass gets all five fingers into the food, takes a good mouthful and eats it.

Mr Irannezhad can stand this.

However, after finishing the meal Mr Irannezhad goes to the washroom to wash his hands, while Glass clears his throat, makes some sounds as if he is about to throw up, and washes his hands under the kitchen tap. This habit Mr Irannezhad cannot tolerate at all. He always reproaches Glass for it. “Hey mate, you will grow old but not grow noble. You have been in this country for four years but your habits are just like those of the uncivilized Baloch. Can’t you go and wash your hands in the washroom? You use this kitchen tap to wash food and vegetables, and then you bend down here to wash your dirty hands.”

After giving voice to his inner anger, Mr Irannezhad felt that Glass was hurt by his words, so he softened his voice. “You are my son; that’s why I am giving you this piece of good advice. When you come to a civilized country like this you should leave your uncivilized Balochi manners behind. In Europe, be European.”

As a matter of fact, Glass had always taken Mr Irannezhad’s older age into account and not been upset about these kinds of rebukes, but on that particular day, damned Glass had had enough. He interrupted Mr Irannezhad: “It’s none of your business what I do. Look at your worn-out coat. What an expert you are!”

Mr Irannezhad’s whole appearance changed. It was as if someone had mentioned Khomeini’s name to him. He stood up, put on his flat cap and left the room trembling with rage. Glass and I were surprised. After all, what Glass said wasn’t bad enough to make him this upset.

But mind you, in Iran an “expert” is what they call a gay person.

Glass and I had to go to a lot of trouble to be reconciled with Mr Irannezhad. When he finally accepted that it was a misunderstanding caused by differences between Balochi dialects, he smiled and said: “Mate, this is really oddish.”

Well, as a matter of fact, the word “oddish” does not seem to exist in this language called Balochi. Not in any dialect spoken in Western or Eastern Balochistan. It was coined by Mr Irannezhad himself.

But after forty years in exile, Mr Irannezhad is convinced that a word like that is part of the basic vocabulary of Balochi.

Didn't I tell you? Exile is a disease!¹⁰

---

10 The translation of Sajid Hussain's short story *Facing exile, facing taunts* was first published in Balochistan Times on 27 August 2020, see <https://balochistantimes.com/facing-exile-facing-taunts/> (Retrieved 2020-08-27)